

Foundations — *of* — **FAITH**

A Handbook for
Christian Growth

Revised Edition

ALTON HOWARD

Foundations

of

FAITH

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Christian Growth

Revised Edition

Alton Howard



Our purpose at Howard Publishing is to:

- *Increase faith* in the hearts of growing Christians
- *Inspire holiness* in the lives of believers
- *Instill hope* in the hearts of struggling people
everywhere

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Published by Howard Publishing Co., Inc.
3117 North 7th Street, West Monroe, Louisiana 71291-2227

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ISBN: 1-878990-24-1

Cover design by Stephanie Denney
Maps and Icons by Kristen Myers

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Acknowledgments

Out of many years of personal study, classroom teaching, listening to, and reading what others have said, now comes these twenty-two lessons of *Foundations of Faith*.

All I know I have learned from others, with the Bible being the foundation of my learning experience.

My acknowledgement to Philis Boultinghouse and John Howard, for their many suggestions in editing and reviewing the manuscripts for this book; to Kristen Myers, who carefully drew our maps and building tools; to Maxine Heath, who worked hours on the computer to get everything just right; to my students, who for over thirty years have been a part in developing these lessons; to my parents, Hardy and Corine Smith Howard, who gave me a secure Christian home and nourished my faith during my early years; and to my faithful wife, Jean Meador Howard, who for over fifty years has been by my side—to all these I give my thanks.

Introduction

Our Wonderful World

Earth is crammed with heaven and every bush aflame with God, but only those who see, take off their shoes.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

And so, the hands of time were set—and in the holy hush of that moment, “God said, ‘Let there be light. . . . Let there be an expanse between the waters. . . . Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear. . . . Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds. . . . Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years. . . . Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky. . . . Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds. . . .’ And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:3–25).

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth. . . .’ So God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them. . . . And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:26–31).

We live in an awesome universe—a place of wonder and beauty encircled with an endless canopy stretching across the heavens, garnished with billions of twinkling diamonds of light, and set in a backdrop of trillions of miles of dark velvet and lights of the night celebrating the joy of creation and declaring the glory and majesty of God.

Our earth abounds with rippling and sparkling brooks, crystal clear lakes, mighty rivers, and oceans of water—all teeming with billions of living creatures. Seasons of

spring, summer, autumn, and winter provide planting time, harvest season, a time for rest, and a time for rebirth.

A Time of Rebirth and Celebration

In spring, warm gentle rains and soft winds touch earth's sod, and the warm rays of the sun kiss it by day, while moonbeams dance over it by night. Flowers burst out of earth's womb, and the hills and valleys are aflame with color and bloom. Their fragrances fill the morning breeze with the sweetness and nectar of life. Birds nest in tall trees and sing their love songs as they make plans for their young. Living creatures frolic in the warm sunshine, dressed in new coats of many colors and royal splendor.

Springtime is God's thinking in color, laughing in rainbows, and speaking in flowers. He hangs tiny blossoms on every branch and nourishes them in the cradle of his warm sunshine and gentle rain. All those who share its fragrance find a like measure clinging to their own hands. And the angels say, "Oooh, how marvelous!"

A Time of Reflection

Following spring, with its spectacular beauty, comes summer. Lazy billowing clouds, sent by the breath of the wind, drift through the blue sky. Imitating huge mountain peaks and castles and ships, they sail gently by. Then come dark clouds with wagonloads of rain to quench the thirsty ground. And roaring thunder claps its hands with joy while bolts of fire and flashing lights streak across the rolling black sky, cleansing and invigorating the air. Rainbows arch across the heavens to remind earth's creation of God's special covenant. And the angels say, "Oooh, how awesome!"

A Time of Harvest

At the end of summer, yellow-gold pumpkins lie over the fields while the big harvest moon's light dances around them and bathes the hills and fields of grain with touches of silver. Frost leaves its first white fingerprints over the landscape, adding an extra crispy-flake serving to our morning treats. God takes his autumn brush and paints the whole earth right before creation's eyes in a matter of days for one grand finale of the season. The beauty of the colors in a million rainbows graces the mountains, hills, and valleys—all in a special holiday dress parade, just before winter's rest. As the poet said, "Oh, be less beautiful or be less brief!" And the angels gasp and say, "Oooh, how beautiful!"

A Time for Rest

Then comes winter, the quiet time of rest. The howling winds, looking for a place of warmth, pierce the woolen coats and blankets of fur that cover God's creatures. Animals bury themselves into holes and thick forest brush while wild geese fly overhead in perfect

formation, honking their way to their new homes for the winter months. Snowflakes silently fall over the hills and fields with blankets of white, yielding treasures for the soil. Days shorten, and nights grow longer for the long winter nap. And all is awakened from sleep for the rebirth of spring. And so it shall be as long as God ordains seed time and harvest time (Genesis 8:22). And all the angels say, “Oooh, how wonderful! When can we all go?”

The Wonder of It All

As dwellers on planet earth, it is easy to lose sight of the splendor and grandeur that surround us. We have become so blinded and deaf from chasing after the wind that we fail to see the beauty that is all around us or hear the songs of God. For on creation morn, even the “morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). They could not contain their joy when they saw the marvelous works of God’s hands. Such beauty touched angel hearts, and their wings fluttered with joy.

King David was amazed as he sat out under the stars in the fields at night, tended his father’s sheep, and viewed the vastness of the heavens.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. (Psalm 19:1–4)

He Made It for Us

The Bible tells us of the special attention God gave to the birth of planet earth, to its intricate design and precision. It is a special planet in our galaxy, created for life and wondrously stock-piled for the support of life’s various needs and support systems. “He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18).

When we compare our earth, which is only a speck of “dust on the scales” (Isaiah 40:15) in proportion to the billions of galaxies stretching across the trillions of light years of stellar fields of space, we cannot but feel a sense of awesome wonder and ask the question as David did: “What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4). Other planets are barren and composed of lifeless matter—rocks and red-hot, molten lava. Our sun, with licking flames shooting out hundreds of thousands of miles into space, burns up millions of tons of hydrogen per second and “just happens” to be precisely the right distance from our earth (ninety-three million miles) so that its rays warm our planet and sustain life. This burning inferno is kept alive with enough energy to bathe our solar system. This energy races out at 670 million miles per hour, reaches Mars, then crosses a belt of asteroids two hundred million miles wide, flies past Jupiter and 150 million miles farther, where its warmth is still felt. Our moon, with its awesome canyons and craters and lunarscape of ash, “just

happens” to be precisely the right distance (239,000 miles) from earth so as to be the keeper of our oceans and seashore lines. And all these heavenly bodies moving and spinning in the cosmos create just enough pull of gravity in every direction to keep our earth in the proper orbit and the universe in place. Who gave all of this its spin?

Who, Me?

Why all this attention to us? Why planet earth? We are the only one! As noted Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson said, “The more I examine the universe and the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming” (Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, New York: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 250).

What mysteries surround us! We are able to look back into time and see things that are not.

What mysteries we behold. But the greatest of all mysteries is the *who* behind it all. Who ordered and designed this engineering masterpiece of physics, laws, chemistry, and life. Who gave the command?

And why does mankind possess the intelligence to want to explore and search and even the desire to want to know?

God Whispers from Space

It is difficult to hear God in the confusion of life. Moses heard him in the quietness of the Sinai desert. Elijah heard him in the whisper of a still, small voice. Jacob heard him under the stars at Bethel, and the psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

For those who have ears, God still whispers from outer space, and more are listening than ever before.

On April 24, 1992, astrophysicist George Smoot announced that the Cobe satellite had measured the “ripples” (also referred to as cosmic seeds—or fingerprints of God) in the microwave background radiation. The headlines all over the world quote Smoot as saying, “If you are religious, it’s like looking at God” (Milton Rothman, “What Went Before?” *Free Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter, 1992–3, p. 12).

Smoot further states: “The question of the beginning is as inescapable for cosmologists as it is for theologians” (George Smoot & Keay Davidson, *Wrinkles in Time*, New York: William Morrow & Co., 1993, p. 189).

John Barrow and mathematical physicist Frank Tipler tried to calculate the time it would take the critical conditions for the development of humankind to come together in the universe without a creator. Allowing for luck to play its part, they concluded that by

the time any one of the ten conditions needed to produce life was in place, the sun would have turned into a red giant and burned up the earth. They summarized that there must be intelligence just to make the necessary selections for human life (*The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Furthermore, one of the world's most prominent astronomers, Robert Jastrow, writes: "The essential element in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis is the same; the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply, at a definite moment in time in a flash of light and energy" (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 2nd Edition, New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992, p. 14).

Physicists see the need for more than just mere matter. Commenting upon this, theoretical physicist Heinz Pagals made the following comment: "Where are these laws written into that void? What 'tells' the void that it is pregnant with a possible universe? It would seem that even the void is subject to law, as logic that exists prior to space and time" (Heinz R. Pagals, *Perfect Symmetry: The Search for the Beginning of Time*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985, p. 243).

Sir James Jeans, physicist and mathematician, is quoted as follows: "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter. . . . We discover that the universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power that has something in common with our own individual minds" (The Mysterious Universe, cited by A. E. Wilder Smith, *Man's Origin—Man's Destiny*, Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1970, p. 9).

Is this not what the book of Genesis says, and does it not say we are created in his image!

Surprise! Surprise!

Astronomer Robert Jastrow, in facing the indisputable new data flowing in from our space probes, has concluded, "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries" (*God and the Astronomers*, p. 292).

The Roof over Our Heads

Maybe we are too close to the forest to see the trees.

NASA astronomer John O'Keefe, on the user-friendly aspect of our planet, said, "To

the astronomer, the earth is a very sheltered and protected place. There is a marvelous picture from Apollo 8 of the blue and cloud-wrapped earth, seen just at the horizon of the cratered, torn, and smashed lunar landscape. The contrast would not be lost on any creature; the thought ‘God loves those people’ cannot be resisted. Yet the moon is a friendly place compared to Venus, where, from skies forty kilometers high, a rain of concentrated sulfuric acid falls toward a surface that is as hot as boiling lead” (*God and the Astronomers*, p. 117).

These quotes are just a few of the many from a new breed of scientists who are on the front lines of exploring our wonderful universe.

The whole structure of our Christian faith rises or falls upon the truth of a transcending God beyond and outside of creation. He is the architect, engineer, designer, first cause, and creator of the universe. “And in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15). He is the source of all truth.

Not only did he plan the universe, but he purposely designed it in perfect minute detail in order that life could exist and inhabit this special bluish ball in space that we call home. “Have you not heard? . . . Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?” (Isaiah 40:21, 26).

Such is the foundation upon which the Christian faith rests. It gives the human race purpose, hope, and incredible worth.

God Is

The grand truth of the ages is that *God is!*

In the chapters that follow, we will drink from the wells dug by the hands of God and relive some of the timeless moments that have changed the course of history. We will follow him as he leads us finally to the threshold of timeless eternity, the new heaven and new earth wherein dwells righteousness. There we will feel the soft, gentle touch of Eden’s breeze brush across our faces and hear the gentle whisper in our ears: “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 30:22; Ezekiel 36:28).

How to Study Foundations of Faith

Laying the foundation for a new structure is an exciting and important event. Exciting because upon that foundation will be built not only new walls and a roof but also new hopes and dreams for the future. Important because a structure is only as good as the foundation beneath.

The purpose of this study is to help you build a strong foundation of faith so that your house of faith (your life) will stand the test of time and be full of hope in Jesus. This study will enrich your understanding of the Bible and deepen your convictions as a disciple of Christ. In fact, I will make this promise to you: If you dedicate yourself to studying and mastering this series, you will come away with a passion and understanding of God's Word you never dreamed possible.

Too few Christians have a working concept of how the Bible relates from Genesis to Revelation. Too many people lose the truths and glorious themes of God's Word because they view it as a compilation of disconnected chapters that are simply placed between two covers. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This book will help you see the central theme that runs through the entire Bible from beginning to end. In addition, this study will:

- Help you gain a better understanding of the Christian life.
- Fortify you for the struggles that lie ahead.
- Give you a deeper appreciation of what God has done for you through Jesus.
- Give you additional light on fundamental doctrines that you have already embraced.
- Enable you to become a better ambassador and sharer of the Gospel (the Good News) and to lead others to the Christ of Calvary.

One very important discovery you will make in your journey through the Bible is how your own spiritual life relates to the lives of the characters recorded in the Scriptures. You will find that their lives, like your own, were filled with moments of love, joy, and victory. However, these Bible characters also experienced times of failure, weeping, and doubt, when giving up seemed more reasonable than looking up to God.

For those whose foundation of faith in the Lord was strong, it is written: “They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11). They are the overcomers who are looking and cheering you on in your endeavor to build a rock-solid foundation of faith that will help you overcome whatever circumstances arise.

There they stand! Noah labored 120 years to build a huge boat while others mocked. Abraham lived in tents as a nomad in a land that was not his own. Jacob lost his beloved wife Rachel at the birth of their son, Benjamin, and was deceived by his own sons who sold his favorite son, Joseph, into slavery. Moses lived in a burning desert with a multitude of murmuring Hebrews for forty years and yet was not allowed to set foot in the Promised Land. Job lost all he had but never cursed God. David, hounded and chased by King Saul, lost his sons as turmoil plagued his house. Daniel faced the lions and kept his faith. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit to starve. Peter was crucified. John was banished to a lonely island. Stephen was stoned to death. Paul was beheaded. And Mary witnessed the crucifixion of her precious son, Jesus.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)

As a child of God, you are in the company of the greatest men and women of all history, heroes of the ages. The *Who's Who* in God's hall of fame now surround you, cheering you on. You can and will make it!

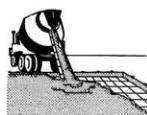
In the midst of that host is one with hands that will sustain you and beckon you ever on and upward. Hands that are scarred because he, too, climbed a difficult hill. It was called Calvary! You will keep climbing because you know it is the only path that leads out of the chaos and darkness of this world and into light triumphant.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31 KJV)

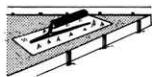
Each lesson of this book is broken down to coincide with the steps a builder takes in laying a strong foundation for any structure. You will see a symbol at the beginning of each section to guide you as you study through this series.



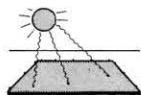
Surveying the Sight provides an overview of the coming lesson. This section serves to prepare you for the lesson and keeps the recurring themes of the Bible in the proper perspective. Listed with the lesson titles (of the Old Testament lessons) are the scriptures that tell the stories. Be sure to read these Bible sections before your start.



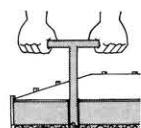
Laying the Foundation is the body of the lesson and should be read carefully. If you don't feel as though you grasp the lesson the first time you read it, go over it again. Take the time to read every scripture printed in the lessons. These are essential to your learning and cannot be passed over.



Finishing the Foundation contains concluding remarks that will either summarize or bring additional insight to the lesson, sometimes tying up the loose ends and sometimes pointing you to the ever-present message of the Savior.



Firming the Foundation brings you a special scripture to affirm the lesson and remind you of God's promise.



Testing the Foundation lists several questions that will help you see if the lesson has firmly set in your heart and mind. If you don't know the answer to a question, look back in the lesson to find it.

Several other helps are included in these lessons to aid you in your study. Date lines and “mini maps” set in the outside margins guide you through history, and full-page maps provide a larger view of these historic regions.

Foundations of Faith is designed to be used for individual or classroom study. If you are using this study guide to teach others, let me remind you that preparation is the key to a successful class. Study and review your material thoroughly before each session. Be sure to read all the Bible sections that each lesson covers so that you will understand the complete background and story. There is no substitute for preparation and study. Make your class an exciting and challenging time for your students as well as for yourself. You are studying the most exciting story ever told, filled with drama and intrigue. Transport yourself and your students into this adventurous biblical journey and let it come alive. The reward will be great.

If you are using this series for personal study, be diligent in your efforts and set goals for yourself. You might even find a friend to study along with you. Make it a team effort, and discuss the lessons and questions with each other. Whether you study alone or with a partner, press forward and finish the course.

As you study, keep in mind that the dates assigned to specific events are subject to some variation. The setting of dates before the time of Abraham is especially uncertain. After the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, however, dates can be figured with reasonable accuracy in the light of archaeological studies of the people and nations involved.

Whether you use this series to teach a Bible class or for individual study, I strongly suggest that you add some basic reference books to your library. For the price of a family dinner you can purchase the tools that will enable you to better understand the wonderful story and help you to lay your foundation of faith.

May God bless you as you undertake the noble task of building your foundation of faith. It is my prayer that upon this foundation you will build a lifetime of faith and service to Jesus Christ.

Lesson 1

In the Beginning

Genesis 1–9

Surveying the Site



Somewhere . . . sometime . . . back before there was a somewhere or sometime as we humans use the terms, God, the eternal one, in the counsel of his own mind, planned our existence.

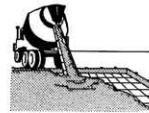
Cherubim and Seraphim must have hovered in that holy throne room and whispered to each other, “What is God up to now? He said he’s going to make a man! What’s a man? Oh, he says a man will be a creature created in God’s own image to rule and subdue a planet called Earth. And he says that this planet will be garnished with beauty and life, oceans of water, mountains and forests, creeping things, cattle, and birds that fly in the heavens. What an exciting plan! But how will it all be done, and what will be the outcome of such a plan?”

Then God wound up the hands of time and said, “Let there be light.” And God said . . . and God said . . . and the heavens and earth and all its inhabitants came into being just like he said (Genesis 1).

“What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4). Who is this creature, man, and what is his purpose? Why do evil and suffering exist? Why did God create man with a free will that enables him to do evil? Surely God, the all-wise one, knew what man would do and the awful price he would have to pay to redeem his creation from a fallen state.

Well, this is what the story of the Bible is all about. Though the mystery will not be completely understood until we anchor on that heavenly shore, enough of this mystery will unfold between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22 that we will want to be in that final gathering. Only then will the total purpose of our existence and the meaning of earth’s sojourn be revealed and understood.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Creation (Genesis 1–2)

A. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*

Date Line
Creation
Date
Unknown

Thus the book of Genesis (the beginnings) opens with this startling declaration! No other single statement has the power of these few words: In the beginning (time) God (force) created (action) the heavens (space) and the earth (matter). And what a creation it is! What design! What awesome power! What precision, timing, and sustaining power! Did all this come about by mere chance? How could anyone believe our universe came into being without a master architect? We are amazed when we consider that our sun is just one medium-size star in our galaxy of 100 billion stars, our galaxy is just one of an estimated 100 billion other galaxies, and each of them have 100 billion stars!

Stretching across fifty-nine billion, trillion miles of sky are wisps of clouds that resulted from some distant past action of God, still observable today through giant telescopes on spaceships. To attempt to explain it all by saying that our wondrous universe accidentally evolved without a design and without a creator is an insult to our intelligence!

B. *Mankind did not evolve—he was created.*

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)

The crowning act of creation was man, and man is distinguished from the animals by being created in God's image.

C. *Jesus affirms God as creator.*

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’?” (Matthew 19:4)

Jesus should know, he was there:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1)

D. Paul and Peter believed the creation account and taught it.

These apostles of the new covenant firmly believed the account of the beginning as related in Genesis 1.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:13)

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. (2 Peter 3:3–6)

II. The Fall (Genesis 3)

Adam and Eve were living in perfect fellowship with God when Satan entered the garden and enticed Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Eve in turn enticed Adam, and thus all our troubles began.

A. God tells Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:15–17)

B. Adam and Eve disobey God.

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:4–6)

Note the avenue of Satan’s temptation: It tasted good, looked good, and promised to make one wise.

C. Their punishment is swift.

The consequences of their disobedience led to their immediate expulsion from the garden. They were no longer privileged to keep their special, close relationship with God, and they were given the sentence of death, which is a separation from God. They were separated that day from God, later to suffer physical death. The serpent was also cursed.

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” (Genesis 3:16–17)

So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.” (Genesis 3:14)

III. The Seed Promise (Genesis 3:15)**A. A Savior is promised.**

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.
(Genesis 3:15)

Immediately after the punishment was declared, God announced his provision for fallen man's salvation. The promise of this verse is woven throughout the whole Bible. Not until you get to Revelation 22:12–14 is the fabric woven to completion.

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:12–14)

B. The Savior will come through the seed of woman.

The struggle for power over the human heart had its beginning in the garden. Through Adam and Eve came the fall of the human race, and through the seed of woman would

come the salvation of the human race. God will use a man-child born of a woman to overcome Satan. The seed of woman will be victorious!

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law. (Galatians 4:4)

IV. The Universal Flood (Genesis 6–9:17)

A. A corrupt world will be punished.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence . . . so God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. . . . So make yourself an ark of cypress [gopher] wood, make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out." (Genesis 6:11–14)

Date Line
Flood
Date
Unknown

As a result of man's failure to walk with God and carry out his divine mission, the world became so corrupt that God had to destroy man. The exception to all the wickedness was a man named Noah and his family. This family stood out among all the rest as righteous, so Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and was spared the awful destruction of the flood (Genesis 6:8). The salvation of Noah preserved the promised redemption of the race (Genesis 3:15).

B. The flood waters come.

Noah and his family entered the ark and God shut the door. For forty days and nights “the floodgates of the heavens were opened,” and the ark was set afloat.

C. Noah steps back onto a purged earth.

The waters continued upon the earth for 150 days.

And on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. (Genesis 8:4)

The wrath of the creator upon sinful man was finally over, and God said to Noah,

Come out of the ark you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature . . . so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it. (Genesis 8:16–17)

Then God blessed Noah and his sons saying to them, be ye fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

D. Noah's salvation typifies our salvation.

When Noah heard God's message, he believed it and obeyed it.

By faith Noah when warned about things not yet seen [a deluge of rain] in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

(Hebrews 11:7)

This is so like our own salvation.

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:20b–21)

The ark was the means through which God's grace and salvation were bestowed upon Noah and his family. Noah passed through the flood waters and stepped out onto a cleansed world. Thus they were saved from the destruction of the flood.

When we are baptized (immersed) into Jesus by faith, God's grace is bestowed upon us. We arise to walk in newness of life, and we are saved from the coming judgment upon this world (Romans 6:3–9).

Date Line

4000 B.C.

Along the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers (Mesopotamia, or land "between the Rivers," the present country of Iraq) the ancient Sumerians paddled their canoes, and the trades developed.

3000 B.C.

King Narmer rules upper and lower Egypt, and Assyria rises.

Date Line

3000 B.C.

In the city of Ur, Abram's birth place, business flourished.

2700 B.C.

The famous Gilgamesh rules the Sumerians at Erech.

2500 B.C.

The great Pyramids of Egypt.

Finishing the Foundation



All science can know for sure is that we are here now and that at some time in the distant past we were not here! Speculation and theories may be advanced, but they remain just that—speculation and theory, no matter how sophisticated or complex they may be. Any theory that denies God as creator is a false theory and has no biblical or true scientific basis. The more science learns, the more evidence there is of a divine creator.

Only in the Bible is such a clear emphatic statement made concerning the beginning. There are no qualifying statements such as, “It appears to be,” “It possibly happened this way,” “One theory is,” “If this were so then it follows that this is true” attached to the opening statement in Genesis 1:1. There is no long drawn out discussion on the subject; there is only one, short, ten-word statement: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It is apparent that man is not the author of that statement; it contains too few words!

Since no one of our race was there at the beginning and since Jesus affirmed that the creation story, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the historical events were all real, then we must either accept it as truth or reject the testimony of Jesus.

When all the dust of man’s theories has been blown away by the wind, the first verse in the Bible will still say, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The story of Noah and the flood is one of the most fascinating stories of all time for both children and adults. The flood had such a catastrophic effect upon the world and upon the minds of the descendants of Noah that relics of this story are embedded in every civilization. The University of Pennsylvania conducted an expedition at Nipper, Mesopotamia, of a temple said to be 5500 years old. Here they uncovered thousands of texts. Among them were stories of creation and a great flood. Archaeology continues to add proof to the biblical account.

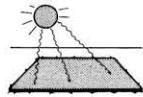
The events of the flood clearly demonstrate the two opposing walks of life. Noah, the righteous one, walked by faith and was saved by God’s grace. Those who were disobedient walked by their own sight and wisdom and were destroyed in the flood.

The same principles hold true today. Salvation is still by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8), and damnation is still the result of disbelieving, walking by sight, and following our own devices.

But whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16b)

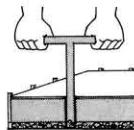
Noah’s faith still shines like a beacon of light and is still visible. It can be seen just after the next rain . . . stretched across the sky in rich, beautiful colors.

Firming the Foundation



*I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign
of the covenant between me and the earth. . . . Never
again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.
(Genesis 9:13, 15b)*

Testing the Foundation



1. List the five declarations made in Genesis 1:1.

2. Did Jesus affirm the Genesis account of creation?

3. What was the consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience?

4. What promise did God make in Genesis 3:15, and what do you see in this promise?

5. Why did God bring a flood upon the earth?

6. What did Noah's faith lead him to do?

7. How is Noah's salvation and our present salvation similar?

8. What sign did God give after the flood as a promise to mankind?

Lesson 2

Good Things Happen to Old People Too

Genesis 12–25

Surveying the Site



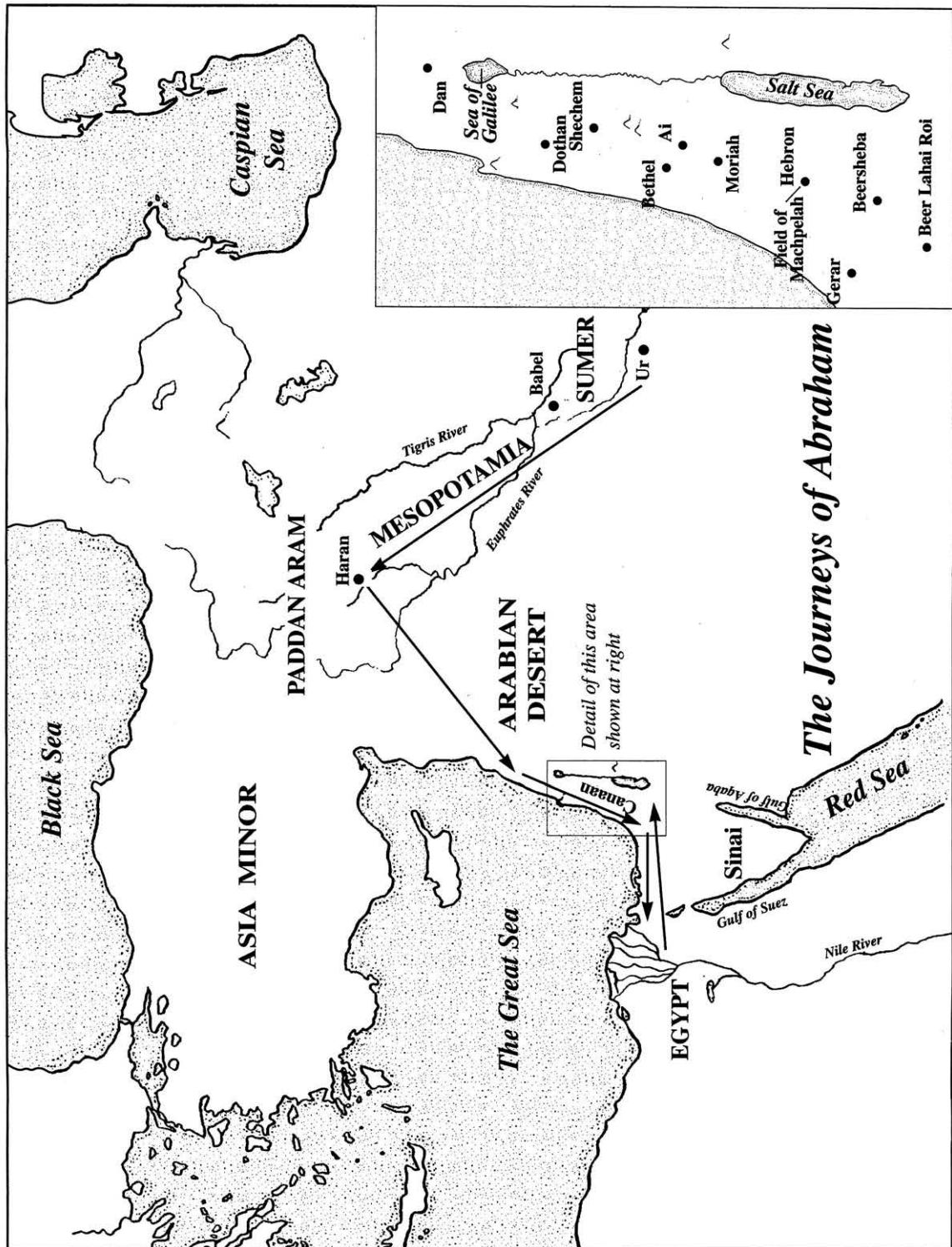
God had taken drastic action to destroy a corrupt world. However, by the same action he preserved the seed-line through Noah, which kept alive God's promise made in Genesis 3:15. God will soon make another selection out of a wicked environment. Again, one man will be chosen to carry on the seed promise.

Because of our limited view, it sometimes seems that God moves slowly in fulfilling his promises. But God does not view time as we do. "A thousand years are like a day" with God (2 Peter 3:8). We humans live under a time clock, but not so with God.

The centuries ticked off on the clock of time, and then one day God called on a Bedouin from the land of Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers). This man was from Ur of the Chaldeans, and his name was Abram.

The city of Ur was located in the land of Sumer, called Shinar in the Bible, where the ancient Sumerians lived. Here in this land, the tower of Babel had been built years before (Genesis 11). The people of this land invented mathematics, and in temple rooms, scribes taught writing. Artisans shaped their wares with skill, and from their hands gold and jewels were fashioned into beautiful objects of art. Here the art of brickmaking was perfected and used to build hundreds of ziggurats.

It was in this setting that God called Abram to leave his home and move to the land of Canaan. Abram was God's chosen man to carry on the seed-line. Abram is honored by God as "a friend of God" and the "father of the faithful."



Laying the Foundation



I. God Chooses Abram (Genesis 12:1–3)

A. God calls Abram out of his homeland.

One day, out of the blue, God told Abram to get up and leave his home in Ur and move to the land of Canaan, a distant land inhabited by wild and warring tribes. There is no revealed explanation, just a command to go to some land that God would show him.

Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

B. Abram obeys God and leaves his home.

Believing God and answering his call, Abram packed his belongings. He gathered his family—which consisted of himself, his wife Sarai, his father Terah, and his nephew Lot—and all his servants and began the move to a strange, new land. Along the way he stopped in Haran (in Turkey near the Syrian border) for a period of time. While in Haran, his father Terah died at the age of 205. At age seventy-five Abram resumed his journey to Canaan, finally arriving at Shechem. “And into the land of Canaan they came” (Genesis 12:5b).

This long journey, based on faith, planted the foundational concept that man’s relationship with God is based on faith. For “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). The faith principle is imbedded in man’s walk with God—from beginning to end. God spoke of it through a prophet: “The righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

II. God’s Twofold Promise to Abram (Genesis 12:7; 15:1–21; 17:1–8)

A. The land promise

At Shechem, God appeared to Abram and promised that his descendants would someday possess the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7; 15:18–21; 17:8).

Date Line

2296 B.C.
Birth of
Terah, father
of Abram

2166 B.C.
Birth of
Abram in Ur

2100 B.C.
God calls
Abram:
“Leave your
country, your
people, and
your father's
household.”

2099 B.C.
Abram, Sarai,
Terah, and
Lot journey
600 miles to
Haran and
settle for
a while
(Gen. 11:31).

2091 B.C.
Terah dies;
Abraham
leaves for
Canaan
(Gen. 12:5).

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.” (Genesis 15:18)

This was a staggering promise indeed since Abram and Sarai had no children and Sarai was well past the years of childbearing. When this nation finally came to be, we see that this promise was conditional. Their continued existence in the land was based on the continued obedience of the Israelites. Joshua 23:6–13 is one of the many passages that admonished the Israelites to be faithful.

B. The Messianic promise (the Seed promise)

This promise was definitely the greater of the two (Genesis 3:15; 12:3). The land promise was for Israel only, but the Messianic promise was for *all mankind*.

And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:3b)

The Messianic promise is prominent in the message of the prophets throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers also speak of this promise thousands of years later.

Peter speaks of this promise in Acts 3:25–26:

And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

Paul speaks to us in Galatians 3:26–29:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.

Remember this rule of interpretation: When a New Testament writer makes application of an Old Testament prophecy or scripture, you can rely on their interpretation as being correct.

III. Abram—The Man of Faith (Genesis 15:6)

A. Abram trusts God, leaves his home, and travels to an unknown land.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)

B. Abram believes that God will bless him with many descendants.

Even though Abraham did not have even one son, Abraham trusted God to keep his promises—and God counted his faith as righteousness:

Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Date Line
2067 B.C.
Sodom
and
Gomorrah
destroyed.

IV. The Promise of a Son (Genesis 15–21)

A. God promises Abram a son.

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (Genesis 15:5)

One day some heavenly visitors called on Abram and Sarai with some unbelievably good news. They were to become the parents of a son who would be named Isaac (Genesis 18:1–15). Their descendants would one day become as numerous as the sands of the seashore.

B. Name changes seal the promise.

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham.
(Genesis 17:5a)

As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. (Genesis 17:15b)

Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, “father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5) and Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah, “mother of nations” (Genesis 17:15–16). These names were indications that God intended to keep his promise.

C. God keeps his promise—a son is born.

Date Line

2066 B.C.

Birth of Isaac

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. (Genesis 21:1-2)

D. They name him Isaac (laughter).

God chose a suitable name for their new son: Isaac (Genesis 17:19). Both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God told them they would have a son. First, Abraham laughed in Genesis 17:17, then Sarah in Genesis 18:12. So the name “Laughter” was more than appropriate. Sarah was ninety and Abram was one hundred years old. What an age to begin a family!

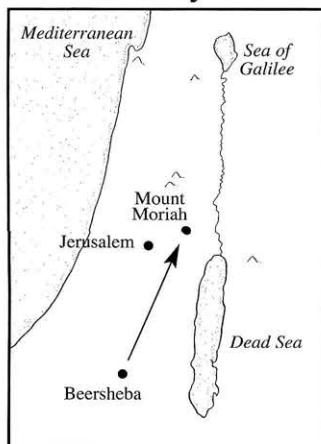
V. The Supreme Test of Faith (Genesis 22:2-14)

A. God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son.

After all the promises and all the waiting, now God asked Abraham to kill his own son as a sacrifice to God.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” (Genesis 22:2)

B. Abraham obeys God.



Abraham's trip
to Mount Moriah

On a clay tablet in ancient Shinar four thousand years ago some poor suffering and despairing soul wrote the following words. Abraham? Job? Such must have been the feelings of these two patriarchs.

My God, for me the day is black . . . tears, lament, and depression are lodged within me . . . suffering overwhelms me.

This old man, whose life was wrapped up in the young son God had given him, must have been brokenhearted. But he obeyed God, apparently without any argument, and began his long journey up to Mount Moriah to offer his only son

by his wife Sarah. On the morning of the third day, they reached the place where God told him to go.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. (Genesis 22:9a)

Abraham grabbed his son, who was unaware of the mission, bound him, and lay him on the altar. With knife in hand, no doubt eyes filled with tears, he stood ready to plunge the knife into Isaac's heart. But just at that moment, God stayed his hand and said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy" (Genesis 22:12). Then Abraham noticed a ram caught in the thicket nearby. He seized it and offered the ram instead of his own son. What drama! What a story! Abraham must have felt a million tons lifted from his soul as he untied his beloved son and headed back down the mountain toward home. What a homecoming that must have been when Sarah saw Abraham and her son at the tent door.

C. Abraham passes the test.

The test of his faith had passed, and Abraham had passed the test. God said, "Now I know you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12b).

D. We are like Isaac.

Do you see yourself on that altar? Sin has brought us the death sentence. We, by all rights of justice, should pay the penalty. But just when all seems hopeless, we look in the "thicket," and there on a cross hangs our substitute sacrifice—with one major difference: Jesus died willingly and out of a heart of compassion and love. We are "untied" and set free. One million tons are lifted from our souls as well!

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh [the Lord will provide]: As it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. (Genesis 22:14 KJV)

E. Abraham is our example.

Abraham, a nobody, became a somebody. No wonder Abraham is called the "father of the faithful." His faith still shines like a beacon for all us weary sojourners as we climb up our own mountains.

VI. Death of Sarah (Genesis 23:1–20)

A. Sarah dies at the age of 127—a devoted wife and mother.

Date Line

2029 B.C.

Sarah dies.

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn Sarah and to weep over her.
(Genesis 23:1–2)

B. Abraham buys a field.

Abraham bought a small field with a cave, called the “cave of Machpelah,” in which to bury Sarah. This became the family graveyard, and it was the only land Abraham ever owned in the land of Canaan. Strange indeed, since God promised to give his descendants the whole land of Canaan. God works on a different time table than we do.

VII. A Wife for Isaac (Genesis 24)

Date Line

2026 B.C.

Isaac marries Rebekah.

2000 B.C.
Sumerians practice medicine:
“Pulverize . . . the dried vine. Pine tree. Pour beer over it. Rub it with oil. Fasten as a poultice.”

A. Abraham wants Isaac to have a wife from his own family.

Isaac was now forty years old and ready for a wife. But Abraham did not want Isaac to marry one of the “heathens” in Canaan; he wanted him to marry one of his own relatives back in Paddan Aram (Northwest Mesopotamia–Haran).

B. Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac.

Abraham’s servant swore to go to Abraham’s homeland, Aram, and try to find a wife for Isaac. The servant was led to the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham’s brother.

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. (Genesis 24:15a)

The servant explained his mission and how God had directed him to Rebekah, Bethuel’s beautiful daughter. The family agreed to allow Rebekah to go with the servant back to Canaan to marry Isaac. This meant moving to a far away land where Rebekah would never again see her parents, as far as we know.

VIII. Death of Abraham (Genesis 25:1–11)**A. Abraham dies at the age of 175.**

Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age.
(Genesis 25:7–8a)

Date Line

1991 B.C.
Abraham
dies.

B. Abraham is buried beside Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah.

His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre. (Genesis 25:9a)

There Abraham and Sarah lie in wait for the time when their descendants would march into Canaan to possess the land.

IX. Abram—The Sojourner (Genesis 12–24)**A. Abraham spends more than one hundred years as a sojourner.**

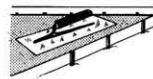
By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob. (Hebrews 11:9a)

From the time God called him in Ur, over one hundred years was lived following the call of God.

B. The land promise is not fulfilled in Abram's lifetime.**C. He never owns any property in Canaan, except a small plot of burial land.**

In Canaan, he moved around with his flocks and servants, living in tents. We would call him a nomad, living like the present-day Bedouins of Arabia. We find him pulling off a few deals and getting himself into some “tight” places. During this period, Sodom—the town where his nephew Lot lived—was destroyed. Lot barely escaped with his life, and Lot’s wife, because of her disobedience, was entombed in salt (Genesis 18–19).

Finishing the Foundation

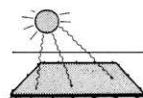


Abraham's long journey began in Ur of the Chaldeans. From Ur, Abram's father, Terah—the head of the clan—took Abram, Abram's wife (Sarah), and Abram's nephew (Lot) and traveled up the Euphrates Valley to Haran. "And they came to Haran and dwelt there" (Genesis 11:31). While in Haran, Terah died and was buried. Then, remembering the call of God, Abram folded his tents and moved to Canaan.

It was a long, eventful, exciting, and frightful journey with many detours, but it was all under the guiding hand of the Almighty. Abraham traversed the Arabian deserts and camped in sight of the capitals and wonders of the ancient world. He was respected and feared by kings, who sensed in him superior qualities and sought his council. He was honored by the rich and the poor, yet he was always an outsider—just a sojourner, a stranger in the land looking for a city whose builder and maker was God (Hebrews 11:9–10). He was rich, indeed, but never owned a homesite, not even one inch of land except a graveyard for burial. He lived amidst pagan idolaters and moral degenerates, yet he clung to his faith in an unseen God who directed him through strange and trying ordeals.

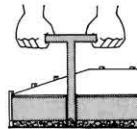
Even after Abraham's death, his faith lived on. Though long dead, this man of faith speaks to us even to this day (Hebrews 12:1).

Firming the Foundation



As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. (Genesis 17:4–5)

Testing the Foundation



1. Who did God select to carry on the seed promise made in Genesis 3:15?

2. Who was Abram's father?

3. Name the two blessings that God promised to Abraham.

4. How old were Sarah and Abraham when Isaac was born?

5. What was Abram's name changed to and why?

6. What does the name Isaac mean?

7. Could you have responded as Abraham did when God told him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice?

8. Where did Isaac find a wife?

9. Where were Abraham and Sarah buried?

10. Why is Abraham called the *Father of the Faithful* and *Friend of God*?

Lesson 3

The Promise Passed On

Genesis 25–35

Surveying the Site



After Abraham's death, Isaac became the rightful heir to all that Abraham owned and to the seed-line promise from God. Isaac would pick up the torch as the son of promise and carry it into the next generation. As the son of promise, God blessed Isaac and developed a personal relationship with him like He had with his father, Abraham. Isaac settled in the land near Beer Lahai Roi, where his twin sons were born, but he soon moved to the town of Gerar to escape a famine. Here, God blessed Isaac greatly:

Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. (Genesis 26:12–13)

But the Philistines became jealous of his great wealth and asked him to move.

Then Abimelech said to Isaac, “Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.” (Genesis 26:16)

So Isaac moved from the town of Gerar to the Valley of Gerar, where he demonstrated himself to be a peaceful man as he dealt with quarrelsome shepherds. The dispute concerned the use of wells originally dug by Abraham. The problems with the shepherds soon escalated to the point that he had to move again—this time to Beersheba.

We learn in this lesson that God is not bound by tradition. When Isaac's two sons were born, God's choice of heir was not the customary one. God had plans of his own that superseded tradition. As we observe Isaac's son, Jacob, we see how God deals with us in areas where we need growth and how his everlasting love works in our lives to bring about his will—even if the path is long.

Canaan—In the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

The Great Sea
(Mediterranean Sea)

Gerar
Rehoboth •

Hebron
(Field of Machpelah)

Beersheba
•

• Beer Lahai Roi

34

• Dothan

Shechem
•

Bethel •

Ai

Mount
Moriah

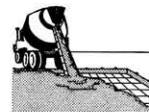
Salt (Dead) Sea

Sodom and Gomorrah
believed to be buried here

Sea of
Chinnereth
(Galilee)

Jordan River

Laying the Foundation



I. The Seed Promise Passes to the Next Generation (Genesis 25:19–28).

A. Rebekah is barren.

After twenty years of marriage, Rebekah was still barren, so Isaac prayed for a child. God granted his request, and Rebekah conceived.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb.
(Genesis 25:24)

B. Twins are born.

While living in Beer Lahai Roi, God blessed Isaac and Rebekah with not one son, but two—twin boys, Jacob and Esau. The boys grew up to be very different individuals. Esau became a skilled hunter, while Jacob stayed close to home. As the story unfolds, Esau became “Papa’s favorite” because he always “brought home the bacon” (venison and game), while Jacob became Mama’s special boy. These developing family relationships set the stage that led to serious family problems later.

Date Line
2006 B.C.
Birth of Jacob
& Esau

C. God chooses Jacob as heir.

Esau, being the first-born, was entitled to the traditional and customary right of heirship and preeminence. However, God is not bound by tradition and selected Jacob instead. God chose Jacob even before he was born, saying, “the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23d). Jacob was selected, not because of his goodness, but because God had his own purposes.

II. Jacob Tries to Supersede His Brother (Genesis 25:29–28:5).

Even though God had already made his choice, Jacob tried to take things into his own hands.

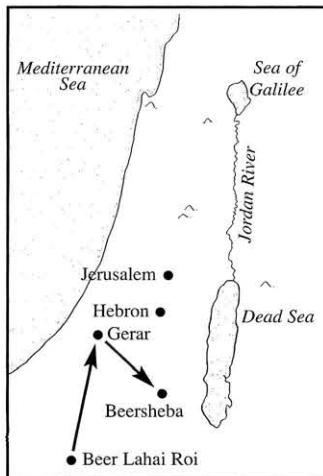
A. Jacob tricks his brother.

We first meet Jacob as a conniving, deceitful son who tricked his brother Esau out of his birthright (Genesis 25:29–34). One day in a moment of weakness after a big hunt, Esau came in famished with hunger. Jacob seized upon the occasion to buy (steal is a better word) his birthright with a meager bowl of stew.

[Esau] said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.” “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. (Genesis 25:30–33)

In selling his birthright, Esau gave up his position as head of the family. In the New Testament, Esau is condemned for this hasty and thoughtless action.

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. (Hebrews 12:16)



Isaac moves to Gerar, then Beersheba

It was after this event that the family moved to the region of Gerar. Their first settling was in the city of Gerar, where Abraham met King Abimilech, then they moved to the valley of Gerar where he struggled with greedy shepherds over well water.

Isaac finally left Gerar in order to keep peace with the shepherds and moved to Beersheba where the Lord appeared to him and reaffirmed his promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12.

From there he went up to Beersheba. That night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.” (Genesis 26:23–24)

B. Jacob deceives his father.

It was in Beersheba that Jacob, with the help of Mama, pulled off another deceitful trick. This time he dared to deceive his father. Isaac was old and nearly blind and thought that his death was imminent. He asked Esau to bring him some fresh venison and planned to use this time to pass the blessing on to Esau. While Esau was out hunting for the deer, Jacob and Rebekah contrived a scheme to trick Papa into giving Jacob the treasured first-born son’s inheritance. (Though twins, Esau was born first.) Jacob dressed up in Esau’s clothes so he would feel and smell like Esau. He lied to his father and convinced him that he was Esau. When Esau returned with the venison and found that his brother had out-

smarted him again, he was furious. He would have killed Jacob had not Rebekah and Isaac sent Jacob away to escape Esau's wrath.

C. Jacob flees to Paddan Aram.

Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob back to the far away land in Paddan Aram, where their relatives still lived (Genesis 27:42–45). Isaac instructed Jacob to choose a wife from among his relatives, as he did not want him to marry a heathen of Canaan. Esau had already married a Hittite woman, and she was driving Rebekah crazy (Genesis 27:46–28:1).

Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.” (Genesis 27:46)

Date Line

1929 B.C.
Jacob flees
from Esau
and goes to
Haran and
meets and
marries
Rachel.

III. God Confirms the Promise (Genesis 28:10–22).

On the trip to Paddan Aram, God visited Jacob in a dream one night.

There above [on a stairway] stood the Lord, and he said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.” (Genesis 28:13–14)

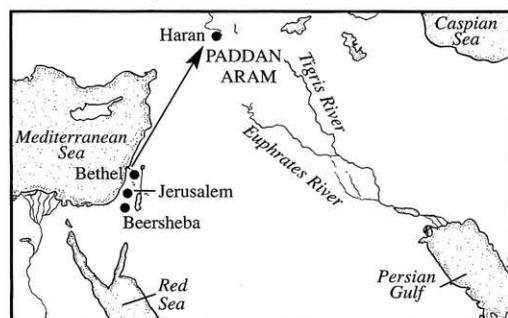
Jacob awoke from the dream terrified and said, “How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17b). He named the place Bethel, which means the house of God (Genesis 28:10–19).

IV. Jacob Meets His Match—Uncle Laban (Genesis 29–30).

A. Jacob works for love.

Upon his arrival in Paddan Aram, Jacob met the beautiful Rachel, his first cousin, and fell madly in love at first sight.

Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. (Genesis 29:17b)



Jacob's trip to Haran

Jacob negotiated a deal with his Uncle Laban (Rebekah's brother) whereby Jacob would work for seven years and get Rachel for his wife. Laban's logic was this: "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me" (Genesis 29:19). Uncle Laban needed a good hand anyway, so they made a deal.

B. Jacob gets a taste of trickery.

Uncle Laban proved to be a worthy match for Jacob, and a little more! After the wedding party was over Jacob found that instead of getting beautiful Rachel for his wife, he was married to the ugly and older daughter, Leah.

When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" (Genesis 29:25)

Uncle Laban had conveniently forgotten to tell Jacob that their custom required that the older daughter marry first. So what do you do when you are outsmarted? Well, you try again!

C. Jacob works another seven years.

Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." (Genesis 29:27)

Uncle Laban extracted another seven years of work out of Jacob—a total of fourteen years—for the beauty queen, Rachel.

Date Line

1915 B.C.
Birth of Joseph

1909 B.C.
Jacob and family return to Canaan (Gen. 31:21).

D. Laban continues to cheat Jacob.

Laban continued to deceive Jacob, just as Jacob had deceived his father and brother. Laban tried to cheat Jacob out of his hard-earned flocks, but God blessed Jacob and he grew prosperous (Genesis 31:6–7).

V. Jacob Goes Home—Enough is Enough (Genesis 31–33:17).

A. Jacob decides to leave.

And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. (Genesis 31:2)

Finally after twenty years of living in the shadow of Uncle Laban, Jacob had his fill and snuck off with his two wives, his children, and his cattle. Indeed God had blessed Jacob greatly, and he left Paddan Aram a rich man.

B. Uncle Laban follows, in hot pursuit.

After Uncle Laban realized that his son-in-law had left him high and dry and had taken his daughters and grandchildren with him, Laban took off after him in hot pursuit. However, God spoke to Laban and warned him not to harm Jacob. So when he caught up with Jacob at Gilead and after the exchange of a few hot words, Jacob and Laban made peace. Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren good-bye for the last time.

Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” That is why it was called Galeed. It was also called Mizpah, because he said, “May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other.” (Genesis 31:48–49)

C. A cheated brother may want revenge.

We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him. (Genesis 32:6b)

Jacob knew he must now deal with Esau. He remembered how angry Esau had been when he left—so angry that Esau wanted to kill Jacob. Now he must pass by his brother’s hometown. Sure enough, when he got near Esau’s home territory, Jacob learned that Esau was on his way to meet him with four hundred men.

Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac. . . . Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.” (Genesis 32:9a, 11)

D. Jacob wrestles with God.

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. (Genesis 32:24)

During the night Jacob took his two wives and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. Then Jacob went away to a solitary place. But before Jacob dealt with Esau,

God had another confrontation for him to cope with. Jacob spent that night turning, twisting, and wrestling with a visitor. In the midst of the struggle, the stranger touched Jacob's hip so that it was wrenched out of its socket. He wrestled all night, and about daybreak he finally recognized that the visitor was God. Jacob asked for a blessing, and God gave him a new start and a new name. His new name was Israel, meaning "He struggled with God."

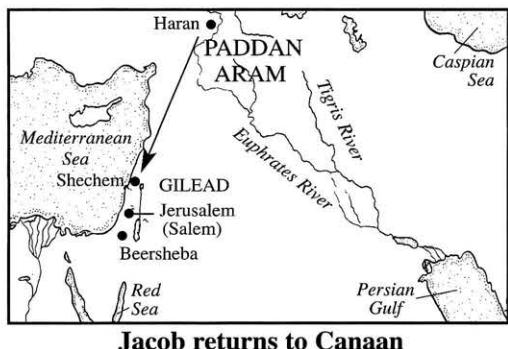
Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome. (Genesis 32:27–28)

E. The surprising reunion.

"Jacob looked up and there was Esau" (Genesis 33:1). The sun rose, and Jacob broke camp. The day before, Jacob had sent emissaries and huge gifts of his flocks in an effort to appease his brother Esau. To his surprise he found a very forgiving brother. When Esau saw Jacob, he ran to meet him and "threw his arms around his neck and kissed him" (Genesis 33:4).

VI. Jacob Settles in Canaan (Genesis 33:18–35:21).

A. Jacob first thanks God.



"He arrived safely at the city of Shechem, in Canaan, and camped within sight of the city" (Genesis 33:18). His first stop was Shechem, where he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel (mighty is the God of Israel). Jacob then settled down in Canaan, moving from place to place looking for adequate pasture and water for his large herds.

B. Jacob settles in Bethel.

God told Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there" (Genesis 35:1). Bethel was the place where Jacob had spent the night wrestling with God and where he had the stair-step vision; now this would be his home.

C. Isaac and Rachel die.

And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t be afraid, for you have another son.” As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. (Genesis 35:17–18)

Rachel died giving birth to a son—Benjamin (Genesis 35:16–19), and Isaac died at the old age of 180 (Genesis 35:28).

Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. (Genesis 35:28–29)

Jacob would now carry the torch into the next generation.

Date Line
1886 B.C.
Isaac dies
(Gen. 35:29).

Finishing the Foundation



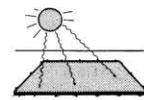
Isaac, the peaceful patriarch, had two sons, Jacob and Esau, who were not so peaceful. In the earlier years of Jacob's life we see him as a conniver and as putty in his mother's hand. God had a few lessons he wanted Jacob to learn, so he sent him off to Paddan Aram to find a wife among his kinsmen. While there, he met his life's love and married beautiful Rachel—love at first sight. In the deal, he got a wife he didn't ask for and a shrewd Papa-in-law (his Uncle Laban), whose conniving ways exceeded Jacob's.

After twenty years in God's school of hard knocks, Jacob grew up and returned to Canaan, his old home. A unique encounter with God changed his life.

Jacob found many occasions to be disappointed with his children. The first was at Shechem, where he saw the dark side of his sons in their deeds of murder and plunder in that city. Soon another sadness gripped his heart: his beloved Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried near Bethlehem.

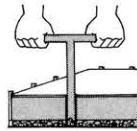
God still had much work for Jacob to do, and Jacob continued to be on center stage for many more years to come. Bigger trouble yet lies ahead, but that is another story.

Firming the Foundation



Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." (Genesis 28:10–14)

Testing the Foundation



1. Name the three patriarchs that now are in the seed-promise line.

2. Why was a birthright so important to a son?

3. Why did Jacob flee from his home and family?

4. What does “Bethel” mean?

5. How much did Jacob have to pay for his wife Rachel?

6. Why did Jacob walk with a limp?

7. What was Jacob’s name changed to and on what occasion?

8. How do you see the providence of God working in Jacob’s life?

9. Do you see the law of reaping and sowing in the life of Jacob?

Lesson 4

Twelve Sons and a Father

Genesis 37–50

Surveying the Site



On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.” (Genesis 15:18)

It had now been over 200 years since Abraham received his call to leave the land of his birth, Ur of the Chaldeans, and migrate to the distant land of Canaan (Genesis 12).

Isaac, the son of promise, lived 180 years waiting for the promise, yet he died without seeing the promise fulfilled. Now Jacob, Abraham's grandson, the son of Isaac, was nearly 108 years old, and he continued the wait.

Let's take a few moments to consider why God took so long to give them this land of promise. There must have been some compelling reasons. While we can't presume to know all the reasons, some seem apparent.

1. *The land was large and was the home of many fierce and warring tribes and kings.* Certainly, the small families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could not, in their wildest imagination, occupy, control, and develop such a vast, wild land. This special family simply was not yet large enough or powerful enough to conquer and maintain the vicious land of Canaan.

2. *Time was needed for the seed-line to develop a strong sense of ethnic loyalty.* This could not take place in the environment of the hostile land of Canaan. (Even when the descendants of Abraham finally did take the land years later, they had a tremendous problem in their tendency to adopt the idol gods of the Canaanites and the culture of the nations

around them. Such threatened God's purpose for which the land and seed promise was made.)

3. *There was need for a multiplicity of miracles and momentous events.* Through these future miracles God would demonstrate his supernatural power in the framework of history. This kind of demonstration would forever prove his power and authority over the nations and affairs of men. At the same time, it would make a lasting impression on the minds of the children of Israel.

The following passages show God's purpose in his miraculous dealings with Egypt and Jericho: Exodus 14:16–18 and Joshua 2:8–11.

4. *God himself clearly states that the time was not right.*

For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

(Genesis 15:16)

Since the time was not yet right to give Canaan to Abraham's descendants, some peaceful place had to be found where Jacob and his descendants could multiply, prosper, and settle down. God needed time to mold them into their own identity. These few people would develop into a nation, with an identity and purpose that would last almost two thousand years. God was preparing his chosen people to inherit the land of Canaan and for the ultimate advent of the Messiah—the seed promise made in Genesis 3:15 and restated in Genesis 12:1–3.

Abraham had been told by God that his descendants would sojourn in a strange land for four hundred years before the land promise would be fulfilled. Surely, Jacob had heard about this prophecy, even though he may not have understood its significance.

Was there such a place for the descendants of Abraham to live? Yes. And you are about to see how God fulfilled his promise. Jacob, Joseph, his brothers, the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt, and others yet unborn are all in the cast of the drama. The story is about to unfold. The curtain rises, and you are there.

Laying the Foundation



I. Jealousy and Favoritism Breed Trouble (Genesis 37:1–11).

As you recall, Jacob had twelve sons. Two of these sons—Joseph and Benjamin—were by his first love, Rachel. At the time of this story, Rachel is dead, having died while giving birth to Benjamin.

A. *Jacob favors Joseph.*

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons . . . and he made a rich ornamented robe for him. (Genesis 37:3)

Jacob was very close to Joseph and loved him dearly. He gave Joseph a special coat of many colors, which was no doubt very expensive in that day. This special treatment of Joseph caused his ten half-brothers to be very jealous.

B. *Joseph's dreams increase the jealousy.*

To make things worse, Joseph had dreams that portrayed him as superior to his brothers, as well as his father. In his dreams, they all bowed down to him! Joseph was only a lad and was only repeating what he had dreamed, but he may have told his dreams a bit too often to set well with his brothers.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. (Genesis 37:5–8)

Joseph continued to dream, which ultimately even got his father, Jacob, upset (Genesis 37:9–11). The meaning of these dreams will play a major part in the story, some twenty years down the road.

II. The Brothers Take Revenge (Genesis 37:12–35).

A. Joseph is sent to check up on his brothers.

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. (Genesis 37:12–14)

Being checked up on by their younger, dreaming, favored brother just inflamed the older brother's hatred.

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. (Genesis 37:17b–19)

B. The brothers sell Joseph.

Joseph found his brothers on the third day. His brothers saw him coming, wearing the special coat of many colors. (This was like a red flag in a bull's face.) They recalled his dream stories and decided once and for all to silence this “dreamer” by killing him. Reuben, because he had a bit of pity on his younger brother and because he considered his father’s feelings, suggested that they cast him into a dry well, which they did. Reuben’s intent was to come back later, pull him out, and send him back home. However, while

Reuben was off tending the flocks, the brothers sold Joseph for a few shekels to a caravan of merchants on their way to Egypt. When Reuben discovered what they had done, he was very angry, but it was too late.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. (Genesis 37:28)

C. The brothers cover up the truth.

One evil usually leads to another. Now they had to deceive their aged father by telling a big lie. The cover up, as usual, was worse than the original wrong. Truth is easier to accept in the long run than deceit—at least you know the facts.

Date Line

1898 B.C.
Joseph sold
by brothers
and taken
to Egypt
(Gen 37:28).

Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. (Genesis 37:31)

Then they contrived a story about finding the bloody coat in the field. Jacob believed their story and concluded that a wild beast had devoured his beloved son. What a cruel hoax to pull on one's own father. The brothers had to live with this lie for the next twenty-two years while they watched their grieving father, who would not be comforted. What a price to pay for one lie!

All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him. (Genesis 37:35)

III. Joseph Begins a New Life in Egypt (Genesis 37:36–39:1–18).

A. Joseph goes from favorite son to slave.

Joseph was sold by the merchant traders to Potiphar, a high-ranking Egyptian official, and became his slave servant. Potiphar soon recognized Joseph's extraordinary abilities and put him in charge of his affairs.

B. The devil moves in—in the person of Mrs. Potiphar.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" (Genesis 39:6b–7)

Joseph refused her advances and ran. However, Mrs. Potiphar grabbed his coat from him as he ran. Furious because she had been rejected by this handsome servant, she used the coat as evidence for her false charges that Joseph had attacked her.

IV. God Is in Charge—Even in Prison (Genesis 39:19–41:57).

A. The cost of doing right.

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. (Genesis 39:20a)

Joseph suffered dearly for doing right. Because of Mrs. Potiphar's false accusations, Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison. It seems doubtful that Potiphar really believed his

wife's story. The usual penalty for a slave who sexually attacked a master's wife was death. This may not have been the first time Mr. Potiphar had such a problem with Mrs. Potiphar. He may have even been a bit disgusted to lose such a talented servant, but it was Joseph or his wife, so he had to take his wife's side in order to save face. Later he promoted Joseph to the top position of authority over his fellow prisoners, which is a further indication that he never really believed his wife's tale.

The Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. (Genesis 39:21)

B. The blessings of doing right.

While in prison, Joseph demonstrated his God-given gift to interpret dreams. When Pharaoh experienced two puzzling dreams and his own astrologers and wise men could not interpret them, Joseph was called from the depths of prison to help. Pharaoh, the dreamer, met Joseph the dreamer.

Pharaoh listened intently as Joseph interpreted his dreams. The dreams meant that there would be seven years of plentiful harvest followed by seven years of disastrous famine. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's wisdom and demeanor that he appointed him to be in charge of the palace and to administrate his affairs. Joseph soon became the prime minister (governor) of Egypt.

Date Line

1885 B.C.

Joseph appointed governor of Egypt.

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:41)

As always, Joseph rose to the challenge and set out to build storehouses in which to store grain during the seven years of plenty.

V. A Trip for Food Brings Surprises (Genesis 42).

A. Joseph receives visitors from home.

Approximately twenty-two long years had passed since a dark secret had been buried in the hearts of ten brothers. Secrets, many times, have strange ways of revealing themselves. Such will be the case with these ten brothers.

Joseph's brothers had hoped that Dad would never learn what happened that day back in the fields near Dothan. But find out he would! The long dark secret was about to come to light as God turned that evil deed into a blessing. And it would be the best news heard in Canaan for over twenty years.

A surprising chain of events weaves a story that has thrilled and touched the hearts of millions. A severe famine caused Jacob to send ten of his sons down to Egypt to buy grain, keeping only Benjamin, the youngest, at home with him.

I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die. (Genesis 42:2)

Of all things, the ten brothers ended up at the home of Joseph, their long lost brother, seeking to buy grain.

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. (Genesis 42:6)

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? The brothers did not recognize Joseph since he was now thirty-nine years old and was only seventeen when they sold him. However, Joseph readily recognized them. Joseph put them through a strangely orchestrated interrogation process and accused them of being spies. They were all put into custody (prison) for three days. After three days, all the brothers except Simeon were allowed to leave. Simeon was kept as a hostage until the other brothers would return with Benjamin to prove their good intentions.

B. The brothers decide they are being punished for their past wrongs to Joseph.

Surely we are being punished because of our brother. (Genesis 42:21a)

As these ten brothers stood before this "foreign" ruler, the long dark secret they had carried for so many years came back to haunt them. As they thought of leaving Simeon in prison and of the awful prospect of having to return with Benjamin, they talked among themselves and decided that all their troubles were God's way of punishing them for their treatment of Joseph. Reuben reminded them that he had told them not to harm the "boy" and that they would not listen. Joseph heard their entire conversation, but since he had been using an interpreter, they were unaware that he understood every word they said.

C. Strange things happen on the trip back home.

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?" (Genesis 42:28b)

After having their sacks packed with another surprise, Joseph dismissed them to return home. They loaded up and began their long journey home. But when they opened their sacks to feed their animals, they found that all their money had been placed back in their sacks. It must have seemed that the dark stranger leapt out of every sack as they opened each one. (It would have been interesting to listen to their conversation on their way back home.)

D. They report to Jacob about the trip.

When they got home, they told Jacob all about their unusual trip—about the stranger who made accusations and how he kept Simeon in prison as a hostage. And then, to cap it off, how they discovered their money returned in their sacks.

The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. (Genesis 42:30)

VI. The Brothers Make a Second Trip for Food (Genesis 43–45:20).

A. Jacob reluctantly allows Benjamin to go.

When his sons returned from Egypt, Jacob was greatly perplexed and saddened by the loss of another son and by the demand that Benjamin go down into Egypt on their next trip. At first he absolutely refused to allow Benjamin to go, but finally the famine became so severe that Jacob had to consent. With a heavy heart, he kissed his beloved Benjamin good-bye, not knowing if he would ever see his face again.

Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved. (Genesis 43:13–14)

B. They are invited to a special dinner.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon.” (Genesis 43:16)

When they got to Egypt, the brothers were taken directly to Joseph's house. They were fearful because their money had been returned to their sacks.

They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.” So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. . . . “We came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in . . . his sack. So we have brought it back. . . . We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.” (Genesis 43:18–22)

When Joseph arrived, they bowed down before him and offered gifts of appeasement. When Joseph saw his only full brother, Benjamin—who had been only six years old when he last saw him—he hurried out into a private room to weep for joy. After he gained control of himself, he washed his face and asked that dinner be served. Each brother was seated according to his age, which magnified their fear. How could he know their ages? And then, another strange thing happened:

When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him. (Genesis 43:34)

C. The brothers are back in hot water again.

Now Joseph gave these instruction to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack.” (Genesis 44:1)

As they prepared to leave, Joseph instructed his steward to put all the money back into their sacks. He also had his own silver cup put into Benjamin’s sack. Shortly after their departure, Joseph sent his steward with instructions to catch up with them and accuse them of stealing his silver cup. Joseph’s cup was found in Benjamin’s sack, and they were quickly returned to Joseph’s house. Here, they threw themselves on the ground and begged for mercy. Judah rehearsed all the events and concluded that God was surely punishing them for their sin against Joseph. (Their big sin had found them out.) Judah, for the sake of his father, could not bear to see Benjamin kept because of the silver cup. He volunteered to take his brother’s place as prisoner.

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? (Genesis 44:33–34a)

D. Twelve brothers have a reunion.

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” (Genesis 45:1a)

The brothers believed God was bringing more punishment upon them and were “terrified.” Joseph urged his brothers to come closer to him and tried to calm their spirits, saying, “Don’t be distressed and don’t blame yourselves about selling me as a slave; it was God’s way of sending me ahead to save your lives.” He fell on their necks and kissed and embraced them all (Genesis 45:14–15).

Joseph simply said,

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.
(Genesis 45:8)

What a brother! Everyone needs a brother like that!

VII. It’s Time to Tell the Truth (Genesis 45:21–28).**A. Joseph sends them back home to get “Papa.”**

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, and bring your father and your families back to me.’” (Genesis 45:17–18a)

Equipped with wagons for all the family members back home and plenty of gifts and supplies, the amazed brothers returned home to bring “Papa” and all the kinfolk back to Egypt.

B. They tell Jacob the good news.

Jacob had been back home waiting and wondering if he would ever see his sons again. Then one evening as he looked down the road, he saw a long caravan heading his way. No doubt, the old man’s heart raced, about to beat out of his chest, as his sons ran toward him. You can almost see Jacob leaning on his staff, expecting the worst. No doubt his first thoughts were of Benjamin. But the news they carried was beyond his wildest dreams!

They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.”
(Genesis 45:26a)

C. Jacob rejoices.

When Jacob heard that Joseph was alive, he was so shocked he could hardly believe it. But when they told him all the news, he was finally convinced.

But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.” (Genesis 45:27–28)

Jacob’s long “dead” son was alive and well. No doubt this was also a time of confession. Ten brothers probably told their father what really happened that day in the field, over twenty long years ago. I doubt if anyone of Jacob’s family slept a wink that night.

VIII. A Third Trip Reunites a Family (Genesis 46:1–30).

A. What is God up to?

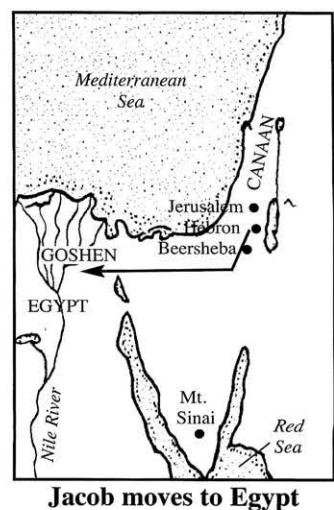
So Israel set out with all that was his. (Genesis 46:1a)

Without delay, Jacob loaded all the families into the wagons and said good-bye to Canaan. We have to wonder what Jacob was thinking about God’s promise concerning the land of Canaan. God had promised this land to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. He himself had spent all but twenty years of his 130 years waiting in Canaan for the fulfillment of God’s promise. Canaan was supposed to be his land of inheritance. Jacob must have wondered—What is God up to?

B. Jacob takes time out to worship God.

And when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. (Genesis 46:1b)

God spoke to Jacob that night, assuring him that he would go with him and make a great nation of his descendants. God promised that he would one day bring his descendants back to Canaan and that Joseph, his lost son, would close Jacob’s eyes at the time of his death. Surely, Jacob could see that this trip to a foreign land was the fulfillment of God’s conversation with his grandfather Abraham concerning a four-hundred-year sojourn in a strange land.



“I am God, the God of your father,” he said, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.” (Genesis 46:3–4)

C. A son and father reunite.

Joseph had his chariot made ready and went down to Goshen to meet his father Israel. (Genesis 46:29a)

Date Line

1876 B.C.

Jacob and family arrive in Egypt
(Gen. 46:3).

As the caravan approached Egypt, Joseph raced off to Goshen to meet his father. When they finally saw each other, Joseph and Jacob embraced and wept for a long time. Jacob, when finally able to speak, said, “Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive” (Genesis 46:30). What a homecoming! No words could ever describe such a meeting.

IX. Egypt Provides a Place and Time to Grow (Genesis 46:31–47:27).

The “clan” of Abraham’s descendants settled in Egypt in the land of Goshen. Upon Jacob’s arrival, Pharaoh rolled out the royal carpet.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you, and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. . . . Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh.” (Genesis 47:5–6a; 7)

Because of Joseph, Jacob was given the best of Egypt—the land of Goshen. While living in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham became exceedingly prosperous and grew mightily.

So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed. . . . They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number. (Genesis 47:11, 27b)

X. Jacob’s Life Comes to an End (Genesis 47:28–50:14).

Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. (Genesis 47:28)

A. Jacob makes a special request.

Jacob made Joseph promise that he would bury him back in Canaan, where his grandfather Abraham had purchased a grave site. When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him,

“If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.” “I will do as you say,” he said.

(Genesis 47:29–30)

B. Jacob reviews the promise of God with Joseph.

Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’” (Genesis 48:3–4)

C. Jacob calls a final meeting with his sons.

In this last meeting, Jacob commented on the lives of his sons and foretold the future of their tribes. Of special interest is the promise to Judah that through his tribe the Messiah would come (Genesis 49:10).

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. (Genesis 49:10)

D. Jacob dies.

When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people. (Genesis 49:33)

Jacob was embalmed and lay in state for seventy days of mourning. His body was carried back to Canaan with great pomp—escorted by Egyptian royalty, chariots, horsemen, and dignitaries of the court, as well as Joseph, his brothers, and their families. He was buried in the cave of Machpelah, a grave site bought by Abraham from a Hittite land owner years before. Here he awaited the fulfillment of God’s promise.

Date Line

1859 B.C.
Jacob dies
(Gen 49:33).

Date Line

1805 B.C.
Joseph dies
(Gen. 50:26).

1700 B.C.
Hammurabi
rules Babylon.

XI. Joseph Also Dies (Genesis 50:22–26).

Joseph was next to die at 110 years of age, and he also requested that his body be taken back to the land of Canaan. Joseph “lay in state” for four hundred years, awaiting the call of the ram’s horn that would pierce the silence of the Egyptian desert.

Finishing the Foundation



Little did Joseph or Jacob realize that Joseph's dreams would eventually send him to Egypt, where he would advance from slave to governor.

The story began innocently enough—just a trip to Dothan to see how the boys were doing. The next thing we know, Joseph was hauled off by merchant traders, who interestingly enough were descendants of Ishmael, his kinfolks. (Remember that Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Sarah's servant girl, Hagar.) But kinfolks or not, Joseph was in trouble. In Egypt, after display on the auction block, he landed a responsible job with Potiphar but soon got in trouble with Mrs. Potiphar and ended up in the dungeon.

Eventually, his gift of interpreting dreams secured him an audition with Pharaoh, who desperately needed a dream interpreted. Joseph so impressed Pharaoh that he was put in charge of all the storehouses in Egypt and held the position of second in command.

The long-kept secret had haunted Joseph's brothers for over twenty years. Every time they saw their old dad, they could still see the pain and sorrow in his face. Memories of that dark day must have plagued them every time they worked in the fields and tended to their herds.

Jacob's only comfort had been his youngest son, Benjamin, the second son of his beloved Rachel, who died while giving him birth. No doubt, every time he watched Benjamin as he slept or sat at the family table, memories flooded back of the happy days when Joseph and Benjamin played together in the fields or tumbled in the tall, green grass around Shechem and Bethel.

But good news would come soon! As God would have it, a severe famine brought the brothers to Egypt to buy food. Unbeknownst to them, they actually bought it from their own brother, Joseph. After observing their behavior and giving them a hard time, Joseph was convinced that they were not the same jealous brothers he had known in his youth. He saw that they dearly loved their father and were sorry for their deeds toward their lost brother. When Joseph could stand it no longer, he tearfully revealed himself, and soon the whole family was united in Egypt.

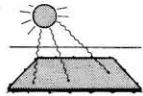
Twenty-two long, painful years had passed, but finally the impossible happened. The empty chair was filled again, and two small chairs were added for Joseph's two sons.

Pharaoh gave them the best of the land, Goshen, and here they were allowed to live in prosperity and to increase in numbers mightily. What Jacob had never dreamed possible must have now seemed like a dream. Joseph stood by his side, and two new grandsons played at his feet; it was his best "dream" ever.

Jacob lived the rest of his life in peace. Upon his death, his body was escorted by royalty back to Canaan and buried with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah. The family was finally back together again after a long journey on God's ladder to heaven.

Jacob was dead; Joseph was dead. A long, hard road now lay ahead for the children of Israel. It will seem God has forgotten his people.

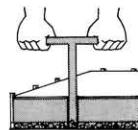
Firming the Foundation



Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” (Genesis 41:15–16)

But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19–21)

Testing the Foundation



1. Why did Joseph's dreams make him unpopular with his brothers?

2. What was Jacob's reaction to the news that Joseph was killed by a wild beast?

3. What charge did Potiphar's wife make against Joseph, and was it true?

4. What was the final outcome of Joseph's imprisonment?

5. What did Pharaoh's dreams mean?

6. How did the brothers react to their treatment by Joseph before they knew who he was?

7. Describe the reunion of Jacob with Joseph in Egypt.

8. What important person would come through Judah's tribe?

9. Why did Jacob and Joseph want to be carried back to Canaan for burial?

10. What was God's purpose for sending Jacob to Egypt where their descendants would become slaves?

Lesson 5

Slavery to Freedom

Exodus 1–6

Surveying the Site



The descendants of Abraham now had a safe and happy home to call their own. They were protected and prosperous, and their families increased in number greatly. But now that everything was beginning to go so well, how would God get them to pull up stakes and return to Canaan when the time came? If this protected nation were to be motivated to leave, the good times would have to end in the land of Goshen.

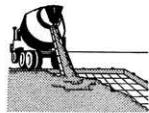
In God's providence, a new Pharaoh came to the throne of Egypt who was not friendly toward the Israelites—"a new king who did not know about Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Joseph, his brothers, and all their generation had died, and their descendants were rapidly multiplying. The prosperity and numerical growth of the children of Israel struck fear in the heart of this Pharaoh. He was afraid that if a war broke out, these foreigners might side with the enemy. The solution to the problem was to confiscate their property and make them slaves.

We will see that one of the reasons God allowed them to be enslaved was so their eventual freedom would be especially precious. None of these occurrences came about accidentally. Remember what he told Abraham many years earlier:

Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13)

God had a plan that would work into his "big plan," the salvation of the human race.

Laying the Foundation



I. Pharaoh Tries to Limit the Growth of the Israelite Nation (Exodus 1).

A. *The Israelites become slaves.*

Date Line

1530 B.C.
Hammurabi's
Old Babylon
destroyed by
Hittites.

"Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. (Exodus 1:9–11)

B. *The Israelites continue to multiply.*

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.
(Exodus 1:12a)

The harder Pharaoh made the Israelites work, the faster their numbers increased. The Egyptians feared the Israelites and made their lives bitter with hard work. But God continued to be with them and multiply their numbers.

C. *Pharaoh orders that all male Hebrew children be killed.*

Finally Pharaoh issued an order to the Egyptian midwives, who delivered the Israelite babies, to kill every male that was born.

When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.
(Exodus 1:16)

But even this did not work, as the midwives feared God and let the babies live. Since the midwives did not kill the babies, Pharaoh extended the order to kill all male babies to all his people.

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." (Exodus 1:22)

II. A Deliverer Is Born (Exodus 2:1–10).

A. It's a boy.

Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. (Exodus 2:1–4)

Date Line

1525 B.C.
Birth of
Moses
(Exod. 2:1)

B. She drew him out of the Nile.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. (Exodus 2:5–6)

The baby's sister, Miriam, was watching nearby and offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby until he was old enough to move into the palace. With permission granted, Miriam ran to find a nurse, and of course, she chose her own mother. On top of this, the baby's mother was paid by Pharaoh's daughter to care for her own son. When the baby grew older, his mother took him to Pharaoh's daughter and she named him Moses, because she "drew him out of the water."

Isn't it amazing how God raises up leaders? A little boy under the death sentence was brought into the executioner's palace, ate at his table, was educated by the best teachers in the land, and became the adopted grandson of Pharaoh himself! Little did Pharaoh know what a tremendous effect this little adopted boy would have on Egypt.

III. Moses Becomes a Fugitive (Exodus 2:11–22).

A. Moses suffers an identity crisis.

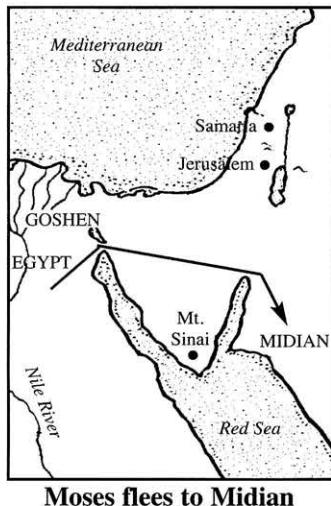
One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. (Exodus 2:11)

Moses was forty years old when he saw this Egyptian beating one of his kinsmen. Moses decided to take matters into his own hands. He killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand, thinking that his deed went unnoticed. However, word of Moses' action got back to the palace, and Pharaoh was furious. Pharaoh saw that "blood is thicker than water" and that he had a rebel living in his own palace. Moses was forced to flee for his life.

Date Line

1485 B.C.
Moses flees from Egypt and lives in Midian
(Exod. 2:15).

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian where he sat down by a well. (Exodus 2:15)



Moses flees to Midian

B. Moses moves from palace to desert.

Moses ended up in the land of Midian where he met a man by the name of Jethro, who soon became his father-in-law. Moses spent the next forty years of his life in the hot desert as a shepherd—a far cry from his soft and luxurious life back in the Egyptian palace with "Grandpa Pharaoh," riding down the streets of Egypt in a golden chariot, drawn by Pharaoh's finest horses.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. (Exodus 3:1a)

IV. God Has a Plan (Exodus 2:23–3:9).

As the years passed, the Pharaoh who sought the life of Moses died, but the Israelites continued to suffer under the bonds of slavery. God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with their fathers.

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant.
(Exodus 2:24a)

A. God speaks from a burning bush.

The clock had been ticking away on God's time table, and he was now ready to make one of the biggest moves of all history. Moses was now eighty years old. He had been trained in the palace for forty years and in the desert as a shepherd for forty years.

One day, while Moses was out in the desert tending his sheep near Mount Horeb, he saw a strange sight. A bush was on fire. A burning bush was not so unusual in the desert, but this one just wouldn't burn up, and that is unusual! So Moses went over to inspect this strange sight.

So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." (Exodus 3:3)

C. Moses hears a mysterious voice.

Just as Moses was about to take a closer look, he was startled by a voice calling his name, and the voice came from the burning bush.

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" (Exodus 3:4)

Well, what would you do if a voice called your name from a burning bush? The voice instructed Moses to take the sandals off his feet because he was standing on holy ground. The voice identified itself as "I AM, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses was terrified and hid his face.

C. History is changed.

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

What a moment in history!

The events that resulted from Moses' experience at the burning bush would change the course of history. There have been only a few moments in history that have affected the whole world, and this is certainly one of them.

V. God Appoints a Deliverer (Exodus 3:10–4:17).

A. God chooses Moses.

God told Moses that he was ready to bring his people out of slavery and into the promised land—the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:3). And Moses was the chosen rescuer. He would go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to set the Israelites free!

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. (Exodus 3:10)

B. Moses makes excuses.

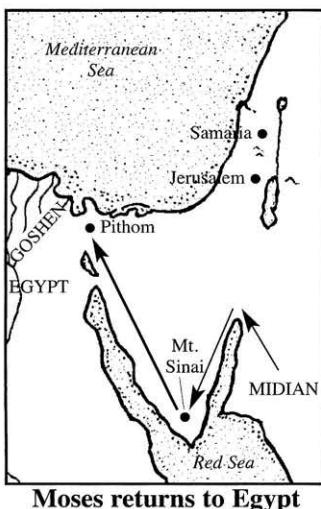
God does not call a person to a task that he or she can't do. God is too wise to choose a failure.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)

"Who me? Tell who?" Moses was full of excuses. He felt inadequate and unqualified for such a big job. He knew he would have a hard time gaining the trust of the Israelites. He doubted himself, and he even doubted God.

God patiently dealt with each of Moses' excuses and doubts. He even equipped him with miracles to prove himself and to prove God had sent him.

When Moses' excuses continued, "the Lord's anger burned against Moses" (Exodus 4:14), and Moses reluctantly agreed to go. Moses' reluctance is somewhat understandable. After all, Moses was a fugitive from Egyptian justice, and he was being asked to go up against the most powerful monarch on earth. He was armed only with a shepherd's staff and dressed only in a shepherd's smelly clothes.



VI. Moses Goes Home (Exodus 4:18–31).

A. God sends Moses back home.

Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead." So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand. (Exodus 4:19–20)

B. Moses and Aaron team up.

Because Moses felt inadequate in his ability to speak, God chose Aaron, his older brother, to be his mouthpiece and helper.

C. Moses meets with the elders.

When they got to Egypt, they called together all the elders of Israel with this report:

And Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped. (Exodus 4:30–31)

How glad they were to hear the good news about their deliverance. But in only a short time, they began to curse Moses.

VII. Moses Meets Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1–22).

A. Moses makes a demand.

Moses had walked up and down these halls forty years ago as the grandson of Pharaoh. Now he and Aaron marched into the throne room with the “brassness of a doorknob” and told Pharaoh to let his people go. You could probably have heard a pin drop as this shepherd demanded that Pharaoh release over one and a half million slaves.

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.’” (Exodus 5:1)

B. Who said what?

Pharaoh was not impressed and was not about to let all this free labor go.

Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:2)

Pharaoh showed his contempt by ordering that the work load of the Israelites slaves be increased and that they be treated even more severely.

VIII. Moses is Discouraged (Exodus 5:23).

A. Moses complains to God.

Moses was greatly discouraged and complained to God bitterly:

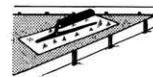
Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all. (Exodus 5:23)

B. God promises deliverance.

Therefore, say to the Israelites: “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” (Exodus 6:6–7a)

Date Line
1445 B.C.
Moses returns
to Egypt
(Exod. 4:18).

Finishing the Foundation



God's calendar on the walls of heaven read, "The time has come to rescue my people. I need a man." God chose Moses, the adopted son of the princess of Egypt, to lead his people out of bondage.

Moses, though tutored in all the Egyptian "wisdom," still needed a bit more education, so God sent him into the desert of Midian to get his degree. There in the blistering, burning heat of the desert, he learned hardship, patience, and the ways of desert life. Moses was forty years old when he came to the desert, and he spent forty years in this desert school as a shepherd—quite different from the luxurious life back in the palace of Egypt. In Midian he married and raised his family while God raised his man.

Then the call came—in a most unusual way, in the back side of the desert. There at a burning bush, the fire of God burned into the soul of Moses. When the time was ripe, God sent Moses back to Egypt to pull off one of the greatest feats of all history.

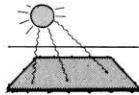
Just who was this God who made such demands of Moses? He identified himself as "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). The God who said in Genesis 1:3, "Let there be light," the God who spoke to Isaac at Beersheba and to Jacob at Bethel. The God who has always been, always will be, and who always is in the ever present. What better name than the one he called himself—I AM.

This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."
(Exodus 3:14b)

Fifteen hundred years will pass before we hear the name I AM again. Then it will be claimed by Immanuel, the I AM incarnate in human flesh.

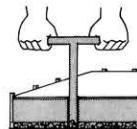
"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I AM!" (John 8:58)

Firming the Foundation



So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. (Exodus 3:20–21)

Testing the Foundation



1. What happened to the Israelites after Joseph died?

2. How did Moses come to live in the palace?

3. Why did Moses have to flee Egypt?

4. Where did he run to, and what was his occupation while living there?

5. Name the excuses Moses offered God to keep from having to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh.

6. Who did God choose to help Moses?

7. Describe Pharaoh's response to Moses and Aaron's first meeting with him.

8. What was Moses and Aaron's response when God did not immediately free the people from bondage after their first visit to Pharaoh?

Lesson 6

The Gods of Egypt

versus

The God of Abraham

Exodus 7–15

Surveying the Site



The stage was set. On one side was Pharaoh—the mighty monarch of Egypt—in all his splendor, with his royal chariots, horsemen, soldiers, and a good supply of Egypt's gods. He stood ready to give the signal to crush any rebellion. On the other side stood Moses and Aaron, with only a shepherd's staff. They had no army or weapons. They had only a word from the God of Abraham, "Let my people go." They represented a God no one could see.

Would Moses and Aaron back down and call it quits before they were defeated in this uneven match? Would Pharaoh consent to Moses' demands and look like a weakling in the eyes of the palace? What would happen? Moses and Aaron chose to stand with God, and Pharaoh was not about to let two shepherds tell him how to run Egypt. The battle was on. Moses and Aaron faced Pharaoh for the showdown.

Pharaoh would need to get all his gods out of his closet and get ready for the battle of his life. The stakes were high: Winner takes all.

Let's see how the God of Abraham will pull this one off.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Ten Plagues (Exodus 7–11)

A. The plague of water to blood (Exodus 7:14–25)

He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood.
(Exodus 7:20b)

The first plague struck the Nile River—“the life of Egypt.” The Nile was worshiped as a god, thus God’s first blow fell upon one of Egypt’s chief gods.

It is interesting that Pharaoh’s magicians had the ability to duplicate some of the miracles of Moses and Aaron. Whether the miracles by Pharaoh’s magicians were by satanic power, or God intentionally allowed them, or they were simply trickery, we do not know. But one thing is certain, these magicians did Pharaoh no favor; they simply piled more destruction upon Egypt. It seems that God may have used these magicians to give Pharaoh a double dose and to allow them, in their stupidity, to destroy themselves.

B. The plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1–15)

So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. (Exodus 8:6)

Frogs were also sacred to the Egyptians. But who wanted a god jumping into their beds and in their bread ovens and kneading troughs? And if God didn’t make enough, the magicians produced more!

C. The plague of gnats (Exodus 8:16–19)

When Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. (Exodus 8:17)

Out of the dust came swarming insects upon man and beast, and they had no insect spray to keep them away.

D. The plague of flies (beetles) (Exodus 8:20–32)

Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.
(Exodus 8:24b)

Some scholars tell us that the word translated “swarms of flies” most probably refers to the scarab beetle, which was sacred to the Egyptians. They were scourged by one of their own gods once again.

E. The plague of murrain (KJV) (Exodus 9:1–7)

The hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats. (Exodus 9:3)

A terrible disease destroyed the Egyptians cattle, among them the Apis bull, which was also sacred to the Egyptians.

F. The plague of boils (blains) (Exodus 9:8–12)

So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. (Exodus 9:10)

This particular plague brought not only discomfort, but severe pain.

G. The plague of hail (Exodus 9:13–35)

Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields—both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. (Exodus 9:25)

The plague of hail destroyed their very subsistence. Note that the intensity of the plagues increases as each one comes to bear.

H. The plague of locusts (Exodus 10:1–20)

So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. (Exodus 10:13–14)

What the hail had missed, the hungry locusts ravaged and destroyed. Historians tell us that such swarms of invading locusts sometimes blocked the sun and left the earth as black as if burned by fire. The devastation of the locusts was so severe that in biblical times a destroying conqueror was sometimes compared to an invading army of locusts.

I. The plague of darkness (*Exodus 10:21–29*)

So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. (*Exodus 10:22*)

This plague was another attack on their gods. Their sun god, Re, was a masculine deity—a creation god. For three days it was so dark that they could “feel it.” Such intense darkness must have struck tremendous fear in the hearts of the Egyptians, especially since theirs was a sunny, hot land. Their “creation god” had lost his light. He had gone blind.

It is interesting to note that God placed a protective line between the Israelites in Goshen and the destruction in Egypt. Most of the plagues did not affect the Israelites at all. Possibly this was the greatest marvel of all.

J. The death of the firstborn (*Exodus 11–12:30*)

God told Moses to prepare for one final plague. Egypt, after all the plagues, was virtually destroyed, and this last plague would bring Pharaoh to his knees in surrender, begging for mercy.

This final plague was the death of the firstborn son in every Egyptian family—including Pharaoh’s own. The firstborn represented the strength of Egypt. God delivered this knockout blow in the tenth round. To the Hebrews, it became known as the night of the Passover.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. (*Exodus 12:29*)

II. Compromises (*Exodus 8–10*)

Throughout the time of the plagues and all the negotiating between God, Pharaoh, and Moses, Pharaoh offered a series of compromises. He hoped to satisfy Moses without really submitting to God’s demands. Compromise is often a strategy of Satan.

A. Go, but stay in the land.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land.” (*Exodus 8:25*)

B. Go, but not far away.

Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.” (Exodus 8:28)

C. Go, but leave your little ones.

Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. “Go, worship the Lord your God,” he said. “But just who will be going?” Moses answered, “We will go with our young and old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord.” Pharaoh said, “The Lord be with you—if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. No! Have only the men go; and worship the Lord, since that’s what you have been asking for.” Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence. (Exodus 10:8–11)

D. Go, but leave your flocks and herds.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the Lord. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.” (Exodus 10:24)

Moses responded with these famous words:

Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind.
(Exodus 10:26a)

Through all these offers for compromise, Moses stood his ground and would settle for nothing less than what God was demanding.

III. The Passover (Exodus 12:1–30)

A. The first passover

Moses instructed each Hebrew family to kill a perfect lamb and mark the door mantel of each home with the lamb’s blood. Seeing the blood, the death angel that was sent to kill all the firstborns would pass over every Hebrew family.

They were further instructed to eat the Passover Lamb that night and to be ready to march out at daybreak, headed toward the Promised Land. What excitement and awe must have filled every Israelite home that evening.

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first-born—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. (Exodus 12:12–14)

B. Jesus, the passover lamb

This Passover feast was to be observed for all generations of the Jews. Some fifteen hundred years later, Jesus sat down at a Passover supper to celebrate with his disciples (Matthew 26:17–30), and he rose up to become the Passover lamb for all.

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
(1 Corinthians 5:7)

IV. The Exodus (Exodus 12:31–14:9)

A. Pharaoh throws in the towel.

Pharaoh's firstborn son was dead. God finally had Pharaoh's attention. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and told them to leave and take everything with them.

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.” (Exodus 12:31–32)

Even the Egyptians urged them to go and gave them gifts of silver, gold, and clothing.

And they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:36b)

The exit was so rapid that the Israelites had no time to prepare their bread and had to take it before the yeast was added. Carried along in the Exodus procession was a coffin.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. (Exodus 13:19)

No other event in all history has ever matched this amazing exodus. Over one and a half million slaves were set free from the dominion of one of the most powerful nations of its time.

B. God chooses an unusual route.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”

(Exodus 13:17)

God directed Moses to lead the people out. But rather than taking them by the shorter route, he sent them a backward way that was almost a dead-end street. God also provided his people with a visual travel guide. He put a pillar of cloud before them in the day and a pillar of fire to guide them at night (Exodus 13:21–22).

C. Pharaoh follows in hot pursuit.

Sure enough, when Pharaoh got word of their situation, he changed his mind about letting them go free. He saw this as his big chance to once and for all get even with Moses for all the destruction he had brought upon Egypt. However, he kept forgetting one small detail.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. (Exodus 14:5–7)

The small detail that Pharaoh kept forgetting was that he was dealing with the Almighty God of the Universe. He seemed blind to the fact that he had already lost ten rounds out of a ten-round match. He wanted a rematch, another round—winner take all. So Pharaoh set out in hot pursuit with all his chariots and troops. If he planned to deliver this eleventh-hour knockout punch, he had better have all of Egypt’s gods in top shape and ready to fight.

Date Line

1445 B.C.

The Exodus
(Exod. 14:13)

V. The Final Battle (Exodus 14:10–15:21)

A. God has a plan.

Pharaoh will think, “The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.” . . . And he will pursue them.
(Exodus 14:3–4a)

Pharaoh found the Israelites just where he wanted them, entangled in the wilderness with their backs to the Red Sea. But God was in control.

B. Terror fills the camp of Israel.

The Israelites heard the thunder of the chariots behind them and saw the Red Sea ahead of them. What a predicament Moses had gotten his people into! The Israelites were terrified! They lambasted Moses for bringing them out into this forsaken place, saying:

Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, “Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians”? (Exodus 14:11–12a)

My, how soon people forget! Well, God works best when there is no chance for success! Their uncertainty about leaving confirms the idea that one reason God allowed them to become slaves was so they would be willing to leave. If they were hesitant to leave such horrible circumstances; how much less would they have been willing to leave a good situation.

C. “Stand still and see.”

Moses stood there like the rock of Gibraltar, calm and resolute, and spoke these immortal words:

Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. (Exodus 14:13–14)

Then, at God’s command, Moses waved his shepherd’s staff, the Red Sea parted, dry land appeared, and the children of Israel marched through to freedom. Free at last!

D. Fools rush in.

Pharaoh, in his madness, rushed in for the kill, unaware that the God of Israel had a big surprise for him. Confusion broke out in Pharaoh's army as God caused the wheels of their chariots to fall off, and his army panicked.

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." (Exodus 14:23–25)

Trying to drive hundreds of chariots while their wheels were falling off was surely a problem. But that was not their major concern. As soon as all the army was in the dry sea bed, the Lord brought the walls of water crashing down upon them. What was dry ground, in the darkness of that night, turned into a “drowning hole!”

That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. (Exodus 14:30)

E. Slaves are free at last!

What a day, what a crossing! Moses and the children of Israel celebrated their victory on the banks of the Red Sea with joy and songs of victory led by Moses and his sister Miriam.

*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:
“I will sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.”
(Exodus 15:1)*

What a night and day. An event that would be forever etched into Israel's history and the history of the world.

Finishing the Foundation



The journey had been long—four hundred years of slavery and hard work—but time did not alter God's purpose for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

From out of the Nile River, which was a god to the Egyptians, God lifted a baby boy named Moses who brought Pharaoh and all of Egypt's gods to their knees. At age eighty, Moses the fugitive returned as Moses the deliverer, and he entered the palace to greet Pharaoh with a list of demands. A shepherd with a staff in his hand confronted the powerful monarch of Egypt—seemingly, an uneven match!

It was a fight to the finish. Pharaoh, dressed in all his royalty and supported by his great army, and Moses, dressed in a shepherd's outfit and accompanied by Aaron his glove bearer, stood ready, waiting for the bell. The contest began and finally came down to the gods of Egypt versus the God of Moses.

The plagues followed a progressive pattern. They began in the River Nile, which was their water source, then moved to the land, which was their bread basket, then to their possessions (their cattle), to personal pain, and into the very heavens when God blocked the light of the sun. Finally, God sent death to the firstborn in every family.

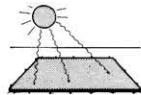
Though badly outnumbered by the Egyptian gods, about a thousand to one, the God of Moses leveled a knockout blow in the tenth round, and the fight was over. Or so it seemed. Being urged by the Egyptians to leave, Moses took all the Israelites into the wilderness for a worship celebration, leaving Egypt and following the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to a new homeland.

When Pharaoh recovered from the final round, he decided he had made a mistake. After analyzing his loss, he went for a rematch. The rematch ended with a death blow! History tells us that from the time of the Exodus, Egypt began to decline in power and influence in the ancient world.

God's hand can be seen over and over as he brought his plans to fruition. In the days of Jacob when God needed a leader, he reached down and called Joseph into Egypt. Then four hundred years later when God needed another leader, he reached down and lifted Moses out of the waters of the Nile River. God also needed a hard-headed Pharaoh to demonstrate his power, so he reached out again and raised up the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

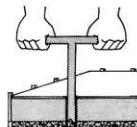
God needed a special nation through which to bring the promised Savior, so he chose Abraham. He eventually carried his descendants out of Egypt and set them down in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. Great events are yet to unfold, but for now: "To Canaan's land I'm on my way."

Firming the Foundation



You have declared this day that the Lord is your God and that you will walk in his ways, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws, and that you will obey him. And the Lord has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.

(Deuteronomy 26:17–19)



Testing the Foundation

1. What purpose do you see in God's placing the Israelites in Egypt for 400 years?

2. The plagues were a contest between whom?

3. What compromises did Pharaoh offer Moses?

4. What were Moses' final words in response to Pharaoh's offers for compromise?

5. What plague finally brought Pharaoh to his knees?

6. Describe the salvation of Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea.

7. Why did God send the children of Israel by a long route instead of directly to the Promised Land?

8. How did the Israelites react when they were seemingly trapped between the sea and the army of Pharaoh?

9. What was Moses' response?

10. Describe the scene after the Israelites were safe and on the other side of the sea.

Lesson 7

The Birth of a Nation

Exodus 15–40

Numbers 10–14

Surveying the Site



The children of Israel had their roots back in the land of Canaan, but these roots had no land of their own to grow in. Jacob (Israel) spent a good part of his life in Canaan as a sojourner, and by the time Joseph sent for him to come to Egypt, his family only numbered seventy souls.

After four hundred years in Egypt, their numbers had grown to an estimated one and a half to two million. They now had sufficient numbers to occupy and settle Canaan, and the four hundred years of slavery had given them a strong ethnic identity that would bind them together as a nation for centuries to come. There is something about common hardships that molds a nation of people together.

God was growing a people strongly bound together by a common faith through which to bring the promised Savior of Genesis 3:15. This had been his overall purpose from the very beginning.

Now, the Israelites were free from their Egyptian bondage and were bound for Canaan Land! Well, not exactly. Even though the Israelites were only a few days walk from the promised land, it would take them forty years to get there. In fact, none of the men of military age, save Caleb and Joshua, would be permitted to enter.

After four hundred years of Egyptian bondage, these people needed written divine laws to govern their new nation and to teach them God's moral standards. From the beginning of creation, God has given man moral laws and has meted out consequences for disobedience. When Cain killed his brother, Abel, he was judged and punished by God.

When the pre-flood world came under condemnation because of their evil deeds, God sent a massive flood in judgment upon them. Now, for the first time, God would give his people a written law. The Law was given at Mount Sinai in an awesome setting of thunder and lightening and smoke. The sentence of death was pronounced upon anyone, beast or man, who dared to touch the mountain (Exodus 19).

Such was that awesome moment when sinful man stood before the God of the universe and heard his voice at Sinai. The very giving of the Law symbolized death, that is, it brought condemnation. The Law exposed our sins “in order that sin might be recognized as sin” (Romans 7:13).

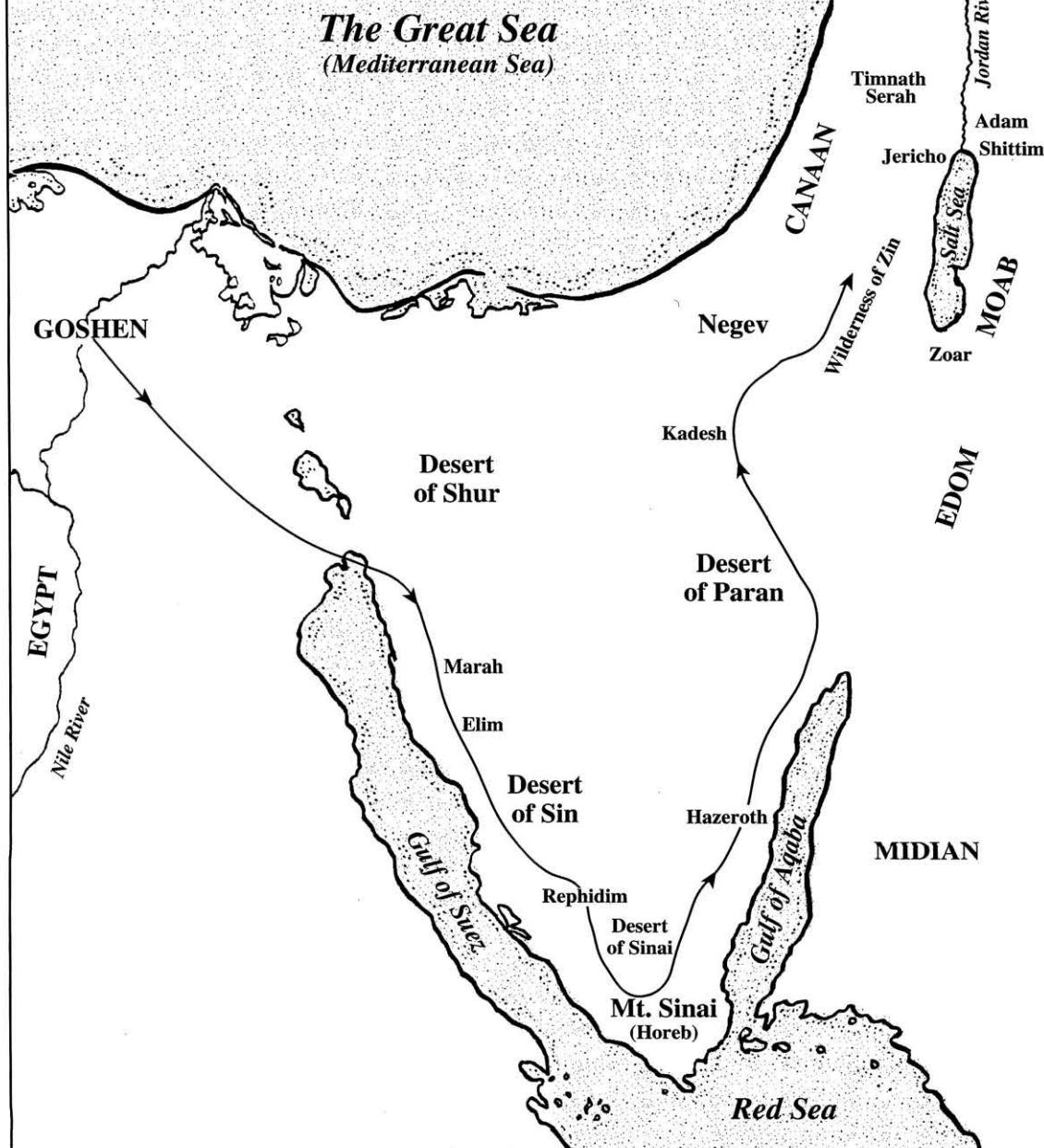
Throughout their journey to Canaan, the Israelites acted like children. They grumbled and complained and continually failed to recognize or appreciate God’s loving care for them. They finally demonstrated their total lack of faith in God when they refused to go in and take the land God had given them. God then pronounced his sentence upon that faithless generation.

They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die.

(Numbers 14:35b)

What a lesson we should learn from that faithless, murmuring generation.

Exodus from Egypt to Unsuccessful Invasion



Laying the Foundation



I. Encampments on the Way to Canaan (Exodus 15:22–19:2)

God continued to show his mighty power and care by feeding them manna and quail, bringing water from the rock, and keeping a cloud above them to give them direction through the wilderness.

A. Marah

After the Red Sea crossing, Moses led the people into the Desert of Shur, stopping at Marah, which means bitter. The place was called Marah because the water was bitter and not fit to drink.

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

(Exodus 15:25)

B. Elim

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water. (Exodus 15:27)

C. Desert of Sin

The Desert of Sin was located between Elim and Sinai. There God fed them manna, which means “what is it.”

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” (Exodus 16:2–3)

Because of their grumbling, Moses called them together:

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning

you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.” That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.” (Exodus 16:10–15; cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4)

D. Rephidim

Moving again, they came to Rephidim. “But there was no water for the people to drink” (Exodus 17:1). “Give us water to drink,” they demanded. They were ready to stone Moses for bringing them to such a forsaken place. Moses, at God’s command, provided water by striking the rock. “So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel” (Exodus 17:6). The place was named Massah-Meribah (testing and quarreling).

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:4, speaks about this event and says that the rock is Christ. In John 4:14, Jesus speaks of living water: “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.”

While at Rephidim, the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites, and Joshua made a counterattack. An interesting thing happened during this battle:

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. (Exodus 17:11–13)

E. Desert of Sinai

After a visit from Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, they came to the Desert of Sinai and “camped there in front of the mountain [Sinai]” (Exodus 19:1–2).

II. God Speaks to Moses from Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3–25).

A. Israel is God’s chosen nation.

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt, they came to the Desert of Sinai. Here God called to Moses from Mount Sinai with a message for this new nation.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:4–6)

What a privilege to be chosen by God as his special nation among all those on earth. But as we shall see, these people often proved to be rebellious and faithless. Only a comparative few ever caught a glimpse of God’s long-range plan or had faith in him to accomplish it.

B. Moses is God’s chosen mouthpiece.

God gave strict warnings that no one was to go up Mount Sinai into his presence except Moses.

Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, “Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.” (Exodus 19:12)

C. God descends on Sinai.

God descended on the mountain in a frightening cloud of smoke described in the following passage:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.
(Exodus 19:16–19)

What an awesome sight that must have been. Fear gripped the hearts of every soul as they stood at the foot of that smoking, shaking furnace on top of Mount Sinai. The same God who called light into being, who called Noah into the ark, who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who called Moses into Egypt, now called Moses into his presence on the mountain.

III. The Law Is Given from Mount Sinai (Exodus 20–32).

When we think of the Law, we normally think only of the “Ten Commandments.” However, God gave a total of over six hundred laws to his people—laws to govern personal relationships, property ownership, social responsibilities, health issues, feasts, and more. The Ten Commandments were the foundation of the law and have withstood the tests of time and culture.

A. The Ten Commandments

God chiseled the Ten Commandments out of stone with his own finger.

- *You shall have no other gods before me.*
- *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.*
- *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*
- *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*
- *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*
- *You shall not murder.*
- *You shall not commit adultery.*
- *You shall not steal.*
- *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*
- *You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.* (Exodus 20:2–17)

These commandments have been the foundation of all moral law adopted by every major civilization for centuries since. This brief statement of man’s relationship to his creator and his neighbor has never been improved upon in any other system of law.

B. The Golden Calf

Even while Moses was upon Sinai with God, receiving God’s laws, the people encamped below were already breaking them.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods

who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.” (Exodus 32:1)

Aaron, of all people, helped these rebels make a golden calf, a god of Egypt, which they wanted to worship as they returned to Egypt (Exodus 32). God saw their folly and sent Moses back down the mountain to put an end to their idolatrous worship and immoral reveling. When Moses saw the festivities, in anger and disgust, he threw down the tablets of stone—on which the finger of God had written the Ten Commandments—and broke them to pieces. Thus the phrase “broken law” was born and has since referred to man’s continual breaking of God’s laws.

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 32:19)

To punish the people, Moses

took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.
(Exodus 32:20)

C. The purpose of the law (*Galatians 3:16–19*)

If Israel was to survive as a nation and fulfill God’s purpose, a written, codified law was needed. Relationships, responsibility, and punishment had to be defined. Because of sin and rebellion, a legal system was necessary to make men fully aware of sin and its consequences. Man needed a mirror through which to see himself as he really was. Such a mirror, the law, made his sins and his desperate need for grace and redemption apparent. The law defined sin.

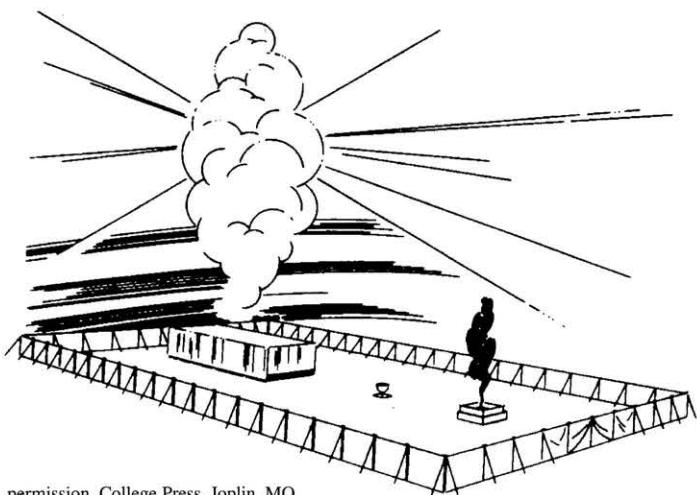
Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” (Romans 7:7b)

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed [Jesus] to whom the promise referred had come.
(Galatians 3:19a)

In essence, the law system kept man in “school” until the time was right for the master teacher to teach them a deeper and better way of living. The law paved the way for the marvelous truth of salvation by grace, paid for in full at Calvary.

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (Galatians 3:24–25)

IV. The Tabernacle (Exodus 35:4–40:38)



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One bright spot in this journey was that the Tabernacle, with all its splendor, was successfully completed. The Tabernacle was a portable place of worship and a visible location for God to dwell in. God gave very specific instructions about how to build the Tabernacle, and the Israelite people did all the work God commanded of them, and did it well.

The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them. (Exodus 39:42–43)

Connected with the Tabernacle were many rituals of sacrifice and worship. Only the priests were allowed to enter the Tabernacle, and only the High Priest was allowed to enter one section called the “Most Holy Place,” where the revered ark of the covenant was placed.

Paul explains that under the new covenant, we ourselves are the temple of God and his Holy Spirit, who dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19). Therefore, the tabernacle—and later the temple—served as an example of God’s dwelling place, foreshadowing the building of the church.

V. The Promised Land Is Finally in Sight (Numbers 10:11–14:10).

The trip to Canaan had been full of adventures—most of them unpleasant because of the rebellious, complaining, faithless nature of the children of Israel.

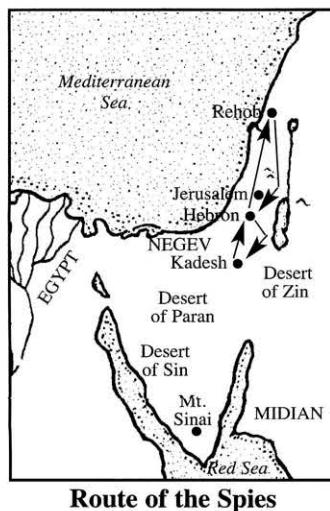
A. The march toward Canaan

The tribes were numbered, and preparation for the march into Canaan began. They broke camp at Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year and followed the cloud that continued to direct their journey. Along the way they encamped in the Desert of Paran and at Hazeroth.

While at Hazeroth, a dispute developed over who was in charge. Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses' Cushite wife and were jealous of his authority. God called a high-level meeting at the entrance of the tent and reaffirmed Moses' leadership. Miriam was stricken with leprosy and confined outside the camp for seven days as punishment. Aaron had to eat his words and pled with Moses, saying, “Please my Lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed” (Numbers 12:9–11).

B. Spying out the land

Canaan land was not far away. At Kadesh, Moses sent out twelve spies, one from each tribe, to spy out the land.



The Lord said to Moses, “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.” (Numbers 13:1–2)

The people waited for forty days in anticipation of the spies' return and a report of a land that was “flowing with milk and honey.” The spies returned, bringing fruits from the land. They gave Moses this account:

We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. (Numbers 13:27–28)

C. The grasshopper complex

This report meant big trouble for Moses. These undisciplined former slaves were afraid to go up and take the land. Ten of the twelve men allowed their fear to override faith in

God. "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. . . . We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes" (Numbers 13:31–33). Only Joshua and Caleb believed in God's ability to lead them to victory. The ten spies saw themselves as grasshoppers, so they acted like grasshoppers: "As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7 KJV).

After hearing the disheartening report of the majority, the whole community of people cried out against Moses:

"If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." . . . The whole assembly talked about stoning Moses and Aaron, then the glory of the Lord appeared at the Tent of Meeting.

(Numbers 14:2b–4, 10)

This part of the story seems almost unbelievable in view of the fact that they all had been eyewitnesses to the mighty miracles of God. But these faithless people were paralyzed by fear and refused to listen to Moses.

VI. The Faithless Israelites Are Denied the Promised Land (Numbers 14:12–35).

The Lord was so angry with these faithless, ungrateful people that he threatened to destroy them all and build a whole new nation from Moses. But upon Moses' request, God forgave them and decided on another punishment instead:

Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you. (Numbers 14:33–34)

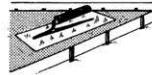
Date Line

1445-1405 B.C.

Forty-year wandering
(Num. 14:35)

God sentenced them to wander up and down the desert sands until every man, who at that time was military age, was dead. The military-aged men alone numbered six hundred thousand. These men and all the others of their generation would die in the desert while wandering amidst scorpions, snakes, heat, and dust. They would be attacked by their enemies in a barren wilderness, and their bones would bleach the desert sands. Only Joshua and Caleb of that original number would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. But better times would come!

Finishing the Foundation



Moses made his way through the desert wilderness, amidst rebellion, quarreling, grumbling, and a threat to his life, and finally reached Sinai (Exodus 19:1–2).

There at the foot of Sinai a whole nation stood in awe as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob descended on the mountain. There has never been a day in all history like that one. Amidst fire and smoke and the sound of trumpets, the people stood in terror. “Moses! Moses!” The voice that had spoken out of the burning bush near this same setting months before now called Moses up into the fiery mountain to be in his very presence. So fearful was that scene that the people begged Moses to go and receive God’s laws as they could not stand God’s voice any longer (Deuteronomy 5:4–5, 22–32). So Moses went up the mountain to meet the God of the universe.

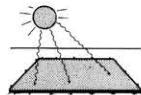
While Moses was receiving the law from God, the people down in the camp rebelled and broke the very commandments Moses would bring down to them. They soon learned that God’s laws would break them and grind them to pieces.

We are all law breakers, and law brings death. The laws given at Sinai, the tabernacle and its furniture, the priesthood, and the sacrifices served as figures or shadows of the coming new covenant (Hebrews 9:1–28). The covenant given at Sinai would serve its purpose. Just like Moses said, “Another prophet like unto me . . . will God raise up—you are to listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:14–16; Acts 3:22–23).

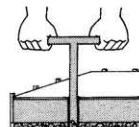
If ever there was a reason for God to be disappointed, it must have been when the twelve spies returned from spying out Canaan and ten gave the report that the people living there were too big. These ten spies were only representative of the multitudes of that generation. Forty years of wandering was the reward for their faithless report.

Nevertheless, God’s agenda was set. He had made a promise, back in Genesis 3:15, a promise that was passed on to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No quarreling, faithless, stubborn people would prevent him from fulfilling his promise. Sadly, only a few of that generation of adults lived to see the land where the world’s Messiah would one day be born.

Firming the Foundation



See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. (Deuteronomy 30:15–16)



Testing the Foundation

1. How did God provide for the Israelites during their years of desert wandering?

2. Why did Israel need a written law?

3. Who was Jethro?

4. Describe the scene on Mount Sinai as the people gathered to receive the law.

5. What occasion caused Moses to throw down the Ten Commandment tablets?

6. Why did the people make the golden calf?

7. What part did Aaron play in this drama of the calf?

8. What kind of report did the twelve spies bring back?

9. What punishment did God prescribe for their lack of faith?

Lesson 8

One More River to Cross

Sections of Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua

Surveying the Site



Never in the history of man has the God of the universe provided such care through supernatural power as when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt and guided them toward the Promised Land.

But in spite of God's overwhelming miracles and love, the faithless Israelites refused to take the land that God had given into their hands. Because of their rebellious, unbelieving hearts, God sentenced them to wander the wilderness for forty years until that generation had died. He would then give the land to their children.

The long forty years finally came to an end, and Moses was called home by God from the top of Mount Nebo.

*And Moses, the servant of the Lord died, there in Moab as the Lord said.
(Deuteronomy 34:5)*

No greater epitaph could have been written about a man than to be called "the servant of the Lord." God brought the new generation of Israelites to the edge of the Promised Land, and under the leadership of Joshua, they took the land and began to settle it. God kept the promise he had made to Abraham over five hundred years before. The big question remains: How long would they keep theirs?

Laying the Foundation



I. The Israelites Wander for Forty Years (Numbers 20–33:49).

The Lord replied, “. . . as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers.” (Numbers 14:20–23a)

A. The complaining Israelites

Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink! (Numbers 20:5)

In spite of their demanding attitude, God brought water from a rock to care for them (Numbers 20:8). Just a short time later, the people raised their voices in complaint again:

They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” (Numbers 21:5)

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. (Numbers 21:6)

B. God's purpose and care

Life in the desert was hard, but God did have a purpose for his people, and he did care for them. After the forty years of wandering were over, Moses explained God's care and purpose to the Israelites:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

. . . Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. (Deuteronomy 8:2–5)

II. Moses' Life Comes to an End (Deuteronomy 32:48–52, 34:1–12).

A. *Moses' call home*

Because Moses took the credit for one of God's miracles (Numbers 20:7–12), he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. However, God dealt kindly with Moses, and when the forty years of wandering were finally over, God gently called him to climb Mount Nebo, where he would die.

There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.” (Deuteronomy 34:1–4)

God gave Moses a view of the land that flowed with milk and honey. There it was—the Promised Land—the fertile, green valleys, the serpentine curves of the Jordan River enriching the plains, and the Sea of Galilee reflecting the blueness of the sky above. Imagine the beautiful, panoramic view of the Promised Land that God had arranged for Moses.

“But Moses, you cannot go over.” Sad words, after forty years of labor with a rebellious people . . . but maybe not. Moses was 120 years old. He had accomplished the impossible with God standing by his side. He had trained his successor well; someone else must now take charge. He was ready to take a long-deserved rest; his task was finished. His faith had been like a rock. He was ready to go.

On the top of Mount Nebo, Moses again stood in the presence of the God of his fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of the universe, the great “I AM” of the burning bush and Sinai.

There were no marching bands, no parades, no speeches to distract his mind from the moment. His eyes were focused on the beauty of the Promised Land. No doubt his memory raced back to the events of that long, forty-year journey and to thoughts about his forefathers who had settled over four hundred years ago in Canaan, which he could now see.

God touched Moses, and the “servant of the Lord” fell asleep in the everlasting arms of God. God himself took Moses’ body to a special place amidst the beauty of those surroundings and laid him to rest.

No other man has ever been so honored to have his funeral conducted by such an august being—the God of the universe. There his body lies in wait for Gabriel’s final blast on the ram’s horn on the resurrection morning.

Date Line

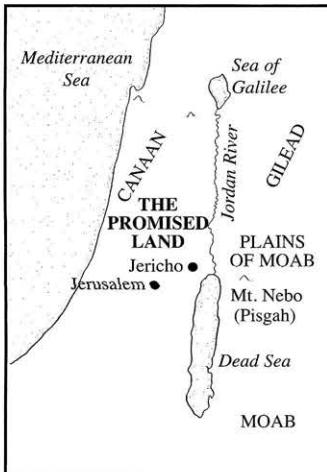
1405 B.C.

Moses dies
(Deut. 34:5).

And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.
(Deuteronomy 34:5–7)

B. Moses—a faithful leader

No doubt about it—Moses stands at the top of the list of the earth’s greatest men. The events during his leadership of God’s people are unequaled in all of human history. Moses, the lawgiver and servant of God, wrestled for forty years with unbelievable problems. Yet, with only a few exceptions, he remained calm and meek throughout these forty turbulent years. In fact, the Bible calls him the “meekest man in the earth.” No other man did God talk to face to face, so many times, and on so many different occasions. His epitaph is written for all to read, for all time.



The Death of Moses

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.
(Deuteronomy 34:10–12)

C. Moses—in the time of Jesus

God gives us one more glimpse of this great hero, fifteen hundred years later, as Moses and Elijah converse on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus (Matthew 17). In Deuteronomy 18, Moses also had the honor of being compared with the Savior to come:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (Deuteronomy 18:18–19)

III. The Promised Land Is Taken (Joshua 1–22).

A. A new commander is chosen.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." (Joshua 1:1–3)

That long-awaited day finally arrived. Before them stood the mighty Jordan River—a roadblock in their path. But God had a plan and was about to display his power once again.

B. They cross the Jordan.

It was springtime, and the Jordan River was filled to overflowing. God had commanded the priests to take up the ark of the covenant (a highly symbolic piece of furniture from the tabernacle) and lead the people across the Jordan River.

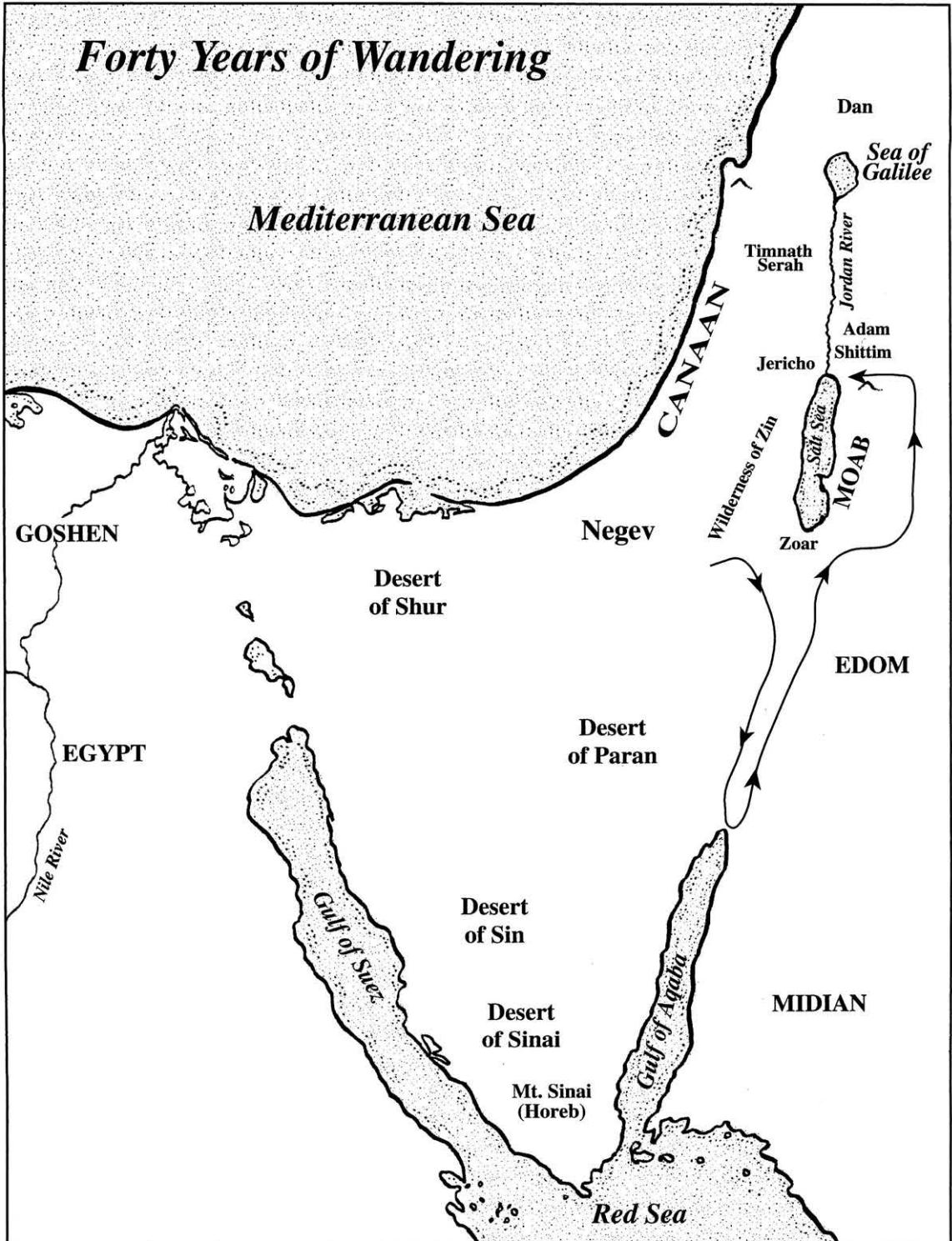
As soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. (Joshua 3:15–16)

Date Line

1405 B.C.

Joshua leads
Israelites into
Canaan
(Josh. 1:3).

Forty Years of Wandering



C. The walls of Jericho come down.

The first city to be taken was Jericho—a mighty, highly guarded, and walled city. God's power was again demonstrated in amazing ways. Through some unusual military tactics, Israel took the city by marching around it for seven days.

When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. (Joshua 6:20)

The fame and fear of the Israelites spread throughout the land, and city after city fell into Joshua's hands. In time the land was taken, and each tribe settled into their allotted place and established themselves in their new homes.

IV. Joshua's Life Comes to an End (Joshua 23–24).**A. Joshua's farewell speech**

Toward the end of Joshua's life, he assembled all the leaders and officials of the twelve tribes of Israel and reviewed what God had done and would do. He admonished, encouraged, and warned them concerning their faithfulness to God and their obedience of his laws. He promised that if they were faithful, God would continue to bless them, and if unfaithful, God would forsake them, and they would forfeit their land.

Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.
(Joshua 23:6)

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.
(Joshua 24:15)

B. Going home to rest

After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. (Joshua 24:29–30)

Date Line

1375 B.C.
Joshua dies.

Joshua had been a faithful and trustworthy leader. He and Caleb had been the only two spies who had believed that, with God's help, they could enter Canaan. A fitting tribute to Joshua and his great leadership is found in Joshua 24:31:

Joshua's generation served the Lord all their days and the generation that followed.

The New Testament speaks of Joshua in reference to our Christian rest.

Date Line

1375 B.C.
Judges begin
to rule Israel.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. (Hebrews 4:8–10)



Finishing the Foundation



This lesson brings us to a watershed in the development of God's plan for man. The long-awaited promise was now fulfilled. In previous lessons we saw that the nation of Israel began with a call to a single man of faith. Abraham believed God, and his faith paved the way for a new nation. Through him, the promise was passed on to Isaac and Jacob, and as God decreed, a family of seventy individuals multiplied into a great nation. God worked to shape this nation through four hundred years of slavery and forty years of wilderness wandering.

When the time was right, God brought the Israelites into the land he had promised to Abraham so long ago! With them they brought the bones of Joseph to be buried with his ancestors. The sound of those marching feet could be heard even in the cave of Machpelah, as the descendants of Abraham crossed the Jordan and claimed the Promised Land. Through our eyes of faith, we can almost see Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob, after lying in the grave dust for centuries, stir in their graveclothes. And we can almost hear a faint whisper from their long-silent lips, "Here they come, just like God said!"

The Israelites, under Joshua, conquered the land and settled in their new homeland—a land flowing with milk and honey. They ate out of vineyards they did not plant, lived in houses they did not build, and were cared for under the canopy of God's love and continued benevolence. What a life!

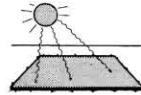
God promised that their good life would continue as long as they remained faithful to him and his laws, which were given for their protection and good.

God's plan was moving forward on his time schedule in spite of their shortcomings. Nations would rise and fall, mighty empires would dominate history, but a remnant of the faithful Jews would survive it all. God kept his promise.

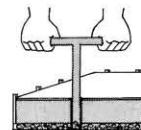
The seed that would grow to bless us all had been placed in the soil of these Old Testament stories and events, awaiting better times yet to come in God's great plan—a time when the desert would bloom again, the burning sand would become a pool, and the thirsty ground a bubbling spring.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. . . Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:1, 5–6, 11)

Firming the Foundation



The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. . . . Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. (Isaiah 35:1–6a)



Testing the Foundation

1. How old was Moses when God called him home?

2. Where was Moses buried?

3. Who became the new commander after Moses died?

4. What tactics did God instruct Joshua to use in the first big battle?

5. Was the keeping of the land conditional?

6. How old was Joshua when God called him home?

7. What kind of influence did Joshua have on his generation?

8. What kind of examples and lessons can we learn from these stories and events?

9. How would you rate the life of Moses?

Intertestamental History

From Malachi to Christ

The Old Testament closes with Malachi, with hope for the coming Messiah still alive. Then there was a period of silence for the next four hundred years. No seer or prophet arose during these years.

In 538 B.C., Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian kingdom, fulfilling Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 2) about Babylon. (Daniel made this prophecy some sixty-five years earlier.) The Persian rule lasted about one hundred years—until it was “gored” by the “he goat” of Daniel's prophecy, in the person of Alexander the Great. From history we learn many things about this period.

At the age of twenty, in 336 B.C., Alexander came to the throne; thus the third world empire came into being. Alexander's dream was to transplant the seeds of Greek civilization and culture. He gave the world a universal language that paved the way for the beginning of Christianity. He gave special treatment to the Jews and set them in high places and in important centers in his empire. Because these Jewish centers of influence reached throughout the empire, expectation of a coming Messiah was widely spread. The Old Testament Scriptures would be translated into Greek and could be read by the whole Greek-speaking world. Little wonder wise men from the East traveled far to worship the newborn king in Judea years later.

In 204–165 B.C., Palestine came under the rule of Syrian kings. Antiochus IV, one of those kings, set out to destroy the Jews. In 168 B.C., he came to Jerusalem and killed forty thousand Jews and desecrated the temple by sacrificing a sow upon its altar. The temple was then devoted to the worship of Jove, a Grecian god. The city of Antioch in Syria was named after the Antiochus family. This city was well-known in New Testament times, and Paul launched his missionary journeys from there. “The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

A band of pious Jews, led by Mattathias (a priest) and his sons, revolted against the atrocities of Antiochus. Surprisingly, Antiochus failed to crush these determined rebels called the Maccabees. Judas, the son of Mattathias, entered Jerusalem in 165 B.C. as victor. He purified the temple and reestablished worship. Antiochus finally died of a terrible disease. Judas the “Maccabee” became governor of Palestine, and the Maccabean rule lasted about one hundred years (165–63 B.C.).

Rome came to full power in 63 B.C., breaking up the Greek empire, and became the fourth empire of Daniel’s dream. In 47 B.C., Herod the Great, son of Antipater, was appointed governor of Galilee. Herod was a cruel monster. He killed his wife and her brother, his two sons, and anyone he thought could challenge his throne. This insane jealousy was still alive when he heard about a newborn king in Bethlehem, and it caused him to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem two years old and under. What a monster!

During this time the Jews were being scattered among the various nations, and the two sects of the Jews arose—the Pharisees and Sadducees. Augustus Caesar became the first monarch of the Roman empire, and all the world was at peace (the Pax Romana). The stage was set for the birth of “the seed of woman,” the branch of David, the long-awaited Messiah.

Finally, after approximately four hundred years of silence, God spoke. Out of darkness a light burst forth.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Matthew 4:15–16)

These words, spoken by the prophet Isaiah one thousand years before, were soon to be fulfilled. As in Genesis 1 when God said “Let there be light,” another light was now ready to shine forth.

May it forever shine! Amen.

Lesson 9

The Coming of the Messiah

Date Line

44 B.C.

Julius Caesar
murdered.

37 B.C.

Herod the Great
made King of
Judea.

31 B.C.

Augustus
Caesar rules the
Roman Empire.

20 B.C.

Herod the Great
begins to build
the temple in
Jerusalem.

6-4 B.C.*

Birth of Jesus
Christ in
Bethlehem

* not 0 because
of the dating
system used
before his
birth

Surveying the Site



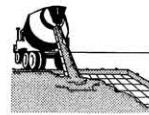
*Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked,
“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?
We saw his star in the east and have come to worship
him.” (Matthew 2:1b–2)*

The coming reign of the Messiah is the hope and message of the Old Testament. Through the inspired prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, the idea of a coming “Anointed One” (Christ) slowly but definitely made its way into Jewish thought.

Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, David, Micah, Joel, Malachi, and others amplified on the original promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in succeeding generations. This common thread of promise ran throughout all their writings and was the one hope that held the Jewish nation—at least a remnant of it—together throughout the Old Testament period. This hope held them together in spite of the fact that few, if any, ever really understood the true nature of the mission of the Messiah.

Even the last chapter of the last book in the Old Testament holds out this hope, which continued through the four-hundred-year interval between the Old and New Testaments.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Coming of the Promised Messiah

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1, 3–7)

A. His exciting birth

The New Testament opens with much excitement and hope concerning this promised Messiah. We begin with the amazing story of a king-child born in Bethlehem to a virgin. Then we are told of angels visiting shepherds in the field, announcing the birth of a Savior, and of wise men coming from the East in search of a newborn king. We learn of Herod's insane jealousy of this baby boy that leads to the slaughter of all males in Bethlehem who are two years old and under (Matthew 1:18–2:18).

As news of these events spread through Judea, so did the belief that something grand and big was blowing in the wind. This belief had obviously spread even to the East, far from Bethlehem, as evidenced by the wise men who followed the eastern star to find him. News of this new king gave hope even to those outside the Jewish fold. Possibly they learned of God's promise of a new glorious king from Jews who had been scattered in exile throughout the centuries. The birth of this God-child, this new king, was widely expected.

B. His quiet childhood

Date Line

6-8 A.D.

At age 12, Jesus is lost by his parents in Jerusalem.

Little is said about Jesus between the time Joseph brought him back from Egypt as a baby and the time his parents lost him in Jerusalem at age twelve. When his parents finally found him in Jerusalem, he was sitting in the midst of the teachers in the temple, amazing them with his knowledge (Luke 2:41–52). After this incident, he simply went back home to Nazareth and worked in Joseph's carpenter shop for the next eighteen

years. Nothing further is written about this period of his life. But God was with him and was preparing him for his ministry to come.

*Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. . . .
And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
(Luke 2:51–52)*

II. The Ministry of John the Baptist

Suddenly, Jesus' cousin John appeared on the scene. He began his strange ministry out in the wilderness of Judea, around the Jordan River, and he dressed like a wild man. The excitement that followed John's preaching about the coming kingdom emptied the cities as folks flocked out to see and hear this new prophet. The fiery preaching of John carried a message of repentance and burning judgment to come upon Israel. Thousands responded to his message and were baptized in the Jordan River. His ministry was so successful that he became known as John the Baptizer (transposed into our English translation as John the Baptist). John was the Elijah who was prophesied to come, preparing the way for the Messiah.

*In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea
and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who
was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the
desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”*

(Matthew 3:1–3)

III. The Ministry of Jesus

A. Jesus is baptized by John.

Jesus, at age thirty, laid down his carpenter tools, selected his disciples, and went to hear John preach on the banks of the Jordan, where he submitted to baptism. At his baptism, God the Father announced to John that Jesus was the promised one, and the Holy Spirit descended on him as a confirmation of his messiahship.

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that
moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending
like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is
my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17)*

B. Jesus is tempted by Satan.

After his baptism Jesus was led into the wilderness for a forty-day encounter with Satan. Satan tried to entice him by promising him the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would only bow down and worship him. Jesus responded by quoting the Word of God to Satan (a perfect example for us), and Satan finally went away without a victory.

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:10–11)

C. Jesus enters his public ministry.

Jesus knew who he was and what his mission was, and he proceeded with deliberation to accomplish it. His message was so profound and appealing that on one occasion when soldiers were sent to arrest him, they left empty handed. When asked by the authorities why they did not arrest him, they simply said, “Never did man thus speak.” Jesus needed no sword to validate his authority; his amazing words were his sword and his authority.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28–29)

D. Jesus' style of ministry

The ministry of Jesus was in obvious contrast to the elitism of the scribes and Pharisees. He walked the dusty roads of Palestine, sat down on the hillside with the multitudes, rubbed shoulders with the common man, and touched the sick. He kept company with the rich and the poor; he ate with publicans (tax collectors) and prostitutes. He turned water into wine, fed five thousand with five loaves and three fish, walked on water, healed the hopelessly sick, cast out demons, and raised people from the dead—he even stopped a funeral procession to raise a dead boy. Every funeral he attended turned into a resurrection!

The crowds were delighted when he denounced the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, and the religious leaders were infuriated (Matthew 23:13–39). He silenced his enemies with profound answers to loaded questions. No one could match his wisdom!

Most of all, he gave hope to all who heard him with open hearts. Although Jesus was a Jew, he was sought by Greeks, Samaritans, Phoenicians, and strangers. He preached a message of peace, reconciliation, mercy, and hope; he offered freedom from the spiritual bondage of mankind.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and hum-

ble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

His message was wrapped in love and compassion. He had a message for everyone; he embraced the little children and used them as an example of how grown men should be humble.

IV. The Culmination of Jesus' Ministry

A. His crucifixion

Finally, after three and a half years of a demanding ministry, on the night of his betrayal by Judas, he surrendered himself freely to his enemies who had been plotting his death for months. He endured a series of mock trials and did absolutely nothing to defend himself, though innocent.

Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. (Matthew 27:13–14)

Under the Roman rule, the death sentence could only be given by the Roman court. Thus the Jews had to convince the Roman authorities that Jesus should die. Pilate, the Roman governor, reluctantly agreed to sentence him to crucifixion at the insistence of the Jewish council. After a series of beatings, he was led up to Calvary to be crucified.

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.
(Matthew 27:28–31)

B. His burial

Now, once and for all, the rulers of the Jews had silenced this trouble maker. Just to make sure, they had Pilate seal the tomb with the Roman seal and place a Roman guard at its entrance. They went to a great deal of trouble to make sure that his body stayed in the grave for at least three days. (Jesus had said he would rise on the third day.)

So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. (Matthew 27:66)

C. His resurrection

Whatever they did, it wasn't good enough. On the morning of the third day, the guards were in for quite a surprise.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

(Matthew 28:2–4)

Only the graveclothes were left in the tomb. Evidently, Jesus had been in no hurry or under any stress, for the napkin that his head and chin had been bound in was neatly folded and placed separate from the graveclothes he had been wrapped in.

Some of the women found the tomb empty, and the news quickly spread among his disciples. His several appearances to his disciples finally removed all doubt, and defeat ended in victory; fear and sadness turned to joy.

The Jewish rulers now had a bigger problem on their hands than before. How could they deal with a live dead man who couldn't be kept in the tomb, even though it was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers?

Jesus appeared to his disciples a number of times over the next forty days. He ate with them and discussed the imminent coming of his kingdom. In his final appearance, he instructed them to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit not many days hence. This would be the sign that remission of sins (salvation) was ready to be proclaimed.

D. His victory over Satan

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, mankind has been hostage to the power of Satan. *Sin and death* are the weapons by which Satan keeps us from God. But the death and resurrection of Jesus stripped Satan of his powerful weapons: Jesus' death paid the debt for our sin, which kept us from a relationship with God, and his resurrection proved his power over death. When we place our faith in Jesus and take advantage of his free gift of salvation, sin and death have no power over us—his victory becomes ours.

The promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has finally been fulfilled.

He [Jesus] will crush your [Satan's] head, and you [Satan] will strike his [Jesus'] heel. (Genesis 3:15b)

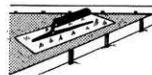
Although Satan struck the heel of Jesus, by necessitating that Jesus submit to death and carry the burden of sin, Jesus has now crushed the head of Satan by conquering death and paying for our sin. Praise God!

V. Old Testament Prophecies and New Testament Fulfillments

The coming of the Messiah is the recurring theme of the Old Testament. Listed below are several Old Testament scriptures that tell of the Messiah to come, along with their New Testament fulfillments. These numerous prophecies are just another proof of the deity of Christ and the love of God for us all.

Old Testament Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment
Genesis 3:15.....Seed of woman	Galatians 4:4
Genesis 12:3.....Seed of Abraham	Acts 3:25–26
Isaiah 11:1–10.....Descendant of Jesse	Romans 15:8–12
Isaiah 9:6–7.....Heir of David	Luke 1:31–33
Malachi 4:5.....Forerunner of Jesus	Luke 1:13–17
Isaiah 7:14.....Born of virgin	Matthew 1:22–23
Daniel 2:44.....Time of kingdom	Luke 2:1–14
Genesis 49:10.....Tribe of Judah	Luke 3:33
Micah 5:2.....Place of birth	Matthew 2:3–5
Isaiah 9:1–2.....Ministry in Galilee	Matthew 4:12–16
Zechariah 9:9.....Triumphal entry	John 12:14–15
Isaiah 53:7.....Opened not his mouth	Mark 14:61
Isaiah 53:9.....In death with wicked & rich	Matthew 27:57–60
Isaiah 53:12.....Numbered with transgressors	Luke 22:37
Psalms 41:9.....Jesus betrayed	Mark 14:10
Zechariah 11:12.....Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Matthew 26:15
Zechariah 11:13.....Money returned	Matthew 27:6–7
Psalm 22:16.....Hands & feet pierced	Jn 20:27; Mk 15:24
Psalm 69:21.....Given gall & vinegar	John 19:29
Zechariah 12:10.....Side pierced	John 19:34
Psalm 22:18.....Soldiers cast lots	Mark 15:24
Psalm 16:10.....Resurrection	Matthew 28:8–10
Psalm 68:18.....Ascension	Luke 24:50–51
Psalm 118:22.....The stone	Acts 4:10–11

Finishing the Foundation



Atheists, infidels, historians, and theologians have all tried to explain this man Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth. But unless they acknowledge him as the Son of God—(deity), begotten by the Holy Spirit, without a human father—none have the answer that explains his life.

For thousands of years, his coming had been predicted. Expectation ran high as Roman power controlled the world during the reign of Augustus Caesar. Then, in a little town that was destined to world fame, a baby boy, who was destined to change the world, was born to a Jewish peasant girl.

Jesus was not the normal rabbi (teacher). He did not teach as the scribes and teachers of Jewish law, but he claimed to have authority and power to speak as God. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgave sins, proving his authority. “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” he challenged his adversaries (John 8:46). “Destroy this temple [Jesus’ body], and I will raise it again in three days,” he told the plotters of his death (John 2:19–21).

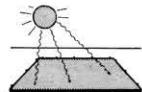
His ministry was filled with controversy. The religious leaders could not cope with his wisdom and were infuriated by his radical teaching. The common folks, shackled for centuries by rules and tradition that gave little or no hope, flocked by the thousands to hear this rabbi from Galilee. Sinners ate and kept company with him. He had a message for everyone. He was the best “dinner speaker” in town and was invited to dine with the rich and the tax collectors.

His response to those who criticized him for eating with sinners was quick and soul piercing: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” He challenged the self-righteous while calmly writing in the sand, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone” (John 8:7).

After three and a half years, he was arrested and brought before the Jewish council. Here he was tried for blasphemy. Following an illegal trial, they rushed him off to Pilate, the Roman governor, to ratify their sentence of death. Pilate reluctantly consented to his crucifixion. However the victory of the Jewish council was short lived. Just as Jesus had said, the tomb was found empty on the third day: He had risen and was alive.

They were able to kill him. But they could not keep him dead! Even the pagan Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion said, “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

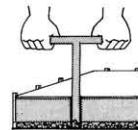
Firming the Foundation



Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” (John 2:19)

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:22)

Testing the Foundation



1. Why were the people who lived at the time of the opening of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) expecting the birth of the Messiah, the king of the Jews?

2. Why was John the Baptist's ministry so important?

3. What happened at the baptism of Jesus?

4. What weapon did Jesus use in his confrontation with Satan during the forty-day temptation?

5. Why were the religious leaders so opposed to Jesus?

6. Why did the Jewish council send Jesus to Pilate?

7. Describe the scene inside of the empty tomb.

8. What final instructions did Jesus give his disciples just before his ascension?

Lesson 10

The Coming Kingdom

Surveying the Site



To understand the kingdom of God, we must take a close look at what God's prophets said about it. After all, the original seeds of the kingdom were sown during the days of Abraham and the prophets.

Ever since Satan caused man to rebel against God's rule in Eden, God has worked to bring man back into his kingdom of peace. God promised that a Messiah would come and that he would establish the kingdom of God on earth. Simply put, the kingdom of God means the "rule of God." God rules the entire universe; however, his rule has different spheres. The sphere we will now discuss is the Messianic kingdom, or the church, which is the part of his universal kingdom over which Jesus reigns.

In this lesson, we will look at Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom. We will zero in on the prophets who give us a clear picture of when the kingdom will come, who the kingdom will include, where the kingdom will begin, what blessings the kingdom will bring, and how the kingdom will come. Then we will look at the New Testament fulfillment of the prophecies and our place in the kingdom.

Laying the Foundation



I. Old Testament Prophecies Answer Questions about the Kingdom.

A. When will the kingdom come?

In the last days:

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. (Isaiah 2:1–2)

Isaiah uses the term “house” as synonymous with kingdom (Isaiah 2:3). Isaiah plainly tells us that it will be established in the “last days.” Many are confused about the term “last days” because we have been programmed to think of the last days as the time when Jesus will return on the “last day.” However, this is not the Old Testament meaning of this phrase. The “last days,” when used in the Old Testament, always referred to events that would bring the days of Judaism and the Old Covenant to an end, events that would usher in the New Covenant and Christianity.

B. Who will rule the nations at the time of its coming?

We have seen that the prophets foretold that the kingdom would come in the last days. They even got more specific than that. We are told that it would be established during the fourth world empire.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy. (Daniel 2:44–45)

The prophet Daniel deals with the empires that will exist from his time (the Babylonian reign) until the setting up of God’s kingdom. He describes four world empires, beginning with Babylon, and names each one. During the fourth (the Roman Empire) God would move in and, like a stone cut out of nowhere, set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed.

C. Who will be included in the kingdom?

All nations:

And all nations will stream to it. (Isaiah 2:2)

As far back as Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his descendants. Many of the prophets reiterated this by speaking of the ingathering of the Gentiles into his fold. The Jews had great difficulty accepting such an idea. During the fifteen hundred years since Sinai, a tradition of exclusiveness had developed; they would not even eat with a Gentile. They never grasped the idea that God cared about all people and that Jehovah God was the God of all creation. Yet all along, the prophets had clearly proclaimed that the Messianic age (the kingdom) would be for all nations. Jesus reminded them again in John 10:

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

D. Where will the kingdom begin?

In Jerusalem:

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
(Isaiah 2:3)

E. What blessings will the kingdom bring?

Forgiveness of sins:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33–34)

Jeremiah is referring to the new covenant of the Messianic age. God's law for man will no longer be written on tablets of stone (the legal law at Sinai) but will flow out of the heart, written in the innermost soul.

F. How will the kingdom come?

With power and by the Holy Spirit:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls. (Joel 2:28–32)

The prophet Joel used highly symbolic language in describing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He described the event as dreadful and earth shaking. Such language was used over and over in the Old Testament in describing great changes and important times. The changes that occurred when the Old Testament covenant ended and the glorious reign of Christ began were dreadful for the unrepentant and glorious for sinners who came to Jesus.

II. The New Testament Tells of the Fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecies.

A. Elijah must come.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”
(Matthew 3:1–3)

Jesus confirms that Elijah is here.

For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. (Matthew 11:13–14)

B. The last days are here.

The Old Testament prophecies said the kingdom would come in the “last days.” The message of Jesus was that the kingdom was near: These were the last days.

During Jesus’ ministry, he prepared his hearers and disciples for this momentous event. While they were incapable of understanding its nature and scope, they later understood it with the help of his Spirit.

“The time has come,” he said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)

And he said to them, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.” (Mark 9:1)

As you go, preach this message: “The kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 10:7)

C. The beginning was in the right place.

Jesus' final instructions to his disciples were to wait in Jerusalem.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. . . . “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:3b–5, 8)

With great joy they returned to Jerusalem to await the day when out of the heavens a sound of “a rushing mighty wind” would come, announcing that the kingdom age had come. Just as the prophets had declared, the kingdom began in Jerusalem.

D. The Spirit came.

Just ten days after Jesus ascended, the Spirit came in mighty power and set the stage for the opening of the doors into God's church family—his kingdom.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1–4)

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, 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 dream dreams.” (Acts 2:16–17)

Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, clearly affirmed that what they were witnessing was exactly what Joel had said would come.

A Summary of Prophecies and Fulfillments

Prophecy

- When:** Isaiah 2:2—Last Days
Daniel 2:40–45—Days of Roman Empire
- Who:** Isaiah 2:2—All nations
- Where:** Isaiah 2:3—Begin in Jerusalem
- What:** Jeremiah 31:34—Forgiveness of sins
- How:** Joel 2:28–32—Through Holy Spirit,
with power

Fulfillment

- Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–3
- Acts 2:23; Luke 23:24–25
- Acts 2:39
- Acts 2:5
- Acts 2:38
- Acts 2:1–4

III. Peter Preaches on Pentecost.

While Jesus was on the earth, he gave “the keys of the kingdom” to Peter.

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17–19)

Upon the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, the church was built. Peter had the privilege of using the “keys of the kingdom” in Acts 2, when he delivered the message of the resurrected Lord. The proclamation of this message unlocked the doors to God’s kingdom. Peter announced the terms of entrance into the kingdom, and the doors have never been locked or shut since.

A. Peter proclaims a risen Christ.

Peter told those gathered that God had raised Jesus to life, exactly as David foretold in the Psalms, and that they were all witnesses of the fact. Furthermore, he told them, Jesus was now exalted to the right hand of God. Also, as foretold by David, Jesus was now reigning on David’s throne.

But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. (Acts 2:30–32)

B. Peter pronounces them guilty of rejecting the Messiah.

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (Acts 2:23)

C. The people respond to his message.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Three questions are answered in Acts 2:38–39:

1. *What shall we do?*

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ . . ." (Acts 2:38)

2. *What will God do?*

. . . for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

3. *Who is this message for?*

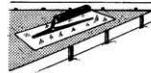
The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39)

So powerful was the message of Christ that three thousand people responded.

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

Peter, using the keys of the kingdom, opened the doors of the kingdom once and for all time.

Finishing the Foundation



My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place. (John 18:36)

It is important to understand the nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The Jewish concept of the kingdom was of a materialistic kingdom, like that of David’s, where Christ the Messiah would reign in Jerusalem. Many people to this day hold on to these misconceptions. Such misconceptions have led to all kinds of errors and speculations, which we will discuss in the lesson on Christ’s second coming. But the Messianic kingdom would not be patched on the physical, earthly Old Testament kingdom of David. Jesus taught: No one sews a patch of new cloth onto an old garment, and no one pours new wine into old wineskins (Luke 5:36–37). The kingdom of Christ would be entirely new and different.

The Jews of Jesus’ day who believed in him as the Messiah tried to insist that he become king of the Jews on earth, but he would hear none of it. The mother of James and John came to Jesus and requested that her two sons be given special seats, one on the left and one on the right, when Jesus sat on his kingdom throne. Jesus responded by saying that they had no idea what they were asking (Matthew 20:20–22). Even his disciples misunderstood the coming kingdom, even after three and a half years of teaching. They had in their minds fifteen hundred years of Jewish theology that said an earthly king would usher in the golden age of Judaism. Only after Christ’s ascension did they understand God’s true intent and then only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, in his very last appearance, was confronted again with this idea of a worldly kingdom, but he simply told them to wait and see what God had in store (Acts 1:6–8).

Had Jesus fulfilled the Jewish expectations, the crowds would have followed him to Rome itself. However, when Jesus surrendered to the Jewish Council and the Roman authorities and refused to use his power to save his life, they all fled, with only a few exceptions.

Little did they comprehend what the third day would bring or that in just fifty short days at Pentecost, the new kingdom of love, peace, forgiveness, and salvation would come and all men would be invited to become kingdom citizens.

And again Jesus said,

Nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21)

The kingdom of God, in one sense, means “the rule of God.” How does he rule? He rules through his word in our hearts as we submit to Jesus, who is the head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:10–23; 5:22). We are now a royal priesthood and part of a spiritual kingdom indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This kingdom is:

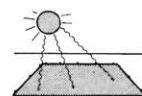
- a kingdom of peace and love (Romans 14:17).
- a kingdom where everyone is a priest (1 Peter 2:9).
- a kingdom where Jesus is our High Priest, our advocate, our mediator, and our elder brother (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7).
- a kingdom born out of love, sustained by grace, and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 1:8–9).
- a kingdom that will stand! (Hebrews 12:28).

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

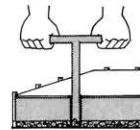
(Hebrews 12:28)

By the end of Acts 2, three thousand had believed and responded in repentance and baptism. The torch had been lit, and nothing would ever be able to put it out. What a story; and, oh, what a Savior!

Firming the Foundation



Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38–39)



Testing the Foundation

1. List the answers to the five questions in this lesson that the Old Testament answers concerning the coming kingdom.

2. What is meant by the “last days”?

3. What were Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples?

4. How did Peter use the keys to the kingdom, as promised by Jesus in Matthew 16:18?

5. What are believers told to do who want to be saved, and what do they receive when they obey?

6. Why did the people of Jesus’ day misunderstand the nature of the kingdom?

7. What does the word “kingdom” imply?

Lesson 11

A New Birth

Surveying the Site



“You must be born again.”

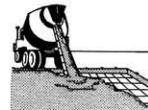
Nicodemus, the wealthy Jewish judge who sat on the Supreme Court of the Jewish nation, was startled and perplexed by these words of Jesus. Strange words indeed, not only to Nicodemus, but to all of us. How can this be? How can a man be born again?

Jesus, in this meeting with Nicodemus, introduced a teaching that is absolutely necessary in order for a person to enter the kingdom of God and become a part of his kingdom family.

For the Jew, this was a shocking statement. Was not every Jew one of God’s chosen people by virtue of his birth, being a descendant of Abraham? Did not their birth automatically ensure their acceptance into the Messianic kingdom? Not so, said Jesus. In fact, on one occasion when the Jews were pressing this very point, Jesus said, “Out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8). Physical linkage will not get it! Mere physical birth guarantees nothing in the Messianic kingdom.

Let’s think back before the days of the Jewish nation, back to the very beginning in Genesis 1. Adam and Eve began their lives with a beautiful, harmonious relationship with God, but as you know, they sinned and destroyed that special oneness. But God, in his love, did not leave man in this hopeless state. He provided a way back to himself through a miraculous rebirth—a new creation of man that Jesus called being “born again.” All men and women need this rebirth—Jew and Gentile alike. This new birth is our only way back to God.

Laying the Foundation



"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:4–5)

I. The Seed and Soil Determine the Harvest

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. But before a birth can occur, the seed must be sown.

With Nicodemus, Jesus used the concept of a new birth to teach about the radical changes that must occur in our lives if we follow Jesus. The parable of the sower and the seed gives us an additional perspective.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. . . . This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. (Luke 8:5–8a, 11)

The emphasis in this parable is the different types of soils, or hearts, that the word falls on. You will note that the sower was only the instrument who sowed the seed; all of the power rests in the seed. The type of soil it falls on determines the harvest.

A. *The pathway heart*

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Luke 8:12)

Because the pathway is beaten down and packed hard, the seed cannot penetrate the soil, so the devil, like the birds who swoop down and eat the farmer's seed in the pathway, snatches it away, and there can be no harvest. If our hearts are hard, like the pathway, God's word will not be able to penetrate and grow.

B. The rock-filled heart

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. (Luke 8:13)

The illustration about the rock and seed is very common in the farmer's life. Somewhere just under the surface of the soil, a big rock may lie. At first, the plant will burst forth with vigor and shoot up as rapidly as the other stalks nearby, but then the sun beats down, the moisture dries up, and the plant dies.

Some hearts, like this rocky soil, are eager and ready to receive the word, but hindrances lie beneath the surface, and there is no room for roots to grow. Their faith is just a flash in the pan, and when the testing time of real living for God comes, they fall away.

C. The thorny heart

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. (Luke 8:14)

When the farmer plants his seed in the field, patches of thorns and bushes may also come up. These can absolutely choke out the young plants. Unless the weeds are uprooted and destroyed before the planting, big problems will result. The thorns represent the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world that choke our spiritual life dry so that we never grow into maturity.

The cure for these three types of soil lies in their preparation. The same is true with our hearts. We must not let sin beat our conscience into a hard, impenetrable pathway. The rocks in our heart must be crushed and removed, and the weeds and thorn bushes must be dug up and destroyed. Painful? Yes, but the reward of a bountiful harvest is great as the Spirit of God works in our lives.

D. The good-soil heart

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

Were it not for the good soil, the farmer would have been very disappointed. Our hearts must be plowed, tilled, and nurtured by God's word so that the good seed, his word, can bring forth a bountiful harvest. The hearts of men and women, as they hear the word of God, are the soil for the seed.

II. The Conception

A. *The Spirit gives life to the word.*

What makes a seed germinate? God has placed life in the seed. Without that unseen ingredient, it will not sprout and bring forth. It is dead without the germ of life within.

So what is it in the word of God that produces new birth? The answer is found in John 6:63:

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

B. *The Spirit “cuts” our hearts.*

Besides giving life to the word, the Spirit uses the word as a soldier uses a sword to fight an enemy. He uses it to cut into our hearts as he convicts us of sin, planting faith therein. Conception is the result if the heart is receptive.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)

The Spirit empowers the word as it falls into good hearts, and as he convicts us of sin, we are led to repentance (a change of heart and mind and ways).

III. The Birth

“You must be born again.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5)

After the seed has been planted and the Spirit has given that seed life, the birth can take place. Just as a physical birth begins a radically new life, so does our spiritual birth. This required change does not come about by our own power. The laws of procreation set up by God brought about our conception and birth, and the new birth is also governed by his law of rebirth.

God, through his Holy Spirit, brings about conception and birth. God is the architect and author of this plan.

When Nicodemus was told that he must be born again, he was perplexed.

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. (John 3:9)

This sounds impossible. Yes, but with God all things are possible. Nicodemus's concept of the new birth was a physical rebirth. Jesus explained that he was not speaking of a physical birth, but of a birth of water and the Spirit, a birth of the inner man, the creation of a new heart. This new man is begotten by the Spirit, not by a human father. This second birth is of water and Spirit.

IV. Peter Sows the Seed

A. The water and Spirit birth that Jesus told Nicodemus about was that which Peter spoke of in Acts 2.

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. . . . Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . . Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:23, 33, 36–41)

Thus the seed (word of God) was sown by Peter, the seed fell into good hearts (soil), and the seed germinated (conception). The result was a birth of water and Spirit (three thousand on that day).

Years later, Peter commented on this new birth:

You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:23)

B. In Romans 6, Paul described to the Roman Christians their new birth.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4)

The figure used here is one of death and rebirth. Through baptism, we are buried in a watery grave and are raised to a new life. We reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The old man is crucified, dies, is buried, and is raised from that grave to walk in newness of life.

The concepts of the new birth and the life-changing death portray the radical changes that take place when we become Christians.

C. God adds to his kingdom family.

*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:47)*

Baptism in God's Plan

Because of so much misunderstanding and misconception about baptism, these points listed will help clarify the place and beauty of baptism in God's plan.

Why be baptized?

Because Christ commanded it.

Matthew 28:19–20

Mark 16:15–16

Because it is the response of an active and obedient faith.

Luke 6:46

Because Jesus set an example of obedience.

Matthew 3:15

What is the meaning of baptism?

It is a faith re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4

Romans 6:3

It is a declaration of our new life in Jesus.

Death to self and sin—buried with Christ—resurrected into a new life.

Romans 6:4

We are united and clothed with Christ.

Romans 6:5

Galatians 3:27

What is the purpose of baptism?

At the point in time of baptism, we receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38

In baptism we receive the seal of sonship.

2 Corinthians 1:21b–22

Baptism is an inward washing by Jesus.

1 Peter 3:21b

What does “baptize” mean?

It means immersion in water.

Matthew 3:16a

Acts 8:38–39

Romans 6:4

Colossians 2:12

The Greek word “BAPTIZO,” from which our word “baptize” comes, means to “dip under or immerse.” The great reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley agree that baptism was originally immersion:

“I would have those who are to be baptized to be entirely immersed, as the word imports and the mystery signifies.”—Martin Luther

“The word ‘baptize’ signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.”—John Calvin

“Buried with Him, alluding to baptizing by immersion according to the custom of the first church.”—John Wesley

When should one be baptized?

Just as soon as one becomes a believer and is ready to make a commitment to turn from sin and follow Jesus.

Acts 16:33

Acts 2:41

Who should be baptized?

Believers in Christ who acknowledge Jesus and make a faith commitment.

Acts 8:12

Acts 18:8b

Should one be baptized again?

Yes, if your baptism was not biblical. Possible reasons:

If not immersed.

If your faith and commitment were not genuine.

If you were too young to understand the Gospel and its faith commitment.

Baptism is not salvation by works, but it is a faith act of submission, not a meritorious work.

Baptism is of God. (Matthew 21:25; 28:19)

Finishing the Foundation

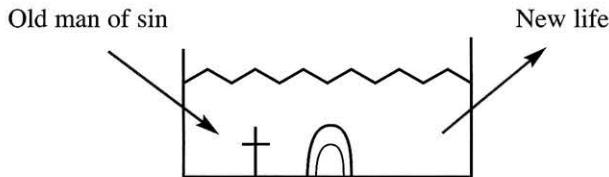


A new birth is absolutely essential for our fallen race. Blinded by sin, ignorance, pride, hate, lust, and covetousness, we are like a ship at sea without a crew, anchor, or sail in the midst of a storm. But God has provided salvation.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In the ancient church, baptism played an entirely different roll than it does in much of Christendom today. In the first-century church it was an act of identification, a time of a new birth into the family of God, the body of Christ; it was a time of commitment and new beginnings (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:12). Professions of faith were immediately followed by submission to baptism. Baptism was not put off until a later time; it was an immediate response to faith. Bible conversions included faith, repentance, and immersion (baptism). Baptism of believers was a time of public commitment, a proclamation of faith in a resurrected Lord, the end of the old life, and the beginning of a new one. It was a clear sign of identification for Christians in a time when Christians were persecuted for their faith. As Christians today, we must also be aware of the significance of baptism.

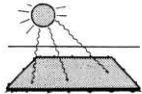
The message of this kingdom age is that there is good news. Jesus has given us marching orders to go and tell this good news to others. This simple chart will help you see how we reenact this gospel in our response to his invitation to come to him for life.



In baptism, we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Our old man of sin is crucified with Christ, we are buried in water (as he was in the tomb), and then we are raised to walk a new life of commitment and faith in Jesus.

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:6–11)

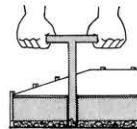
Firming the Foundation



Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:18–20)

Testing the Foundation



1. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus he must do to enter the kingdom?

2. Why is a new birth necessary?

3. What is the Gospel?

4. What is the seed of the kingdom?

5. What gives life to the seed?

6. Take Acts 2 and list the process of the new birth as it occurred in the three thousand who responded on that occasion.

7. Memorize these gospel facts (good news):

- God came down, became flesh, and dwelt with man—the Incarnation (John 1:14).
- Jesus was crucified and died for us—the Cross (1 Corinthians 15:3).
- Jesus was buried and rose on the third day—the tomb (1 Corinthians 15:4).
- Jesus ascended back into heaven to intercede for us as our High Priest (mediator) (Hebrews 4:14).
- Jesus will return for us at the end of time (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).
- All this is made possible by his amazing grace (Ephesians 2:8–10).

Lesson 12

The Resurrection

(Myth or Fact)

Surveying the Site



The previous lesson discussed the birth process through which we become Christians. Another essential doctrine of Christianity is the Resurrection. We may not all agree on every facet and doctrine in Christianity, and we may hold various opinions on many subjects; however, to disbelieve in the reality of the bodily resurrection is, according to Paul the apostle, equivalent to heresy.

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

The Resurrection is inseparably tied to the very core of the Gospel and is of “first importance” according to Paul. Our faith is “in vain” without the reality of the Resurrection.

While we want to understand all we can about every Bible teaching, the bottom line is that only a relatively few teachings are absolutely essential to our salvation. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is one of those few. It was the core of New Testament preaching. On Paul’s first visit to Athens when he spoke to the philosophers of the city, some of them asked,

“What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts 17:18b)

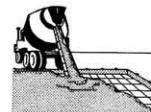
Hollow indeed would have been the message of the cross had there been no resurrection. In fact, without the Resurrection, there would have been no message at all, and Christianity would never have been born.

To put it simply, all of Christianity hinges on the truth of the Resurrection:

- The Jewish rulers staked their reputation and position upon the fact that Jesus was dead and upon the assumption that the sealed and guarded tomb would keep Jesus in the grave beyond the third day. This would prove that Jesus was not God and that he was not the Messiah.
- The disciples staked their lives and reputations upon the fact that the tomb was found empty, that Jesus had been bodily raised from the dead, and that he was alive.
- Christians stake all of their present hope and future life upon the truth of the claims of the disciples and the word of Jesus.

Which side is right makes a vast difference.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Testimony of Jesus

No mere man in his right mind would make the claims Jesus made. The validity of his word and promises were all wrapped up in the promise of his resurrection. His credibility was at stake. Was he the Messiah, the Son of God, or was he an imposter? The tomb would give the final answer.

A. His testimony to the Sadducees and other critics

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40)

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. . . . But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (Matthew 22:29–32)

Jesus very clearly points out the reality of the Resurrection to his adversaries.

B. His testimony to Mary and Martha

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:25)

C. General testimony about his resurrection

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (John 2:19–21)

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. (John 10:17–18)

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Matthew 16:21)

Jesus knew he would die, and he knew he would be resurrected.

II. The Tomb

A. The tomb is sealed.

Jesus was killed, just as he had predicted. The Jews made every effort to make sure that his body would not be stolen but would remain in the tomb.

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” (Matthew 27:62–64)

B. The stone is rolled away.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. (Matthew 28:2–4)

C. The tomb is empty.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who

was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (John 20:1–8)

(See also Luke 24 and Mark 16.)

D. The guards report everything.

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"
(Matthew 28:11–13)

III. His Appearances after the Resurrection

A. To Mary (Mark 16:9–10)

B. To two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)

C. To the disciples, without Thomas (Luke 24:36–43)

D. To the disciples, with Thomas (John 20:26–29)

E. To seven disciples by the sea of Galilee (John 21:1–24)

F. At the Ascension (Matthew 28:16)

G. To more than five hundred people on one occasion (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Jesus appeared to too many different people and on too many different occasions for these appearances to have been staged or some type of hallucination. They were genuine appearances to real people, witnesses to the fact that Jesus was alive. The testimony of these witnesses is sufficient proof to establish that Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised, and is now alive.

IV. The Critic's Explanation of the Empty Tomb

A. *First the facts:*

- Jesus was buried in the tomb.
- Guards were posted, and the tomb was sealed by the Romans.
- The stone was rolled away, and the tomb was opened.
- The body of Jesus was gone. No one disputed this fact; the tomb was empty.
- The graveclothes in which Jesus had been wrapped were lying in the tomb.
- He was raised on Sunday, the third day.
- The guards left, as there was no longer anything to guard.

B. *The disciples took the body.*

Some try to explain the empty tomb by saying that the disciples took the body. But this is absurd! The disciples were in hiding behind locked doors and in fear of their own lives. How could they overpower armed Roman soldiers guarding a tomb sealed with a Roman seal? Could they break the Roman seal and keep it all secret? Such would bring about a certain death sentence for them all.

C. *The Jews stole the body.*

First of all, the Jews would have had the same problem getting past the guards as the disciples. But more importantly, the Jews wanted Jesus to remain in the tomb in order to disprove his claims. They were the ones who went to Pilate to have the guards posted and the tomb sealed. Also, if they had stolen the body, why did they not produce the corpse after the third day. Such would have doomed Christianity before it ever started a few days later. The Jews surely wanted the body kept in the tomb at all cost.

D. *Jesus only fainted.*

This theory is sometimes called the “swoon theory.” It contends that Jesus simply fainted on the cross and revived in the coolness of the tomb. This is even more absurd than the other theories. Jesus had been killed by crucifixion. And then, to make certain he was dead, a Roman soldier had thrust a spear through his side, out of which poured blood and water—a sure sign of death (John 19:32–34). As disciplined, hardened Roman soldiers, they made sure Jesus was dead.

To say that a person would be able to revive after such circumstances and then have the strength to unwrap the graveclothes, remove the large boulder that sealed his tomb, and overpower the Roman guards would be almost as big a miracle as the Resurrection itself. And these are the best explanations that critics of the Resurrection can come up with! Totally absurd!

V. Further Compelling Truths

A. *The three-day promise of Jesus*

Jesus had said he would rise on the third day. The Jews knew about his claim, and they did all they could to ensure that he would be kept in that tomb. Well, the tomb was still sealed Friday and Saturday, but early Sunday morning at sunrise it all happened. He did exactly what he said he would do. The tomb was empty. He came out!

B. *The graveclothes*

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. (Mark 15:46a)

Joseph was one of the last to see Jesus and knew he was dead. He even poured some ointment over his dead body as part of Jewish custom.

Simon Peter . . . saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. (John 20:6–7)

The graveclothes were lying there, and no corpse was inside. The napkin that was wrapped around his head to keep the mouth closed was neatly folded and separate from the linen. Jesus had been in no hurry; a robber would have been in and out as fast as possible. A robber would not have taken the time to undo the graveclothes with the Roman guards posted outside. He especially would not have taken the time to neatly fold them and lay them separately.

All kinds of books have been written by unbelievers denying the Resurrection. Each one, without exception, lacks any plausible explanation of the empty tomb. When the facts are carefully examined, the only tenable explanation is the miracle of the Resurrection.

C. *The sudden change in the apostles*

After the Resurrection, the apostles were dramatically changed men. They went from timid, fearful men to bold, fearless proclaimers of the Lord. They dared tell their message in the very faces of those who had crucified Jesus. This change came about within days of their cowardly, confused behavior during the trial and crucifixion. Especially amazing is the fact that these men left their deeply rooted Jewish faith of fifteen hundred years. As a result they lost friends, position, and the fellowship of their Jewish faith. Would they give up all of this for a lie? For a dead Messiah? No way. Only an event of miraculous proportions could bring about such drastic life changes. They saw him, talked with him, and

ate with him. He was alive! All these men eventually lost their lives, except possibly John who was banished to prison on Patmos. They would not, could not, deny the truth of his resurrection.

The same can be said about Saul of Tarsus, who was a disbelieving fanatic of unwavering zeal. His zeal led him to imprison and even kill Christians of his day. This same Saul, later known as Paul, became a disciple of Jesus and the Apostle to the Gentiles. His sudden conversion is unexplainable outside of his own claims that he saw and talked to the resurrected Lord (Acts 9).

D. The Pentecost phenomenon

How do you account for the excitement and the baptism of three thousand men on Pentecost, only a few days after Jesus' resurrection and right there on the temple grounds—the most prominent and public place in Judaism? What gave Peter and the apostles their boldness, power, and understanding of the mission of Jesus? Just days before, their concept of the Messiah had been totally different. Before Pentecost they still believed in an earthly Jewish Messiah, one who would overpower the Roman conquerors. What forced them to make such a radical change overnight? Only the miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, could have brought about such change (John 16:12–15; Luke 24).

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

Jesus made this statement just before his ascension, and it came about just as he said (Acts 2).

VI. What the Resurrection Means to Christians

A. Of first importance

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand, By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

The Resurrection was at the center and core of Paul's preaching. It was of "first importance": If there were no Resurrection, there is no Gospel.

B. It is essential to our faith.

Without the Resurrection our “faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:2b).

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (1 Corinthians 15:14)

C. It is essential to our salvation.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. (1 Corinthians 15:13, 17–18)

D. It is essential to Paul’s credibility.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. (1 Corinthians 15:15)

VII. What Body Will Be Raised from the Grave?**A. Our dead bodies, the same body buried**

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:42–44)

Notice what the above passage says about the body that is “sown.” “It is raised . . . it is raised . . . it is raised . . . it is raised.” The same dead body that is buried is the body that will be raised. It is our body!

Do not misunderstand the phrase “spiritual body.” This does not say we are raised a spirit, but a spiritual *body*. The spiritual body is suited for our eternal, spiritual service. God will give us a new, spiritual body suited to our new dwellings.

The spirit never is in the grave to start with. It’s the body that is in the grave, and from the grave our body is resurrected to rejoin our spirit. If the body is not raised from the grave, then what is? These verses clearly teach that there will be a continuity between the body that dies and the body that is raised.

B. What this body will look like

But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. (1 Corinthians 15:35–38)

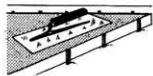
In the passage above, Paul explains that the grain of wheat that is sown looks very different from the blade that sprouts from it. Yet there is a continuity between the two—they are one and the same—yet vastly different! So it is with man. We will have a new body, yes; immortal, yes; vastly changed, yes: but it will still be our own body. Mankind is not complete as a spirit only.

In the verse following, we see that our bodies will be like Jesus’ resurrected body, suited for our new homeland. These bodies will not be the flesh and blood type, suited for our earthbound habitation; nevertheless, in some fashion they will be the same body we sow in death (1 Corinthians 15:37–38).

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

A God who can create our universe has no problem with the resurrection of the dead. Trust him! He has our DNA!

Finishing the Foundation



No fact of antiquity is better documented than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is documented by reliable witnesses of his resurrection as well as by historians and other sources. The Christian faith rises and falls on the validity of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul, pulls no punches:

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

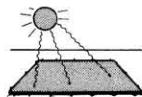
(1 Corinthians 15:14–15)

There is not one word of doubt—no “maybe’s,” no “possibly’s”—in all the New Testament about the Resurrection. Every apostle went to his grave proclaiming it was so.

It is human nature to “fess up” if the cost of perpetuating a lie becomes greater than the reward. The only reward these men had was hardship and loss—loss of families, friends, and their centuries-old Jewish faith. Is it really plausible that they would give up so much for a lie? Human nature does not operate that way. Remember, there were twelve of these men, including Paul, plus thousands of other disciples who held to this story. They could not have all been lying! They knew the truth: Jesus was resurrected and is alive!

The core of the Gospel, the “Good News,” centers around the resurrection of not only Jesus but also of our own bodies. The Christian’s hope is anchored in the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. There *was* an empty tomb, and so will it be for believers in Jesus on that coming resurrection morn!

Firming the Foundation

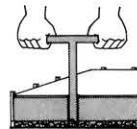


Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

*“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”*

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51–57)

Testing the Foundation



1. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”?

2. What did the Roman soldier do to make sure Jesus was dead?

3. Describe the scene on the morning of the third day at the tomb.

7. Did the Jews or disciples have a reason to steal the dead body of Jesus?

8. What brought about the big change in the apostles after the crucifixion?

9. Why is the Resurrection so important to us?

10. What will come forth from the grave?

11. Name the one fundamental fact upon which the Christian faith stands.

Lesson 13

The Holy Spirit

Surveying the Site



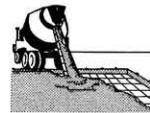
There is probably no subject so written and preached about yet so misunderstood as the Holy Spirit. Countless happenings and phenomena have been attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Many find this subject confusing, but the answers are in the Bible.

Although the Holy Spirit was involved in creation and the work of the prophets, most of what we know about the Spirit is found in the New Testament. We first see the Spirit at work in the New Testament in the conception of Jesus. We see him again at the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit descended in the form of a dove. God, the Father, here affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, his Son. From there we go with Jesus and the Spirit into the wilderness, and finally, all through Jesus' earthly ministry, the Spirit confirmed the Messiahship of Jesus through his miracles.

Some of the Old Testament people were visited by the Holy Spirit and empowered for certain works, but I know of no Old Testament character who had the permanent indwelling of the Spirit as every New Testament Christian has.

The Spirit was active in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and in these books Jesus promised the Spirit's coming. However, the greatest portion of the Spirit's work, we will find, began in Acts 2 and moved forward through the ministry of the apostles and the church. We have already talked briefly about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the kingdom in Lesson 12. We will now take a deeper look.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Holy Spirit—a Personal Being

The Holy Spirit is a person, not a thing. He is one of the three persons of the one Godhead.

A. The Holy Spirit was active in creation.

We are first introduced to the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1, where he actively participated in creation.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2)

The Spirit is an active being. His mission in creation was to bring order to our formless world. In the above passage we see the Spirit at work, “hovering over the waters,” working to bring order and beauty into our world.

B. The Holy Spirit is eternal.

The Spirit is not a created being. He is God, eternal.

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:14)

C. The Holy Spirit has intelligence.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:27)

The very nature of his work proves his intelligence and great mind. “Things” do not think.

D. The Holy Spirit can be grieved.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

The Holy Spirit can be grieved and feels sadness as well as joy. Again, “things” do not experience feelings. We must, therefore, conclude that the Spirit is deity, God, a “person” of the “Godhead.” Genesis 1:26 says, “Let us [plural] make man.” God was not talking to himself. With our limited knowledge and finite minds, we cannot comprehend or explain God, but one way to think of him is as a triune being: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

E. The Holy Spirit has many other characteristics.

He convicts, teaches, witnesses, guides, speaks, and inspires, just to list a few (John 16:8–11; 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13; 2 Peter 1:21). The place of the Holy Spirit in God’s plan of redemption is of the highest priority and is invaluable.

II. The Promise of the Holy Spirit

A. The Spirit will live in you.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17)

You will notice that Jesus here states that the Spirit, up to this time, had only been “with” the disciples but that soon the Holy Spirit would live “in” them. A similar statement by Jesus is recorded in John 7:37–39:

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

B. The promise is fulfilled.

At his last appearance (the Ascension), Jesus instructed his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit’s coming.

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

In Acts 2, we find them waiting as commanded.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1–4)

Thus, the promise of his coming was fulfilled. Jesus promised that after his departure from the earth, he would send the Spirit to indwell his disciples (John 7; 14; Acts 1:4). Joel, the Old Testament prophet, had spoken of this event in Joel 2:28–32. Peter tells us that all of these promises were fulfilled in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16).

C. The Holy Spirit is for every believer.

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. (Acts 5:32)

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6)

You will note that in Acts 2:38, the Holy Spirit is given to every believer at baptism, not just to a select few. This gift of the Spirit is also affirmed as being for every baptized believer in Acts 5:32 and Galatians 4:6.

III. The Holy Spirit and the Unbeliever

A. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin.

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:8–11)

The Spirit's mission is to convict men of their sins, the righteousness of God, and his judgment upon evil. But how does the Spirit accomplish this momentous task?

B. The Spirit convicts through the Word of God.**1. The Word is the seed of the kingdom.**

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:23)

The word is the seed by which we are begotten. This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. (Luke 8:11)

2. The Word is the sword of the Spirit.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)

3. The Word of the Gospel is God's power to save.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Romans 1:16)

4. The Word produces faith by hearing.

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

We see from these passages that the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to convict the unbeliever.

IV. The Holy Spirit in the Christian**A. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.**

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Godly living reflects Christ in our lives and the Spirit dwelling in us.

B. The Holy Spirit is a seal and guarantee of our salvation.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13–14)

C. The Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our resurrection.

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)

D. The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26–27)

E. The Holy Spirit affirms that we are God's children.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:15–16)

F. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us (sets us apart).

The Holy Spirit works in us to conform us to the image of Jesus, to set us apart as a holy people (sanctify us). He is creating a new world order made up of born-again, regenerated, sanctified people. This new world order is the kingdom, the church, the body of Christ.

The real goal of the Holy Spirit is not to work miracles that dazzle the eye. His real goal is to shape our lives, to glorify God, and to prepare us for our future resurrection and heavenly dwelling place. We miss the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit if we focus on the miraculous gifts given to the infant church. If our focus is wrong, we can miss the real life-

changing work of the Spirit in our lives—to help us be “Christ-like.” A changed, sanctified life is a lasting miracle (Galatians 5:16–25; Colossians 3:1–10).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22–25)

Finishing the Foundation



The fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was a victory for Satan. Satan was determined to foil God's plans for his creation. The creation was now marred by sin and headed on a collision course.

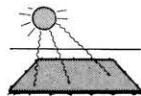
The Holy Spirit's mission was to restore order from the chaos Satan had created so that God could accomplish his divine purpose in his creation of man. A new and nobler creation was the goal of the Spirit. This new man would partake of God's divine nature and would be part of a universal kingdom, the family of God. In this new relationship, the Holy Spirit would teach this kingdom family the character of God. The hearts of this God-family would yield the fruits of the Holy Spirit of God—love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, patience, goodness, and faithfulness. The lives of these new creations would be empowered by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. And the Spirit would indwell them, guaranteeing their resurrection from the dead and their victory over satanic power.

The Spirit indwells each Christian, sanctifying us to live Holy Spirit-filled lives and guaranteeing our victory over death. Satan cannot steal from us this "seal of promise" or the glory of our resurrection. What a glorious relationship we have with our creator—God himself dwelling in us through his Holy Spirit. We are actually the "temple of the Holy Spirit," the habitation of God (2 Corinthians 6:19). What an encouragement to live holy lives and to shine like stars in a darkened world marred by Satan. This new creation, recreated after his likeness, will far outlive the physical creation of Genesis. Satan has no power over God's eternal kingdom.

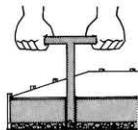
We marvel that God can take the evil Satan brought upon us and, with his patient and loving hands, create new earthen vessels of honor, stars that will decorate the dome of heaven's universe. We can now confidently say to Satan, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. (Philippians 2:14–16)

Firming the Foundation



And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17)



Testing the Foundation

1. Is the Holy Spirit a thing or a divine being?

2. How can we grieve the Holy Spirit?

3. Who does the Holy Spirit live in?

4. What is the sword of the Spirit?

5. How does the Spirit work in the lives of unbelievers?

6. How does the Spirit convict us?

7. How does the Spirit help us pray?

8. What is the “real goal” of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Lesson 14

The Gift of the Spirit and His Gifts

Surveying the Site



A proper understanding of the distinction between the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and “gifts (plural) of the Holy Spirit” is of extreme importance. Every time the Bible mentions “gift” of the Holy Spirit, it must be determined whether the context is referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit himself or a gift that the Holy Spirit gives or bestows upon someone. There is a big difference, and proper understanding of the Holy Spirit depends upon understanding the difference. To be confused on this point will lead to all kinds of biblical misinterpretation.

The “gift of the Holy Spirit” is the personal indwelling of the Spirit in each baptized believer. The initial outpouring occurred on the day of Pentecost and was accompanied by great signs. The Spirit is now given to all who respond to the Gospel.

The “gifts (plural) of the Holy Spirit” are God’s gifts to equip and mature his body on earth. When Jesus returned to heaven, he did not leave the church helpless and orphaned. When Jesus conquered death, he loosed our chains of captivity and gave us gifts.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:7–8)

These gifts are to be used and shared in his kingdom’s march to glory.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11–13)

Too many Christians are confused and unable to appreciate the gifts God gives his people. It is time that these spiritual gifts be used by his body to the glory of God.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

A. *The initial gift*

The gift of the Spirit himself was first given on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This “pouring out” fulfilled the promises of Jesus (John 7:37–39; 14:16–17; Acts 1:4). Joel foretold this event in Joel 2:28–32, and Peter affirmed its fulfillment in Acts 2:15–21. Peter told the multitude on that day, “This is that which Joel . . . prophesied.” Therefore, it seems clear that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the once-for-all-time pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost.

B. *The gift to every believer*

Since the initial pouring out, the Spirit is now available and is given as a gift (the Spirit himself) to all believers at their new birth into the family of God (Acts 2:38).

Acts 2:38 tells us that when we are baptized, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; this is a gift of the Spirit himself:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 5:32 tells us that he is given to those who obey God:

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

His work in us was explained in detail in the previous lesson: He lives in us, guarantees our salvation, guarantees our resurrection, makes intercession for us, affirms that we are God’s children, and works in our sanctification.

II. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit—Miraculous and Non-Miraculous

In addition to living in every individual Christian, the Spirit also gives special gifts to individuals. Some of these gifts were miraculous and were given only for specific purposes. Most were non-miraculous and are still available to us in God’s church today.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7–11)

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10–11a)

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6–8)

(See also Ephesians 4:7–16.)

Note that many of the gifts mentioned in the passages above were not miraculous. While these non-miraculous gifts may include the development of our natural talents, they are more than this. God gives extra, spiritual gifts to his children in accordance with the needs of each church.

The Spirit empowers us to develop these gifts to their full use. We must develop a sensitivity to our gifts and the gifts of others in order to encourage their growth and use. The gifts of the Spirit are many: hospitality, mercy, administration, ministering, serving, great faith, teaching, speaking, encouraging, exhortation, giving, wisdom, pastoring, and evangelizing. These gifts are the core and foundation of our Christian walk.

All gifts of the Spirit are for the common good of the body of Christ. Not to use them is detrimental to the church, and to misuse them is worse.

III. Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Peter 1:5–8)

The true measure of the Spirit's work in the Christian's life is the fruit of the Spirit, demonstrated in the control and growth of the inner person. The beauty of the Spirit's work is not in dazzling momentary miracles that attract and satisfy our curiosity. Rather, a Spirit-controlled, changed life, full of good fruit, reflects the real beauty of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit, growing in our lives, provides the power to face the storms and disasters of life—the power to stand at the grave site of a dear one and not despair, the power to minister to the dying and fallen, the power to live for Christ in a hostile world, the power to replace desperation with hope—this is the lasting work of the Spirit.

IV. Miracles and Their Purpose

What is a miracle? What one person considers a miracle, another may consider the working of God's providence. Sometimes the differences are merely a matter of semantics; other times the differences result from misunderstandings. Let's talk about what the Bible calls "wonders," "signs," and "miracles," and what their purposes were.

A. Biblical miracles

God has used miracles in his dealings with man throughout the Old and New Testaments. God used miracles when he delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, opened the Red Sea, fed the Israelites with manna, gave them water from a rock, felled the walls of Jericho, and on many other occasions.

The New Testament opens with the story of the miraculous conception of Jesus. Angels announced his birth to shepherds in the field, and wise men saw a special star that led them to him. His ministry was filled with miracles, and his resurrection was the apex of power. He left this earth defying the laws of gravity and will come back with a mighty display of power.

The miracles of Jesus were instantaneous, complete, and spectacular—blind men regained their sight; men lame from birth immediately walked; water turned to wine; even the dead received back their lives. The miracles of Jesus were so obvious that even his enemies could not deny their reality.

B. The purpose of Bible miracles

1. Miracles confirmed the word.

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mark 16:20)

Mark tells us that miracles were used to confirm the word of the apostles and the early Christians (Mark 16:20). The miracles authenticated their word; that is, they proved that these men were the true spokesmen of God—genuine, authoritative spokesmen.

2. Miracles confirmed who Jesus was.

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (Acts 2:22)

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

Peter tells us that God confirmed Jesus as the Messiah by his miracles. John affirms that the purpose of Jesus' miracles was to enable us to believe in him. Certainly, those who were healed received a blessing, but the primary purpose of biblical miracles was confirmation of the Messiah and the messengers.

3. Miracles helped “steady” the infant church.

Miracles served to guide the infant church while it matured (1 Corinthians 12:7–11).

Paul affirmed that special miraculous gifts were given to certain ones in the church for the common good of helping the infant church grow up. Thus God gave these special helps to “steady” the church during its infant state in a pagan culture (1 Corinthians 13:8–11).

4. Special miracles were for a temporary time period.

These special miracles were to end as the church grew out of its infant state.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (1 Corinthians 13:8–11)

Paul stated that these spectacular, supernatural gifts were temporary and would last for a period while the church was in its infantile state (1 Corinthians 12:27–31; 13:8–13). God expected his church to mature and to rely upon his confirmed word. In the passage above, Paul described the early church as being in a childhood state and thus in need of miraculous aid. He said that as the church matured, it should put away childish things and walk by faith, in love, as mature, adult Christians. Mature Christians walk by faith and not by sight.

To insist that miracles are needed today to confirm his word is to digress. Such an insistence shows a lack of trust and faith in what God has already confirmed and settled. Once God has confirmed his word, we do not need a constant reconfirmation. Faith accepts it, and we walk by faith. In 1 Corinthians 1:22–24, Paul points out two problems that always seem to face the church. First, men seek after signs (miracles). Second, men seek after wisdom. Both, Paul said, miss the mark. The answer lies in the message of the cross and our faith in that message.

V. Prayer and Healing

Within the context of the Holy Spirit, let us briefly look at prayer.

The fact that extraordinary, supernatural biblical miracles have ceased—dead men being raised, men walking on water, people crippled from birth leaping and walking instantly, people born blind instantly receiving their sight—does not mean that God does not still work in healing the sick and in answering our prayers. God’s power has not diminished; however, he may choose to use his power in different ways.

The Bible tells us to pray for the sick and to ask God for what we need. To deny God's healing power today would be anti-biblical and would show our lack of faith. All healing is divine healing. God is sovereign and still works in healing and in answering our prayers, but in ways we may not see or comprehend.

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. (James 5:14–15)

The new birth itself, in one sense, is a miracle through which God gives us new life. This is the real miracle all need. His coming again and the resurrection of the dead will be a miracle of miracles! God is not limited by man as to what he can do; whether he heals or not in no way diminishes or adds to his power. Ours is to ask, be obedient, and walk by faith. He knows what is best. To God be the glory in all his ways and blessings.

VI. Confusion about Miraculous Gifts

A. Spectacular claims generate confusion.

There are many people who make spectacular claims concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is no wonder that there is so much confusion about miraculous gifts.

B. Salvation is by faith—not works (miraculous or otherwise).

If we keep in mind that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works (I might add that we are not saved by *miraculous* works either), this will help us keep things in perspective.

C. Understanding the miraculous is not essential to salvation.

While we should strive to learn all we can, it is important to understand that our salvation does not rest on our ability to *understand* the miraculous aspect of the gifts of the Spirit. Not understanding everything about how God works in our world is not a sin, but claiming special miraculous power in order to deceive others and for personal gain is.

VII. Beyond the Miraculous

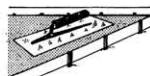
It is of special interest that God has often displayed miraculous power at times when great changes were initiated. When God was ready to give birth to our world, he did so with a mighty miracle; when he was ready to give birth to the nation of Israel, the people of the Messiah, he did so by the display of mighty signs and wonders; when God

was ready to give birth to the kingdom of Christ (the church), once again he did so with the demonstration of wonders, signs, and miracles; and when the final minute of the final hour has come, Jesus will burst the silence of the heavens with a shout of victory, and all the dead shall come forth—the miracles of miracles.

However, amidst all of these great events of the extraordinary, we are called to walk beyond the miraculous; we are called to walk by faith and not by dazzling miracles, after which the world often seeks. A quiet, peaceful, and godly character that brings honor and glory to our heavenly Father through daily efforts to serve and grow—this is what God has called us to. We are known as the people of God by our steadfast perseverance to grow in the inner qualities produced by the Spirit.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Peter 1:5–9)

Finishing the Foundation



The Holy Spirit is deity, God. His mission to our world in creation was to bring order out of the disorder of the formless earth. His mission to us today is to bring order out of the disorder of our lives, to make us a new creation, to set us apart to serve and glorify God.

In New Testament times, the Spirit worked in special ways to mature the church in its infant state. Special miraculous gifts were given to the apostles and other Christians to stabilize the church and to confirm that the message they preached was authentic.

In time, God wanted the infant church to grow up and mature. Now our walk of faith rests in Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith,” as he is revealed through his inspired, confirmed Word. Additional wonders are no longer necessary.

In every field of endeavor there are charlatans and fakes. This was true both in Old Testament times and New Testament times. Where the genuine exists, the possibility of the fake also exists; false Christs still appear on the scene after two thousand years.

We are told to try the spirits of men who claim special powers and insight to God’s workings (1 John 4:1). The area of biblical miracles is fertile ground for those bent toward greed and deceit. Miracle workers are alive and well in our time. Begging for money in the name of God is big business.

In reality, such people are not God’s spokesmen, but their own. These modern-day miracle workers have their bags full of all sorts of tricks, and they deceive innocent, God-loving folks into believing in their “special powers.” The ultimate price for many is a loss of faith in God because the promised miracle is short lived, not to mention the loss of their money.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?
(Matthew 7:15–16)

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.
(2 Corinthians 11:14–15)

Even in biblical times it was easy to get attached to the miracle instead of the miracle maker (Acts 14:8–11). Our Christian walk must always be focused on Jesus. It is easy to become distracted by strange phenomena, such as bleeding hands, the face of Jesus on the knot of a tree, fake resurrections, and the like.

A faith based upon a constant display of miracles always leads to a demand for bigger and still more miracles. The Jews of Jesus' day saw dead men raised, but they disbelieved. Such was exactly the problem that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1:22–23:

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

Even King Herod asked Jesus to perform a miracle for him (Luke 23:8). If our faith is based on miracles, we may lose sight of the real beauty of Christianity—the transformation of the human heart. Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19) and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives—these are the real evidences of his power.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22–23a)

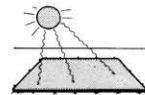
The world is always ready to flock to displays of dazzling wonders and signs, but it is unwilling to repent, to pay the price of a changed life, and to walk the more difficult road of faith. Faith is the test, not sight.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

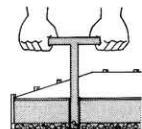
We live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Faith does not demand of God a continuous line of miracles but relies upon the written Word through which his Spirit instructs. As an assurance to Christians, the Spirit indwells us. Like a down payment on our future, he is a seal that guarantees God's promised redemption of our bodies.

Firming the Foundation



And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)



Testing the Foundation

1. Explain the difference between the gift of the Holy Spirit and gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

2. On what occasion was the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, given to mankind?

3. What three things did Paul say would always abide in our Christian walk, and which is the greatest of the three?

4. How were biblical miracles different from many proclaimed “miracles” today?

5. Explain the purpose of miracles in New Testament times.

6. Does God answer our prayers and also heal the sick today?

7. Name some of the fruit of the Spirit in a Christian’s life.

Lesson 15

Law and Grace

Surveying the Site



When Adam and Eve were denied access to the Garden of Eden because of their sins, they also found themselves cut off from their close relationship with God. Since that day, man has struggled to find his way out of the dilemma of sin and its consequences.

The bad news is that however hard man tries, he cannot save himself from sin's deadly bite. The good news is that God did not abandon the human race, but immediately announced that he would provide a way whereby man could be reunited with God.

Eventually, God provided Israel with a written set of laws and regulations to teach them what God expected of them. However, as we will learn, mere law could not bring man back into a good relationship with God. The problem was not with law, but with man. We are lawbreakers (criminals); there is no way for the human race to become righteous under a law system. Some other way would have to be made available, or else man would be forever under the penalty of death.

The first glimmer of hope is found in Genesis 3:15, when God cursed Satan for tempting Eve. God predicted that the offspring of the woman would defeat Satan:

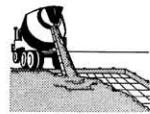
And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

The promise was stated again in Genesis 12:3, as God said to Abraham,

. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

All through the Old Testament, the prophets focused on this promise, and hope was kept alive in the hearts of mankind. The angels were mystified as to what God was up to, and the Old Testament prophets had little understanding of their own prophecies (1 Peter 1:10–12). But finally, the wonderful mystery that dumbfounded even Satan has been made known to us in the church.

Laying the Foundation



I. A Look at Universal Condemnation

Before we can understand grace, we must understand law and how it works. Our first awareness must be that we are all lawbreakers, criminals. We have violated, or broken, God's laws. As a result, we are lost and stand before God without excuse.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. . . . Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

(Romans 1:18; 3:20)

Romans 1:18–3:20 plainly tells us that all of mankind falls under condemnation. None of us has an excuse as we stand before him.

A. *The pagan is without excuse (Romans 1:18–32).*

Even those who have no formal teaching about God and his law are without excuse, for the evidence of creation reveals God to them.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

B. *The “moral” Gentile is without excuse (Romans 2:1–16).*

The Gentiles did not live under the Law of Moses, yet it was evident that they knew right from wrong. Their own knowledge, apart from the law, judged them.

All who sin apart from the law [the law given at Sinai] will also perish apart from the law. . . . Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

(Romans 2:12a, 14–15)

C. The Jew is without excuse (*Romans 2:17–3:8*).

Even the Jews, God's chosen people, stood guilty before God. Their knowledge of the law did not grant them pardon from the law. On the contrary, it made them accountable to that law.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (*Romans 3:19–20*)

When Paul gets through, it is evident that we all stand before God without excuse. We are all in need of a Savior.

II. Two Systems

When we stand before God, we stand before him under one of two systems: a law of works or a system of faith. It is our choice.

A. The law of works

1. Law of works defined

The law of works is a binding code of regulations which dispenses only justice and wherein one violation condemns (*Romans 6:23*). This system makes no provision for violations. The only options are to live perfectly or pay the penalty.

2. Impossible to keep

If we could obey the whole law perfectly, we would have nothing to worry about. But Scripture tells us that this just can't be done.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (*James 2:10*)

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law. (*Galatians 3:10–11*)

For the wages of sin is death. (*Romans 6:23a*)

Mankind obviously cannot be saved by a law of works. He cannot earn his salvation. Sin touches us all and holds us by its infectious power. Trying to live in our sin-infested world while remaining unaffected might be compared to living in a prison camp filled with every deadly disease known and coming out in good health. Neither are likely, and the former is impossible.

3. God is a just God.

God's very nature demands that he mete out punishment where punishment is due. We sometimes have a hard time understanding how a good and loving God can condemn a person. But Romans 1–3 amply shows that all men stand before God deserving punishment. The pagan is guilty because he ignores the evidence of God in creation and chooses not to glorify him, the "moral" man because he violates his own conscience, and the Jew, who took great pride in having God's law, because he failed to obey that law.

God has always rendered judgment on those who do wrong. Long before the cross of Jesus or the written Law given at Sinai, God punished wrongdoers. Cain was condemned because he killed his brother Abel, the people of Noah's day were punished for their wickedness, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their sin.

God can justly judge us on what we do know. We cannot plead ignorance. We fail by our own admission and standards. Every time we say, "He shouldn't have done that" or "That was wrong," we show that we do know right from wrong, and we condemn ourselves.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

(Romans 2:1–2)

The law of works and the justice of God seem to leave us in a helpless state.

B. The system of faith

The law of works leaves us condemned and without hope. But God, in his mercy, has given us another choice. We can choose to live under the system of faith.

1. System of faith defined

The system of faith does not negate God's moral law and holy precepts, but rather gives them a deeper meaning. Under the faith system, provision is made for violations: The penalty is paid by someone else—Jesus. Keeping God's laws proceeds from a heart of love, not a legalistic punch list.

2. *Faith counted as righteousness*

Under the system of faith, our faith is actually counted as righteousness.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

(Romans 3:21–22)

Even before Calvary, faith was counted as righteousness.

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

(Romans 4:3b)

God has always saved man on the basis of his faith. Habakkuk the prophet said, “The righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). The system of faith offers us salvation by grace through faith. God’s grace and our faith in Jesus as our sin offering work together under the system of faith.

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)

Salvation is a closed system; that is, it begins in faith and it ends in faith. This is very different than a works-oriented system.

3. *Jesus satisfied the justice of God.*

A just God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Yet God loves us and wants us to be with him. What is the answer to this dilemma? How can God reconcile us to himself and forgive us and at the same time maintain his holiness, which requires that he punish law-breakers? God does this by allowing Jesus to pay the price for our sin.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6–8)

Christ died for us. His death paid for the punishment we deserved.

We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

Jesus' death satisfied God's justice.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:25–26)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus was able to satisfy God's justice because he was sinless. No one else could have done it. He became sin for us so that we could be declared righteous. By allowing Jesus to pay our debt, God remains just. His law is upheld, his honor is upheld, and sin is punished. Jesus is the answer to our dilemma. Justice is met, and grace is bestowed.

4. We stand justified before God.

God presented him as a sacrifice for atonement. . . . so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:25–26)

This says that God is just and that he “justifies those who has faith in Jesus.” *Justify* means to “judge, regard, or treat as righteous” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). God can view us as justified because Jesus paid our penalty.

III. The Mystery Revealed in Jesus

A. Angels and prophets longed to know the mystery.

All through the Old Testament, God threw out tantalizing clues about a coming kingdom, a coming savior, and a coming peace. Even the angels desired to know what the mystery was, and the prophets searched diligently to understand it.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. . . . Even angels long to look into these things.

(1 Peter 1:10–12)

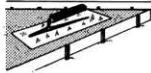
B. Even Satan must have been dumbfounded.

Satan knew that justice demanded that all of mankind be sentenced to condemnation. Satan could have asked God how he could overlook David's sin of murder and adultery and still be just. God's own laws strictly forbade such! Satan could have said, "King David belongs to me; he is a big-time sinner." But God's response would have been, "Wait and see; I have a plan." From the time that Adam and Eve broke fellowship with God in the garden, God had been planning to reconcile man to himself.

C. The mystery was made known through the church.

This grace was given me . . . to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:8–11)

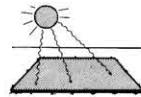
Finishing the Foundation



Paul, in the book of Romans, relays a discouraging message: All of mankind is guilty before God, and all are deserving of death! Before Paul could proclaim the Good News of Jesus, he had to spell out man's sinful condition and desperate need. He concludes in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Based upon this universal truth, Paul unfolds a new system of grace that will replace the old system of law. The old system, the law of works, is based on performance and is impossible to keep. It demands perfection before a just God. The new system, ushered in by Jesus, is based on faith in a perfect sacrifice. Jesus satisfied the justice of God by offering himself as payment for our sins.

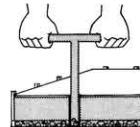
The mystery that had been hidden so long has been made known to us in the church! What prophets and angels longed to know but could not, we have been blessed to know and to be a part of (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:3–5; 1 Peter 1:18–20). Knowing this should inspire us to serve him all the more. And now we are to make the mystery known to all men.

Firming the Foundation



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

The spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:17)



Testing the Foundation

1. Does man have within himself some standard of right and wrong?

2. What extra responsibility did the Jews' knowledge of the law give them?

3. Define "law of works."

4. Why does the law of works fail to meet man's needs?

5. What are the wages of sin?

6. Define "the system of faith."

7. How does God maintain his holiness and forgive man for violating his laws at the same time?

8. Why is Jesus able to satisfy God's justice?

9. To whom did God first reveal the mystery of salvation—angels, Satan, or the church?

10. Under which system do you choose to live?

Lesson 16

Law's Design and Grace's Fulfillment

Surveying the Site

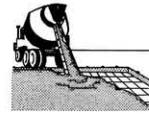


During the long centuries of the Old Testament, God gave laws, both moral and ceremonial, to man. These laws were for man's own welfare, for his relationship with his neighbor, and for his relationship with his creator. But the law itself quickly proved to be inadequate because of man's inability to keep it. The law prepared us for the coming Messiah and for the marvelous system of faith that he would bring. Jesus ushered in a totally new covenant.

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."
(Jeremiah 31:31)

This new covenant was a vast improvement over the old one. It was the difference between life and death—literally.

Laying the Foundation



I. The Purpose of the Law

A. To make mankind aware of sin

Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” (Romans 7:7b)

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. (Galatians 3:19)

The law makes clear what is right and wrong. It works like a mirror: It reflects our imperfections. Before we can be aware of our need for a savior, we must become conscious of our desperate, sinful condition. This is exactly what the law was designed to do.

B. To demonstrate that law cannot save

The Jews had lived under law for fifteen hundred years, and during that time it was evident that the law could not save them. Something more was needed.

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. (Romans 8:3a)

C. To lead the Jews to Christ

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (Galatians 3:23–25)

The inadequacy of the law demonstrates our need for a savior. The law of works could not offer freedom from our sins—to the contrary, we were prisoners of the law. So we see that another purpose of the law was to lead us to Christ. When Jesus came, he took us out from under the law system and brought us into the system of grace.

II. The Inadequacy of the Old System

A. The inadequacy of the old law—the law of works

The law served an important purpose. In Romans, Paul tells us:

The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. . . . But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. (Romans 7:12–13)

As good as the law was, it was not good enough.

For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. (Hebrews 8:7)

B. The inadequacy of the sacrificial system

An important part of the Old Testament law was the sacrificial system. Sacrifices were offered on a regular basis and also for specific sins. But these sacrifices only satisfied the requirements of the Mosaic Law; they did not satisfy the justice of God. Only Jesus could do that. This system fell short in that it could not forgive sins.

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1–4)

C. The inadequacy of the priesthood

Under the old law, the priests served as mediators between God and man. They were the ones who offered the sacrifices.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come. (Hebrews 7:11a)

The old system—the law of works, the sacrificial system, and the priesthood—is shown to be totally inadequate. God intended for it to be temporary. He had a better plan, and when the time was right, he revealed it through his Son.

III. The New System—More Than Adequate

God's plan to save mankind is brought forth in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These three events are the climax of all history.

A. A better way—the system of faith

Paul compares the old and new covenant in the passage below and shows that the new is far superior.

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. (2 Corinthians 3:7–10)

Under the new covenant, Jesus bridges the gap between God and man (reconciliation). The fact that the old law was inadequate did not mean that it was not good. Paul said:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. . . . Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:28,31)

The law was inadequate in that it demanded perfection. The system of faith allows Jesus to be our perfection.

1. Jesus' death put the system of faith into effect.

Jesus' death on the cross simultaneously made the old system of works ineffective and activated the new system of faith.

In Colossians 2:13–14, Paul writes of God:

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

The Hebrews writer tells us that the new covenant, like a will, is activated by someone's death.

A will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. (Hebrews 9:17)

2. Even those saved in Old Testament times were saved by faith.

The verse that best explains how God forgave sin under the old covenant, and even before the Law at Sinai, is found in Hebrews 9:15:

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The death of Jesus even paid for the sins of those under the old covenant. Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, and all those who were counted righteous before Jesus—they were counted thus because of their faith, not because of their works.

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6–9)

David, who lived under the old system, understood that righteousness comes apart from works.

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” (Romans 4:6–8)

B. A better sacrifice

The sacrifice of Jesus was totally adequate. In fact, no other sacrifice could have satisfied God's justice. Because Jesus was perfect and without sin, he alone could pay the debt of sinful men and women.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come? (Hebrews 7:11)

The old sacrificial system was inadequate. The sacrifices had to be offered over and over again. And the blood offered was merely of goats and calves. Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, shines in total contrast to the inadequate sacrifices of old.

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:12–14)

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (1 Peter 1:18–20)

Jesus' death satisfied God's penalty for sin, both pre-Calvary and post-Calvary. We look back to the cross, understanding its meaning and walking in faith, and God calls us righteous. They looked forward, never comprehending the reality of the cross but walking in faith, and God counted them righteous in view of the coming sacrifice on Calvary.

C. A better priest

In addition to being our sacrifice, Jesus is also our priest. And because he is sinless and because he lives forever, his priesthood is far superior to that of old.

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:26–28)

Jesus continually serves as our high priest as he sits on his throne in heaven.

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. (Hebrews 8:1–2)

This perfect sacrifice pleased God, and his wrath for sin was satisfied in the perfect sacrifice. God's legal system of punishment for sin is upheld. God keeps his integrity and at the same time extends his love and mercy to those who come to him.

Finishing the Foundation

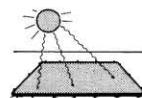


Even though the old system was inadequate, it was part of God's plan for the time it was in effect. It served three very important purposes: It made the Jews aware of sin, it demonstrated that the law was inadequate, and it prepared the Jews to understand the sacrifice of Jesus.

The old covenant was intended to be temporary. It taught important lessons about sin and sacrifice, but it offered no forgiveness of sin because the sacrifices were inadequate. The law also offered priests to the people—intercessors between God and man, someone to present their sacrifices and plead for God's mercy. But these priests were inadequate because they, too, had sin in their lives. They, too, needed sacrifices offered on their own behalf. They, too, were mere mortals. They died and new priests took their places. However, the priesthood of Christ is more than adequate. Jesus is without sin. He needs no sacrifices on his behalf. And since he lives forever, he is totally sufficient.

Praise be to God for the new system of faith and hope, and praise be to Jesus for becoming our all and all!

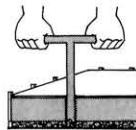
Firming the Foundation



But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

(Romans 3:21–23)

Testing the Foundation



1. What was the purpose of the Law given at Sinai?

2. How did the old sacrificial system fall short?

3. Are God's laws good and right?

4. In what way was the old law inadequate?

5. At what point in time was the new covenant activated?

6. How were Old Testament people saved?

7. Why was Jesus the only sacrifice that could satisfy God's justice?

8. What was inadequate about the old priesthood?

Lesson 17

Living under Grace

Surveying the Site



The new system of grace was so different from what the Jewish people were accustomed to that many had a hard time accepting God's grace. Even today we have difficulty understanding the two systems.

We are programmed from childhood to believe that reward comes only by work. Such a philosophy has merit; however, when it comes to salvation from sin, it is far from the truth. We cannot "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps." Salvation by grace may seem too good to be true, but thanks be to God it is true.

Jesus explained to John's disciples how different his teachings were.

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. (Matthew 9:16)

The kingdom that Jesus established was not patched on the Old Testament covenant. It was totally new. Jesus' teaching, no doubt, amazed and shocked the religious minds of his day. They could not believe that their centuries-old Jewish covenant was outside his new kingdom. They prided themselves on being Abraham's seed and the chosen race. But Jesus dared say that their relationship with God could no longer be based on their heritage.

And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. (Luke 3:8)

God had a plan for reconciling the Jews and all mankind to himself, but the cost was staggering—grace was purchased by the blood of God’s own Son. The grace of God, offered through the system of faith, frees us from the unbearable load of trying to keep every law perfectly. Our gratitude should be reflected in our songs, speech, life, wealth, and everything we do! This free gift motivates us to a life of service to him.

“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”
(Jeremiah 31:31)

Paul spent much time teaching the Jews the new way. And with the new way came a new language of special words. Words like *justification, sanctification, atonement, reconciliation, propitiation, righteousness, and redemption* fill the pages of the New Testament as Paul and others inscribe God’s message of a new hope for every nation, Jew and Gentile.

Laying the Foundation



I. The New System Is Not Faith Plus Works.

A. Jewish Christians found grace hard to accept.

To the Jewish Christian, salvation by grace seemed “too good to be true.” But Paul, in Ephesians 2:8–9, trumpets that salvation is by grace through faith and not by a law of works. In fact, the major thrust of the books of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians is this very message.

Paul’s biggest battles were with those who would attach works to grace for justification, saying, “Grace plus works equals salvation.” No! says Paul.

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

A segment of the early Jewish Christians (influenced by the Pharisees) insisted that in order to be justified, one must keep the Law of Moses and certain ceremonial laws such as circumcision. Paul preached that if just one work was added to grace to attain justification, then salvation was no longer by grace, but by works. Thus he stood “foursquare” against such a gospel. He stated that if there were any other gospel, then it was not from God, but from men. To accept such was to fall from grace.

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

Legalism is a deadly trap that makes grace void. According to Webster, legalism is “a strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law.” For the Jews, and for many today, legalism is more than *conformity* to law; it is *reliance* upon keeping the law as a means of salvation. To keep God’s laws is good. The fruit of the spirit are good works, and we glorify God when we keep his laws, but to *rely* on our performance of law as a way to merit salvation voids the grace of God. Legalism exalts our law keeping instead of him who enables us to be law keepers.

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

B. Justification is by grace through faith—100 percent.

Although grace does not eliminate obedience and good works or even being a good law keeper, justification is by grace. If salvation is in any way earned, then how would we ever know if we had done enough? Is it 75 percent God and 25 percent man, 90 percent God and 10 percent man, or how about 99 percent man and 1 percent God? Do you see the trap we would all be in? Our salvation is dependent upon God.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

(Ephesians 2:8–9)

II. The New Covenant Has a New Language.

A study of the new covenant introduces us to several new and meaningful words. Words such as *grace, justification, sanctification, atonement, reconciliation, propitiation, righteousness, and redemption* offer the Christian hope and joy and assurance. Understanding what these words mean adds new dimensions to our faith.

A. Grace

Grace is defined as “God’s unmerited favor”—a favor bestowed on us of which we are totally undeserving. Grace is given freely without any meritorious work on our part.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

(Romans 3:23–24)

The preceding verse says that we have all sinned. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. So even though we deserve death, we are given the righteousness of Christ!

B. Justification

An easy way to remember the idea conveyed by this word is the phrase “just as if I’d never sinned.” God offers us the ability to stand before him in a sinless state—as if we had never sinned. We can stand justified before God because Jesus paid our penalty.

The words “it was credited to him[Abraham]” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

(Romans 4:23–25)

There is an important difference between the word *pardon* and the word *justified*. *Pardon* is a term used when someone is allowed to go free after he has been proven guilty of a crime. A criminal receiving a pardon is surely blessed, but the fact will always remain that he is a convicted criminal even though *pardoned* is now stamped on his record. But the unthinkable has happened in the Christian's case. He is just as guilty as the criminal who received the pardon, but at the "trial" when the law demands a verdict of guilty, the judge interrupts and says "justified." My record has no guilty stamp and needs no court-ordered pardon. It is "just as if I'd never sinned."

C. Sanctification

To sanctify means to "set apart to a sacred purpose; to make productive of holiness." As Christians, we are set apart for God's purposes, and he calls upon us to live a life of holiness.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. (Hebrews 13:12 RSV)

D. Atonement

Even Webster defines this word as the Bible uses it: "the reconciliation of God and man through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ." The phrase "at one-ment" might help you remember this meaning. We are now "at one" with God. Atonement means reconciliation, to be restored to a relationship that was lost.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

E. Propitiation

Propitiation is something that gains or regains the favor or goodwill of another. Jesus is our propitiation. His death brought us back into favor with God. His death satisfied God's justice.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. (Romans 3:25 KJV)

F. Righteousness

Righteousness basically means being right. Webster's says "being free from guilt or sin; morally right or justifiable." But we have already learned that we are anything but

righteous! However, the amazing grace of God allows us to stand before him as righteous people.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.
(Romans 3:21–22)

G. Redemption

To redeem means “to buy back, repurchase; to free from captivity by payment of ransom.” How blessed we are that Jesus did this for us. He bought us back from Satan, who owned us because of our sin. Jesus’ death paid our ransom and set us free from Satan’s captivity.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13–14)

When we understand this marvelous new language, we are motivated to live for God.

III. Grace Motivates Us to a New Life.

A. Shall we sin that grace may abound?

When Paul taught the Jews that salvation was by grace and not works, they asked an obvious question—one that we might ask too. Notice their question and Paul’s answer:

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)

We see that Paul’s answer was emphatic! He then went on to explain that our baptism into Christ brings us into a new life.

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. (Romans 6:3–5)

We also see in the above verse that our baptism is a reenactment of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Through faith and repentance, we die to sin and are baptized into Christ's death. We are then raised to walk a new life.

Grace is not license to commit sin and violate God's laws. God's moral laws have been in effect from the beginning of time. What has changed is that justification is now possible through faith. Under the law, justification was impossible. But now Jesus has paid the debt, once for all time, for those who come unto him. The law demanded death, and Jesus satisfied that demand!

B. Our response to God's amazing gift

Paul was so touched by God's gift that he penned these beautiful words:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

(Romans 11:33)

When we realize the cost that God paid for our forgiveness of sins, we will be motivated to serve him. What did our forgiveness cost? It cost the life of the Son of God on Calvary. Sin is not taken lightly by God! Our response to God's love and grace must be a desire to please him above all else. When we get this attitude right, our lives will change.

As Christians we honor God by striving to keep his righteous law through the royal commandment of love (Romans 3:31). With the load of sin lifted from our lives, our hearts are able to catch a glimpse of divine love (agape). Love is a better motivator than fear. We now respond as law keepers to glorify God rather than to justify ourselves.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Under grace we soar to new heights, honoring our God. "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18b).

Finishing the Foundation



The Jewish Christians had a hard time accepting that justification was by grace through faith and that works did not save them. They often fell into the trap of legalism—one that we can fall into today. But Paul assured them that grace was a free gift, totally beyond their ability to earn. Through this gift of grace we can be assured of our salvation.

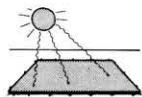
Lest someone conclude that we are free to sin so that grace may abound (as Paul was accused of teaching), let me hasten to say with Paul, “God forbid!” God has always required that man abide by his moral laws. From the time of creation to the patriarchs, he communicated his laws orally. Then, at Mount Sinai he presented his law to Israel in written form. The cross did not nullify or remove God’s moral law. Rather, it released us from the penalty (death) that results from our inability to keep the law perfectly. Under the law of works, man is still judged by God’s moral law, which brings condemnation for all violators. But because of what was accomplished at Calvary, when we come to Jesus and place ourselves under his blood, we are no longer under the judgment of law. We are now under the system of faith—the system whereby we become righteous through Jesus by his merit, not our own. Justification by faith is the kernel of the new covenant, the gift of God through a new birth. And with this wonderful assurance of grace comes a whole new language of love—words like *justification, atonement, propitiation, and righteousness*.

This free gift of grace does not take away the need for a response to God’s grace in our obedience to his commandments; rather, it motivates us to godly living and service. Grace is now our motivating force.

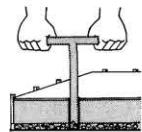
“What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Many songwriters have been inspired to write about the wonderful grace of Jesus. Our appeal to God has always been and always will be to that grace that was demonstrated at Calvary. This is the only appeal that saved sinners and unsaved sinners can make.

Jesus has paid my fine and accepted my guilt at Calvary. My, my, what love! Paul called it an “unspeakable gift.”

Firming the Foundation



Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27–28)



Testing the Foundation

1. What is legalism?

2. Is salvation 100 percent grace, 90 percent, 99 percent? Explain.

3. Define grace.

4. Define justification.

5. How costly is sin in God's sight?

6. What is an easy way to remember what atonement means?

7. Who is our propitiation?

8. Where do we get our righteousness?

9. Which is a greater motivation to live for God: love (grace) or fear (legalistic law keeping)? Why?

Lesson 18

The Feast

Surveying the Site



It was the evening of the Passover Feast, and Jesus would observe this special night with his chosen twelve (Matthew 26:20–30).

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.
(Luke 22:15b)

Jesus knew his “hour” had come; his disciples did not. They had been with Jesus for about three and a half years and had visions of glory through a conquering Messiah. They had witnessed his mighty miracles and knew he was the one who was to come, the one who would deliver Israel from her enemies and reestablish the throne of David. This they knew, but a suffering Messiah who would die and abandon them to Romans and unbelieving Jews was not part of their vision. Never would Jesus surrender to death—he was the Messiah! Even as they ate the supper, they jockeyed for positions of honor in his kingdom. Then the carpenter from Nazareth, the Son of God, took them all by surprise: He took a towel, got down on his knees, and washed his disciples’ feet—the task of a servant (John 13:2–9).

The time had come for him to die.

Judas, the betrayer, slipped out into the dark to do his dark deed. Judas would sell his master’s life for the price of a slave, thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus instituted a lasting memorial to remind us all of the price he would pay for our redemption. The cost? His life!

Laying the Foundation



I. The Origin of the Supper

A. The Passover scene (*Exodus 12:1–13*)

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first-born—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. (Exodus 12:12–13)

The lamb was slain, and the blood was placed on every Hebrew door mantel throughout the land of Goshen. That night the death angel visited each home in Egypt and destroyed the firstborn son of every family. Only the Hebrews who had the lamb's blood on their doors were spared. This event has become known as the "night of the passover."

Centuries later, thirteen men met in an upper room to celebrate this memorial event, the Passover Feast. This special supper, attended by those thirteen men, has been remembered for generations as the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. This is now a lasting memorial of the Christian Passover.

B. Our Passover Lamb is Christ.

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
(1 Corinthians 5:7)

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26–28)

From this supper, Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray and wait. Judas, the betrayer, brought soldiers and Jewish officials to arrest him. Then they led him to a mock trial. The events of the evening moved quickly, and the Jewish instigators thought they were having their way when the sentence was death by crucifixion. Little did

they know that God was in total control and that in three short days Jesus would rise from the dead having become our Passover Lamb.

Our Passover Lamb conquered death and rose from the dead. He could not be held by death! When his blood is applied to our hearts, Satan—the “angel of death”—no longer has any hold on us, and he must pass over us like the angel of death passed over the Hebrew homes. The blood of Jesus brings freedom from slavery and bondage to every Christian.

Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, on the Day of Pentecost, the church was born. From that day forward, this supper, this memorial feast, has been celebrated and proclaimed around the world and will continue until he comes again!

II. Different Names for the Supper

What we commonly refer to as the Lord’s Supper is called by additional terms in the New Testament.

A. “*The Lord’s table*”

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.

(1 Corinthians 10:21)

You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, “How have we defiled you?” By saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible. (Malachi 1:7)

The picture in Malachi goes back to the Old Testament imagery of sacrificial offerings in the temple.

B. “*The Lord’s Supper*”

When you come together it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. . . . For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:20–25)

Some at Corinth were not being respectful at the time of the supper; therefore, Paul restates the meaning of the event. The Greek word for *supper* in the above passage is

deipnon; it means main meal. The whole assembly of the New Testament church was focused around the observance of the Supper.

C. “*The breaking of bread*”

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

“The breaking of bread” is an endearing term that has been used for thousands of years. It implied an intimate time of sharing among friends. This term is also used in Acts 2:42. Jesus “broke bread” on many occasions. How fitting that the term was applied to the Lord’s Supper—the time when God’s family gathers at the table.

III. Different Aspects of the Lord’s Supper

A. *A memorial feast*

This feast is a memorial of Calvary—a memorial without relics, pictures, or monuments. The memorial is a simple one—not a building in Jerusalem, not a piece of the cross or of his graveclothes. God did not provide a marble or gold monument, but simple elements from the earth that fittingly represent his body and blood. God doesn’t want us to get caught up in fancy memorials, lest we forget what price he paid for our sins. The elements of the Supper are available in any part of the world.

B. *A communion (or participation together)*

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Communion comes from the Greek word *kōnōnia*, meaning fellowship or joint participation. We participate with Christ and with the body of believers when we partake of these emblems.

C. *A covenant feast*

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. When this special supper is called a *covenant*, it brings to our attention that Jesus has given us a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31, Hebrews 8:6–13). The covenant that God made with Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus. By his blood he has sealed the new covenant wherein we find forgiveness of sin.

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

D. A proclamation feast

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

The Greek word for *proclaim* is *kataggelo*, meaning “to tell thoroughly” (Acts 4:2). The Supper tells the core of the Gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection. It is a proclamation of our faith, his coming, the family, the kingdom, his love, and the power of the Gospel. Each time we partake of the Supper, we are saying that we believe the Gospel Story.

IV. Manner of Partaking

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:27–28)

Of course, we are not perfect, but we do need to regularly reflect on our lives and relationships with others in the body (the church). The emphasis here is that it is inconsistent to partake of the Supper and at the same time be in disunity with fellow Christians. You cannot love Christ and hate or do wrong to a sister or brother. In Matthew 5:23–25, Jesus tells us to make things right with those we are in conflict with before we present an offering at the altar.

V. Why Observe the Lord's Supper on Sunday?

There is no specific verse that commands that the Lord's Supper be observed on a certain day. However, the abundance of evidence and examples for the first day is overwhelming. While examples may not always be binding, they do show us ways God's purposes are carried out and confirm the acceptability of a given practice.

A. Because of first-day events

1. The Resurrection

Jesus was raised on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–9).

2. Post-resurrection appearances

Most recorded post-resurrection appearances occurred on the first day of the week (to Mary—Mark 16:9–11; to the women—Matthew 28:1–10; to two men on the road to Emmaus—Luke 24:13–35; to the disciples without Thomas—John 20:19–20; to the disciples with Thomas—John 20:24–31).

3. The Holy Spirit poured out

The promised Holy Spirit was poured out on the first day of the week (Acts 2).

4. The beginning of the church

The birthday of the church and the new covenant, which had been prophesied for centuries, occurred on the first day of the week (Acts 2).

5. Pentecost day

God chose the day of Pentecost to present the first gospel message. Pentecost always occurred on the first day of the week. Pentecost was a celebration of the first fruits of harvest—a fitting day for the first fruits of the kingdom family, the church. Three thousand were baptized on that first day.

6. Troas church meeting

We find the church meeting at Troas on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

7. Corinth church meeting

The church at Corinth met on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 11; 16). It is specified that the purpose of the assembly in 1 Corinthians 11 was the Lord’s Supper. In 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, the Corinthians are told to use the first day as a collection time for their donations. This was the natural, convenient time since they were already meeting together. The point is that under apostolic authority the church was assembling for the Supper on the first day of the week. This was an opportune time to collect contributions, but the purpose of the assembly was to celebrate the Supper. Paul affirmed that he had followed a consistent pattern in setting things in order in all the churches (1 Corinthians 4:17).

8. “The Lord’s Day” in Revelation

No doubt, John used the phrase “the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10) because the first day of the week was the day on which our Lord conquered death and the day on which the Gospel was first proclaimed.

No other day of the week holds such a preponderance of events relative to Christianity.

B. Because of its historical significance

No other day lends any meaning to the memorial feast. Only the first day has any special relationship to this feast that proclaims our resurrected Lord. To miss the historical significance of the first day would rob us of much of the beauty and emotional value of this memorial feast.

The compelling motivation for the celebration is not a legalistic law; rather, the motivation stems from love and the meaning of the celebration. The first day has special significance because of the events that surround the birth of Christianity.

There is also a considerable amount of testimony outside the Bible affirming that it was the custom of Christianity in the early centuries to meet together on the day called *Sunday* to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

C. To preserve the meaning of the celebration

Certain days under the Old Testament covenant were observed because of their special meaning—the Passover, Pentecost, the Jubilee year.

We Americans celebrate New Year's Day on January first. The celebration would be shallow and lacking if we celebrated it on January 10. We attach significance to birthdays and anniversaries and other special days. Surely the most blessed memorial event of history would have a fitting and meaningful day for its celebration.

Do this in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19b)

This is the command. I believe the examples and events surrounding the observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day provide sufficient reason for us to celebrate it in like manner.

Finishing the Foundation



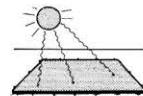
The Supper was the center stage of Christian assemblies in New Testament churches. There is no greater drawing power than this event of celebration on every Lord's Day. This feast, rich with symbolism, reminds us of our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. Thus it has both horizontal and vertical implications—horizontal between brethren and vertical between ourselves and God. It reminds us of our relationship with God and the high price that was paid for our salvation: This is the vertical aspect of the Supper. It also reminds us of our relationship to one another in the body of Christ: This is the horizontal aspect of the Supper. The symbol of the cross reminds us of these two relationships.

The Supper is a time of communion, joint fellowship, and self-examination. It is a living testimony to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a reminder of the new covenant sealed by his blood. What a simple yet beautiful memorial to the cost of our salvation.

But in many churches today it has lost much of its original meaning. Too many times it is only a formality. In some churches it is seldom observed. Many of the participants do not relate to its beautiful meaning.

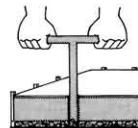
“Do this in remembrance of me” and “until I come” were among his last words. He gave his all, body and blood, so that you and I could live. May we remember that sacrifice, our Passover, and discern the body, his church, until he comes.

Firming the Foundation



*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.
(Matthew 26:28–29)*

Testing the Foundation



1. What do the Old Testament Passover Feast and the Lord's Supper have in common?

2. List the different things this feast is called.

3. Why is it a memorial feast?

4. Name at least five things we proclaim when we participate in the Supper.

5. What day of the week did the New Testament church observe the Supper?
Why that day?

6. Why do you suppose Jesus chose such a simple way to remember him?

7. How do you suppose Jesus feels when part of his family is willfully absent from his Supper?

8. Why is self-examination so important as we participate in the Supper?

9. Why is the Supper called a "covenant feast"?

Lesson 19

Stewardship

Surveying the Site



Many of Jesus' parables are about money and management. There are hundreds of references to money in the Bible. Some scholars say there are as many as three thousand indirect references. God knew that money, or wealth, can be very dangerous. It can either be a blessing for humanity or a curse. For these reasons, God gave instructions to help us handle our money and possessions.

Whether or not you correctly handle your wealth is largely determined by your attitude toward it. Remember, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)—not money itself. Money used or sought after for evil purposes has been the root cause of hundreds of wars, murders, and family feuds, and has led to the breaking of every commandment. God teaches us principles of ownership and management so we can know how to handle wealth.

Ownership of money and possessions is actually a management relationship. Your understanding of this relationship will largely determine your success or failure in money management. If we don't understand this principle, in the final analysis we will not be good stewards, and we will not reach our total financial capabilities in a responsible way. Understanding this concept will change your life and your concept of wealth.

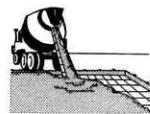
Try this exercise. If you own a piece of land, go down to your local courthouse and trace the title. Your lawyer did this when you bought the property. It's called a title search. You'll soon discover that someone else owned it before you, and someone before that person, and someone else before them—on back to the time the Indians roamed free throughout the

land. You might ask, "Where did the Indians get it?" Well, it was just there, and someone came along and laid claim to it. In the final analysis, everything can be traced back to God, the creator. We're just titleholders, stewards, using and working and serving until time eventually comes to an end.

Therefore, we must conclude that God owns it all by reason of being the creator and the sustainer of heaven and earth and our very being. We are in a management relationship with him. He really owns it, but we are allowed to manage it. Since this is so, as good stewards (managers) of God's possessions, we must manage them well.

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.
(1 Corinthians 4:2 KJV)

Laying the Foundation



I. Stewardship

A. *The steward is a manager.*

The word *steward* means the arranger or manager of the affairs of another. A steward does not own the household; he manages it for the owner. He is entrusted with another's goods. First, let's establish who really owns all the things we think are ours.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. (Psalm 24:1 KJV)

*For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
(Psalm 50:10–11)*

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine. (Haggai 2:8 KJV)

Heaven and earth is yours. (1 Chronicles 29:11)

That's everything!

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. (Deuteronomy 8:17–18)

B. *The steward is accountable.*

As Christians, God has entrusted us with his goods (Matthew 25:14–30), and we are accountable to him for how we handle them.

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. . . . After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. (Matthew 25:14–15, 19)

We are blessed with the things we hold temporary title to. We are God's managers. But he will return and settle accounts with us later. In the parable of the talents, a man (God) called three of his servants to him. He was going on a journey, and before he left, he

entrusted money to each of them. He left them on their own, and when he returned, he checked their bank accounts. Two of the managers did a good job and returned a very good profit. They were commended for being wise and good. The one who failed the test had buried his money because he was afraid of the responsibility. The master was displeased with his inactivity and his excuses. He cast him out and gave what he had to the two stewards who had used their wealth in a responsible way.

It's amazing that God trusts us. He gives us the keys to his "store" and tells us to use what he has put into our hands to benefit ourselves and all of mankind. If we owned a store, we would certainly hesitate to turn it over to an inexperienced person or one who had been dishonest in the past. But God puts us on our honor and tells us to manage the store and to do a good job. However, we will have to give an account to God concerning what kind of a manager we have been.

C. The steward gives self.

The first thing that must be laid at the Master's feet is ourself.

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Corinthians 8:5)

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (Matthew 16:25)

If we want to find life, we must lose it. Psychologists say, "Understand yourself"; the world says, "Enjoy yourself"; Jesus says, "Give yourself."

II. The Sin of Covetousness (or Greed)

A. A serious sin

Covet means having a greedy spirit or selfishly hoarding to the neglect of others. It is a misuse of the blessings of God on temporary and selfish pleasures. It is probably the most frequently committed sin, yet the least recognized. The following verses show the sin to be deadly.

[The wicked man] boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord. (Psalm 10:3)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Ephesians 5:5)

B. The rich farmer (Luke 12:13–21)

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’”
(Luke 12:16–19)

Notice the pronouns—I, mine, my, I’ll. There are eleven personal pronouns in four short verses. This man was only thinking of himself and bigger barns when a hungry child or widow possibly lived nearby.

Covetousness actually steals good things from us. It steals God from our heart, discernment from our minds, service from others, contentment from our heart, security from our future, and Christ from our souls.

III. How Much to Give

A. Giving before the law

Before the Law of Moses was in effect, Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek, who was a priest and the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. (Hebrews 7:1–2a)

Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our priest and king after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). Thus Abraham gave a tenth to a priesthood that was higher than the priesthood under the Law of Moses. Can we expect to please our high priest, Jesus—who is greater than Melchizedek—by giving less.

B. Giving under the Old Testament law

Under the Old Testament, God demanded that the Jews give him one-tenth of all they had, plus extra gifts and many free-will offerings. They were even required to leave the

corners of their fields unharvested so that the poor would be provided for. So strict was God that if a person missed giving on the set day, he had to make it up with 20 percent interest (Leviticus 27:31). All of this was required under the Law of Moses—a system that did not provide the blessings that you and I have under Christ. When all the required gifts of the Jews are added up, we find that they gave over 30 percent.

C. Giving under the new covenant (New Testament)

As Christians, our decision to give is based upon love; however, let us not be led into thinking that God is pleased when I give less than the 10 percent the Jews started with.

First Corinthians 16:1–2 tells us to give as we have been prospered. Second Corinthians 9:6–10 teaches us to plan our giving. Can you imagine the first converts to Christianity, converted from Judaism, giving any less than they did under an inferior law, a law that had not been bought with our Lord’s blood.

Liberality is the accepted standard of giving by Christians. There are many reasons why we should give even more than a tenth, but not one good reason suggests we can please God by giving less than 10 percent.

Giving 10 percent was the minimum in the Old Testament. To suggest less under Christ and the better covenant is not to understand what Calvary really accomplished.

God has a bigger “giving shovel” than any of us. He wants us to be in the distribution business, not in the business of storage just for the sake of storing. Our wealth should move in one side and out the other.

God has put us on our honor, and an honorable man will do more than the requirements of any law. Love can never give enough, do enough, or become enough. Love will never say, “This much and no more,” or “How much do I have to give?”

IV. The Blessing of Giving

A. Sowing and reaping

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. . . . Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.
(2 Corinthians 9:6, 10)

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How do we rob you?” In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the store-

house, that there may be food in my house. “Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:8–10)

Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

(Other verses to look at are Proverbs 11:24; Galatians 6:7; and Psalm 126:5–6.)

The extent of our sowing and giving determines the extent of our blessings. What comes in depends on what goes out. Does the farmer sow his field with as few seeds as possible?

God can do amazing things with what we give him. Jesus had five fish, and he fed five thousand; he had twelve men, and he changed the world. If I give him my life, I can do the impossible. Many say, “I would give anything to be happy.” If that is true, try giving yourself.

B. The benefits of giving

- Giving pleases the owner (God).
- It brings help and Good News to others.
- It relieves suffering and hunger.
- It gives a purpose to wealth.
- It proves the giver’s ability to be a good manager.
- It stores up heavenly treasures that moth and rust cannot destroy (Matthew 6:19).
- It enables God to entrust more to the giver’s care.
- It benefits others after the giver leaves this earth.
- It is never wasted when given in the spirit of love
(even though we may sometimes be disappointed in those who receive it).
- Through giving, we plant and receive a harvest.
- Jesus said, “It is more blessed (makes us happier) to give than to receive”
(Acts 20:35).

The greatest example of giving was by God himself at Calvary. To be stingy and covetous is completely out of character with Christianity.

Finishing the Foundation



The principle of tithing (giving 10 percent) goes far back into Old Testament history. We see Abraham paying the tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of God. Then when Jacob spent that eventful night at Bethel, he made a promise to give God a tenth of all he would ever own (Genesis 28:20–22).

Giving 10 percent was the practice long before the law was given to Moses, which required every Jew to give a minimum of 10 percent. That there should ever be a lowering of this standard in New Testament times is unthinkable. Christianity lives under a better covenant, under a better sacrifice (Jesus), under a better priesthood, under a better hope, under better promises, under forgiveness of sins, under better motivation (love), and under a better example (God's gift of his Son).

Under the New Testament covenant, we are "God's possession," his "heritage," "the sheep of his pasture." Our special relationship with him should motivate us to give even more. Are we to return less than they? We are all tenants living on God's land! Giving in the New Testament is not a matter of law. Under grace, *you* have the freedom to set the limits! The Old Testament's 10 percent becomes an example to us. Under Old Testament law, a Jew could obey the legal requirement while harboring a selfish heart. In contrast, under New Testament grace, giving is from the heart and reaches a nobler and higher plane. God does not put us under compulsion; rather, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

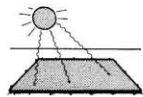
What is your level of giving? Your giving reveals your heart. Your actions reveal the real you. In fact, you judge yourself. Giving tells God how you feel and think. Your check-book reveals your heart. Quite sobering! Money is a part of us. It is work coined into a means of exchange. When we give, we give a part of our life.

Our attitude should be that of David, who felt overwhelmed when he considered all the blessings that God had bestowed upon him.

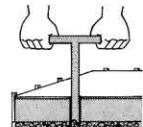
How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? (Psalm 116:12)

We must conclude that our giving certainly should be as much or more than that which was required under the Old Testament.

Firming the Foundation



*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.
(2 Corinthians 9:10)*



Testing the Foundation

1. What does the word *steward* mean?

2. What must I first give?

3. What is covetousness?

4. What example do we find in Abraham's giving to Melchizedek?

5. What was the minimum that God demanded of the Jews?

6. Under the law of love, might we give even more than what was demanded under the Old Testament law?

7. Can we believe that the first Jewish Christians gave less than they had been giving under the Old Testament law?

8. Who supplies us with the seed for our harvest?

9. Do I look upon giving as sowing or as loss?

10. What is God's law concerning sowing and reaping?

11. List five benefits of giving.

Lesson 20

The Second Coming

Surveying the Site



The second coming of Christ (his birth was the first) has been at the center of the Christian faith since its beginning. “I will come again” is the promise made by Jesus in John 14:3.

At the time of his ascension, two angels reminded those who witnessed the scene that Jesus would return (Acts 1:11). When he comes he will come in bodily form. His coming will be visible, personal, and the culmination of his redemptive work. The Bible tells us his coming will be sudden and without warning. No man knows the hour or the day (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3).

We are admonished to look forward to that day, to be alert and ready.

We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:28)

Volumes of books have been written concerning this event to come, and there are some who continue to set dates in spite of the fact that Jesus said “no one knows” when he will return. Why they do this is puzzling, outside of biblical ignorance or maybe to sell books.

All kinds of theories have been advanced surrounding his second coming and what will happen at his appearing. Many of these doctrines contradict each other. I have personally found so many contradictions and disagreements that it is impossible to sort them all out and make sense of them. But I do not have this same difficulty when I simply read the Bible and let it speak for itself. We can learn all we need to know from the teachings of Jesus and the inspired apostolic writings.

Laying the Foundation



I. His Coming

A. *The promise of his coming*

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1–3)

B. *The way of his coming*

At his ascension, two heavenly messengers announced that he would return in the clouds, just as he ascended.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9–11)

C. *The time of his coming*

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3)

The Bible is very clear that no one knows when he will return. Many have tried to foretell the time of his coming, but all have been wrong. Listen to what God says about false prophets:

You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of

the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

II. What He Will Accomplish When He Comes

A. We will be transformed.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20–21)

B. The dead will all be raised and caught up in the clouds to meet him.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:51–54)

C. The wicked will be judged.

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–9)

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

D. The earth and its works will be burned up.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. (2 Peter 3:10–11)

E. All in the grave will come forth—the saved and the unsaved.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.
(John 5:28–29)

F. The living will be caught up.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

G. Death will be abolished.

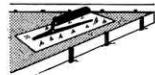
The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

H. The kingdom will be presented to the Father.

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.
(1 Corinthians 15:24–28)

The scriptures cited above give us a clear understanding of his second coming and put us on solid biblical ground.

Finishing the Foundation



There is nothing in Scripture that is any more plain and emphatic than the fact of Jesus' second coming. Jesus himself said:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . I will come back and take you to be with me. (John 14:3)

At the ascension of Jesus, the angel announced that Jesus would return.

This same Jesus . . . will come back the way you have seen him go.
(Acts 1:11)

Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the Hebrew writer all testify to the certainty of his coming. The hope of our resurrection is tied to his coming and is the core of our Christian hope as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:13–14:

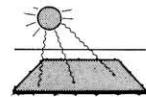
If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

This lesson has plainly and clearly set forth the scriptures concerning the core teaching of the Second Coming, without the speculative attachments.

We can safely conclude that Christ's second coming will be the climactic point of all history. We must not lose sight of this promise by becoming entangled in endless speculations and interpretations based on obscure passages. Such speculations do nothing in building up the body of Christ, but they actually shift our focus away from the plain teaching concerning his coming.

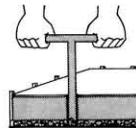
The bottom line is clear. He is coming, and we will be caught up in the clouds to meet him and to live with him forever in that forever land with our forever family.

Firming the Foundation



Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.
(Revelation 1:7)

Testing the Foundation



1. In what way will Jesus come back?

2. When will Jesus return?

3. In what way will we be transformed at his coming and our resurrection?

4. What will happen to the saved? The unsaved?

5. What will happen to our present earth?

6. What is the last enemy to be destroyed?

7. What is the Christian's hope?

8. What will Jesus do with his kingdom when he returns?

Lesson 21

The Thousand-Year Reign and the Book of Revelation

Surveying the Site



And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:1–2)

All kinds of theories have been advanced concerning the Lord's second coming and what will happen at his appearing. One very popular teaching is the doctrine of premillennialism, which is rooted in Revelation 20. Understanding the *setting* and *purpose* of the book of Revelation helps us understand its meaning. F. W. Farrar, in *Message of the Books* (pp. 518–519), sheds some light on the subject:

Historical Background to the Book

To understand it [Revelation] rightly, we must read it by the lurid light of the bale-fires of martyrdom as they flared upon the palace gardens of the Beast from the abyss. We must try to feel as Christians felt when they saw their brethren torn by the wild beast of the amphitheater, or standing as living torches, each in his pitchy tunic on one ghastly night at Rome. Such a book was needed in the awful days when men saw an Anti-Christ, a wicked human god, sitting absolute, and slavishly adored upon the throne of the civilized world. . . . It was written in days of

earthquakes and volcanic outburst, and horrible prodigies. Emperor after emperor was perishing by poison, suicide, or slaughter. Rome and Jerusalem had been deluged with massacre, men were gnawing their tongues with pain and terror. The sun of human life seemed to be setting amid seas of blood, the air was full of vultures of retribution as they gathered to the carcass of decadent societies.

Such were the times. Persecution was severe, and hope was dim, so God pulled back the curtain and allowed those Christians to see that God would bring victory in the end.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer. . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

(Revelation 2:10)

This is the message of Revelation: Hold on! Those who are being killed have not died in vain. Look! They are not dead; they are reigning with Jesus in his kingdom!

Keeping this simple message in mind clears our vision as we look at the figurative language and strange symbols of this amazing book and steers us away from perilous misinterpretations.

Laying the Foundation



I. Misconceptions about His Second Coming

A. *The doctrine of premillennialism*

Much speculation revolves around the doctrine of premillennialism. *Millennial* means one thousand, and *pre* means before. The primary teaching is that Jesus will return to earth and reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. During this time all the Jews will be converted, and peace will reign. There is to be a resurrection of the righteous to reign with him while the rest of the dead remain in the grave. Surrounding this basic teaching are various others, including the seven-year rapture, which is supposed to occur just before the thousand-year reign. Many of these highly speculative teachings may sound exciting and mystical, but as we shall note, they have no solid biblical base. There are a number of variations of this basic teaching, which is based on the following passage:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:1–4)

Note that Revelation 20 says nothing about:

- Christ on earth.
- Reigning in a literal Jerusalem.
- Restoration of the Jews to Palestine.
- People who had not been beheaded.

All of these points are necessary to support premillennialism!

B. Figurative language misunderstood and misused

The book of Revelation is written in a style of signs, symbols, and highly figurative language. Knowing this, we should be careful not to speculate or jump to conclusions. A few Old Testament passages that supposedly concur with Revelation 20 are also used to substantiate the premillennial doctrine.

It is true that the Old Testament prophets did often speak in the same type of highly symbolic language used in Revelation, but these prophets were not even speaking of the same events spoken of in Revelation. Prophets such as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and Jeremiah prophesied of the coming Messianic age (Christianity) and the end (last days) of the Jewish system. Much of their prophecy dealt with the nations around them, how God used these nations, and God's ultimate judgment upon them—the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, and their rulers being the major nations spoken of. Ignoring the Old Testament fulfillment of these prophecies in order to fit some speculative theory connected with Revelation is not good biblical scholarship.

C. The term “last days” misunderstood

The use of the term “last days,” especially in the Old Testament, did not mean the end of time. This expression meant the end (last days) of the Old Testament system and the beginning of a new age and a new covenant. The term “end of the age” had a similar meaning. (See also Lesson 10.)

II. Rules of Bible Interpretation

Applying these simple rules will save you many mistakes in your application of hard-to-understand passages of Scripture.

A. Do not take a passage out of its context.

Always look closely at its context and setting.

B. Use plain passages to interpret figurative passages.

If a figurative interpretation contradicts plain passages, your application is always wrong. Remember that the book of Revelation is written in signs and symbolic language. It is also important to note that Revelation 1:1 clearly tells us that the things in this book must “soon take place” (NIV) or “shortly come to pass” (KJV), a fact that those who follow the premillennial theory do not accept.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him, to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. (Revelation 1:1)

C. Always accept an inspired biblical writer's interpretation of a passage.

Sometimes the Scriptures explain themselves through other writers, and of course their interpretation supersedes our own.

III. The Reign of Christ

Christ is reigning now and has been since Pentecost (see also Lesson 10).

A. Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36)

B. Jesus sits on the throne of David.**1. A descendant of David will be placed on his throne.**

That descendent is Jesus, and the throne is now a heavenly one.

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. (Acts 2:29–31)

2. David's throne was rebuilt, and Jesus is on it.

At the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, James affirmed that Paul and Peter's work with the Gentiles was God ordained. He stated that what Paul was preaching agreed with what the Old Testament prophets had said would happen when Christ sat on David's rebuilt and reestablished throne. James proclaimed that Jesus is now on that throne!

Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The word of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

*"After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things
that have been known for ages." (Acts 15:14–18)*

These verses are too clear to misunderstand! If Jesus is not now reigning on David's throne, then Paul and Peter's preaching to the Gentiles about salvation was too soon. But James makes the argument that the Old Testament scripture has been fulfilled; thus Gentiles are accepted in the kingdom. And if Jesus is not now reigning, how can we Gentiles claim to be Christians?

3. The authority of the throne comes from God.

David's earthly throne was originally in Jerusalem and was a symbol of God's authority; his authority to reign came from God. Jesus is the new David. The Gospels refer to him as "son of David." Jesus reigns by the same God-given authority David did. This authority was granted to and claimed by Jesus:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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." (Matthew 28:18–19)

This authority was boldly affirmed by Peter forty days later in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36)

4. Jesus reigns over a heavenly Jerusalem (the church, his new creation).

Jesus is now seated in heaven at the Father's side.

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. . . . Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. (Hebrews 12:22–24, 28)

We now are in that kingdom that cannot be shaken, the true Zion, Jerusalem from above. To deny the reign of Jesus in his kingdom is to deny Christianity and the existence of his church.

C. Earthly Jerusalem was merely a foreshadow of the true heavenly Jerusalem.**1. The earthly Jerusalem was temporary and was destroyed in A.D. 70.**

This is in fulfillment of Matthew 24 and Daniel 9.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. . . . I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (Matthew 24:14–20, 34)

Note that Jesus says the end will come while the generation he was speaking to was still living. He is clearly speaking of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. This prophesied destruction was carried out by Titus in A.D. 70. In the above passage, Jesus warned Christians to flee.

When Jesus comes in person, no one will have time to run and hide in the mountains as Jesus warned these people to do. Jesus will come in a “twinkling of the eye.”

2. Jesus' reign brings in a better system.

The shadow gave way to the substance. Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant. He ushered in a whole new system. If he had reestablished the physical temple and served as king over such, he would have regressed backward from the substance to a shadow. Jesus brought a better priesthood and sacrifice.

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. (Hebrews 8:1–2)

D. Jesus reigns in heaven—and on earth through his people.

Jesus reigns as king and priest, as mediator and advocate. And although he reigns over the earth, his reign is not *on* an earthly throne; rather, he reigns on David's throne in heaven.

An essential work of Christ as he reigns in heaven is to function as our High Priest. If Jesus reigned *on earth*, as premillennialism suggests, then he could not function as our High Priest because he was not of the tribe of Levi, and only Levites could serve as High Priests on earth. The writer of the book of Hebrews (in chapters 7 and 8) points out that Jesus is a priest after a superior order, the Melchizedek order. God had promised with an oath that this would be. However, this does not qualify him to serve in such a capacity on earth. The office of the Messiah is the combined office of priest and king.

E. Jesus will reign until death is destroyed.

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:24–26)

He must reign until death, the last enemy, is destroyed. Then the victory will be complete. If Jesus reigns until death is destroyed, and if death will be destroyed at his coming, then where does a thousand-year reign fit in and for what purpose? There would be no enemies to conquer, no dead to be raised, and no one to be converted.

IV. Understanding the Thousand-Year Reign

There are a variety of opinions surrounding the thousand-year reign. Some of them are easily refuted, while others leave room for discussion. I suggest the following explanations as ones that take into account all the clear teaching on the subject and the overall message of the book of Revelation.

A. Time period involved

The thousand-year reign represents the period of time from Pentecost until the second coming of Jesus, while the kingdom of God on earth struggles with the kingdom of the world and Satan.

B. Satan bound (Revelation 20:1–3)

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:1–2)

Through the power of the word of God (the “chain”), Satan is under restraint. His power is limited in proportion to the use of the “sword of the Spirit,” the word of God.

C. Martyred Christians (Revelation 20:4–6)

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. . . . They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4b)

The souls of martyred Christians are now reigning with Christ and will reign with him until the Second Coming. Satan no longer has any power over these martyred men and women. Their deaths were not an end, but a new beginning.

D. The end of the thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:7–10)

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth. . . . But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:7–10)

Jesus allowed John to see the final outcome of the struggle against evil: Satan and his power are bound completely and forever.

E. Final outcome of the lost (Revelation 20:14–15)

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14–15)

All whose names are not found in the Book of Life are thrown into the lake of fire with Satan (Revelation 20:10).

F. Final outcome of the saved (Revelation 21:1–7)

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3–4)

The new heaven and the new Jerusalem appear. The church, depicted as a bride, is united with Christ, the bridegroom, to dwell with God forever.

Finishing the Foundation

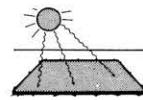


We must conclude that whatever God has in store for the Christian is for him to give. If God wants to remake the earth after he has destroyed the present one (2 Peter 3:10–13), praise God! However, teaching that Jesus will come back to the earth, reign a thousand years, set up his kingdom, rule from Jerusalem, make war, and convert all the unconverted Jews (which his Gospel was unable to accomplish)—this is out of harmony with clear passages about his second coming.

Christ now reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings! He is coming to receive his bride, the church, and to judge the wicked. This is the clear teaching of all the plain and non-figurative passages we have studied. All other passages must be interpreted in the light of these plain passages in order to develop an accurate body of teaching concerning Christ's second coming. Using highly figurative passages and misapplied prophecy is not wise.

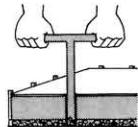
For Christians, the second coming of Christ will be a time of great joy. The work of redemption will be finished. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples will finally be fulfilled. God's reign will be complete, the universe will be in harmony with itself, and the peace of God will rule. Sin will no longer destroy or mar that paradise of Eden. Eternal will be that day!

Firming the Foundation



Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

(Revelation 21:1, 3)



Testing the Foundation

1. In what style is the book of Revelation written?

2. What can help us interpret figurative passages in the Bible?

3. Why is the throne that Jesus sits upon called David's throne?

4. When did Christ begin his reign?

5. In regard to Paul's preaching, what was the conclusion of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) about what the Old Testament prophets had foretold?

6. What is the last enemy that Jesus will destroy?

7. Do you find any time between the resurrection of the dead and his coming for a thousand-year reign?

8. What does the thousand-year reign of the beheaded Christians symbolize in Revelation 20?

Lesson 22

Prayer

Surveying the Site



Prayer is one of the most neglected acts in the lives of many believers. In biblical times it was a central part of family life, even to the extent that it was actually abused by the self-righteous Pharisees who liked to pray in public places just to be seen. Today, the opposite extreme of praying too little is usually the rule.

Even when we do pray, our prayers are sometimes selfish: “Bless me and Sue and our two kids—us four and no more.” Also, many use prayer only in times of emergency—like an emergency switch flipped on when nothing else seems to work.

God’s hands do move at the request of his children, not always the way we think is best, but nevertheless for our own good. Prayer is rooted in trust. It is a request to God, believing that he answers best and trusting the answer he gives.

Jesus was a man of prayer. The Gospels are filled with his prayers: at his baptism, in the forty-day wilderness temptation, in dark Gethsemane, on the cross, over Jerusalem, for his disciples, and even for his enemies. Jesus was the Son of God, yet he felt the need for frequent prayer. Do we need God less than he?

Laying the Foundation



We are created with the desire to live, yet we are continually moving toward death. We are bound to earth by physical limitations yet tied to eternity by a searching, eternal spirit. We stand halfway between the two. Without a connection, we are like a ship without a harbor. Our prayer life is our connecting link to our Father in heaven.

I. The Model Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9–13)

A. “Our Father”

God is not a task master or a tyrant; rather, we are privileged to call him “Father.”

B. “Hallowed be your name”

Our God is holy and is due our reverence.

C. “Your kingdom come”

This portion of Jesus’ prayer was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the kingdom began with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The expanding and maturing of the kingdom should always be a part of this prayer.

D. “Give us today.”

We have no assurance of tomorrow and are totally dependent upon his rain, sunshine, and air. Today is enough and is all we have at the moment.

E. “Forgive us as we forgive others.”

We all need forgiveness, but we are only forgiven as we are willing to forgive others. If I don’t forgive others, then my own sin debt will crush me.

F. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

God does not tempt us (James 1:3–4), yet as sin gets its hold on us, we need God’s help to be delivered from its clutches.

G. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” (KJV)

We need to recognize that everything belongs to our God. He is all powerful and all wise. All praise and glory belong to him. Our prayers should be filled with adoration and praise.

II. Our Attitude in Prayer**A. Do not be self-righteous.**

God will not hear a self-righteous person’s prayer.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10–14)

B. Be Sincere.

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. (Matthew 6:5a)

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

C. Be Watchful.

The devil is always on the prowl. To pray and not watch is like going to sleep with a bag of gold in a room full of thieves (Mark 14:38; Colossians 4:2).

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

D. Be persistent.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. (Luke 18:7–8a)

Jacob wrestled with an angel at Bethel and held on until he was blessed. God has unlimited power, and if we are persistent, he will answer consistent with his nature for our good.

III. Why God Sometimes Says No

A. First, be assured that he hears you.

Even though God sometimes answers no, we can rest assured that he thoughtfully hears and considers each and every prayer of his children. John assures us that we are heard.

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God . . . he hears us.
(1 John 5:14)*

Not only does God hear us, but he answers according to what is best for us. The Israelites sometimes wondered whether God heard them. Isaiah assured them in the following passage:

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. (Isaiah 40:28–29)

B. What part do we play in receiving no for an answer?**1. Unconfessed and unrepented sins**

*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.
(1 Peter 3:12)*

2. Damaged relationships

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

(1 Peter 3:7)

3. Selfishness

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

4. Uncaring and unforgiving attitude

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14–15)

5. Faulty faith

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:6)

C. God might say no for other reasons.

1. Our request would interfere with God's redemptive purpose.

My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will. (Matthew 26:39b)

2. Our request would harm us or someone else.

God knows what is good for us. He can see the big picture, while we see only our immediate circumstances. He sometimes says no for our own good.

3. Reasons beyond our understanding

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

(Romans 11:33–34)

IV. Some Things to Remember When God Says No

A. We can have total confidence in God to make the right choice.

Will not the judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25b)

B. God's purposes are sometimes beyond our understanding.

Why did he allow James to be beheaded and just a short time later send an angel to lead Peter out of prison to escape death? (Acts 12:1–19a). Life's circumstances don't always make sense to us. The following passage offers insight for some situations:

The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death. (Isaiah 57:1–2)

C. Consider the example of Job.

Job lost his sons and daughters, his oxen, camels and servants, but he retained his trust in God.

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:21–22)

Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? (Job 2:10b)

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him. (Job 13:15a)

Job never knew why he was put to the test, but he held fast to his faith in God. God had a larger reason that Job did not know about. We, too, must trust God no matter what happens, knowing that he is good! The story of Job's troubles has no doubt given hope to multiplied millions.

D. Difficult times can help us grow.

Paul stated that his imprisonment turned out to be a blessing.

What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. (Philippians 1:12)

When we ask God to bless us, we often are actually asking that God make our lives free of pain and provide us with the easy way out. However, the easy way is not always the best way. God loves us and wants what is best for us. That is why he doesn't always answer yes. That is why he sometimes allows pain to come into our lives.

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.
(Hebrews 12:10)

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (1 Peter 1:6)

Consider Peter and Paul: Both spoke of having joy, even in prison. Troubles should not kill our joy in God. In fact, God does not make the best children on the mountain of ecstasy, but in the valley of suffering!

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
(Psalm 23:4)

We must pray that God will do what is best in our lives!

V. God Wants to Say Yes

There is an abundance of passages teaching us that God wants to say yes.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.
(1 John 5:14–15)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

(James 5:13–16)

God loves us and says yes whenever it is best. His hands move in so many different ways. We cannot always explain *how* he answers our prayers, but we can have confidence that he does! He has said yes to so many of our prayers. God is able to say yes in many different ways.

Finishing the Foundation



We need to devote more and more of our life to prayer. Our world is in a frenzy, and so are most of us. We are in a hurry to go somewhere and to get back to nowhere!

Prayer does change things. The prophet Isaiah delivered this message from God to King Hezekiah: “Put your house in order, because you are going to die” (2 Kings 20:1).

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, “Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with whole-hearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: “Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”

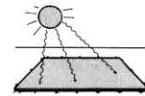
(2 Kings 20:2–6)

God still heals the sick, still sets up and takes down nations, and still protects us and brings us through trials. He never promised a sick-free, trouble-free life, but he did promise that he would be with us.

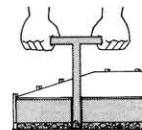
And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

We do not know all the ways his hands work, nor do we need to. The message to us is the same message Job teaches us: Trust God!

Firming the Foundation



Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7–8)



Testing the Foundation

1. Outline a model prayer.

2. What should be our attitude in prayer?

3. Should we be persistent in our prayers?

4. Why does God sometimes say no to our prayers?

5. What should be our attitude when the answer seems to be no?

6. Look back on your life and note how many times your prayers have been answered with a yes.

7. Now look back and see how many were answered no.

8. Would you benefit in the long term if God said yes to your every prayer?

9. In two words sum up our whole attitude about the answers to our prayers.

Conclusion

Foundation Completed

The whole Bible is Christ-centric. Without this central theme, it would offer no lasting hope. From the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1 to the end of the book of Revelation, the scarlet thread of blood stains its pages.

The Old and New Testaments are so interwoven that one without the other stands incomplete. The last verse of the Old Testament leaves us expecting grand and marvelous things to come. The New Testament picks up the story and tells us about an amazing event that took place in a quiet little village called Bethlehem. The Judean hills lit up as angels brought the glorious message of joy:

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10–11)

The last book, the book of Revelation, ends by telling us about another grand and marvelous day that awaits us all, a day when all of God's people will stand before him and sing that "New Song" on that glorious reunion day. The curse of the fall in Eden will be broken, and all creation will be in harmony.

"Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20)

In the pages from Genesis to Revelation, God begins with the first creation and ends with the new creation, the body of Christ, the church. This body is the redeemed of the earth, those washed in the blood shed at Calvary.

Here and now we live and conduct our lives by the instructions given through his Word. This wonderful book instructs us in new relationships, fellowship, servanthood, holiness, and much more. We are taught that we have the sanctifying help of the Holy Spirit living in us, and through it all, we are pointed to his second coming at the close of the age.

What an amazing, exciting journey it has been. We have been in company with earth's greatest. We have met the poor, the rich, the powerful, and the weak—all sojourners together on planet earth. We have been up on the mountain tops and down in the valleys, through deserts and in green pastures, by waters still and by raging rivers, and we have been led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. In time, we moved to the star that shone brightly over a little sleepy town called Bethlehem. There we looked, as no one had ever done before, into the face of God—a tiny baby wrapped in human flesh lying in a cattle barn. Held in Mary's arms, the savior of the earth was totally dependent upon Joseph and Mary to shelter, feed, and clothe him. And now we are totally dependent upon his arms that were stretched out on a Roman cross to enfold all humanity. "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). God incarnate, "Immanuel," God with us.

Now our steps heighten as we can see the way more clearly. The mystery that angels had long desired to know and what the prophets had spoken of is now ours to know and experience. For the rest of our journey, the star of Bethlehem will give light to our way and be our guide, for he is *the way*.

There will be no more night. (Revelation 22:5a)

As John concluded from the isle of Patmos in the book of Revelation, we can now all say with full assurance in a hallelujah chorus: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

The carpenter from Nazareth, the seed of woman, the loin of Judah, the prince of peace has conquered!

Appendix

An Easy-to-Follow

Presentation of the Gospel

The Bad News

We are criminals.

We have all committed crimes against God.

Galatians 5:19–21

We have a legal problem.

Sin brings its consequences.

1 John 3:4

Romans 1:18

We have a grave problem.

The spiritual violation of God's law is a capital crime.

Romans 1:32

"But I didn't know."

We are without excuse.

Romans 2:1

"But I'm a good person."

No one is good enough.

Romans 3:10–12

No one can be saved by keeping law.

Romans 3:19–20

This is the bad news: The truth is we are all lawbreakers, guilty of crimes against God. We are condemned by our own unrighteousness and are powerless to pay sin's debt. The problem is who pays. We can't!

The Good News

Who will rescue me?

Romans 7:24–25

Saved through the Gospel

Gospel of Resurrection—Acts 17:18

Gospel of God's Son—Romans 1:9

Gospel of Power and Righteousness—Romans 1:16–17

Gospel of Salvation—Ephesians 1:13

Gospel of Sonship—Ephesians 3:6

Gospel of Peace—Ephesians 6:15

All must obey the Gospel.

2 Thessalonians 1:8

1 Peter 4:17

What is the Gospel?

Paul tells us.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4

Romans 6:17–18

This is the good news: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

How does one obey?

One must believe (have faith).

John 8:24

Hebrews 11:6

One must repent and turn to God.

Acts 20:21

One must confess Jesus as Lord.

Romans 10:9

One must by faith submit to baptism, the visible re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Romans 6:3–4

The Gospel

He became flesh.—John 1:14

He died for our sins.—1 Corinthians 15:3

He was buried.—1 Corinthians 15:4

He arose.—1 Corinthians 15:4

He is coming back.—Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:52

What does Jesus do now?

He is our High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14

He keeps us clean.

1 John 1:7

He is our mediator.

1 John 2:1–2

What will he do in the future?

He will answer our grave problem.

1 Corinthians 15:52–54

Jesus is the answer to our sin problem, our life problem, and our grave problem. The answer is found in him and in him alone.

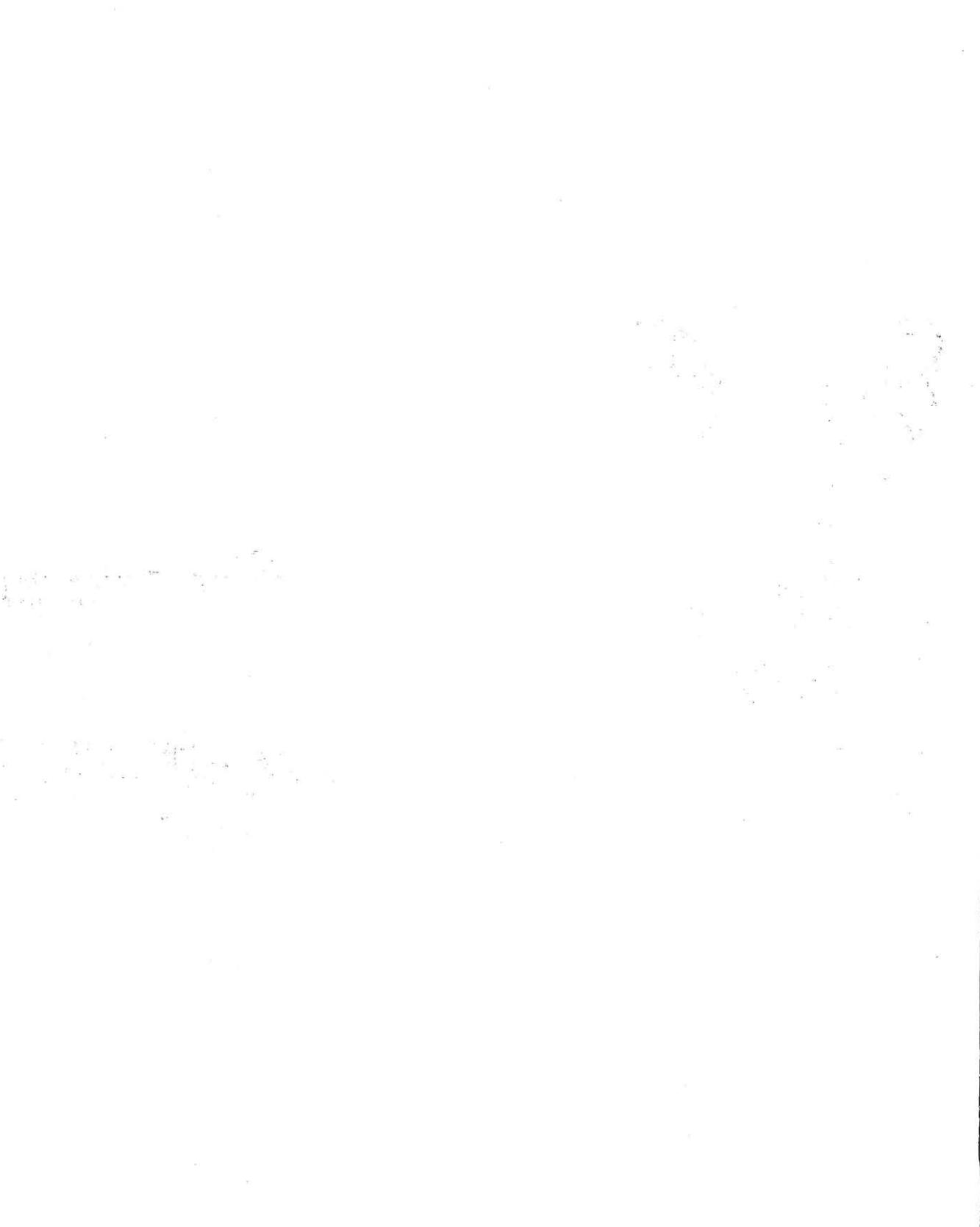
Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

He proved it by his life and his resurrection. Our response as saved sinners is to live godly, moral lives and to love God, neighbors, and the family of God. By such we glorify God. (John 13:35)

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5–8)

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation. (Philippians 2:14–15)

Have you obeyed the Gospel?



Strengthen Your Faith in God!

Do you desire a stronger foundation for your faith in God?

Do you find it difficult to understand how the Bible fits together?

Do you need an easy to follow, educational, and inspirational study guide?

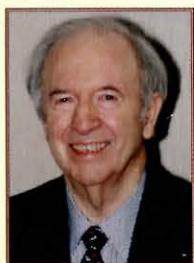
If the answer is yes, you will find this book an indispensable tool for building your Christian foundation. Alton Howard has spent over thirty years developing and teaching this valuable material. Now he has brought it all together into a complete twenty-two chapter book that is ideal for new Christians or anyone who desires a strong faith and a better understanding of God's Word.

Howard serves as your guide as he leads you on an excursion through the Bible that travels the whole breadth of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, building strong foundations at every stop. You will learn about:

- God's unfolding plan for the human race
- The seed promise passed from generation to generation
- Abraham and his twelve grandsons
- The gods of Egypt versus the God of Abraham
- The Kingdom of God
- The new birth
- Law and grace
- Prayer
- Stewardship
- and much, much more.

This book is perfect for: Classroom study, personal reading and study, and small group study.

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ALTON HOWARD has been instrumental in establishing several international outreach ministries and has served as an elder for over thirty-five years.



HOWARD
PUBLISHING CO.

\$13.99 USA
ISBN 1-878990-24-1
Christian Living

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51399



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