



THE STORY

See the Big Picture of the Bible's Story and Message
A Guide for Teachers (Easy-to-Read Version)

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Introducing the Story

Books and articles always promise answers to life's problems. They always say that their "recent studies" can show us how to have longer and better lives. This is a bad promise since their answers change every day. Today's research always seems to disagree with yesterday's answers. The Bible is not like this. The Bible has changed people for thousands of years and it has only taught people about one problem and one answer. Sin is our problem. Jesus is our answer.

Sadly, many do not find life in God's word because they do not understand the whole message of the Bible. Most people know some history and some details in the Bible, but most people do not truly *know* God, the Bible, or why those details are important. Many people also do not know why we must know the Bible today. They have many important questions. Who is God? Why did God create people? Why does God give us laws? Why should we care about God? How can we start a relationship with God? Our goal is to answer many questions like these by seeing a big picture of the Bible in five lessons.

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Many people do not think they can understand the Bible, but God speaks so that common people like us can understand him (Ephesians 3:3-5). You can see the history of the Bible in the picture on the front of this booklet. God blessed people and let them live with him *in the garden of Eden*. People did not listen to God, so they lost eternal life and their relationship with God. Most people think they can save themselves by doing good things, but God gave *the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai* to show us that we are all sinful and that we all deserve death. Thankfully, God shows us that he loves us by sending his Son, Jesus, to die *on a cross* so our sins can be forgiven. From start to finish, the Bible shows us how great God is by telling us the story of how God gives weak people like us eternal life and joy with him.

The Bible has 66 books in it. These 66 books were written by forty different authors. These authors lived at different times and places. It took almost 1500 years for these authors to write the Bible. Each book has its own important message; but, when we see these 66 books together, we can see them as part of a one, big story. The story is about a great God who loves his people and judges his enemies. The books of the Bible are united because Yahweh, the LORD God, is the true author of the Bible. The Holy Spirit put God's words in the minds of human writers ("inspiration"). These writers wrote exactly what the Holy Spirit said to them (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Very careful writers ("scribes") made thousands of copies of the Bible books. We have thousands of these copies today ("manuscripts"). People make mistakes, so there are some small differences between these copies (i.e., spelling mistakes, minor differences in the order of words, etc.). Our Bibles today are translated from the original languages. Large groups of experts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek very carefully translate the Bible into English and many other languages. There are so many copies of the books of the Bible that the translators are able to see where the mistakes are. This is important because we need to be able to trust that the Bible is reliable. The Bible truly is God's word and it gives us victory over sin - the only problem that is important.

#1: Sin Separates Us From God and Kills Us (Genesis 3)

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Many people want to know why God's creation is so beautiful. **Psalms 19:1-4** says creation tells us about the glory of God everywhere on the earth. Every big star, beautiful sunrise, and small particle was created to show God's greatness. After God created the heavens, earth, plants, sun, moon, stars, and animals, **Genesis 1:26-28** says God made men and women in his own image and told them to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. We could also ask why God created mankind in his image. **Isaiah 43:7** says God created people for his glory. Just like a picture of a bird looks like a bird, we were created to be a picture of who God is. People exist to fill the world with living "pictures" of God's purity so God is praised.

Our study begins with the first man, Adam. God created a garden in Eden and put Adam there to work in it. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone," so God made an equal helper for Adam, Woman. She became his wife and Adam named her "Eve." Since Adam and Eve were pure like children, they were not ashamed to be naked. God and the tree of life were in Eden, so it was perfect. **Genesis 2:16-17** says God told Adam and Eve to stay away from one thing. They could eat fruit from every tree, but they must not eat fruit from the tree that gives knowledge of good and evil. God said they would die the day they ate from this tree. **1 John 3:4** says "sin" is disobeying God's law. **Genesis 3:1-6** tells us how God's enemy, Satan, came as a snake to trick Eve into breaking God's law. Let's notice what happens so we know how Satan tries to trick us today.

Sin Is Tempting (Genesis 3:1-6)

Genesis 3:1-6, *"¹ The snake was the most clever of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. The snake spoke to the woman and said, 'Woman, did God really tell you that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?' ² The woman answered the snake, 'No, we can eat fruit from the trees in the garden. ³ But there is one tree we must not eat from. God told us, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch that tree, or you will die.' ' ⁴ But the snake said to the woman, 'You will not die. ⁵ God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree you will learn about good and evil, and then you will be like God!' ⁶ The woman could see that the tree was beautiful and the fruit looked so good to eat. She also liked the idea that it would make her wise. So she took some of the fruit from the tree and ate it. Her husband was there with her, so she gave him some of the fruit, and he ate it."*

You Cannot Eat of Any Tree (3:1)? Did you see how tricky Satan's question is in verse 1? God told Adam and Eve they could eat fruit from every tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of good and evil. God's words were very kind and generous, but Satan changes God's words to make Eve think about what God did not give her. God's words do not sound good any more. Satan does this to us too. God gives us many blessings and simple commandments to keep us safe and alive. Satan wants us to forget God's blessings and focus on how mean God's commands are. Instead, we should be satisfied and praise God for what he gives us.

You Will Not Die (3:4). Do you see how Satan tricks Eve in verse 4? Satan lies about the result of disobeying God. God said she would die if she ate the fruit, but Satan says, "You will not die." Satan wants us to think we will be safe if we disobey God today too. Satan wants us to think, "God sounds crazy when he says it is dangerous to disobey him. God says we will die if we sin and we will not be able to live with him forever. Is that actually true? Everyone else lives how they want and they look happy and safe." Satan wants us to think that sin will not kill us. These thoughts might seem true, but we will see how painful and deadly sin is very soon.

Your Eyes Will Be Opened (3:5). Can you see how tricky Satan's promises are in verse 5? Satan tells Eve her eyes will be opened, she will be like God, and she will know good and evil. Consider two problems with this. First, Eve is already like God. She was created to be a picture of God's purity, not to be God and make rules for herself. Second, Satan's promise that her eyes will open so she can know good and evil sounds great and

promising, but it is actually bad! Satan tricks us with similar desires. It sounds good to be famous, rich, powerful, knowledgeable, and to have endless pleasure. But people actually become sad and crazy when they try to fill these desires. We are never happy once they taste riches, power, and pleasure. We never have enough. Sin always lies. Notice how Adam and Eve show they have shame because of sin in **Genesis 3:7-13**.

Sin Is Shaming (Genesis 3:7-13)

Genesis 3:7-13, *"⁷ Then it was as if their eyes opened, and they saw things differently. They saw that they were naked. So they got some fig leaves, sewed them together, and wore them for clothes. ⁸ During the cool part of the day, the Lord God was walking in the garden. The man and the woman heard him, and they hid among the trees in the garden. ⁹ The Lord God called to the man and said, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰ The man said, 'I heard you walking in the garden, and I was afraid. I was naked, so I hid.' ¹¹ God said to the man, 'Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from that special tree? I told you not to eat from that tree!' ¹² The man said, 'The woman you put here with me gave me fruit from that tree. So I ate it.' ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What have you done?' She said, 'The snake tricked me, so I ate the fruit.'"*

They Covered Themselves and Hid (3:7-10). How do Adam and Eve show their shame in verses 7-10? Their eyes were opened in a way they did not expect. They now saw they were naked, and this was embarrassing. They tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. But they were still ashamed because they tried to hide from God when he walked in the garden. This is how we often act after we realize we sinned. We hide the evidence and stop thinking about it so we do not feel guilty. We act like God cannot see. We stop praying and reading the Bible. But only God can remove our sin and shame. We will fail when we hide our sin and avoid God.

They Shifted the Blame (3:11-13). How do Adam and Eve show their shame in verses 11-13? They do not want God to know they dishonored him by disobeying him, so they blame each other for their sin. Adam blames God and Eve. Eve blames Satan. This was a dishonorable thing to do. Even if we are tricked by someone, we need to take responsibility for what we do. It is our own choice to sin. Blaming other people only makes our problem worse. We will return to verses 14-15, but notice in **Genesis 3:16-19** the painful results of sin. Men and women have different roles, so their results for sin are different too.

Sin Is Painful (Genesis 3:16-24)

Genesis 3:16-19, *"¹⁶ Then God said to the woman, 'I will cause you to have much trouble when you are pregnant. And when you give birth to children, you will have much pain. You will want your husband very much, but he will rule over you.' ¹⁷ Then God said to the man, 'I commanded you not to eat from that tree. But you listened to your wife and ate from it. So I will curse the ground because of you. You will have to work hard all your life for the food the ground produces. ¹⁸ The ground will grow thorns and weeds for you. And you will have to eat the plants that grow wild in the fields. ¹⁹ You will work hard for your food, until your face is covered with sweat. You will work hard until the day you die, and then you will become dust again. I used dust to make you, and when you die, you will become dust again.'"*

The Woman's Consequences (3:16). What results does sin bring for the woman? Sin will cause problems in her family. Women want to have and raise children, but now this will be painful. Sin will also make her marriage very difficult. Sin wants Cain in Genesis 4:7 because it wants to control him. It is the same for Eve. Eve will sinfully want control over Adam. Adam will sin by ruling over her in a mean way. Sin has already caused Adam and Eve to have these problems: Eve took control by giving Adam the fruit and Adam blamed Eve for his sin. Adam needed to lead Eve gently and Eve was supposed to help Adam. The opposite happened. **Ephesians 5:21-33** teaches husbands and wives to fight these sins by doing what is best for our spouse. Husbands must lovingly lead their wives by giving up their lives for them. Wives must respect and follow their husbands.

The Man's Consequences (3:17-19). What results does sin bring for the man? Sin brings painful work. Men like to take care of their family, but sin makes this painful. Before, they could eat fruit easily from the garden of Eden; now the ground will grow thorns more easily than fruit. God also says in verse 19 that Adam will work hard so he can eat bread that cannot keep him alive. We have this problem too. We work to have food so we do not die. But work feels worthless because even if we work and eat much food, we will still die. God warns in the Bible that food does not give us true life. Only God's word will make us live forever (Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:27). We will find life when we seek satisfaction in God's word. But, sin's worst results are in **Genesis 3:22-24**.

Genesis 3:22-24, *"22 The Lord God said, 'Look, the man has become like us—he knows about good and evil. And now the man might take the fruit from the tree of life. If the man eats that fruit, he will live forever.' 23 So the Lord God forced the man out of the Garden of Eden to work the ground he was made from. 24 God forced the man to leave the garden. Then he put Cherub angels and a sword of fire at the entrance to the garden to protect it. The sword flashed around and around, guarding the way to the tree of life."*

Driven from Eden (3:22-24). What do Adam and Eve lose here? They lost the tree of life and a relationship with God in Eden. We can only have eternal joy, no pain, no sin, and no death when we live with God. Sin became worse outside of Eden. Pain and death grew. **Genesis 6:5-7** says people only thought about evil things. People were violent. This made God sad. God wished he did not create people, so he decided kill them in a flood. Noah was the only one who obeyed God, so God was kind to him. God saved on Noah's family of eight and many animals in a big boat. Everyone else died. Sadly, Noah's children still disobeyed God after the flood. People made a group to build a tower to honor their own name. They did not want to make a group to honor God's name, so God confused their languages. People spread across the world. People disobeyed God and fought against each other. The Bible shows how good God is because God had an answer. God had a plan to let his chosen people live in peace with him and with each another. God wanted his people to have the tree of life and to live with him forever. God gave hope when he cursed Satan (the snake) in **Genesis 3:14-15**.

Hope for the Woman's Offspring (Genesis 3:14-15, 12:1-3)

Genesis 3:14-15, *"14 So the Lord God said to the snake, 'You did this very bad thing, so bad things will happen to you. It will be worse for you than for any other animal. You must crawl on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. 15 I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your children and her children will be enemies. You will bite her child's foot, but he will crush your head.'"*

The Serpent's Curse (3:14-15). Satan had bad results for his sin too. God says he will make Satan, the woman, and their children enemies. The NET translation helps. *"And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel."* An attack to the head is better than an attack to the foot. God says here that one day the children of the woman will crush Satan's head. One day, the woman's children would defeat the power of Satan and his children. Let's finish by seeing how God also promised hope through Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**.

Genesis 12:1-3, *"1 The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country and your people. Leave your father's family and go to the country that I will show you. 2 I will build a great nation from you. I will bless you and make your name famous. People will use your name to bless other people. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you. I will use you to bless all the people on earth.'"*

All Blessed through Abraham's Offspring (12:1-3). Abraham's wife could not have kids, but God promised to give Abraham land, make him a great nation, and to bless the world through him. Abraham had no children at, but he trusted that God would provide. Two thousand years later, God brought the savior of the world through Abraham's lineage (Matthew 1:17). In the next lesson we will turn to Exodus to learn about the purpose of the law God gave the nation that came from Abraham.

#2: The Law of Moses Shows Us Our Sin (Exodus 20, etc.)

God created people so they could be righteous like God, live with God, and praise God's name everywhere. Instead, Satan tricked people into disobeying God and living selfishly. Because people acted shamefully, they lost eternal life and their relationship with God. However, God began a relationship with Abraham. God promised to make Abraham's family into a great nation and give them the land of Canaan. God also promised to bless the whole world through Abraham. Abraham had no children or land, but he learned to trust and obey God. Abraham was not perfect, but God forgave Abraham since he trusted in God in **Genesis 15:6**. God was faithful to Abraham. God gave Abraham children and he made Abraham's children a great nation of 2-3 million people in 400 years. These children of Abraham were called "Israelites." When the Egyptians forced the Israelites to become slaves, God sent ten plagues against Egypt through Moses and freed Israel from slavery.

Before God took Israel into Canaan, he made an agreement (i.e., "covenant") with them at Mt. Sinai. Notice what God's goal was in **Exodus 19:4-6**. *"4 You people saw what I did to the people of Egypt. You saw that I carried you out of Egypt like an eagle and brought you here to me. 5 So now I tell you to obey my commands and keep my agreement. So if you do this, you will be my own special people. The whole world belongs to me, but I am choosing you to be my own special people. 6 You will be a special nation—a kingdom of priests."* God freed the Israelites from slavery to show how he loved them. God wanted Israel to be his special people. But the Israelites had to obey God's agreement with them. This agreement is also called the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses (cf. **Exodus 34:28; Joshua 8:31**). If Israel obeyed God's Law, they would be priests. Priests show others how to be righteous and how to have a relationship with God. In this lesson, we want to understand what the Law shows us. Let's read the first section of the Law in **Exodus 20:1-11**.

The Law of Moses is Given (Exodus 20:1-17)

Exodus 20:1-11, *"1 These are the things God told his people: 2 'I am the Lord your God. I am the one who freed you from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. 3 You must not worship any other gods except me. 4 You must not make any idols. Don't make any statues or pictures of anything up in the sky or of anything on the earth or of anything down in the water. 5 Don't worship or serve idols of any kind, because I, the Lord, am your God. I hate my people worshiping other gods. People who sin against me become my enemies, and I will punish them. And I will punish their children, their grandchildren, and even their great-grandchildren. 6 But I will be very kind to people who love me and obey my commands. I will be kind to their families for thousands of generations. 7 You must not use the name of the Lord your God to make empty promises. If you do, the Lord will not let you go unpunished. 8 You must remember to keep the Sabbath a special day. 9 You may work six days a week to do your job. 10 But the seventh day is a day of rest in honor of the Lord your God. So on that day no one should work—not you, your sons and daughters, or your men and women slaves. Even your animals and the foreigners living in your cities must not work! 11 That is because the Lord worked six days and made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. And on the seventh day, he rested. In this way the Lord blessed the Sabbath—the day of rest. He made that a very special day.'"*

Love the LORD Your God (20:1-11). Which relationship do these first four commandments focus on? These commands focus on Israel's relationship with God. Later, Jesus summarized these four commands as "love the Lord your God" (Matthew 22:36-38, etc.). God gave Israel a big reason to love him by freeing them from slavery. Israel must now show their love for God in multiple ways. They must have no other gods and not bow before statues. We commit idolatry when we love and trust any created thing instead of God - the Creator. God also commanded Israel to not use his name to make empty promises. We must respect God's name. We make God's name common when we use his name in promises and in cursing. We must not say we love God's name, but then live shamefully. God also commanded Israel to do no work on the Sabbath to remember how God freed them from slavery (cf. Deuteronomy 5:12-15). God was very kind to the Israelites, so showing their love for God in these commands would be a joy. Notice how God told them to love people in **Exodus 20:12-17**.

Exodus 20:12-17, ¹² *You must honor and respect your father and your mother. Do this so that you will have a full life in the land that the Lord your God gives you.* ¹³ *You must not murder anyone.* ¹⁴ *You must not commit adultery.* ¹⁵ *You must not steal anything.* ¹⁶ *You must not tell lies about other people.* ¹⁷ *You must not want to take your neighbor's house. You must not want his wife. And you must not want his men and women servants or his cattle or his donkeys. You must not want to take anything that belongs to another person."*

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (20:12-17). What relationships do these final six commands focus on? These commands focus on relationships with other people. Later, Jesus summarized these six commands as "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40, etc.). God loved the Israelites, so the Israelites must respond by being loving to each other. God commanded Israel to honor their parents. Children and adults can do this by respecting, obeying, and taking care of their parents. God also commanded Israel to not do wrong to others by murdering, committing adultery, stealing things, lying about people, or by *wanting* to take their neighbor's things. This command to not even want our neighbor's things shows us that we must keep the Law in our heart. We must not dream about doing wrong things. We disobey God when we trust money, even if we do not bow to it. We disobey God when we think sexually about another woman, even if we do not have relations with her. True obedience is internal and external. Let's skip ahead 900 years to **Daniel 9:11** to see if Israel obeyed God.

The Law of Moses Is Broken (Daniel 9:11, etc.)

Daniel 9:11, *"All the people of Israel disobeyed your teachings and turned away from you. They did not listen to you. We sinned, so you did what you promised to do. All the curses and promises in the Law of Moses, your servant, happened to us."*

Rebellion (Daniel 9:11). What does Daniel say about how Israel obeyed the Law of Moses? Daniel says Israel disobeyed the Law and did not listen to God. In **Leviticus 26** God promised to live with and bless Israel if they obeyed, but to leave and punish Israel if they disobeyed. Sometimes the Israelites obeyed God, the books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles show how Israel did not obey God for a long time. King Solomon in 1 Kings 8-11 is a good example of this. Just as God began to bless the world and cause people to know him through Abraham's children, they began to trust in idols and break God's agreement with them. Sin and fighting caused the Israelites to split into two nations. The northern nation was called "Israel" and the southern nation was called "Judah." Many prophets like Isaiah and Hosea warned Israel and Judah that God would punish them for their sin, but they did not listen. God left his people and destroyed Israel with the Assyrians in 722 BC and Judah with the Babylonians from 606-586 BC. God only kept a small group of Israelites alive. Most of them became slaves in other nations. Most of the Israelites did not care if they disobeyed God, so they received the punishment they deserved. But **James 2:10-11** shows us another reason why Israel failed to obey the Law.

James 2:10-11, ¹⁰ *You might follow all of God's law. But if you fail to obey only one command, you are guilty of breaking all the commands in that law.* ¹¹ *God said, "Don't commit adultery." The same God also said, "Don't kill." So if you don't commit adultery, but you kill someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God's law."*

Failure to Keep the Whole Law (James 2:10-11, etc.). How James say we fail to obey the Law? A person fails to obey the whole Law when a person disobeys only one command. This might not seem reasonable, but we need to know that we can only be righteous and innocent through any law system if we perfectly keep all the laws. This is also true for the Law God gave through Moses. Notice how Moses actually warned Israel about this in the Law. **Deuteronomy 6:25**, *"If we carefully obey the whole law, exactly as the Lord our God told us to, he will say that we have done a very good thing."* **Deuteronomy 27:26**, *"Cursed is the one who does not support this law and agree to obey it."* The Israelites earned punishment because they did not carefully obey all of the Law. This is important because the Bible says the Israelites are an example of how every person fails to obey all of God's law. Notice how Paul, an apostle of Jesus, wrote about this in **Romans 3:9-12**.

Romans 3:9–12, *“⁹ So are we Jews better than other people? No, we have already said that those who are Jews, as well as those who are not Jews, are the same. They are all guilty of sin. ¹⁰ As the Scriptures say, ‘There is no one doing what is right, not even one. ¹¹ There is no one who understands. There is no one who is trying to be with God. ¹² They have all turned away from him, and now they are of no use to anyone. There is no one who does good, not even one.”*

None Is Righteous (Romans 3:9-12). According to this passage, who is righteous? No one! Israel (the Jews) failed and all people fail to be righteous through law because we do not perfectly keep all of God’s law. All of us have made something else more important than God. Everyone has disobeyed their parents. Everyone has lied and wanted our neighbor’s things. As **Romans 3:23** says, *“All have sinned and are not good enough to share God’s divine greatness.”* This is important to know because sin has a very bad result. **Romans 6:23** says, *“When people sin, they earn what sin pays—death.”* God told Adam this same thing when God warned him about the tree that gives knowledge of good and evil. God is the only one who gives life and God cannot live where sin is, so sin brings death. Since *“sin pays death”*, God told Israel to give animal sacrifices so their sins could be forgiven. But **Hebrews 10:1–4** says the blood of animals cannot take away sin forever. God promised to bless the world through Abraham, but Abraham’s physical children were punished. Would God be faithful? Fortunately, God knew the Law would not save us. God even made promises about a new prophet and new agreement in the Law (cf. **Deuteronomy 18:15–19** and **30:1-10**). God knew the Law of Moses was temporary.

Why Did God Give the Law? People usually ask a good question after hearing this. If God planned to give his people a new prophet, new law, and new agreement later, why did he give them Law of Moses? The apostle Paul answers this question in **Galatians 3:19-22** and **Romans 3:19–20**.

The Law of Moses Shows Us Our Sin (Galatians 3:19, 22; Romans 3:19-20)

Galatians 3:19, 22, *“So what was the law for? The law was given to show the wrong things people do... The Scriptures put the whole world in prison under the control of sin, so that the only way for people to get what God promised would be through faith in Jesus Christ. It is given to those who believe in him.”*

Romans 3:19–20, *“¹⁹ What the law says is for those who are under the law. It stops anyone from making excuses. And it brings the whole world under God’s judgment, ²⁰ because no one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin.”*

The Law Shows Us Our Sin (Galatians 3:19, 22; Romans 3:19-20). What does Paul say the purpose of the Law was in Galatians 3? Paul says the Law was given to show the wrong things people do. The result is that we are enslaved - we are prisoners of sin. What things does Paul say the Law does in Romans 3? Paul says the Law stops anyone from making excuses since we cannot say we are made right through Law. Paul says the Law only shows us our sin. The result is that everyone sees that God is going to judge them. Normally, we think we are good people and that God is happy with us. The Law shows us the truth: we are sinful and God will punish us.

Knowing About Our Sin Helps Us Trust Jesus (Galatians 3:22). According to **Galatians 3:22**, why do we need to know we are prisoners of sin? Paul says this helps us see we that we can only have God’s promises through faith in Jesus Christ. But how? Though we should try to obey God’s Law, the Law should show us that obedience alone will not save us. This is because we have already sinned and we still accidentally sin. We have acted shamefully and are guilty. Just as a murderer cannot undo his crimes by doing good things, we too cannot undo our sins. The Law shows us the problem (sin) so we understand the solution (Jesus). Therefore, everyone can receive God’s blessings through Abraham. God forgave Abraham because he trusted God, and God will also forgive and bless us when we trust Jesus (Abraham’s descendent) like Abraham trusted God. In the next lesson we will read prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah about the new agreement God promised to bring through Jesus. This will help us believe in Jesus when we read about him in lesson 4.

#3: A New Covenant Promises Hope (Jeremiah 31, etc.)

Sin separated God and his people, but God promised to bless the world through Abraham. God tried to live with and bless Abraham's children, the Israelites, but the Law of Moses proved that Israel was guilty of sin. God allowed animals to be sacrificed to take away Israel's sins, but the animal sacrifices could not remove sin permanently. Israel had to repeat these animal sacrifices constantly. This constantly reminded Israel of their sin and did not give them very much confidence before God. We are like Israel. The Law tells us that we all have disobeyed God. The Law tells us that we all deserve to die and be separated from God. It is very important for the Law to tell us this. We normally do not care about an "answer" or "hope" if we do not know that we have a problem. Therefore, it is good for us to lose confidence in ourselves and to become afraid when we see our sins. When we understand our problem of sin, this helps us appreciate the hope God promises.

But how could God be faithful to his promises to Abraham when people are so sinful? How could God give any hope to the world? The writings of the prophets tell us about this hope. The prophets taught against Israel and Judah before, during, and after God's punishments against them. God not only used the prophets to tell Israel and Judah of their sins, God also used the prophets to tell Israel and Judah about a future day of salvation. The prophets speak of how God would one day return to save Israel, Judah, and the world. **Jeremiah 31:31-34** is a good place to start because he writes about the hope God promises in a new agreement ("covenant"). Jeremiah wrote about 600 years before God began fulfilling this promise.

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Jeremiah 31:31-34, ³¹ *This is what the Lord said, 'The time is coming when I will make a new agreement with the family of Israel and with the family of Judah. ³² It will not be like the agreement I made with their ancestors. I made that agreement when I took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt. I was their master, but they broke that agreement.'* This message is from the Lord. ³³ *'In the future I will make this agreement with the people of Israel.'* This message is from the Lord. *'I will put my teachings in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ People will not have to teach their neighbors and relatives to know the Lord, because all people, from the least important to the most important, will know me.'* This message is from the Lord. *'I will forgive them for the evil things they did. I will not remember their sins.'*

I Will Put My Law inside Them (31:31-34). God says his new agreement will be different, but what is the first way this new agreement would be different (verse 33)? God says he will put his teachings in their minds and write his law on their hearts. This is very different from the agreement and law Moses taught. Some knew God's law in their heart (Psalm 40:8), but most people did not know God and had hard hearts (Zechariah 7:12). But God promised a new agreement. God's people will know God and obey his law even with their hearts.

I Will Not Remember Their Sin (31:34). How could people with hard hearts know God and accept his law in their hearts (verse 34)? God says he will forgive them for their evil things and not remember their sins. We need more than animal sacrifices if God will permanently forgive us of our sins. But how can a good and holy God permanently forgive the many shameful things we have done? Let's notice an important prophecy of God's future salvation through a special servant in **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**.

The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Isaiah 52:13-15, ¹³ *The Lord says, 'Look, my servant will succeed in what he has to do, and he will be raised to a position of high honor. ¹⁴ It is true that many were shocked when they saw him. He was beaten so badly that he no longer looked like a man. ¹⁵ But it is also true that many nations will be amazed at him* (HCSB: "He

will sprinkle many nations"). *Kings will look at him and be unable to speak. They will see what they had never been told. They will understand what they had never heard.*"

Successful, Exalted, Marred, and Sprinkling Many Nations (52:13–15). How is God's servant described here? God's servant will succeed, be raised up to a high position, and be beaten so badly that he will no longer look like a man. This will cause many to be astonished. God cleansed *Israel* from sin by sprinkling them with blood (cf. Hebrews 9:13-22), but verse 15 says this servant will sprinkle *many nations*. This servant's work for all nations is also referred to in **Isaiah 49:5–6**. *"The Lord is the one who made me in my mother's womb, so that I could be his servant. He wanted me to lead Jacob and Israel back to him... And now he says, 'You are a very important servant to me. You must bring back to me the tribes of Jacob. You must bring back the people of Israel who are still alive. But I have something else for you to do that is even more important: I will make you a light for the other nations. You will show people all over the world the way to be saved.'"* This servant will have great pain, but will be exalted and sprinkle and cleanse many nations. As we think about who this servant is, let's continue reading in **Isaiah 53:1–6**.

Isaiah 53:1–6, *"¹ Who really believed what we heard? Who saw in it the Lord's great power? ² He was always close to the Lord. He grew up like a young plant, like a root growing in dry ground. There was nothing special or impressive about the way he looked, nothing we could see that would cause us to like him. ³ People made fun of him, and even his friends left him. He was a man who suffered a lot of pain and sickness. We treated him like someone of no importance, like someone people will not even look at but turn away from in disgust. ⁴ The fact is, it was our suffering he took on himself; he bore our pain. But we thought that God was punishing him, that God was beating him for something he did. ⁵ But he was being punished for what we did. He was crushed because of our guilt. He took the punishment we deserved, and this brought us peace. We were healed because of his pain. ⁶ We had all wandered away like sheep. We had gone our own way. And yet the Lord put all our guilt on him."*

No Beauty, Rejected, Man of Sorrows, and Pierced for Our Sins (53:1-6). How is God's servant described in these verses? He would not have a special or impressive appearance to cause people to like him. Isaiah even says people would *"make fun of him"* and that he would have *"a lot of pain."* Bad things would happen to him, but Isaiah says in verses 4-6 that this servant would be beaten for what we did so he could carry away our suffering, heal us, and bring us peace with God. People would kill this servant and say God was punishing him, but he would actually save others from their sins. Isaiah continues in **Isaiah 53:7–12**.

Isaiah 53:7–12, *"⁷ He was treated badly, but he never protested. He said nothing, like a lamb being led away to be killed. He was like a sheep that makes no sound as its wool is being cut off. He never opened his mouth to defend himself. ⁸ He was taken away by force and judged unfairly. The people of his time did not even notice that he was killed. But he was put to death for the sins of his people. ⁹ He had done no wrong to anyone. He had never even told a lie. But he was buried among the wicked. His tomb was with the rich. ¹⁰ But the Lord was pleased with this humble servant who suffered such pain. Even after giving himself as an offering for sin, he will see his descendants and enjoy a long life. He will succeed in doing what the Lord wanted. ¹¹ After his suffering he will see the light, and he will be satisfied with what he experienced. The Lord says, 'My servant, who always does what is right, will make his people right with me; he will take away their sins. ¹² For this reason, I will treat him as one of my great people. I will give him the rewards of one who wins in battle, and he will share them with his powerful ones. I will do this because he gave his life for the people. He was considered a criminal, but the truth is, he carried away the sins of many. Now he will stand before me and speak for those who have sinned."*

Silent, Overlooked, Innocent, Prolonged Days, Bear Iniquities (53:7-12). How is God's servant described in these verses? There are many details, but what is most clear is that this servant's suffering and death would not be fair. *"He had done no wrong to anyone. He had never even told a lie."* Even though this servant would be

innocent, he would die silently. Nobody at the time would think that he was dying as a sacrifice for other people's sins. We may wonder why God could allow this, but verse 10 says God would be pleased with this. In fact, verse 11 even says the servant will be satisfied in his pain. This is because his death would do great things for many people. His death will be a guilt offering (ESV - vs. 10) so that many people's sins could be carried away (vs. 12). His death would cause many to be counted as innocent and righteous. God's servant would not only be a sacrifice for sins, he would also become a priest who stands before God to speak for sinners (vs. 12).

Jesus Suffered for Sins. Who is this innocent servant who would be killed for our sins? Though this prophecy was written over 700 years before Jesus lived, Isaiah is clearly speaking of Jesus. Read Matthew 27 to see how clear this is. We are all like sheep who have left God, but Jesus lived with no sin. All of us have separated ourselves from God, but Jesus died to take away our sins. Through Jesus, we can be counted as righteous and we can have peace with God. This prophecy gives powerful evidence to show the Bible is inspired by God. There are existing copies of Isaiah from the 2nd to 4th centuries BC. This is a long time before Jesus lived or died. Yet, this text speaks in great detail of Jesus' life and death. Even Jesus' resurrection is prophesied in verse 10. *"Even after giving himself as an offering for sin, he will see his descendants and enjoy a long life."*

Other prophecies also say Jesus would have God's Spirit on him (Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 48:16, 59:21, 61:1). Let's look at one of many prophecies that speak of how God would also pour out his Spirit and live with his people again. Notice **Isaiah 32:9-18**.

The Spirit Poured Upon Us (Isaiah 32:9-18)

Isaiah 32:12-18, *"¹² Beat your breasts in sorrow. Cry because your fields are empty. Your vineyards once gave grapes, but now they are empty. ¹³ Cry for the land of my people. Cry because only thorns and weeds will grow there. Cry for the city and for all the houses that were once filled with joy. ¹⁴ People will leave the capital city. The palace and towers will be left empty. People will not live in houses—they will live in caves. Wild donkeys and sheep will live in the city—animals will go there to eat grass. ¹⁵ This will continue until God gives us his Spirit from above. Then the desert will become rich farmland and the farmland will be like thick forests. ¹⁶ That is, what is now a desert will be filled with right decisions, and what is now a farmland will be filled with justice. ¹⁷ That justice will bring peace and safety forever. ¹⁸ My people will be safe in their homes and in their calm, peaceful fields."*

A Spiritual Desert (32:12-14). Notice the images in verses 12-14. How does Isaiah describe Israel's land and people? Isaiah describes Israel as a spiritual desert. People did evil things in Israel, so God's life-giving Spirit could not be there to protect God's people. Therefore, God let other nations remove the Israelites from their land. The empty land was a poetic picture of Israel's spiritual deadness and emptiness.

A Spiritual Garden (32:15-18). Notice the images in verses 15-18. How does Isaiah say change would happen and what will this change look like? Israel would be a spiritual desert because of sin, but Isaiah prophesies that one day God's Spirit would return and be poured out on the people. This would bring a great change: the spiritual desert would become a spiritual garden like Eden. God's Spirit would bring life and peace to his people again. There would be no more injustice or not trusting God. The people would be blessed. Righteousness, trust, and security would result. It is prophesied in **Joel 2:28-32** that Israel would know the Spirit had been when God gave miraculous signs to common people. We will look at this prophecy more closely in lesson 5, but in the next lesson we will turn to the Gospel of Matthew to read in more detail about Jesus. Jesus is the one whom the whole world can come to in order to receive salvation.

#4: Jesus Defeats Sin and Death (Matthew 1, 4, 9, 27-28)

Israel and Judah were not faithful to their agreement with God, so God left them. But God promised to make a new, different agreement with his people in the future. Though his people were sinful, God promised to forgive their sins and to write his law on their hearts. **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** prophesied that this forgiveness would come through the death of God's chosen servant. In this lesson we will read from Matthew. Matthew records the good news of Jesus Christ - God's chosen servant to bring salvation to all nations. Notice **Matthew 1:17-25**.

Jesus Is the Son of God (Matthew 1:17-25)

Matthew 1:17-25, ¹⁷ So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David. There were also fourteen generations from David until the people were taken away to Babylon. And there were fourteen more from the time the people were taken to Babylon until the Messiah was born. ¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah happened. His mother Mary was engaged to marry Joseph. But before they married, he learned that she was expecting a baby. (She was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit.) ¹⁹ Mary's husband, Joseph, was a good man. He did not want to cause her public disgrace, so he planned to divorce her secretly. ²⁰ But after Joseph thought about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, 'Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to accept Mary to be your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son. You will name him Jesus. Give him that name because he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord said through the prophet: ²³ 'The virgin will be pregnant and will give birth to a son. They will name him Immanuel.' (Immanuel means 'God with us.') ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord's angel told him to do. He married Mary. ²⁵ But Joseph did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And he named him Jesus."

What does this text teach about Jesus? This passage says Jesus is the Messiah (i.e., prophesied savior, chosen servant). Jesus is also a child of Abraham and of King David. God promised to bless the world through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). God also promised to make one of David's descendants king forever (2 Samuel 7:12-17). Jesus fulfills these promises. Most importantly, Jesus is from the Holy Spirit. **Colossians 1:16** says everything was created by Jesus. Jesus is God in the flesh, so he is called "Immanuel" (i.e., "God is with us"). Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God was with his people again.

Jesus Is Perfect against Temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)

Matthew 4:1-11, ¹ Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert. He was taken there to be tempted by the devil. ² Jesus ate nothing for 40 days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. ³ The devil came to tempt him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread.' ⁴ Jesus answered him, 'The Scriptures say, 'It is not just bread that keeps people alive. Their lives depend on what God says.' ' ⁵ Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place at the edge of the Temple area. ⁶ He said to Jesus, 'If you are the Son of God, jump off, because the Scriptures say, 'God will command his angels to help you, and their hands will catch you, so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.' ' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the Lord your God.' ' ⁸ Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all the wonderful things in them. ⁹ The devil said, 'If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Get away from me, Satan! The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only him!' ' ¹¹ So the devil left him. Then some angels came to Jesus and helped him."

What do we learn about Jesus from his battle against Satan? Jesus was not tricked by Satan. Jesus is different from Adam and Eve and Israel. Adam and Eve had many blessings in Eden, but they still ate the forbidden fruit. Israel ate manna in the desert for 40 years, yet they did not obey God. Jesus ate nothing in a desert for 40 days, treated God's word as his food, and defeated Satan. Jesus defeated Satan because God's word was written on his heart. We can defeat Satan too if we will think on and study God's word regularly. If we will do this, God will put his law on our hearts and take control of our lives.

Jesus Shows Mercy to Sinners (Matthew 9:9-13)

Matthew 9:9-13, ⁹ When Jesus was leaving, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the place for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, 'Follow me.' So he got up and followed Jesus. ¹⁰ Jesus ate dinner at Matthew's house. Many tax collectors and others with bad reputations came and ate with him and his followers. ¹¹ The Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with these people. They asked his followers, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and other sinners?' ¹² Jesus heard them say this. So he said to them, 'It is the sick people who need a doctor, not those who are healthy. ¹³ You need to go and learn what this Scripture means: 'I don't want animal sacrifices; I want you to show kindness to people.' I did not come to invite good people. I came to invite sinners.'"

What does this text teach about Jesus? This account shows us Jesus' mercy for sinners. Jews hated tax collectors because they worked for the Roman Empire. Tax collectors were often dishonest. The Pharisees thought of themselves as good people, so they never ate with sinners. Jesus was different. Jesus made a tax collector his apostle and Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus does not invite people who think they are righteous. Jesus invites people who know they need spiritual healing. We need this humility to follow Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders did not have this humility. These leaders were afraid that Jesus would cause them to lose their influence, so they did not believe in Jesus and began looking for the right time to kill Jesus (John 11:45-57). Jesus told his followers that he would be killed. Jesus also told his followers that he would rise from the dead after three days, but they did not understand. Jesus was betrayed by Judas (an apostle), arrested by the Jews, left alone by his followers, wrongly accused by the Jews, and sent to the governor to for questioning.

Jesus Is Crucified to Defeat Sin (Matthew 27:11-56)

Matthew 27:11-56, ¹¹ Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor, who asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Yes, that's right.' ¹² Then, when the leading priests and the older Jewish leaders made their accusations against Jesus, he said nothing. ¹³ So Pilate said to him, 'Don't you hear all these charges they are making against you? Why don't you answer?' ¹⁴ But Jesus did not say anything, and this really surprised the governor.

¹⁵ Every year at Passover time the governor would free one prisoner—whichever one the people wanted him to free. ¹⁶ At that time there was a man in prison who was known to be very bad. His name was Barabbas. ¹⁷ When a crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'I will free one man for you. Which one do you want me to free: Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' ¹⁸ Pilate knew that they had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous of him. ¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting there in the place for judging, his wife sent a message to him. It said, 'Don't do anything with that man. He is not guilty. Last night I had a dream about him, and it troubled me very much.' ²⁰ But the leading priests and older Jewish leaders told the people to ask for Barabbas to be set free and for Jesus to be killed. ²¹ Pilate said, 'I have Barabbas and Jesus. Which one do you want me to set free for you?' The people answered, 'Barabbas!' ²² Pilate asked, 'So what should I do with Jesus, the one called the Messiah?' All the people said, 'Kill him on a cross!' ²³ Pilate asked, 'Why do you want me to kill him? What wrong has he done?' But they shouted louder, 'Kill him on a cross!' ²⁴ Pilate saw that there was nothing he could do to make the people change. In fact, it looked as if there would be a riot. So he took some water and washed his hands in front of them all. He said, 'I am not guilty of this man's death. You are the ones who are doing it!' ²⁵ The people answered, 'We will take full responsibility for his death. You can blame us and even our children!' ²⁶ Then Pilate set Barabbas free. And he told some soldiers to beat Jesus with whips. Then he handed him over to the soldiers to be killed on a cross.

²⁷ Then Pilate's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace. All the soldiers gathered around him. ²⁸ They took off Jesus' clothes and put a red robe on him. ²⁹ Then they made a crown from thorny branches and put it on his head, and they put a stick in his right hand. Then they bowed before him, making fun of him. They said, 'We salute you, king of the Jews!' ³⁰ They spit on him. Then they took his stick and kept hitting him on the head with it. ³¹ After they finished making fun of him, the soldiers took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be killed on a cross.

³² The soldiers were going out of the city with Jesus. They saw a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. ³³ They came to the place called Golgotha. (Golgotha means 'The Place of the

Skull.)³⁴ There the soldiers gave Jesus some wine mixed with gall. But when he tasted it, he refused to drink it.³⁵ The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross. Then they threw dice to divide his clothes between them. ³⁶ The soldiers stayed there to guard him. ³⁷ They put a sign above his head with the charge against him written on it: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' ³⁸ Two criminals were nailed to crosses beside Jesus—one on the right and the other on the left. ³⁹ People walked by and shouted insults at Jesus. They shook their heads ⁴⁰ and said, 'You said you could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. So save yourself! Come down from that cross if you really are the Son of God!' ⁴¹ The leading priests, the teachers of the law, and the older Jewish leaders were also there. They made fun of Jesus the same as the other people did. ⁴² They said, 'He saved others, but he can't save himself! People say he is the king of Israel. If he is the king, he should come down now from the cross. Then we will believe in him.' ⁴³ He trusted God. So let God save him now, if God really wants him. He himself said, 'I am the Son of God.' ⁴⁴ And in the same way, the criminals on the crosses beside Jesus also insulted him.

⁴⁵ At noon the whole country became dark. The darkness continued for three hours. ⁴⁶ About three o'clock Jesus cried out loudly, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" This means 'My God, my God, why have you left me alone?' ⁴⁷ Some of the people standing there heard this. They said, 'He is calling Elijah.' ⁴⁸ Quickly, one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled the sponge with sour wine and tied the sponge to a stick. Then he used the stick to give the sponge to Jesus to get a drink from it. ⁴⁹ But the others said, 'Don't bother him. We want to see if Elijah will come to save him.' ⁵⁰ Again Jesus cried out loudly and then died.

⁵¹ When Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn into two pieces. The tear started at the top and tore all the way to the bottom. Also, the earth shook and rocks were broken. ⁵² The graves opened, and many of God's people who had died were raised from death. ⁵³ They came out of the graves. And after Jesus was raised from death, they went into the holy city, and many people saw them. ⁵⁴ The army officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus saw this earthquake and everything that happened. They were very afraid and said, 'He really was the Son of God!' ⁵⁵ Many women were standing away from the cross, watching. These were the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for him. ⁵⁶ Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were there."

The blood of of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (**Hebrews 10:4**), but Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). Jesus was innocent as Isaiah prophesied, but Jesus let the Jews beat him, nail him down, and lift him up on a cross. Jesus allowed this to happen because he loves us. **Philippians 2:6–8**, ⁶ "He was like God in every way, but he did not think that his being equal with God was something to use for his own benefit. ⁷ Instead, he gave up everything, even his place with God. He accepted the role of a servant, appearing in human form. During his life as a man, ⁸ he humbled himself by being fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross."

Jesus Rose to Defeat Death (Matthew 27:57-28:15)

Matthew 27:57–28:15, ⁵⁷ "That evening a rich man named Joseph came to Jerusalem. He was a follower of Jesus from the town of Arimathea. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked to have Jesus' body. Pilate gave orders for the soldiers to give Jesus' body to him. ⁵⁹ Then Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a new linen cloth. ⁶⁰ He put Jesus' body in a new tomb that he had dug in a wall of rock. Then he closed the tomb by rolling a very large stone to cover the entrance. After he did this, he went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other woman named Mary were sitting near the tomb.

⁶² That day was the day called Preparation day. The next day, the leading priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ They said, 'Sir, we remember that while that liar was still alive he said, 'I will rise from death in three days.' ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be guarded well for three days. His followers might come and try to steal the body. Then they could tell everyone that he has risen from death. That lie will be even worse than what they said about him before.' ⁶⁵ Pilate said, 'Take some soldiers and go guard the tomb the best way you know.' ⁶⁶ So they all went to the tomb and made it safe from thieves. They did this by sealing the stone in the entrance and putting soldiers there to guard it.

28:1 The day after the Sabbath day was the first day of the week. That day at dawn Mary Magdalene and the other woman named Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 Suddenly an angel of the Lord came from the sky, and there was a huge earthquake. The angel went to the tomb and rolled the stone away from the entrance. Then he sat on top of the stone. 3 The angel was shining as bright as lightning. His clothes were as white as snow. 4 The soldiers guarding the tomb were very afraid of the angel. They shook with fear and then became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, 'Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, the one who was killed on the cross. 6 But he is not here. He has risen from death, as he said he would. Come and see the place where his body was. 7 And go quickly and tell his followers, 'Jesus has risen from death. He is going into Galilee and will be there before you. You will see him there.' ' Then the angel said, 'Now I have told you.' 8 So the women left the tomb quickly. They were afraid, but they were also very happy. They ran to tell his followers what happened. 9 Suddenly, Jesus was there in front of them. He said, 'Hello!' The women went to him and, holding on to his feet, worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Go tell my followers to go to Galilee. They will see me there.'

11 The women went to tell the followers. At the same time, some of the soldiers who were guarding the tomb went into the city. They went to tell the leading priests everything that happened. 12 Then the priests met with the older Jewish leaders and made a plan. They paid the soldiers a lot of money 13 and said to them, 'Tell the people that Jesus' followers came during the night and stole the body while you were sleeping. 14 If the governor hears about this, we will talk to him and keep you out of trouble.' 15 So the soldiers kept the money and obeyed the priests. And that story is still spread among the Jews even today."

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus' would live long after he died as a sacrifice. God fulfilled Isaiah's words when he raised Jesus from the dead. The Jews tried to hide Jesus' resurrection, but their lie is recorded here in Matthew's account. Jesus died to take away our sins and defeated death so we too can be raised after we die. **Philippians 2:9-11**, *"9 So God raised him up to the most important place and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. 10 God did this so that every person will bow down to honor the name of Jesus. Everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow. 11 They will all confess, 'Jesus Christ is Lord,' and this will bring glory to God the Father."*

Jesus Tells Disciples to Make Disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)

Matthew 27:57-28:15, *"16 The eleven followers went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. 17 On the mountain the followers saw Jesus. They worshiped him. But some of the followers did not believe that it was really Jesus. 18 So he came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. 19 So go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach them to obey everything that I have told you to do. You can be sure that I will be with you always. I will continue with you until the end of time.'"*

What does Jesus command his followers to do? Jesus commands his followers to make followers of Jesus from all nations. They must make followers of Jesus by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to obey Jesus. Though there will be dangers, Jesus promises to always be with his followers. But the story is not over. God had promised to pour out his Spirit so God could live with his people and give them life again. John the Baptizer talked about this restoration and judgment when he said Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). In the next lesson we will read **Acts 2** to see God offer salvation and begin fulfilling the prophecies about the Spirit and about God's fiery judgment.

#5: The Spirit Gives Restoration and Life (Acts 2, etc.)

God cannot be near us and bless us when we sin. Animal sacrifices cannot permanently remove our sins, so the Son of God became a man and died on a cross. Through Jesus' sacrifice, we can be permanently cleansed of our sins and have a restored relationship with God. Jesus is the Messiah - God's chosen servant that the prophets said would suffer, die, and raise to reign as Lord. But the Jews did a bad thing when they killed the Son of God. How could the Jews be forgiven? How can we be forgiven of our sins? The apostle Peter answered this question in **Acts 2** when God poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost - fifty days after Jesus died.

The Apostles Speak in Different Languages (Acts 2:1-13)

Acts 2:1-13, *"¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a noise came from heaven. It sounded like a strong wind blowing. This noise filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw something that looked like flames of fire. The flames were separated and stood over each person there. ⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages. The Holy Spirit was giving them the power to do this.*

⁵ There were some godly Jews in Jerusalem at this time. They were from every country in the world. ⁶ A large crowd came together because they heard the noise. They were surprised because, as the apostles were speaking, everyone heard in their own language. ⁷ They were all amazed at this. They did not understand how the apostles could do this. They said, 'Look! These men we hear speaking are all from Galilee. ⁸ But we hear them in our own languages. How is this possible? We are from all these different places: ⁹ Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the areas of Libya near the city of Cyrene, Rome, ¹¹ Crete, and Arabia. Some of us were born Jews, and others have changed their religion to worship God like Jews. We are from these different countries, but we can hear these men in our own languages! We can all understand the great things they are saying about God.' ¹² The people were all amazed and confused. They asked each other, 'What is happening?' ¹³ But others were laughing at the apostles, saying they were drunk from too much wine."

What did the apostles do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit? They began to speak in different languages. This was an important and helpful miracle. Jews who spoke languages from across the world had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The apostles did not know these languages, but the Holy Spirit gave them the power to speak in these languages so everyone could hear God's message. Some were amazed. Some said the apostles were drunk. Peter explains this event in **Acts 2:14-21**.

Languages Are a Sign about the Spirit and Judgment (Acts 2:14-21)

Acts 2:14-21, *"¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles. He spoke loudly so that all the people could hear. He said, 'My Jewish brothers and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me. I will tell you something you need to know. Listen carefully. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk as you think; it's only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ But Joel the prophet wrote about what you see happening here today. This is what he wrote:*

¹⁷ 'God says: In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will have special dreams. ¹⁸ In those days I will pour out my Spirit on my servants, men and women, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will work wonders in the sky above. I will cause miraculous signs on the earth below. There will be blood, fire, and thick smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be as red as blood. Then the great and glorious day of the Lord will come. ²¹ And everyone who trusts in the Lord will be saved.'"

What does it mean for the apostles to miraculously speak other languages? Peter says this miracle of speaking different languages was given by the Spirit. This miracle is a sign to show that the two events prophesied about in **Joel 2:28-32** were ready to be fulfilled. First, this miracle showed that God was finally pouring out his Spirit. When the Spirit is poured out, this means God is living with his people and giving them spiritual life. God had

promised to make a new agreement with his people and to forget their sins. Second, the miracle was a sign that blood, fire, and darkness was coming. God often uses pictures like this to poetically describe a nation's judgment (Isaiah 13:1-13; Ezekiel 32:2-8). The Jews killed Jesus because they were sinful and they did not believe he was the Messiah. Therefore, God would soon judge the Jews for killing Jesus (Joel 2:32; Matthew 21:33-46). Judgment was near, but the Spirit was being poured out and everyone who trusted in the Lord could be saved. A new agreement, law, temple, priest, and sacrifice would replace what was old. But how could Peter prove that Jesus is the Messiah? How could they trust the Lord and be saved? Notice **Acts 2:22-36**.

Jesus Is Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:22-36)

Acts 2:22–36, *"²² My fellow Israelites, listen to these words: Jesus from Nazareth was a very special man. God clearly showed this to you. He proved it by the miracles, wonders, and miraculous signs he did through Jesus. You all saw these things, so you know this is true. ²³ Jesus was handed over to you, and you killed him. With the help of evil men, you nailed him to a cross. But God knew all this would happen. It was his plan—a plan he made long ago. ²⁴ Jesus suffered the pain of death, but God made him free. He raised him from death. There was no way for death to hold him. ²⁵ David said this about him: 'I saw the Lord before me always; he is at my right side to keep me safe. ²⁶ So my heart is happy, and the words I speak are words of joy. Yes, even my body will live with hope, ²⁷ because you will not leave me in the place of death. You will not let the body of your Holy One rot in the grave. ²⁸ You taught me how to live. You will come close to me and give me great joy.'*

²⁹ My brothers, I can tell you for sure about David, our great ancestor. He died, was buried, and his tomb is still here with us today. ³⁰ He was a prophet and knew something that God had said. God had promised David that someone from his own family would sit on David's throne as king. ³¹ David knew this before it happened. That is why he said this about that future king: 'He was not left in the place of death. His body did not rot in the grave.' David was talking about the Messiah rising from death. ³² So Jesus is the one God raised from death. We are all witnesses of this. We saw him. ³³ Jesus was lifted up to heaven. Now he is with God, at God's right side. The Father has given the Holy Spirit to him, as he promised. So Jesus has now poured out that Spirit. This is what you see and hear. ³⁴ David was not the one who was lifted up to heaven. David himself said, 'The Lord God said to my Lord: Sit at my right side, ³⁵ until I put your enemies under your power.'

³⁶ So, all the people of Israel should know this for certain: God has made Jesus to be Lord and Messiah. He is the man you nailed to the cross!"

God, David, the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit Testify about Jesus. Peter says Jesus is the prophesied Messiah from David's family whom God resurrected to reign as Lord and Messiah at God's right hand, but what evidences does he give for this claim? Peter gives four evidences. First, this crowd saw the miracles God did through Jesus (vs. 22). Second, David prophesied that God would not let his Holy One rot in the grave (vs. 25-28). Peter says David was talking about the Messiah. David was not speaking of himself since David was still buried in his tomb (vs. 29-31). Third, the apostles are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (vs. 32). The apostles saw, heard, and touched Jesus (1 John 1:1-4). Fourth, they could know Jesus rose to sit at God's right hand because Jesus poured out the Spirit to give the miracle of different languages that they now saw and heard (vs. 33).

Jesus Is Lord and Messiah. Peter's defense is strong. "You saw the miracles, you read the prophecies, we are witnesses, and you can hear us speak different languages through the Spirit: Jesus rose from the dead - he is Lord and Messiah and he is sitting at the LORD's right hand." John the Baptizer said Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Jerusalem would be destroyed because they murdered God's prophets and God's Son (fire), but restoration and life was being offered (Spirit). How would these Jews respond? Notice **Acts 2:37-41**.

What Shall We Do? (Acts 2:37-41)

Acts 2:37–41, *"³⁷ When the people heard this, they felt very, very sorry. They asked Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' ³⁸ Peter said to them, 'Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Then God will forgive your sins, and you will receive the gift of*

the Holy Spirit.³⁹ This promise is for you. It is also for your children and for the people who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord our God calls to himself.’⁴⁰ Peter warned them with many other words; he begged them, ‘Save yourselves from the evil of the people who live now!’⁴¹ Then those who accepted what Peter said were baptized. On that day about 3000 people were added to the group of believers.”

Repent (2:37-38). When the crowd asked what they should do, what does Peter first tell them to do? Peter commanded them to repent. To repent means we must change our hearts and lives from sin. We do not like how sin hurts us, but we must make a serious commitment to stop being okay with disobeying God. It is good to pause to ask ourselves this question: are we willing to stop living for ourselves and start living for Jesus?

Be Baptized (2:37-39). What is Peter’s second command? Peter commanded them be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is immersion in water “for the forgiveness of your sins.” Our actions are sinful, so we will only be saved if we trust Jesus to remove our sins. **Colossians 2:11-13** says that baptism is how we put faith in God’s work to forgive us and raise us from spiritual death. Just as Jesus was buried and rose, our old person of guilt, shame, and fear is buried in baptism so God can raise us to live a new life (cf. Romans 6:1-11). Peter also says “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” when we are baptized. God promised his Spirit would live with his people to give them life (Ezekiel 36:26-27, 37:1-14). We can now receive the promised Spirit. This is not something we feel physically; rather, the Spirit is given to believers at baptism so spiritual life and change and life result inside us (John 7:37-39). Christians are must be different from people in the world since they are becoming a place for God to live through the Spirit (Ezekiel 37:26-28; 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1; Ephesians 2:22).

A New Life (2:40-41). Sin makes us rotten, but we can become pure and have new life through Christ. We must stop living like our old self, be made new in our hearts, and start being a new person who is like God (Eph. 4:20-24). The crowd’s response to Peter’s message was amazing: three thousand were baptized that day and added to God’s group of believers! Jesus is the only way we can have life and joy in a relationship with God. Do you trust Jesus? Are you changing from your sins? Have you asked God to forgive your sins by being immersed in water? Notice the new life, fellowship, and purpose God’s brings to Christians in **Acts 2:42-47**.

The Fellowship of Believers (Acts 2:42-47, etc.)

Acts 2:42-47, “⁴² The believers spent their time listening to the teaching of the apostles. They shared everything with each other. They ate together and prayed together. ⁴³ Many wonders and miraculous signs were happening through the apostles, and everyone felt great respect for God. ⁴⁴ All the believers stayed together and shared everything. ⁴⁵ They sold their land and the things they owned. Then they divided the money and gave it to those who needed it. ⁴⁶ The believers shared a common purpose, and every day they spent much of their time together in the Temple area. They also ate together in their homes. They were happy to share their food and ate with joyful hearts. ⁴⁷ The believers praised God and were respected by all the people. More and more people were being saved every day, and the Lord was adding them to their group.”

Devoted to the Fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). How did the believers spend their time? The Christians spent a lot of time together. This church was a true family. They committed to listening to the apostles’ teaching together. The Christians were committed to pray together. They were committed to remembering Jesus by eating the Lord’s Supper together on Sunday (“breaking bread”; cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). The Christians shared their things, time, food, and homes with one another (vs. 44-46). Most importantly, the believers shared the gospel with others (vs. 47). Christians today must make the same commitments.

Gentiles in the Fellowship (Acts 10). Many Jews hurt the Christians, but the Jewish Christians left Jerusalem and told everyone in every place about Jesus (Acts 8:1-4). Even Gentiles (people who are not Jews) began changing their lives. In **Acts 10:44-48**, the Holy Spirit fell on Gentiles who believed in Jesus. The Holy Spirit gave these Gentiles the same miracle of different languages that the apostles received. This was God’s sign

that non-Jews can also have a relationship with God if they will change and trust Jesus. All Christ-followers from all nations are part of the same family (Ephesians 1:9-10, 2:11-3:13). Since the world was created, people have been enemies with God and enemies with one another. Before, people came together at Babel to honor their own name, so God confused their languages and scattered them from each other. But in **Acts 2** and **10**, the Spirit removed the language barrier so God's scattered people could hear the gospel. The gospel unites people to praise and honor God's name. By adding people from all nations to Jesus' church and giving them his Spirit, God is bringing peace (Ephesians 2:11-22). When God changes our hearts to love him and love each other, he is glorified (Ephesians 3:6-13). But our story is not over. One day, Christ will appear from heaven to judge both the living and the dead. Notice **Revelation 20:11-21:8**.

The Judgment (Revelation 20:11-21:8)

Revelation 20:11–21:8, ¹¹ Then I saw a large white throne. I saw the one who was sitting on the throne. Earth and sky ran away from him and disappeared. ¹² And I saw those who had died, great and small, standing before the throne. Some books were opened. And another book was opened—the book of life. The people were judged by what they had done, which is written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. All these people were judged by what they had done. ¹⁴ And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

^{21:1} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared. Now there was no sea. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, 'Now God's home is with people. He will live with them. They will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain. All the old ways are gone.'

⁵ The one who was sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.' ⁶ The one on the throne said to me, 'It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give free water from the spring of the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. ⁷ All those who win the victory will receive all this. And I will be their God, and they will be my children. ⁸ But those who are cowards, those who refuse to believe, those who do terrible things, those who kill, those who sin sexually, those who do evil magic, those who worship idols, and those who tell lies—they will all have a place in the lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.' "

The Judgment (Revelation 20:11-21:8). One day, the dead will be raised and we will all appear before Christ so each one can be judged for what they did in the body - whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5:10). Those who cling to their evil will be thrown into the lake of fire. Those who repent and follow Christ will be raised to a resurrection of life (Jn. 5:28-29). All things will be made new. Our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21). Our perishable bodies will put on the imperishable so we can inherit God's kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50-55). Mourning, crying, pain, and death will cease in the glory of God's presence. Trials, temptations, and persecutions will come in this life, but **Revelation 12:7-11** illustrates how we as God's children can defeat Satan, the serpent, when we continue to trust Jesus' blood and not love our lives - even in the face of death.

Summary & Conclusion. God created us and gave us everything, but we have all disobeyed and dishonored him. We deserve death and separation from God, but God sacrificed his Son to free us from sin so we can have a relationship with God our Father again. Jesus our King has defeated death. He invites everyone to enjoy eternal life with him. When we leave our sinful lifestyle, trust Jesus as the Son of God who rose from the dead, and are baptized, our sins will be forgiven and we will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we will use Jesus as our example, we will be changed to be pictures of God's purity again. Through God's Spirit, Christians become temples for God. We must shine like lights in darkness. Let Jesus save you. Tell others. Give God the glory.

Appendix

Jesus Is the Only Way

John 3:18, 36 say that we are condemned and God's anger is still on us, unless we believe in the Son.

John 14:6 say that Jesus is the Way and people can only have a relationship with the Father through Jesus.

Acts 4:8-12 says that we can only find salvation through Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 says there is one God and there is only one mediator between God and man - Jesus.

Baptism

1 Peter 3:21 teaches us that baptism saves us and is how we ask God for a clean conscience.

Matthew 28:18-20 shows us how Jesus told his followers to make followers through baptism and teaching.

Acts 19:1-6 shows us that people can be baptized again through the example of the Ephesian followers.

Acts 22:6-16 shows us that baptism truly washes away our sins through Paul's example.

Colossians 2:11-13 says that baptism is how we put faith in God's work, not our works.

Romans 6:1-8 says our old, sinful body is buried when we are baptized into Christ's death.

Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus' Brothers. John clearly says in **John 7:5** that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him before he died. However, Luke's account in **Acts 1:14** shows that this changed after Jesus' resurrection. After this, Jesus' brothers, James and Jude, both wrote inspired letters in our Bibles today. James even became a leader in the church at Jerusalem. Why did they change and believe in Jesus? **1 Corinthians 15:7** says Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection. The resurrection is the great proof that Jesus truly is from God.

Paul's Changed Life. Even history experts who do not believe in Jesus say that Paul was a real person who wrote many of the letters in the New Testament. Paul was trained as a boy in the Law of Moses, he became a Pharisee (Jewish leader), and he imprisoned and killed Christians (Acts 8:1-3, 22:3-5; Philippians 3:4-6). Yet, Luke records the thing that changed Paul's life in Acts: Jesus came to Paul on the road to Damascus. After this, Paul stopped persecuting Christians and started making Christians. Paul left his old life and goals. As Paul says in **Philippians 3:7**, *"At one time all these things were important to me. But because of Christ, I decided that they are worth nothing."* If Jesus did not appear to Paul, why did Paul's life change so much?

The Empty Tomb. The news of Jesus' resurrection began in Jerusalem and spread from Jerusalem. Many enemies in Jerusalem did not believe in Jesus and did not want this news to spread. They even put followers in prison and killed them. But if Jesus did not rise from death, why didn't these enemies in Jerusalem show everyone Jesus' body? If people saw Jesus' dead body, they would not believe. If Jesus' body was in the tomb, the news of Jesus would not have spread anywhere. The gospel spread because the tomb was empty.

Motivations of the Apostles. Many people today still claim that the apostles stole Jesus' body and lied about his resurrection. This would only be logical **if** Jesus' disciples gained something by lying. Muhammad's followers gained riches and power, but Jesus' apostles were killed for telling people about Jesus' resurrection. If the apostles were lying, they would have stopped when people tried to kill them. But they could not stop. As Peter said, *"We cannot be quiet. We must tell people about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20).

Resurrection or Apparition? Some will admit that the apostles thought they saw Jesus after his resurrection, but they actually saw a ghost. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, this claim would explain how the apostles were ready to die teaching about Jesus' resurrection. But this argument fails because it relies on many people being able to see the same fake ghost. After his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to small and large groups. Two people can't see the same fake ghost at the same time. This is also true for five hundred people. Either way, if we claim the apostles saw a ghost, we still have to answer the question, *"Where is the body?"*