



# His Story

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*The story of Scripture in 9 Sessions*

Notes on using this resource-

## **In between meeting times-**

- God helps people understand his message and he wants to hear from us even if we have doubts. Pray every day for yourself and every person in the study to understand what God wants them to know.
- Read the story 3-4 times before you meet with the group.
- Share what you've been learning with friends and family. Invite them to this study or start your own study with them.

## **During each meeting**

- Begin each session with one person leading a prayer for the group to hear from God.
- Always review previous sessions using the review questions in order to tie the stories together and fold in newcomers.
- Have one person read the story for the week straight through without stopping. If questions arise in your mind during the reading, write those down to ask during Q and A time.
- Share leadership. This study is designed to allow anyone to lead it anywhere so everyone should get a chance to read the story and guide the discussion.

Review Questions (to be used at the beginning starting with Session 2)-

1. What are some things God has done?
2. How did people respond?
3. What happened next?

Process Questions (to be used after the telling of the story)

1. What does this story say about God?
2. What does it say about people?
3. What does it say about you personally?

## Session 1- Creation, Fall, Judgment (Gen. 1-9)

Where did everything we see around us come from? According to the Bible an ultimate being who we've come to call "God" made it by just speaking it into existence. Of course, things have changed since God (who revealed himself to the writers of the Bible by the name, "Yahweh") first made everything. For instance, God started the human race with just two people named Adam and Eve. God put these people into a garden perfectly designed for them that they were to rule over and care for. His intention was that they would have children who in turn would have children so that the human race would fill the earth.

In the middle of the garden, God planted two trees. One tree was the Tree of Life. The other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God commanded the people not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because on that day they would die.

One day, however, a being that is called The Serpent called to the woman and said, "Did God tell you not to eat of any tree in the garden?"

The woman replied, "We may freely eat of any tree in the garden except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God has said that on the day we eat from that tree we will surely die."

"You won't surely die." said The Serpent, "God knows that on the day you eat from that tree you will be just like him, knowing good from evil."

So the woman considered what The Serpent said. The fruit was beautiful, and it smelled delicious. Besides that, it could make people wise. So she ate and gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate as well.

In that moment, both the man and the woman felt a new sensation- shame. Their rebellion against their creator, or "sin" as the Bible calls it, had wrecked their innocence. They had been naked but now their nakedness seemed dirty. They wove fig leaves into aprons and tied them around their waists. When they heard the presence of God in the garden, they hid from him.

God, of course, found them and asked them why they had been hiding. When they told him that it was because they were naked God asked the man, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man admitted that he had but he blamed the woman for offering it to him. The woman in turn blamed The Serpent for tricking her.

God killed animals and made clothes for the man and the woman from the skins. Then God told them the consequences of their actions. All of creation fell under a curse that day. Things that should have come easily like growing food and having children would

now require pain and struggle. Worst of all, the man and the woman were cast out of the garden and prohibited access to the Tree of Life which would enable them to live forever. They would now grow old and die as would all of their descendents after them.

After leaving the garden, Adam and Eve had children who in turn had children. As God had planned, the human race began to fill the earth. However, Adam passed his sinfulness on to his offspring who passed it on to their offspring. With each successive generation sinfulness became more pronounced until every thought of every person was evil all the time.

There was one man named Noah who found favor with God. God visited Noah and told him that he was going to destroy humanity and all land dwelling creatures by means of a worldwide flood. In order to escape this destruction, Noah was to build a huge wooden box, or ark, according to the dimensions that God would give him. So Noah obeyed God and for the next 120 years worked with his three sons to construct the ark.

When the ark was finished, God sent animals of all sorts to Noah to be rescued. Once Noah, his family, and the animals were on board, God sent torrential rains which flooded the world and destroyed every other land dwelling creature including humans, animals, and birds.

After nearly a year on the ark the flood waters receded. Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives, and all of the animals came off of the ark into a new world. God commanded Noah and his sons to have children and replenish the earth. Noah built an altar to God and sacrificed some of the animals on it as an offering of thanksgiving. God was pleased with this gesture and made a promise to Noah and to every living creature that he would never destroy the world by flood again. God put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of this promise.

## Session 2, The Patriarchs (Gen. 12, 15-18, 21, 49-50)

Noah and his sons did as God commanded them to do. They had children who had children who had children and in time they repopulated the earth. Sadly, sin followed Noah and his sons off of the Ark and spread to their descendants. People started to worship false gods and teach wrong ideas about how to live.

After several generations, God spoke to a man named Abram who lived in a village named Haran which was located in modern day Turkey. God told Abram to leave Haran and go to a land that he would show him. God made Abram three promises—that he would make him a great nation, that he would make his name great, and that through Abram all the nations of the world would be blessed.

So at age 75 Abram left Haran with his wife, Sarai, and nephew, Lot, and headed for Canaan, which is modern day Palestine. After Abram arrived in the land, God spoke to him again to remind him of the promises he had made. Abram responded, “How can I receive your blessings? I don’t have a son to inherit the things you have promised and a servant in my house will be my heir.” God said, “No, you will have a son of your own.” Abram believed God and because he believed, God considered Abram to be right in his sight. God further promised that Abram’s descendants would possess the land of Canaan after 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

Ten years later Abram and Sarai still had no children. Sarai went to Abram and said, “The Lord has kept me from having children but I do have an Egyptian servant. Marry her. Perhaps she will have a son on my behalf and in this way we can see God’s promise fulfilled.” So Abram did as his wife suggested and when Abram was 86 years old, Hagar, the Egyptian servant, gave birth to a son who Abram named Ishmael.

Abram and his family lived in Canaan another 13 years and when he was 99 years old God appeared to him to remind him of the promises he had made. God said, “I am making you the father of many nations. For this reason your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham (which means ‘father of a multitude’).” As a sign of God’s agreement with Abraham, God commanded Abraham and every male in Abraham’s household to be circumcised. God told Abraham that every one of his male descendants must be circumcised eight days after birth.

God also changed Sarai’s name to Sarah saying, “She will give you a son.” When he heard this, Abraham fell facedown laughing and said, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” Abraham said to God, “Can’t you just bless Ishmael?”

“I will.” God replied, “Ishmael will become the father of twelve rulers and I will make him a great nation. However, my promises to you will be fulfilled through Sarah’s son, Isaac.”

So Abraham obeyed God and was circumcised along with Ishmael and all the other males in his household.

Later that year God came to Abraham's tent in the form of 3 men. God told Abraham that in a year, Sarah would give birth to a son. Sarah, who overheard the conversation from the entrance to their tent, laughed to herself saying, "After I've gotten this old, could I really have such a wonderful experience?" God responded, "Why would you laugh? Is anything too hard for Yahweh?" In fact, what God said to Abraham did come true and the couple had a son one year later. They named him Isaac, which means "he laughs".

Isaac grew up and married a woman named Rebekah. They had twin sons named Jacob and Esau. Of the two boys, God chose Jacob to be the one through whom the promises would be fulfilled.

Jacob (who also came to be known as Israel) had twelve sons. One of the sons was named Joseph. Jacob treated Joseph better than he treated Joseph's ten older brothers. Out of jealousy, the older brothers conspired to sell Joseph as a slave to Egypt and tell Jacob that he had been killed by a wild animal. God blessed Joseph in Egypt and in time he became second in command to the king.

Because of a drought in Canaan, Jacob's family came to Egypt in search of food. Joseph and his brothers were reunited and reconciled. When Joseph introduced his family to the king he invited them to come and live in Egypt where they settled in the land of Goshen. Seventy people in all moved to Egypt to be with Joseph and to escape the drought.

As a very old man in Egypt, Jacob blessed each of his sons. God spoke through Jacob to foretell what each tribe would be like. Jacob's words to his son, Judah, are particularly important for our study. Here is what he said,  
The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until he to whom it belongs shall come  
and the obedience of the nations be his.

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were afraid that he would try to get revenge on them for selling him as a slave. They came to Joseph to ask him to promise not to get back at them. Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid. You tried to harm me, but God intended that you would do as you did so that we could be saved from the drought. I will take care of you and yours."

So the Israelites settled in Egypt and flourished there.

## Session 3, Moses (Exodus)

After several generations, the Hebrews (as Jacob's descendants had come to be called) had filled the entire region of Goshen where they lived. Their numbers were so great that the king of Egypt became concerned that they would participate in an uprising and overthrow his rule. In hopes of controlling their numbers, the king burdened them with forced hard labor. In spite of this, they continued to multiply. So he commanded the Egyptians to throw all of the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile River. One mother hid her son for three months. When she could no longer avoid detection, she obtained a papyrus basket and waterproofed it with tar. She put the boy in the basket and hid him among the reeds along the banks of the Nile where he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him as her own naming him Moses.

As an adult Moses went to visit his people where he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. The king discovered Moses' crime and attempted to have him killed, but Moses fled to the east to an area called Midian. There Moses joined the household of a priest named Jethro.

After forty years, Moses was herding Jethro's sheep in the wilderness near a mountain called Horeb when he spotted a bush which was on fire but not burning up. As he was moving in to inspect the unusual phenomenon, the voice of God called out to Moses from the bush. God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and free the Israelites from their slavery bringing them to the land which was promised to Abraham. God predicted that the Egyptian king known as "Pharaoh" would not allow the Israelites to leave until God had fully demonstrated his power over the Egyptian gods through a series of supernatural calamities called plagues. Once the Israelites were liberated, Moses was to bring them back to Horeb to worship Yahweh their God.

Moses returned to Egypt and things unfolded as God predicted. Nine times Pharaoh refused to allow the Hebrews to leave and nine times God brought disasters such as hail, death of livestock, or painful skin disease on the Egyptians. Finally, God warned Moses that he would bring his worst and final plague against Egypt. God would kill every firstborn son in Egypt including Pharaoh's son. To escape this plague, the Israelites were to kill a spotless lamb and paint its blood around the doorframe of their house. They were to roast the lamb and eat it in their homes with flat bread while fully dressed for a trip. God promised that the plague of death would pass over their houses when he saw the blood on the doorframe. From that night on, they were to eat lamb and flat bread once every year in a feast to commemorate this event which came to be known as The Passover.

That night, the angel of death passed through Egypt and killed all the firstborn sons in the land. Before morning, Pharaoh decreed that the Hebrews must leave Egypt. So the entire nation of Israel, 650,000 men with their wives and children, left Egypt in one day.

Now God was leading the Israelites by means of a floating pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. After two weeks God had led Israel to camp by the Red Sea.

Meanwhile, Pharaoh and his officials met and said, “What have we done? We’ve lost our source of free labor!” So, Pharaoh gathered his army and pursued the Israelites. He caught up with them as they were camping by the sea.

When the Israelites saw that they were trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the sea, they were terrified. God, however, told Moses to raise his staff over the water and a strong wind began to blow across the sea all night. While this was happening, the cloud which they had been following moved between them and the Pharaoh’s army covering the Egyptians in darkness. The wind parted the sea and the Israelites went through on dry ground with walls of water on either side of them.

Once the Israelites had come through the sea, the cloud moved away from the Egyptians. They charged after Israel but the sea closed in and drowned all of Pharaoh’s army. The Israelites celebrated that they had been rescued by God from slavery and death.

Moses obeyed God and brought the people to Horeb where he gave them his law which consisted of ten commands which are:

1. Worship only God
2. Don’t make any kind of image (or idol) to worship
3. Treat God’s name, Yahweh, with respect
4. Set Saturday aside for rest and worship
5. Respect your mother and father
6. Don’t commit murder
7. Don’t cheat on your husband or wife
8. Don’t steal
9. Don’t falsely accuse another person
10. Don’t desire things that belong to someone else

God gave them these rules to help them define and deal with sin. God instructed that people who broke these rules were to die for what they did.

God knew that people would sometimes break these rules on accident. Because of that he set up a way for their sins to be covered. They would have to come to a special tent called a tabernacle with a perfect animal such as a lamb or bull and give that animal to a priest who would kill the animal at a special altar. In addition to these sacrifices, God commanded that the whole nation observe a special day every year to make a special sacrifice in which a priest selected two goats. One goat was killed for the guilt of the people. The priest was to lay his hand on the other goat and confess the sins of the people. This goat was taken out into the wilderness to symbolically take sins away. This special day was called the Day of Atonement. Atonement means to make up for wrongs done against someone.

So the nation was free and they had a law to live by. They were now ready to enter the land that God had promised them.



## **Session 4, Rise and Fall of a Nation (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings)**

The Israelites didn't enter Canaan right away. In order to take over the land, they would have to fight and destroy the people who already lived in the land. God promised to help them win, but they didn't believe him and refused to go. To punish them for their unbelief, God told them that they would have to wander in the wilderness south and east of Canaan for 40 years.

After 40 years the entire generation who had feared to enter the land had died including Moses. Joshua, Moses' successor, led the people into the land and through a series of supernaturally empowered military campaigns, they took it over. Once conquered, the land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Even though Israel took over the land, they did not wipe out the people who lived there as God had commanded. After Joshua's generation died, another generation arose which began to adopt the evil practices of the other nations around them. They worshipped idols and became violent and immoral. When this would happen, God would send one of the neighboring nations to conquer the Israelites as punishment. In their misery, Israel would turn from their sins (or repent) and pray to God. God would respond by selecting a leader called a judge to deliver the people. Once they had been rescued, they would again fall into the practices of the people around them and so the cycle would continue.

The last judge to rule Israel was a man named Samuel. Samuel was called by God to speak his words to the people of Israel; he was a prophet. He was also a priest who was able to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Samuel ruled faithfully over the nation but when he grew older, his sons took bribes and ruled unjustly. So, the people came to Samuel and asked him to give them a king to rule over them so they could be like the nations around them. Samuel thought this was a bad idea but God told him to give in to what the people wanted. In those days, a man was made king through a ritual called anointing where a priest poured oil on the man's head. God led Samuel to a man named from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul and Samuel anointed Saul as king over Israel.

At first Saul was a humble and brave man, but in time he became insecure in his rule. His insecurity caused him to bend to the will of the people rather than doing what God said. Because of Saul's disobedience God said that he was going to take the kingdom away from him and give it to a man with a heart like his own.

God spoke to Samuel and told him to go to the house of a man from the tribe of Judah named Jesse and anoint one of Jesse's sons as the new king of Israel. Starting with the eldest, each of Jesse's sons passed in front of Samuel, but each time God rejected the man. Finally, Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons. Jesse did- a youth named David who was out tending the sheep. When David was brought in, Samuel immediately got up and anointed him king.

Saul continued to rule until he died in battle at the age of 72. By this time David had become famous as a military leader so the people made him their king. David ruled well and under his reign, Israel took possession of the entire land that God had promised to Abraham. He conquered the city of Jebus, renamed it Jerusalem, and made it his capital. God was pleased with David and promised him that one of his descendants would reign on his throne forever.

After David died, his son Solomon became king. Solomon was 16 when he began to rule. He prayed to God for wisdom and God made him the wisest man who had ever lived.

During Solomon's reign, however, he married many foreign women. These women led Solomon away from worshipping only Yahweh. In fact Solomon built shrines to these foreign gods for his wives and worshipped their false gods with them. As a result, God split the kingdom in two after Solomon's death. Solomon's son Rehoboam ruled the two southern tribes and Solomon's aid Jeroboam ruled the northern ten tribes. The tribes in the north came to be known as Israel while the tribes in the south came to be known as Judah.

Jeroboam was a wicked king as were the 18 kings who succeeded him in the north. In 722 BC God sent the Assyrian Empire to conquer Israel. The Assyrians destroyed the cities of Israel and diluted the bloodline of Abraham by transplanting foreigners into the area. Israel went out of existence.

The kings in Judah were mostly bad as well with the exception of a few men like Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah who were good. These men prolonged the existence of Judah but it wasn't enough. In 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, conquered Judah and took the people to live in captivity in Babylon for 70 years.

## Session 5, A New Hope (Isaiah 9:1-7; Daniel 2; Luke 1-2)

Around the time that the northern kingdom of Israel went into captivity, prophets began to foretell the coming of a great king who would be a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah. This king, or Anointed One as he came to be called, would not only rule over Israel but over the entire world. One prophet named Isaiah wrote these words somewhere around 700 BC:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.

By the time Isaiah wrote these words Zebulun and Naphtali, which were tribes in the northern kingdom, had been taken into Assyrian captivity and their lands had been settled by non-Jews, or "Gentiles." Isaiah writes that in these lands, the region of Galilee, God will send a great light. This great light will be a child who will become a ruler like no other. The fact that he will be born to us, the human race, means he will be fully human. But he is also called, "Mighty God" among other titles. He will be a descendent of David but somehow unlike David his rule will continue to expand around the globe and it will never end.

So the remaining southern kingdom waited for the Anointed One which in Hebrew is "Messiah" and in Greek is "Christ". In just a little over a century, however, the southern kingdom of Judah was also taken into captivity by the Babylonian Empire. Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians didn't take everyone from the land. Instead, they took the wealthy and intellectuals both young and old, leaving the poor and uneducated to maintain the land under Babylonian oversight.

A young man named Daniel was among those taken into captivity to Babylon. Daniel was gifted with wisdom from God and he had the ability to interpret certain dreams. Because of this, he rose to prominence among the advisors of the king, Nebuchadnezzar.

One night, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of seeing a great statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, waist and thighs of bronze, calves of iron with the feet made of iron mixed with clay. A rock cut out, but not by human hands, struck the statue on the feet causing the entire thing to crumble and blow away in the wind. The rock became a great mountain and filled the entire earth.

Among all of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors only Daniel could interpret the dream. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the statue represented four empires. The head of gold was the Babylonian empire. A second, less glorious empire would conquer Babylon and rule until a third empire would overthrow them and rule the whole world. Finally, a fourth kingdom would come to power which would be as strong as iron but it would be a divided kingdom which was signified by the mixture of iron and clay in the feet. In the days of that fourth empire, God would set up his kingdom which would fill the whole earth and never be destroyed.

As Daniel had predicted, the Babylonians were conquered by the Persian Empire. After the Jewish people had been in Babylon for 70 years the Persian emperor, Cyrus, allowed them to return to their homeland where they restored their temple and rebuilt their capital city of Jerusalem. They were allowed to live in their homeland and worship their God but they were under the control of Persia.

In 333 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Darius III, overthrowing the Persian Empire. Over the next 10 years Alexander would establish the largest global empire which had ever existed. Domination of the Jews passed to Alexander and then to his successors who at times persecuted them for their worship of Yahweh.

In 200 BC, Alexander's successors began a campaign to conquer Italy. This was the beginning of the end for the Greek Empire as the Romans defeated them in a series of battles which left the Roman Republic as the great world power by 168 BC.

In 46 BC, Julius Caesar would have himself declared the first Roman Emperor. As Daniel had predicted, this fourth empire possessed more military might than any of the ones which preceded it. Unlike previous kingdoms, Rome did not officially claim territories but rather subdued other nations. Under Roman rule, local leaders continued to rule while paying tribute to Rome and observing specific limitations. Those who failed to comply would face swift and severe retribution. As Daniel had predicted, this fourth empire was strong and fierce but divided.

During the reign of the second Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, an angel (or heavenly messenger) was sent by God to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a young woman named Mary who was engaged to marry a man named Joseph, a descendent of David. Her conversation with the angel, Gabriel, is recorded in the Gospel of Luke as follows,

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word."

As the angel predicted, the virgin, Mary, had a son and named him Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves". So the son of God was born the offspring of Abraham, a descendent of David, from the tribe of Judah, during the reign of the fourth kingdom from Babylon to become the king of the world.

## **Session 6, Jesus' Life and Work (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)**

Jesus grew up in the home of Joseph and Mary along with his half brothers and sisters. Because he was born of a virgin, he did not receive the tendency to sin that had been passed through fathers to their children since Adam. Jesus lived an ordinary but sinless life as the son of a carpenter until he reached around 30 years of age.

About that time, a man named John who lived in the wilderness, began announcing that God was about to establish his kingdom. John administered a washing ritual called baptism to prepare people for the coming of the Anointed One. Thousands of people responded to John's message and received his baptism in the Jordan River.

One day Jesus came to be baptized by John. At first John, who was also Jesus' distant cousin, wouldn't do it saying, "I need to be baptized by you." But Jesus explained that it was what God wanted and so John baptized him. When Jesus came up out of the water, God the Father spoke to him in an audible voice from heaven saying, "You are my dearly loved son. I am very pleased with you." At the same moment the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. In this way Jesus was anointed not with olive oil, but with the Holy Spirit. From this time on he began his work as the Christ.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by a being named Satan who was also The Serpent who tricked the woman in the Garden. While in the wilderness Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights. Satan, also known as the devil, came to Jesus in his weakened state and confronted Jesus with three temptations which Jesus resisted each time. After the third temptation, angels came and cared for Jesus.

Having emerged from the wilderness victorious over Satan, Jesus went to Galilee to a town by the sea named Capernaum where he began to announce the coming of God's kingdom. From there Jesus traveled all over that area with twelve hand-picked followers teaching about what the kingdom would be like. He taught his twelve disciples and all of the people to love others, take the lowest place of service, and care for the poor.

Regarding the kingdom he said this:

"The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

The Holy Spirit worked with Jesus to confirm his message by empowering him to perform supernatural signs. During the three or so years that Jesus traveled around teaching and announcing the coming of God's kingdom, he healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed storms, liberated people who were oppressed by evil spirits, and multiplied a small amount of food to feed thousands.

Jesus, however, worked to stay out of the spotlight. When he would heal a person, he would command them to tell no one. Jesus had a job to do and too much fame would slow him down. Of course, the people he healed would disregard his instruction and spread his fame all the more.

The more people followed Jesus, the more concerned the religious leaders became. They were jealous of the influence that he had. They didn't like the way that he pointed out their hypocrisy. Most of all, they were concerned that the people would rally around him and start a revolt against Rome since Rome was known to utterly destroy countries and cities which rejected their occupation. For all of these reasons, the religious leaders decided to have Jesus executed. So, they waited for an opportunity to arrest him.

Every year faithful Jews came from the entire Roman Empire to the city of David, Jerusalem, to celebrate the Passover feast. Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem as well. They came into town on a Sunday. From Sunday through Thursday, Jesus taught in the temple in Jerusalem. While there, he had many confrontations with the religious leaders. Time and again they wanted to arrest him, but they feared that the crowds who were listening to Jesus would revolt.

Finally, they got the opportunity they were looking for. One of Jesus' twelve followers, a man named Judas Iscariot, went to the religious leaders and said, "How much will you give me if I turn him over to you?" They gave him 30 pieces of silver, the standard price of a slave. Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

On Tuesday of that week, Jesus was eating dinner just outside of Jerusalem in a town called Bethany at the house of a leper named Simon. A woman came into the room where they were with a bottle of expensive perfume. She broke the bottle and emptied its contents over Jesus' head. Some of the people who were there were disgusted at such a waste since that perfume was worth a year's wages. Jesus said, "Let her alone. She has done a beautiful thing to me by preparing my body for burial."

When Thursday came, it was time to sacrifice and eat the Passover lamb. So Jesus and his twelve followers gathered in an upstairs room to eat the feast. While they were sitting at the table, Jesus took his plate of flat bread and passed it around to the twelve. He said, "Take this and eat it. It is my body which is given for you."

After they had eaten the bread, Jesus passed around his own cup filled with wine. He said, "Drink all of this. This is a new agreement ratified by my blood. From now on you will eat this bread and drink the wine to remember me until I return."

Once they had eaten the Passover, they sang a song to God and then went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. When they got there Jesus became overwhelmed with grief. In prayer, Jesus cried out to God, the Father, asking that he might be spared the suffering which lay ahead. Jesus prayed this prayer three times and each time he ended it with, "not my will but your will be done."

After Jesus had prayed the third time, Judas came upon him leading a detachment from the temple guard who arrested Jesus and took him to stand trial before the Jewish ruling council. Jesus' followers abandoned him and ran away.

## **Session 7, Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts)**

The Jewish council interrogated Jesus and attempted to bring witnesses against him. Finally, they asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the son of God?"

Jesus replied, "You said it. And from now on you will see the Son of Man (as Jesus called himself) sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming in the clouds of the sky." This response infuriated the Jewish leaders who considered Jesus' words to be an insult to God.

They grabbed him and took him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and insisted that he execute Jesus by hanging him on a cross. At first, Pilate objected since he could find no legitimate charge against Jesus. The Jewish leaders began to suggest that by letting Jesus live, Pilate was showing disloyalty to Caesar since Jesus claimed to be a king. Finally, Pilate gave in and ordered that Jesus be crucified.

The Roman soldiers took Jesus and for the rest of the night they beat him and humiliated him. They stripped off his clothes and whipped his back until blood gushed out. Then they put a kingly robe on him and placed a crown of thorns on his head. They bowed down him saying, "Hail king of the Jews." They spit on him and hit him on the head driving the thorns into Jesus scalp.

When morning came, they led him out to be crucified carrying his own cross. At nine in the morning they reach a place called "Skull Hill" where they nailed his hands and feet to the cross and then lifted him up to hang to death. Beginning at noon thick, black clouds rolled in making the day as dark as night. At 3 PM Jesus cried out, "It is finished." And then he died. To make sure he was dead, a Roman soldier stabbed him in the side with his spear. Blood and water poured out of the hole which indicated that his heart had stopped.

Some of Jesus' friends took him down from the cross and placed his body in a cave. They rolled a huge rock in front of the door and then went home to observe the Day of Rest which began on Friday evening. On Saturday morning, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate asking him to put a guard around Jesus' tomb since they were afraid that his followers would take the body and claim that he had risen from death. Pilate granted their request. The tomb was sealed and an armed guard was placed on watch there.

Early Sunday morning the earth shook as an angel appeared from Heaven, rolled the stone away from the tomb, and sat on it. The guards who were standing there shook with fear and fainted. Mary Magdalene, a close friend of Jesus, came to visit his grave and found that the stone had been rolled away. In alarm, she ran to Peter, Jesus' closest friend, and told him that Jesus' body was missing. Peter came back to the tomb along with another of Jesus' disciples named John. The two of them inspected the tomb and found it empty. Jesus' grave clothes were there but Jesus was gone. Peter and John left, perplexed over what might have happened but Mary stayed at the tomb.



Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."

Over the next forty days Jesus appeared to his eleven followers and to several others who had believed in him. He showed them how the prophecies which had been spoken about him foretold that the Christ would suffer and die to pay the penalty for the sins of the people and that on the third day he would rise from death. Jesus commissioned his followers to tell others his story, to offer them a chance to accept his death as payment for their sins, and to commit their lives in obedience to him as their king. Jesus promised that God, the Holy Spirit, would come to them and empower them to spread kingdom over the whole world. Then, while they were watching, Jesus rose up into the sky and a cloud took him out of sight.

## Session 8, The Spread of the Kingdom (Acts)

Jesus' followers watched him rise into the sky and out of their sight. While they were still looking up, two men in white stood beside them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

So they returned to Jerusalem to an upstairs room where they had been staying and began to pray along with a little over one hundred other believers. Ten days later they were all gathered together during the Jewish harvest festival known as Pentecost. As they were praying, the sound of a violent wind filled the room. What appeared to be tongues of fire rested on each person. They all began to speak in various languages which they had never studied.

Jews from all over the Roman Empire were in the city for the festival and heard the sound of the wind. When they came out to see what had happened, they were amazed to discover that all of these Galileans were praising God in languages from all over the known world.

As they were trying to figure out what was going on Peter, spoke up and said, "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will rest in hope,

because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,

you will not let your holy one see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

"Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

These three thousand people constituted the first kingdom colony which has come to be called, the Church. For nearly a year, these people continued to gather together in Jerusalem. They prayed together, ate together, and learned from the apostles. When anyone had a need among their number, they would all give to help so that no one among them went without. People kept on joining them and in time their number swelled to five thousand people.

The Jewish leaders who had executed Jesus did not like this movement. They tried to intimidate Jesus’ twelve followers who had begun to be called apostles or “sent ones”. On one occasion, they even captured and beat Peter, James, and John. But rather than causing them to stop, the beating just made them happy that they were considered worthy to suffer for Jesus. They kept on teaching his message. Finally, a man named Saul along with several others began a campaign of violence against the church which began with the murder of an early church leader named Stephen. This wave of persecution scattered the believers back to their homelands. As they went, they took the message about Jesus with them. And so kingdom outposts cropped up all over the known world.

Saul attempted to chase these Christ followers into other areas. He received extradition papers from the Jewish counsel and headed for a city north of Jerusalem called Damascus to arrest any believers that he found there. While he was on the way, Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light which knocked Saul to the ground. Jesus enlisted Saul to be his messenger to all the nations. Saul entered the city and was baptized as a follower of Christ.

Saul, who came to be called by his Greek name, Paul, went on to announce the message about Jesus and start churches all over the Roman Empire. He wrote thirteen letters to churches and individuals encouraging them, correcting wrong teaching, and explaining the significance of Christ’s work. Very early in the history of the church, Paul’s letters came to be considered part of the inspired Scriptures. Paul himself was beheaded by the Roman Emperor Nero in 64 AD as a part of a program to stamp out Christianity.

All of Jesus' original followers died in similar ways with the exception of John who died in exile on the Island of Patmos. In spite of constant and brutal persecution by the Roman government, the kingdom of God continued to spread until in 313 AD Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. In another few centuries the Roman Empire would crumble and fall, but the kingdom of God continues to grow and spread until this day. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is still coming true.

## Session 9, Christ's Return

Those who follow Jesus will experience everything he experienced. As they do the things he did, they will be mistreated by the people of this world. Even people who claim to believe in God will cause them harm and even kill them. Even those who are not killed for their faith will experience physical death. Christ's followers will also experience a resurrection into an invincible body like his. In that new body, they will live in God's very presence serving and worshipping him forever. This resurrection will happen at Christ's return to earth.

Christ's return will not be good news for everyone. Jesus will come to execute final judgment on The Serpent and on the angels and humans who followed him. In Scripture, we are told that he and his followers will be thrown into an eternal fire.

While the apostle John was in exile on the Island of Patmos, he received a vision about what would happen at the end of time. His description of that vision can be found in the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22. Here is an excerpt from what he wrote:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new! It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

One of the angels said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

"Look, I (Jesus) am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.