

The Bible's Grand Story



**An 18 Part Biblical Overview with Questions
for small group and Confirmation use.**

**Additional units 19-21 are included
along with 3 Bonus Resources**

The Bible's Grand Story

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The Bible is a grand stage which portrays one thing: how God has worked throughout time within His creation! It may seem confusing at times, and it can certainly be overwhelming since it is a BIG book!

But the story itself is really a simple one! It is a true story, believed in faith, because it is the Word of God.

It is worth noting that in these 21 units, they are merely a broad summary of all that the Bible teaches.

There is indeed much more detail that we could cover, but these are intended to convey the Bible's Grand Story in its most basic form. Numerous studies show today that Biblical illiteracy is at an all time high in America. Everyone must begin somewhere to understand this Grand Story, and this has been assembled to facilitate just that, along with the additional resources at the end.

It starts at the beginning...

The Bible's Grand Story

Part One: the Genesis - “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” Six times we are told about creation, “it was good.” So when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, did God make a mistake? No. Everything is unfolding according to God’s plan. Does the account of creation explain to us “how” God does things? No, except that we see the sheer power of God’s Word: All God must do to create out of nothing is to speak. And it was good. And we begin to understand the nature of our creator from the beginning. We can also trust God’s Word to mean exactly what it says. So when the creation account uses the literal word “Day” for each of God’s episodes of creation, we can trust that it does indeed mean what it says. Of course, this runs in direct opposition to what the geological sciences tell us today, and while that is definitely a discussion for another time, it is sufficient to understand that there is also abundant contradictory evidence to science, suggesting a much younger earth than we are taught.

So back to Genesis: Satan under the guise of a serpent (literally meaning “one who deceives”) tricks Eve by telling her that she will become like God, knowing good and evil (**Genesis Ch. 3**). She gives some to Adam too, and instead of becoming like God, they become ashamed. God administers punishment for violating his law: banishment from Eden forever. And yet in all of it, God provides clothes for them, showing that there is grace, even in the midst of judgement by God.

What follows is a repeating pattern of human sin/God’s judgement/God’s grace. Cain kills Abel over a feud on who’s offering was better (**Genesis 4**), God banishes Cain from the human community forever, but protects his life with the “mark of Cain.” Soon we see a bizarre account of how sin has even entered into the heavenly realm with “angels” mating with humans. God’s judgement is swift and final: destroy the earth by flood (**Genesis 6-9**), but God’s grace prevails again with a remnant preserved through Noah and the Ark. Yet again, humanity tries to become like God as the human race builds a tower in a vain effort to take heaven by storm (**Genesis 10-12**), and God confuses their language and scatters them all across the known world.

Where’s the grace in that, you might ask? Well, it comes in God’s focus, which is now centered on one man: Abraham (**Genesis 12-15**). As God slowly reveals Himself to humanity (His creation), now God has approached Abraham and established a promise of 4 things with him: he gets to have God as his God, he will receive the land of Canaan (present day Israel) to live in (an ongoing source of political strife), he will have so many offspring and descendants as to become a great nation (the Hebrew people), and through his descendants, ALL nations will be blessed.

Who is this descendant, you might ask? Well, St. Matthew goes to great lengths to inform us that Jesus is indeed an ancestor of Abraham. So our story as it unfolds even at the beginning ultimately leads through Jesus!

Questions - Part 1

1. Have you ever read through the entire Bible? Have you tried to? How far did you get? How much do you know about the Bible's story?
2. What is the greatest thing you've ever "created?" Does it compare to God's creation?
3. Why does God punish Adam and Eve, or Cain, or even all of humanity? What does it say about us? Compare Genesis 6:5 with Romans 3:10-18
4. What is a covenant? What 3 things does God promise Abraham? How does this apply to you today?
Read Genesis 12:1-7.
5. Can you name some things that demonstrate the pattern of sin, judgement, and God's grace? For reference, read Genesis 3:13-24.
6. Who made everything? Who owns everything? What is our role in "everything?" (Aka the universe).
Read Genesis 1:28
7. How does God's "Covenant" (promise) to Abraham point right at Jesus in the future? Read Matthew 1:17

Part Two

The Early Years - Part one left off with God's promise (or covenant) with Abraham, promising 3 things in addition to the promise to be Abraham's God. The creation account is very broad, but with Abraham, the Bible's focus becomes very specific now. So land (Canaan, the land "flowing with milk and honey"), offspring, and "descendants being a blessing to all nations" becomes the focus of this divine commitment by God (**Genesis 12 and 15**). It also establishes a mission for Abraham and his descendants: to not only be God's chosen people but also to be God's instrument to speak to the world about his true nature, over and against the nature of all the false gods and idols. However, almost as soon as God's promise is made, and though initially, "*Abraham believed God...*" (**Genesis 15:6**), mistrust of God begins soon thereafter. They begin to have children from Abraham's mistresses because Sarah was unable to conceive initially (**ch. 16**). God reminds them again of his divine promise through a physical reminder: circumcision - which is to be an ongoing sign of God's promise to Abraham and his offspring. Still there is doubt about God's promise - and Sarah again scoffs at the idea of bearing children as God promised, even in the presence of the three "angels," thought to be the Holy Trinity (**ch. 18**). We see that sin is still as rampant and perverse as ever, with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**ch. 19**); Abraham becomes quite good at deception by lying to kings and Pharaohs for his own personal gain (**ch. 20**); and it seems that Abraham is out to bring about the results God promised on his own, rather than truly trusting God. Finally a true heir is born of his wife, Sarah, and they name him Isaac (**ch. 21**). Abraham is tested to see if he truly trusts God, and it is borne out as he is prepared to kill his son and heir, all the while telling an inquisitive Isaac that "*God will provide the lamb*" for the sacrifice, which God does indeed do in the end (**ch. 22**).

What follows then is a history of Abraham's line through Isaac, to Jacob, then to Jacob's twelve sons (who become the "12 tribes"), along with Ishmael's sons (the child of one of Abraham's mistresses) that eventually lead to the Palestinian people and the religion of Islam today. Jacob's twelve sons were extremely jealous of Jacob's favorite: Joseph. Joseph sharing his dreams of having authority over his brothers (**ch. 37**) certainly did not help, and so through trickery and deception, they sold him into slavery and told his father, Jacob, that he had been killed! (**ch. 37**). This sets in motion the descendants of Abraham living in Egypt, which will lead to the great event of the entire Old Testament: The Exodus from Egypt. So we already that God is indeed fulfilling one part of his promise to Abraham: he has had offspring through his wife, Sarah, and now two generations have passed, and his family line is growing!

Questions - Part 2

1. Is Abraham perfect? Does he sin? Why does God consider him “Righteous?” Compare Genesis Genesis 15:4, 15:6 and Genesis 16:1-4. See also Genesis 12:10-13.
2. Why does Sarah laugh when the Holy Trinity confirms God’s promise of Children in Genesis 18:9-15?
3. What sin is grievous that Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by God? Read Genesis 19:4-7 and 12-13.
4. Why would God command Abraham to kill his true son Isaac, after promising him this very son? Read Genesis 22:2. What is Abraham’s faith in God like during this time? Read 22:7-8.
5. What Happens to Joseph? (Jacob’s son and one of Isaac’s grandsons) Read Genesis 37:18-22 and 28. What lie did they tell their father, Jacob? Read Genesis 37:31-33.

Part Three

The Israelites in Egypt - We left our story off with Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, being sold into slavery. God's promise of offspring to Abraham had indeed come true, but continually we see deception and sin amongst his descendants. Joseph's history is indeed a colorful one, more so than his coat of many colors (**Genesis 37**). Because Joseph was his father's favorite, and because he told his brothers about his dreams of being their master one day, envy and hatred existed amongst his 11 brothers. They sold him to a band of Ishmaelites (who would be distant relatives of theirs and also the forefathers of the Palestinians and of Islam). They in turn took him to Egypt and Joseph was purchased as a slave by Potiphar, who was one of Pharaoh's officials (**ch. 39**). Reuben, one of his brothers, unsuccessfully tried to prevent this from happening (**Genesis 37:22**). His brothers took his coat and made it appear to have been ripped to shreds by a wild animal, causing Jacob to believe that his son, Joseph, was dead.

In all of this, and including the subsequent deceptions and trickery by not only those who enslaved Joseph as well as his surviving brothers, God was with him, and continued to have events unfold according to His divine plan! Joseph is thrown into prison in Egypt based on a lie (**ch. 39**), and while there, interprets dreams correctly for another of Pharaoh's officials. Eventually Pharaoh himself (the ruler of Egypt, who proclaims himself a god), has dreams of seven fat cows being consumed by seven sickly looking cows. The dream repeats, but with heads of grain in place of the cows (**ch. 41**). The dream's interpretation given to Joseph by God indicates that there will be seven years of plentiful harvest, followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh believes Joseph, and so he is now put in charge of storing up food during the seven good years, in order that the Egyptians will be able to survive the coming years of famine. So Joseph has gone from favored son, to slave in a foreign land, to prisoner, and now to one of Pharaoh's top officials!

Eventually, the famine becomes so severe that people from all over the region travel to Egypt to see about securing food from the surplus stored up by Joseph. This includes Joseph's brothers, sent there by Jacob (**ch.42**). Joseph instantly recognizes them, but they do not recognize the brother they hadn't seen in years. Though he initially toys with them and has them imprisoned, accusing them of being spies, he eventually reveals himself to them (**ch. 45**) and tells them, "*do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.*" (**Genesis 45:5**). The brothers return home and bring Jacob and all of their families back with them to Egypt. Though it is not the land promised to them by God, nonetheless God blesses them, and they continue to become a great nation with numerous descendants through many generations, enjoying prosperity in Egypt. And so the stage has now been set for the greatest event of the Old Testament: The Exodus!

It is worth noting that while archeologists will deny these events ever took place, they do so by denying the abundance of archeological evidence that supports that it is indeed historical.

Questions - Part 3

1. God promises that Abraham's descendants will become a great nation, meaning his descendants are numerous, united, and now a people belonging to a country. Has this happened? Read Exodus 1:6-7.
2. What got Joseph in trouble with his master in Egypt? Read Genesis 39:11-20.
3. Does Joseph continue to trust in God? Read Genesis 39:23.
4. How does Joseph end up as the second most powerful person next to the Pharaoh of Egypt? Read Exodus 41:9-16.
5. Why does Joseph not hold a grudge against his brothers for what they did to him? Read Genesis 50:19-21.

Part Four

Exodus! - Where we left off at the end of the book of Genesis, the stage has now been set for the greatest and most spectacular event of the Old Testament: *The Exodus from Egypt* around the year 1446 BC, which is also recorded in other historical records besides the Bible. God's promise to Abraham is slowly but surely being fulfilled, for his descendants have indeed grown through subsequent generations and now number possibly close to a million people.

Two hundred years after Joseph, however, a Pharaoh who didn't know about Joseph and his deeds in Egypt called for the enslavement of the Israelites because there were too many in his land (**Exodus ch. 1**). He even instituted a heinous form of population control by instructing that all the Hebrew males must be killed after birth.

Eventually, Moses is born. To avoid his death also, he was set afloat in the Nile river, and Pharaoh's daughter eventually found him and raised him (**ch. 2**). As a young adult man, Moses ended up fleeing Egypt after he killed an Egyptian who was beating one of the Hebrew slaves. While in hiding in Midian (present day Saudi Arabia along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba), he marries, has children, and encounters God in the form of a burning bush on Mount Sinai (**ch. 3**). "I AM," or "Yahweh" in Hebrew (the Divine Name of God), gave Moses a great task: to be his messenger to Pharaoh that God was putting an end to His peoples' suffering and enslavement. As a sign that God was going with him, his staff turns into a snake (**ch. 4**). Moses is reluctant, and also fails to follow God's decrees to his own peril, but eventually reestablishes the sign of God's original covenant through circumcision. Thus begins the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God (**Exodus 4:21**) in order that the people, through the coming signs and wonders, will know that he is indeed God (**Exodus 6:1-8**).

The initial request by Moses causes Pharaoh to force the Israelites to make their bricks without the aid of straw, making the task much harder since they now had to gather their own (**ch. 5**). What follows are ten plagues caused by God, so terrifying in their own right that most rational people would believe in the LORD: The Nile river turns to blood, killing its wildlife (**ch. 7**); the land is infested with frogs (**ch. 8**); then come the gnats, flies, the death of Egyptian livestock (**ch. 9**), a plague of boils (lesions), hail, locusts (**ch. 10**), darkness, and the final plague: the striking down of all the Egyptian firstborn (**ch. 11**) in an ironic answer to Pharaoh's initial decree to kill the Hebrew firstborn males.

It is here that God institutes the "Passover" meal (**ch. 12**, AND the foundation of the Lord's Supper): to eat in haste while marking the doorposts of the Hebrew homes as the angel of death comes through the land, carrying out God's terrifying plague and "passing over" the homes of God's people. Pharaoh finally relents, and orders all the Hebrews to leave his land, which they do immediately, being led by God himself as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. Upon encampment at the Red Sea, however, (most likely along the Gulf of Aqaba/Nueva Beach), Pharaoh has a change of heart and pursues them once again. The pillar of cloud envelops the Egyptian army (**ch. 14**) while Moses holds his staff over the water. The water divides, and the Israelites escape across the sea on dry land, with "*a wall of water on their right and on their left*" (**Exodus 14:22**). Pharaoh's army pursues. God sends the water back into place and destroys the armies and chariots of Egypt. The Israelites see the awesome power of God and trust in God, singing a great song of triumph in "Moses and Miriam's song" (**ch. 15**).

God has rescued and delivered his people out of bondage and slavery! This becomes a recurring and prominent theme throughout the Bible - delivery by God out of bondage and slavery!

Questions - Part 4

1. Most archeologists claim that the Exodus never happened and that the account of the Exodus is myth. Is there evidence of the Israelites ever having lived in Egypt? Search the internet for the name “Avaris” and see what comes up. Recall that the Bible identifies the Israelites living in the land of Goshen (the eastern Nile delta region) where they built the cities of “Pithom” and “Rameses.” (Exodus 1:11).
2. Is there a reason the Bible would use the names “Pithom” and “Rameses” if they were not the names of the cities when the Hebrews lived in Egypt?
3. Why did Pharaoh not give in when he kept getting beaten up with the plagues? Read Exodus 4:21 and 6:1-8.
4. Take some time to reflect on the dreadful plagues in Chapters 7-11. Is there evidence of such destructive forces even today? (Ask anyone who grew up in the early 1900's).
5. Of all the events described in our summary, what do you think is the most miraculous? Explain why.

Part Five

Wandering the Wilderness - Upon crossing the Red Sea, where God destroys the armies of Pharaoh, the Israelites immediately set out upon a journey that will take them ultimately to the land promised to Abraham in the covenant God made (Part 1), thereby fulfilling the second part of the promise. Despite the spectacular nature of the Exodus event itself, the Israelites not only grumble constantly against God, but also continue to disobey God, seemingly forgetting the amazing things God had just done - all for them.

Not long after, the Israelites find themselves encamped at the base of Mount Sinai (*if Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai - both described as “the mountain of God” in Exodus 3:1 and 24:13- are the same, then Mount Sinai would be in the region of Midian, inland from the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba in present day Saudi Arabia, and NOT where most people mistakenly locate it in the Sinai Peninsula*). It is there that God again appears to them in spectacular fashion through earthquakes, dense smoke surrounding the mountain top, thunder and lightning - all of which we call a “theophany.” Moses climbs the mountain, where God establishes a second “covenant” with the people - this one a covenant of “law” that tells them how to copy Godly behavior, live in community with one another, and experience the blessing of truly knowing God as their Lord. Today, these are what we call the “Ten Commandments” (**Exodus 20**). Instructions were also given regarding worship and worship space (the tabernacle - **ch. 26**) and the storage of the covenant in the “ark” - a golden box that would contain the actual tablets of the covenant (**ch. 25**). Many other instructions regarding worship and its leaders or priests are given in the following chapters. However, during this time of instruction by God to Moses, the people once again quickly forget what God had done, and fashion a false god in the shape of a golden calf (**ch. 32**). Read Aaron’s whopper of a lie in how it transpired in **Exodus 32:24**!

Sadly, it would not be the last of such occurrences, leading to all manner of plague and other punishment by God, including wandering in the wilderness for 40 years before reaching the land promised to Abraham clear back in Genesis (Part 1).

To complete the journey through the “Pentateuch,” (a scholarly word for the first 5 books of the Bible), **Leviticus** is a book that presents the young nation of Israel with a series of holiness codes and purity codes. While we generally are not bound by these rules as Gentile or non-Jewish believers today, many of them still make perfect sense, such as washing before eating, the possibilities of contracting parasites from certain meats (because they were often consumed undercooked), and so on. Certainly as well, treating our worship with sense of reverence and respect is also something that shows the seriousness with which we take it and our devotion to God today.

The Book of **Numbers** chronicles their 40 year wilderness journey. Remember that the lengthy journey to the “promised land” is a result of their sin before God. In fact, Moses is told that he would see - but never enter - that land (**Numbers 14:30**). The grumbling continues, and it seems that Israel’s sin becomes more brazen. In one instance, it was so great that they claimed to have no food, and in the same breath complained that they hated the food provided! This resulted in God sending poisonous snakes into their camp, forcing them once again to turn to God for help. Moses was instructed to craft a bronze serpent, place it on a pole in the center of camp, and anyone who looks on this “idol” would then live (**ch. 21**). This incident is cited again in The Gospels: **John 3:14**. Israel’s general response to God was not with faith, gratitude, and obedience, but with unbelief, ingratitude, and downright rebellion against God.

The book of **Deuteronomy** retells the laws as a covenant - stressing the need for the people to show a total commitment to God. *Why?* Because of what God had already done for them in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians and bringing them out of bondage to slavery. Finally, Israel is now about to take possession of the land of Canaan, promised by covenant with Abraham nearly 500 years earlier.

Questions - Part 5

1. Where is Mount Sinai most likely located?

2. What caused the Israelites to wander for 40 years in the wilderness? Why was Moses not allowed to enter the Holy Land but only see it once before he died? (Deuteronomy 34:4)

3. There are three basic sets of laws or “codes” to be found in the laws of Moses from God: There are the “holiness codes,” the “purity codes,” and the “Worship codes.” Which of the three are the Ten Commandments, and why are they still important today?

4. What do the people do when Moses disappears up the mountain for a lengthy time, and how does Aaron compound their sin? See Exodus ch. 32.

5. Why is it important to think of God’s laws as a “covenant” or “contract?”

Part Six

Holy War! - Moses has now died, having led his people out of Egypt to the eastern side of the Jordan River - across from the land of Canaan. Remember that Abraham never had a permanent home, but God's covenant had promised this land would one day be called home for his descendants. The book of **Joshua** recounts the conquest of the Holy Land by God's command, and the allotment given to each of the 12 tribes, who were the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob.

Though some of the eastern territories (east of the Jordan River) were previously conquered in the latter chapters of Numbers, Joshua is the name of the Israelite put in charge of the conquest of the land of Canaan. Moses, true to God's promise, was allowed to view the promised land, but was not allowed to enter it, in punishment for Israel's continual disobedience toward God, **Deuteronomy 34:4**.

As the plans are made for conquest, the manna finally ceases to fall from heaven (**Joshua 5:10-12**), as the men go to spy out land and strike a deal with Rahab, a prostitute in the land (**ch. 2**). In addition, before conquest can proceed, the covenant must be reestablished, meaning all men born during the 40 year wilderness wandering must now be circumcised (**Joshua 5:2-9**). In addition, God alone is the commander in chief of the invading army(**Joshua 5:13-15**).

Famous battles include the battle for Jericho (**5:13-6:27**), and the day where the sun stood still (**10:1-15**). Jericho is a well known excavation today, and the evidence within it's excavated ruins support completely the Biblical account of it's demise. **Chapter 12** provides a list of cities and kings defeated in conquest. Much of the latter chapters of Joshua provides for the division of the land. It is also important to note the establishment of "cities of refuge," (**ch. 20**), where a person may find safe refuge from accidental crimes.

Though their conquest is not completely done, there is a renewal of the covenant God made at Sinai, in **chapter 24**. It is important to note that this Sinai covenant has always been conditional (unlike God's covenant with Abraham) - things will go well for the people if they worship the Lord only, and things will go horribly if they don't. Their wandering in the wilderness, and even their first failed campaign against the city of Ai (**ch. 7**) demonstrate that God is serious about the people not turning to foreign gods and idols, and living in covenant with Him alone.

Joshua recounts in rather gruesome detail some of the horrors of war. There are many place names also included, some of which are unknown today. What stands is the impressive list of cities Israel was able to capture with God on their side (**ch. 12**). Historically, there is little debate over this conquest, despite that many in secular archeology will argue and debate the timing of many known historical events that correspond to the conquest. More importantly some want to question the integrity of God in calling for such genocidal behavior and taking a lead role in it. It is also important to note that Israel was in the land LONG before Palestine was. The land was given to them by God.

Perhaps it is important to remember that far worse crimes or atrocities have been committed throughout human history, and this is not a matter of genocide per se, but rather God's purposeful demonstration that it is He, and not us, who is the maker AND owner of all things, including our very lives. He is at work in calling all to repentance, and to understanding his purpose and his purpose alone for the world (HIS world). Or, as the NIV (1985) Study Bible states, "*The battles for Canaan were therefore the Lord's holy war, undertaken at a particular time in the program of redemption. God gave his people under Joshua no commission or license to conquer the world with the sword but a particular, limited mission. The conquered land itself would not become Israel's national possession by right of conquest, but it belonged to the Lord. So the land had to be cleansed of all remnants of paganism.*"

We must understand the additional reason why God calls for such wholesale destruction: Israel, like us today, is extremely susceptible to being led astray by sin, which is precisely what happens when Israel fails to carry out God's instructions.

Questions - Part 6

1. Name two reasons why God would command such wholesale destruction and utter slaughter of the inhabitants of the Holy Land. For hints, re-read the body of Part 6.
2. Why do you think that the Manna, which had fed the people for 40 years in the wilderness, now stopped falling from heaven? (See Joshua 5:10-12).
3. Can you identify any historical or archeological information that supports the destruction of Jericho in 1400 BC? (Hint: there is quite a bit that supports the Biblical account of it's destruction)
4. Who is the leader of Israel's armies? (Joshua 5:13-15)
5. What are some reasons you think God would make the 10 commandments (the laws of Moses) as "conditional?"

Part Seven

The Judges - The next book of the Bible after Joshua and the conquest of Canaan (the land promised to Abraham's descendants as one of the three parts of God's covenant with Abraham - **Genesis 12, 15**), is the book of Judges. The question of a human ruler or king has come up, and as the later book of 1 Samuel hints at, Israel was supposed to acknowledge God as their king (**1 Samuel 8:7**). Here, however, fresh off of an incomplete campaign to rid the land of all foreigners, the book of Judges shows us repeatedly how in this instance: a) Israel sins because they were influenced by those they failed to purge from the land (involving worship of the Baals and other pagan fertility gods); b) God sends various groups of foreigners in who fight against Israel and defeat them; c) the people cry out in anguish, asking for someone to save them; and d) God raises up a "judge" ("judge" here refers to a warrior/leader, rather than our common understanding of someone who presides over a court room), and the judge rescues Israel according to God's plan.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the book of Judges, as well as the newly formed kingdom of Israel, is to look at the very last verse of the book itself: "*In those days, Israel had no king, and everyone did as he saw fit.*" (**Judges 21:25**). And though the Judges were raised up by God to save Israel and restore the kingdom, the pattern of everyone "*doing as they saw fit*" demonstrates the Biblical nature of sin itself: sin is defined as when a person follows their own ways and not the ways of God.

The book of Judges chronicles this repeating pattern and how such well known Judges as Othniel (**Judges 3:7-11**), Ehud (**Judges 3:12-30**), Deborah (**chs. 4-5**), Gideon (**chs. 6-8**), Jephthah (**Judges 10:6-12:7**), and Samson (**chs. 13-16**) carry out God's ultimate plan and drives back such ethnic groups as the Moabites, the Canaanites, Midianites, Ammonites, and Philistines. Other, lesser known Judges are also chronicled in the book. It is noteworthy to see that there was a female Judge - Deborah, who was originally a prophetess for the people. It is also worth mentioning that the beginning of every account of each Judge begins with stating that the Israelites "*did evil in the eyes of the Lord*" following the previous Judge, such as with the beginning of Gideon's rule (**ch. 6**).

Many people might recall the story of the Judge, Samson (ch.13-16), who had great strength and had been set apart from birth, much the way John the Baptist from the Gospels had. Samson was a man of considerable strength - one might call him the "strongest man in the world." Unfortunately, he was also gullible and succumbed to his pagan wife Delilah's persistent attempts at trying to learn the secret of his strength to betray him to the Philistines (**ch. 16**). After several failed attempts by her to betray him, he finally admitted to her that the secret of his great strength lie in his hair, which had never before been shaved or trimmed. She had his braids shaved off (**Judges 16:19**), and he was defeated then by the Philistines.

Another and perhaps lesser known Judge was Jephthah - also an example to us of how we should think before speaking or making a promise. He was "a mighty warrior" (**Judges 11:1**) and after Israel turned again to false idols, cried out to God for help, and made him their Judge, he made a vow that he would sacrifice the first thing to walk out of his house upon his return, should the Lord make him victorious in battle. God did make him victorious, and the first "thing" to come out of his house was his very own daughter. Ironically, it was the daughter who insisted that he needed to keep his vow to God (**Judges 11:36**).

Sadly, though, this pattern of everyone doing what was right in their own eyes and "*doing evil in the sight of the Lord*" continues, despite the reign of several Judges over the early years of Israel as a nation. It is a pattern of behavior that persists even today, among not just Israel but the world.

Questions - Part 7

1. How is the conditional nature of the Sinai covenant seen in the repeating patterns of the people of Israel and the judges that God sends them?
2. Who is the extreme ruler of Israel? (See 1 Samuel 8:7)
3. What happens before the people cry out to God for a leader? (It happens repeatedly. See Judges 6:1 as an example)
4. Is there a parallel between Israel in the time of the Judges and today's world? Do you follow God or do you follow the world? (Read the last verse of Judges - 21:25)
5. Pick a favorite Judge, and briefly describe the pattern: Israel's sin, who God used to punish the people, the people's cry out to the Lord, and who the Judge is and what they did to save the people. List pertinent verses for each condition.

Part Eight

Kings: Good and Bad - If the time of the Judges demonstrated Israel “doing their own thing,” the time of the Kings showed the extent of them failing to listen to God. Following the time of the Judges, Israel still clamored for a true king to lead them, despite that it has been God all along telling them that he was their king, and they needed no other (**1 Samuel 8:7**). Their problem continued to be the First Commandment - they could never seem to get over worshiping the false gods of their neighbors and the foreigners in their land. God sent them a king anyhow, with the warning to the people, “*if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.*” (**1 Samuel 12:25**). Thus begins the line of the Kings of Israel.

The books of **1 and 2 Samuel** tell the stories of Saul and David. Following Saul, who was eventually rebuked by God (**1 Kings 15:26**), comes the great kingship of David (**2 Samuel 2**), who is known in part for his battle with Goliath (**1 Samuel 17**). Though he honors God in establishing Jerusalem as the spiritual center and trusting in God’s power, even David was not without troubles. Eventually his sin compounded as he committed adultery with Bathsheba, then allowed for the murder of her husband Uriah, and finally claimed her as his own wife (**2 Samuel 11**). **Psalm 51** is David’s song of lament and repentance for these sins.

The books of **1 and 2 Kings** follow the accounts of **1 and 2 Samuel** and present a succession of kings who followed in later generations. Solomon follows David after another, Adonijah, had himself wrongfully appointed as David’s successor (**1 Kings 1**). As Solomon succeeds David as the true King of Israel, he asks God for a wise and discerning heart (**1 Kings 3:9**). Sadly, even now, the people were forgetting God and worshiping false idols in the “high places” of Israel (**1 Kings 3:2**), and even Solomon did the same. However, God grants him the wisdom he sought and despite his sin, he rules wisely.

Solomon arranges for the construction of a great temple to God (**ch. 5**), and it was eventually built, and the inner space called the “Holy of Holies” was the residing place for the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments and God’s covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19-20**). Despite his wisdom, and because of his sin, Solomon could not keep the nation of Israel together, and so it split in two at the end of his reign: the northern kingdom of Israel (10 of the 12 tribes) and the southern kingdom of Judah (the tribes of Benjamin and Judah). The kingdom of Judah is where David’s capitol city of Jerusalem, and thus the temple, was to be found.

The remaining chapters tell the account of the various kings of both Israel and Judah. In most instances, these kings are described as one who “*did evil in the eyes of the Lord...*” (**1 Kings 15:34** and elsewhere). They worshiped false idols and failed to worship God. Consequently, disaster was waiting to happen. Israel’s kings were far worse, and the northern Kingdom of Israel was overrun and destroyed by the Assyrian empire in 721 BC.

Judah’s kings were a little more obedient, despite that most still did evil in God’s eyes. Josiah was one such king (**2 Kings 22-23**), who when having the temple refurbished, discovered the books of the Old Testament law, and instituted a series of sweeping reforms to try and return the kingdom to one that worshiped God alone. His reforms were short-lived, however, as Judah returned to pagan worship and eventually it too was overthrown in 597/587 BC. Its’ inhabitants were carried off into exile by the Babylonian empire, to what is present day Iraq. The temple was looted and destroyed, and the kingdom was no more.

Questions - part 8

1. What made David a “good” king (one in whom God would establish a line of kings forever: Jesus is biologically a descendant of David), despite his heinous sins (2 Samuel 11)?
2. What chief sin were all of the northern kings and most of the southern kings guilty of? (See 1 Kings 14:22-24)
3. Solomon asks God for wisdom, rather than for wealth or women. Why would 1 Kings 3:16-28 be wise, despite what he orders to happen?
4. The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 721 BC. What does the Bible say happened? See 2 Kings 17:5-8.
5. Because of the peoples’ sin, the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Babylonian Empire in 587 BC. What does the Bible say about this? See 2 Kings 24:8-14 and 25:2-7. Why are there seemingly two different accounts?

Part Nine

Exile! - Because Israel had forsaken God, who had granted them the prosperity they once enjoyed, God now threatened through a small remnant of faithful followers (the prophets) that disaster would fall on them if they did not return to their Lord and God and forsake the many sinful, selfish ways that God deemed destructive to them and the common good. Warnings were issued for dozens, even hundreds of years, that went unheeded.

In 587 BC, the Babylonian armies once again marched across the now-destroyed Northern Kingdom of Israel, and what was left of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, completely looting and leveling everything in their path, including Solomon's great Temple in Jerusalem. A vast majority of the Hebrews they encountered were either put to the sword or carried off as slaves into exile in Babylon. In other words, the Israelites were now enslaved and in exile in what is present-day Iraq.

Why? Why did God let this happen? It could be said that history does indeed repeat itself, especially for those who fail to learn from it. Recall the great enslavement of the people in Egypt and the great event of the Old Testament: The Exodus from Egypt, where God leads his people out of the chains of slavery into a new land, with the understanding that they were to honor and glorify God and God alone. Sadly, honoring God rarely happened, and so they found themselves enslaved and in exile once again.

Conditions throughout the kingdoms were horrific. Morality had crumbled and society was in chaos. The people by-and-large were morally and spiritually bankrupt as they engaged in open prostitution even within the temple, and filled the temple with shrines to all manner of false gods. Its leaders were fiscally irresponsible, enslaving their own people and letting greed run as the center of their existence. Taxation was through the roof. Leaders only looked out for themselves (this includes the majority of the kings), and were as morally and spiritually bankrupt as the people. As the end of Judges testifies, people were doing as they saw fit, not as God had commanded them. God's Word meant very little in those times. The laws that Israel had to honor God by honoring their neighbor had long disappeared. Prosperity had completely ruined them, and as a result, they had forsaken God who had given them this prosperity in the first place. As a political commentary: if you change a few names, dates, and place locations, are we describing our own country?

The books of **1 and 2 Chronicles** essentially retell the story of the kings, but this time for a remnant of God's people now in exile that longed for restoration. If God had something to say before the exile, did God also have something to say even now to those who were in exile? Was God still interested in them? The answer is a resounding "yes." Israel needed to recall what had gotten them into this new slavery and this new mess in the first place: they themselves did.

Continuity with the past was perhaps the best way they could prevent the same thing from happening once more. And of course, during this whole period of time, the prophets - those elusive, sometimes reclusive, often reluctant but faithful messengers of God, were not only warning them of disaster, but also reminding them that God's covenant with Abraham was not fulfilled yet. While their predictions of disaster did indeed come to be fulfilled, would their words of comfort and encouragement regarding the restoration of Israel and a coming Savior from God also be fulfilled?

Questions - Part 9

1. Read the third paragraph of Unit Nine, which describes the conditions which led to the destruction of the nation and people of Israel. Is there a warning here for us today?
2. What is the covenant God made with Abraham (in Genesis 12 and again in 15), and why does that one still matter?
3. The two major covenants in the Old Testament are the Abraham covenant and the Sinai covenant. Can you describe the differences between the two? Which one led to the events that have now happened, i.e. the people being conquered and driven into exile and slavery in a foreign land?
4. It is said that "*those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.*" What does this mean, and are there examples of this that we can see in Scripture, and what can we learn from such a statement?
5. There is another saying that "*affluence breeds apathy.*" How might this describe the Israelites then, and how does it apply to us today?

Part Ten

God is Not Done Yet: The Prophets - The Kingdom has been destroyed. Its' buildings lie in ruins. The Temple has been leveled. Its' people have been carried off into exile in Babylon, and it seems they are right back where they started - in slavery and bondage. So what happened to God's promise to Abraham? Enter the prophets!

There are numerous books of prophecy in the Old Testament. They are divided into "major" and "minor" prophets. These correspond largely to the size of the books. Therefore, the books of **Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel** are considered "major," while the majority of the prophets (**Hosea through Malachi**) are considered "minor." Other prophets also existed that do not have their words recorded in the Bible, such as Elijah, who was a prophet of God in the early years of the kings. *Nearly half (17 of 39) books of the Old Testament are books attributed to these elusive messengers of God.* It should also be noted that while **Daniel** is often considered prophecy (because of the visions Daniel has), it is also part historical, as well as part apocalyptic in nature, with Daniel's visions concerning both the coming of the Messiah some 500+ years in the future, as well as an unknown time when God's plan is ultimately fulfilled. **Jonah** is also a fun book - mainly because Jonah calls the people to repent, and when they actually do, he gets angry at God for not destroying them!

What is a prophet? It is someone, called by God, to deliver a message to God's people. A prophet's primary mission for God is not to predict the future, but to deliver the message. God's prophets had a universal message that recurred over and over. It is not unlike the message we saw throughout the history books telling us of the kings: the people had rebelled against and turned away from God, and needed to renew their commitment to the LORD. Spiritually, the people were terminally sick. Morally, the people were bankrupt. Socially, however, things never *appeared* better, despite the lies, deception, corruption, and greed on a national level. What we see is an age-old truth that affluence breeds apathy toward God.

As God's messenger, first and foremost, what is often associated with the prophet's words is a statement such as "*Thus says the Lord...*" (**Jeremiah 2:2** and elsewhere). Though the prophets spoke for God, their message was often ignored. So how then, one might ask, does a person know if the prophet's message is for real? It can be measured on whether or not it conforms to God's past history with the Israelites, and on whether or not its message comes true.

In the case of the Biblical prophets, they really weren't telling the people anything new that they had not heard before. If we recall the covenant God made on Mount Sinai (the 10 Commandments), there were certain stipulations that went along with it. The prophets were simply reminding the people and the leaders of those stipulations, and warning them that the disasters foretold for them disobeying the covenant would take place soon if they did not change their ways (**Deuteronomy 27:15-26**).

However, the prophets, in addition to warning the people of impending disaster *according to the conditions of the Sinai Covenant*, also foretold of a restoration after disaster hit, that would also be brought about by God. The restoration prophesies all center on a future Messiah or Savior that was yet to come. Some of these prophetic words are even affirmed when we read the four Gospels, especially in the Gospel of St. Matthew. For example, **Isaiah 7:14**, which says "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son...*" is confirmed to be fulfilled in Jesus when we read **Matthew 1:23**. So even though the disaster scenario of the Israelites disobeying their part of the covenant was going to happen, God wasn't done yet, and had additional plans for not only Israel but also the whole world, **Isaiah 11:10, 12** and elsewhere.

Though Israel was God's chosen, eventually all peoples are chosen by God to live in covenant with Him through the examples both good and bad given us by the Hebrew people. The foretold Messiah is to be the fulfillment of this future hope. Today, we know this Messiah as Jesus.

Questions - Part 10

1. What was the prophet's primary message? For reference, see Isaiah 1:16-20 and Deuteronomy 27:15-26.
2. What does the Bible say about our sins and our nation today? See Isaiah 60:1-3 and Isaiah 56:6-8.
3. What is the difference between a Jew and a Gentile? See if you can figure out the answer from Isaiah 11:10-12.
4. How can we distinguish between a true prophet and a false prophet? (The answer is in the body of Part Ten). What were the false prophets during the time of the prophets saying that was false, compared to the Biblical prophets? (See 1 Kings 22:6-23)
5. What disaster fell upon the remaining southern kingdom for refusing to return to God in 587 BC? (Read 2 Kings 25:1-21)

For additional resources on prophecy and fulfillment, see ***Bonus Resource A: “Old Testament Prophecies and Their New Testament Fulfillment.”***

Part Eleven

A New Hope: The Forgotten Message of the Messiah - As mentioned, the prophets' message was twofold. The second part regarding a future restoration was often overlooked as a result of the peoples' disobedience and God's corresponding judgement. That restoration was about the grace that God would give to both the Jews and the Gentiles (all nations, **Psalm 86:8-10** and elsewhere), with the coming of a future Messiah or Savior. This pattern of sin-judgement-grace has occurred throughout the Bible thus far (Part One), and so in God's Divine Plan that is yet unfolding, the pattern continues.

It is no accident that all of the stories and legend surrounding George Frederick Handel's Oratorio entitled "Messiah" are true. In fact, Handel tells the entire story of the Messiah, taken directly from the pages of Scripture, in song. Accordingly, the first section of the entire Oratorio is entitled, "The Prophesy and its Fulfillment." What it tells us is how historically the prophesies of the Old Testament prophets have been viewed, both as direct prophesies and as shown to be fulfilled in the Gospels.

Prophesies of the Messiah do not always appear direct, however. For example, **Hosea 11:1** states: "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*" At first glance, it doesn't appear to have anything to do with a future covenant God might be establishing (such as in **Jeremiah 31:31**), but in this specific instance, we know that it is fulfilled about the Messiah, Jesus, because the Gospel according to Matthew tells us that it is (**Matthew 2:14-15**). Other similar passages also are confirmed in the Gospels, such as **Isaiah 40:1-3**, which is about John the Baptist.

Here are some other passages that are about the coming Messiah:

Isaiah 40:1-5
Isaiah 60:2-3
Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 22
Malachi 3:1-3
Isaiah 53

Haggai 2:6-7
Isaiah 9:1-6

This is but a sampling of the passages from prophesy that talk of God's Divine Plan yet to be fulfilled through a New Covenant God will establish through the Messiah. For additional references, refer to Bonus Resource A. The point of it all is that God is in control, and God's plan will be fulfilled in time. Note that some of these are included in books like the Psalms that are not normally associated as books written by the prophets.

Ephesians 1:9-10 states that God is "*making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*" The conclusion of God's plan is that all things be united in Christ Jesus, who is the Messiah foretold in the pages of the Old Testament. In the person of the Messiah, we find that the real enemy of humanity is not bad nations, presidents or rulers but sin, death, and the devil, and this is what God has come to liberate all people from, both the Jews and non-Jews (the Gentiles). The fulfillment of this plan begins with a baby, born in Bethlehem - an event we celebrate each Christmas.

Questions - Part 11

1. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What does God appear to be saying here?
2. Read Psalm 22. Without reading the “passion” accounts in the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what specific verses appear to refer directly to Jesus’ own torture, crucifixion, and death?
3. Read the entire chapter of Isaiah 40. Do you see any “future” messages here about either Jesus, the Gospel story itself, or how God might rescue people from sin and suffering?
4. Read Haggai 2:6-9. What does this say about God restoring and rescuing all people? Who is the maker and owner of everything, including all those things we consider valuable?
5. Read Malachi 3:1. This verse is understood to be about a future person. Who do you think it is? (Hint, there are other verses in the prophets that talk about him also, and for the answer, read Mark 1:1-3)

Part Twelve

The Birth of the Messiah - We leave behind the Old Testament and get into the heart of God's divine plan for humanity. Remember that God created all things, and promised to Abraham three additional things besides being his God: the land of Canaan (present day Israel), descendants that would be a nation and people (the Hebrew people), and that through his descendants all nations would be blessed (from **Genesis 12, 15**). It is this third part that the prophets allude to in the prediction of a new covenant and the cryptic passages regarding the Messiah. *It's fulfillment begins in that event we celebrate each December 25: the birth of Jesus.*

It is worth noting that there is approximately 500 years 'missing' from the Old Testament's account of history leading up to the New Testament and the Gospels. **Isaiah** prophesies that the people of Israel would return from their Babylonian exile (**Isaiah 44 - 45**) in what is perhaps the most specific prophecy, naming Cyrus, King of Persia, as God's instrument for the return of his people. History does indeed record Cyrus sending the Jews back to their homeland. The 'missing' 500 years are chronicled in other non-Biblical writings, and so we know a great deal about them. In fact, some of the events during that time are included in what are referred to as "Apocryphal" writings that are included in the Roman Catholic version of the Bible, which contains more books than our Protestant version. There is a reason why they are not in our Bible: there is nothing new presented in these writings or this time period, other than certain historical events that continue to demonstrate the perpetual sin of both Jews and Gentiles, as well as our continued need for the messiah.

And so we come to the Messiah's birth. It does not happen in an immediate fashion. It does not happen as the people in exile in Babylon (587 BC) cry out to God and lament their status as slaves once again. It does not happen when the prophets foretell of this event in the 6th and 7th centuries BC. It happens as ALL things happen: in God's time. And so, likely in the year 4 BC, and likely sometime in the spring, rather than the arbitrary date of December 25, a child is born. The account of this event and the events leading up to it can be found in both the Gospels of **Matthew** and **Luke**.

Especially in **Luke 1 and 2**, we get details of the events leading up to his birth. Mary is chosen by God for a singular honor: to bear the Son of God into the world, but to do so as a virgin. Her cousin, Elizabeth, is also with child, and this child would later become known as John the Baptist. Most importantly is the encounter we see, where Elizabeth instantly recognizes that Mary has this honor, and refers to her as "*the mother of my Lord.*" Mary sings a magnificent song in praise of God, called today "*the Magnificat.*" Joseph also has an angel appear to him (**Matthew 1:21**) to assure him that Mary has not been unfaithful, and that her story is true: her child comes from God. They are called to Bethlehem to register in a census, and while there, Mary gives birth. The child is placed in the manger portion of the home, and is soon visited by some shepherds from nearby fields who are told of this event by an angel of God.

That the announcement of Jesus' birth is to shepherds and later to the Gentile Wise Men is no accident, since Jesus came not only for the "select," but for all people, including the outcasts and the non-Jews. And so begins the fulfillment of God's divine plan. The messiah has been born! He is a messiah for all people, to save them from their sins!

Questions - Part 12

1. Which of the two Gospel books do we read about Jesus' birth?
2. If you read Luke chapters' 1 and 2, you encounter 4 humble songs of praise to God sung at various times. We discussed Mary's Song (the "Magnificat"). What are the other 3 and who sings them? Their traditional names are: the "Benedictus," the "Nunc Dimittis," and the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo."
3. What might give us a clue that Jesus' birth occurred in the spring, rather than the arbitrary date set for it of December 25? (Hint: The Bible does not tell us the exact date, but does hint at the time of year).
4. A "Savior" is someone who saves. Israel had been under oppression from foreign nations for centuries. What reason do you think might be why they were looking for something other than a savior who was a lowly baby born in a manger?
5. Read Genesis 12:3. Why is it an important part of the Bible that Jesus is biologically a descendant of King David, and ultimately Abraham? (Hint: This is the heart of the Bible's Divine message!)

Part Thirteen

The Life of the Messiah - Theological discussions have occurred throughout history on the exact nature of the law God provides. In Martin Luther's time, he identified two uses of the law (the theological use and the civil use) and folded a third use into the first two, namely that God's law is also a guide for Christian living.

If there was any doubt about that, One only needs to turn to Jesus' "*Sermon on the Mount*" in **Matthew 5-6** and to his frequent use of parables as teaching tools, especially throughout the Gospel of **Luke**. God's Divine plan was for Jesus to die the death we deserved to die under the law, and then to destroy sin, death, and the devil by rising from the dead. All of this was to bring us new life and righteousness by God's sheer grace through our faith in Him. During his life and ministry, he accordingly taught about this divine plan of God's: how it would happen and more importantly why it had to happen. The how is the Gospel itself. The why is because of humanity's disobedience to the will and the laws of God.

Take the "*Sermon on the Mount*," for example. Especially in **Matthew 5**, we discover that sin doesn't just constitute the physical actions that many of us might have indeed avoided in our lives, but it also includes the mere thoughts we have as well. St. Paul emphasizes Jesus' own point in **Romans 3** when he states that "*there is no one righteous. Not one.*" We sin merely by our thoughts, regardless of any corresponding action.

Jesus' parables are a whole different style. Rather than direct teaching, he uses an allegorical story, usually fictitious, to illustrate certain theological truths regarding God's law and the salvation that comes through the Gospel. Take, for example, the parable of the "*Good Samaritan*" (**Luke 10:29-37**). Among its lessons are that we cannot justify ourselves (God alone justifies, saves, and makes righteous), and that to "be a neighbor" is far more than merely being pleasant. In this case, the victim's direct enemy is the most unlikely person to show mercy and to care for the beaten man on the side of the road, and yet that is exactly what he does. That is how far-reaching God's law calls for our obedience: we are to imitate God's love by showing love to one another!

The parable of the "*Prodigal Son*" (**Luke 15:11-32**) shows that God's love knows no bounds, and that it is God's mercy, NOT self-justification, that ultimately matters. God (the father) treats repentant sinners as equals to those who need no repentance (the elder son), showing love and mercy to the repentant, though rebellious and disobedient son. In the end, we are all sinners, which the "*Sermon on the Mount*" from **Matthew 5** illustrates. We can never justify ourselves by the law. God alone can justify through the ultimate purpose of the Gospel.

It is this ultimate claim of Jesus throughout the Gospels that matters, as he explains one last time after the resurrection: "*....he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'*" (**Luke 24:45-47**) He not only tells them this repeatedly before his death, but also in his explanation to them on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. This is the central event of God's Divine Drama and is the fulfillment of that third and final part of God's promise to Abraham clear back in the book of Genesis! (**Genesis 12, 15**)

Questions - Part 13

1. Read Matthew 5:27-28. Describe how our thoughts and our senses can also cause us to sin, based on this passage.
2. Read the parable of the “Good Samaritan,” in Luke 10:29-37. How does this show the extreme nature of God’s love? How does it show the disobedience of even the religious folks?
3. An inheritance is normally the transfer of possessions to the children when the parents have died. What is the younger son (the “Prodigal” son) saying to his father by demanding his inheritance? Read Luke 15:11-32.
4. Read the Parable of the Sower, Luke 8:1-15. This parable is unique in that Jesus explains the meaning for us. What might be our biggest problem today, according to this parable?
5. Read Luke 18:9-14. In this parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, what does this suggest our attitude toward God should be?

Part Fourteen

The Death and Resurrection of the Messiah - the Gospel of **Matthew** goes to great lengths in the first chapter to assure us that, in fact, Jesus is a direct descendant of King David AND Abraham, thereby fulfilling not only the prophesies regarding the Messiah who will come out of David's lineage, but also fulfilling that third part of God's covenant with Abraham (**Genesis 12 and 15**). The Gospel of **Luke** demonstrates that not only is Jesus a fulfillment of that covenant, but that in Christ, we are truly a new creation (**2 Corinthians 5:7**), tracing Jesus back to Adam.

So as Jesus himself lay claim to not only numerous times during his life and ministry, but also again after his rising from the dead (referred to last time - **Luke 24:45-47**), the Messiah's true purpose was to destroy the Jews' (and humanity's) ultimate enemy. This enemy is not in any government, king, or army, but is actually sin, along with sin's cause (the Devil), and sin's punishment - death (**1 Corinthians 15:26**). Another way to look at it: Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that we are still under the law (*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished - Matthew 5:18*), and also shows us that we sin even in our thoughts. Sin brings us but one punishment: death (**Romans 6:23**). So to defeat death on our behalf, Jesus died (see **Romans 6:8-10**), suffering the punishment we deserved (**Isaiah 53:4-6**) as one who did NOT deserve sin's punishment (**1 John 3:5**), but then destroying death by rising again from the dead on that first Easter day.

This is an incredible act by God. We may not comprehend this because we think differently from God. Humanity does not think selflessly as God does. Jesus tells us, "*greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends*" (**John 15:13**). This is an act that defies human understanding and reason. When a person really puts their mind to it and ponders this turn of events, it truly humbles them, to believe and know that "*God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" (**John 3:16**). God did not just "love" the world. God "*so loved*" the world. It is complete love. It is total sacrifice for others. It is putting others before self. It is God's Divine Plan being fulfilled. Perhaps it seems strange to us, that God would choose to act in this fashion, and rightly so, since we are bound by sin and our focus is usually more on the self than on others. But recall God's own words: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). Accordingly, it is not up to us to comprehend fully or understand completely God's actions or purpose. Rather, it is, as Jesus stated in the Gospel of John above, simply to "believe." Remember that even Abraham "*believed God*" when God made a promise to him that "*All nations would be blessed*" (**Genesis 12:3** and elsewhere) through his offspring.

When we think of God as infinitely sovereign, omniscient, omnipresent, and powerful, then having the faith to believe that God acts according to His own will and purpose becomes easy. Therefore, we receive this great gift of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection with incredible thanks, and also breathing a sigh of relief in knowing that we are powerless to save ourselves! This message was received by many following Jesus' resurrection, for the "good news" of Jesus spread like wildfire in the first century after Christ!

Questions - Part 14

1. Part 14 is a summary of the Gospel itself: explaining many doctrines of the Christian church. The Nicene Creed is a summary of such doctrine (see Bonus Part B). One of the main criticisms of the Christian faith is that it seems “silly” or “far-fetched” that God would act in this way. What does Isaiah 55:8-9 suggest about such an attitude?
2. Read John 3:16. What is it saying about Jesus’ (God’s) attitude when it comes to humanity? For perspective, read also John 15:13.
3. For centuries, the Jews were awaiting a Messiah who would look more like the “knight in shining armor;” someone who would conquer all of Israel’s political enemies. What do Romans 8:31-39 and 1 Corinthians 15:26 tell us as to what the real enemy is?
4. Did Jesus willingly die on the cross? Read Matthew 26:36-44. How is this a confirmation of John 15:13, from the first question?
5. Do God’s actions in saving us make sense to you? Why or why not? What is required of us to comprehend the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice for us? (Hint: re-read John 3:16).

Part Fifteen

The New Church Spreads: The Book of Acts - While the book of Acts records events after the resurrection of Jesus in all four Gospels, it specifically forms a continuous account with the Gospel of **Luke**, as they are both written by St. Luke. From the ascension of Jesus, there is an immediate call to *go and make disciples*, just as the Gospel of **Matthew** ends with. There is an initial reluctance on the part of the disciples to go and do anything, and they are told of the imminent sending of the Holy Spirit.

As promised, the Holy Spirit arrives in spectacular and supernatural fashion. The day of Pentecost finally comes (**chapter 2**). The term “Pentecost” is the Greek word for the Jewish Feast of Weeks. The disciples are all gathered in a public place, and suddenly a mighty wind enters, tongues of fire rest upon them, and they begin telling the story of the Gospel in all manner of different languages. Peter then takes the lead and tells all those gathered of the real reason they are doing what they are doing. It is not because of “*too much wine*,” as most said, but it is because of the risen Jesus who lives in them!

Soon, Peter is evangelizing along with some of the other disciples and apostles, and eventually the direct instruction comes from God not to just tell the Hebrew people, but to go to all nations and evangelize the gentiles too! (A gentile is anyone who is not of Jewish ancestry). This all happens in fulfillment once again of Old Testament prophesy. This command comes not only through Peter’s dream (**chapter 10**), but also through the conversion of a Pharisee and persecutor-of-Christians, Saul (**chapter 9**). Saul’s conversion is a significant stepping stone for the early church. One who had been persecuting the Christians and being complicit in their killing (see Stephen - **chapter 7**), is now one of the most zealous advocates for Christ. Upon his conversion, he takes the name “Paul,” and specifically takes the Gospel message beyond the Jewish people to all non-Jewish people as well.

From **chapter 13** on, the book of Acts focuses on 3 of *Paul’s Missionary journeys*. What we discover is that as the Gospels focus in on Jerusalem as the central point of the Gospel, where Jesus is crucified and rises again, the book of Acts shows how the Gospel begins to spread rapidly out away from Jerusalem, and more and more people learn of Jesus and are baptized. Paul becomes the greatest missionary of the early church. He is beaten, stoned, left for dead, persecuted, imprisoned, and yet he continues to make disciples of Jesus. Paul’s journeys eventually take him to Rome: the cultural center of the Roman Empire. Of course, he arrives there because he had been arrested. The trip there was miraculous, to say the least. The ship is late getting across the Mediterranean, caught by the winter storms, eventually gets shipwrecked, and eventually the crew and Paul are stranded on the island of Malta.

In Rome, Paul is under house arrest, where he continues to teach the Gospel. *This is where book of Acts ends*. Some say that Paul was eventually executed in Rome. *However, history and geography contradict that theory*. There is plenty of historical evidence in both Spain and France to suggest that Paul was released from house arrest, and eventually made it beyond Rome, all the way to the western side of the Mediterranean Sea and the known world, evangelizing new Christians there as well.

However, the main focus of the book of Acts is to show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread rapidly throughout the empire, literally taking some Jews but especially the gentiles by storm. To be a follower of Jesus is to be more than just someone who receives the message. It is a life altering event! The Gospel message should indeed change us (**Romans 12:1-2**). The epistles that follow are letters to churches and individuals that illustrate this!

Questions - Part 15

1. Pentecost is the Greek name for the Old Testament festival “the Feast of Weeks” (Leviticus 23:15, Deuteronomy 16:9). What is significant about that festival in the book of Acts? (See Acts 2:1-21). Does it occur before or after Jesus rose from the dead?
2. St. Paul was one of the greatest evangelists of all time. He was originally known as “Saul,” and was a Pharisee. Acts Chapters 7 and 9 are the chapters where we first encounter him. According to Philippians 3:4b-11, what does he think of his former way of life as a Pharisee?
3. Our unit concludes laying claim that to be a follower of Jesus must change and alter us (Read Ephesians 4:22-24). What are some ways we should be changed by this?
4. Read the account of Saul’s conversion, as he becomes known as Paul, in Acts 9:1-19. What is the last thing God says to Ananias before he heals Saul’s blindness? Does Saul (Paul) suffer for the sake of Christ? (Read Acts 14:19-20).
5. What are some reasons that the Bible’s message doesn’t seem to change people today the way it did in the time of St. Peter and St. Paul?

Part Sixteen

The Practice of Christianity in Acts and the Epistles - Much can be gleaned from how Christians ought to act from Jesus' own words in the Gospels. Much more can be gleaned on how Christians DID act as we examine the early church in the book of **Acts**, and in the letters to the various churches from the Apostle Paul and a handful of others contained in the New Testament.

The overriding theme seen time and again in the Epistles (**Romans - Jude**) is one of obedience. Obedience is not just to please God. We fail on that task constantly, much the way the Israelites did repeatedly in the Old Testament. Rather, obedience to God should come as the result of faith - faith in believing what God has done for us (saving us for eternity from our sins) because we were powerless to do so ourselves.

To put another way: it is seen in the uniquely Lutheran doctrine of "*Law and Gospel*." The book of **Romans** is the best place to identify this, but it is seen throughout the Epistles. Consider these verses: *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Romans 3:20)* *Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:31)* *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Romans 6:1-2)* *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)*. The Law is given to A: restrain society and promote good and peace; and B: accuse us of being sinners. The Gospel does not eliminate the law's demands on either us or society (**Matthew 5:17-18**). But it changes the focus of why we continue to observe it.

The law was seen as the means of salvation for a long time. It was simple: obey God's law and earn salvation. Disobey God's law and suffer eternal punishment. Job's friends were rebuked by God for thinking this way (the book of **Job**- see Part 20). While this was true of the Sinai Covenant and the 10 Commandments, God's foreknowledge demonstrates that this was never possible for us beyond the Garden of Eden. However, the whole of the Old Testament demonstrates another purpose for the law, and that is to point the way to the eventual coming of Jesus the Christ. Christ brings salvation (the Gospel) and the law brings us Godly order in society - we now serve God by serving others through our obedience to God's laws.

It is hard to adopt a worldly, 21st century attitude of social and cultural accommodation today in light of the classic understanding of "Law and Gospel." The law can never be tossed aside, as many are in the habit of doing today. But it can also never be used as a road map to salvation, since salvation comes to us purely by the grace of God through our faith in Christ.

Another good example of this can be seen in the letters to the **Corinthians**, and the letter to the **Galatians**. In the **Corinthian** case, they believed falsely that they could do as they wished because Jesus had forgiven them. St. Paul gives them an emphatic "NO" to that attitude, that the law was to be obeyed. In contrast, the **Galatian** Church believed that they had to be obedient to the laws of God for salvation to become reality. They also receive a stern admonishment that salvation comes only through faith, and NOT through obedience to the law.

God takes care of the relationship we have with Him. He does so in order that we don't have to worry about it, since we cannot ever fix it anyhow. That then frees us to become obedient to the laws of God so that good order in our homes, churches, and society can prevail, all to the glory of God. This is the underpinning of Discipleship. The next unit examines what Christian Disciples do that sets them apart from others.

Questions - Part 16

1. Martin Luther, in his writings, points repeatedly to the doctrine of “Law and Gospel” as the central doctrine of the church, and one that we should all be familiar with. Read Romans 3:9-20 and explain what “Law and Gospel” might mean. For additional insight read Ephesians 2:8-10.
2. Read the summaries of the Corinthian church and the Galatian church (to which the Epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians were written). Which of the two situations might we be like today here in America?
3. The book of Job in the Old Testament is a lengthy book written in poetic form about a man (named Job) who suffered unjustly. His friends claimed he must have sinned greatly to suffer the way he did. Why is this attitude wrong?
4. We say that God is all knowing - Psalm 138 speaks of how God knew each of us before we were even conceived. So if God knew that we would all sin, what purpose might He have had in even giving us His Law to begin with?
5. Some might argue that believing in God is being obedient, and something that we can do to please God. What does Ephesians 2:8-10 from above suggest about this?

Part Seventeen

The Practice of Christianity Continued: Discipleship -The early church emphasized discipleship since the beginning, but has largely lost that emphasis in modern times. We need to continue the Reformation again and recapture what it means to be a Christian following the example of the first followers of Jesus. While there are many facets to being a Christian, there are specific themes mentioned time and again throughout the New Testament (and seen as well in the Old too).

It should be no surprise that this unit focuses on what both Lutheran CORE and we have called the “Six Habits of Discipleship.” (From a 2011 document entitled “the Proposal for Discipleship Networking”). Following Jesus means discipleship. Discipleship means nothing if it cannot be identified through Scripture. The New Testament is full of examples!

Praying Daily: Consider **Acts 1:14** - “*They all joined together constantly in prayer...*” along with other passages such as **Acts 10:9; 13:3; 14:21-23**. We also see the importance of constant (interpreted as “daily”) prayer in such passages as **Ephesians 6:18** - “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*” along with other verses such as **1 Thessalonians, 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2 Timothy 1:3, Colossians 4:2, and Philippians 4:6**.

Worshiping together weekly as a family: We see a significant devotion to worshiping together within the Christian community, gathering weekly and seeing themselves as a family, united by God. We see that a Sabbath worship was standard throughout the early church, as seen in **Acts 13:44** - “*on the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord*,” as well as **13:2, 13:48, 16:35, 17:2 and 18:4**. You can also see it in **1 Timothy 2:1-8**, and **Hebrews 13:15**.

Reading the Bible on a regular basis: Consider **Acts 18:28** - “*For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*” See also **Acts 13:46-48, 17:11, and 28:31**. From the Epistles, “*devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*” (**1 Timothy 4:13**), as well as **Ephesians 6:17, 1 Timothy 4:5-6 and 13**, and Jesus’ own words in **John 15:7**.

Sharing the Gospel with others: The “Great Commission” is the basis for all discipleship making - “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” (**Matthew 28:19-20**). Like the Apostle Paul at the end of **Acts (28:30-31)**, it is seen throughout the early church and the letters to the churches that this is the fundamental task of the church - to carry out Jesus’ final command to the disciples.

Relating to other Christians in the bond of Christ’s love - holding each other accountable to the basic doctrines and practices of the Christian faith is also seen throughout the early church. We will all give an account before God (**Romans 14:12**), but while we work together as the hands and feet of Christ, we also hold one another accountable as well (**Matthew 18:15-17**), as also seen in **Galatians 6:1-2, James 5:16-20, Hebrews 10:25, Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 4:25-32**, as well as being the subject of the Epistles in general.

Giving generously of our time, talents, and treasures, and testimony is the last of the six habits. The practice of the early church was almost communal in nature - meeting the needs of all through their various gifts: “*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had*” (**Acts 4:32**). See also **Acts 10:2, Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 9:11, and 1 Timothy 6:18**.

The doctrine of Law and Gospel shows how we apply the work of Jesus in our lives, the habits of Discipleship show us how we put it to practice. We live each day as followers of Jesus, until the day that Christ returns again!

Questions - Part 17

1. Describe the six habits of discipleship described in this unit.

Pray Daily:

Worship together weekly:

Read Scripture regularly:

Share the Gospel:

Relate to other Christians:

Give generously:

2. What can you do to be a better disciple, based on these six basic themes of discipleship from the Bible?

3. Can our church do better at being disciples? Give some ideas and examples.

Part Eighteen

The End: The Return of Christ to Judge the World - The practical application of the Christian faith is called Discipleship. It is how we live in the here and now. However, Jesus promised to return again (**John 14:1-4**), despite his ascension after the resurrection, with the subsequent commissioning of the church (**Acts 2**) to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments until that time comes.

What exactly will the return of Christ look like? Some books of the Bible also deal directly with the end times. Called “apocalyptic writings,” the books of Daniel and Revelation are the two primary apocalyptic writings of the Bible. Much of the apocalyptic writings are cryptic. We will not fully comprehend the imagery and the events to come. Much like heaven, and much like eternal life in Christ, we only see a poor, incomplete image at present (**1 Corinthians 13:9-12**). The book of Revelation gives us one such incomplete image. If anyone wants to claim they understand it fully, they are deceiving themselves. If anyone wants to claim they know what day Christ will indeed return, they are denying the testimony that Scripture gives: “*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ...Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come*” (**Matthew 24:36-37, 42**).

The key is in the final verse: “*keep watch.*” Be ready. Some of Jesus’ parables deal directly with this topic - to not dwell on the ‘when,’ but to simply keep on doing the work of someone who follows Jesus. However, the other common thread is that Jesus, the Messiah, will come again one day, at what can be considered the end of time. The world as we currently know and understand it will come to an end. But until that time, we are to keep watch and be ready, and continue being disciples of Jesus.

And why exactly? Some of the Revelation images of the throne of God tell exactly why: “*the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’*” (**Revelation 4:10-11**). It all centers on the absolute sovereignty of God. Just because many today do not believe in God, does not make God any less real. Just because so many today want to redefine God and God’s laws according to human will does not make God any less powerful or the demands of God’s laws any less final on us. The end times are no different. We may decide to think we can control our own destiny, but the end will come regardless, simply because the God who has fulfilled everything else thus far will fulfill the final chapter of this Divine Drama as well!

So how do we summarize? Jesus did not withdraw His presence from us at the ascension, He transformed it. At the last day, when He returns to judge the heavens and the earth, All God’s people will be welcomed into their eternal home, but He will also separate the sheep from the goats, and the goats will go to eternal punishment (**Matthew 25:31-46**). In the meantime, we are to not revel in the authority given us by Jesus, but to give thanks that we are numbered among the saved (**Luke 10:20**). We are not to hasten the day of His coming, but live in preparation for it, going to all nations and making Disciples - the call and ‘Great Commission’ given to us by Jesus. Most importantly, “*Be faithful unto death*” (**Revelation 2:10b**). Live each day according to his will and plan, until that day when each of us is called into His eternal kingdom!

Questions - Part 18

1. When will the end times happen? (See Matthew 24:36-42)

2. In that same passage from question 1, what is the fundamental message for us... in other words, what should we do to be ready for it? For another hint, look at the end of Revelation 2:10.

3. Why do you think so many people ridicule belief in God today? Does such ridicule do anything to change who God is?

4. There is an attitude today that believes we can control our own destiny, and therefore no longer need God. What do you think of this attitude? Is it dangerous, and if so, why?

5. Martin Luther once was asked what he would do if the world ended tomorrow. His response was “if the world would end tomorrow, I would go plant a tree today.” What do you suppose he meant by this, and what should we be doing today, whether or not the world ends tomorrow, next week, next year, or even within our lifetimes?

Part Nineteen

The “Skipped” Books of Old Testament History - Ruth, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah

There are certain books of the history portion of the Old Testament that until now, we have not referred to directly. This does not mean they are not equally important or valid! Therefore it is worth making mention of them here in order that in the Bible’s Grand story, we understand their role and place within it.

Ruth: Ruth is a book about it’s title: a woman named Ruth. We learn from the beginning of the book that it takes place during the time of the Judges (the book by the same name). Naomi, the initial Hebrew figure, has married and has moved into pagan territory. Naomi, unlike most Hebrews, has remained faithful to God. Her husband dies, leaving her to raise two sons on her own. They both marry pagan women, and one marries Ruth. The two sons also die, and as Naomi prepares to move back home to the land of Judah and her people, Ruth vows to stay with her, no matter what. It is an encounter of extreme loyalty, that also shows how God will work through even the Gentiles to save them, as Ruth eventually re-marries to a man named Boaz, and she becomes the great grandmother to King David. Ruth demonstrates that it is not who you know, or who you are, but that you have an obedience that comes through faith in the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Esther: Esther is also a book titled after the main character. However, we must now fast forward to the time of the exile (after 587 BC). Esther is a young Jewish woman living in exile. She becomes the queen to the Babylonian King Xerxes after he deposes Queen Vashti. A brief summary of the book of Esther is that she aids her people at Mordecai’s insistence in helping to foil a plot by Haman, a high official, to destroy all of the Jews living among them. Haman’s plot backfires and he himself is executed, thus sparing the Jews from annihilation. Esther reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, even if the situation appears hopeless.

Ezra: Once again we fast forward to the time immediately following the Babylonian exile and captivity of 587. In the latter part of the 5th century and early 4th century BC, the Jews are issued a decree that they may return to their homeland (the land of Canaan). Ezra chronicles the beginning of this return and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. As the Jews in exile wondered if God had abandoned them, Ezra demonstrates that God can and does act according to His promises, and hope is once again restored - but by God and not by anything we can do.

Nehemiah: Nehemiah also presents the immediate history following the return from exile, but here the concern is with their ongoing enemies, who are bent on destroying the Jews. Nehemiah, with God’s permission and protection, rebuilds the wall around Jerusalem (no small task in itself) in a mere 52 days! (**Nehemiah 6:15**). During this time, they often worked with tools in one hand and their sword in the other for protection (**Nehemiah 4:17**). They also concerned themselves with the tasks that the law of God had for so long been forgotten about. This book demonstrates that with God’s plan and under His protection, nothing is truly impossible.

Part Twenty

The Wisdom Literature of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

The same rule applies here: While our summary units of the Bible have skipped over these 5 books of Wisdom, they are no less important than the books we have covered, and in fact, are even more so! Wisdom literature is the effective application of all that the Bible is about.

Job: It begins here. Job (pronounced Jō b) is a man considered holy and blameless (**Job 1:1**), and would most likely be a contemporary of Abraham, meaning he lived in the early time of the Bible's history. In a strange and rare glimpse into the spiritual realm of God's kingdom, we discover that Satan accuses God (**Job 1:9-11**) of providing for and protecting Job, and that is the only reason Job worships God or lives according to Godly precepts and laws. And so comes a series of tests, where God withdraws His hand from Job, and in one day, Job loses his property, his herds, his children, and even his health. He is reduced to sitting on a pile of refuse, afflicted with a leprous like condition, while his wife tells him to just curse God and get it over with (**Job 2:9**). The majority of the book, which is written in poetic fashion, deals with Job maintaining that he has done nothing to warrant such suffering, all the while 4 different friends attempt to convince him that his sin had to be a grievous one to cause such suffering. In the end, God responds to Job's questioning of why he was made to suffer so, by simply stating that Job has no authority to challenge or question God: "*Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?*" (**Job 38:2**)

The **Psalms** are really the heart of the Bible. Contained within them are all of the principles of both Old and New Testament history, wisdom, and teaching. They are songs of both lament and songs of praise toward God, while more of the Psalms complain to God than praise him. Yet even in the complaints, they, like Job, express an unwavering trust in God despite the uncertainty of human suffering and evil, such as in **Psalm 13:5** and elsewhere, "*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*"

The **Proverbs**, while largely of King Solomon, are pithy 1-2 line statements that express an absolute truth within the context of the singular universal reality established by God alone. They express a wisdom that is sorely needed with respect to God, and have application in how we are to live life. An example would be this Proverb, which occurs multiple times: "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*" (**Proverbs 1:7**). It expresses where the wise can find wisdom, and also why the foolish among us remain fools, because they consciously rebel against and ignore God, thereby rejecting true wisdom.

Ecclesiastes, most likely also written by Solomon, is an extremely philosophical work, and one that is pertinent to our understanding of God and society today. Solomon is accusing all of life as being "meaningless" and lists multiple examples of how he found no pleasure or satisfaction in anything, due to the fleeting nature of life itself. He repeatedly states that there is "nothing new under the sun," (**Ecclesiastes 1:9**) meaning that we commit the same meaningless acts and grievous sins over and over. He searches for meaning in life, and the ultimate meaning is found only in remembering who God is from an early age, that faith in Him may carry us all through this life and beyond.

Song of Solomon is a love poem. While some have accused it of being "R rated," it rather expresses the nature of true love that is to exist between a husband and wife. This, of course, is the only Biblical context for the physical, erotic nature of human love. Such physical, erotic forms of love are indeed permissible within this context and ONLY this context.

While all of these are brief summaries only, each of these 5 books is critical to both our understanding of the Bible's Grand Story, as well as how we apply it in daily life. They, too, express history and knowledge of God's Divine Plan, and they also speak volumes to our understanding and application of Scripture!

Part Twenty One

The Bible on Steroids: a Quick, One-Page Summary! Here is a short summary of all that we have discussed in the previous parts.

Genesis: God is the creator AND owner of all that exists. God singles out Abraham to be his chosen people to reveal his plan to all nations. His descendants eventually settle in Egypt.

Exodus-Deuteronomy: Abraham's descendants are delivered from bondage in Egypt, and despite God's effort on their behalf, they continually disobey God's law, given to them.

Joshua: After 40 years of wandering as punishment for turning from God, the Israelites take possession of the land promised them. They still do not carry out God's commands.

Judges: The people clamor for a leader *other* than God. A series of Judges are given as leaders, though the people continue to follow their own desires rather than God's.

Ruth: Ruth demonstrates an unwavering commitment to Naomi and the commands of God during the time of the Judges, and sets the stage for the birth of Jesus through her descendants.

1 Samuel-2 Kings: These books detail the history of Israel and the kings, from Saul and David (the Lord's anointed) up to the time of the exile of both the northern and southern Kingdoms.

1 and 2 Chronicles: retell the account of the kings but from the perspective of those in exile as a result of their disobedience to God. Does God still care for them? The answer is yes.

Ezra and Nehemiah: Tell the story of the exiles return from Babylon and the efforts to begin rebuilding and to recall their disobedience to God which got them in trouble to begin with.

Esther: An account of the Israelites attempting to recapture their faith in God while in captivity.

Job: The story of one man's faithfulness to God in the face of extreme suffering.

Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes: Songs of praise of God, Words of wisdom regarding faith in God, and a search for the true meaning of life - to remember who created us throughout our days.

The Prophets: Warnings to the people leading up to the conquest and exile, and admonishment to return to God and his ways. Also a promise to restore a lasting dynasty through a Messiah.

The Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John: The account of the promised Messiah as fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God. We learn of his birth, his life and ministry, his death, and his resurrection.

Acts of the Apostles: a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, recounting the day of Pentecost and the spread of the Gospel throughout the known world by the apostles and St. Paul, a convert. The fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham in blessing all nations through his descendant: Jesus the Christ.

Romans: A major letter of St. Paul that instructs the church in Rome on what it means to be a Christian - namely how we practically apply God's laws and the Gospel of Jesus in our lives. We call it "living the faith," or "discipleship."

The Epistles (letters) of Paul: Directed letters to churches instructing them in specific matters of faith, and in how to live out the tenets of the law and the Gospel in their lives.

The remaining letters (Hebrews - Jude): Other writers continue many of St. Paul's themes in how to practically believe and live out knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah in the lives of those reading them.

Revelation: A final vision from the apostle John regarding the end of time and the return of Christ to judge the world. *When He comes, will He find faith on earth?* Will He see YOUR faith?

Resource A - Old Testament Messianic Prophesies and Their New Testament Fulfillments

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Old Testament Reference</u>	<u>New Testament Fulfillment</u>
1	The Messiah would be born of a woman.	Genesis 3:15	Matthew 1:20, Galatians 4:4
2	Born of a virgin.	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-31
3	Bethlehem the birthplace.	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-6
4	From the lineage and ancestry of Abraham.	Genesis 12:3, 22:18	Matthew 1:1, Romans 9:5
5	From the tribe of Judah.	Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:33, Hebrews 7:14
6	heir and successor to King David's throne.	2 Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 9:7	Luke 1:32-33, Romans 1:3
7	His throne will be eternal.	Psalm 45:6-7, Daniel 2:44	Luke 1:33, Hebrews 1:8-12
8	He would be called Immanuel.	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
9	Will live in Egypt.	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14-15
10	Associated slaughter of innocents.	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18
11	The messenger to prepare the way.	Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:3-6, John 1:9-23
12	His own people would reject him.	Psalm 69:8, Isaiah 53:3	John 1:10-11, John 7:5, Luke 4:14
13	He is a prophet.	Deuteronomy 18:15	Acts 3:20-22
14	Elijah would come (return) first.	Malachi 4:5-6	Matthew 11:13-14, Matt 17:3
15	The Son of God.	Psalm 2:7	Matthew 3:16-17, Hebrews 1
16	He would be called a Nazarene.	Isaiah 11:1	Matthew 2:23
17	Light for Galilee.	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:13-16
18	Teaching in parables.	Psalm 78:2-4, Isaiah 6:9-10	Matthew 13:10-15, 34-35
19	Would heal the broken hearted.	Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:18-19
20	Would be called King.	Psalm 2:6, Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 27:37, Mark 11:7-11
21	His betrayal.	Psalm 41:9, Zechariah 11:12-13	Luke 22:47-48, Matthew 26:14-16
22	Betrayal money used to buy field.	Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 27:9-10
23	False accusations.	Psalm 35:11	Mark 14:57-58
24	Silence before his accusers.	Isaiah 53:7	Mark 15:4-5
25	beaten and spit upon.	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67
26	hatred for the Messiah.	Psalm 35:19, Psalm 69:4	John 15:24-25
27	Criminals crucified with the Messiah.	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27-28
28	Vinegar to drink during execution.	Psalm 69:21	Matthew 27:34, John 19:28-30
29	Piercing of "hands" and feet."	Psalm 22:16, Zechariah 12:10	John 20:25-27
30	Mockery and ridicule.	Psalm 22:7-8	Luke 23:35, Matthew 27:39-40
31	Soldiers would gamble for His robe.	Psalm 22:18	Luke 23:34, Matthew 27:35-36
32	no bones would be broken.	Exodus 12:46, Psalm 34:20	John 19:33-36
33	abandonment by God.	Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46
34	Prayers for enemies.	Psalm 109:4	Luke 23:34
35	The pierced side.	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
36	The resurrection.	Psalm 16:10, Psalm 49:15	Matthew 28:2-7, Acts 2:22-32
37	The ascension.	Psalm 24:7-10	Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51
38	the Christ to be seated at God's right hand.	Psalm 68:18, Psalm 110:1	Mark 16:19, Matthew 22:44
39	God's sacrifice for sin.	Isaiah 53:5-12	Romans 5:6-8
40	Jesus clears the temple	Psalm 69:9	John 2:12 ff
41	Both Jews and Gentiles to be saved	Genesis 22:18; Hosea 2:23; Isaiah 10:10-11; Psalm 22:27-28	Romans 3:29-30; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 3:6

"The Bible is the cradle wherein the infant Jesus is laid" - Martin Luther

Depending on how closely one might divide them, there are well over 300 specific prophesies regarding the Messiah, fulfilled in the New Testament account through the person of Jesus the Christ! Some entire chapters are directly prophetic about the nature of the Messiah, such as Psalms 22 and 69. This is just a small sampling of the most direct prophesies concerning Jesus. The WHOLE of the Bible, as Luther suggests, points us to Jesus as our Messiah!

Resource B - Scripture References in the Sunday Divine Service

Have you ever wondered why Lutherans worship “the same old way” each Sunday? Why do we use this thing called “liturgy” out of the hymnal?

The very word “*liturgy*” means “the people’s work.” It is the gathered assembly known as the family of God, gathering together to accomplish the task of worshiping God and learning God’s purpose and will for our lives.

It also has the historical tradition of teaching Scripture through music. Each part of the old LBW and LSB liturgy is a part of the Bible that is sung, with additional spoken portions. Included each week, as well, are lessons from a 3 year cycle of readings designed to ensure that those who participate in the church’s worship as a family of God will learn God’s revealed purpose and will in Christ Jesus, as well as the necessity of why God has chosen to act in this manner. Other services not used for Sunday worship (such as Matins, Vespers, and Compline) follow the same pattern of “*Scripture set to music.*” Our current hymnal, the Lutheran Service Book, includes abundant Scriptural references alongside each part of the Divine Liturgy.

Study after study today shows that the vast majority of Americans will identify that the Bible is at least one of the most “influential” books ever, and yet that same majority rarely (or even never) read it. With such statistics, Lutheran Worship plays an ever-increasingly critical role in aiding to teach the faith handed down to us through the Word of God! To follow Jesus means to learn what God’s will is for us, and we learn through knowing God’s Word!

In addition, other music is added into the worship offered by God’s people that express the truths of the faith as formulated by God’s Word. Many of the great hymns of the church teach us about faith and everyday life, and also tell us great stories of faith and witness by those who composed them. Many of them are also Scripture being told through Music.

For example: LSB #763 (LBW #346) - “*When Peace, Like a River,*” was written by a man named Horatio Spafford. Here is the story:

...Spafford planned a European trip for his family for his wife’s health. At the last minute he had to remain in Chicago, but sent his wife and four daughters ahead as planned... intending to follow them in a few days. [His wife’s ship], however, was struck... on November 22, 1873, and sank within twelve minutes, taking the lives of his four daughters. ...Spafford wrote this hymn aboard ship as he sailed to meet her [after being informed by the captain that they were at the location where his daughters perished.] (Hymnal Companion, 1981, p. 396)

Other great hymns, like “*Amazing Grace,*” “*Silent Night,*” and countless more have similar stories of faith behind them!

Scripture references from our Liturgy (LSB and LBW Setting 1) each Sunday:

<i>Invocation</i>	Matthew 28:19b
<i>Confession of Sins</i>	1 John 1:8-9
<i>Absolution</i>	John 20:19-23
<i>Apostolic Greeting</i>	2 Corinthians 13:14
<i>Kyrie</i>	Luke 17:13; 18:38-39 Psalm 123:2-3; Mark 10:47
<i>Hymn of Praise</i>	
“Glory to God”	Luke 2:14, John 1:29
“Worthy is Christ”	Revelation 5:9-13; 19:4-9
<i>Salutation</i>	Ruth 2:4; Luke 1:28, 2 Timothy 4:22
<i>Gospel verse</i>	
“Alleluia”	John 6:68
“Return to the Lord”	Deuteronomy 30:2; Numbers 14:18, Joel 2:13
<i>Sharing the Peace</i>	Matthew 5:23-24; Ephesians 4:1-3 Romans 16:16; John 20:21
<i>Prayers of the Church</i>	1 Timothy 2:1-4
<i>Offertory</i>	
“Let the Vineyards” (LSB #955)	1 Corinthians 10:16; John 6:35
“What Shall I Render”	Psalm 116:12-19
<i>Sanctus</i> (“Holy, Holy, Holy”)	Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 21:9
<i>Words of Institution</i>	Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
<i>Lord’s Prayer</i>	Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4
<i>Agnus Dei</i> (“Lamb of God”)	John 1:29
<i>Post Communion Canticle</i>	
<i>Nunc Dimittis</i> (“Lord Now You Let”)	Luke 2:29-32 (Simeon’s Song)
“Thank the Lord”	Colossians 3:17; Psalm 7:17; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:11; 1 Chronicles 16:8-10
<i>Benediction</i>	Numbers 6:24-26
<i>Dismissal</i>	Luke 7:50

references

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Resource C - The Nicene Creed as a Faithful Statement of Scriptural Belief

THE NICENE CREED¹ (*with Scriptural evidence²*) (Using the Nicene Creed from the Lutheran Service Book)

Article 1:

I³ believe in one God⁴,
the Father⁵ Almighty⁶,
maker of heaven and earth⁷,
of all that is, visible and invisible⁸.

Article 2:

And in one Lord⁹, Jesus Christ¹⁰,
the only-begotten Son of God¹¹,
eternally begotten of His Father¹² before all worlds¹³,
God of God¹⁴, Light of Light¹⁵,
very God of very God¹⁶,
begotten, not made¹⁷,
being of one substance with the Father¹⁸.
by whom all things were made¹⁹.
who for us²⁰ men and our salvation²¹
came down from heaven²²;
by the power of the Holy Spirit
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary²³, and was made man²⁴.
and was crucified²⁵ also for us²⁶ under Pontius Pilate²⁷;
he suffered²⁸ and was buried²⁹.
and the third day he rose again³⁰
according to the Scriptures³¹;
and ascended into heaven³²
and sits at the right hand of the Father³³.
and He will come again³⁴ with glory³⁵ to judge both the living and the dead³⁶,
whose kingdom will have no end³⁷.

Article 3:

And I believe in the Holy Spirit³⁸, the Lord³⁹ and giver of life⁴⁰,
who proceeds from the Father⁴¹ and the Son⁴².
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified⁴³.
who spoke by the prophets⁴⁴.
and I believe in one⁴⁵ holy⁴⁶ Christian⁴⁷ and apostolic⁴⁸ Church⁴⁹.
I acknowledge one Baptism⁵⁰ for the remission of sins⁵¹.
I look for the resurrection of the dead⁵²,
and the life of the world to come⁵³. Amen⁵⁴

¹ The Nicene Creed's short history: First adopted at the Council of Nicea (325 AD) and later modified at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD), to address numerous heresies (false teachings) in the church; chief amongst them would be the Gnostic and Arian heresies.

² This compilation lists specific verses that directly refer to the word or phrase associated. It is by no means exhaustive, and many of the words/phrases/themes of the creed can also

be identified throughout Holy Scripture in lengthy passages and the overarching themes presented in Scripture itself. This is one of the primary reasons that the Christian must indeed immerse themselves in the study of Scripture daily!

³ “*I*” Here, we only express individual belief, though the corporate “we” is sometimes used to indicate our resolve of faith in numbers, as a collective family of God, which also follows the original language of the creed.

⁴ “*One God:*” Malachi 2:10; Mark 12:29, 32; Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:9

⁵ “*The Father:*” Matthew 6:9; John 5:18; John 20:17; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; 1 John 3:1;

⁶ “*Almighty:*” Genesis 17:1; Psalm 46:7; Isaiah 37:16; Revelation 1:8

⁷ “*maker of Heaven and Earth:*” Genesis 1:1ff; Revelation 4:11

⁸ “*visible and invisible:*” Amos 4:13; Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 11:3

⁹ “*One Lord:*” Luke 7:18-19; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:5

¹⁰ “*Jesus Christ:*” Matthew 1:16; Matthew 27:22; John 20: 30-31; Acts 2: 36

¹¹ “*only-begotten Son of God:*” John 3:16

¹² “*begotten of the Father:*” Matthew 1:20-22; Luke 1:35

¹³ “*before all worlds:*” John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:15-17

¹⁴ “*God of God:*” John 1:1-2

¹⁵ “*Light of Light:*” Psalm 27:1; 36:9; Isaiah 53:7; Isaiah 60:1-3; John 1:4; John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 21:23

¹⁶ “*very God of very God:*” John 17:3; 1 John 5:20

¹⁷ “*begotten, not made:*” Matthew 1:20; John 1:3, 18;

¹⁸ “*being of one substance with the Father:*” John 1:1, 14; John 10:30; John 17:21

¹⁹ “*by whom all things were made:*” John 1:3; 10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2

²⁰ “*who for us:*” Matthew 1:21; Acts 2:21; Acts 11:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 Timothy 2:4;

²¹ “*and for our salvation:*” Psalm 98:2; Luke 1:77; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31; Romans 1:16; Colossians 1:13-14

²² “*he came down from heaven:*” John 3:13; John 6:33, 38, 51; 1 Corinthians 15:47;

²³ “*incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary:*” Matthew 1:20-21; Luke 1:34-35

²⁴ “*was made man:*” see note 22; John 1:14; Acts 2:22; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14

²⁵ “*he was crucified:*” Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18; Acts 2:36; 1 Corinthians 1:23

²⁶ “*for us:*” see note 20; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:32; 1 John 3:16

²⁷ “*under Pontius Pilate:*” Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24-25; John 19:16; Acts 13:28

²⁸ “*suffered:*” Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Romans 6:3; 2 Corinthians 4:10

²⁹ “*was buried:*” Matthew 27:58-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40-42

³⁰ “*and the third day he rose again:*” Matthew 27:63, 28:6; Mark 8:31, 16:6; Luke 24:6-7

³¹ “*according to the Scriptures:*” Luke 24:27, 45-46; Acts 18:28; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

³² “*ascended into heaven:*” Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9, 11; Ephesians 4:8-10

³³ “*sits at the right hand of the Father:*” Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62, 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:32-33; Romans 8:34

³⁴ “*he will come again:*” Daniel 7:13; John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 22:20

³⁵ “*with glory:*” Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 4:13

³⁶ “*judge both the living and the dead:*” Matthew 16:27; Acts 10:42; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5

³⁷ “*whose kingdom will have no end:*” Daniel 4:3; Luke 1:33; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:11

³⁸ “*Holy Spirit:*” Psalm 51:11; Luke 1:35; John 14:26; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:8

³⁹ “*the Lord:*” (Holy Spirit as God) 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 3:17

⁴⁰ “*and giver of life:*” Job 33:4; John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

⁴¹ “*proceeds from the Father:*” Joel 2:28; John 14:26; John 15:26

⁴² “*and the Son:*” Luke 24:49; John 16:7; John 20:22

⁴³ “*who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified:*” John 4:23; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:3

⁴⁴ “*spoke by the prophets:*” Nehemiah 9:30; Acts 28:25; Ephesians 2:20, 3:4-5; 1 Peter 1:10-11;

⁴⁵ “*one:*” 1 Corinthians 6:17, 8:6; Ephesians 4:3-4

⁴⁶ “*holy:*” 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:4, 5:27; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 Peter 2:9

⁴⁷ “*Christian:*” The original word used is “catholic” (greek Καθολικός or catholikos) The word literally means “universal,” as in there is one church of Christ, that is united as long as it remains pure in God’s Word and faith toward the triune God. Matthew 28:19; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 19. Here, we use the term “Christian” to define that we are NOT in agreement or fellowship with the multitude of non-Christian “churches” throughout the world. Sadly, we are not in agreement with many so-called “Christian” churches as well today, as they do not adhere to either the creeds or Scriptural fidelity.

⁴⁸ “*apostolic:*” Acts 1:24-25, 2:42; Ephesians 2:20

⁴⁹ “*church:*” Matthew 16:18; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:17

⁵⁰ “*one baptism:*” Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12

⁵¹ “*for the remission (forgiveness) of sins:*” Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38, 22:16; Colossians 2:13-15;

⁵² “*resurrection of the dead:*” Romans 6:4-5; 1 Corinthians 15:12-22; Philippians 3:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

⁵³ “*life of the world to come:*” (eternal life/God’s heavenly kingdom) John 3:16, 14:1-3; Romans 6:23; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1

⁵⁴ “*Amen:*” (greek ἀμήν) - used by Jesus frequently in the Gospels, often translated “truly truly,” or “verily verily,” creating an emphatic expression of truth, or a strong statement of agreement. Using it here as a solemn and serious ending (as also in the ending to a prayer) that is indicative that “this is what we believe, and it is most certainly true.”