

UNIT TWO: WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR UNIT TWO

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so. - Hebrews 6:1-3

PRE-TEST OF THE BASICS

CLASS 1: FOUNDATIONS AND WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

1 Reading, 1 Exercise

Each individual believer must know and believe the basic foundations of the Christian faith for ourselves. But it doesn't stop at the basics. God has given us the Scriptures so that we can know Him and understand His ways according to the whole counsel of God.

CLASS 2: GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM

1 Reading, 2 Exercises

The whole Bible tells the story of God's desire and design for His Kingdom. Jesus is King and the centerpiece of God's plan of redemption for mankind. Jesus is coming back to judge all evil and establish His Kingdom on earth forever.

PRE-TEST OF ISRAEL KNOWLEDGE

CLASS 3: ISRAEL & ONE NEW MAN

1 Reading, 1 Prayer Guide

Jesus was born Jewish, a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. The Jewish people have, for the most part, rejected Jesus as their Messiah, but God's eternal plan for Israel has not changed.

CLASS 4: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL NATIONS

1 Reading, 1 Exercise

There is no authority on the earth that has not been established by God. Jesus is returning to judge all nations and establish His Kingdom forever. Until then, He has made a way for people from all nations to be saved.

KEY QUESTIONS

GROUP EXERCISES

FOUNDATIONS TEST

Do you know the elementary teachings of the Christian faith?

Answer the following questions. Examine what you know and believe about these elementary teachings.

What does it mean to repent from dead works ?	What does it mean to have faith in God?	What is the doctrine of baptisms? <i>(Note: plural.)</i>
What is the laying on of hands?	What is eternal judgment?	What will happen at the resurrection?
How do we attain a clear conscience before God?	What is permitted for followers of Jesus?	What is forbidden for followers of Jesus?

FOUNDATIONS & WHOLE COUNSEL

When the author of the letter to the Hebrews spoke about going on to spiritual maturity, he first referenced the elementary teachings of the faith.

*Hebrews 6:1-3 ESV - Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and **go on to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of **repentance from dead works** and of **faith toward God**, and of **instruction about washings**, the **laying on of hands**, the **resurrection of the dead**, and **eternal judgment**. And this we will do if God permits.*

Without these elements firmly in place in the hearts and lives of believers, they were not ready to press on to the meatier teachings of the Word and the Spirit. We should take heed of this before we press on with this course which is aimed entirely at spiritual maturity.

Each of the elements listed above were deliberately included and explained in the Cornerstone Course. You can review the answers in the Cornerstone Course as follows:

What does it mean to repent from dead works ?	What does it mean to have faith in God?	What is the doctrine of baptisms? <i>(Note: plural.)</i>
Cornerstone Course: C1.3, C3.3, C1.4	Cornerstone Course: C1.3, C1.1, C6.1	Cornerstone Course: C3.1
What is the laying on of hands?	What is eternal judgment?	What will happen at the resurrection?
Cornerstone Course: C3.2	Cornerstone Course: C1.1	Cornerstone Course: C1.1
How do we attain a clear conscience before God?	What is permitted for followers of Jesus?	What is forbidden for followers of Jesus?
Cornerstone Course: C1.1, C1.2, C1.3	Cornerstone Course: C3.2	Cornerstone Course: C3.2

Please take the time to review these basics before pressing onwards. Building on the foundation of Christ is absolutely critical to your spiritual development.

The Whole Counsel of God

When the Apostle Paul was parting company with the elders of the Ephesian church, he declared himself to be innocent of their lifeblood because he had declared to them the whole counsel of God. (See Acts 20:20-27.) In the days of the early church, they did not have the New Testament yet. Scrolls of the Old Testament were studied extensively by Jewish scholars but only the wealthy could afford to have scrolls in their homes. Paul had been trained in the Scriptures by the best in the world in his day. After the Holy Spirit came into his life, his ability to fully understand the Scriptures was unlocked. He purposefully went to the Jewish synagogues of every city he traveled to in order to reason with them from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. When he was with Gentile believers, he taught from the Scriptures about God's eternal redemptive plan of salvation for all mankind and also used the Scriptures as a guide for pointing out what God deems to be right and wrong, good and evil, and clean and unclean. Paul honored the Word of God as the source of all good and proper doctrine, correction, and training for those who want to be God's servants. Peter also honored the Scriptures as the source of our strengthening for endurance in the times before the return of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19-21: We also have the **prophetic message as something completely reliable**, and **you will do well to pay attention to it**, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that **no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things**. For **prophecy never had its origin in the human will**, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Abusing the word of God is something the evil one has been doing since the Garden of Eden. Usually, false teachers wrench Scripture out of context to promote techniques for establishing self-righteousness or to promote free blessings while endorsing lawless behavior. If we lose sight of the truth of God's Word, we will be vulnerable to their flatteries and false promises of being like God. However, the Word of God is only profitable if it is used properly. We must know what the Scripture says for ourselves so that we can discern truth from error and good teaching from false teaching.

1 Timothy 1:8-11: We know that **the law is good if one uses it properly**. We also know that **the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels**, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--**and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel** concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

I like the comparison of a person who is charged with spotting counterfeit money, bills, and coins. It is said that the way these experts train is NOT by spending time examining the various counterfeits that are out in the marketplace but by spending the majority of their time with the genuine article. When their eyes have been given only to the real thing, they can spot a fake immediately because it does not conform to the pattern of genuine article. Similarly, the only way we will be able to discern false teaching is to know the truth and this means the whole counsel of God, from Genesis to Revelation.

God gave us His Word as a gift for our encouragement to help us stand through the trials of the life of faith. One of my favorite things about the Scriptures is that God, who does not lie, included accounts of the failures of His people at various points in time alongside the stories of their glory in Him. We can learn so much from the examples of faithfulness or faithlessness laid out in the stories of the Bible. (See Romans 15:4.) At times, reading the stories of Israel's failures might cause us to feel superior or as if we could not possibly make the same mistakes they did. It's easy to say from observation, especially because we can turn the page and know how the story turns out. But when God puts us in situations which demand our response of faith, it will be revealed that we are just as human as the Israelites were and they did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is why their example is such a comfort and exhortation for us to NOT make the same mistakes they did and for us to keep pressing into the Holy Spirit to endure through trials and fight the fight of faith. (See 1 Corinthians 10:11.)

Therefore, let us press on to know and understand the whole counsel of the Word of God for ourselves. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God until we are firmly established the truth so that we can quickly discern false teachings when they batter our ears. Let us proclaim Jesus and the whole counsel of God to others so that their eternal blood is not on our hands.

FEAR OF THE LORD

Job 28:20-28 NLT – But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all humanity. Even the sharp-eyed birds in the sky cannot discover it. Destruction and Death say, "We've heard only rumors of where wisdom can be found." God alone understands the way to wisdom; he knows where it can be found, for he looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens. He decided how hard the winds should blow and how much rain should fall. He made the laws for the rain and laid out a path for the lightning. Then he saw wisdom and evaluated it. He set it in place and examined it thoroughly. And this is what he says to all humanity: "The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding."

DESCRIPTION

God is all powerful. It is His privilege as the Creator of the Universe and the Most High God. God is good. He is also perfectly just as the Judge of all the earth and King above every king.

At the end of the age, every person will stand before God and give an account for what they have done. The Fear of the Lord is to live today in a manner that reflects our recognition of God's eternal position of authority in our lives. If He is truly God and if He is truly our only judge, which He is, then our actions today should demonstrate our desire to be pleasing to the One who has this right. This rightly places emphasis on God over any other person or influence in our lives.

Putting the Fear of the Lord into practice is about aligning our lives with a healthy reverence for God in all that we think, say, and do because of who He is.

PRAYER

Father, I recognize that you are the only God and only judge of my eternity. Thank you for your mercy for times when I have not lived as if this is true. I ask you to examine my heart and help me to acknowledge you in everything I do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MEDITATION

Look up and slowly read through the Additional Scriptures listed on this page. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you insight about what it means to genuinely Fear the Lord.

TALK WITH GOD

How have you experienced the Fear of the Lord in your own life? How is God inviting you into deeper fear of the Lord?

Have you tended towards fearing God's punishment such as legalism or religion or in self-indulgence such as permissiveness or lawlessness? What is God saying to you about this?

What is the right balance between fearing God and experiencing His love and mercy? How is God advising you to maintain this balance?

How did Jesus demonstrate the Fear of the Lord? How is God asking you to apply this to your life right now?

PRACTICE

1. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal some areas where your thoughts and actions are out of alignment with the Fear of the Lord. Write down what He says.
2. Ask God to reveal to you how/why these thoughts or behaviors lack reverence for God. For example:
 - Are they arrogant or self-sufficient? As if God didn't exist or was not there for you?
 - Are they contradictory to what you know of His will for you and/or written word?
 - Are they rooted in fearing or trusting something/someone other than God?
 - Are they unwise? Do they lead to bad consequences?
3. Ask God how He desires for your heart to change towards Him. Ask Him to grant you a deeper respect for who He is and how He wants you to do things.
4. Listen to what He says. Put it into practice.

NOTES:



PURPOSE:

To grow in understanding accurately what the Fear of the Lord is.

To develop in our own personal walk in the fear of the Lord.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Fear of the Lord.

Right reverence for God, who He is, and how He likes things.

Repentance from sin.

Purification of motives and actions.



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- Proverbs 3:1
- Job 28:28
- Proverbs 16:6
- Psalms 25:14
- Proverbs 1:7
- Exodus 20:20
- Proverbs 8:13
- Revelation 20:11-15
- Matthew 16:27
- Psalms 19:9
- Matthew 10:28
- Isaiah 11:1-2
- Ecclesiastes 12:13
- Proverbs 14:27
- Psalms 34:9
- 2 Corinthians 5:11



GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM

All of humanity is in a war. It is an ancient war for worship. It is a war between God, who is the giver of life and worthy of all worship, and His adversary, an angel named Lucifer, who was created by God to be His chief worshipper but who rebelled because he wanted worship for himself and desired to usurp God's throne. Lucifer launched a rebellion against God which God speedily crushed. Lucifer was banished from heaven along with the angels who had joined in his rebellion, and he became known as Satan, which means *adversary* of God. Soon after this rebellion when God spoke creation into existence, Satan was thrown down to the earth in the form of a serpent. At this time, the earth was void and without form and the waste-waters of chaos covered the earth as the adversary's dwelling place. (This occurred between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 and is reflected in more detail in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.)

In the Beginning (Genesis 1-4)

When God created all of creation, He made it as a gift for mankind, whom He would make in His image. God created mankind to bear His image, have eternal life, and to subjugate Satan as his punishment for rebellion against God. (See Genesis 1-2.) Everything about creation was designed to reproduce and multiply a fruitful bounty for mankind to enjoy without sweat and toil, and to rule over as kings. God's assignment for mankind was to tend to the earth and to be fruitful and multiply in order to fill the earth with descendants who would worship God in thanksgiving for the life He had given them and the world He created for them while enjoying sweet fellowship with God.

Unfortunately, all of creation and fellowship with God wasn't enough for Adam and Eve. The serpent deceived them into disobeying God by appealing to their seemingly harmless desires to be wise and to be like God, even though they had already been made in God's image. They gave way to the nature of a usurper and subjugated themselves to the one they were supposed to rule over. They had lived a life of innocence but they became rebels when they disobeyed God's command, sold out to God's adversary, and forfeited eternal life with God. The time of testing revealed that they worshipped themselves and wanted to be God rather than obey God.

God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and from fellowship with Him. They were deposed as kings. God's adversary became the prince of this world. The adversary became the ruler of mankind and the creation was cursed. Adam and Eve were also cursed to eating their bread only through sweat and toil in the thorns and thistles of the cursed ground, and they would eventually die and return to the dust that God had created man out of.

It appeared that God's adversary had won the battle of the Kingdoms.

However, even in their punishment, God granted a ray of hope by promising that one of the woman's descendants, her seed, would crush the head of the serpent and re-establish God's Kingdom for mankind. This promised descendant is who we have come to know as the Messiah—the Anointed One of God. (See Genesis 3.)

Was this calling fulfilled by one of their immediate sons? No. Adam and Eve's rebellion against God's ways became evident in their children very quickly. Their elder son Cain, in the likeness of an usurper, killed their younger son Abel because Cain was jealous that God accepted Abel's blood sacrifice as an offering

but did not accept his offering. For this, Cain was banished even further from Eden and driven from any hope of ruling the earth with God. (See Genesis 4.) As Adam and Eve had more children and the generations continued down the line, it became evident that every thought in the minds of Adam and Eve's descendants tended to evil all the time. (See Genesis 6:5.) They worshipped anything and everything except God and their selfish behavior resulted in wickedness and violence filling the earth. They continued to choose the ways of the adversary and displayed his likeness rather than God's.

A Remnant of One Man (Genesis 6-9)

Therefore, God started over again with a remnant of one, a man named Noah. In all the earth, God found only Noah to be blameless because Noah's heart was towards God and not himself. God instructed Noah to build an ark that would house a remnant of creation. It took Noah many years to build this boat and he looked very foolish because it had never rained on the earth. But Noah's building of the boat was a warning to the rest of mankind that judgment was coming upon their rebellion against God.

Once Noah and his family were safe, a great flood filled the earth, killing and destroying everyone and everything that was not inside Noah's Ark. Again, the waste-waters of chaos covered the earth as the dwelling place of God's adversaries.

After the flood had receded, God instructed Noah and his sons to fill the earth with descendants. God's ultimate purpose for mankind had not changed – He still sought a Kingdom of people who would fill the earth and worship Him rather than his adversary. God also entered into a covenant with Noah, promising that He would never again destroy the earth by flood.

Man's United Rebellion Against God (Genesis 11)

As generations continued to be born, mankind proved to have an innate determination to rebel against God. Instead of desiring to rule the earth as a Kingdom for and with God, they took rebellion to a whole new level and gathered together to build a kingdom for themselves. Nimrod led the way as the leader of the world in uniting all of mankind to work together to build a tower that would reach up to heaven. They built the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves as a symbol of self-empowerment and rejection of God altogether. The world was united as usurpers. They may have hoped that the tower would be so high that they could escape the waters of another flood of judgment.

God saw this rebellion and scattered the peoples to the ends of the earth. He gave them different languages so that they would not be able to work cooperatively in this manner again, so as to impede any further rebellions of this sort.

At this point, God's destiny for mankind to be a Kingdom on the earth as His image bearers seemed all but lost and hopeless.

One Chosen Man (Genesis 12-50)

Therefore, God again selected one man as a remnant to carry forth His Kingdom purposes for mankind. God chose Abraham. Out of all the peoples in all the earth, Abraham was the only one who believed and obeyed God. God entered into a covenant with Abraham which was sealed with the blood of sacrifices. God promised to bless Abraham with a land of his own and make Him into a nation of people—a Kingdom that would bless all the nations of the earth. The Messiah, the One who would crush the head of the serpent and establish the Kingdom of God on the earth, was now promised to come through one of Abraham's descendants.

God also showed Abraham what His judgment looked like so that Abraham could teach His descendants to fear Him and walk blamelessly with Him. Abraham stood and watched as fire and brimstone was rained down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah, cities which had given themselves over wholly to wickedness, violence, and perversion.

Abraham believed God and this faith was credited to him as righteousness. This means that even though Abraham's behavior was not always completely kosher, God did not hold Abraham's errors against him, nor did He hold the sins of Abraham's ancestors against him. Abraham's faith was also evidenced by his actions. He left everything he had ever known in this world in order to follow God's call. He left his country, his father's household, and his father's traditions, and his ancestor's approach to religion and spiritual life. He set out looking to for the Kingdom of God on the earth. Even the Gentiles recognized Abraham as a prince among them. (See Genesis 23:6.)

Now that the Messiah was going to be born through Abraham, was it Abraham's immediate son who would bear God's image and trample the head of the adversary? No. Abraham and his wife Sarah waited a long time for an heir, even past the point of her menstruation and child-bearing years. Eventually, angels visited them and told them that they would have a son and they were to name him Isaac. Through a miraculous conception, Sarah became pregnant at age ninety, after being barren her whole life. Abraham was one hundred years old when their son Isaac arrived.

After a while, God tested Abraham's faith to see if he was a worthy steward of His Kingdom. When put to the test, would Abraham falter as Adam and Eve had? God told Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and offer Isaac, his only son, as a sacrifice. According to any reasonable concept of good and evil, this makes no sense whatsoever. But Abraham trusted God as the source of life who was even able to raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promises. In trust, he set out to obey God's command rather than rebel against Him. Before Abraham was able to slay Isaac on top of Mount Moriah, an angel stopped him and pointed out that God had provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. The angel also confirmed that Abraham, through his humble submission and faithfulness to God, had passed the test. Abraham had not taken matters into his own hands as Adam and Eve had. Now, most assuredly, the Messiah would come through Abraham's descendants to crush the head of the adversary and establish the Kingdom of God. Then, Abraham saw into the future and prophesied that on the same mountain, the Mountain of the Lord, God would see to the fulfillment of this promise.

God's covenant with Abraham was transferred exclusively to his son Isaac. Then, through another miraculous conception, Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the elder and apparent heir of the promises of God. However, God had fore-ordained that His promises would pass to Jacob. Long story short, through a series of events, Esau rejected his firstborn birthright and sold it to Jacob for a bowl of lentils and Isaac passed the blessing of God to Jacob. Therefore, God's covenant with Abraham transferred exclusively from Isaac to Jacob, whose name God later changed to Israel.

Jacob, aka Israel, had twelve sons who had sons and daughters and became the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, had two dreams from God showing that the rest of his family was going to bow down to him and serve him. Jacob, as God's covenant carrier in his generation who knew the prophecies and promises given to his fathers, took note of this. It is possible that Jacob considered that Joseph might be the promised Messiah who was going to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. Joseph's brothers, however, rejected Joseph's dreams entirely and threw him in a pit to leave him for dead before selling him to some Gentiles passing by. The Gentiles brought Joseph to Egypt to serve as a slave. After many years and a series of divinely orchestrated events, Joseph was appointed second in command to Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world at that time. Everything that God had revealed to Joseph came to pass. He had been granted great authority on the earth and eventually, all his brothers bowed down to him.

The God of Israel received great glory on a global basis during this time. Joseph had God-given wisdom and was a righteous image-bearer for God with no record of sin according to Scripture. When this was combined with Joseph's position of authority as second in command under Pharaoh, who was the most powerful man in the world at that time, Joseph was responsible for feeding the whole world during a time

of global famine. However, God had a different kind of Kingdom in mind for His people. He had a plan to bring forth image-bearers who were second to no one but Him, the way it had originally been in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Furthermore, even though Joseph was considered a prince among his brothers in his generation, when the time came for Jacob to bless his sons and pass the covenant promises of God to the next generation, Jacob prophesied that the scepter of God's Kingdom would be carried through his son Judah.

One Chosen Nation: The First Passover (Exodus 1-15)

After Jacob's descendants had multiplied through the course of several generations, God chose the whole nation of Israel for His purposes. God sent Moses to deliver them from Egyptian slavery exactly as and when He promised He would. God worked miracles for Moses as His servant so that the Jewish people would see the power of the Kingdom of Heaven follow Moses as His chosen servant.

In judgment against Pharaoh, Egypt, and their false gods, God orchestrated nine ferocious plagues. Most of these plagues impacted Egyptians but did not touch the people of God. After these plagues, Moses told Pharaoh that God was going to send the Destroyer to kill all the firstborn sons in Egypt. At the same time, Moses told the Israelites to slaughter a lamb for each household and paint the lamb's blood on the doorpost of their homes. When God saw the blood on the doorposts, He would **pass over** the house and not allow the Destroyer to enter. The Israelites obeyed God and God was faithful to deliver them. They departed from Egypt and left behind Egyptian slavery by walking through the parted waters of the Red Sea on dry ground. When their enemies pursued them, the waters came crashing back down on them and buried them forever.

In one day, the nation of Israel was born and set apart to God as His special people. From this day forward, there was only ONE nation in the entire world which was in covenant with the one true God who created heaven and earth and everything in it. The rest of the world was hopeless and disconnected from God altogether because they were usurpers and rebels against God and His authority.

A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19-40)

Since God had spared the Israelites first born sons from destruction in Egypt, God now required His people to dedicate to Him every firstborn male as a priest of God. This would mean that almost every Jewish household would have a priest in it to keep the ways of God constantly before all of His people.

God's design for His special people was to be a Kingdom of priests who would worship Him, bear His image of righteousness, rule over God's adversaries, crush the evil one, and bless the whole world. (See Exodus 19:5-6.) God's purpose for Israel was to be a Kingdom for Him, like the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. At Sinai, God gave His people His Law and entered into covenant with Israel which was sealed with the blood of sacrifices. (See Exodus 19-24.) By obeying God's Law, they would maintain fellowship with God and He would dwell among them. Through observing the righteous standards of God's Law, they would bear His image, demonstrate God's likeness to the rest of the world, and be granted eternal life with God. (See Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Leviticus 18:5.)

The Law also established the Tabernacle of God as the predecessor to the Temple and God's sacrificial system by which Israel could atone for their sins through blood sacrifices. When individuals or the collective community of Israel rebelled against God in the likeness of Adam and Eve or committed violations of the Law, either knowingly or unintentionally, the Law requires the shedding of the blood of an unblemished sacrifice to atone for their sins. The Law commands that at God's designated place for sacrifice, the sins of the people must be confessed as they lay their hands upon a spotless sacrificial lamb, transferring their sins to the lamb. Then, the lamb is slaughtered, shedding its blood as atonement and dying the death penalty in the place of the person who had committed error. According to the Law, only blood can make atonement for the soul. (See Leviticus 17:11.) Without the shedding of blood, there is no atonement.

If Israel listened to God and obeyed the Law, they would be His royal Kingdom people and would rule the earth because God would raise them high above all other nations and all of His adversaries. On the other hand, if Israel went the way of Adam and Eve, whoring themselves out to the adversary through disobedience against God's commands, they would find themselves cursed, scattered, and cut off from God. (See Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28.)

One Mediator between God and Man (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, 18)

When God appeared to the Israelites at Sinai, He manifested Himself in an all-consuming fire over the mountain, and the Israelites were afraid of God. They recognized that God was too holy for them to approach on their own and recognized that they would die if they entered God's presence or spoke to Him directly. God commended them for their recognition of His majesty and healthy fear of His power.

Out of reverence, the Israelites requested that Moses be the Mediator between them and God, and God granted their request. However, Moses promised that God would appoint a Prophet like Moses to be a superior Mediator between God and man – the Messiah.

Wilderness Rebellion (Exodus 32-33; Numbers 3, 13-14, 16, 21; Psalm 78, 105-106)

Unfortunately, the Israelites in the wilderness repeatedly rebelled against Moses and they constantly questioned his authority as God's only appointed leader and Mediator. Only a few months after they had walked through the Red Sea, they worshipped a Golden Calf and claimed that this was the god who had brought them out of Egypt.

After one year in the wilderness, it was time for Israel to inherit the Promised Land. Moses sent twelve spies into the Promised Land to bring back a report. Although all twelve agreed that it was a good land, only two of the spies believed that God was able to give it to them. The people of Israel rejected the report of the two spies and agreed with the unbelief of the ten spies. As a consequence for this rebellion, God was again ready to disinherit the people of Israel and start over with only Moses by multiplying Moses' descendants into a new generation which would inherit His promises and His Kingdom. However, Moses interceded for Israel and God relented. At that time, God decreed that Israel would have to stay in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation from twenty years of age and older had died. None of them would be allowed to inherit the Promised Land. After God told them of this consequence, their nature as usurpers was made plain when they thought they could take the Promised Land without God's power and presumed to go into battle against Moses' warning not to. Their rebellion was crushed and they were chased out by their enemies as if by a swarm of bees.

Throughout the wilderness years, Israel grumbled against God and tested Him through unbelief and rebellion. On several occasions, they attempted to appoint leaders for themselves who would meet their demands to return to Egypt, even though they had been slaves there. As the consequence for such insolence, God was ready to destroy the Israelites and start all over again with a remnant of one man, Moses. But Moses prayed to God on Israel's behalf. Mercifully, God did not destroy them and start over but instead, let them live for the sake of His own holy name.

A New Generation & Time of Judges

When the time came for Israel to inherit the Promised Land, Moses transferred leadership of God's people to Joshua. Joshua led the people to conquering many nations within the territory that God had promised to His people.

After this, there were times when Israel did well in obeying the Law and remained faithful to God. At other times, however, they revealed the likeness of the adversary through disobedience to God. When they failed, adversaries were allowed to rule over them for a time. When they cried out to God for mercy, God delivered them. During this time, Israel's devotion to God and the Law waned. They were usurpers who

wanted to do things their own way according to what was right in their own sight rather than what God had commanded them. Rather than being a demonstration of God's righteousness to the nations of the world, they conformed their behavior and their forms of worship to imitate the nations. They even worshiped their gods – who are the agents of God's adversary. Their moral condition became so degraded that they behaved as badly as Sodom and Gomorrah.

A Human King (1 Samuel 1-15)

Eventually, Israel asked God to give them a King so that they could be like all the other nations. In this, they were partially right and partially wrong. They knew they were supposed to be a Kingdom for God on the earth, but they were rejecting God as their rightful King. Nevertheless, God granted their request and appointed a man named Saul from the tribe of Benjamin as the first King of Israel. With their first human King, would Israel fulfill their destiny as a Kingdom of God on the earth? No. Saul did well at first in remaining true to God. Soon however, Saul sought to maintain his authority by disobeying God's commands. Therefore, the Kingdom was taken from him and given to David, a simple shepherd boy from Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah.

David was a man after God's own heart. God entered into covenant with David through which He promised to build His Kingdom through one of David's descendants. God would be a Father to David's descendant – the Messiah – and establish His Kingdom forever. (See 2 Samuel 7.) Unfortunately, soon after this, David made some royal missteps against the Law and God's ways. God would have been justified in putting David to death for his sins and revoking His covenant with David, but He never did. Even though there were short-term consequences within David's family and in Israel for David's errors, David was quick and sincere about admitting his faults, turning from his sins, genuinely entrusting himself to the Lord's mercy, and offering the blood sacrifices required by the Law for the atonement of his soul. In spite of his sins, this is what made David a man after God's own heart.

A Kingdom Divided (1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles)

After David, Israel had a taste of what it would be like to be the Kingdom designed by God to bear His image and be a blessing to the whole world. David's son Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem on the very same mountain where Abraham had offered Isaac and proclaimed God's provision for His Kingdom. Because Solomon recognized the high importance that God placed on the blood of sacrifices offered on His altar and the atoning power of blood for the sins of the people, he offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep and goats, shedding massive amounts of blood to dedicate the Temple of God. (See 1 Kings 8:63.) The glory of God filled the Temple, and the people of Israel were esteemed as the only people on earth in covenant with the Most High God, Creator of the Universe. People came from far and wide to worship the God of Israel and to hear the God-given wisdom of Solomon. This was the closest Israel had come so far to having a Kingdom which bore God's image and blessed the whole world.

However, Solomon was neglectful about obedience to God's instructions and gave way to rebellion in his own life, particularly through intermarriage with Gentile women who led him astray by their worldly ways and pagan gods. This insubordination resulted in the Kingdom of Israel being split in two after his lifetime. Ten out of the twelve tribes of Israel abandoned David's royal line to form the northern kingdom, while two tribes carried on with David's line to form the southern kingdom.

Both the northern and the southern kingdoms began to adopt the practices of the pagans in the land. In addition to this, the kings of the northern kingdom erected their own altars, created their own festivals to God, and appointed their own priests from the common people. These activities were in direct rebellion against God's explicit instructions that Jerusalem, the place where He had chosen to put His name forever, was the only place that sacrifices could be offered to Him. These things were also against the rules of the Law, which gives clear instructions about God's appointed feasts, priests, and Levites. The northern kingdom's rebellion against God and His ways went from bad to worse until the kingdom was

scattered among the nations by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. in accordance with the consequences outlined in the Law. The kings of the southern kingdom had a little more success. Some were good, some bad; some were faithful, and some wretched. But eventually their collective disobedience led to their scattering and exile to Babylon, in accordance with the consequences outlined in the Law. Jerusalem was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, and the Temple of God was destroyed in the year 586 B.C.E.

In the centuries leading up to the destruction and exile of the northern and southern kingdoms, God faithfully sent Prophets to both kingdoms to warn God's people of what would happen to them if they did not repent, turn to Him as their one and only King, and keep His ways. Unfortunately, the people of Israel not only refused to heed the words and warnings of God's Prophets, but they persecuted and killed most of the Prophets for saying things that they didn't want to hear. They continued living their lives as they pleased, worshiping the gods of the nations rather than obeying the Law.

In due time, the words of the Prophets came to pass. Just like God's banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden into exile, God ejected His people from the Promised Land and scattered them to the four corners of the earth.

The Promise of a New Covenant

In spite of their banishment from the Land, God's Prophets revealed God's plans and promises for the future of Israel. God promised to forgive their transgressions, bring the exiles back to the Promised Land and more significantly, God promised to enter into a New Covenant with Israel which would prevent this cycle from recurring again. (See Jeremiah 31:31-37.) The New Covenant between God and Israel would not be like the covenant God had established with them at Sinai when He gave the Law through Moses. Due to the fact that they had proved again and again to be incapable of adhering to God's ways, obeying the Law, and heeding the warnings and directives of His Prophets, God would extend a great mercy to His chosen people through the New Covenant. God would write the Law on their hearts and give them a new heart and a new spirit. God would even place His own Spirit within them so that they would no longer be inclined toward Adam-and-Eve-style usurping and rebellion. Additionally, God would forgive all of their disobedience to the Law and no longer remember their sins against them. This would mean that there would no longer be any divinely instituted consequence for their error and rebellion, including the sins of their ancestors. This way, God's people would be able to obey Him from the heart and fulfill their God-given destiny as an image-bearing Kingdom of God and blessing to all the earth. (See Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27.)

The Promised Messiah, the Righteous King of Israel (the Prophets)

In the same way that God's existing covenants were established through God's chosen men Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, God promised through His Prophets that this New Covenant would be given to Israel through His Servant, the Messiah.

According to the prophecies, the Spirit of the Lord would continually guide the Messiah to bring justice and vengeance against God's adversaries and establish the Kingdom of God. The Messiah would crush the head of the ancient serpent and Israel would be able to become a blessing to the whole earth. (See Isaiah 41:1-7; 61:1-3.)

Even in the midst of their exile, God continually reassured His people that He will never reject all of the descendants of Israel because of their rebellion. Instead, He would send the Messiah to establish justice on the earth as God's anointed King whom has been promised from the beginning and who lives in perfect righteousness and obedience to God, a standard that no one else has been able to live up to.

According to the Book of Daniel, which was written during the time of the Jewish people's exile in Babylon, several empires would rule the world before God's Messiah came to crush them all. God's people would

even be oppressed and tormented by these evil empires until the time came for God to avenge them by sending the Messiah to establish the everlasting Kingdom of God. (See Daniel 2:44, 7:13-14, 21-27.)

The Messiah would fulfill God's righteous requirement of the Law of God without ever rebelling against God or trying to usurp God's authority for Himself. This would be the righteousness of the people of God. (See Jeremiah 23:5-6.) Even though the Messiah would be innocent of evil, He would be inflicted with the punishment of God that the people deserved. Like a spotless sacrificial lamb, the sins of the people would be laid upon the Messiah, and His soul would become an offering of atonement for their souls. The Messiah, the Righteous Branch, would suffer for the sins of the unrighteous. **(Read Isaiah 53.)**

Returned Exiles Prepare for their King (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

At the appointed time after the Babylonian exile, God allowed many of the scattered Jews to return to the Promised Land. They were able to rebuild a Temple in Jerusalem and God allowed them to experience some level of spiritual re-awakening. However, this Temple was not as grand as Solomon's had been, and the glory of God never filled it. Plus, the Jewish people remained under the authority of a foreign King and were not re-established as an independent nation.

During this time, the Jewish people did not resemble a kingdom at all. Many of them were still scattered in the nations, and even in the Promised Land, they were subjected to Gentiles ruling over them. However, there was an eager expectation for the Messiah's arrival, partly because of the desire for liberation from foreign kings but mostly because of the words of God's Prophets.

No One Righteous (All of History)

During this time, out of fear that the increasingly lukewarm devotion of the Jewish people would lead them into another exile, the leaders of Israel created many rules and regulations in an attempt to establish and maintain holiness among God's people as they awaited Messiah. Various schools of interpretation sprung up with teachings of Scripture in accordance with their way of thinking. Some were extremely religious, forcing common people to maintain priestly standards of holiness. (Pharisees.) Others were very worldly, hoping to blend with the powers of the world in order to prosper as an earthly nation. (Sadducees.) Some wanted to instigate political revolt and throwing off the taxation of foreign powers through insurrection. (Zealots.) None of these groups were righteous in God's sight. They were all usurpers and rebels.

The rest of the nations of the world were still hopelessly disconnected from the one true God. Like their ancestors before them, they were usurpers and rebels who worshipped creation rather than the Creator and worshipped demons, the host of God's adversary, rather than God. There was no eternal hope for them. (See Romans 3:10-20.)

Yet again, it looked like God's plan for a Kingdom of descendants of Adam and Eve who would fill the earth and worship Him looked completely lost and hopeless.

Messiah's Birth (the Gospels)

At the exact time prophesied by Daniel, an angel visited a young Jewish woman from the tribe of Judah. The angel told Mary that even though she was a virgin, she would conceive a child by the power of the Spirit of the LORD, and she was to name Him Jesus. The name Jesus means God saves, because Mary's son would save the people from their sins. (See Matthew 1 and Luke 1, 3:23-38.) In accordance with the prophecies and promises of the Scriptures, God came to dwell with His people. Because Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit of the LORD, God was His Father. Jesus was also the seed of a woman descended from Eve—the One who would crush the head of the adversary. Jesus was formed in the womb in God's exact likeness to be God's perfect human image-bearer and King to reign on the eternal throne promised to David. (See Luke 1:32-35.)

Messiah's Kingdom Message

When the time came for Jesus to begin His earthly ministry, He had one simple and clear message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" Jesus reached out exclusively to Jewish people teaching in synagogues and at the Temple in Jerusalem, encouraging them to turn from their sinful ways and live for God. Jesus spoke almost exclusively about the Kingdom of God. Jesus words, teachings, and actions demonstrated greater God-given wisdom than that of King Solomon. In every circumstance Jesus faced, He said only what God was saying and did only what God was doing because He had the Spirit of God inside of Him to guide Him. Jesus was God's perfect image-bearer. He demonstrated God's holiness, righteousness, power, and mercy. Jesus taught His followers that the Kingdom of God was the absolute top priority and the thing to be sought after above all else. (See Matthew 6:25-33.)

Jesus also demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God by healing the sick, cleansing lepers, casting out demons, and raising the dead. In a similar way to how God had worked miracles for Moses so that the Jewish people would believe that he was God's appointed servant, God worked miracles through Jesus. In accordance with the prophecies pointing to the Messiah, the sick were healed, the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were raised, and good news was proclaimed to the poor. He sent His followers out to reach the Jewish people, proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of God and doing the miraculous works that He did in order to reveal that the Kingdom of God had come near. (See Matthew 10; Luke 10:8-12.)

Jesus was not on a self-promotional "Messiah Tour of Israel" but rather, preferred to keep His identity concealed so that only those who had a heart to perceive His message as coming from God would believe Him and follow Him. Those who recognized this discerned that Jesus spoke the words of eternal life which were from God and not the words of the knowledge of good and evil or rules and regulations like the religious leaders. This said, Jesus never rebelled against the Law nor did He encourage anyone else to do so. Jesus even said that the Law scribes and teachers who understand the things of the Kingdom of God have special advantages over those who do not have knowledge of the Law. (See Matthew 5:17-20, 13:52.) Moreover, Jesus raised the standard of obedience to God in God's Kingdom to be one that cut through to the motives of the heart, not just a measure of external actions. According to His teachings, looking at a woman lustfully is the same as committing the act of adultery and anger against someone is the same as committing the act of murder. The only way for His followers to be able to live up to such an impossible standard would be for them to be reborn by the Spirit of the Lord in keeping with the New Covenant. Without an internal renovation of the human heart and spirit in order to purify character and morality at their deepest levels, no person would ever be able to attain the standard of Jesus' teachings. For this, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, would be sent from heaven to dwell inside His followers to enable them to live out His commands and teachings and participate in the Kingdom of God. (See John 14:15-17.)

All of this is to say that what God desired from the beginning of mankind for the establishment of His Kingdom on the earth is childlike trust and obedience to His commands from the depths of the heart. This kind of humble submission and faith in God is what God had found in Abraham and is exactly what Jesus taught His followers. (See Matthew 18:1-4.) Jesus' followers would only be able to fulfill this when the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell inside of them, in accordance with the New Covenant. This would change their hearts away from Adam and Eve's likeness back to the likeness of God.

Messiah's Kingdom

Jesus' followers, who were all Jewish, came from every kind of Jewish household and lifestyle. They regarded the depth of Jesus' understanding of the Scriptures, His miracles in healing the sick, commanding the weather, multiplying food to feed hungry people, and His mercy and compassion for people as confirmation that He was the Son of God. They openly recognized and acknowledged Jesus

as the Messiah, the promised Anointed One of God, and the Prophet like Moses whom Israel must listen to. This revelation of Jesus' identity as King of the Kingdom of God was the foundation upon which God would be able to build His Kingdom on the earth.

*Matthew 16:16-20 – Shimon Cephas answered, “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Shimon Bar Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Cephas, and **on this rock I will build my congregation, 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.**” Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

The religious leaders of Israel, however, did not follow Jesus or accept Him as the Messiah. By this time, the leaders of Israel, who were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Messiah due to Daniel's prophecy, had also created many rules as a supplement to the Law which they claimed were the keys to obedience. Jesus did not submit Himself to their rules and pointedly rejected the ones which were a contradiction of the Law and the heart of God. (See Matthew 23.) Some of the religious leaders were so consumed with maintaining the traditions of the Jewish people and observing their religious rules that they had forgotten that being an image-bearing Kingdom for God is God's main purpose for Israel.

Additionally, some of the religious leaders had blended themselves into the marketplace of the world to such a degree that they had procured positions of political power and commercial authority. Leaders like this had turned God's house into a marketplace for personal gain and desired to “keep the peace” by maintaining the status quo with the world. They did not like the way Jesus drew great crowds that acknowledged Jesus as their King rather than the Roman Emperor because they feared that it would be seen as rebellion by all Jews against Rome and they would lose their positions of power. These religious leaders rejected Jesus as their King while submitting to Rome's authority.

Other Jewish leaders were looking for the Messiah to come and establish His Kingdom on the Day of the Lord with great terror by overthrowing their Gentile oppressors in a cataclysmic battle between God on Israel's behalf and the rest of the world. For them, Jesus' teachings of humility, sacrificial love, and mercy did not fit the profile of the Messiah they were looking for. These religious leaders rejected Jesus as their King because they lacked faith to see how God was fulfilling His promises right before their eyes. Though Jesus righteously longed for the day of judgment by fire, He knew that before judgment, God was doing something wonderful to make a way for the redemption of mankind.

*Luke 12:49-50: **I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!***

All of these religious leaders conspired together to stir up false accusations against Jesus as a deliberate attempt to prevent Israel from following Him and making Him their King. In a move to maintain their own authority, they sought to trap Jesus in His words and find contradictions against the Law in His life and teachings and sought ways to put Jesus to death and cut Him off from God's people.

Knowing in advance that all of this must take place, Jesus told His followers that He would be handed over to the religious leaders, and then to the Gentiles, and would be beaten, scourged, and put to death. This was hard for His followers to understand because, like Abraham being asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac, this didn't make any sense. Peter even tried to rebuke Jesus for saying so but Jesus sharply said, “Get behind me Satan” because He recognized the voice of the usurper speaking through His friend. Peter was thinking from the world's perspective of war and victory through self-exaltation, whereas Jesus was on a mission to fulfill God's righteousness through obedience.

On the night before His death, Jesus shared a meal with His disciples. He prayed the blessing over the

bread and broke it saying, "This is my body, broken for you." Then He prayed the blessing over the wine and said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins." That same night, Jesus prayed to ask God if there was any other way to offer atonement for His people but there was not. So, He submitted Himself to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, knowing that it must be fulfilled in order for God's Kingdom to be established.

At the appointed time, because Jesus knew the plan of God for Him to be cut off from the land of the living in fulfillment of the Scriptures, He allowed the religious leaders to arrest Him on charges of blasphemy for claiming to be God's only Son and prophesying that the Temple would be destroyed. Jesus could have used His own power to stop this, or He could have called out to God to put a stop to this unjust treatment, but instead, in accordance with the Scriptures, He did not open His mouth in self-defense. Like Abraham offering Isaac, Jesus had perfect faith in God as the source of life who had power even to raise Him from the dead in order to fulfill His promises. He trusted the prophetic promises about Himself which foretold that His death would be an offering of atonement which would establish the New Covenant between God and Israel and which would be sealed with His blood. When Pilate asked Jesus if it was true that He was a king, He did not deny it but affirmed His own destiny.

John 18:36-37 ESV: Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

The Crucified King & Eternal Passover Lamb

On the day of Passover, when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in remembrance of the way that God delivered His people from Egyptian slavery, Jesus the Messiah, the eternal Passover Lamb, was slaughtered and shed His blood. On the same mountain where Abraham had offered Isaac as a sacrifice and said that God would provide for all of His promises, Jesus the Messiah offered Himself as the only Son and Lamb of God who makes provision for atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and scourged until He no longer resembled a human, and then He was hung upon a tree to die a horrifying, brutal, cursed death.

The sign above His head said, "King of the Jews" in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek the major languages of the world in that day. The whole world was out on notice that God was establishing His Kingdom through His chosen King of Israel, God's anointed Messiah. The cross was God's standard lifted up on the earth. All of mankind was exposed as usurpers. All of the descendants of Adam and Eve who, being more inclined to the ways of the adversary, didn't want God to rule over them and be their King. Even Jesus' own disciples abandoned Him in shocked unbelief at these turn of events.

During His crucifixion, He said to God, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," and with His dying breath, He cried out, "It is finished!" knowing that the requirement for atonement of souls had been satisfied. Then, He committed His spirit into the hands of God and hung His head and died.

From a worldly perspective, God's plans for His Kingdom on the earth again looked hopeless.

But on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, God raised Jesus from the dead. Because He had lived in accordance with the Law perfectly, Jesus was an unblemished sacrifice and merited eternal life. Jesus served as the eternal Passover Lamb so that He passes over anyone who covers their soul with His blood to protect them from the Destroyer, namely death. Now, anyone from any nation, tribe, or tongue who believes in Him as the Suffering Servant and Messiah of Israel is redeemed from the curse of the Law which means that their sins no longer held against them by God. (See 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 5:7.)

Crushing the Head of the Serpent

Jesus' resurrection proved that the offering of His soul for atonement for the sins and souls of mankind had been accepted by God. Through His resurrection, Jesus reversed the curse of Adam, crushed the head of Satan, and was granted the keys to the Kingdom of God.

The resurrected Jesus showed Himself alive to His followers for forty days. He gave them the keys to the Kingdom of God and commanded them to leave behind the life they had known and go, be fruitful, and multiply on the earth by making disciples of His Kingdom.

One New Man – One Mediator – the New Covenant

Through all of this, God was again starting with a remnant of one Man—His Son, Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel. Moreover, God did this while remaining totally faithful to the Law and every promise He had made to the Patriarchs and Prophets of Israel. He fulfilled the Old Covenant and established the New Covenant through which the forgiveness of sins is available to anyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead. Faith in Jesus Christ as the King of the Kingdom of God is the only way to be included in God's people and the blessings of the righteous. He is the Mediator and Prophet, greater than Moses, appointed by God to represent mankind. (See John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5.)

After forty days of resurrection appearances, Jesus' disciples asked if He was going to establish His Kingdom by overthrowing all the kingdoms of the earth in the epic battle of the Day of the Lord. Jesus said it was not for them to know the times of God. He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, it was promised that He would return to the same place in order to fulfill the remaining Scriptures about the Messiah. At that time, bring judgment on all God's adversaries and anyone who does not accept Him as their King. Until then, Jesus' disciples are called upon to fulfill God's purpose for mankind by making disciples of God's Kingdom in readiness for the world to come.

Must Be Born Again by Faith (Acts & Beyond)

When Jesus ascended to and arrived in heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. Ten days later, the Holy Spirit was poured out from heaven to all who believed in Jesus, who were gathered together at the Southern Steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. Similar to how a consuming fire dwelt over Sinai when the Law was written on tablets of stone and given to Israel, flames of fire hovered over the heads of Jesus' followers as the Law was written on the tablets of their hearts. (See Acts 2, Joel 2:28-29.)

The New Covenant between God and Israel, which had been sealed with the blood of the Messiah, which He shed for the forgiveness of sins, was now fully established and functional. Followers of Jesus now hold the keys to the Kingdom of God, bearing His image from the heart through the Holy Spirit, with delegated authority and power from heaven for the purpose of establishing God's Kingdom on the earth.

In the days and years that followed, the good news of Jesus the Messiah was initially spread only to Jews. After about ten to fifteen years, Jesus' Jewish followers came to understand that the New Covenant was also intended to be extended to Gentiles as long as they believed in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. From then on and including now, anyone in any nation, Jew or Gentile alike, who confesses the name of Jesus and believes in their heart that God raised Him from the dead will have their sins blotted out and can live for God and His Kingdom. Like God's covenant with Abraham, righteousness is credited to us who believe by faith, not like the covenant with Moses which required perfect obedience to God's Law. This is really good news! (See John 1:12-13, 3:3-6; Romans 1:16-17.)

This said, our faith is revealed by what we do. We must be born again which includes an entire renovation of our human nature by the Holy Spirit who enables us to deny and crucify our sinful nature of the rebellious usurper who wants to be our own god rather than let Jesus be our King. (See Galatians 5:19-24.) We must allow the Holy Spirit within us to strengthen us in righteousness so that we do not give way to temptation

like Adam and Eve did. Our faith will be tested and our actions will reveal what we truly believe. God's mercies are sure through our faith in Jesus but we will only be people after God's own heart if our repentance from error is swift and real from the heart.

Judgment Day to Come (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Revelation)

As Jesus promised, He will return to avenge all evil and judge the world. This time, it will not be by water as it was in the days of Noah, but by fire as it was for Sodom and Gomorrah. It will be a time similar to the outpouring of plagues in Egypt when God protected those who were His while He poured out judgments on those who defied Him. There will be wars, earthquakes, tsunamis and strange tides, and every type of plague, disease, and disaster in this world as the cursed creation groans for its rebirth by fire.

The times before the return of Jesus will be consumed with false prophets and false teachers using the tactics of the ancient serpent to prey upon the elect of God. Through teachings and techniques claiming to establish God's likeness through deeper spirituality, divine power, prophetic omniscience and things like this, the adversary will deceive many into counterfeit worship. The antichrist will set up his kingdom in absolute blasphemous rebellion against God, while imitating God's power with all manner of signs and wonders, and declaring himself to be God. There will be a great apostasy in the Church as many will fall away from worshipping God to worship the beast and take his mark.

Similar to the days of Noah, people will be going about their normal lives up until the moment judgment begins. Moreover, even Jesus does not know the exact day and hour of His return but says that it will come like a thief in the night when no one is expecting it. Similar to those who were inside Noah's Ark, we will be spared from the wrath of God through our faith in Jesus. Therefore, we are told to keep watch, be ready, and faithfully fulfill our duties as His servants until He returns. Even if the other servants in God's house begin to beat us and treat us shamefully while they themselves begin to eat, drink, and be merry because the Master is delayed. We must be vigilant in keeping the commands of our King.

In the end, just like in the beginning, all of mankind will sell themselves out to worship the ancient serpent – the beast – except for those who have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and endure in their faith. (See Revelation 13.) When the time for God's wrath comes upon the world, God will judge the living and the dead according to whether or not their names have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The dead will be raised and judged – some to everlasting life in God's Kingdom and some to everlasting contempt and punishment in the fires of hell. All usurpers and rebels will be destroyed. God will take vengeance on the beast, the ancient serpent who deceived mankind away from worshipping the one true God. (See Revelation 19:19-21; Daniel 12:1-2.) Then, God will establish His Kingdom and we will live with Him forever in the new heavens and the new earth after the old heavens have been rolled away like a scroll and the new earth has been created without any waters of chaos. (See Revelation 21:1-8.)

God's plan for mankind will be fulfilled. God's ultimate defeat of His adversary will be complete. God will have a people who will fill the earth and worship Him in Spirit and in truth from their hearts. And He will reign and dwell with us forever. Amen.

CHRIST REVEALED (TYPES & SHADOWS)

Luke 24:27 NIV – And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

DESCRIPTION

Jesus plainly said that all Scripture testifies about Him. From the beginning of mankind, God had Jesus in mind. This includes His perfect life, sacrificial death, resurrection, ascension, and eternal Kingdom. Finding Jesus in all of Scripture can be easy in some passages and more challenging in others, forcing us to press into God for revelation. He can be found in people, things, holy objects, in ways that New Testament writers called "types" or "shadows." He is also discovered in the vivid words, metaphors, and predictions of the Prophets. Practicing Christ Revealed is about discovering Jesus in all of Scripture. It helps us to marvel at how God has been disclosing parts of the mystery of His eternal plan of redemption since before the world began.

EXAMPLE

Genesis 4:1-16 – The Story of Cain and Abel

What are some ways that this passage reveals or points to Christ?

1. Adam and Eve may have thought that one of their sons would be the One to crush the head of the serpent. Jesus is that Son.
2. Evil Cain killing righteous Abel is like the wicked world crucifying righteous Jesus because He was acceptable to God.
3. Abel's blood cried out to God to be avenged. Christ's blood cries out to God for forgiveness of sins and then ultimately for eternal vengeance.
4. Cain was forced into exile away from God's presence with a mark on him. Those who do not believe Jesus will accept the mark of the beast and spend eternity away from the presence of God.



PURPOSE:

To accurately understand God's meaning and imagery used in Biblical texts.

To read the Bible objectively and impartially seeking out what God is speaking.

To identify key themes in the Bible and know how they point to Jesus the Messiah and fit into the greater picture of redemption.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Deeper knowledge of God through His Word.

Increased revelation of Jesus and God's purposes for mankind.

Improved understanding of how God revealed Jesus throughout His Word.

Greater faith through hearing the Word of God.

PRAYER

Father, thank you sent Jesus to fill me with the Holy Spirit who teaches me and leads me in all truth. Holy Spirit, fill me now with wisdom and revelation. Explain the Scripture to me in a way that reveals Christ and helps me turn to Him in my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

1. As you read your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight something within the text you are reading.
 - How does this passage anticipate the life, death, and/or resurrection of Jesus?
 - Can you hear Jesus speaking in this passage of His suffering and victory? (i.e. the Psalms) If so, how?
 - How is this a metaphor for God's redemptive work? (i.e. the Feasts of God, Tabernacle, etc.)
 - How has Jesus already fulfilled prophecies in the text?
 - Will the text's prophecies be fulfilled when Jesus returns?
 - How is this a "type" of Christ? (King, Prophet, Priest, etc.)
 - How is this a metaphor for something Jesus is? (i.e. light, life, way, truth, offering for sin, God's tabernacle, etc.)
 - How do the failures, faithlessness, and imperfections in the characters expose humanity's need for a Savior, eternal blood sacrifice, and righteous King? (i.e. through the Law, sin, curse, human weakness, imperfect leadership, etc.)
 - How is Jesus the perfect example of the application of God's wisdom this passage speaks about?

3. Summarize briefly how this has given you deeper insight into the redemptive work of Jesus.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

John 5:39-40
Colossians 2:17
Hebrews 10:1
Luke 24:25
Acts 3:24
John 1:45
Galatians 4:21-31

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Romans 1:5-4 NIV – For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

DESCRIPTION

When we read the Scriptures to delve deeper into our knowledge of God, it is important to understand the context surrounding any passage we may be reading. There is always an original voice, audience, purpose, and history surrounding what God intended when He first spoke those words. By asking questions such as: who, what, where, when, how, and why, we gain insight into God's heart, plan, and purposes. Plus, we grow in our confidence that we are not misquoting or misunderstanding Him.

Practicing Context, Context, Context is about pulling our interpretive lens back to see the bigger picture of what God is saying in any given passage.

EXAMPLE (ABBREVIATED)

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

1. **First Impression** – A promise of blessing for my life.
2. **Who** – The Prophet Jeremiah, mid-life, in a written letter. Called by God at a young age, rejected by leaders due to his prophecies of impending doom.
3. **To Whom** – The surviving exiles of Judah who have been deported to Babylon as captives.
4. **What** – Announcement of seventy years of exile. Exiles encouraged to live decently. False prophets denounced. Preceded and followed by false prophecies promising imminent blessing.
5. **Audience Interpretation** – Exile in Babylon was going to be long but God would eventually restore them and bring them back to the land of Judah.
6. **Look Again** – God's plan of discipline and redemption for Israel.



PURPOSE:

To accurately and objectively understand what God is saying in His Word.

To gain insight into God's redemptive plan through identifying the original setting of the text.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Deeper knowledge of God through His Word.

Increased revelation of God's ways and dealings.

Improved understanding of what God is speaking through His Word.

PRAYER

Father, thank your Word is truth. I ask you now to grant me wisdom and understanding of what you are truly saying in your Word the way you originally intended it. Help me to grow in my knowledge of you by learning of your ways through your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

1. As you read your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight a particular verse to you. (We'll call this the "Verse.")
 - Summarize your First Impression of the Verse.
2. Use the following questions as a guideline to research some information about the context of your Verse.
 - Who is speaking? The person who wrote the Book, a person in dialog, God, or someone speaking for God?
 - To whom is the speaker speaking? Why?
 - What are the highlights in the lives/backgrounds of the speaker and the audience up to this point?
 - Where does it take place? It is referring to another place?
 - When was it first spoken? Is it referring to its own present time, the past, the future, or the end of time?
 - Is it part of a greater story, proclamation, or dialog? When does the full story/speech begin and end?
 - What is being said in the Verse? Summarize it in your own words, including how it fits into the full story/speech.
 - Are there any Scriptures quoted within the Verse? Are there any symbols or figures of speech being used? How did the original speaker or audience interpret or understand these symbols from their culture background?
3. Look Again at the Verse by considering the following:
 - How does the context clarify what God is really saying?
 - Does the context alter or confirm your interpretation of what God is speaking through your Verse? If so, how?
 - Summarize what the Verse is about in its proper context.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- 2 Timothy 3:16
- Acts 20:27
- 1 Corinthians 2:13
- Isaiah 55:11
- Matthew 24:35
- Jeremiah 23:29
- Joshua 1:8
- Psalms 119:105

ISRAEL FOUNDATIONS TEST

Do you know the significance of Israel?

Answer the following questions. Examine what you know and believe about Israel and the Jewish people.

Why did Jesus have to be Jewish?	Has God rejected the Jewish people?	Is God still in covenant with the Jewish people?
Are Jewish people already saved?	How do Jewish people get saved?	Who is the Israel of God?
What does One New Man mean?	Are Jews the rightful owners of the land of Israel?	Will all Jews return to Israel?

ISRAEL & ONE NEW MAN

God established an everlasting covenant with Noah that He would never judge the earth again by water.

God established an everlasting covenant with Abraham that Abraham would be the father of many nations and that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. God also promised to be Abraham's God, to bless all the nations of the earth through him, and to curse anyone who cursed Abraham.

God established a covenant with the nation of Israel at Sinai that they would be His special possession and holy nation. If Israel obeyed the terms of this covenant, they would be richly blessed above all other nations on the earth, but if they disobeyed the terms of this covenant, they would be plagued, judged, oppressed by enemies, scattered among the nations, and made to be a horror in all the earth.

God established an everlasting covenant with David that one of David's descendants would be the Messiah of Israel who would establish a Kingdom with everlasting dominion.

The people of Israel consistently failed to be able to meet the requirements of the Old Covenant and so through His prophets, God promised to establish a new and everlasting covenant with Israel. This New Covenant would be through the Messiah, David's descendant, who would BE the covenant between God and Israel and extend its benefits even to the Gentiles. (See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 42:6.)

Jesus fulfilled these prophecies and established the New Covenant. He is the Messiah born in the line of David. He is the covenant between God and Israel and the New Covenant's mediator. His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins and as the seal of the New Covenant.

*Hebrews 8:10-13: [Quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34] **This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel** after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." **By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete;** and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.*

Take note: Who is the New Covenant with? Israel. Who is the New Covenant for? Everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord. It is not a covenant with Gentiles as if God has neglected or rejected the Jewish people.

This said, when the Jews in Jesus' day claimed that they had access to the Kingdom of God and eternal life because they were descendants of Abraham, Jesus rebuked them and informed them that biological relation to Abraham is not enough to qualify anyone for eternal life and the world to come. (See John 8:31-59.) What is required is not to be descended from Abraham but to **be like** Abraham by doing the things that Abraham did: **believing God**. (See Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:29.)

*Romans 9:6, 8: It is not as though God's word had failed. For **not all who are descended from Israel are Israel**. ... In other words, **it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children**, but it is the **children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring**.*

During his life, Abraham declared from the mount where the Temple eventually stood that God Himself would provide the atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. (See Genesis 22.) God fulfilled what Abraham saw and declared by sending Jesus.

The New Covenant – One New Man

God's covenant with Abraham was sealed and symbolized through circumcision. According to the Old Covenant Law of Moses, anyone who was not circumcised was not allowed to participate in the Passover Feast commemorating God's deliverance of His people. Under the Old Covenant, only the nation of Israel had a relationship with God, and everyone else (collectively referred to as Gentiles, foreigners, and strangers) was completely excluded from the covenant and its blessings unless they were circumcised into God's covenant with Israel. At Sinai, God said that if Israel obeyed Him, they would be His special people and royal (kingdom) priesthood. But now because Jesus obeyed God in perfect righteousness, we who believe Him have become a new generation of humanity. God has chosen us out of every nation and background and ethnicity to participate in this new people in Christ. (See 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9-10.) In the New Covenant, we are spiritually circumcised through baptism. When we enter the waters, we symbolize putting to death our Adamic nature and it is rolled away as we emerge out of the waters as a new creation in Christ. We are born again as sons and daughters of God. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, only believers who have put their faith in Jesus. Our circumcision is of the heart. (See Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3.)

*Colossians 2:11-12: In him [Christ] **you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands.** Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

When we put our faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of us, we become a new creation. We are a new species on the earth, a new generation, a new nation of people which was born by the power of God.

*Ephesians 2:15-19: by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. **His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity** out of the two, thus making peace, and **in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross**, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [Jews]. **For through him we both [Jews & Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.** Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but **fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.***

There are sixty-eight uses of "Israel" in the New Testament and they consistently refer to Israel as the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and followers of Moses. It is impossible to realistically interpret these verses to allegorically or metaphorically refer to the Church. However, two uses of the word Israel in the New Testament refer to Israel in a context other than natural descendants of the patriarchs.

*Galatians 6:15-16: Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; **what counts is the new creation.** Peace and mercy to **all who follow this rule--to the Israel of God.***

*Romans 11:25-26: I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: **Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.** As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.*

Both of these verses explicitly point to the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles as part of God's promises to Israel which were fulfilled in Christ. God has chosen a people from every nation, tribe, and tongue (including the natural descendants of the patriarchs) to be included in His promises to Israel. As such, those who

believe Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are the "Israel of God."

God Has NOT Rejected the Jewish People

Just because Jesus fulfilled the New Covenant does not mean that God has rejected the Jewish people who are still under the Old Covenant. Believers in early church in Rome became confused about this matter when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome around 49A.D. The believers in the church at Rome began to regard this expulsion as evidence that God had rejected the Jews and was punishing them for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. However, the Apostle Paul strongly rebuked them for this error.

*Romans 11:1, 11 ESV: I ask, then, **has God rejected his people? By no means!** For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ... So I ask, **did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!** Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. (Also Romans 9:3-5, 10:1.)*

Jesus is Jewish. Jesus is the King of Israel. Every book in the Bible was written by Jews, for Jews, about Jews, and to Jews. All of Christ's apostles and first followers were Jewish and witnessed almost exclusively to Jews for the first ten years of Christianity. In fact, the inclusion of the Gentiles in the New Covenant was so controversial at first that the hot theological debate of the early Church was whether or not non-Jews had to be circumcised in their flesh in order to be included considered part of God's people at all. (See Acts 15:1-29.)

Jews were chosen by God first, loved by God first, and will be judged first when Christ returns. (See Romans 1:16, 2:9-11.) For this reason, it was the Apostle Paul's practice in all of his travels to witness first to the Jewish people in any given city before sharing the good news with Gentiles. For the most part, the Jews rejected this message and the people spreading it. Even so, Jews are still loved by God because of the covenant promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This said, Jews who do not believe that Jesus is Lord are enemies of gospel message. They are fighting against the righteousness of God, which is by faith, while trying to establish their own righteousness by works of the Law.

*Romans 11:28-29: As far as the **gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake;** but as far as **election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,** for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.*

*Romans 10:3: Since they did not know the righteousness of God and **sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.***

When the Jewish people rejected and continue to reject Jesus as their Messiah, they disqualify themselves from admittance into the New Covenant through their unbelief. If they repent of unbelief and place their faith in Jesus, God will readily accept them. **(Read Romans 11:17-24.)** In fact, the hearts of the Jewish people were hardened to the Gospel message so that the Gentiles, who were already enemies of God because of sin, could come to know Jesus and be saved. It is still God's will that the Jewish people come to know Him and believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of His promises for their Messiah. Their inclusion in the New Covenant through faith in Christ is absolutely and undoubtedly the will of God. (See Romans 11:12.) In fact, throughout history, God consistently maintained a faithful remnant of His people by His grace. (See Romans 11:5.)

Therefore, let us not be conceited but grateful regarding the Jewish heritage of our faith and let us be merciful to God's chosen people by giving them top priority as we witness for Christ. God's promise to Israel has not failed but it must be received by FAITH.

God Has NOT Replaced the Jewish People

Certain people throughout the centuries to believe that the Church has replaced Israel. This is a lie. Jesus fulfilled God's Old Covenant with Israel and as such is the rightful heir of all of God's blessings and promises

to Israel which He extends in the New Covenant to everyone who believes in Him. However, just because Christ fulfilled the Old Covenant does not mean that God has revoked it.

When the writer of Hebrews wrote to Jewish believers in the early church, he stated that through the institution of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant was made obsolete and would soon disappear. (See Hebrews 8:13.) The words used describe something that has been made old, become worn out through time or use, or is about to be done away with – not something that has already been done away with. For example, when the automobile was invented, it proved itself to be a superior form of transportation but this did not mean that people could no longer travel by horse and buggy. Some might think that a horse and buggy is too slow, dangerous, or that water and hay are difficult sources of fuel. But if this is all you have ever known and what your people have always used then, an automobile looks like a strange contraption and probably a death wish. Even though automobiles may have been made available, people were still free to use a horse and buggy if they wanted to.

You get the point. God has not nullified the Old Covenant with Israel and it is still intact for those who have not aligned themselves with the New Covenant through faith in Jesus. However, the Old Covenant is not an everlasting covenant and will soon fade away, having been worn out from use. In the meantime, there are still people in the world today under the Old Covenant even while there are believers and adherents to the New Covenant.

Moreover, Jesus being Jewish actually served to CONFIRM God's promises to the patriarchs of Israel.

*Romans 15:8: For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, **so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed***

Who are the patriarchs? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. While the Old Covenant with Moses was NOT an everlasting covenant, God's covenant with the patriarchs preceded His covenant with Moses and IS everlasting. So, what is it that God promised the patriarchs? In an EVERLASTING covenant, God promised Abraham a land, a nation, a name, to be his God and bless him, and that his offspring would inherit the world. (See Genesis 12:2-3, 15:18, 17:4-8.) Jesus did not negate or replace these promises but rather confirmed them. These promises still stand firmly in place and will be ultimately and literally fulfilled.

God has not become anti-Semitic. His Son is still Jewish. It is a dangerous misunderstanding of God's character for us to think that He has in any way broken His word to His covenant promises to His people or replaced them with another group of people. If He has been fickle in keeping His promises to them, then we should be very concerned that He might back out of His New Covenant assurances to us.

The truth is that God sustains His people by His mercy as a witness to all nations that He is still their God and to give them ample time to repent and come to know that Jesus is their Messiah. They are beloved to Him on account of the patriarchs. Love is patient.

God Has NOT Revoked or Broken His Covenant with the Jewish People

Just because Jesus fulfilled the New Covenant does not mean that God revoked the Old Covenant or is not still enforcing its terms upon natural descendants of Jacob who are under the Law of Moses.

In fact, the Old Covenant Law is still being sovereignly enforced and the words of God's prophets regarding Israel continue to be fulfilled. The Law clearly outlines the blessings and the curses which will come upon the Jewish people based on their obedience or disobedience to God's requirements. These can be found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The Leviticus version includes God's schedule of increasingly severe punishments for persistent disobedience. **(Read Leviticus 26.)**

In summary, if Israel persisted in rebellion and disobedience to God they would experience every kind of plague and disease, crop failure, famine, drought, terror, defeat by enemies, the sword of the Lord, and

having their cities overthrown and demolished. Ultimately, they would be cast out of the land that God had given them and scattered among the nations to perish.

Moreover, in the last days of Moses, before the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, the Lord instructed Moses to write down a song as a witness against His people. **(Read Deuteronomy 30, 31 & 32.)** God knew that His people would experience the fullness of the blessings and the curses laid out in His Law even before they had entered the Promised Land. He knew that they would be scattered and exiled among the nations of the earth for their rebellion against Him. But God in His great mercy, also made a way for their return to the land and to His blessings.

God does not break His promises. God does not violate His covenants. God explicitly promised that in spite of great calamities and afflictions that would come upon His people, He would never fully reject them or completely destroy them because this would be a violation of His covenant with them.

Moreover, in the promise of the New Covenant, God affirms His promise that He will again joyfully plant His people in the land promised to their ancestors. (See Jeremiah 32:40-41.) Additionally, God promised that at that time, He would be ready to circumcise their hearts so that they could willingly obey Him and experience eternal life with Him. This has always been His will and plan.

*Deuteronomy 30:1-7: When **all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you** and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your **God disperses you among the nations**, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and **gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.** He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. **The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.** The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you.*

Historical Fulfillment

After Israel entered the Promised Land, their obedience waxed and waned. When Israel disobeyed God, God sent prophets to continually warn them and exhort them to return to the Lord and His ways. If they ignored the prophets, they experienced the beginnings of the punishments listed above. When they repented, God restored them to His favor because of His rich mercy towards them. However, their obedience was usually short-lived and they resumed their rebellion. So, God persistently and consistently urged His people to repent so they would not experience the curses of the Law. However, their repeated, persistent, and unabashed rebellion against God ultimately forced God's hand in delivering the consequences He forewarned them about would result from their disobedience.

When God's people divided into northern and southern kingdoms, the northern kingdom rebelled egregiously against God, and therefore, within a few hundred years they experienced defeat by the Assyrians and were scattered into exile in the nations in 722 B.C. God divorced Himself from the northern kingdom but prophesied that they would ultimately (in the last days) return to Him in recognition that God's covenant remained with David's descendant as the promised Messiah. (See Jeremiah 3:8; Hosea 3:5.) The southern kingdom was inconsistent in their obedience depending on who was king. The good kings would attempt reform to bring the people back into submission to God and His Law, but after they were gone, the people returned to neglecting the commands of God in favor of the ways of the world. Therefore, in 586 B.C., the Kingdom of Judah was trampled and overthrown by the Babylonians and they were exiled to Babylon and scattered among the nations. In keeping with His promise to David, God

never divorced the Kingdom of Judah even though their sins exceeded that of the northern kingdom. (See Jeremiah 3:8-14.) Before the southern kingdom was exiled, God told them in advance exactly how long their exile would be. Once the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths, God's people would seek Him in the midst of their exile and He would hear them and bring them back to their land. (See Jeremiah 29:10-14.)

Many of God's prophets prophesied that God's plan for His people, collectively referred to as Israel, included restoration to the land, rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, and living in the blessings of God to be a great kingdom on the earth as His shining light to the nations. Exiles longed to return to the land and see these prophetic promises fulfilled. However, while in exile, Daniel had a series of visions which foretold much hardship on the way to restoration. **(Read Daniel 7, 8 & 11.)**

Daniel's visions and their interpretations explicitly outline a sequence of increasingly fierce world empires leading up to one kingdom which would take over the whole world. From this kingdom would emerge a leader who, with total world dominance, would oppress God's people until the Messiah came to overthrow his empire and establish God's eternal kingdom. Because of these visions, Daniel realized that God's people had not responded correctly to God's discipline through repentance and returning to obedience to God. God's restoration of His people and establishment of His Kingdom would not come as easily or swiftly as the exiles hoped because they had not returned to the Lord with their whole heart.

*Daniel 9:13-14: Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God **by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.** The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; **yet we have not obeyed him.***

According to the word of God through Jeremiah, after seventy years of exile was completed, God would keep His promise and allow the exiles to return to the land and rebuilt the Temple. But God informed Daniel that this would happen in a time of great trouble. Then, the Messiah would come and would be cut off from His people and a wicked world ruler would desecrate and demolish the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. War would increase, Jerusalem would be trampled by Gentile empires, and desolations would continue until the end. But in the last days, the Messiah would come riding on the clouds to demolish all other kingdoms and hand His Kingdom over to His people in total fulfillment of His promises to Israel through the prophets.

*Daniel 7:13-14: In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, **coming with the clouds of heaven.** He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and **his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.***

The world empires proceeded in succession according to the visions God had given to Daniel. First, Babylon was overthrown by Persia. Then, according to God's promise, after seventy years of exile were completed, a decree was made that the Jewish people could return to the land of Judah and rebuild the Temple of God. About forty thousand exiles returned to the land at this time but many Jewish people remained in the lands of exile and to varying degrees, blended themselves in with the cultures of the nations of their exiles. Nevertheless, in the midst of great opposition, the Temple of God was rebuilt by the exiles under Zerubbabel with the encouragement of Prophets Haggai and Zechariah. During the rule of the Persian Empire, antisemitism spiked in the highest levels of the government and a decree was issued for the annihilation of all Jewish people in the entire empire. But God had positioned Esther as queen of Persia to advocate for her people before the king and a new decree was issued for their defense. (See the Book of Esther.) After this, more exiles returned with Ezra, the scribe, who sought to re-train God's people in the Scriptures and ordered a massive separation of intermarriage with pagan wives in order to purify God's people. Later, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the wall of the city, as its

governor, while Ezra remained its religious leader. Several years after this, the Prophet Malachi pointed out that the people's worship was already hypocritical and weak and reminded them of Messiah coming to judge.

Next, according to Daniel's vision, Persia was conquered by Greece under Alexander the Great. He sought to "Hellenize" the world to a uniform Greek culture and language in order to create a one world order. But Alexander died young and his empire was divided among four generals. During this time, the Jewish people in the land of Judah found themselves bargaining for peace between the rulers in the south (Egypt/Ptolemy) and the rulers in the north (Assyria/Seleucid) and subjugating themselves under one or the other depending on the agreement reached. While the Pharisees were advocating strict adherence to priestly standards of purity for all residents of Judah and Jerusalem, the Sadducees, who controlled the High Priesthood and Sanhedrin, advocated compromise with the Hellenists to open Jerusalem up as a commercial center along the trade routes. This division among God's people led to unrest and rebellion which was ultimately crushed by Antiochus IV, of Assyria. This is when the story of Hanukkah happened. Antiochus cut off the daily sacrifice, desecrated the Temple by sacrificing pigs, and stood on the Temple Mount declaring himself to be God. Judah Maccabee led a revolt against him, took back the Temple, and rededicated it to God. From this, the Maccabees began the Hasmonean dynasty and the Jews essentially ruled themselves for about 100 years.

But soon the Romans arose as a world power. They were so strong and fierce that the Jewish people willingly subjugated themselves rather than try to fight these ferocious warriors. The Roman style of government allowed for many freedoms within the kingdoms conquered by Rome, as long as they still paid taxes and did not revolt against Rome's authority.

Then, Jesus was born, proclaimed God's Kingdom, and was rejected and cut off from God's people who crucified Him on a cross. But God raised Him from the dead and He ascended into heaven on the clouds, promising to return riding on the clouds to fulfill the remaining prophecies of the Messiah and establish His Kingdom forever.

However, Jesus had made it clear during His ministry that for their rejection of Him, Jerusalem, the Jewish people, and the Temple would experience another destruction and scattering into exile in the nations. Jerusalem would continue to be trampled by Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles was complete and the Jewish people would not see Him coming on the clouds until they called out blessing His name. (See Luke 21:24-27; Matthew 23:37-39.) Therefore, in 70 A.D., the Romans overthrew Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. In the years that followed, the Jewish people were again forced into exile in the nations and the promised land became desolate. This time, there was no prophetic indication of how long this exile would last or how long the land would remain desolate to keep its Sabbaths.

Over the next eighteen hundred years, Jerusalem would be owned and trampled on by empire after empire of Gentiles while the Jewish people remained in exile in the nations. While in exile, the Jewish people repeatedly experienced cycles of blessings and curses. They would flee from one place due to persecution or expulsion to start again in a new place with nothing. Then, they would re-devote themselves to God, work hard, experience God's blessings, and be exalted to top places in government, commerce, banking, philosophy, and other arenas. As new generations became more entitled to the blessings without reverence for the source of them, they blended with the pagans of the nations and their practices through intermarriage and unfaithfulness to God's Law. Soon, the punishments of the curse of the Law would begin to come upon them including escalating persecution and ultimately the sword and expulsion from wherever they lived. They would flee to a new place and the cycle would repeat itself.

The most historic example of this was the holocaust of World War II when Jews were expelled from their homes and ravaged mercilessly by Gentile nations. In fulfillment of God's word, it has become the most visceral object of horror that the world has ever known. (See Deuteronomy 28:37.) Please note, the curse

is no excuse for persecution, antisemitism, or hateful behavior towards the Jewish people. It simply explains God's sovereignty over this grotesque mistreatment and destruction of His people.

But after these events, God did what only God could do and made a way for the Jewish people to return to the very land that He had promised to their ancestors. What a miracle! In 1948, the nation of Israel was born in a day. Jewish people who had survived the horrors of war flocked to their homeland.

Continued Fulfillment

The return of the Jewish people to the land God promised to them through their ancestors is called making Aliyah (ah-lee-ah.) There are almost seventy specific promises in Scripture pertaining to the return of God's people to the land promised to their ancestors. God knows where each and every single Jewish person is in the world and not one of them will be left behind. (See Ezekiel 39:27-28.) God does all of this for His own namesake in the sight of the nations and to assert His absolute sovereignty over all things in the sight of His adversaries. (See Deuteronomy 32:26-27, 36-43.)

The return of God's people to the Land of Israel after two thousand years of exile is an even greater miracle than parting the waters of the Red Sea to grant them escape from Egypt. It is such an awesome wonder that almost no one in Church history considered that God would LITERALLY fulfill these passages of Scripture and this is what led to some very incorrect theological positions about God's heart and plans for the Jewish people. However, God will fulfill His plan of gathering all of the Jews out of the nations by sending His agents to gather them.

*Jeremiah 16:14-16 - "However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be said, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but **it will be said, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.'** For I will restore them to the land I gave their ancestors. But now I will **send for many fishermen,**" declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will **send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down** on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks."*

God will send fishers and hunters to gather the Jewish people from all the nations under heaven. Fishers use a net which gently drags the fish to the shore, preserving the life of the fish until they arrive safely in the harbor. Hunters however, hunt with intent to kill. When the time for the hunters comes upon the world, there will be another horrifying persecution of the Jewish people on a global scale. At that time, Jews will be evicted from every nation in which they live in a time of great wrath. Not all of them will enter the land of Israel but God will preserve a remnant and restore them to the land.

*Ezekiel 20:33-38, 44: "As surely as I live," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will reign over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. **I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered--with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you into the wilderness of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you.** As I judged your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you," declares the Sovereign LORD. "**I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel.** Then you will know that I am the LORD."... You will know that I am the LORD, when **I deal with you for my name's sake** and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, you people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.' "*

Even after the people have been restored to the land of Israel, there will be a time of great trouble, wars and desolations until the end when Jesus returns on the clouds to establish His Kingdom. This time has

become known as the time of Jacob's Trouble and I believe it is the same type of thing Daniel saw in his visions of the times preceding the arrival of the Messiah. **(Read Jeremiah 30.)**

The Days to Come

The Jewish people will experience the full discipline of God and this will continue to suffer at the hands of Gentile oppressors in their land. But ultimately, God will vindicate His people and destroy all the nations under heaven which have stood against them – ALL the nations of the earth. This day will not come until the strength of God's people has been broken so that God can be completely glorified by the miracles and wonders He will work to save and deliver His people.

*Deuteronomy 32:36-43: **The LORD will vindicate his people** and relent concerning his servants **when he sees their strength is gone** and no one is left, slave or free. He will say: "Now where are their gods, the rock they took refuge in, the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up to help you! Let them give you shelter! See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. I lift my hand to heaven and solemnly swear: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, **I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.** I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, **the heads of the enemy leaders.** Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will **take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.***

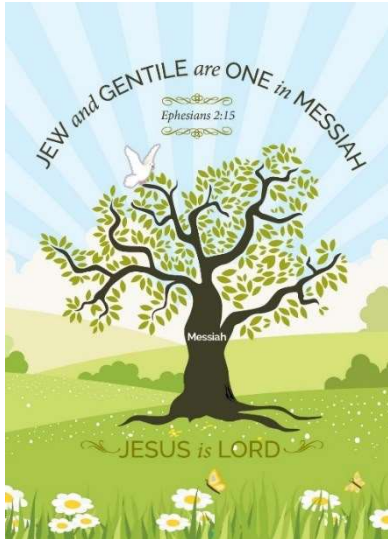
*Daniel 12:6-9: One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. **When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.**" I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and **sealed until the time of the end.***

In that day, God will circumcise the hearts of the Jewish people to come fully into the New Covenant through faith in Jesus as their Messiah. (See Ezekiel 39:22.) God will gather all the nations of the world and their armies to surround Jerusalem and fight against God, His city, and His people. But God will vindicate His people and turn Jerusalem into a cup of His wrath upon His adversaries. (See Joel 3:1-2; Zechariah 12:2-9.) ALL nations will fight against Jerusalem and God's people. Then, Jesus will come riding on the clouds and set His feet on the Mount of Olives. (See Zechariah 14:2-4.)

Jesus came the first time in a literal body to a literal place. He literally lived, He literally fulfilled the prophecies of the prophets. He literally died and was cut off. He was literally raised from death and literally ascended to heaven. He literally established a New Covenant with Israel, which is entered into by faith. This covenant literally extends the mercy and grace of God to Gentiles who put their faith in Him. He will literally return just as the prophets have foretold and judge all the nations of the earth. In that day, there will be one nation remaining – a holy nation and royal priesthood, purified by the blood of Jesus through faith in Him. God will literally establish a new earth and we will literally dwell with God forever. Hallelujah!

INGRAFTED IN MESSIAH

Post Card Handout



Jew and Gentile Ingrafted by Faith into Messiah

A visual demonstration of Romans 11

1.



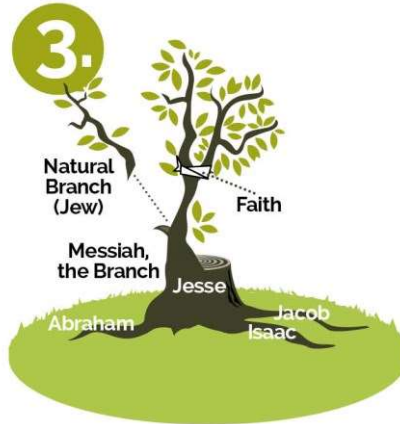
- A. Natural branches broken off because of unbelief. (Rom 11:20)
B. A shoot comes up from the stump of Jesse, a Branch bearing fruit from his roots. (Isaiah 11:1)

2.



- C. Gentiles (wild branches) grafted in by faith in Messiah. (Rom 11:17, 20)
D. Jewish hearts partially hardened until the fullness of Gentiles comes in. (Rom 11:25)

3.



- E. Jews (natural branches) grafted back in by faith in Messiah. (Rom 11:24)
F. Jew and Gentile are justified by faith. (Rom 3:22-30; Gal 5:6)

4.



- G. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom 10:11-13; Joel 2:32)
H. Great riches in the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in Messiah. (Rom 11:12; Col 3:11)

Further Study: Romans 9-11, Ephesians 2, Isaiah 11 and 49, Jeremiah 23 and 33, Galatians 3, Romans 4, Zechariah 3 & 6

PRAYER GUIDE FOR ISRAEL & THE JEWISH PEOPLE

ISRAEL & JERUSALEM

- Give no rest to the Lord until He establishes the peace of Jerusalem. (Isa 62:6-7; Psalm 121, Psalm 122)
- Israel to be a light to the nations, revealing God's holiness and power to the nations. (Isa 49:6; Zech 12:1-9)
- The Lord to take delight in His people and for them to delight in Him. (Zeph 3:14-17; Isa 62:1-5; Psalm 149)
- The people of Israel to know that God's plans for them are for good, to give them a hope and future. (Jer 29:11)

SALVATION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

- The Jewish people to seek the truth in God with all their heart and find Yeshua. (Deut 4:29-31; Jer 29:12-13, 33:3)
- The fullness of Gentiles to come in so that Jewish hearts may soften and all Israel may be saved. (Rom 11:25-26)
- Outpouring of Holy Spirit leading Jewish people to genuine repentance. (Zech 12:10; Daniel 9:4-19; Ezek 36:31)
- The Lord to circumcise the hearts of the Jewish people into the New Covenant. (Deut 30:6; Rom 2:29; Jer 31:31-34)
- The Lord to remove the veil and give the Jewish people a new heart and a new spirit. (2Cor 3:16; Ezek 36:26)
- Jewish people grafted into Messiah through faith, redeemed from the curse of the Law. (Rom 11:24, Gal 3:13)

THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

- Be thankful and inclusive towards the Jewish people rather than conceited. (Rom 11:18-20; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-15)
- Have right revelation and correct doctrine about Israel and the Church. (Rom 11:1; Rom 11:28; Gen 12:1-3)
- Prioritize witnessing to the Jewish people in a Jewish context of Scripture and Messiah. (Rom 11:1-6; 1Cor 1:22-24)
- Support Messianic ministries and outreaches to the Jewish people. (Rom 1:16; Rom 10:14-17; Rom 15:27)
- Jewish believers to be unified, filled with love, and protected as a living witness of Yeshua. (John 17:11,23)
- Provoke the Jewish people to jealousy through righteousness, boldness, signs & wonders. (Rom 11:11; Acts 4:29-30)
- Give no unnecessary offense to the Jewish people in lifestyle or witnessing. (1Cor 10:32-33; Acts 15:21)

ALIYAH – THE RETURN OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO ISRAEL

- The Jewish people to respond to the call to return to the Land of their ancestors in these last days. (Isa 11:10-16)
- The Lord to be proved holy in the sight of the nations by gathering the Jewish people out of every nation to which they have been scattered, not leaving any behind. (Jer 23:7-8; Ezek 39:27-28; Ezek 20:41; Ezek 36:36; Ezek 28:25)
- The Jewish people to return voluntarily before the Lord sends His fishers and hunters to gather them. (Jer 16:16)
- The Jewish people in the land to prosper so that they come to know Yeshua as Messiah. (Deut 30:1-9; Ezek 36:30)

END-TIMES EVENTS DISCERNMENT & FULFILLMENT

- Discern the times, urgency for salvation, and God's ultimate purpose of redemption. (Luke 12:54-59; Jer 30:1-24)
- Israel to receive the Lord's supernatural protection as a witness to the nations. (Zech 12:2-9; Psalm 91)
- The Lord to judge nations setting themselves against Jerusalem. (Joel 3:1-4; Micah 4:11-13; Deut 32:36; Zech 14:1-4)
- The Lord to establish His Kingdom and set His glory upon Israel. (Dan 7:13-27; Ezek 39:21-22; Joel 3:17)

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL NATIONS

God's purpose in ALL things is that HIS NAME is exalted on the earth – as it should rightfully be.

What do the heroes of the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith have in common? They were all looking for a city and a Kingdom built by God which was not of this world. Their attention was not on the nations of this world or the political powers of this world because they knew that the nations of this world are a drop in the bucket to God. (See Isaiah 40:15, 17.) Their focus was exclusively on God and His Kingdom as they longed to see it manifest on the earth. We would be wise to follow their example instead of subscribing to a watered-down, political "gospel" that has no basis in the reality of the life of Jesus and what is coming in the days ahead before He establishes His Kingdom on earth.

We must narrow our focus on the Kingdom of God and widen our perspective of how God actually rules in the nations of the world. In fact, if we do not understand and accept God's absolute sovereignty over the nations of the earth and their authorities, we will be distracted from our true worship of God by turning our hope to world rulers. Ultimately, this will cause us to be ensnared into worshipping the beast in the end times – the adversary of God, who is the antichrist. We will cover the end-times piece of this more in Unit Six of this course but for this segment, we are going to focus on how God has demonstrated His authority over all international events from the beginning of time. He is God. There is none other.

God remains absolutely sovereign over all the nations of the earth and appoints ALL authorities on the earth. From the authority of a husband or father in a household to the authority of a president or emperor. No matter how they think they have attained it, it is God who appointed them to their position. This is true whether they know Him, believe Him, or even acknowledge His existence. (See Daniel 2:20-22, 4:17; Isaiah 45:1-6; Proverbs 21:1.) God appoints authorities whom we consider to be good/righteous and authorities whom we consider to be bad/evil. God uses them as His servants to carry out His justice on the earth, good or bad, however He sees fit and whether they know that God is using them or not. God speaks to them through dreams and other forms of communication. Examples include: Pharaoh in Abraham's day and Joseph's day, Pharaoh Necho in Josiah's day even though Josiah did not believe that God would speak to a foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, visions, and divination which was ultimately controlled by God, Ahasuerus' sleepless night, Pilate's wife's dream, etc. God sometimes sends His own prophets to speak to or anoint foreign kings who do not know Him. Examples include: Jonah to Nineveh and Elisha anointing the king of Assyria. God also uses His prophets to declare what will happen in the nations as evidence that He is the One who is actually in charge. Whatever we may think of the authorities over nations, all of them are appointed by God. Through them, God sovereignly asserts His authority over all the earth. **(Read Romans 13:1-7.)**

God's view of world justice in the nations is completely different than the human perspective. His patience with nations spans hundreds if not thousands of years. He endures long and sends witnesses to give warnings, He responds to their repentance with mercy, He waits until justice is required and then, He sends it swiftly. (See Jeremiah 18:7-10.) As an example, consider that God sent the Prophet Jonah to warn Nineveh (a Gentile city) of impending disaster if they did not repent. The king of Nineveh ordered a fast to humble themselves before the God of Heaven. God saw this and relented of the disaster that He planned, much to Jonah's dismay. However, within one hundred years, the people of Nineveh had returned to their sins again warranted judgment. At that time, God warned them through the Prophet

Nahum but they did not repent. So, God destroyed the city of Nineveh to a degree that its ruins were not identified for thousands of years. (See the books of Jonah and Nahum.)

The truth is that the whole world, every nation, and all of mankind already stands condemned. (See John 3:18-21.) It is only because of God's great mercy that He allows us to continue to live and set up nations and governments here on earth. But even in this, God rules over all. God appointed the times of the rise and fall of nations and empires before nations were even started. (See Acts 17:26-31.)

God's desire is to be sought and found by people in all nations. (Matthew 7:7; John 6:44-45.) God has made a way for everyone from any nation, tribe, or tongue to be saved. God knows that all of world history will culminate in the Day of the Lord when He gathers together all the nations for judgment. It is not God's desire that anyone should perish on that day. But when that day comes, anyone who has not put their trust in Jesus Christ will be condemned for eternity.

Examples of God's Judgment: Noah, Babel, Sodom & Gomorrah (Genesis 6-19)

The Book of Genesis gives us three vivid examples of God's judgment on the wickedness of mankind. Each of these prophetically foreshadow the great day of God's judgment that is still yet to come.

In the days of Noah, ten generations of man had passed since Adam. By this time, the hard labor of sweat and toil in the cursed land of thorns and thistles had driven mankind to wickedness in their hearts and violence against one another. They had conjugated with spiritual beings to create a species of giants on the earth. Mankind was absolutely NOT reflecting the likeness of God and so, God regretted that He had made mankind. So, He called upon Noah to build an Ark to spare a remnant of mankind and creation from the judgment of flood He was about to send. Noah built the Ark and God sent the flood. All of mankind and everything with the breath of life in it was destroyed from the face of the earth. Only eight people were in the Ark plus one male and one female of each creature. God promised He will never judge the earth again by water. Noah's sons had children and eventually, their descendants grew into nations. All people spoke the same language.

Soon, Nimrod arose as a mighty hunter who built cities. He gathered all nations together in unity to build a tower up to the heavens to make a name for themselves. They may also have been attempting to avoid any future flood by building a tower high enough to escape – this would be their stronghold and their fortress. God saw this and changed all languages so that they could no longer communicate easily or join together for more tower building. At that time, God scattered humanity all over the earth. Everyone had to start again with nothing in a new territory that they had not known before.

In every culture in the world today, varying versions of these two stories are recorded and have been accepted as historical and factual events which took place in the dawns of humanity.

In the days of Abraham, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had grown so wicked with abominations that the outcry of their victims rose up to God's ears in heaven. He could no longer tolerate the evil in these cities. So, He sent angelic messengers to confirm just how evil they were and the men of Sodom wanted to rape and sodomize God's messengers. Therefore, God rained fire and sulfur down from heaven to demolish the cities from the face of the earth. This time, only four people were rescued, minus one who looked back.

God allows wickedness, perversion, violence, and evil to exist in the world. God knows it is happening and has kept record of it all. Every lie ever told, every selfish sin ever committed, every misstep, every hateful thought, every act of meanness and cruelty, every perverted and unclean trespass, and all other manner of iniquity that anyone ever does is all known by God. As Creator of the world and mankind, it is God's sovereign right at any time to execute vengeance through any kind of judgment He sees fit, in order to vindicate the innocent, punish the guilty, and reestablish order on the earth.

If it were not for Jesus, we all rightfully deserve these judgments. This said, these judgments are only a preview of what is yet to come.

God's Right and Reason for Judging

God created heaven and earth and mankind. Anyone who says otherwise is a liar and a blasphemer. In most societies, anyone who denied the authority of their earthly king would be called a traitor and would be instantly put to death. How much greater is God than any earthly king? God in His great love gave us free will to acknowledge Him or not and to serve Him or not. In His great mercy, He does not pour out wrath swiftly but turns us over to our own depravity and the consequences of our ungodly decisions. All of creation testifies to the glory of God but mankind continues in rebellion against God and denial that He even exists. **(Read Romans 1:18-32.)** Is it not right for God to judge this however He sees fit?

But God does not always judge by water or fire or scattering. In fact, God precisely said the reason why He was expelling the seven nations dwelling in the land. Sin. Even though none of these nations were in covenant with God, their conduct was beyond reprobate in perversity and godlessness, particularly their sexual sin and sinful spiritual practices with their pagan gods. **(Read Leviticus 18.)** When it reached a limit which warranted God's judgment upon them, judgment came in the form of war, being overthrown by another people, and expulsion from their land. (See Leviticus 18:24-28; Deuteronomy 18:9-12.)

Truthfully, God could have destroyed the earth by fire many thousands of years ago because the wickedness, violence, and rebellion against Him which quickly resumed after the floodwaters receded in Noah's day. God could have done it in the days of Babel, but He didn't. Instead, He did something else. God called Abraham.

A People for the Sake of His Name

When God entered into covenant with Abraham and told him what his descendants would experience in the future, He revealed something about His sovereign hand over the nations of the world. At that time, the Amorites were the predominant people group living in the land that God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. (See Genesis 15:13-16.)

Abraham believed God and lived in a land not his own for the majority of his life, being a witness for the one true God and telling people that his descendants would inherit the land of the Amorites. While in Egypt, Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, became the second-most powerful man in the world and the God of Israel became known among the nations. A couple of generations later, they were forced into slavery and were mistreated for the next four hundred years.

God knew about the mistreatment and did not prevent it. What do you think of a God like that? It is the same God who multiplied His people over the course of four generations in the midst of this mistreatment in order to fulfill what He had spoken to Abraham. (See Deuteronomy 10:22.)

Moreover, God did not see fit to punish the wickedness of the Amorites while Abraham was still alive. Their sin had not yet come to the full measure of deserving to be expelled from their land. However, after four hundred years, God's time of mercy would be expired and their behavior would warrant God's judgment. This time, instead of sending fire and sulfur on the nation, God sent another nation to overthrow them, destroy them, and kick them out of their land.

Consider God's mercy for the Amorites even while His own people were mistreated. What do you think of a God like that? It is the same God who delivered His people by great displays of His power and through the midst of plagues and disasters in the land where they were slaves.

When the time came for God to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery, He called upon Moses to deliver the warnings to Pharaoh of what would happen if Pharaoh did not let God's people go. But God was also sovereign over Pharaoh's heart and hardened it so that Pharaoh would not let them go. This was

God's plan all along so that His name would be exalted on the earth. (See Exodus 9:16.)

God made a name for Himself by rescuing the smallest nation on the earth from slavery in the most powerful nation in the world. The whole world heard about the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of firstborn sons that God released upon Egypt and how Pharaoh and his army had drowned in the midst of the sea after God's people walked through it without hindrance. It became known all over the world that the God of Heaven had chosen a people for Himself. Even forty years later, the nations feared the God of Israel because of these events. (See Joshua 2:10.) In fact, the story is still known all over the world today.

In Egypt, the Israelites did not deserve to be delivered. Even though they remembered God's promise to Abraham, they neglected their worship of God and turned to the idols of the land of Egypt during their time of slavery. But for the sake of His name in the sight of the nations, God delivered them. In the wilderness they often rebelled against God and He could have rightfully destroyed them. But for the sake of His name in the sight of the nations, God spared them. Their behavior did not warrant them inheriting the Promised Land. But God's promise was already known among the nations and therefore, for the sake of His name, God gave it to them and worked wonders on their behalf. **(Read Ezekiel 20:1-44.)**

God's interactions with Israel are always for the sake of His own name. If His people are blessed, it is so that all the nations of the world can know His goodness. If His people are bad, God must execute justice upon them to maintain His holy name in the sight of the nations. Even today, and even if they mess everything up beyond recognition of the likeness of God, God will not destroy them completely – for the sake of His name in the sight of the nations. (See Psalm 67; Ezekiel 36:22-23.)

Throughout the book of Judges, Kings, Chronicles, and the Prophets God's sovereign execution of justice for or against His people is clearly laid out. When the people were faithful to God, the fear of God fell on their enemies so that they would not attack. Those who did attack were sorely embarrassed. When God's people were unfaithful to Him, God orchestrated, appointed, and ordained enemies to rise up against them to attack them and oppress them.

When King Solomon's heart turned to other gods because of his pagan wives, God promised ten of Israel's tribes to Solomon's servant, Jeroboam. After Solomon's death, the kingdoms of God's people were divided in what looked like civil war, rebellion, and anarchy but was actually ordained by God.

Eventually, God appointed the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and vomit them out of their land and into exile. The southern kingdom of Judah saw this act of judgement and knew by God's prophets that it was the will of God. However, this did not lead them to repent out of reverent fear of God and instead, they continued in their sin. So, God appointed the Babylonians to conquer them and vomit them out of their land and into exile. It was God who appointed the Gentile rulers and nations to conquer His own people. (See 2 Kings 17:6-8; Habakkuk 1:6; Jeremiah 21:2-7.)

God's prophet Habakkuk had a difficult time understanding how God could use the unrighteous, brutal, and godless Gentile nation like Babylon to judge God's own chosen people. But God, in His great mercy and for His own namesake, did not annihilate His people even though they behaved worse than the pagan nations in their vile practices and false spirituality against His commands. (See Ezekiel 5:6-7.) Instead, when His people demonstrated that they wanted to be like the nations, He turned them over to their own evil desire and sent them into exile in the nations.

They deserved to be punished like Sodom and Gomorrah but God left a remnant of survivors for the sake of His name in the sight of all the nations. (See Isaiah 1:9.) He is known as their God and He is a God who cannot and does not lie. All His words to His people will be fulfilled – for the sake of His name in the sight of all the nations.

God also assured His people through His prophets (particularly Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Habakkuk) that He

would ultimately avenge His people by punishing those whom He had used to punish them. The Babylonians destroyed Assyria because Assyria thought they had power to overthrow and destroy God's people as if they were stronger than God. (See Isaiah 10:5-19.) Babylon was overthrown by the Persians (or Medes) because the Babylonians thought in their hearts that they had ascended to the power of God. (See Jeremiah 50-51; Isaiah 14:1-27.) Moreover, other neighboring nations who looked on and mocked while Judah and Israel were humiliated by their oppressors would also suffer consequences from God. Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines no longer exist. (See Ezekiel 25 and the Book of Obadiah.)

Since God called a people for His name's sake, He will show Himself mighty on their behalf, even if it takes hundreds or thousands of years before His justice comes. The first example of this is when the Amalekites attacked the newly born nation of Israel when they first came out of Egypt. God promised that He would judge and destroy the Amalekites because of this. But it was not until almost four hundred years later, when Saul was king of Israel that God ordered that the Amalekites be destroyed. (See Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:17; 1 Samuel 15.) Unfortunately, Saul did not completely destroy the Amalekites, and a descendant of their king Agag became the enemy of the Jews in the days of Esther. (See Esther 3:1.) But that's another story.

God's Judgment on and through Nations

As we have already seen, God uses nations to judge other nations to execute justice according to His righteousness and mercy. From the world's viewpoint, it may appear that one nation has a stronger army or better strategy than the one they conquer. But God can work through many or few and no one can supersede His sovereignty by their own might.

To recap, God used Egypt to suppress His people while they multiplied and then judged Egypt with mighty plagues of judgment. God overthrew seven nations in the land He had promised to Abraham through supernaturally empowered warfare on behalf of His people in judgment of their sins against Him. God split His own kingdom due to their compromise and false worship. God used the Assyrian Empire to judge and scatter ten tribes of His people. God used the Babylonian Empire to judge the Assyrians for doing so with such hubris. God also used Babylon to judge and scatter Judah and Jerusalem.

At that time, God also used the Babylonians to conquer and judge many nations and bring them into subjection under one world empire. Even though Nebuchadnezzar thought he had conquered the world by his own power, it was God who turned the whole world over to Nebuchadnezzar's authority and even referred to Nebuchadnezzar as His servant. (See Jeremiah 27:3-8; Daniel 2:37-38, 5:18-19.) Babylon became the cup of God's wrath upon the nations of the world in that day and God poured out His vengeance upon the nations through the dominant rule of Nebuchadnezzar. **(Read Jeremiah 25, 50-51.)** In fact, for doing such a good job in conquering so many nations, God gave Nebuchadnezzar the land of Egypt as a bonus. (See Ezekiel 29:18-20.)

Babylon became the center of global trade and the wealthiest empire in the entire world. Jewish exiles in the land of Babylon must have been awed by Babylon's opulence and indulgence, being either repulsed or tempted by it in their hearts. When Nebuchadnezzar became proud and exalted himself as a god, God humbled him. When Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God's rule, he issued a proclamation throughout the world that the God of Israel reigns on high. (See Daniel 2-4.) In spite of His people's exile from their land, God's name was honored in the sight of the nations. Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, had seen his grandfather experience God's humbling but did not choose to humble himself. Therefore, while Belshazzar was holding a feast, God put an end to Babylon. (See Daniel 5.) In one day – in one hour – the Babylonian Empire fell. It became like Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Jeremiah 50:40.)

God used the Persian Empire to judge Babylon and to set His people free from exile so that His Temple could be rebuilt in Jerusalem. God warned His people to get out of Babylon and leave behind their luxuries and lawless lifestyle to return to Him and His ways and His land. Later in the Persian Empire, the

fear of God fell on God's people when their annihilation was decreed. But God again made a name for Himself through His people by their vindication on the day of Purim. After that, His people became more serious about separating themselves from the world and purifying themselves for God.

After Persia, Alexander the Great heard the vision of Nebuchadnezzar for one world order and took it on as his own personal mission. As quick as a leopard with wings, Alexander conquered the world and began to "Hellenize" every society with Greek culture and language. But Alexander died young and his empire was divided among four of his generals.

During this time, Greek replaced Aramaic as the primary international language of the day. Jewish exiles who remained in the nations learned Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic and for the most part, lost their ability to read or understand the Scriptures for themselves. A committee was assembled to translate the Scriptures into Greek. The translation is known as the Septuagint. The common, literate, Jewish person would now be able to read the Scriptures that typically only priests, scribes, and scholars could access.

Eventually, God raised up Rome to be the ruling force in the world. God used Rome to bring judgment on His people for their faithlessness and rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. The Temple was destroyed, the land was made desolate and the people were exiled. Those among the Jewish people who thought they could rebel against Rome were utterly crushed. The last remaining hold-outs on the mountain of Masada committed group suicide rather than be subject to Roman punishment. It is said that the Christian believers who heeded the words of Jesus to escape from the city when they saw the signs of the end had escaped the city and their lives were spared – even though the world did not end at that time.

These events were prophesied in advance by God's prophets, particularly Daniel, who saw the empires rise and fall according to God's plan. This gives us both the assurance that God is truly sovereign over the events in the nations and also gives us a basis of understanding God's ways of dealing with the nations whether they know Him or not. The point is that it is God who determines who rises and who falls and for what purpose according to His much larger, longer, and more all-encompassing view of the people involved and the measure of justice that is required at any given time.

Babylon – the Harlot of the End Times

The ancient city of Babel was built by Nimrod, who assembled all the peoples of the world together to build the tower of Babel. This tower has always been a symbol of mankind's assertion of independence from God, rebellion against Him, and spiritual attempts to access heaven's power through their own means in order to subvert and deny God's authority. In the ancient Akkadian language, the site of the tower of Babel was called the Gate of God. In essence, their desire was to access God and the heavenly realm in order to make a name for themselves on the earth. In a moment's time, it was shut down.

The world empire of Babylon and its king, Nebuchadnezzar, was raised up by God as an agent of His wrath. God used Babylon to conquer many nations and join them together as one people under one man who thought he was a god. In addition to its ferocious and conquering strength, Babylon was known for its luxury, opulence, and indulgent lifestyle. Their gods were revered as more powerful than the other nation's gods. Nebuchadnezzar even set up a statue of himself and demanded to be worshipped as a god. Babylon's world-dominating empire was thought of as so strong and mighty that it could never fall. But it fell in one day – in one hour.

These realities of Babylon's history prefigure a reality that is yet to come – a spiritual Babylon. Historical Babylon has become the Biblical symbol of mankind's self-indulgent, defiant rebellion against God. The prophet Daniel was told that his visions of Babylon's fall were for the time of the end. **(Read Daniel 8 & 11.)** As such, there is still a global one world order which has been prophesied by God and one world ruler who will deceive the nations and rule all peoples. The one world order yet to come is a new type of Babylon. It will be raised up by God to intoxicate the nations with luxury and indulgence and gather the

world together as one. (See Revelation 17:4-6.) The aim of this ruler is to be worshipped by the whole world. He will use flattery and deception to corrupt, oppress, and destroy God's people, if it is possible. As such, and as God's New Covenant people, we have been warned to not fall prey to the numbing effects of Babylon's complacency, comfort, and luxury. We must also be ready to suffer persecution, captivity, or death for refusing to worship the antichrist and remaining loyal to Jesus. (See Revelation 13:7-10.)

But in a day – in an hour – this one world Babylon will come to an abrupt end. **(Read Revelation 18.)** All the nations and peoples of the world who have been gathered together will be shocked and appalled at Babylon's downfall.

The End: The Days of Noah, Egypt, and Sodom & Gomorrah

Jesus said that the day of judgment to come will be like the days of Noah. People will be doing normal things and carrying on with life up until the very moment that Jesus returns.

The Book of Revelation vividly describes the times of the end of the world. Like the series of plagues poured out on the land of Egypt before Israel was delivered as a nation, a succession of increasing disasters will cover the earth. In those days of great tribulation as the seals of the scroll are broken and the trumpets are blown, God will make a distinction between those who are His and those who are not, just as He did for His people when plagues were poured out on Egypt. In the end, God will deliver those who have remained faithful to Jesus and Jesus will return in triumph over the world to save us.

When the time for God's wrath has come, God will pour out desolations on the earth like never before. God will unleash a global assault like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. On that day, nothing will escape the fiery destruction of the wrath of God.

God's Will Until That Day

When Jesus came the first time, He proclaimed the message, "repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" He spoke almost exclusively about the Kingdom of God, how it would and would not come, and who would and would not be included in it. He warned that only those who both heard His message and put it into practice would be blessed. His priorities were not set on the things of this world but in establishing the Kingdom of God in people's hearts so that we could be saved from the wrath of God. He was warning them that the Kingdom of God will ultimately overthrow ALL kingdoms of this world.

Jesus never once scheduled an appointment to meet with Caesar or any of the world's rulers to discuss governing the world. He sought only to please God and did not entangle Himself in civilian affairs. (See 2 Timothy 2:4.) At that time, Caesar was living an absolutely licentious lifestyle on a remote island but Jesus never spoke of it. Jesus never spoke of Caesar at all except for one time when He was asked about taxes. At that time, He told people to submit to the governing authorities by paying their taxes. He knew that Caesar's authority over the world was given to him by God. When Jesus stood before Herod, He was on trial and did not say a word to defend Himself. When Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate asserted His right to put Jesus to death, Jesus made it clear that Pilate had no authority except that which God had given to him. Jesus allowed the rulers of this world to reject, mock, ridicule, abuse, torture, and ultimately kill Him. His Kingdom is NOT of this world.

Jesus' first followers also gave us an example to follow. They recognized that all the nations were raging against God's anointed one and against them. As they eagerly awaited Christ's return in glory, they realized that the fulfillment of the prophetic scriptures pertaining to the oppression of God's people by world powers was imminently upon them. They were thrown in prison and persecuted for following Jesus. Their prayer had nothing to do with politics, governments, or world leaders. The focus of their prayers was entirely on boldness to proclaim the day of wrath to come and the salvation made available by God through faith in Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:24-31.)

In the midst of global tumult and great misunderstanding about Christianity in its earliest days, Christians were ruthlessly persecuted. Nevertheless, the apostles adamantly admonished believers to submit to the governing authorities, even at the expense of their lives. (See Romans 13; 1 Peter 2; Revelation 2:10, 12:11.) When false teachers encouraged believers to pray against the rulers and governments of this world, Paul addressed their ignorance of the Scriptures and the mercy of God. In the same way that the prophet Jeremiah had told exiles in Babylon to pray for the peace of Babylon, Paul instructed that we are to pray FOR the rulers of this world so that we may live peaceable lives in this world. (See Jeremiah 29:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-6.) This does NOT mean that our hope shifts away from God to the rulers of this nation or that our prayer lives are to become consumed with praying for the nations. Instead, we must recognize that we are strangers and exiles here in this world who pray for our oppressors and persecutors until Jesus comes.

It is not God's will that any should perish. It is God's will for everyone to know that He has appointed His Son, Jesus, to judge the living and the dead on the day of God's wrath. Everything that God does in the nations of the world is for the singular purpose that all people might seek after Him. If they seek Him, He will be found by them. And He will receive all the glory. Rightfully so.

PRESSING ON TO SUCCESS

Philippians 3:12-14 NIV – Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

DESCRIPTION

Jesus is God's image of perfect success. Yet, His life did not match the world's view of triumph. Instead, Jesus willingly laid down His life to fulfill God's purpose. When He tells His followers to take up our cross and follow Him, He means denying ourselves as He did, including letting go of our own opinions, desires, cultural norms, preferences, and concepts of success.

For example, when measured by certain standards, the Apostle Paul had much to boast about. However, Paul knew that the world's standards of measurement are worthless in the sight of God. Paul had one objective in life and it was to know Jesus and be like Him, no matter the cost to his life, ego, or agenda. Pressing on to Success is about entering into a deeper commitment to following Jesus, surrendering ourselves to God, and moving towards His purposes for our lives, no matter the cost.

STUDY/MEDITATION

Read Philippians 3:4-14 slowly and prayerfully. Read it two or three times, asking the Holy Spirit to speak. How did the Apostle Paul's image of success change when He came to know Jesus? What was Paul's aim in life with the Lord? What was his burning desire? What did Paul have to lose, give up, or walk away from in order to follow Christ? Why was Paul willing to give up these things?



PURPOSE:

To detach from, let go of, cut off, release, and repent of anything hindering my walk with Jesus and attaining His likeness.

To silence the past and look onwards to the future in the new mercies of God.

To take steps necessary for the advancement of God's Kingdom purpose for my life.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Increased freedom to obey God today.

Advancement in God's purpose for your life.

Alignment with God's perspective and purpose.

Restored focus on Christ.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be the perfect example of pressing on in your purposes. Help me by your Spirit to forget the past and take new steps of faith towards all you have for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TALK WITH GOD

In your life right now, in what ways/areas is Jesus asking you to "forget what is behind" and press on to follow Him?

How are your standards of success or failure affecting your obedience to God? How is your boldness for God affected by your self-image, fears, or insecurities?

Are your desires, opinions, preferences, behaviors, or cultural norms hindering your advancement in God's purposes? If so, which ones? What does God say about these things?

Are there material objects or relationships that God is asking you to let go of? How is He asking you to go about doing this?

PRACTICE

- Write down your past or present definition of success and its attributes. What does success look like to you? How do you measure success?
- Write down what you believe God's idea of success is.
- Compare your definition and God's view of success.
 - How does your view differ from God's?
- Write a new definition of success for your life.
 - Ask Jesus to refresh your focus on His desires for your life.
 - Ask Him if there is anything from your past that you need to let go of or give/throw away. (It could be a past trophy, a sentimental object, or an old mindset, etc.)
- Ask God what steps of faith He is calling you to take as you pursue Christ and His likeness. Do what He says.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Colossians 2:13-15

Matthew 16:23-26

Luke 14:26

Romans 8:38-39

1 Corinthians 9:24

John 12:25

Luke 9:51

UNIT TWO – KEY QUESTIONS

Foundations & Whole Counsel of God

Use this worksheet to test your grasp of the material and exercises of Unit Two.

Why is it important to have an understanding of the whole counsel of God? (in your own words)	
Why is mankind doomed to God's wrath?	What is the good news of salvation?
Why did Jesus have to be Jewish?	How will God keep His promises to Israel?
How does God rule the nations?	How will the day of wrath be like God's prior judgments? How will it be different?
What is one thing you learned that you did not know before?	What questions do you still have about this subject?

SUCCESS IN GOD'S KINGDOM

DESCRIPTION

Jesus is God's perfect example of success. However, in many ways and by worldly standards, Jesus was a failure. Similarly, the Apostle Paul was at the top of his game and one of the leaders in the world before he came to know Jesus as his Messiah. Then, he left all of his worldly acclaim behind to follow and die for the one who had died for him. The same is true for the other apostles, even though they had left behind less revered fishing and tax collecting businesses.

This reveals something important to us about what success in God's Kingdom is and is not. All of us must keep our eyes on Jesus and God's idea of success so that we do not become ensnared by the ways of this world.

As believers, we are called to encourage one another to obey God and provoke one another to good works in God's kingdom. We not only have to count the cost of following Jesus for ourselves but also to exhort one another to count the cost and pay it willingly because of the worthiness of Jesus and His eternal Kingdom.

SCRIPTURE PORTION: PHILIPPIANS 3:8-14

Philippians 3:8-14 NIV - What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

GROUP PRACTICE

1. Pray and invite the Lord to speak to your hearts. Allow a moment of stillness before the first reading.
2. Have one person read the Scripture Portion out loud and slowly while others listen.
3. What are your past/present ideas of success? Describe it.

4. What is God's view of success? Describe it.

5. In your life right now, what is Jesus asking you to "forget" from the past in order to "press on" to God's purpose?

6. Have each member of the group share with the group:
 - What they discovered about how their concept of success differs from God's.
 - One growth area they would like the group to pray for them.
7. Pray for one another and exhort one another in your pursuit of God and His purposes.



PURPOSE:
Line up with God's purposes for our lives.
Encourage one another in our pursuit of God.

GROUP SIZE:
Small to medium sized group.
Or break up large group into smaller discussion groups.

SCRIPTURES:

Colossians 2:13-15
Matthew 16:23-26
Luke 14:26
Romans 8:38-39
1 Corinthians 9:24
John 12:25
Luke 9:51
Luke 16:15
Hebrews 12:1-3

UNIT TWO: GROUP EXERCISES

Use the Prayer Guide for Israel to pray for Israel as a Group. AND/OR Do the following exercise: