

Genesis

INTRODUCTION

God at Work

Everything—literally everything—begins here

2:3 *And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

The Bible begins with words that have become famous: “In the beginning God created.” God, like an artist, fashioned a universe. How can we grasp the grandeur of this?

Michelangelo, perhaps the greatest artist in history, may help us to understand. He painted Rome’s famous Sistine Chapel to retell Genesis’ story of creation. His experience proves one thing: Creativity is work.

An Exhausting Effort

Michelangelo had 6,000 square feet of ceiling to cover—the size of four average house roofs. Anyone who has painted a ceiling with a paint roller has caught a hint of the physical difficulty of such a task. But Michelangelo’s plan called for 300 separate, detailed portraits of men and women. For more than three years the 5’4” artist devoted all his labors to the exhausting strain of painting the vast overhead space with his tiny brushes.

Sometimes he painted standing on a huge scaffold, a paintbrush high over his head. Sometimes he sat, his nose inches from the ceiling. Sometimes he painted while lying on his back. His back, shoulders, neck and arms cramped painfully.

In the long days of summer, he had light to paint 17 hours a day, taking food and a chamber pot with him on the 60-foot scaffold. For 30 days at a stretch he slept in his clothes, not even taking off his boots. Paint dribbled into his eyes so he could barely see. Freezing in the winter, sweating in the summer, he painted until at last the ceiling looked like a ceiling no more. He had transformed it into the creation drama, with creatures so real they seemed to breathe. Never before or since have paint and plaster been so changed.

The Miracle of Life

But, as Michelangelo knew very well, his work was a poor, dim image of what God had created. Over the plaster vault of the Sistine Chapel rose the immense dome of God’s sky, breathtaking in its simple beauty. Mountains, seas, the continents—all these, and much more, are the creative work of God, the Master Artist.

God’s world, so much bigger and more beautiful than Michelangelo’s masterpiece, is the product of incomparably greater energy. As author Eugene Peterson has written, “The Bible begins with the announcement, ‘In the beginning God created,’ not ‘sat majestic in the heavens’ and not ‘was filled with beauty and love.’ He created. He did something.” In the beginning, God went to work.

Genesis focuses attention on this creative, hardworking God. The word *God* appears 30 times in the 31 verses of chapter 1. He grabs our attention in action. Genesis is an account of his deeds, ringing splendidly with the magnificent effort of creation.

Mending Broken Pieces

Genesis also talks about the work of humankind—but the tone changes abruptly. God had barely finished creating the universe when human rebellion marred it, like a delinquent spraying graffiti on the Sistine Chapel. Chapters 3-11 of Genesis portray a series of disasters: Adam and Eve’s rebellion, Cain’s calculated murder of his brother, the worldwide wickedness leading to the great flood, and human arrogance at Babel.

God immediately began to mend the pieces his creatures had broken. He narrowed his scope from the whole universe to a single man—not a king or wealthy landowner, but a childless nomad, Abraham. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph—the upward thrust from chapter 12 on came

through God's work in these startlingly human individuals. They were far from perfect, yet God picked them up where they were and carried them forward. He promised them great things. He moved through them to restore his art. His creative activity did not stop on the seventh day.

Genesis and Revelation

Many people read the Old Testament as though it portrayed the "bad old days" before Jesus. But that's not an accurate picture. Actually, the first three chapters of Genesis link to the last book of the Bible, Revelation. They are like brackets of perfection around the sadness of life marred by sin, death, suffering and hatred. In Genesis we learn that life didn't start out that way. In Revelation we find out it won't end that way either. But the Old and New Testaments take place between those brackets. Through Abraham, through Moses, ultimately in Jesus, God is hard at work to make things right.

How to Read Genesis

Genesis is one of the most enjoyable Old Testament books, full of memorable stories of people and events. It is a crucial book to know, for the rest of the Bible often refers back to it.

Genesis tells the story of many beginnings—the beginning of the universe; the beginning of sin; and perhaps most important, the beginning of God's work to restore a sinful humanity.

The book breaks into two major sections. The first 11 chapters take a big view. They give the origins of human society, including the familiar stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's ark and the tower of Babel. Here, a few words carry great significance. You need to read slowly and reflectively, for what happens in a single line may echo off events for centuries to come. For instance, Adam and Eve's sin, because it was the first sin, became an emblem of disobedience against God.

Beginning at chapter 12, Genesis tells a different kind of story—that of a single family. The pace of the story slows to develop the personalities of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These fathers and sons are full of human faults and oddities. Do you recognize any of their traits in people you know?

Seeing their fully human personalities, try to understand what God's plans were for them as individuals—and through them, for the restoration of a whole world marred by sin.

High Points in Genesis

The following chapters from Genesis are of special note, and included in the Guided Tour of the Bible reading plan. See pages x-xi for further details.

Chapter 1: the story of creation.

Chapter 2: Adam and Eve.

Chapter 3: sin enters a perfect world.

Chapter 4: Cain and Abel.

Chapter 7: Noah and the great flood.

Chapter 8: the end of the great flood.

Chapter 15: God's covenant with Abraham.

Chapter 19: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chapter 22: God's testing of Abraham.

Chapter 27: Jacob cheats his brother Esau.

Chapter 28: Jacob, fleeing Esau, dreams about God.

Chapter 37: Joseph is sold into slavery.

Chapter 41: Joseph rises to the highest position in Egypt.

Chapter 45: Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers.

People You'll Meet in Genesis

Adam and Eve (p. 6)

Abraham (p. 17)

Sarah (p. 23)

Jacob (p. 36)

Esau (p. 46)

Cain and Abel (p. 8)

Lot (p. 18)

Isaac (p. 27)

Laban (p. 39)

Joseph (p. 53)

Noah (p. 13)

Ishmael (p. 21)

Rebekah (p. 32)

Rachel (p. 43)

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was^a formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

¹¹Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹²The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to

its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,^b and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested^c from all his work. ³And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Adam and Eve

⁴This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

^a2 Or possibly became ^b26 Hebrew; Syriac *all the wild animals* ^c2 Or ceased; also in verse 3

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—⁵and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth^a and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth^a and there was no man to work the ground,⁶ but streams^b came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—⁷the LORD God formed the man^c from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.⁹And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four

headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin^d and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.^e ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the

^a5 Or *land*; also in verse 6 ^b6 Or *mist* ^c7 The Hebrew for *man (adam)* sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for *ground (adamah)*; it is also the name *Adam* (see Gen. 2:20). ^d12 Or *good; pearls* ^e13 Possibly southeast Mesopotamia

GUIDED TOUR

Genesis 1

A Book of Beginnings: *Genesis gives the who, not the how*

1:1,31 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

The story of the Bible—more, the history of the universe—starts with the simple declaration, “God created.” The rest of this chapter fills in what he created: stars, oceans, plants, birds, fish, mammals and, finally, man and woman.

Genesis 1 says little about the processes God used in creation. You’ll find no explanations of DNA or the scientific principles behind creation. For this reason, controversy springs up in classrooms, and even in courts, between those who see God’s hand in creation and those who see only the blind forces of evolution at work. The opening chapter of the Bible does, however, insist on two facts:

1. *Creation is God’s work.* “And God said . . . And God said . . . And God said”—this phrase beats a cadence all the way through the chapter. Butterflies, waterfalls, bottlenose dolphins, praying mantises, kangaroos—they are all God’s idea. This magnificent world is like a museum displaying God’s artistic genius. All that follows in the Bible reinforces the clear message of Genesis 1: Behind all of history, there is God. Every helium atom, every spiral galaxy, every living creature exists because God wants it to. Think of Genesis 1-3 as an artist’s signature on a painting; God is saying, “This is mine.”

2. *Creation is good.* Like a bell, another sentence tolls softly throughout this chapter: “And God saw that it was good.” In our day we hear alarming reports about nature: global warming, polluted oceans, vanishing species, the destruction of rain forests. Much has changed, much has been spoiled, since creation. Genesis 1 describes the unspoiled world God designed. Whatever beauty we sense in nature today echoes, however faintly, that pristine state.

In fact, the Bible opens and closes with much the same scenery: a garden, watered by a river, with human beings living in the actual presence of God. The two scenes are like brackets of perfection around the history of a badly scarred planet.

Captain Frank Borman, one of America’s Apollo astronauts, read this very chapter on a telecast from outer space during the Christmas season. As he gazed out his window, he saw Earth as a brightly colored ball, hanging alone in the darkness of space. It looked at once awesomely beautiful and terribly fragile. It looked like the view from Genesis 1.

LifeQuestions

Think of a time when you noticed—really noticed—the beauty of the natural world.

knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

¹⁸The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam^a no suitable helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs^b and closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib^c he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’^d
for she was taken out of man.”

²⁴For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

²⁵The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

The Fall of Man

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may

^a20 Or the man ^b21 Or took part of the man’s side

^c22 Or part ^d23 The Hebrew for woman sounds like the Hebrew for man.

GUIDED TOUR



Genesis 2

One Shining Moment: *The world as God intended it*

Continued from page 4

2:7 *The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

After presenting the cosmic view in chapter 1, Genesis repeats the story of creation, this time narrowing the focus to human beings. We alone, of all God’s works, are made in God’s image (1:26). People disagree on what exactly the phrase “image of God” means. Does it refer to immortality? Intelligence? Creativity? Relationship? Perhaps we understand its meaning best by thinking of “the image of God” as a kind of mirror. God created human beings so that by looking upon them, he sees reflected something of himself.

Genesis makes the point that human beings differ profoundly from the rest of creation. We recognize this difference instinctively: The law has a different penalty for killing an animal than it has for killing a person. Human life is “sacred.” Alone of all creation, human beings receive the breath of life from God himself.

History Set in Motion

Genesis 2 shows human history just getting under way. Marriage begins here: Even in a state of perfection, Adam feels loneliness and desire, so God provides woman. From this time on, marriage takes priority over other relationships. Work begins here too: Adam assumes a role of authority over the animals and plants. Humans begin to exercise a kind of mastery over the rest of creation.

Only the slightest hint of foreboding clouds this blissful scene of Paradise. It appears in verse 17, in the form of a single negative command from God. Adam and Eve enjoy perfect freedom with this one small exception, a test of their obedience.

Throughout history, artists have tried to re-create in words and images what a perfect world would look like: a world of love and beauty, a world with no guilt or suffering or shame. Genesis 1-2 describes such a world. For the last time in many thousands of years it could be said, “They felt no shame.”

Life Questions

Think about a close friend or family member. In what way does this person reflect God? Does he or she possess a quality or personality trait that reflects what God must be like?

To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 7. You can find the overall plan on the bookmark or on pages x-xi.

eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹²The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^a and hers; he will crush^b your head, and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

¹⁷To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

^a15 Or seed ^b15 Or strike

100 people
you should know

Adam and Eve

First in Everything

They were the first human beings on Earth, part of God’s original creation. As such, Adam and Eve set the standard for everything that followed. Their lives illustrate what God loves in human beings—as well as what he loathes.

First ecologists. They were the first to name animals, the first to tend a garden, the first to be placed in charge of all the creatures. They took on the huge task of caring for the earth and guiding its proper use.

First to form a relationship with God. Adam and Eve were made in God’s image. God conversed with them and gave them responsibilities. When they failed God, they felt ashamed and feared meeting him.

First married couple. God himself made the introductions and gave the first couple the delight of each other, body and soul. As 2:24 suggests, this suitability is the basis for all marriages. Both Jesus and Paul quoted this passage in their comments on sex and marriage (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Marriage led to parenthood, though the very first child (Cain) brought pain as well as joy.

First to sin against God. Although they only had to follow directions, they failed. In response to their sin, they hid from God and blamed each other. “Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years,” wrote Martin Luther. “Eve would say, ‘You ate the apple,’ and Adam would retort, ‘You gave it to me.’”

In the end, the first two human beings were banished from Paradise and driven out into a world full of problems God had never intended for them to confront. In that, as in everything, these two led the way for all of us.

Life Questions

Are you in a position to set an example for others? What can you learn from Adam and Eve’s experience?

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

²⁰ Adam^a named his wife Eve,^b because she
would become the mother of all the living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for

Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side^c of the Gar-

^a20 Or *The man* ^b20 Eve probably means *living*.

^c24 Or *placed in front*

GUIDED TOUR



Genesis 3

The Crash: Rebellion, nakedness, hiding and shame

Continued from page 5

3:3 *But God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”*

“The Fall” theologians call it, but the event this chapter describes is really more like a crash. Although Adam and Eve have everything a person could want in Paradise, still a thought nags at them: *Are we somehow missing out? Is God keeping something from us?* Like all of us, they cannot resist the temptation to reach out for what lies beyond them.

Said journalist and author G.K. Chesterton, “There is only one doctrine that can be empirically verified: the doctrine of original sin.” Genesis gives few details about the first sin. Many people mistakenly assume sex is involved, but something far more basic is at stake. God has labeled one tree, just one, off-limits. The real issue is, Who will set the rules—humans or God? Adam and Eve decide in favor of themselves, and the world has never been the same.

The underlying message of Genesis goes against some common assumptions about human history. According to these chapters, the world and humanity have not been gradually evolving toward a better and better state. On the contrary, long ago we wrecked against the rocks of our own pride and stubbornness.

Nobody, including God, has been satisfied with human beings since that time. Though created good, humans disobeyed God right from the beginning, and we’ve been suffering the consequences ever since. Genesis helps us understand why the universe is so strikingly lovely, yet so terribly tragic. It is lovely because God made it. It is tragic because he trusted it to us—and we failed.

Did God Really Say?

Adam and Eve react to their sin as anyone reacts to sin. They rationalize, try to explain themselves and look for someone else to take the blame. The author of Genesis pointedly notes that they also feel the need to hide. They hide from each other by making coverings for themselves because they sense, for the first time, a feeling of shame about being naked. Perhaps the greatest change of all occurs in their relationship with God. Previously, they had walked and talked freely with God in the garden, much as one would with a friend. Now, when they hear God’s voice, they hide.

The three questions God asks Adam and Eve apply to anyone in hiding: (1) Where are you? (And why are you hiding from me?) (2) Who told you that you were naked? (And why did you believe somebody else, not me?) (3) What is this that you have done? (And are you ready to take responsibility for it?)

Genesis 3 tells of other profound changes that affect the world because the creatures choose their own way rather than their Creator’s: suffering multiplies, work becomes harder, and a new word—*death*—enters human vocabulary. Perfection is spoiled forever. All wars, all violence, all broken relationships, all grief and sadness trace back to this one monumental day in the Garden of Eden.

To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 9. You can find the overall plan on the bookmark or on pages x–xi.

Life Questions

Have you ever felt hemmed in or stifled by one of God’s commands? How have you responded to this feeling?

den of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain and Abel

4 Adam^a lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.^b She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth^c a man.” ²Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

⁸Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”^d And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from

the ground. ¹¹Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹²When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

¹⁵But the LORD said to him, “Not so^e; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod,^f east of Eden.

¹⁷Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹His brother’s name was Ju-

^a1 Or *The man* ^b1 Cain sounds like the Hebrew for *brought forth* or *acquired*. ^c1 Or *have acquired*

^d8 Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Masoretic Text does not have “*Let’s go out to the field*.”

^e15 Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Hebrew *Very well*

^f16 *Nod* means *wandering* (see verses 12 and 14).

100 people
you should know

Cain and Abel *Blood Brothers*

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) were the first of many feuding siblings. After them came Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers. It’s a theme song in Genesis and in life: Blood kin have a hard time getting along, and they can make bitter rivals.

Cain offered a sacrifice to God, and then killed his brother when he learned God had honored Abel’s offering. Genesis does not specify why God preferred Abel’s offering to Cain’s. (Later in the Old Testament, God accepted both animal and agricultural offerings.) Quite possibly, Cain’s problem was his attitude (see Hebrews 11:4). Regardless, Cain lost his temper when things did not go his way.

The Bible tells us little about Abel and a good deal about Cain. Sadly, that makes sense because, as sinful humans, we see more of ourselves in Cain than in Abel. Cain wore his emotions on his sleeve: first jealous anger, then defensiveness, and finally shame and fear. In response to his great crime, God both punished and protected Cain. Banished from home and forced to wander all his life, he nevertheless received a measure of protection, “the mark of Cain” (4:15).

Cain’s children set the pattern for humanity as it has lived ever since, a mixture of good and bad. On the one hand, as musicians, metalworkers and farmers, they helped civilize the earth. On the other hand, Cain’s problems got passed down to future generations. Where Cain felt shame for his crime and punishment, his descendant Lamech would boast about his own murderous deed (4:23-24).

LifeQuestions:

Which of Cain’s responses to God—anger, defensiveness, fear, shame—do you identify with most easily?

Matthew

INTRODUCTION

A Bridge from Old to New

Why start with a list of names?

1:21 *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

For four hundred years, nothing new was added to the Bible. The prophets fell silent. During this time, Middle Eastern empires rose and fell, and the tiny nation of Israel suffered under the domination of greater powers like Greece and Rome.

But then something momentous happened. A baby was born—a baby unlike any who had ever come before. By introducing this baby who grew into the man Jesus, the book of Matthew opens a whole new section of the Bible—the New Testament.

Matthew makes his intentions clear from the very first sentence: He connects Jesus' arrival with the Old Testament story line. Jesus was a Jew, he says, the son of Abraham. And also a king, the son of David. Matthew then sets out to prove an audacious claim: This Jesus, from the humble town of Nazareth, is the very "Messiah," the deliverer promised back in the Old Testament. *Christ* is a Greek translation of the word *Messiah*.

Jesus' Family Tree

People all over the world, especially Jews, had been eagerly awaiting the Messiah. His coming would change the entire history of the world, they believed. Could this carpenter's son be the long-expected king? To answer that question, Matthew starts with a genealogy.

Genealogies—long lists of names—rarely prove interesting to anyone but the people directly involved. To those people, however, the lists are anything but boring.

Listen to one modern author describe what it was like to hear an ancient genealogy: "There is an expression, 'the peak experience,' a moment which emotionally can never again be equaled in your life. I had mine, that first day in the village of Juffure, in black west Africa . . . Goose bumps came out on me the size of marbles." With those words, Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, recalls the day he first heard, from the lips of an aged storyteller, the account of young Kunta Kinte being taken captive by slave traders in 1752.

The Importance of Roots

Haley's ancestors in Tennessee and Virginia had descended directly from a native African captured in a tiny village in Gambia. The day he listened to the gentle African elder recite, "And so-and-so took as a wife so-and-so, and begat so-and-so," the final link in Haley's family chain snapped into place. *Roots* tells the story of this connection.

In a similar way, the book of Matthew doesn't begin with Jesus' birth, but reaches back further to establish his roots. If indeed Jesus is the Messiah, his ancestors must match up to that claim. As any student of history knows, kings don't merely declare themselves; they must belong to a royal line. Matthew traces Jesus' lineage to the father of the Jewish race, Abraham—who first received the promise of the Messiah—then to the great Jewish king David.

Links to the Old Testament

After recording Jesus' bloodline, Matthew narrates the story of Jesus' life on earth. He relies heavily on the Old Testament, quoting it more frequently than does any other New Testament author. (Note such phrases as "So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets.")

The first book in the New Testament, then, stands as the Gospel that pulls things together, the link between the old and the new. Matthew starts with Jesus' roots, but he also contrasts Jesus with the traditional Jewish picture of the Messiah. The coming of Jesus, a king, ended thousands of years of eager waiting. But he came to establish a wholly new kind of kingdom—a kingdom different from what anyone expected.

How to Read Matthew

Anybody who has looked over an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) form knows what tax collectors like: neat, orderly rows of figures, with all expenses and income classified by type and source. Fittingly, the Gospel attributed to former tax collector Matthew reflects systematic, ledger-sheet thinking. He doesn't tell Jesus' story chronologically; he groups facts topically.

Matthew collects Jesus' sayings in five main places. First comes the famous Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. Chapter 10 records Jesus' instructions to his disciples about their mission; chapter 13, a series of parables on the kingdom; chapter 18, Christ's words on the church as a community; and chapters 23-25, Jesus' thoughts on religious hypocrisy and his predictions of the future. Sandwiched in among these five great discourses you'll find connected scenes of Jesus in action.

The skillful blending of Jesus' action and teaching has helped earn this Gospel an esteemed place in literature. Artists are often drawn to it as a capsule summary of Jesus' ministry: Witness J.S. Bach's greatest choral work, *Saint Matthew's Passion*, the joyous play *Godspell*, and Italian film maker Pasolini's film *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. The French skeptic Renan praised Matthew as the most important book of Christendom—the most important book that has ever been written.

Two approaches will help in a detailed study of Matthew. First, consider how it differs from the other three Gospels; this will give you some idea of Matthew's distinctive purpose. Then, you will find it enlightening to look up many of Matthew's references to the Old Testament. Most are cited in the NIV footnotes.

High Points in Matthew

The following chapters from Matthew are of special note, and included in the Guided Tour of the Bible reading plan. See pages x-xi for further details.

Chapter 5: the Sermon on the Mount.

Chapter 6: a continuation of Jesus' longest single speech, perhaps the most familiar passage in the entire Bible.

Chapter 13: some of Jesus' parables—concise stories with a powerful meaning behind them.

Chapter 19: stories of forgiveness and grace.

Chapter 26: Jesus' arrest and trial.

Chapter 27: the crucifixion.

Chapter 28: Jesus' resurrection.

People You'll Meet in Matthew

Joseph (p. 1006)

John the Baptist (p. 1018)

The Herods (p. 1024)

The Genealogy of Jesus

See *Ru* 4:18-22; *1 Ch* 3:10-17; *Lk* 3:23-38

1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his
brothers,

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose
mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother
was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,
⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose
mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^a and

^a11 That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12

1:6 Shady Ancestors

Matthew's list differs from many Jewish genealogies by including women, and a surprising selection of women at that. Tamar, a Gentile, tricked and seduced her father-in-law, then bore illegitimate twins (Genesis 38); Rahab, another Gentile, once worked as a prostitute (Joshua 2; 6); Ruth also grew up as a pagan Gentile (Ruth 1-4); and Uriah's wife Bathsheba committed adultery with King David (2 Samuel 11-12). Many of the men listed had unsavory pasts as well; taken together, these ancestors of Jesus vividly demonstrate God's ability to work with all sorts of people.

his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

- ¹² After the exile to Babylon:
 Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
 Abiud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,
¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Eliud,
¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.^a

The Birth of Jesus Christ

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel

of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^b because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^c—which means, "God with us."

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The Visit of the Magi

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^d from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east^e and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ^f was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
 for out of you will come a ruler
 who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'^g"

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east^h went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense

^a17 Or *Messiah*. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One." ^b21 *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves*.
^c23 Isaiah 7:14 ^d1 Traditionally *Wise Men* ^e2 Or *star when it rose* ^f4 Or *Messiah* ^g6 Micah 5:2 ^h9 Or *seen when it rose*

1:18-20 More Than Engaged

Jewish custom in Joseph and Mary's day recognized a state called "betrothal" that fell somewhere between our modern commitments of engagement and marriage. A betrothal was more binding than an engagement: It could only be broken with an act of divorce. But if a betrothed woman became pregnant, she was regarded as an adulteress.

and of myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^a

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^b

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother

2:11 The Wise Men

Of the four Gospels, Matthew alone tells of the visit of the Magi, or Wise Men. This incident shows that people from other parts of the world, not just from Israel, were anticipating the Messiah. The Magi’s visit underscores the fact that Jesus came for all people, not just the Jews. The last words of this Gospel spell out that mission very clearly.

and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

See Mk 1:3-8; Lk 3:2-17

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ²and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^c

⁴John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His

^a15 Hosea 11:1 ^b18 Jer. 31:15 ^c3 Isaiah 40:3

100 people
you should know

Joseph Stepfather

Stepparents take on one of the hardest tasks in life—raising a child who isn’t biologically theirs. When Joseph first learned that his fiancée Mary was bearing someone else’s child, he must have felt deep heartache. By law, he had the right to accuse Mary of adultery and have her executed. Then an angel brought instructions in a dream: Joseph was to stay with Mary, for her child was from God (1:18-25).

Three times Joseph received angelic messages in dreams, and each time they called for moves he had not planned and could hardly wish. First he was called to care for a wife he had never slept with and a child who was not his. Then he was ordered to flee as a refugee to far-off Egypt. Finally an angel told him to return home, where skeptical neighbors probably remembered that Mary had been pregnant before her marriage.

We know one thing about Joseph: He obeyed, following the angel’s orders in each difficult case. A dutiful stepfather, he treated his son as his own, raising him according to the Jewish law. As a carpenter, he taught Jesus to hammer and saw. As a righteous man, he modeled for him an obedient life.

We last hear of Joseph when Jesus was 12. After that, the Bible only mentions Jesus’ mother, Mary, and Jesus’ brothers. (Joseph probably died before Jesus began his ministry. From the cross, Jesus committed the care of his mother to one of his disciples [John 19:25-27].) Through his faithfulness as a stepfather, however, Joseph made a lasting contribution to the world.

Life Questions

Has God asked you to do any thankless tasks? What were they, and how did they turn out?

food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with^a water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

The Baptism of Jesus

See Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21,22; Jn 1:31-34

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

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

The Temptation of Jesus

See Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”^b

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”^c

⁷Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”^d

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus Begins to Preach

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, along the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of
death
a light has dawned.”^f

¹⁷From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

The Calling of the First Disciples

See Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:2-11; Jn 1:35-42

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

^a11 Or in ^b4 Deut. 8:3 ^c6 Psalm 91:11,12 ^d7 Deut. 6:16 ^e10 Deut. 6:13 ^f16 Isaiah 9:1,2

4:17 Words for Jewish Readers

Matthew wrote for a primarily Jewish audience. Starting with his opening chapter, he affirms that Jesus is the Messiah, backing up that claim by constant reference to the Old Testament. Often Matthew leaves Jewish phrases and customs unexplained, assuming that his readers are familiar with them. And, where other Gospel writers say “kingdom of God,” he uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” out of respect for Jews, who never wrote out the word *God*.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus Heals the Sick

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and

sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,^f Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

^a25 That is, the Ten Cities

Why Come to Earth?

The only way God could get through

3:17 *A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Paul Harvey tells a modern parable about a religious skeptic who worked as a farmer. One raw winter night the man heard an irregular thumping sound against the kitchen storm door. He went to a window and watched as tiny, shivering sparrows, attracted to the evident warmth inside, beat in vain against the glass.

Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through fresh snow to open the barn door for the struggling birds. He turned on the lights and tossed some hay in a corner. But the sparrows, which had scattered in all directions when he emerged from the house, hid in the darkness, afraid.

The man tried various tactics to get them into the barn. He laid down a trail of Saltine cracker crumbs to direct them. He tried circling behind the birds to drive them toward the barn. Nothing worked. He, a huge, alien creature, had terrified them; the birds couldn't comprehend that he actually desired to help them.

The farmer withdrew to his house and watched the doomed sparrows through a window. As he stared, a thought hit: *If only I could become a bird—one of them—just for a moment. Then I wouldn't frighten them so. I could show them the way to warmth and safety.*

At the same moment, another thought dawned on him. He had grasped the reason Jesus was born.

When God Came to Earth

A man becoming a bird is nothing compared to God becoming a man. The concept of a sovereign eternal being, the Creator of the universe, confining himself to a human body was—and is—too much for some people to believe. But how else could God truly communicate with us?

We don't know what God looked like as a man; no Gospel writer described the physical appearance of Jesus. But, in other ways, the four Gospels together paint a full picture of his humanity. Jesus, who claimed to be God, didn't have a supernatural glow about him. His own neighbors and family marveled that he seemed so, well, normal.

The Bible does not diminish Jesus. It shows the power of a man who healed the sick with a simple touch, and the authority of a teacher so captivating that people sat for three days straight, with empty stomachs, just to hear him (15:32). Even after Jesus hushed them, people wouldn't stop talking about his miracles.

But the Gospel writers also reveal the full range of Jesus' emotions: a surge of compassion for a person with leprosy, a deep sigh in response to nagging critics, a look of anger and distress at cold-hearted legalists, and then an awful cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46). Sometimes Jesus was witty; sometimes he cried. He got tired: Several times he left the crowds to seek a quiet place for rest.

Like No One Else

Jesus was like no other person who has ever lived. Twelve men left their jobs and families at a single command to follow him. Yet Jesus was also fully "one of us." He needed food and friends. He got lonely. He showed anger and disappointment. Because Jesus experienced all we experience as human beings, he can understand us completely and share in our joys and sorrows.

Matthew portrays both sides of Jesus—the divine and the human. The disciples needed to see both dimensions before giving their lives to him.

Life Questions

Suppose that Jesus had never come, that God had merely sent an elaborate love note. What difference would that have made?

The Beatitudes

See Lk 6:20-23

5 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them, saying:

- ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
- ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you,
persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be
glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the
prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt
loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty
again? It is no longer good for anything,
except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city on a
hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light
a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they
put it on its stand, and it gives light to every-
one in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your
light shine before men, that they may see your
good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

GUIDED  TOUR

Continued from page 1055

Matthew 5

Inflammatory Word: *Jesus' listeners fail to hear*

5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

One emotionally charged word, *kingdom*, makes images dance in the minds of Jesus' audience: bright banners, glittering armies, the gold and ivory of Solomon's day, the nation of Israel restored to glory. Yet Jesus often uses this word that quickens the Jewish pulse, starting with his very first message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (4:17).

Winds of change are blowing through Israel as Jesus speaks. Guerrilla fighters called Zealots hang on the edges of the crowds, awaiting the signal. Armed and well organized, they are spoiling for a fight against oppressive Rome. The signal for revolt, however, never comes. To their dismay, it gradually becomes clear that Jesus is not talking about a political or military kingdom.

The expectations raised by Jesus' statements lead to confusion and, ultimately, to angry rejection. Initial excitement over Jesus' miracles sours into disappointment when he fails to restore the long-awaited kingdom. As it turns out, the word *kingdom* means one thing to the crowd and quite another to Jesus.

Two Kinds of History

Jesus indicates that two kinds of history are going on simultaneously. We live in a visible world of families and people and cities and nations—“the kingdom of this world.” But Jesus calls for people to commit their lives to an invisible kingdom, the “kingdom of heaven,” a kingdom more important and more valuable than anything in the visible world. It is like the finest pearl in the world, he says—worth selling everything you have to invest in it.

Success in the kingdom of heaven involves a complete reversal of values, as seen in this major address, the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Jesus says, and also those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the persecuted—“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Status in this world does not guarantee status in the kingdom of heaven.

Life Questions

Are you focused on achieving success in the kingdom of this world or in the kingdom of heaven?

To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 1011. You can find the overall plan on the bookmark or on pages x-xi.

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

5:17 Jesus and Moses' Law

In this statement, Jesus clarifies his relationship to the law of Moses. The next verses get more specific, contrasting Jesus' teaching with many common interpretations of that law. “You have heard that it was said . . .” he begins, and then concludes, “But I tell you . . .” Jesus revealed the true intent of the Old Testament law, rather than its legalistic interpretations.

Murder

²¹“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder,^a and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother^b will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,^c’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.^d

Adultery

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’^e ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already

committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Divorce

³¹“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’^f ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

An Eye for an Eye

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’^g ³⁹But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Love for Enemies

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^h and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemiesⁱ and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers,

^a 21 Exodus 20:13 ^b 22 Some manuscripts *brother without cause* ^c 22 An Aramaic term of contempt ^d 26 Greek *kodrantes* ^e 27 Exodus 20:14 ^f 31 Deut. 24:1

^g 38 Exodus 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21

^h 43 Lev. 19:18 ⁱ 44 Some late manuscripts *enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you*

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Timothy, *page 1287*
Titus, *page 1298*
Zechariah, *page 1080*
Zedekiah, *page 425*



Glossary

of Nonbiblical People and Places

This glossary lists the names and gives brief descriptions of most of the nonbiblical people and places cited in Introductions, Insights, Guided Tour and Highlights. We have made every effort to be accurate and comprehensive, while acknowledging the limitations of such a list.

Alcatraz: an island in the San Francisco Bay, former site of a famous U.S. prison (reference can be found on page 1348).

Idi Amin (1925): at one time the cruel dictator of the East African nation of Uganda, known for his persecution of Christians (references can be found on pages 920 and 1325).

Roy Chapman Andrews (1884-1960): U.S. naturalist and explorer, best known for books on his central Asiatic field trips (reference can be found on page 1312).

Armenia: region and ancient kingdom in south-western Asia, now divided between Russia, Turkey and Iran (reference can be found on page 1325).

Augustine (354-430): bishop of Hippo in Roman Africa who was in his day the dominant personality of the Western church (reference can be found on page 1169).

Joseph Bayly: American author, educator, and long-time columnist for *Eternity* magazine, known for books such as *The View From a Hearse* and *Psalms of My Life* (reference can be found on page 546).

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153): the abbot of Clairvaux in France, a mystic and reformer known as a writer of sermons and treatises (reference can be found on page 704).

Black Muslims: African-American separatist movement led by Wali Farad and later Malcom X, eventually split into two groups: the American Muslim Mission, a mainstream Islamic movement, and the Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan (reference can be found on page 1238).

William Booth (1829-1912): founder of the Salvation Army, deeply committed to evangelistic and social justice activities (reference can be found on page 591).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945): German theologian who resisted the Nazi regime and was executed for treason; known for such books as *The Cost of Discipleship* (reference can be found on page 691).

Frank Borman (1928-): American astronaut who commanded Apollo 8, the first mission to orbit the moon (reference can be found on page 3).

Charles Loring Brace (1826-1890): U.S. reformer and pioneer social welfare worker, founder and director of the Children's Aid Society of New York City (reference can be found on page 1259).

Buddha (563-483 B.C.): Indian philosopher, founder of Buddhism (reference can be found on page 1307).

Buddhists: Followers of Buddha, numbering more than 300 million, who believe that proper thinking and living lead to Nirvana (reference can be found on page 1238).

Frederick Buechner (1926-): ordained Presbyterian minister, called by the *New York Times* the leading clergyman/writer in the U.S., the widely read author of many novels and works of nonfiction (reference can be found on page 567).

John Bunyan (1628-1688): English Puritan minister, considered to be the greatest literary genius to come out of the Puritan movement (reference can be found on page 1261).

Calcutta: Second largest city in India, notorious for its overcrowding and poverty, founded in 1690 by the British East India Company, (reference can be found on page 972).

John Calvin (1509-1564): French-born Genevan theologian and reformer, a leader in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century (reference can be found on page 1309).

Rachel Carson (1907-1964): U.S. scientist and writer, a pioneer in the environmentalist movement, especially in her warnings about the effects of pesticides on the environment (reference can be found on page 633).

Chartres: a city in northwestern France, site of the great cathedral of Notre Dame (reference can be found on page 106).

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936): English journalist and author, outstanding as critic, polemicist, and rhetorical poet (reference can be found on pages 7, 582, 1203).

Winston Churchill (1874-1965): British statesman and orator, the great national leader during World War II (references can be found on page 981).



Well-known Events

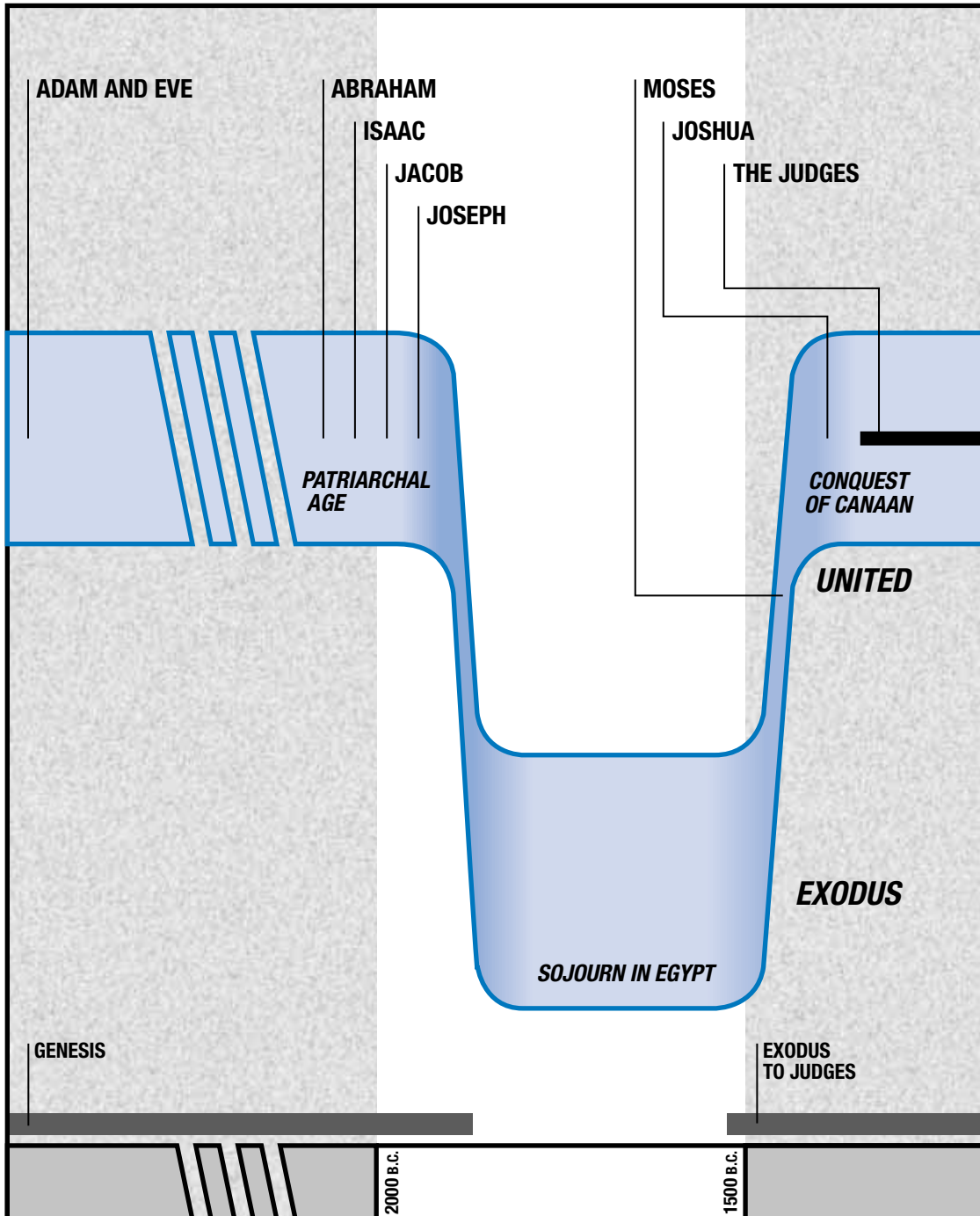
Overview of Biblical Events

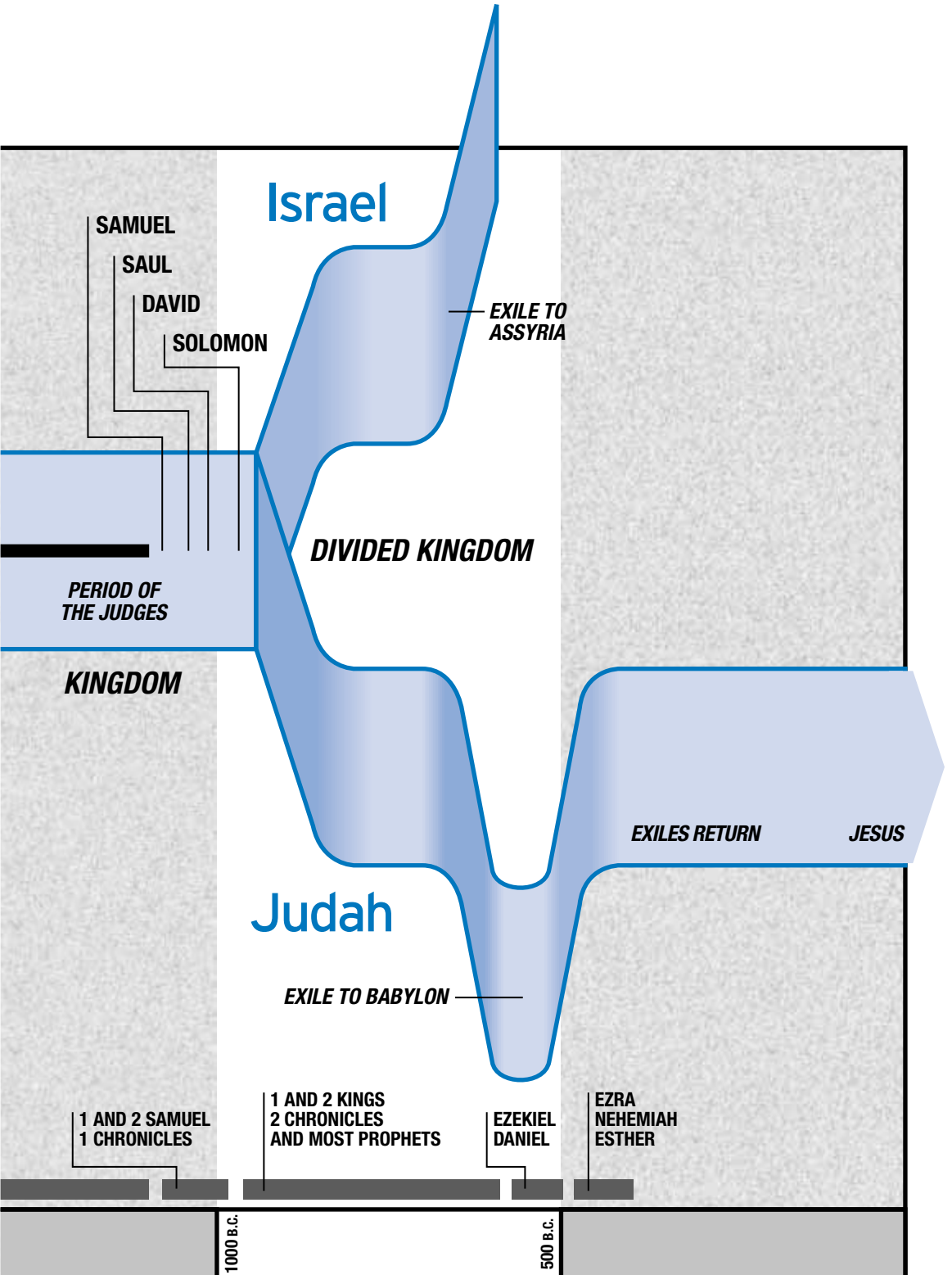
(in approximate order of occurrence)

Creation: *Genesis 1-2*
The first sin, or fall: *Genesis 3*
Cain kills Abel: *Genesis 4*
Noah and the ark: *Genesis 6-9*
Sodom and Gomorrah: *Genesis 18-19*
Abraham sacrifices Isaac: *Genesis 22*
Jacob's ladder: *Genesis 28:10-22*
Joseph and the coat of many colors: *Genesis 37*
Moses' birth: *Exodus 2*
Moses and the burning bush: *Exodus 3*
Plagues on Egypt: *Exodus 7-11*
The exodus: *Exodus 12-13*
The Ten Commandments: *Exodus 20*
The battle of Jericho: *Joshua 6*
Gideon and the fleece: *Judges 6-7*
Samson and Delilah: *Judges 13-16*
God calls young Samuel: *1 Samuel 1-3*
David and Goliath: *1 Samuel 17*
David and Bathsheba: *2 Samuel 11*
Elijah versus the priests of Baal: *1 Kings 18*
The miracles of Elisha: *2 Kings 4-5*
Ezekiel and the dry bones: *Ezekiel 37*
Daniel in the lions' den: *Daniel 6*
Jonah and the fish: *Jonah 1*
Hosea and his adulterous wife: *Hosea 1-3*
Jesus' birth: *Luke 1-2*
Jesus' baptism: *Mark 1:9-11*
Temptation of Jesus: *Luke 4:1-13*
Jesus clears the temple: *John 2:12-25*
The transfiguration of Jesus: *Matthew 17:1-13*
Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead: *John 11:1-46*
Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem: *Mark 11:1-11*
Jesus and the widow's offering: *Mark 12:41-44*
The Last Supper: *Luke 22:7-38*
Jesus washes his disciples' feet: *John 13:1-17*
Jesus at Gethsemane: *Matthew 26:36-56*
Judas betrays Jesus: *Luke 22:1-53*
Peter denies Christ: *Luke 22:54-62*
Jesus' crucifixion: *Matthew 26:57-27:66*
Jesus' resurrection and ascension: *Luke 24*
Holy Spirit at Pentecost: *Acts 2*
Stephen martyred: *Acts 6-7*
Paul's conversion: *Acts 9:1-31*
Peter's escape from prison: *Acts 12:1-19*
Paul and Silas in prison: *Acts 16:16-40*

Outline of Old Testament History

This outline emphasizes broad historical periods rather than specific events. Dates, which often depend on scholarly interpretation, are approximate.





A Lineup of Rulers

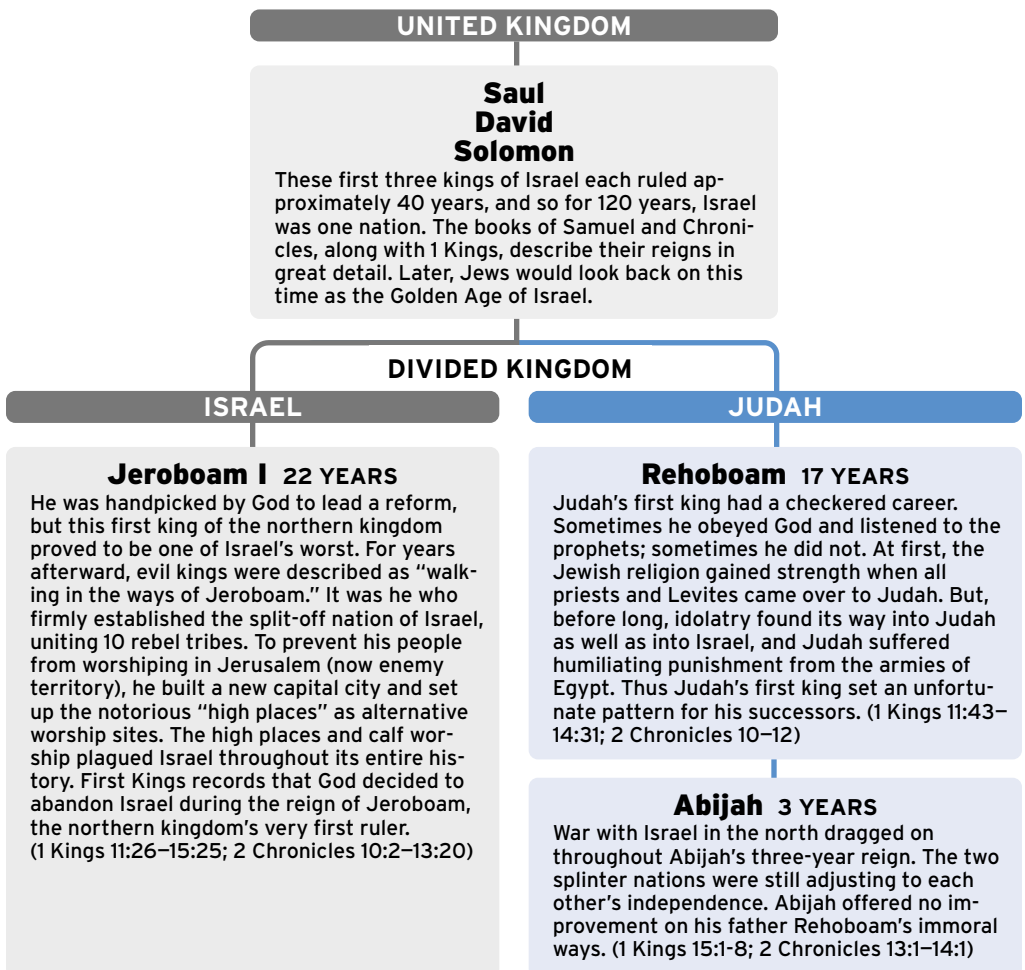
The history books of the Old Testament, especially the two-part books of Kings and Chronicles, can be confusing. First, there's one nation to keep track of, then two, then one again. In all, the history books profile 39 different rulers.

To complicate matters, prophets are arranged in no particular chronological order. What are the circumstances of the nation when each prophet speaks? It takes a Biblical scholar to keep all the details straight.

The following list of 38 kings and one queen should help. When you come across the name of a ruler, simply refer to the capsule description for a brief summary of life during the time of that ruler. Or, to locate a prophet, look for the name on the time line at the bottom of the page and then glance above to see what was happening during that prophet's lifetime.

In all, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were united for 120 years and divided for just over 200 years. Then Israel disappeared and Judah lasted alone for another 135 years. After that, no fully independent Jewish nation existed until the 20th century.

The time line at the bottom of the page places the prophets in the approximate time period, along with the rulers of their era. Jonah and Obadiah are omitted because they cannot easily be placed. Prophets whose names appear in gray boxes spoke to Israel; those listed against a blue background spoke to Judah. (Dating of some rulers is inexact because of overlapping reigns.)



Subject Guide

The Subject Guide is not a “concordance” that shows where the Bible uses a certain word. Rather, it lists major subjects that may be of interest, along with the Bible passages (not single verses, usually) that speak to these subjects. Topics of pressing interest or major significance have been highlighted within the list. Although we have tried to be comprehensive, any list of subjects must necessarily be restrictive. The italicized titles in quotes refer to Highlights, Insights, or Introductions on the subject. Page numbers are given in boldface type.

A

AARON brother of and spokesman for Moses; became the first high priest

“Working Together . . . and Apart”—p. 162
with Moses, **Exodus 4:10–12:50**—p.71
made priest, **Exodus 28–29**—p.98; “The First High Priest”—p.120
his role with golden calf, **Exodus 32**—p.102
budding of his staff, **Numbers 17**—p.167
his death, **Numbers 20:23–29**—p.170

ABEL Adam’s second son; murdered by his brother Cain

“Blood Brothers”—p.8
his life, **Genesis 4:1–9**—p.8
example of faith, **Hebrews 11:1–4**—p.1314
relationship to Christ, **Hebrews 12:22–24**—p.1317

ABIATHAR high priest in the days of Saul and David

“Outlaw Priest”—p.361

ABIGAIL wife of Nabal, became David’s wife after Nabal’s death

“Beauty and Brains”—p.320

ABISHAI nephew of David and one of his chief warriors

“Bloody Brothers”—p.441

ABNER cousin of Saul and commander of his army

“On the Wrong Side”—p.328

ABORTION death of a fetus through a medical procedure

penalty for harming fetus, **Exodus 21:22–25**—p.91
unborn life important to God, **Psalms 139**—p.654

ABRAHAM founder of the Jewish nation

called by God, **Genesis 11:26–12:20**—p.16
“Abraham”—p.17
his life, **Genesis 11:26–25:11**—p.16
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faith demonstrated by deeds,

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ABSALOM third son of David, by Maacah

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“No Way Back”—p.345

ADAM the first man

“First in Everything”—p.6

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his fall into sin, **Genesis 3**—p.5

Jesus and the line of Adam, **Luke 3:23–38**—p.1085

Jesus as second Adam, **Romans 5:12–21**—p.1210;

1Corinthians 15:21–22, 42–57—p.1237

ADOPTION becoming a child of one who is not your biological parent

Abraham and adoption of an heir,

Genesis 15:1–6—p.19; **Genesis 16**—p.21

Israel as God’s adopted son, **Exodus 4:21–23**—p.72;

Jeremiah 31:9, 16–20—p.814

Believers as God’s adopted children, **John 1:12–13**—

p.1122; **Romans 8:12–25**—p.1213; **Galatians 3:26–**

4:7—p.1250; **Ephesians 1:3–8**—p.1260

ADULTERY sexual unfaithfulness of a married person

laws against, **Numbers 5:12–31**—p.152

David and Bathsheba, **2Samuel 11–12**—p.336

warnings against, **Proverbs 5**—p.665;

Proverbs 6:20–35—p.666

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effect on the church, **1Corinthians 5**—p.1227

AFTERLIFE see ETERNAL LIFE, HEAVEN, HELL, RESURRECTION

AGRIPPA descendant of Herod; king before whom Paul pled his case

“Roman Heart”—p.1198

AHAB Israel’s most wicked king

“Worst King Yet”—p.390

ascended throne, **1Kings 16:29–33**—p.382

contest with Elijah, **1Kings 18**—p.384

and Naboth’s vineyard, **1Kings 21**—p.388

his death, **1Kings 22:34–38**—p.391

ALCOHOL see DRINKING ALCOHOL, WINE

Ambition

strong desire for success, honor, or power (PRIDE, SERVANTHOOD)

competing with God, “Human Ambition”—p.15

at the tower of Babel, **Genesis 11:1–11**—p.15

results of, **Matthew 16:21–27**—p.1026

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 Notes