

ONE

story

FROM SHADOWS TO SUBSTANCE



—the gospel from genesis to revelation—

ONE STORY:

FROM SHADOWS TO SUBSTANCE

—a journey of the gospel from genesis to revelation—

David Holcomb
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One Story: From Shadows to Substance

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FOREWORD



Dear Friends,

Thank you for being part of our *One Story* journey as we consider God's great plan for his people from beginning to end in Scripture. Our goal is to see the Bible as a unified whole, lovingly crafted by one divine Author.

There will be challenges! We will be pushed to understand why God gave us some of the Old Testament books (like Leviticus) that we might prefer to speed-read in our daily devotions. We will ask what the less-familiar books of the Bible can teach us about God, ourselves, and our place in his great plan. Hopefully, these challenges will yield the fruit of greater appreciation for Scripture and greater love for the One who inspired its writing.

We also hope to equip you to better respond to questions from not-yet-believers. Many people scoff at the idea of divinely-inspired and divinely-preserved Scripture. Others see the Old and New Testaments as contradictory, and absent of any unified theme. We will seek to discover the unity of Scripture, and the contribution of Old and New Testament books to God's eternal plan for his people.

I think you will get the most out of this study if you read through the whole Bible this year. There are several helpful plans that can guide you in this. Most prescribe reading from both testaments each day. My favorite is Robert Murray M'Cheyne's "Read the Bible in a Year" calendar. It takes you through the Old Testament once, and the New Testament and Psalms twice in a year, but of course it requires more reading.

In the Books of Poetry and the Prophets, we will discover different styles of writing, but will continue to see Scripture as a unified whole, lovingly crafted by one divine Author. We will consider why a righteous person like Job suffered as he did. We will explore the unusual statements in the Book of Ecclesiastes. We will study prophets who rebuked God's people while looking forward to God's *One Story* redemption. Hopefully, these challenges will yield the fruit of greater appreciation for Scripture and greater love for the One who inspired its writing.

Though written over many centuries by authors from different walks of life, these Old Testament books combine to build an expectation for God's people. They leave us looking for an answer—something more, something greater. That answer is found in the New Testament. The New Testament begins with the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give us the remarkable record of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. They reveal Christ's challenging teachings and his miracle-working power. They show us his wisdom, compassion and sinless life. They verify that he was more than a mere man—he was God become man.

The Book of Acts gives us the account of the early Christian church, and teaches us what can happen when God empowers his people to take the message of Jesus' salvation to the world. The letters, or epistles, of the New Testament provide us with a clear understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. They teach us how to live as followers of Jesus. The Book of Revelation, while challenging to understand with its rich symbolism, teaches us what is ahead for those who follow the Lamb of God.

It is our hope that this study will better equip you to share the message of Jesus' saving work with friends and family who do not yet know him. We also hope the study will help you see the unity of Scripture and the contribution of both Old and New Testaments to God's eternal plan for his people. Above all, we hope it will help you to know the Lord better and love Him more.

In His great love,

David Beaty

Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

INTRODUCTION



The Bible is often viewed as a collection of books—a series of stories loosely tied together with Scripture cross-references and common religious language. That could not be any farther from the reality of what we have been gifted and what we have available to us in this one-of-a-kind, fully authoritative, completely inerrant Word of God.

The Bible is actually one book—one amazing work of literature—historical, theological, and anthropological. It is the one story of redemption...one harmonious, unified narrative of deliverance and salvation that has emerged from a diversity of authors, circumstances, and literary forms. It is a miracle of inspiration and preservation that provides us with the progressive revelation of God's character and his plan to reconcile fallen creation to himself.

Every page, every passage, and every book of the Bible moves the one story of redemption forward. It is our prayer that this *One Story* study will bring greater insight to these forward movements, helping to put the pieces together in a meaningful, life-changing way.

While not every single book of the English Bible is covered in *One Story*, most are at least cited. And because God's story moves us from Genesis to Revelation across a space of real time and real history, the story will move forward naturally with a directional progression from fallen humanity to restored creation.

In Units 1 and 2, we begin with the beginning. The books of the Law and History help to lay the foundation for the story. We observe the continuous narrative of God's people as the story advances each week, and—in doing so—we discover many Old Testament shadows of the One who is the substance in God's grand plan of redemption: Jesus—the Christ, Messiah, and Savior—the One who is central to the entirety of this one story.

In Units 3 and 4, we explore the works of biblical wisdom, poetry, and song, as well as the recorded life and ministry of God's chosen prophets. These unique collections move the narrative forward while reinforcing the account already covered. These inspired and anointed works gave—and continue to give—evidence to God's character and his work in our world.

In all of the previous units, there was a significant level of emphasis on the shadows—the many Old Testament references, allusions, copies, and types that prefigure the coming Messiah—Jesus. As the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, these shadows, while pointing us to Jesus, are incomplete and infinitely inferior copies of

the substance found in Christ.

In Units 5 and 6, the substance we have in Christ is revealed! The new covenant of the law, the ultimate deliverance from sin, the once-for-all atonement sacrifice.... these—and all the other shadows—are made incarnate, fully-human and fully-divine, as the advent of Jesus introduces us to the section of the *One Story* we refer to as the New Testament.

The Gospels of the New Testament describe the good news of Jesus' birth, ministry, and resurrection. The narrative continues with the Acts of the Apostles and the unbelievable invitation that you and I have—equipped with the Holy Spirit's presence—to enter and participate in his global church.

The final chapters of God's *One Story* take us through the many inspired Epistles—or letters—of the apostles. These conclude with the Revelation of John, reminding us that, while the *One Story* preserved for us within Scripture closes at this point, the final chapter of God's redemptive plan is yet to come.

As we follow the story of redemption from cover to cover, you are encouraged to take the opportunity to become more familiar with each of these divinely-inspired authors and books, with the intention of gaining greater understanding of the dates, people, and events.

The guidebook for *One Story* has been created primarily as a supplement to the Sunday morning teaching and a prompt for personal time of study and devotion. It includes a unit for each week of the 2020 sermon series. We encourage you to listen online in order to experience the full benefit of the unfolding narrative. Each chapter includes a link to a River Oaks Community Church Sunday morning message.

However you choose to utilize this guide, may this season be one of deep biblical literacy—learning, loving, and living out God's Word. May we all desire to know God better and love him more as we delight in the sweetness and richness of all that he has revealed of himself, and all that he has expected of us in response. May we marvel at the shadows as we worship the Substance.

Because He lives,

David Holcomb

Discipleship Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

THE LAW



The Law is also referred to as: the Torah (Hebrew for “law”), the Pentateuch (Greek for “five scrolls”), or the Five Books of Moses. These five books, with clear continuity of content, theme, and purpose, each picking up where the previous one leaves off, contain much of the content we often think of in stand-alone Bible narratives: The Garden, the Flood, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the Ten Commandments. Yet, each of these episodes is deeply woven into the fabric of the redemption story.

Throughout the Law, we discover not only the foreshadowing of Jesus, but—importantly—the *reason* for Jesus. We discover the cause of our fallen nature and begin to understand what God is putting in place to save us from that nature. It is all intentional. It is all Christ-centered. It is all critical to how we view God’s holiness, justice, mercy, and grace.

We will journey from Creation (Genesis) to the brink of the Promised Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy), from Adam and Eve to Moses and Joshua—and to all the wonderful places in between. We will observe and apply those moments that impact the overarching narrative of redemption and move our *One Story* along. May you thoroughly enjoy and be encouraged by this five-volume “Book of Moses.”

GENESIS. IN THE BEGINNING



KEY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:1-5

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. –Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.
–John 1:1-3

KEY WORD(S): Covenant

KEY THEME(S): Creation. Fall. Judgment. Father Abraham.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Genesis is the book of beginnings. Literally, this first book of the Law is referred to as both “Genesis” (meaning “origin”) in our English Bibles and “B’resheet” (meaning “in the beginning”) in its original Hebrew title.–and for good reason. Not only does Genesis begin the *One Story* of God’s redemptive history, but it takes us squarely to the beginning of all creation–the beginning of all things except God himself (John 1:1-3).

In Genesis, the Creator God engages in relationship with the world he has created and initiates many good beginnings. Throughout the first twelve chapters, we learn about God’s character and purpose through the created universe, man and woman, Sabbath, marriage, family, civilization, government, nations, Israel. Of course, it is also the beginning of those things that God did not create, but were a consequence of evil and pride and disobedience–sin, violence, death.

The *One Story* sermon series begins with three units in Genesis. Until we reach the final book (Revelation), Genesis is the only book on which we will spend more than one week. This is a deliberate indication of how critical the Genesis elements are within the *One Story*. This is also an indication of just how much there is to cover in this one book, including a span of time that is greater than all the other sixty-five books put together.

In consideration of creation, Genesis 1 provides a significant amount of theological and practical understanding. Genesis, whom Jesus himself credited to Moses as having authored (Luke 24:44), introduces us to the concept of the Trinity. This is the first occurrence of Father, Son, and Spirit working as one, even using the language of “our” and “us.”

Further, these beginning passages reinforce our standing before God as having been “created in His image” (1:27). This relational God is **creating in his own image** for the purpose of love and glory. This is critical to recall as we move through the *One Story*. Men and women— though distorted after the fall—remain image-bearers.

Finally, the *One Story* will include the many ways humanity has attempted to restore “garden perfection” and failed. It will also reveal to us the only way humanity can possibly be restored: through Jesus, who will prove to be the Substance to the many *One Story* shadows.

As we begin the *One Story* year, we encourage you to consider why acknowledging God as having created all things is fundamental to fully appreciating and comprehending the road ahead. How might this acknowledgment affect our view of moral right and wrong, good and evil? How do we apply our understanding of purpose for those who are called God’s children?

ACCESS message on [GENESIS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, January 12, 2020.

GENESIS. WAS THE FLOOD NECESSARY?



KEY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 6:1-22

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. –Genesis 6:5-6

KEY WORD(S): Covenant

KEY THEME(S): Creation. Fall. Judgment. Father Abraham.

CONSIDER & APPLY: A study of Genesis is often outlined in eight parts, with chapters 1-11 categorized by **four key events (Creation, Fall, Flood, Nations)**, and chapters 12-50 divided into four key people (which we'll discuss in Unit 3). In this unit, we consider the third key event, the **Great Flood**.

To fully grasp the necessity of the flood, which destroyed much of this created world and left only Noah and his family as inhabitants, one must first fully grasp the separation between God and mankind resulting from the fall. Scripture tells us that in Adam all have sinned (Romans 5:12), and sin multiplied as mankind multiplied. In fact, sin multiplied to such a degree that, if God is truly a just and holy God, judgment and wrath must to be expected.

Wickedness, violence, corruption. This described the state of the world in Noah's day. Genesis 6:5 states that in the wickedness of man God saw that "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Was mankind beyond repentance? Perhaps. Of course, only God would know this. Still, God's wrath through the flood was a holy cure to a worldwide sin problem. A far cry from the peacefulness of a garden relationship.

Importantly, in Noah we see a shadow of the salvation that will be ultimately fulfilled in the substance of Jesus, Messiah. Noah is saved by his faith and obedience (Hebrews 11:7). Additionally, Peter would compare the shadow of Noah's deliverance through the waters to that of faith in Jesus, being baptized in his death and rescued from the waters of sin, as were Noah and his family (1 Peter 3:18-22).

While it might be unpleasant to consider, the truth of eternal separation brought on by a wickedness we are born

into (a result of the fall), is real. The flood was necessary to demonstrate God's standing as both Judge and Savior, and to provide a model of faith and obedience for those who will be called into his *One Story* plan of salvation.

ACCESS message on [GENESIS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, January 19, 2020.

GENESIS. ABRAHAM AND THE COVENANT PROMISE



KEY SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 15:1-20

And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. –Genesis 15:5-6

KEY WORD(S): Covenant

KEY THEME(S): Creation. Fall. Judgment. Father Abraham.

CONSIDER & APPLY: In a final unit from the Book of Genesis, the *One Story* has advanced past the four key events of chapters 1-11 and entered into the **four key people** of chapters 12-50 (**Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph**). The most pivotal passages of Genesis will occur with the introduction of, and **covenant relationship with, Abraham**.

Up to this point Creator God has established a garden relationship with his creation. His creation has sinned against its holy God. God has withdrawn his presence and created a separation through the fall of mankind. This fall has brought death, rebellion, and eternal consequences. The initial response to dealing with this evil was near total destruction. Yet even in the flood, God demonstrated great grace and mercy on the ones who came to him in faith and obedience. Once again, creation is moved by pride and self-centeredness when God fragments the unity of a single culture and scatters people across the face of the earth.

Enter Abraham.

In God's great sovereign wisdom, he will create a nation of people who will be separate from all other nations. They will be his people and he will be their God. This relationship will result in a blessing for all nations. This relationship will result in a model for the future people of God (followers of Jesus), called out to be set apart. This relationship will begin with a series of covenant encounters and ceremonies (Genesis 12, 15 and 17).

The remaining covenant promises with Abraham—and later with Moses, David, and through Jesus (the New Covenant)—form the backbone of the *One Story*. They will be central to practically every biblical book, teaching,

prophecy, and revelation. The covenants formed with Abraham (a great nation, a land, and a blessing to all nations) are shadows of a future new covenant in Jesus and give evidence to the fact that God always keeps his promises.

In short, the Abrahamic covenant is seen as a blessing in chapter 12, a ceremony in chapter 15, and a symbol in chapter 17. Each is significant in its own right. Most importantly, chapter 15 provides the image of God moving through the fires of the covenant and essentially saying, "This one is on me. Even though I am God and you are not, Abraham, I promise to fulfill the covenant agreement, or I will suffer the consequences." This would have been shocking, but in reality God was gifting Abraham, the future people of Israel, and the future church of Jesus Christ, an unconditional covenant of grace. There is nothing we can do to fulfill the covenant; we can only receive it in faith as a result of God's grace and God's work.

The beauty of the *One Story* is found in God's covenant promises. Continue to consider the implications and the shadows as you progress through the unified narrative of God's redemptive history.

ACCESS message on [GENESIS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, January 26, 2020.

EXODUS. HOW RELEVANT ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?



KEY SCRIPTURE: EXODUS 20:1-17

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." –Exodus 20:1-3

KEY WORD(S): Deliverance

KEY THEME(S): Salvation. Redemption. God's Covenant People.

CONSIDER & APPLY: If Genesis provided the "beginnings" to God's *One Story*, Exodus provides a significant level of "framework" to the story. In fact, much of what is revealed in Exodus has dominated the thought of Jews and Christians even to this day: **Passover, the Exodus, Moses, the Law, and the tabernacle.**

Powerful **acts of redemption and deliverance** fill the pages of Exodus. Continuing the story of Abraham's family, this infant nation of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, is delivered from the bondage of slavery by God. This deliverance includes the introduction of Passover, whereby an innocent life (a lamb) was sacrificed for the people. The **shadow of Jesus, our Passover Lamb**, is not only clearly evident, but would be verbalized as such in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and would be visible through all future shadows of sacrifice.

Important to the question of relevancy regarding the Ten Commandments is the observation that God first delivered (saved) his people before he required obedience of the law from them. In other words, the law (Ten Commandments and all that would follow), were intended solely to set God's people apart, to "sanctify" them. The law was never intended to deliver or justify them. God's people, Israel, and his church are his treasured possession. His law is intended to protect, purify, and differentiate them from the world.

Yes, the Ten Commandments are relevant today, just as being set apart is relevant. The Commandments act as a guide for God's people and establish a moral law, whereas other Old Testament laws, considered civic or ceremonial, are deemed as contextual to Old Testament Israel. Further, Jesus would emphasize their importance during his Sermon on the Mount, while also stressing that in all law the motivation of the heart was the critical understanding (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28).

As the Book of Exodus concludes, God has revealed himself to Moses and instructed him on construction of the tabernacle. The tabernacle will be a place of God's presence and central to the Israelites throughout the remainder of their journey to the "promised" land (remember the Abrahamic covenant). However, Exodus ends with God inside the tabernacle and Moses outside of the tabernacle. Moses was not allowed to enter in. We discover why as the story continues in Leviticus.

ACCESS message on [EXODUS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, February 2, 2020.

LEVITICUS. CENTRAL TO THE STORY



KEY SCRIPTURE: LEVITICUS 17:11, 20:22

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. –Leviticus 17:11

KEY WORD(S): Atonement

KEY THEME(S): Holiness. Atonement of Sin. God's Presence.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The tabernacle is complete and the children of God remain encamped at Mount Sinai. The book of Exodus closes. The narrative continues in Leviticus 1:1, where God "speaks to Moses from the tent of meeting (tabernacle)." God's is presence inside, Moses' out. Interestingly, when the next book begins, in Numbers 1:1: "The Lord spoke to Moses *in* the tent of meeting." What happened to change this dynamic?

Leviticus happened!

And that's the *One Story* fit of this sometimes-challenging book. God's dwelling place for this wandering generation would be the tent of meeting. For the people to know and experience his presence, God had to sanctify them through sacrifices, offerings, and acts of practical holiness.

Most importantly, and the aim of our time in Leviticus, is **God's introduction of sacrificial atonement as the penalty for sin**. It is perhaps the most obvious and beautiful of shadows moving forward the story of redemption and pointing us to Christ. His once-and-for-all sacrificial atonement for sin allows those who confess him as Lord into the presence of God, who now tabernacles (dwells) within them.

Consider chapters 16, 17:11, and 20:22. The Day of Atonement was a necessary ceremonial ritual that the cross has permanently replaced. Our understanding and appreciation for the cross is severely diminished without our understanding and appreciation for the Day of Atonement.

Unlike the first two books of the Bible, there is no geographical movement in Leviticus. The people of God will remain for over a month as God prepares them for worship and the pending journey of wilderness wandering that is the Book of Numbers.

The sacrifice ritual was more than a symbolic gesture; it was a picture of the ultimate substitutionary atonement fulfilled by Jesus. His lifeblood was shed so that we might live. Yom Kippur (Day to Cover) = Day of Atonement. Two goats. One takes on all sin and is sacrificed. A life is given in order to forgive. A second one carries sins away: a scapegoat. Sins are forgiven and forgotten. Sins are covered.

The most important command in this passage is that of receiving Christ as Lord of our life, accepting his sacrifice as sufficiently covering our sins. "For life of the flesh is blood, I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls" Lev. 17:11. **The once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus atoned for our sins; they are forgiven and forgotten (covered).** We are now allowed into the presence of our holy God.

ACCESS message on [LEVITICUS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, February 9, 2020.

NUMBERS. THE GOSPEL IN THE WILDERNESS



KEY SCRIPTURE: NUMBERS 20:10-13, 21:4-9

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."
—Numbers 20:12

And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. —Numbers 21:7

KEY WORD(S): Wandering

KEY THEME(S): Wandering. Rebellion. Mercy.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Sandwiched between two books of the *One Story* (Leviticus and Deuteronomy), the Book of Numbers covers over forty years and a few hundred miles! During this period, the people of Israel advance only a few months, with no change of scenery.

While the English title is "Numbers," a nod to the census counts, it's the original Hebrew designation that is a better description of its contents. The Hebrew Bible has titled this fourth book of Moses, B'midbar, "in the desert / wilderness." It's through extended time in this desert/wilderness that many of the well-known acts of the people (mostly disobedient ones) and the acts of God (mostly grace and mercy-filled ones) take place.

An interestingly "come-full-circle" trait of Numbers is noted in a basic outline of the book. Encamped at Mt. Sinai, a census of the people is completed and the journey to Canaan begins. The people rebel, complain, and are punished for their lack of faith. **They wander.** Eventually, a next generation survives the forty-year consequence of disobedience and arrive near the Jordan. A census is completed and the people prepare to journey into Canaan as Numbers ends. The question is whether or not they will faithfully arrive this time or continue to complain (stay tuned ...).

The passages above point to a **lack of faith**, even that of Moses in Numbers 20, and the shadow of Christ's salvation and God's mercy in Numbers 21. Be careful not to get pulled down too many trails regarding snakes and healings. The point is that by admitting one's condition and intentionally fixing one's eyes on God's cure, one is healed - physically in the desert, eternally for you and me (John 3:14-15 is key).

Pick either of the passages and imagine the scenes. Either you are hot and thirsty and grumbling, or you are being chased by snakes, fiery ones! Both are extreme conditions and matters of survival. Consider also where we are in the overall view of the *One Story*.

Why was Moses' punishment so extreme? Why snakes? The people say, "We have sinned." What was their sin? What is the theme of these passages, if grouped together?

Faith. Trust. Mercy. Provision. Life. These aspects are found in the shadows of both passages and the substance of Jesus. See also Psalms 78, 95, 106 and John 3:14-15.

Consider the view of Jesus, the living water, given freely by grace through faith, not our own striking of the rock. Also, the visual of **Christ held up**, with our eyes turned to him, as our only true healing grace. "For we have sinned ... pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents" - Num. 21:7. As the people confessed their iniquities before God, they looked in faith to God's deliverance. Those who look to Jesus and his work on the cross, in faith, will receive God's deliverance.

ACCESS message on [NUMBERS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, February 16, 2020.

DEUTERONOMY. THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW



KEY SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9, 7:6-9

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." –Deuteronomy 6:4-7

KEY WORD(S): Remember.

KEY THEME(S): Remember. Covenant Renewal. Faithfulness.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The *One Story* journey has brought the people of Israel to the brink of entering the Promised Land. Now the story pauses. Moses gathers the people, and this man who had originally shunned God's request to speak publicly, delivers three lengthy, powerful sermons—or farewell speeches—which are collected and recorded as the Book of Deuteronomy, the final book of The Law.

As with Numbers, the Greek/English title "Deuteronomy," is a bit misleading, as this name literally means "the Second Law." It is not a new, or second, law. The original Hebrew title for this fifth and final book of Moses, is *Devarim*, meaning "the Words," (as in, "the words of Moses"), which is definitely a fitting description, though it doesn't exactly help us understand what's going on. Perhaps the most accurate title for Deuteronomy, one that helps us recall at least one aspect of its purpose, comes from the Jewish tradition of referring to these speeches of Moses as "*Mishneh Hattorah*" or "the Repetition of the Law," which carries a nuance of reflection on, or remembrance of, that which has come before.

If we approach Deuteronomy with an eye to remember what has come before, we can start to see ourselves in the middle of this great crowd of people, listening to these final words of Moses, as he encourages us to **remember: what God has done ... what God expects ... what God will do**. Moses reminds the people of the Ten Commandments, the Great Commandment, and of the importance of covenant obedience. In this, we are reminded that God's law, above all else, is an indication of the holiness that is required by God and our inability to live up to it. Only as it points to Jesus, the one who would fulfill the law perfectly (Matthew 5:17), can we truly be made righteous in the sight of God.

Our passages for this unit are remarkable words for which Jesus, New Testament Christians, and orthodox Jews through the ages have all held with high regard. They were/are spoken daily in private and public worship. They are reminders of God's character and our response. They are also passages that remind us of the **three-fold purpose of the law**: 1) A mirror/teacher to reflect our sinful nature, 2) A guide to direct our desired obedience, and 3) A compass for civil and moral societies. In this, we are pointed to Jesus as the one who saves us from our sinful inadequacy and enables us to live, not perfectly, but more consistently grounded in obedience as a result of (not a requirement for) our salvation.

Our key passages from Deuteronomy 6 and 7 might be considered the largest pre-game, locker room speech in history. The crowds are gathered, the Promised Land is in sight, and Moses delivers these farewell speeches to prepare the people. Listen to the words of these passages. How do you think you would have responded? What's the significance of "God is one" in 6:4? What is meant by: "Tie them, bind them, and write them," in 6:8-9? Why did God want Moses to remind the people of these instructions or laws?

There are several things going on here. Against nations of polytheists (those worshiping many gods), God is adamant that he alone is God. Also, God is reminding his people of his grace and mercy against their inability to fully obey. He delivered them when they couldn't deliver themselves. Romans 3:21-25.

God reveals several attributes of his character in chapter 7. We are also reminded that only Jesus will perfectly fulfill this law and thereby our only hope is his righteousness in us by way of his death and our faith. "Therefore these commandments are to be on your hearts ... impress them ... talk about them ... at home ... as you go ... " - Deut. 6:4-9. To love the Lord with all that we have is not a one time, once-a-week, or even hour-a-day thing. Do we wake to, lie down with, talk about, teach, or even remember the love of God as we should?

BONUS: What is "the Shema?"

ACCESS message on [DEUTERONOMY](#) from River Oaks Community Church, February 23, 2020



THE BOOKS OF HISTORY



The twelve historical books pick up the story of God's people Israel where Deuteronomy leaves off, with the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

In the canon order of Scripture, the Books of History are, for the most part, arranged chronologically, and can be read as a true record of history. The sections of history can be thought of as:

- **Theocratic Books:** Priests/Judges rule Israel. (*Joshua, Judges, Ruth*)
- **Monarchial Books:** Kings rule Israel. (*Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*)
- **Restoration Books:** Post-Exile Jews. (*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*)

It should be noted that 1 and 2 Chronicles are considered books of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, as they retrace much of the same material as the Books of Samuel and Kings. The difference is that 1 Chronicles is a divine perspective on the history of Israel from David to captivity, with an emphasis on the spiritual life of David. 2 Chronicles, on the other hand, focuses not only on the temple construction and dedication, but also on the spiritual and moral reasons for Israel's downfall.

Also worth noting is the structure of the earliest manuscripts of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah, originally formatted as four books, now as eight. In effect, as you read them, you will discover a continued storyline from Book 1 to Book 2, or from Ezra to Nehemiah.

The time span between Joshua and Esther is approximately 900 years. When the final historical account is penned, the one story of redemptive history will have moved to within 450 years of the birth of Jesus. Within this history is the lineage of the Christ, the "all-nations" gospel, and many shadows of the One who is our High Priest and Almighty King. May you thoroughly enjoy and be encouraged by this twelve-volume "Book of History."

JOSHUA. THE FAITH OF RAHAB



KEY SCRIPTURE: JOSHUA 2:1-21

And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. –Joshua 2:11

KEY WORD(S): Conquest

KEY THEME(S): Obedience. Conquest. Settlement.

CONSIDER & APPLY: As the *One Story* transitions into the next collection of writings—the Historical Books—it's important to see this transition as more of a "passing of the baton" from Moses to Joshua, as opposed to a start/stop of the *One Story* narrative. In fact, the book of Joshua is the bridge that perfectly links the Law and the remainder of Israel's history. These books of History serve as a consistent, chronological continuation of God's redemptive plan, pointing forward to deliverance through Jesus Christ.

In a broad sense, the Book of Joshua is about two things: the **conquest and the settlement of the Promised Land**. The first half of Joshua (chapters 1-12) focuses on Israel preparing for, entering into, and conquering the Promised Land. The second half (chapters 13-24) speaks to the settlement of Canaan and allotment of land.

Yet, as we dig deeper, we discover themes of obedience and faithfulness. We see a new generation of Israelites passing far more tests than the previous generation. We learn how an active faith leads to an obedient faith.

Specific to our passage in Joshua 2, the *One Story* is directly impacted by a woman, Rahab, who would next appear in the genealogy of Jesus as the mother of Boaz. It is through her fear of God, and faith in his deliverance, that she is rescued. A Canaanite prostitute, stirred to belief from what she had heard and "knew to be true," is shown much mercy. This is the saving grace of God.

Finally, the name of Joshua. In Numbers, his name is Hoshea ("salvation"), but Moses would later change it to Yehoshua ("Yahweh is salvation"). At times, he is called an abbreviated form of this name, Yeshua ("to deliver, to

rescue"), which, translated in Greek, is *Jesus*, or Jesus. If you know a Messianic Jew, you will find that he/she will generally reference Yeshua as the Christ, the Hebrew given name of our Lord.

Did you ever want to be a spy? Adventurous, exciting, dangerous. Can't you visualize two Israelites making their way into Jericho and finding themselves hiding out on Rahab's roof? This passage reads like something out of a spy thriller. Notice that others had seen them, resulting in Rahab's fib. She ties a scarlet cord out of her window.

The men would have searched out a house in the wall (common to walled cities) and the home of a prostitute was good cover. Of course, in God's providence, the grace extended Rahab reminds us God is an all-people's God. Lying is a sin, but Rahab's faith was pure and honored by God, recognizing an unbeliever had come to saving faith. "For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath ... And Rahab the prostitute and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved. She has lived in Israel to this day" - Joshua 2:11, 6:25

Do you resonate with Rahab? God can rescue you. Do you regularly confess God's all-powerful authority? Consider why God chose a prostitute, and if there is significance to her house being built in the wall? Was her lie justified? How had she heard about the Lord and all that he had done for his people?

This is a passage of great hope. God has revealed that none are beyond his saving grace. He delivers kings and prostitutes and all in-between. Confession of the Lord (Joshua 2:11/Romans 10:9) as the Creator, Sustainer, *One Story* God, brings salvation.

BONUS: Compare the Scarlet Cord with the Passover.

ACCESS message on [JOSHUA](#) from River Oaks Community Church, March 1, 2020

JUDGES. WHAT TO MAKE OF EXCESSIVE VIOLENCE



KEY SCRIPTURE: JUDGES 6:6-23, 21:25

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." –Judges 6:11-13

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. –Judges 21:25

KEY WORD(S): Cycles

KEY THEME(S): Disobedience. Violence. Cycles of Decline.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The conquest and settlement of the Promised Land begins so well under Joshua, but it is never actually completed. Whereas "obedience" was central to the Lord's fulfillment of his promise in Joshua, "disobedience" is now the theme of what will follow in the book of Judges.

As a continuation of the *One Story*, Judges opens with Joshua's death, and we read what is perhaps the most frequent phrasing throughout the book, "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."

The key to Judges is that it is a historical account of 13 judges, through seven **cycles of sin - repentance - deliverance**. These cycles cover 400+/- years of moral and spiritual decline: a downward spiral from good and neutral judges to corrupt and evil ones. Mostly, the culprit was idol worship, an abomination to the Lord that Moses and Joshua had warned against.

We read that Israel is under the oppression of the Midianites. Read chapters 6-8 for a more complete understanding of Gideon, his lack of faith, his weak theology, his transformation into a godly leader, and ultimately, the sad, prideful end to his influence over the people.

In the story of Gideon, we see shadows of, and warnings for, ourselves. We know that God can move us from spiritual cowards, lacking in faith, to a place of great confidence in him through the revelation of his Word and his Spirit's work in us. We also know that we can set up idols to ourselves, letting our egos before others redirect our worship and influence.

In the story of Gideon, we see shadows of Jesus. We are presented with the offices of prophet, priest, and king. We also observe a "theophany," or God's presence, manifested before Gideon (6:11) as an "Angel of the Lord," which many believe is the pre-incarnate Christ, or a "Christophany," similar to that of Genesis 32 in Jacob's all-night wrestling match. Importantly, whenever God makes his presence known before his people in the Old Testament, we are reminded of Immanuel, "God with us," through the incarnate Christ to come later in the *One Story*.

The Israelites are hiding out in caves, cowering within their own "Promised Land." Can you imagine the fear that would cause Gideon to thresh wheat in a winepress, rather than out in the open, in order to "hide it" from the Midianites. There is distress, hopelessness, distrust: "Why has all this happened, the Lord has forsaken us, show me a sign." The Israelites were guilty of worshiping Amorite gods (6:10). The unnamed prophet gives this message before the Angel of the Lord appears, who is the Lord himself. Gideon is fearful and has a bad theology of God's providence and grace. "Mighty man of valor" was either a jab at Gideon for hiding out, or an indicator of what the Lord would do through him.

"Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." Judges 6:22-23. Gideon realized he was in the presence of God, and his fear was that he deserved death as a sinner before a holy God. Do we appreciate this reverence before God for his holiness?

If Gideon is thought of as having little faith (a coward by some), why did the Angel call him a "mighty man of valor"? Why did the Lord allow the Midianites to oppress the Israelites? What's a "terebinth"?

The final verse of Judges (21:25) is one of the most sobering of Scripture. It's a reminder of how deep sin can become when people resist God's authority. This is a predictable conclusion to this 400-year period of Israel's history. Do we do this...resist God's authority for "what is right in our own eyes?"

What word/phrase that comes to mind with the book of Judges? What truth or lesson would you like to retain?

BONUS: How did Gideon test God? Then how did God test Gideon?

ACCESS message on [JUDGES](#) from River Oaks Community Church, March 8, 2020

RUTH. SELFLESS LOVE IN A SELFISH WORLD



KEY SCRIPTURE: RUTH 1:1-18

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." –Ruth 1:16

KEY WORD(S): Loyal-Love

KEY THEME(S): Provision. Redemption. All-Nations God.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of Ruth is a beautiful depiction of love and loyalty set within a period marked by idolatry, immorality, and violence. Perfectly positioned in our English Bible between the Book of Judges, from when Ruth took place (Ruth 1:1) and the Books of 1 & 2 Samuel, from when Ruth was likely written (Ruth 4:22). Ruth is a bridge, of sorts, between the time of the judges (first verse) and the time of the kings (final verse).

Ruth is short and simple, yet rich in the examples of faithfulness, virtue, and redemption. Central to the shadow of Jesus found in Ruth is the concept of "Kinsman-Redeemer," the role that Boaz would serve.

It's important to note that a kinsman-redeemer meets four key qualifications: 1) be related by blood (Hebrews 2:14-15); 2) be able to pay the price of redemption (Galatians 3:13-15); 3) be willing to pay the price of redemption (Matthew 20:28); and 4) be free of the bondage for which the price is being paid (1 John 3:5). What a wonderful shadow of Jesus, or "type of Christ" Boaz becomes in the book of Ruth, pointing us toward the substance in Jesus.

Our study passage is set in the country of Moab. As a perspective, commentators suggest that this first of four specific settings in Ruth takes place across ten years of time. The other three settings in the book of Ruth include: 1:19 - 2:23, a field in Bethlehem (a few months); chapter 3, a threshing floor in Bethlehem (one day), and chapter 4, the city of Bethlehem (about a year).

It's interesting to compare aspects of Ruth's story with Esther's, specifically as they both demonstrate God as an all-nation, all-people God who uses those willing to be obedient. Ruth is a Gentile woman, living among

Jews, marrying a Jewish man, and demonstrating extreme **faith**. Esther is a Jewish woman, living among Gentiles, marrying a Gentile man, and demonstrating extreme faith. Both are placed squarely into God's *One Story* plan of deliverance, salvation, redemption.

We are told that Ruth takes place during the time of the judges. Think about how desperate the famine had made the people of Israel, to journey into Moab for food (Judges 3 tells of Moabite oppression of Israel). How desperate Naomi must have become—losing her husband and two sons. Imagine making the decisions that Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi faced.

Moab is where King Balak asks Balaam to curse the Israelites. A pagan nation, east of the Dead Sea, that had oppressed Israel until King Saul defeats them. But the famine was bad and Elimelech intended to "sojourn" there (short-term stay), for food. The Moabites are not "of the land which the Lord gave Israel" (Deut. 7), thereby no command against marriage.

"Naomi said, "See, your sister-in-law (Orpah) has gone back to her people and her gods." When she saw that Ruth was determined to go with her (Naomi), she said no more." - Ruth 1:15,18.

May we be as determined as Ruth in doing what is right, in turning from certain people and other gods, in following our one true God. Amen.

Our passage introduces a book of significant redemptive meaning, but the redemptive shadow comes later. Here we find faith and integrity. Like Rahab, there is genuine, heart knowledge of God and great trust. There is evidence of how some Old Testament Gentiles were called to, and lived for, God.

BONUS: Why might David have had peaceful relations with the King of Moab (1 Sam. 22), as he leaves his mother and father there?

ACCESS message on [RUTH](#) from River Oaks Community Church, March 15, 2020

1 SAMUEL. THE HEART OF A KING: SAUL AND DAVID



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 SAMUEL 15:22-31

"For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."

Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." –1 Samuel 15:23-24

KEY WORD(S): Transition, Whole Heart

KEY THEME(S): Bad Heart. Good Heart. Our Heart?

CONSIDER & APPLY: The days were dark in the time of the judges, as most of the people "did what was right in their own eyes," (even as Ruth modeled godliness and goodness in the midst of corruption and violence).

But change is in the wind.

As we enter the Book of Samuel, we find the prayer of Hannah (chapter 2) reminding us that God is the great Deliverer and Savior. It foreshadows God's sovereign plan of **raising up the humble and humbling the proud**. It would be echoed by Mary's Prayer of another humble King (Luke 1:46-51).

Hannah's son, Samuel, would become Israel's last judge. By 1 Samuel, chapter 8, he would be squarely positioned in the eye of a not-so-perfect storm as the judgeship transitions to a monarchy. In short, Samuel's sons are unworthy to judge, and the people demand a king. A key to realize is that God did not oppose a monarchy for Israel, Deuteronomy 17 seems to affirm this. However, God did oppose a monarchy formed out of the reason given by the elders: "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). It was another example of Israel's assimilation to the ways of pagan nations around them.

So, Samuel appoints Saul the first king of Israel. The rest, as they say, is history.

In order to move the *One Story* along, this study will devote one chapter to Samuel and one chapter to Kings. However, please read through all four of these books. They are rich in the revelation of God's character and in the

lessons for our application.

Also, you might know that both Samuel and Kings were originally recorded and preserved as single books in the Hebrew Bible, not as the 1st and 2nd we find in our English Bible. The narratives are continuous and can be thought of as:

1 Samuel - Transition to Kings / King Saul

2 Samuel - King David

1 Kings - King Solomon

2 Kings - Divided Kingdom / Exile

In 1 Samuel 15:22-31, it appears that Samuel is chastising King Saul on behalf of God. Saul is attempting to justify his actions, but Samuel is revealing deeper truths. Saul appears desperate for Samuel to accept his "apology" and stay with him, and actually rips Samuel's robe as Samuel is leaving—a tense scene and revealing way for the king of Israel to act. The context for this passage actually begins in 1 Samuel 15:1, where Samuel brings instructions to Saul on behalf of God: "Destroy the nation of Amalek and do not keep for yourselves any of what they have." Read on to find that Saul completely disobeys this order. His heart is not after God's heart. He thinks sacrifices will replace obedience.

Doesn't Saul repent of his sins and ask forgiveness? So why does Samuel seem to not accept this plea for forgiveness? But then why does Samuel eventually turn and go with him? Since Saul the king, why does he need Samuel's approval?

If you attended *Walk Thru the Bible*¹, you might recall: "Saul - No Heart, David - Whole Heart, Solomon - Divided Heart." As we spend time on this passage, we are challenged to consider our obedience as a matter of the heart. Are we all in? Divided? Is our heart MIA when it comes to our faith? May our worship be grounded in obedience. Amen.

A key verse within this passage is v. 22, "to obey is better than sacrifice." The heart of obedience is a heart that desires to follow God's will, not simply religious ritual. We see this principle emphasized as Samuel is led to Saul's future replacement (1 Sam. 16:7, "the Lord looks at the heart.") The shadow of Jesus' life and ministry is seen in this moment.

BONUS: How does 1 Samuel 13:14 relate to 15:23 final line?

ACCESS message on [1 SAMUEL](#) from River Oaks Community Church, March 22, 2020

1 Walk Thru the Bible, walkthru.org.

1 KINGS. THE WISDOM OF KING SOLOMON



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 KINGS 11:1-13

When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn." –1 Kings 2:1-3

KEY WORD(S): Division, Captivity

KEY THEME(S): Divided Heart. Divided Worship. Divided Kingdom.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of 2 Samuel comes to a close with a repentant King David building an altar before the Lord. As the *One Story* continues, the Book of 1 Kings opens to find the seventy-year-old monarch of Israel about to "go the way of the earth," and transition the throne to his son, Solomon.

In those final moments, David charges his son to "be strong and walk in the ways of the Lord; keep his commandments" (1 Kings 2:1-3). These words will haunt Solomon more than once before 1 Kings concludes. In fact, these words will answer the question as to how one of the most promising figures in all of Scripture could start so well and finish so poorly.

As with Samuel, the Books of 1 & 2 Kings were originally one record, the Book of Kings. They trace the **life of Solomon**, the **divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel** (a consequence of Solomon's acts), and the **exile of the Jewish nations** at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. One single narrative spanning 400+/- years, beginning in the early 10th century B.C., concluding around 560 B.C.

In our focused passage, the life of Solomon provides a tragic example of one wasting great potential. Divinely granted the gift of "discerning between good and evil" (1 Kings 3), and blessed with much wealth and influence, Solomon was a king whose legacy is a divided kingdom and unimaginable disobedience because of a divided heart before the Lord.

1 and 2 Kings are rich in the examples of doing good, of doing mostly bad, and of often doing ugly, in matters of

faith and worship. Kings provides us much to learn, love, and live out.

May we all "be strong and walk in the ways of the Lord."

In 1 Kings 11:1-13, the "elephant in the room" are the 700 wives and 300 concubines in the room! They are from many nations and peoples, and they worship many gods. Repeated word alert: heart (6x), love (2x). We notice that God is "angry" with Solomon; God is not endorsing Solomon's behavior, particularly as it runs counter to his commandments. Solomon's failure is a heart matter. Having a love for pleasure and wealth, Solomon no longer focuses on God. What begins as sins of immorality, lust, and pride (all detestable to God), becomes the sin of idolatry. All that God had given David will be torn apart. At age 60, Solomon once a wise young man, is now an old fool. This is a warning for all ages and stages.

When we consider the idea of a "divided heart," perhaps it's easier to think about as a "distracted heart." For Solomon, it was wealth, pleasure, many queens, etc., that distracted his heart and directed his love toward ungodly outcomes. What are our "700 wives?" Which pleasures create divided loyalties and turn our heart to evil?

What is with the 1,000 women? What's the difference between wives and concubines? How old is Solomon at this time? Was this acceptable? How does God "tear the kingdom" from Solomon? Why does God wait and take it from his son? Did Solomon not love God like his father David? Was Solomon still possessing the wisdom God gave him earlier?

A key verse is v. 6, "So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord." Interestingly, if we look closely at what Solomon asked God for in 1 Kings 3:9, it was "an understanding mind ... to discern between good and evil." This was the wisdom he received. Solomon knew between right and wrong; he chose evil over good.

BONUS: Read Deuteronomy 17:17 in light of this week's teaching - hmmm.

ACCESS message on [1 KINGS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, March 29, 2020

EZRA. REVIVING TRUE WORSHIP



KEY SCRIPTURE: EZRA 6:13-22, 7:8-10

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. –Ezra 6:16

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. –Ezra 7:10

KEY WORD(S): Revival

KEY THEME(S): Rebuilt Temple. Renewed People. Revived Worship.

CONSIDER & APPLY: While Ezra is the focus of our *One Story* week, we should at least comment on the two books we are not addressing in the sermon series, 1 & 2 Chronicles. As with Samuel, Kings, and what we know of Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles was originally one written record that would later be divided into separate books in the Greek OT translation (c. 3rd century BC) mostly due to scroll lengths. On the surface, Chronicles appears to cover ground we have already traveled (Samuel and Kings). However, the key, and it is significant, is that these prior books of history were written while the Jewish people were in exile (560-530 BC). They provided a detailed account—the good, bad, and ugly—of how they had arrived into captivity in Babylon. They were annals of history.

Fast forward to post-exile Jerusalem (450-430 BC) and Chronicles is written, most likely by Ezra (the scribe who set his heart on knowing God's Word). In Chronicles, the intent is to answer the question, "Has the God of our ancestors rejected us for good? Are we still God's people?" In other words, has the *One Story* ended?

Chronicles answers these questions with references to Israel's heritage (a genealogy from Adam forward), with reminders of the covenant to David (a forever throne), and with an emphasis on the restored temple and faith of God's people. These accounts emphasize God's purposes for his people and bring hope to a repatriated nation. Interestingly, due to this emphasis, and associated literary stylings, the Hebrew Bible listed Chronicles alongside Wisdom Writings and not historical books.

As we move forward, we note the final passage in Chronicles is picked up in the first verse of Ezra (further evidence to a single author). The people are returning to Jerusalem, first under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple and then with Ezra to rebuild their faith and obedience to God. That's the book of Ezra!

Actually, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one written record as well, and it's important to see that there are actually **three returning waves of exiles** and three reconstruction projects God had planned. The **temple (Zerubbabel)**, the **people (Ezra)**, and the **wall (Nehemiah)**.

The *One Story* has not abruptly ended in Babylon, it is alive and well! Amazingly, God has punished a people for disobedience, yet protected them from annihilation. His plan of redemption will not be thwarted.

May we all set our heart to study the Word of God and to teach his statutes to one another.

In Ezra 6, the temple is completed and dedicated. There is celebration, joy, and the observance of sacrifices and Passover. There is a reference to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (might be worth looking over the OT books that bear their names). In Ezra 7, we are introduced to Ezra: a "skilled scribe" returning to Jerusalem in a next wave. This is a key moment in the history of Israel and in God's *One Story* promise. The people are returning from exile to move the story forward. God was actively working among their former captors (Ezra 1:1, 6:22, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Proverbs 21:1). While the temple is rebuilt, Ezra, with a heart for God's Word, arrives to a people lacking genuine worship.

However, simply because the temple is complete, doesn't mean God's people have been restored. Years in exile leaves many without a knowledge of God's desire that his people be separate from pagan nations. Revival begins with Ezra, who sets his heart on learning, loving, living out, and "teaching" God's Word. That's a great place for us to begin as well.

Why does Ezra credit the completion of the temple to the decree of God and decrees by Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes (three of the greatest monarchs in the ancient Near East during this period)? Why was Ezra necessary? Notice that when the temple is restored, it seems the people are keeping all the feasts and sacrifices from the "Book of Moses."

"They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes" (Ezra 6:14). A powerful message: God, the Sovereign of the universe, gave authority to rebuild the temple. Secondly, three kings of Persia are used to serve out his command. God "stirred up their spirits" (see Ezra 1:1, 6:22, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Proverbs 21:1).

BONUS: Which OT book is likely set between the return of Zerubbabel and that of Ezra?

ACCESS message on [EZRA](#) from River Oaks Community Church, April 5, 2020

NEHEMIAH. REBUILDING WALLS AND REVITALIZING PEOPLE



KEY SCRIPTURE: NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you." –Nehemiah 1:4-6a

KEY WORD(S): Restoration

KEY THEME(S): Rebuilt Walls. Revitalized Obedience. Resettled People.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The book of Nehemiah opens twelve years after the final chapters of Ezra. It is the second half of Ezra - Nehemiah, in what was once read as a single document history of the **post-exile resettling of Jerusalem**.

Nehemiah is a contemporary of Ezra. In fact, following the completion of Nehemiah's wall, we will find Ezra reappearing in chapter 8 as the priest to the people. So close was their relationship that, while most attribute authorship to Ezra, most also recognize the book as a collaboration that includes many of Nehemiah's writings and words.

A wonderful way of viewing this final historical account of the Old Testament (Malachi, the last OT prophet also ministers during this time, 425 - 400 BC), is with the themes of reconstruction and revival. The book of Ezra leads us through the temple reconstruction and spiritual revival, and now Nehemiah leads us through the **physical and political reconstruction and moral revival**.

As Nehemiah closes, God's people are resettled in Jerusalem. However, this remnant is nowhere near the size of a prior covenant people. They now have a sovereign city, yet they do not possess the entirety of the Promised Land. The priests have brought revival, but the throne of David is unoccupied. God's new covenant promise of redemption now awaits the birth of a Messiah.

In Nehemiah 1, we have the "words of Nehemiah" who lived in Susa (Persia). He receives a report of Jerusalem and the Jewish people that leaves him visibly shaken, and he immediately turns to God. There is a reference to

Moses (Deuteronomy perhaps?). There is covenant language of a chosen people, a chosen land, and redemption.

It so happens that Nehemiah is the cupbearer– a prestigious position– and confidant to the king. As with Esther, there is a "such a time as this" theme to God's plan for Nehemiah. The Israelites who had returned prior (in Ezra) had faced much opposition to rebuilding their city, as evidenced by a broken wall. Nehemiah was divinely appointed to aid rebuilding. God worked through the king of Persia.

When we hear of others in trouble, whether by their own doing (sin, corruption, disobedience) or by no fault of their own (oppression, disaster, circumstances), do we immediately respond with mourning, prayer, fasting, and confession? Probably not. What an encouragement that Nehemiah would become such a great, godly leader through these traits.

Why would Nehemiah be so concerned about Jerusalem, her walls, and broken gates? What are the sins and corruption that Nehemiah is talking about?

"As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying" (Nehemiah 6:4). Nehemiah's first instinct was to lament and pray for the people of Jerusalem when he heard of their trouble. He was comfortable and well-regarded in Persia, yet his heart broke for God's people.

BONUS: Ammonite "trash talk" in Nehemiah 4... Can you find it?

ACCESS message on [NEHEMIAH](#) from River Oaks Community Church, April 19, 2020

ESTHER. SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE GOD



KEY SCRIPTURE: ESTHER 4:1-17

“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” –Esther 4:14

KEY WORD(S): Providence

KEY THEME(S): God's People. God's Providence. God's Persian Queen.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of Esther, as ordered in our Bible, closes out the Old Testament historical record (Five Books of the Law + Twelve Books of History). It follows Ezra-Nehemiah as having been set during the time of Ezra 6:22-7:1, the fifty-nine-year gap between Zerrubabel finishing the temple (516 BC) and the return of Ezra to Jerusalem (458 BC). While Esther is not the latest of OT writings, only Ezra 7-10, Malachi, and Nehemiah record later history than Esther.

The Book of Esther provides a wonderful example of courage, bravery, trust, and accepting the **providential call of being born "for such a time as this"** (Esther 4:14), but there is so much more.

Much like Exodus, Esther chronicles the attempt of a foreign nation to eliminate the Jewish race (recall, there had been only one release of the Jews at this time, there would be two more major releases). Like Exodus, **God's deliverance**, through Esther's actions, preserved his people in accordance with his **covenant promises to Abraham and David** (a great nation, a great people, a king from the line of Judah). Without a people or a line of Judah, the *One Story* would appear to have come to an abrupt ending.

This book includes nine fascinating chapters, with a cast of unforgettable characters: King Ahasuerus, or Xerxes in Greek - the Persian leader in God's plan; Queen Vashti - the stubborn first lady; Haman - the evil VP; Mordecai the Yoda-like older cousin; and our heroine, Esther.

Of course, **God's sovereign plan** cannot be thwarted. He uses a Gentile king in a Gentile land to move forward

his promises. The king of Judah, through the line of David, would arrive on the scene in just over 475 years. An all-nation God would dwell with us in order to deliver - rescue - save us. A new covenant, the Substance of the shadows would fulfill all that had been written about him. And back in Susa, Persia, some 500 years prior, a young lady's faithfulness had played a major role. Wow.

Esther 4 begins with Mordecai extremely upset over something that "had been done." He's crying, ripping his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes. He's a mess. This upsets Queen Esther. She sends an attendant to find out what's going on. It's bad news for Jews. Esther hasn't been in front of the king for 30 days and can only do so (and live) if he holds out the golden scepter.

One possible "big idea" to this passage, and the overarching theme of Esther, is that we can **trust in God's sovereignty** to fulfill his promises, and often to fulfill them through those who are faithfully trusting in his timing, protection, and provision. Much like the psalmist of Psalm 121:4, "Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." We can rest in this promise.

Discernment has been central to our lessons of application the past several chapters. From Nehemiah and Ezra, through the Kings (Solomon had it, didn't use it), and with Ruth and Joshua. Seeking an audience with God brings greater clarity, faith, and desire, upon his timing and his will, to act on those moments in our lives for which we were born to trust and act for his glory. What is the practice of holding out the golden scepter and how might that impact Esther?

Does it seem like Mordecai is manipulating Esther and that she might die as a result? Note: To truly grasp the context in this passage, it's important to survey chapters 1-3. "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf ... I will also fast as you do" (Esther 4:16).

Doesn't this sound like Nehemiah after receiving the news of the people's sins and condition. For discerning, trusting, faithful followers of God, action is always preceded by seeking God's guidance. Prayer is not mentioned, but almost certainly was part of fasting.

BONUS: What is the Jewish holiday that celebrates Esther's act and God's protection of the Jewish people against Haman's order? (Hint: Esther 9:20-32)

ACCESS message on [ESTHER](#) from River Oaks Community Church, April 26, 2020



POETRY & WISDOM



The Books of Poetry and Wisdom are perhaps the most beautiful—albeit challenging—works of divinely-inspired literature that we come across within the One Story. Serving as a bridge linking the past (Books of History) with the future (Books of Prophecy), these works explore the experiential present—with an emphasis on our worship, posture, thoughts, and behavior before a holy God.

Many don't realize that the literary form of wisdom and poetry comprise a full one-third of the Bible. In fact, of the thirty-nine Old Testament books, poetry is completely absent in only five of them. Think about that. God has inspired and revealed himself as often through poetry and wisdom as through any other genre in Scripture. This consideration alone would warrant our diligent approach to better understand these writings.

The books that we will classify in this study as Poetry and Wisdom include: Psalms and Lamentations (Poetry), and Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (Wisdom). Often Lamentations is included with the Prophets; however, that is because it is considered to be authored by Jeremiah and was positioned after Jeremiah's namesake book in the Old Testament canon. In terms of ancient Near Eastern literature, Lamentations is poetry.

We encourage you to participate with these books. Enjoy them. Meditate on them. They are intended to be evaluated actively and experientially. Literary styles have changed over the past 2,500 plus years. Though poetry and wisdom and proverbs and laments may look and sound different than what we are accustomed to, they are nonetheless uniquely geared toward praising God, advising man, declaring beauty and grief, and highlighting shadows of the One who is the worthy recipient of all our songs and poems, our shouts and tears.

JOB. PERSEVERANCE IN SUFFERING



KEY SCRIPTURE: JOB 1:6-12, 19:23-27, 42:7-10

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. –Job 19:25-26

KEY WORD(S): Sovereignty

KEY THEME(S): Human Suffering. God's Sovereignty. That Is Wisdom.

CONSIDER & APPLY: In the spirit of full transparency, I love the Book of Job! I love the beauty of its literary styling, the richness of the poetry (Job 28 "Where is Wisdom Found?" is one of my favorites in all of Scripture), the intensity of the debate between Job and his friends, and—even more—the intensity of God's creation tour with Job (Job 38-41).

Job is really not about suffering, or at least not "why" there is suffering. It's more about the straightforward, brutally honest, always simple, but never easy, question that God has of Job (and each of us): "Do you trust in my sovereignty over all earth and heaven, enough to trust I know what I'm doing in your life?"

The Book of Job, where chapters 1-2 are in narrative form, 3-41 are poetry, and 42 returns to narrative, provides two building blocks of belief for any follower of Jesus. They are foundational to our current journey and do more to reflect God's love and character than anything else.

The first, God is the source of all wisdom. His wisdom comes from his all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present self. It is his sovereign existence that has created, sustained, and controlled all things from forever until forever. God wants us to trust in his wisdom despite our circumstances. Doubts, frustration, impatience, bitterness ... sure, we're human, we'll experience them just as Job did. But as Job was reminded of God's sovereign wisdom, he released those accusations and uncertainties. We would do well to do the same.

This leads to the second major point: When we fully trust in God's sovereignty and wisdom, we learn *how* to live in

suffering. We realize God doesn't rule through "retribution." It's not as straightforward as the righteous avoiding suffering while those living in sin suffer much. Yes, God blesses and punishes, but in the case of human suffering, most often only God knows why.

So, we trust God. We learn not to blame him. We strive for Job's repentant perspective of watching what we say in our suffering. We grow closer to God in suffering. And in all of these ways we grow in our fear of the Lord (awe and reverence) and our turning from evil (obedience), as we discover godly wisdom and understanding (Job 28:28).

Job is one of six books known as Poetry & Wisdom literature. The author is unknown (some point to Moses, Elihu, Solomon, Jeremiah and others). The events take place in the time between the tower of Babel and Abraham (Gen. 11-12), in the land of Uz.

There is a conversation between Satan and God. Is that possible? Why does God allow Satan to test Job? For 29 chapters, here are three cycles of debate with three friends, then a fourth friend. What does this accomplish? Why do we say the "patience of Job," when Job accuses God and seems impatient? We never learn why Job suffered, so what do we learn?

Job 1:6-12. God is holding a heavenly council when the "adversary" (Hebrew word is "Satan" meaning adversary/accuser), is allowed to speak. The dialogue turns into a test of whether Job would continue to love God in suffering.

Job 19:23-27. Job pleads that the record will show how he truly believes in his redeemer despite his suffering. He is confident in a physical resurrection before God and this passage provides a great shadow of Jesus, our Redeemer, who lives.

Job 42:7-10. Job is rebuked and repents. The Lord restores him and then does something remarkable. Even though his friends have spoken harshly to him and used unfounded "retribution" theology against him, Job prays for them. God hears his prayer and spares his friends.

Ultimately, God is God and we are not. Are we willing to accept this truth in such a way that despite our suffering we will continue to love God and not deny him? Like Job, God does not owe us an explanation. He has demonstrated his superior wisdom in all things and we can trust that in whatever we are going through, God's plan is one for his glory and our eternal good. This is especially true as we know that our Redeemer lives, and we will stand before him in our flesh!

ACCESS message on [JOB](#) from River Oaks Community Church, May 3, 2020

PSALMS. WE HAVE A SHEPHERD!



KEY SCRIPTURE: PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. –Psalm 23:1-3

KEY WORD(S): Praise and Worship

KEY THEME(S): 150 Works of Praise. 5 Collections of Songs. 1 Book of Worship.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The title, Book of Psalms, originates from the Greek word *psalmoi*, meaning "a song sung to the plunking of an instrument," which was translated from the original Hebrew title for this book, *tehillim*, meaning "praises." In short, this collection of 150 early temple prayers and songs is the divinely-inspired book of praise and worship!

Our second book of Poetry & Wisdom, Psalms, is the longest, most-often quoted, and most diverse book of the Old Testament. It is perhaps the most referenced of the entire Bible. The "songs" speak to creation, the patriarchs, the time of the judges, the kings, and the exile. In fact, as we think of our journey so far (Law/History), we might think of the Psalms as our *One Story* theme music playing throughout.

While there several authors (more than seven), David is identified with nearly half of the psalms (73). Other key contributors include Asaph, the sons of Korah, and several anonymous authors who address the exile and return. There is even one psalm attributed to Moses (Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses). This would imply that, while many were written in the time of the kings, the actual span of the psalms might be over 1,000 years, (!) compiled along the way and completed in the late 5th or early 4th century BC.

The key to interpreting Psalms is to realize that, despite their differing "types" (lament, thanksgiving, wisdom, royalty, imprecatory, or messianic), the primary literary characteristic in all of them is poetry. And unlike modern poetry, Hebrew poems are filled with symmetry, parallelism, introverted or chiasmic patterns of purposed progression, and regression. And no, it's not necessary to understand any of this styling to understand the message of the psalm; don't overcomplicate it. However, when pausing to reflect and meditate on a psalm, these literary

devices can certainly bring out the beauty of its meaning and the heart of the author, God.

The Five Books of Psalms - Each concludes with a doxology (Psalm 150 is a fitting doxology for all the books: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!")

Book One: Chapters 1-41

Book Two: Chapters 42-72

Book Three: Chapters 73-89

Book Four: Chapters 90-106

Book Five: Chapters 107-150

Psalm 23 is a psalm of thanksgiving with an emphasis on trust. It was written by David, likely as king with life's experience providing much of the inspiration. It is likely the most well-known passage of the entire Old Testament.

Many of the questions that one might have in this psalm come from the imagery and use of poetic language. Why a shepherd? What is the significance of the shepherd image to the ancient Hebrew? What exactly is the "valley of the shadow of death?" -A momentary suffering or death itself? Is anointing with oil a reference to prosperity or health? And what is David's understanding of the "house of the Lord"?

The Shepherd (part I): The primary roles of the shepherd include guarding the sheep (highly critical to keep from thieves and predators), nourishing the sheep, guiding the sheep (along the safe path and out of harm's way), and if necessary, correcting the sheep. In other words, provision and protection. David is exclaiming that God is his/our Great Shepherd, not only for provision and protection (23:1-4), but also for blessing (23:5, anointing with oil - also see Ezekiel 34:17-26) and an ongoing relationship/presence with the Lord (23:6). Do we see God as our Shepherd?

The Shepherd (part II): The emphasis of God as our Shepherd is more direct in Jesus' proclamation that he is "the Good Shepherd who will lay down his life for his sheep" (John 10:3-15).

The question for application is one of trust and submission to Jesus as our Shepherd. Are we willing to allow Jesus to guide us, protect us, provide for us, correct us as submissive sheep—trusting in his wisdom and sovereignty, even through near-death, threatening situations? For the flock who remain close to the life-giving Shepherd, the cup of blessings (temporal and eternal) overflows. The goodness and mercy of God will follow us for all of our days and beyond. Amen and amen!

Challenge: Psalm 23 is a great passage to challenge yourself to memorize and to pray aloud.

If you haven't done so already, this is a wonderful time to check out Pastor Beaty's podcast, [Psalm Starter](#). Go back and listen to Psalm 23 for further guidance on this week's focused *One Story* passage, and how it moves the story forward. Further, enjoy those psalms that are most meaningful to you, those psalms that have influenced any number of worship songs, and those psalms you discover this week.

ACCESS message on [PSALMS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, May 10, 2020

PROVERBS. PROVERBIAL WORDS OF WISDOM



KEY SCRIPTURE: PROVERBS 3:1-12

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. –Proverbs 3:5-8

KEY WORD(S): Wisdom

KEY THEME(S): Practical Living. Skillful Living. Wise Living.

CONSIDER & APPLY: For most, the Book of Proverbs is an enjoyable and entertaining read. Concise verses with deep meaning, colorful imagery, and witty sayings, Proverbs is written in a comprehensive tone that speaks to everyone. Even as individual application might differ, the generalized statements are true to life, with practical and moral implications for each of us.

The Hebrew word for proverb (*mashal*) means "comparison, similar, parallel." From this, we might surmise that Proverbs is a collection of **simple illustrations that expose fundamental realities** of life by way of comparisons or figures of speech that make pithy and poignant observations: i.e., "The way of the fool is ... while the wise are"

Further, the Book of Proverbs presents general statements of timeless truth, but—and this is critical—also allows for, though never condones, exceptions to the rule. In other words, in general, when parents train up a child according to godly instruction, that child will tend to cling to those instructions as they grow older (Proverbs 22). However, it is neither a promise nor a guarantee; rather, the proverb is sound, practical advice for those intent on following the Lord in all wisdom.

It's a bit like the advice to stop smoking: "It will kill you." In general, yes. Statistics, medical research, and personal testimonies back this up as solid advice. However, we've all heard stories of the 94-year-old lady who has smoked three packs a day since she was 14. The advice is still wise and true, and we don't condone Granny's smoking habit for being that rare exception. That is proverbial wisdom, we live by the general truth, not the exception.

In a larger sense, Proverbs joins Job and Ecclesiastes as text-book forms of ancient near-Eastern Wisdom Literature. Each of these books is grounded in the fear of the Lord as the basis for personal holiness and practical living. Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (as well as James in the New Testament), focus on gaining greater understanding and knowledge in life by turning to God and away from the world, shunning evil, deferring ultimate wisdom to God alone. And while Psalms emphasized our walk before God and our devotional life, Proverbs speaks to our walk before others in daily life. As we consider Proverbs and the selected passage, may the many nuggets of wisdom buried in each pithy and poignant observation be lived out in our daily walk.

Proverbs is a collection. Solomon includes 800 of his 3,000 (1 Kings 4:32) maxims in chapters 1-22, seemingly before the time of his divided heart. It's thought he was the collector of sayings in chapters 23-29, with the words of Agur and Lemuel in 30 & 31. Proverbs was not assembled in its final form until King Hezekiah's day.

Proverbs 3 begins "My son, do not forget my teaching." What teaching and who is speaking as "father"? In verse 2, there appears to be a promise of long life. In verse 7, a warning of being "wise in your own eyes." How would we say that today? Do verses 9-10 sound like prosperity gospel: "Give your money and you'll get more money"?

"My son" is an important element to the structure of Proverbs 1-9. This is the third time (he will do this ten times) where Solomon establishes a father-to-son talk. Here, the paternal appeal is "the fear of the Lord." Solomon gives six calls (every two verses) to live in light of the fear of the Lord in all respects: faithfulness, trust, humility, generosity, gratitude, and submitting to reproof. And no, "barns filled with plenty" (or the "long life" of verse 2) is not a formula for health and prosperity, but a generalization of how living in the fear of the Lord can often lead to a path of fuller life and satisfaction. Not always, not promised, and not a sign of righteousness, but often.

Central to this passage is devotion and trust, dependence on God in all aspects of life. An open mind to godly teaching. An open hand with resources and time. An open heart to discipline. An open life, as a testimony before others. Do you and I fear the Lord to this extent, that we would completely and wholeheartedly love him in these ways?

NOTE: Every two verses complete a thought for Solomon. Challenge yourself to memorize the two-verse instruction that most resonates you.

ACCESS message on [PROVERBS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, May 17, 2020

ECCLESIASTES. THE END OF THE MATTER: WISDOM IS...



KEY SCRIPTURE: ECCLESIASTES 1:1-4, 12:9-14

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. –Ecclesiastes 12:13

KEY WORD(S): Vanity

KEY THEME(S): Vanity of Vanities. Under the Sun. A Life of Meaning.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Ecclesiastes has been described as the most complicated, profound, philosophical, and puzzling of all the books of the Bible. It is rarely preached and often misinterpreted as a "throw up your hands and give up" or "throw up your hands and party up" answer to those searching for the meaning of life.

Of course, the message of Ecclesiastes is far from "give in" or "party on." Ultimately, the "words of the Preacher" (Ecc. 1:1), who is considered to be Solomon passing along the wisdom of his roller coaster journey to a large assembled gathering, will lead us on a search for the meaning and satisfaction of life found only in the fear of God and obedience to his commandments.

There are **three key points** to understanding the philosophical discourse of this book:

1. Solomon writes with a view to original sin and how the Garden fall has frustrated both humanity and creation ever since. Consider this when you read about the reality of our work: "our toiling" and foolishness of our "empty pursuits." This is a **critical starting point for understanding Solomon's lens to worldly skepticism.**

2. **Vanity/Hevel** - The word is used 38 times in this book (five times in verse 2 of chapter one). The apostle James had used the Greek term of this Hebrew word for vanity to speak of the vapor-like, mist-like, meaningless, and empty aspects of life without Christ. This is the theme of Solomon's book.

3. The term "**under the sun**" is used throughout. It marks a distinct difference between life in this world (under the

sun) and that of God's heavens. Solomon is pushing us to live a life "*beyond* the sun," not simply "under the sun."

Finally, we are at a greater advantage than Solomon when it comes to understanding meaning and satisfaction. Yes, we know that the fear of God is still central to meaning. Yes, we know that obedience to God's instructions is still critical to complete satisfaction. But, because of the empty tomb, we now know of the eternal hope and glory that awaits followers of Jesus—an entirely new and changed life of meaning. We also know that Jesus came that we might have life more abundantly. In other words, we no longer simply exist under the sun, we live *in the Son*. Instead of worrying about whether or not what we do is "vanity," we now know that everything we do has meaning.

Ecclesiastes has traditionally been thought of as being authored by Solomon. Both Jewish tradition and the evidence of Ecc. 1:1, "the son of David, king in Jerusalem," point to Solomon. There are some who consider the styling as not of Solomon, but one who recorded the wisdom and life of Solomon. Either way, the message is taken from an older Solomon, having experienced the years of a divided heart and seemingly expressing the disgust of realizing those aspects of a wasted life, while pointing others to true meaning and satisfaction.

Ecclesiastes begins by describing Solomon as "the Preacher," and the king. Repeated words in these first several verses include: "vanity," "under the sun." This is pretty intense. What is Solomon's point to these observations? He mentions that there is nothing new under the sun, but what about technology, transportation, communication, and on and on. There has been a ton of stuff new since Solomon. What does he mean?

Think philosophically. Everything that Solomon says is true. We might not like to hear it, but generations come and go. Do we really think future generations will remember us and our work (can you name your great, great, grandfather and speak of his work? - just four generations back) From this lens, it's all the same, nothing new. We rise, work, eat, sleep, marry, have children, grow old, and die. Our desires, pleasures, relationships, and more, are the same as they have always been since our Garden parents. We think we are much more important and try to find meaning in what we can do. This is Solomon's point. Almost eleven chapters of making us think, but then giving us the wisdom of where meaning is found—above the sun, the fear of God.

We look to Jesus. We consider the abundant life he provides (John 10:10). We consider that in the Lord our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We do all things, with all our heart, as working for the Lord (Col. 3:23). Our life is not vanity of vanities when it is lived in the Son, not under the Sun.

ACCESS message on [ECCLESIASTES](#) from River Oaks Community Church, May 24, 2020

SONG OF SOLOMON. BIBLICAL INTIMACY AND LONGING



KEY SCRIPTURE: SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-17, 2:15-17

"Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom." My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. –Song of Solomon 2:15-16

KEY WORD(S): Intimacy

KEY THEME(S): God's Gift. Marital Love. The Greatest Song.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Now really, who hasn't turned to their special someone from time to time and uttered the most heartfelt and romantic of words"Sweetheart, your eyes are as doves, your hair like goats, your teeth remind me of a flock of sheared sheep!" (Gentlemen, tuck that away for next Valentine's Day!)

Oh, what a book we have this week to wrap up the Poetry & Wisdom section of our *One Story* series. Song of Solomon, or as it is titled in the Hebrew Bible, *Shir HaShirim*, The Song of Songs, is the greatest of songs composed by Solomon (recall, he wrote 1,005, according to 1 Kings 4:32), with the single aim of his passion and love, his beloved, the Shulammite woman (Song of Solomon 6:13).

This love song is filled with imagery, metaphors, similes, and all of those other literary devices that most of us could never keep straight back in high school English literature class. However, one literary device that Song of Songs has often been incorrectly accused of utilizing—leading to a misinterpretation and missed application—is the allegory. Many over the recent centuries, in attempts to "water down" the intimacy of the song, have claimed this book to be strictly allegorical, representing something deeper, something hidden from the casual reading. In short, Jews have translated Song of Solomon as a picture of God's love for Israel, while Christians have translated Song of Solomon as Jesus' love for the church. And, while the intimacy depicted within biblical marriage can certainly be used as a picture of mutual intimacy between Christ and his bride, the church, this was not Solomon's intention.

No, Song of Solomon is "what it is": a sensual, passionate, intimate discourse between lovers experiencing the

purity and sanctity of this gift. With the background of God's garden relationship between man and woman and his call to marital purity, Song of Solomon speaks to Solomon's falling in love, uniting in love, and growing in love—the courtship, the wedding, the marriage—the leaving, cleaving, and weaving—of man and woman.

As further thought, John MacArthur writes, "The metaphoric nature of this book is designed by God to veil the private intimacy of marriage. Its beautiful expressions of romantic love are purposefully shrouded in poetic language to express the wonders of marital love while distancing itself from anything crass or explicitly sensual."

You will likely find disagreements in both authorship and interpretation. Some point to Song of Solomon as being a collection of Solomon's poems or authored by one speaking as Solomon or at a later date. The early church and consensus, the conservative view, is taken in these notes.

Song of Solomon has traditionally been thought of as authored by Solomon. He is mentioned seven times in the book, including as the groom. Further, internal evidence/language strongly favors Solomon as author. The dating is early in the reign of Solomon with a Shulammitte woman being the focus of Solomon's poem, even as the perspective is written primarily from her point of view. There are many geographical locations mentioned, mostly in and around Jerusalem. Assuming a standard chronology, the poem moves between a first "spring" and a second one—meaning, it plays out over the course of a year or two.

A big question regards Solomon's notoriety of wives and harems, and how he could possibly be the expert on marital purity and God's gift of intimacy? Also, who is the Shulammitte woman? Specific to our focus passage, what does she mean when referencing "the foxes, the little foxes" in Song of Solomon 2:15?

Solomon was a complicated guy, mostly the result of a "divided heart." It reasons that there would be some level of contradiction between the words written at one part of his life and the actions lived out later. Many have speculated the Shulammitte was the Pharaoh's daughter of 1 Kings 3:1, although no evidence points to this. Regardless of who she was, this relationship is likely one of his first and only meaningful ones. Since most of his marriages were political, and Song of Solomon is written before he plunged into immorality and idolatry, there appears to be something different. When Solomon was loyal to God, he experienced the gifts of God in ways that God intended. When he was not loyal to God, he profaned what God had intended, aka, the "pleasures" of Ecclesiastes. The reference of foxes emphasizes an urgency of resolving the potential problems in our marriages early on, even small ones, Otherwise, they will spoil the relationship. A reminder to work on our marriages, at all times.

God's gift of intimacy and love is to be enjoyed and cherished. Encourage one another with words, with touch, with protection, and provision. Keep working on **preserving the relationship** at all times, even as you catch the little foxes.

BONUS: Did you notice the superlative?

"Song of Songs" (1:1). Similar to "Vanity of Vanities," Holy of Holies," "King of Kings" The superlative emphasizes the highest degree. In other words, of the 1,005 songs written by Solomon, this is his greatest, his magnum opus, his masterpiece.

ACCESS message on [SONG OF SOLOMON](#) from River Oaks Community Church, May 31, 2020



THE PROPHETS



We now transition from Poetry & Wisdom to the Prophets. There are sixteen prophetic books in all (seventeen, if you include Lamentations - I'll explain when the *One Story* arrives to that beautifully-inspired word of Jeremiah).

The prophets of God were instruments of the Lord used to communicate to and deal with his people and, on occasion, other nations. They were not "fortune tellers," but mouthpieces of God, relaying his messages, warnings, and praise.

There were "former prophets," recorded in Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. They included those who left no written record of their ministry: Nathan, Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Obed, Azariah, and more. And "latter prophets," the 16 (or 17) books we have in our Bible today. Note: Former/latter were not chronological indicators, but the order in which they appear in the canon of Scripture (i.e., Joshua vs. Jeremiah).

Of these written prophets, the *One Story* series will include each of the "Major" prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah / Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel) and two of the "Minor" prophets, Micah and Malachi. Regarding the designations of "major prophets" and "minor prophets," these are not indications of significance or priority or prophetic skills and abilities. The Hebrew Bible had originally included a Book of Prophets (Luke 24:44). This book contained the shorter prophetic writings as a single book—or final chapter—called "The Book of the Twelve." When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, these twelve were broken out, and most English Bibles have followed suit. We continue to group the prophets into major and minor, though there should be no further distinction other than length.

The sixteen books referred to as the Prophets are comprised of a widely-diverse mixture of people, contexts, and messages. The one unifying characteristic across all of them: they were servants of God sent to tell a message of God. And while foretelling (proclaiming man's future) was certainly found within the ministry of several prophets, the primary role of the prophets was forthtelling (proclaiming God's message).

These messages were generally one of four kinds:

- exposing the sinful practices of the day,
- calling God's people back to the law,
- making clear a coming judgment for those who rejected God, or

- proclaiming the coming Messiah (advancing the One Story).

In this final category, there are over three hundred prophecies recorded in Scripture that were fulfilled in Jesus. As Peter declared: "To him all the prophets bear witness" Acts 10:43.

As you read the words of these godly messengers, imagine walking in their sandals, taking in their particular circumstances. Note that they were firmly grounded in the contemporary events of their day, not our day. We learn from their messages for the purpose of our life application. We do not use the prophetic books for the purpose of speculating about the future or predicting the end times.

Let us read the Prophets for their relevancy to the *One Story* and how they center on Jesus. It is the Apostle Paul who considers the Old Testament Scripture and reminds us: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him, the son of God, and it is why we utter our Amen to God for his glory" 2 Corinthians 1:20.

INTEGRATION OF PROPHETS IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

	<i>2 Kings/2 Chronicles</i>		<i>Captivity/Exile Ezra/Nehemiah</i>		
	9 TH CENTURY	8 TH CENTURY	7 TH CENTURY	6 TH CENTURY	5 TH CENTURY
TO ISRAEL		Hosea Amos			
TO JUDAH	Joel	Isaiah Micah	Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk		
TO EDOM	Obadiah				
TO NINEVAH (ASSYRIA):		Jonah	Nahum		
IN BABYLON (EXILE)				Daniel Ezekiel	
JERUSALEM (POST-EXILE JUDAH)					Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The Four- Major (Considering Lamentations an extension of Jeremiah and a book of poetry, not prophet)
 The Twelve Minor: ("Book of the Twelve" in Hebrew Bible, collection of shorter prophetic writings)

UNIT FOUR, THE PROPHETS

ISAIAH. PROPHECY OF A CHILD



KEY SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 9:1-17, 11:1-9

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. –Isaiah 9:6

KEY WORD(S): Salvation

KEY THEME(S): Judgment and Hope. Interestingly, though not intentional, as chapter/verse designations are a relatively modern addition, still many outline the Book of Isaiah as chapters 1-39 = Judgment and 40-66 = Hope. This is great for retention purposes because it follows a general OT / NT division (note: number of books, 39 + 27). However, it often prejudices believers into thinking of the OT as strictly judgmental and the NT as strictly hopeful.

TO: Primarily Judah, the southern kingdom (including Jerusalem) during the period of the divided kingdom.

WHEN: Beginning in 739 BC, Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of four kings (Uzziah - Hezekiah).

CONSIDER & APPLY: Isaiah. He has been referred to as the "Apostle Paul of the Old Testament," the "Shakespeare of the Bible," and even the "Old Testament Evangelist." With a name meaning "Yahweh is Salvation," it reasons that salvation is the key word to this book filled with messianic prophecies. In fact, the Book of Isaiah is often referred to as the "Fifth Gospel." It is quoted some 65+ times in the New Testament, and Isaiah is mentioned 20+ times in NT, more than any other prophet. Dig deep and enjoy!

Chapter 9 speaks of a former and latter time, stressing the latter time as much better (9:1). Isaiah begins a poem, which includes verses we read during Advent, (9:2-7), then shifts back and speaks of calamities in Israel due to the fact that they didn't heed the Lord's warning; they were arrogant. In chapter 11:1-9, there is language of peace and righteousness, and the "shoot from the stump of Jesse." God has warned Israel of the coming Assyrian invasion, but is promising those in the area of Galilee they will one day be blessed with the coming Messiah. Note the language of Abraham's covenant: "multiplied the nation." Chapter 11 gives the covenant with David language: King Jesus will come to the throne, *one from the stump of Jesse* (David's father).

In Isaiah 9 - 11, we see the reality of **judgment and hope**. The nation of Israel (both kingdoms), will pay for their arrogance. Isaiah speaks the words of the Lord regarding imminent invasion and captivity. Yet, he also provides great hope, not necessarily for the current generation, but for future ones. The promise that God will not abandon his people, break his covenants, or alter his promises, is a reassuring word for the Israelites. It is for us as well, collectively, when we go through generational suffering (war, terrorism, C-19), and individually. Despite circumstances, the assurances of our Wonderful Counselor Prince of Peace, bring us great hope.

Memorize one descriptive verse of Jesus in Isaiah and keep it with you all week. Share the good news of hope.

ACCESS message on [ISAIAH](#) from River Oaks Community Church, June 7, 2020

JEREMIAH. THE NATIONS WORSHIP IDOLS



KEY SCRIPTURE: JEREMIAH 4:1-14, 9:23-26, 10:6-16, 31:31-34

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. –Jeremiah 31:31-32

KEY WORD(S): Last Chance

KEY THEME(S): God is patient, pleading with his people to repent, over and over and over. God is just, giving them over to their idolatry and into captivity. God is faithful, sparking hope through a prophesy of a limited captivity and a new covenant.

TO: Judah (Jerusalem) in the final years before the city's destruction and her people's exile to Babylon. Jeremiah also spoke a few words to surrounding nations.

WHEN: From 627 - 605 BC, Jeremiah prophesied as Judah was threatened by Assyria. From 605 - 586 BC, Jeremiah prophesied as Judah was threatened by Babylon. From 586 - 580 BC, Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem and Egypt after the cities' destruction.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Talk about your hard-knock life. The prophet Jeremiah lived out one of the most difficult and conflicted ministries of any biblical figure. Called by God as a youth, this son of a priest served over fifty years during an especially disruptive and troubling time in Israel's history. As a result of proclaiming judgment on Judah, his own people, he was constantly threatened, put in stocks, forced to flee, beaten, publicly humiliated, and thrown in a pit. And if all this wasn't bad enough, Jeremiah was sent into exile in Egypt.

The Book of Jeremiah is a collection of sermons, prophetic words of God, and a record of Jeremiah's actions that (we learn in chapters 36-38) were dictated to his personal secretary, Baruch. Most of the messages are words of condemnation against Judah with pleas to repent (mostly from their practice of idolatry) and return to God.

Jeremiah mourns the disobedience of his people, mourns the threat of imminent invasion, mourns that evil

prospers, and mourns the captivity and exile of the nation to Babylon. Next we look at Lamentations, which is basically five dirges—or laments—when Jeremiah mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem. Is it any wonder that Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet"?

While Isaiah is "two parts judgment and at least one part hope," Jeremiah is approximately "9/10 judgment and 1/10 hope," but what great hope we find in the 10%. We'll look into this promise of a new covenant in our key Scripture for this chapter. Enjoy your time in Jeremiah, where God's patience, holiness, justice, and covenant-keeping character are on full display. And of course, may you run with horses ... (Jeremiah 12:5).

Jeremiah 30:3 and 33:26 frame the one hopeful moment in this book: God's declaration: "I will bring back from captivity my people." There is restoration of the land, nation, Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, the covenant. It is foreshadowed by one of the most misused Scriptures (29:11): the "plans to prosper," which is future-oriented and of eternal prosperity. There will be a new covenant that is different from the past covenants (31:31-34).

The new covenant will be the indwelling Spirit of God for all to receive. Even as Israel has broken the unconditional covenants of their fathers, the new covenant will be available to them, written on their hearts, not as external laws. It is brought about through the blood of Jesus (see Hebrews 8:7-13).

The call of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is for our understanding and profession of the new covenant relationship with God through Jesus. It is the new covenant that we drink in remembrance of during communion (1 Corinthians 11:25), and for which Jesus has come once and for all (Hebrews 10:10). Have you fully comprehended, received, and professed new life under this new covenant? An additional application is to ensure you. Memorize Jeremiah 31:33 and note how it speaks toward our definition of biblical literacy: learn, love, live out.

ACCESS message on [JEREMIAH](#) from River Oaks Community Church, June 14, 2020

LAMENTATIONS. DO WE MOURN FOR OTHERS?



KEY SCRIPTURE: LAMENTATIONS 1:1-18, 3:22-24

For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed. –Lamentations 1:16

KEY WORD(S): Mourning

KEY THEME(S): God's holiness was so offended by the sins of Judah that he brought judgment on his people. This was cause for genuine sorrow, mourning, confession, and prayers for forgiveness. Ultimately, there are signs of hope, mercy, and grace.

TO: While Lamentations is listed among the books of the prophets in our English Bible, it is actually a Wisdom & Poetry book. It was placed after the Book of Jeremiah because he is considered to be the author of both (with secretarial assistance from Baruch). This is not a message of prophecy to a certain people.

WHEN: Jeremiah wrote Lamentations during, or soon after, the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Lamentations, from its Hebrew title "*Ekah*" conveys the idea of "How?" or dismay at what has happened. The Greek translation is best rendered as "loud cries," and the Latin is a root for "tears." All point to a book of the Bible unique from any other, one that contains only laments, or—as they are often referred—"dirges of death."

In fact, one way of outlining Lamentations is as a book comprised of five specific laments. The "funeral tears" for a city, a people, a prophet, a kingdom, and nation. Easily the saddest book in Scripture, Jeremiah expresses the horror and **helplessness of seeing Jerusalem reduced to rubble and her people taken captive**. Yet, even as Jeremiah laments this bleak situation, **he pauses in the middle of it all to proclaim God's promise—a great example of how God's people can be both heartbroken and hopeful**.

Don't miss the literary structure of Lamentations. It's no coincidence that as chapters/verses were later added,

they broke into five chapters of 22, 22, 66, 22, and 22 verses. The first four chapters are acrostics, using each letter of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet in sequence to begin the verse. Chapter three uses each letter for three verses until there are 22 trios (66 verses). That middle-of-the-text proclamation is found in 3:22-24, a high point in the midst of calamity. This *One Story* guide focuses on Lamentations 1:1-18, and should also note 3:22-24. Observe the descriptions and emotions Jeremiah expresses as he looks back over Jerusalem. Notice the confession of 1:18, a "no excuses" statement.

As we lament for our world, our communities, the evil that exists through racism and inequality, the brokenness of marriages, the impact of a pandemic, and more, may Lamentations guide us, and may our hearts break for what breaks God's heart.

While evident in the Book of Jeremiah, we see more evidence here of the weeping prophet serving as a "type" of Christ. Read Matthew 23:37-38 and compare to Jeremiah's heart and words. He is the One who personally identifies with the affliction, sorrows, griefs, and suffering caused by sin.

Lamentations calls us to mourn for our sins against God (always important that we begin with our own sins first), but also for the collective sins of God's people, his church, and those professing to be followers of Jesus. Like few times before in our lifetime, a reminder of God's new morning mercies and great faithfulness is a critical truth to hold in our hearts and live out in our day.

ACCESS message on [LAMENTATIONS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, June 21, 2020 (*This sermon will emphasize the Book of Lamentations as it relates to the sin and circumstances of racism in our world.*)

EZEKIEL. A NEW HEART, A NEW SPIRIT



KEY SCRIPTURE: EZEKIEL 2:1-3:2, 11:14-21, 36:22-27

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. –Ezekiel 11:19-20

KEY WORD(S): God's Glory. Restoration.

KEY THEME(S): Like many prophets, Ezekiel has a message of judgment and hope. Initially, he informs the people they will not be freed; God will fulfill his condemnation. But like dry bones, they will be restored and brought to life. There is a strong emphasis on God's glory: heavenly, departing, and earthly glory. God's sovereignty will be acknowledged by all people and all nations.

CONSIDER & APPLY: As a matter of context, the prophet/priest Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah and a similar-aged contemporary of Daniel. Ezekiel was 25 years old when he and his wife were among 10,000 Jews taken captive to Babylon in 597 BC during the second of three waves. (Daniel had been taken in the first wave of 605 BC, and Jeremiah was left in Jerusalem to mourn for his city.)

Ezekiel was a prophet to the people of Judah, much like Jeremiah, yet while Jeremiah spoke of God's pending judgment and destruction, pleading for God's people in Jerusalem to repent before it was too late, Ezekiel spoke mostly of God's pending reconstruction and renewal to God's people while they were captive in Babylon. While Jeremiah was a man of tears and mourning, Ezekiel was a man of visions and new life. His visions told the story of God's condemnations and horrors of the past turning to consolation and hope for the future. The people may be as "dry bones in the valley" (Ezekiel 37), but they will eventually be transformed and resuscitated.

Ultimately, Ezekiel, through visions, symbols, signs, and prophecies, dramatizes the message that through it all, everyone will come to see and know the glory of Israel's sovereign God and "they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 6:10).

TO: Jewish exiles in Babylon who were taken from Jerusalem (605 - 586 BC) and held captive by King

Nebuchadnezzar.

WHEN: Ezekiel received his commission from God after having been held captive for five years; he was thirty. He ministered to the captives for 22 years.

The *One Story* passages of Ezekiel 11:14-21 and 36:22-27 include similar language, even as chapter 11 emphasizes judgment and chapter 36 restoration. Examples include: "restored nation," "hearts of stone and flesh," "walking in obedience." These passages echo Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Deuteronomy 30:6-8, "circumcision of their hearts," –pattern of disobedience, judgment, heart change, restoration.

In the contextual circumstance, there are promises of a restored remnant. Israel is scattered but will ultimately be restored to the land. They will also return to the Lord through obedience and to his glory. Finally, a shadow of the new covenant in Jesus, with total heart transformation and the indwelling of the Spirit.

Ezekiel causes us to reflect on many aspects of the Israelites' captivity and God's promise of restoration. Do our sins, individually/collectively, warrant God's judgment? Are we remaining in them or do we desire to walk according to his statutes? Do we embrace the Spirit's indwelling presence as "God in us!" Do we live in the gratitude of having been transformed from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh? God continues to demonstrate throughout the *One Story* that restoration begins with repentance, obedience, and acknowledgment of his glory and lordship. Will we live in this manner?

Throughout the day, offer the breath prayer of Ezekiel 11:20, "Lord, I will obey you. I am your 'people' and you are my God. Amen."

ACCESS message on [EZEKIEL](#) from River Oaks Community Church, June 28, 2020.

DANIEL. PRAYING FOR MERCY



KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 9:1-6, 16-23

O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name. –Daniel 9:18-19

KEY WORD(S): Dreams. "Trust the Plan."

KEY THEME(S): Daniel repeatedly emphasizes the sovereignty of God against human kingdoms. Israel will suffer under Gentile powers for many centuries, from the Babylonians to the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. If God's people will "stay the course" and be encouraged, they will know that God's plans will not be thwarted by these kingdoms.

TO: A wide audience. Daniel's ministry was directed to the Babylonian and Persian courts (Nebuchadnezzar/Belshazzar and Darius Cyrus), but also to the Jews held captive with him.

WHEN: Beginning in 605 BC (exile to Babylon in 1:1), Daniel spans seventy years of captivity to 530 BC (before Cyrus in 10:1).

CONSIDER & APPLY: With our *One Story* arrival at the book of Daniel, we come to the final major prophet of Scripture. Despite being only twelve chapters, Daniel's divinely-inspired record provides an incredibly broad range of subject matter, style, and insight. It's a fascinating and illuminating book familiar to most all of us on some level. What John's Revelation is to the New Testament, prophetically and apocalyptically, Daniel is to the Old. Like the Apostle John, Daniel is a captive when God speaks to and through him. Like John, Daniel's use of symbols and numbers fits a more nuanced genre of literary meaning, one that is easy to over-complicate.

Most importantly, like the Revelation of John, the Book of Daniel is a **message of hope**. The visions and dreams declare God's ultimate victory over this world while encouraging God's people to faithfully endure persecution and suffering.

Bottom Line: Despite circumstances, "trust the plan!" God's covenant promises will be fulfilled. The God who directs the forces, kingdoms, and rulers of this world has not deserted his people. We continue faithfully, because great is his faithfulness.

Among many interesting observations, the original language of Daniel was both Aramaic and Hebrew. Chapter's 1, 8-12 were in Hebrew, and chapters 2-7 in Aramaic. These languages were utilized often in fifth-century Babylon. In fact, the earliest discovered manuscripts of Daniel, the Dead Sea Scroll fragments of late second-century BC, testify to the dual languages noted by Greek translations and Rabbinic tradition.

Many well-known Bible stories are found in the first half of this book: the dietary protests of Daniel and his friends, the furnace fire of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel and the lion's den, and the visions of Nebuchadnezzar. The second half includes more of the apocalyptic visions of restoration.

Daniel 9:1-6 and 9:16-23. The reference to Darius (a title) Cyrus dates this passage to 539 BC. Daniel writes that he knew from "the books" that the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied how long captivity would last (where is that in Scripture?). Daniel prays for fulfillment of this prophecy. He pleads for mercy and confesses sin on behalf of God's people. The angel Gabriel answers him.

Isn't the *One Story* awesome! Daniel is familiar with the scrolls of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) and prays, seeking mercy, not because he is deserving, but for the sake of God's name (Ezekiel 36). Captivity will end with these seventy years completed. However, as we read on, we see that Gabriel will also show Daniel a longer-term release from captivity, shadows to Jesus and God's eternal kingdom.

The Book of Daniel encourages us to know **God is always at work**, despite world events or the situations we experience. God's covenant promise will not end. Daniel provides assurance of this. However, he also gives a reminder that future troubles are guaranteed—that's the power-hungry, pride-filled, fallen world where we live. Even still, God is on his throne and working all things for our eternal good and his eternal glory. We apply this when we live in light of the assurance, confidence, and hope of this promise, and when we follow Daniel's prayerful posture before God.

Frustration, anger, fear, despair in your circumstances ... Trust the Plan. Now, say it out loud and insert you name, "David, trust the plan today, trust God's plan."

ACCESS message on [DANIEL](#) from River Oaks Community Church, July 5, 2020.

MICAH. JUSTICE, KINDNESS, HUMILITY



KEY SCRIPTURE: MICAH 6:1-8, 7:18-20

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? –Micah 6:8

KEY WORD(S): Justice

KEY THEME(S): The consistent message of the Prophets continue throughout the Minor Prophets; judgment on a people pursuing evil and hope of future restoration. Specifically in Micah, there is an emphasis on exposing the injustice of Judah against the righteousness of God.

TO: Though a few words were directed to the northern kingdom of Israel, Micah's primary attention was directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah, in which he lived.

WHEN: We are told Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, approximately between 735 - 710 BC. A time in which the northern kingdom will be invaded by Assyria, and roughly 100 years before Judah would be taken captive to Babylon.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The *One Story* now enters the least familiar territory of the entire narrative, the Minor Prophets. These twelve books, from Hosea to Malachi, were deemed "Minor" in the 4th century AD, not because they were considered less important or less inspired, but because they are generally shorter than the previously covered "Major" Prophets. These books were set apart because the earliest of Hebrew manuscripts, including those that Jesus and his contemporaries would have studied, joined together all of these shorter works into one scroll known as "The Twelve" or "Book of Twelve." Their combined length comprises sixty-seven chapters and, while their messages are more succinct than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel, their messages are equally as powerful and profitable.

The **Minor Prophets** cover a span of four-hundred years (840 BC - 430 BC). They are quite diverse in terms of personalities and backgrounds, and God uses them to speak his truth to the people of Israel, Judah, Edom,

Ninevah, the Jewish captives in Babylon, and those who return from exile.

The canonical order (or traditional order of books in the English Bible) is not exactly chronological when it comes to the Minor Prophets. The only significant order is that the first six (Hosea - Micah) takes place between 840 - 730 BC, while the second set of six (Nahum - Malachi) occurs between 660 - 430 BC. Though you are encouraged to read through all the Minor Prophets, the *One Story* series will cover the two closing bookends of each set, Micah (Unit 11) and Malachi (Unit 12), as representative of the twelve.

May we be awed by the Word of the Lord through his prophets. May the words of judgment and hope for God's people of yesterday, be lived out in our lives today.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8

With chapters 6 & 7 in view, there appears to be a courtroom scene: "Arise, plead your case," "indictment of the Lord," "pardoning inequities," "Hear - speak," etc. Micah (God's attorney) makes a strong accusation against the people in Micah 6:8. By the end, Micah 7:18-20, God's judgment has turned to mercy and forgiveness for the remnant of his people.

The case against God's people (primarily Judah, but would also apply to Israel) is that they have replaced heartfelt worship with empty ritual, thinking this was all that God had required. The mountains and hills are called to witness this charge against the people and there is only one verdict: GUILTY! Yet, as a future remnant returns to the Lord, his mercy and forgiveness is as a pardon for their sin. There is hope for the guilty.

What might the case be against us, should the Lord call us to defend our ways of worship and the way in which we live out our witness as his children? The people of Judah lost sight of what God required of them because they had set their sight on worldly pursuits, evil desires, and practices that made a mockery of God's instructions for justice, kindness, and humility. Yes, we are forgiven, as we acknowledge our guilt and seek forgiveness, but we would do well to make this a "head to the pillow" accountability question: "Did I do what the Lord required today?"

Memorize Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

ACCESS message on [MICAHA](#) from River Oaks Community Church, July 12, 2020.

MALACHI. A MESSENGER PREPARES THE WAY



KEY SCRIPTURE: MALACHI 3:1-15, 4:1-6

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” –Malachi 3:1

KEY WORD(S): Wake up!

KEY THEME(S): After a reminder of God's love for his people, much of Malachi is an accusation of the people's sin and disbelief. Only a few generations removed from the restoration of the temple and the wall (Ezra/Nehemiah), most had become unfaithful. They needed a wake-up call and warning of God's imminent judgment, and a reminder that—Praise God—he is coming again.

TO: A post-exile Judah/Israel, from about 50,000 Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon a century prior.

WHEN: No exact date is known, but the evidence of Scripture points to a time between Nehemiah's trip to Persia (432 BC) and his return (425 BC), a century after the Jews' release from captivity (536 BC).

CONSIDER & APPLY: The final unit of *One Story: Unit 2* is a teaching on the Book of Malachi: the final voice of prophecy and history in the Old Testament canon.

Malachi, a contemporary of Nehemiah, approximately 435 - 425 BC, provides one last prophetic message before God's spoken/written revelation goes quiet. This next chapter is a four-hundred year silence, a period of time during which God is working among his people, but in different ways, preparing covenant fulfillment to come.

Much is recorded about this "intertestamental" history: some being found in books often referred to as the Apocrypha (particularly interesting are Maccabees). These are not inspired Scripture; they were added during the translation of the Greek Septuagint. However, many of these records provide wonderful insight on cultural/historical context, setting the scene for the continued *One Story* in the New Testament.

One important observation about Malachi, whose name means "My Messenger" or "Messenger of Yahweh," is how his wake-up call to God's people, who were back from captivity and back before a rebuilt temple and city, will give way to a new messenger, a voice crying out in the wilderness (Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3, John 1:23, Matthew 3:3), issuing a new wake-up call to all people! What an amazing *One Story*!

Interestingly, the structure of Malachi is unique to any of the prophetic books. For starters, there is a recurring pattern of accusation ("You are robbing me"), interrogation ("But how have we robbed you?"), and refutation ("In tithes and offerings"). This is repeated many times across the fifty-five verses, forty-seven of which are spoken by God, (the highest proportion of any book), further emphasizing the accusations against the backsliders.

Finally, Malachi is the only writing that ends with judgment, rather than hope or blessing. Perhaps this is the best conclusion to the Old Testament record, a reminder of the sinful human condition, and the judgment it is due, all against the anticipation of God's solution through the future work of the Messiah. So, in reality, there is hope for God's people who heed this wake-up call, not so much for those who do not.

May we guard our hearts, words, attitudes, and actions, so that we might not hear the accusations that God spoke through Malachi, "You have wearied me ... you have robbed me ... you have profaned my covenant ..." Have mercy on us Lord, make our ways straight and faithful before you and others.

Malachi 3:1-5 points to a "messenger" preparing the way of the Lord. Who is this? There is a list of offenders who will bear much of the wrath of the Lord (3:5). Additional accusations include robbing God and speaking harshly against God (3:6-15). What is the book of remembrance in 3:16? Malachi 4 notes the Day of the Lord, with another reference to Moses & Law. What is it?

Chapter 3 is viewed with an eye to the previous passages in which the people have "wearied the Lord" (2:17), the primary theme of the book. John the Baptist is the "messenger" preparing the way. And while there is hope in the Day of the Lord, the warning is strong toward evildoers who have forgotten, or disbelieve, that this day will happen. Psalm 56:8 is a type of book for those not wanting to forget God's promises or eternal rewards. A journal, of sorts.

Malachi is a warning we need to heed on a regular basis. Through the prophet, God reminds his people (you and us) of the privilege to receive his love. We would do well to **approach God with gratitude for this love**. But God also reminds his people (you and me) of the pollution that sin and disobedience create in the face of his great love. We would do well to repent for how we have polluted God's glory. Finally, God speaks to the promise of judgment for failing to repent. We would do well to thank God for his mercy, while looking to that day with great anticipation.

One fun way to help retain the teaching of Malachi is to rise each morning, open your eyes, take in the gift that is one more day of great kingdom potential, and then shout out for the neighbors to hear: "Wake Up! The Lord is coming again!"

ACCESS message on [MALACHI](#) from River Oaks Community Church, July 19, 2020



THE GOSPELS & ACTS



It's been 400 +/- years of biblical silence. The divinely-ordained voices of prophecy have not been heard from since Malachi last spoke about a coming day of the Lord. Inspired records of *One Story* history have not been written since last we saw Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilding a Jewish nation, temple, and worship. And not a line of God-authored poetry, praise, or wisdom has been revealed since the last of the psalms and Jeremiah's gut-wrenching lament.

Is the story over? Has the book closed on any hope of a "once-and-for-all sacrifice" to appear and fulfill the law? Will the Messiah ever come as promised?

Or, like the 400 years between Genesis and Exodus, is God actively establishing a moment—the right moment—to deliver his people? Is he, though not revealing himself or his actions, working through all things?

If the latter is your hunch, then you are spot on. This "active intermission" has moved the *One Story* forward in amazing ways. God is at work, prophecy fulfilled, and the table is set through this highly fascinating "intertestamental" period.

In fact, R.C. Sproul believed these years comprised the "most overlooked and under-appreciated period of biblical history." For a summary of what that means, you can listen to our post-Malachi sermon, "[Pastor, What Did You Mean?](#)" where we cover topics like Greek Hellenization, Roman dominance, the Apocrypha writings, and more of God's setting the stage.

So, cue John the Baptist, Herod the Great, Joseph, Mary, and the rest, God's *One Story* continues without any change or break from his redemptive storyline.

As we move through Unit 5, we will explore the genres of Gospel Narratives, Historical Acts of the Apostles, and Epistles. Collectively known as the New Testament, these 27 books reveal the promised New Covenant, which in itself is a direct link to the "old" covenants we have come across almost weekly in our series.

The Gospels and the Book of Acts can collectively be thought of as historical books depicting key events in the life of Christ, the foundation of the church, and the early missionary-driven spread of Christianity.

The term, "The Gospel of..." was placed as a title heading for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the early centuries—likely as a result of Mark 1:1, which says: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The term "gospel" comes from the Greek word "εὐαγγέλιον" (eu-a-gel-ion), meaning "proclamation of good news." It is where we get the English word "evangelism." The original designation—or titles—for these documents, however, was simply, "According to Matthew" (for example), and each seemed to be written in the form of a biography, according to the perspective of the one writing. Each author was inspired to provide a different slant to the person, deity, and ministry of Jesus and his church. Each wrote of the Jesus he knew and wanted others to know. To better understand the Gospels, we have included a chart that outlines the similar—yet different—objectives, personalities, and styles of the Gospel authors (see chart: "The Gospel According To...").

Finally, in the spirit of the *One Story* study, the Gospels are filled with many connections to the Old Testament. These connections are reminders that the Gospels, the New Testament, and even Jesus, are not simply points of new beginnings; they are the fulfillment of prophecy, the continuation of themes, and the substance of shadows, all of which have been revealed by God throughout the Old Testament.

The Book of Acts is perhaps more completely termed, "The Acts of the Apostles." Since it is a continuation of the biographical and historical record according to Luke, Acts is—in a very real way—2 Luke. Though Acts does seem to follow a consistent chronological structure, chronology was not generally a matter of importance to first-century authors. We should not, therefore, expect the biographical nature of the Gospels to be similar to our modern biographies in that respect.

May we grow in our knowledge of, and love for, King Jesus, the One who has been given all authority of heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18), who came as Christ, Messiah, fulfilling the covenant as son of Abraham and son of David (Mt. 1:1), and for whom the wise men knew was the promised "King of the Jews." (Mt. 2:2). Amen.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO...

ACCORDING TO...	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
WRITTEN TO:	Jews	Romans	Greeks/ Gentiles	All Nations
CHRIST AS	King	Servant	Savior/Messiah	Son of God
HIGHLIGHTS	Sermons	Actions	Parables	Allegories
TONE:	Prophetic	Practical	Historical	Spiritual
KEY WORD	Fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man	Believe
OT QUOTES	53	36	25	20
OT ALLUSIONS	76	27	42	105

MATTHEW. GOOD NEWS-THE REDEEMER IS AMONG US!



KEY SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-17

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—Matthew 4:17

KEY WORD(S): King Jesus

KEY THEME(S): Temptations resisted. Sinless Messiah. Prophecy fulfilled.

WHO: The apostle Matthew, a former tax collector named Levi.

WHAT: A systematic record of credentials, authority, and teachings of Jesus that validate his claim as the Messiah. FYI, the term "Gospel" was added later, the earliest manuscripts read "*Kata Matthaion*" / "According to Matthew."

WHY: To evangelize Jews (the audience), as a Jewish witness (the author), in the way of the Jewish King, Jesus the Christ (the subject).

WHEN: The language and events, along with external writings, lead most scholars to date Matthew as late AD 50's - late 60's.

WHERE: Antioch of Syria (modern day Antakya of Turkey) is the likely location, given the emphasis and audience. Also, early reference from Antioch Bishop Ignatius.

CONSIDER & APPLY: According to Matthew 3 and our text, Matthew 4:1-17, Jesus has just been baptized by John ("one preparing the way" - Isaiah 40:3-5). In Matthew 5, he will call his disciples and begin to preach. In between is this interesting preparation time we refer to as the Temptation of Christ. This is where we may ask ourselves: If God is Father, Son, and Spirit, is God leading Jesus directly to Satan? We may also compare elements in this scene with others we've come across. Matthew notes that Jesus was in the desert for forty days, a number Jews would

be familiar with from the accounts of both Moses and Elijah. With each temptation, Jesus counters Satan with God's Word (Old Testament Law). Jesus is tempted in all things where Adam/humanity failed (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and pride, Hebrews 4:15). Jesus resists, Satan leaves, and Jesus begins to preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" - 4:17 "Repent, the King is here!" (Note Mt. 3:2). As he did in Job's life, God uses Satan to serve his sovereign purposes.

We will never perfectly resist the temptations of this world. However, Jesus' example enables us to more consistently avoid worldly traps. What is his example? **An awareness of Scripture.** All three of Jesus' responses begin with "It is written" and include quotes from the Law of Moses. Further, notice how Satan tries to twist God's Word (Matthew 4:5, Psalm 91:11-12). We protect ourselves and honor God by learning, loving, and living out what is written in his Word (and knowing what is *not*).

Let us each consider our greatest temptations. Where do we struggle to do what is honoring to God? Immediately seek Scripture that speaks to that struggle and memorize it. Share in the temptation of Jesus by honoring God's Word.

ACCESS message on [MATTHEW](#) from River Oaks Community Church, July 26, 2020

MARK. GOOD NEWS-THE HEALER IS AMONG US!



KEY SCRIPTURE: MARK 1:29-45

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons –Mark 1:32-34a

KEY WORD(S): Servant Jesus

KEY THEME(S): Immediate Action. Selfless Mission. Miracles & Signs

WHO: In the Epistles of Paul, we find Mark, referred to as John Mark, a close friend of Peter whom the early church fathers called, "the disciple and interpreter of Peter," referring to this gospel record.

WHAT: The shortest gospel, this is a fast moving account of the life of Christ. The earliest manuscripts read "*Kata Markon*" / "According to Mark."

WHY: To provide an account of the deeds, sacrifice, and service of Jesus to a mostly Gentile church in Rome.

WHEN: The language and events, along with external writings, lead most scholars to date Mark as AD 50's.

WHERE: Mark was likely written in Rome, to Roman believers, as a ministry partner of Peter, who spent much time in Rome.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Matthew records the "good news" for his Jewish audience, scattered along the Mediterranean, that Jesus is the One who has fulfilled the Scriptures, our New Covenant, the link from Abraham through David. Jesus is our Messiah King.

Mark, on the other hand, records the "good news" for his **mostly-Gentile, Roman audience**, comprising the churches in Rome, that Jesus is the Son of God, able to perform great miracles and signs, a Servant among all

servants, even unto self-sacrifice. Jesus is our One Lord.

The apostolic credentials of Mark come by way of his association with Peter. In fact, most believe that Mark had spent so many days and years under Peter's teaching, following Peter around, listening to Peter preach, that this Gospel writing is more accurately "the memoirs of Peter" (Justin Martyr, AD 150), transcribed by Mark. Of course, Mark was not solely influenced by Peter's eyewitness accounts. We find Mark (also, referred to as John Mark), to be the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 12:25).

The unique audience and objective of the Book of Mark is perhaps more obvious than the other Gospels. In addition to the internal evidence of what Mark writes, and the evidence of the early church leaders, the style of Mark is very clear. Mark is consistent in his translation of Aramaic terms (which were unfamiliar to Gentiles) adding "which means ..." (3:17). He uses Latin expressions instead of Greek (5:9). He reconciles time to the Roman system (13:35) and he explains Jewish customs (7:3-4) more than other authors.

Finally to believers and non-believers in and around the Roman church, Mark gets to the point. He doesn't emphasize those "links" connecting Jesus to the covenants, nor does he spend much time on the words of Jesus. Rather, Mark stresses the *actions* of Jesus. He moves the record along with the use of the word "euthos" (meaning "immediately") some 42 times, demonstrating the power of Jesus in rapid progression.

For example, after Jesus heals a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit, Mark 1:29-45 notes: "And immediately he [Jesus] left." This is followed by several more passages describing acts of healing. In 1:34 we are reminded that the demons know Jesus; their theology is most certainly orthodox (think James 2:19). Jesus leaves Simon and Andrew's house for a week-long—perhaps maybe month-long—preaching and healing tour (which aligns with Matthew 4:23).

And near the end of this wonderfully quick-paced, deeds-centered historical narrative, we have one of the more powerful scenes of the New Testament. A Roman centurion stands facing the cross of Jesus, watching Jesus breathe his final breaths, and he says, "Truly this man was the Son of God." (Mark 15:39).

May we look to Jesus daily, affirming that by his power and his deeds, he is surely the Son of God. Amen.

The power of Mark's record to transform Gentile Roman believers is rooted in the miraculous signs and acts that Jesus performed. He healed with humanity; he was "moved with pity" (1:41) and with purpose, for "that is why I came" (1:38). Surely this was the Son of God!

Application can be difficult with passages about the miracle works of Jesus (most of us are likely not called to go about healing and casting out demons as Jesus did); however, there are two applications that we can consider from this text:

1. In caring for and introducing others to the One who is the great physician (spiritually and physically), we can move in the same urgency that Jesus and his disciples moved.

2. We can "have pity on," or compassion for, those who are hurting. Jesus touched the leper. Wow!

May we be prompted toward deliberate, urgent, Christ-like acts in our own daily walk.

ACCESS message on [MARK](#) from River Oaks Community Church, August 2, 2020

LUKE. GOOD NEWS-THE TEACHER IS AMONG US!



KEY SCRIPTURE: LUKE 6:27-42

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. ... And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. –Luke 6:27, 31

KEY WORD(S): Savior Jesus

KEY THEME(S): Historical Order. Parable Heavy. The Son of Man

WHO: The beloved physician, Luke. Through his writings, the words of the Apostle Paul and early church records, Luke appears to be well-studied, warm, and compassionate.

WHAT: The longest Gospel, it is a detailed account of the life of Christ. The earliest manuscripts read "*Kata Loukon*" / "According to Luke"

WHY: "To write an orderly account ... of the things that had been accomplished ... so that Theophilus [you and I] may have certainty ... of what you've been taught" Luke 1:1-4.

WHEN: Based on scriptural and external evidence, most scholars date Luke to the early AD 60's.

WHERE: Luke is said to have been from Antioch (note emphasis in Acts). Some say his account was written in Greece.

CONSIDER & APPLY: *Kata Matthaion* - According to Matthew, the good news of Jesus, recorded for a Jewish audience, scattered along the Mediterranean, is that Jesus is the One who has fulfilled the Scriptures, our New Covenant, the link from Abraham through David. Jesus is our Messiah King. Just look at what he said and how he taught. Don't you see as I have seen!

Kata Markon - According to Mark, the good news of Jesus, recorded for a mostly Gentile, Roman audience, comprising the churches in Rome, is that Jesus is the Son of God, able to perform great miracles and signs, a Servant among all servants, even unto self-sacrifice for you. Jesus is our One Lord. Just look at what he did. Don't you see as I, through Peter, have seen!

Kata Loukon - According to Luke, the good news of Jesus, recorded for a mostly Gentile, Greek-speaking audience, throughout the churches of the Mediterranean, is that Jesus is the divine Son of Man, able to teach and heal with compassion for all people. Jesus is our Savior. Just look at how he came to save the lost. Don't you see as I, through Paul, have seen!

The apostolic credentials of Luke come by way of a close friendship with the Apostle Paul (much like Mark, with Peter). As author of both Luke and Acts, the "we" Luke often writes of is almost always a reference to himself and Paul. In fact, in both Colossians and Philemon, Paul refers to Luke as the "beloved physician," and in 2 Timothy, during Paul's final imprisonment, he writes, "Only Luke is with me."

Luke's account is the most scholarly and meticulous of the Gospel records. Even his introduction (Luke 1:1-4) is impressive (and I paraphrase):

Many have written of Jesus, many have witnessed Jesus, so it seemed that I, having been exposed to so much of what has been said and written, should write an orderly, more academic account for you Theophilus, so that, (don't miss this), so that you may have certainty of things you have been taught.

WOW! We could spend weeks in these first four verses!

Luke's record emphasizes the humanity of the divine Son of God, stressing that he is also the Son of Man. He does this through the compassion of Jesus, the parable teaching of Jesus (at 24, more parables than any of the Gospels, 18 of which are most unique of the first three Gospels), and the healings of Jesus (perhaps an interest of Dr. Luke).

Ultimately, Luke wants Theophilus, and all who would read this account, to know Jesus came to seek and save the lost— those of all nations and all people. He truly is Savior to the world, and this historical writing is one more way that God has chosen to reveal this truth.

May we grow in the humanity that Christ exhibited on our behalf. May the knowledge of his having lowered himself from fully Creator to also fully creature, humble us. May we recognize our lostness and praise Him for having sought us out. Amen.

Luke 6:27-42 is located within a large section of Jesus' teaching. In Luke 5:29-6:11, Jesus is "teaching" the Pharisees. In Luke 6:12-6:49 he begins teaching his disciples. Notice that Luke makes a point to recognize how Jesus required time in prayer during this transition. After this prayer, Jesus chooses his "twelve" and begins to deliver a sermon that might sound familiar, one we read in Matthew 5:1-7:29, the Sermon on the Plateau (named as such in Luke's version because of Luke 6:17 "level place").

While Luke's account is shorter than Matthew's as a result of what appears to be the omission of uniquely Jewish sections (eg., exposition of the law), he ensures the teachings on compassion, mercy, and humility are included. We find instruction on avoiding hypocrisy and seeking discernment.

Can there be any more convicting passage for believers today? As you consider the words of Jesus, recorded by Luke, say them aloud and respond yourself, or if in a group setting, allow members to name the many situations in our world where following Jesus in this way will run counter to our very own sin-conditioned, self-centered tendencies and desires.

- Love your enemies.
- Do good.
- Do to others what you wish is done to you.
- Be merciful.
- **Judge not.** (In context, this speaks to hypocrisy; do not judge or condemn when you struggle with the same).

If followers of Jesus are identified by obedience to Jesus, the question we should ask is, "Based on Luke 6:27-42, would anyone identify me as a follower of Jesus?" Think about this all week.

ACCESS message on [LUKE](#) from River Oaks Community Church, August 16, 2020

JOHN. GOOD NEWS-THE LIFE-GIVER IS AMONG US!



KEY SCRIPTURE: JOHN 11:1-27

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" –John 11:25-26

KEY WORD(S): Christ Jesus

KEY THEME(S): The Word. "I Am" Way, Truth, & Life. The Son of God.

WHO: While the author's name does not appear, strong and consistent evidence points to "the disciple Jesus loved," the Apostle John. Due to his long life and active role in the early church, this is not disputed.

WHAT: The "Spiritual Gospel," one that is topical and less chronological. The earliest manuscripts read "Kata Ioannen"/"According to John."

WHY: To prove that Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, was born to die for our sin and salvation.

WHEN: The final Gospel written, most scholars date John to AD 80 - 90.

WHERE: Early second-century tradition/writings place John in Ephesus for much of his later life, before and after Patmos. Maybe encouraged by the Ephesian church to document the life of Jesus.

CONSIDER & APPLY: John 11:1-44 is a significant theological passage, centering on a well-known biblical event, the resurrection of Lazarus. The chapter begins with Mary and Martha getting word to Jesus about their sick brother. Jesus delays his response and eventually shows up after Lazarus had been buried for four days. There is a conversation about life, death, and belief, and a proclamation about Jesus, the Christ (our study stops at verse 27).

The miracle of Lazarus is the final, most dramatic, "sign" in John. There had been six earlier signs, but this one

signifies the complete life-giving nature of the Messiah, even over a four-day-old death! There is a sixth (of seven) "I am" statement, "the resurrection and the life" in 11:25, and Martha's acknowledgement of Jesus' deity in v. 27.

We had mentioned in Mark's Gospel how applications on passages of healings are often difficult to grasp. Though we don't deny the Spirit's power to do so, we are likely not called to raise the dead, However, when we consider, especially in John, that these healings are considered "signs" more than "miracles," we can start to look at what they point to and how they transform us. So, what does the act of raising Lazarus point to? It points to the gift of life that is Jesus. Because he was fully man, he could stand in for our sin. But because he was fully God, he had the power to give life, then and now. Our greatest application is to receive that gift of life.... to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, the One who can save us from sin and restore us!

Memorize John 10:10. We have life to the fullest through Jesus! Amen!

ACCESS message on [JOHN](#) from River Oaks Community Church, August 23, 2020

ACTS. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH



KEY SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:14-24, 36-46

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. –Acts 2:41-42

KEY WORD(S): Luke 2

KEY THEME(S): Jesus' Ascension. Pentecost. The Growth of the Early Church.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of Acts can be considered a historical link between the Gospels and the Epistles. Many early Greek manuscripts referred to this book as the *Praxeis*, meaning, "the acts of outstanding people." Though it likely had no title at all, we could think of it as Luke 2, since he wrote it.

Picking right where his first account left off—the scene of the ascension of Jesus (Luke 24:50-53 & Acts 1:1-11)—Luke goes on to record the many **works of the Spirit-filled church**. He includes in his account the scene that includes Jesus' final words: that disciples are to go, teach, and make disciples (Matthew 28). Before he sets down his pen, Luke will have provided the very first (of what will be thousands to come), work of church history ever written.

Interestingly, unlike Luke's Gospel, in Acts we discover that Luke is personally involved in the process of the *One Story*. He not only hears of the numerous accounts of how the Holy Spirit is growing the numbers of believers, (despite the challenges of persecution, imprisonment, and resentment), Luke is seeing this work firsthand as a missionary and confidant of Paul (specifically in Acts chapters 13-28).

In Acts, we are provided with **history-altering events and significant markers in the birth, growth, and trajectory of the church** to which you and I are forever connected. The disciples receive the Spirit's power on the day of Pentecost. Peter preaches the first, and perhaps greatest, sermon ever delivered by anyone with the exception of Jesus. The office of deacon is instituted, the Gospel spreads like fire, and witnesses take shape in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. In Acts we find the missionary travels of Peter, Paul, and others, and

we are introduced to Lydia, Aquilla, Priscilla, Timothy, James, Barnabas, and—one of my personal favorites—Festus!

Ultimately, the Acts of the Apostles provides a background to the Epistles that follow. Acts enables us to better appreciate and understand the writings of Peter, Paul, and John. It is a foundational book to any study of the New Testament and any study of the Lord's church.

May we all be encouraged by these "acts" and may we be emboldened to commit our lives to the spread of the Gospel and the work of discipleship that is evident in this book. Amen.

ACCESS message on [ACTS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, August 30, 2020



THE EPISTLES



The Epistles (including Revelation) comprise the final twenty-two books of God's *One Story*. A majority of these letters were written by the Apostle Paul. However, we also have letters from James, Peter, John, Jude, and one (Hebrews) that is anonymous.

As we read the Epistles, we are reminded that we have been granted access to private conversations and personal correspondence that occurred at a real time, in a real place—inspired “mail” written for us, but not to us. This realization requires us to be especially intentional about the historical, cultural, and scriptural context. These letters cannot mean today what they did not mean to the original audience. If we manipulate the meaning, we are in danger of misusing the message.

Additionally, we observe that many of these letters were written within a larger dialogue between the apostles and various churches and individuals. We are dropped into this dialogue, and must depend on the Holy Spirit's insight and our commitment to disciplined study in order to fully comprehend the intended teaching, which is often one of spiritual encouragement, conviction for ungodly behavior and belief, or expressions of doctrine, worship, and praise.

The Epistles provide a view into the early church and, as with all of Scripture, a view of God's character. They move the *One Story* along by providing a link between Jesus and his people. In the Epistles, we find more detailed instruction for confessing belief in God and receiving his gift of grace as assurance of our salvation and our eternal dwelling place (which the final book of the Bible addresses).

Revelation. The final work of the New Testament is one of apocalyptic literature delivered as a letter “to the seven churches that are in Asia” (Revelation 1:4). While there is much to understand or misunderstand in Revelation, the key principles are fairly straightforward. A suggested approach is:

- Be reserved. There is imagery, symbolism, and historical background to this genre that is neither literal nor precise.
- Know that this epistle is as much poetic prophecy as it is straight prophetic work. Again, this is an early form of literature for which most of us have little exposure.
- Keep it simple. Revelation is a book that shouts, “CHRIST JESUS WINS!”
- Be encouraged. A key motivation to John's letter is to provide hope to those in the midst of struggle and pain.

God is on his throne and he will complete his great plan of redeeming his creation.

The beauty of Revelation is found in the tabernacle, or literally, God's dwelling place. God first dwelt with us in the garden of Eden, then through the tent of meeting among Israel. Later, his presence was established in the temple of worship in Jerusalem, and eventually, God incarnate dwelt with us through the life and ministry of Jesus. For those who believe, the tabernacle of God dwells within them by way of the Holy Spirit. Revelation makes clear that one day the eternal, permanent tabernacle of God will be experienced and enjoyed in a new heaven and new earth.

ROMANS. THE BOTTOM LINE



KEY SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 3:19-28, 5:1-15

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. –Romans 3:23-24

KEY WORD(S): Justified by Faith

KEY THEME(S): Grace. Righteousness. Salvation.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of Romans contains the most systematic presentation of doctrine in the Bible. In preparation for his long-awaited visit to the churches of Rome, the Apostle Paul writes a letter unlike any other. Rather than addressing specific issues, the purpose of Romans was to provide rich teaching on **the power of the gospel to deliver salvation to all people**. The rich doctrinal teaching can be outlined as follows:

- **Chapters 1-8. Doctrine:** God's sovereign plan of salvation (the gospel) from condemnation (sin) to justification (faith) to sanctification (maturity) to glorification (eternal hope).
- **Chapters 9-11. Doctrine:** How Jews and Gentiles both fit into this plan of salvation.
- **Chapters 12-16. Application:** How believers of this plan live righteous and harmonious lives.

Romans is Paul's magnum opus. Martin Luther said of this letter, "It is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."

Key to appreciating the masterpiece of this letter is being mindful that Paul was a stranger to most Roman believers (hence the long introduction). Perhaps because of this unfamiliarity, Paul, through the Spirit's inspired authorship, goes to great lengths to create one of the most formal, forceful, logical, and eloquent works ever penned.

Romans is placed at the beginning of the Pauline letters, not only because it is the longest, but also because it provides the theological foundation on which all other epistles are built. In other words, if Paul had much more to say, he had to ensure the Romans (you and I) at least knew the basics.

May we all know that "all have sinned" (3:23), our "wages are death," but the "gift of eternal life is through Jesus" (6:23), who "died for us" (5:8), and through confession and belief, we "will be saved" (10:9). Amen.

ACCESS message on [ROMANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, September 6, 2020

1 CORINTHIANS. MANY MEMBERS, ONE BODY



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. —1 Corinthians 12:12-13

KEY WORD(S): Correction!

KEY THEME(S): Reproof. Church Issues. Paul's Defense

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Apostle Paul's epistle to the believers in Corinth is a corrective response to problems within the church. As his letter to the Romans set the groundwork for rich theological doctrine taught in other letters, the Apostle Paul's letters to the church in Corinth laid the foundation for his frequent instruction on how the church is to be different.

The Corinthian church was founded on Paul's second missionary trip (Acts 18). It was here that Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquilla, teaching in the synagogue for a year and a half. He would be joined by Silas and Timothy. Though most Jews resisted Paul's message, the leader of the synagogue, Crispus, his family, and many others in Corinth were converted, forming the first church in Corinth.

Critical to understanding these letters, especially 1 Corinthians, is acknowledging that the city of Corinth was a major trade and travel route in southern Greece, recognized for being a place where "anything goes" (What happens in Corinth, stays in Corinth). In fact, the name itself would become synonymous with debauchery and immorality; i.e., "When you go to college, don't go all Corinth on us!"

With this in mind, it's easy to see how new believers, without the oversight of mature teachers and leaders, could easily fall back into worldliness. They confessed and believed in Jesus, but they couldn't divorce themselves from the surrounding culture. These letters are Paul's attempt to instruct them on how changed behavior is a sign of genuine belief.

As we read, we realize there were many issues in this early church—moral, ethical, doctrinal, relational, and more. It was a mess! Interestingly, Paul had already written once on the subject (1 Cor. 5:9); this is a second letter. He will write again (2 Cor. 2:4) before his final letter (what we call 2 Corinthians, but is likely 4 Corinthians). In that final letter, Paul is mostly defending his authority to rebuke them in previous letters; the Corinthians were apparently a bit defensive regarding his correction of them. Definitely a mess!

May we be cautioned by the Corinthian church. May we take seriously the instruction of Paul to be **different from the world**. May we **guard the unity, purity, and honor of His church**. Amen.

Message on 1 CORINTHIANS from River Oaks Community Church is unavailable.

GALATIANS. ABRAHAM'S FAMILY TREE



KEY SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 3:1-14

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. –Galatians 3:7-9

KEY WORD(S): Freedom.

KEY THEME(S): The Cross. Salvation. Sanctification.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Book of Galatians might be considered a manifesto of **liberty over legalism**. It is the only one of Paul's letters specifically addressed to a number of churches: "the churches of Galatia" (1:2). Recognized as the region of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), the name Galatians was given to these mostly-Gentile, Celtic people who had previously migrated from Gaul (modern France).

On the Apostle Paul's first missionary voyage (AD 46-48), he and Barnabas (Acts 13:13-14:23) established these churches. It's thought that he had heard a report about a specific concern out of these churches upon his return to Antioch, but before his participation in the Jerusalem Council (AD 49). His response is this letter.

And what was Paul's concern? It was regarding the Judaizers—Jewish Christians who, though they believed in Jesus, also believed Gentiles must first become like Jews (i.e., by becoming circumcised) before becoming Christians. Certain false-teaching Judaizers were pressuring the believers to trade their freedom in Christ and the justification they had received by grace through faith in for bondage to the law and to works. "O foolish Galatians!" (3:1) (Paul's words, not mine), pretty much sums up the situation.

One way to outline Galatians is to consider the three purposes Paul had in mind for the letter:

- **Chapters 1-2:** To remind them of his apostolic authority, as compared to the false teachers. This builds further credibility for the gospel message.

- **Chapters 3-4:** To give a theological defense of justification by faith as superior to justification by law. He uses the Law itself to make this case.
- **Chapters 5-6:** To prove that he is teaching liberty, not lawlessness. This was a claim of his opponents. Rather, liberty leads to obedience.

It is the Magna Carta of Christian liberty. The gospel of grace is defended, explained, and applied to a people who had once walked in that freedom, but were being lured back into an oppressive theology of legalism.

May we all know **true freedom**—not the overly-selfish and irresponsible kind that is carelessly promoted in modern society, but freedom to love others, freedom to pursue Christlikeness, freedom to live and give through the fruit of the Spirit, freedom that assures us of eternal hope and glory. Amen.

ACCESS message on [GALATIANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, September 20, 2020

EPHESIANS. IN HIM, WE HAVE...



KEY SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 1:3-20

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ. –Ephesians 1:7-9

KEY WORD(S): Blessings.

KEY THEME(S): Redemption. Forgiveness. Inheritance.

CONSIDER & APPLY: As believers, we are blessed beyond measure. The letter of the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus can be described as an encouragement for believers to always be mindful of the unimaginable blessings we have in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the first half of the letter (chapters 1-3) to teach the doctrine of "the riches in Christ" and the second half (chapters 4-6) to focus on the practical working out of this doctrine, i.e., how to live as gratefully and respectfully in light of these blessings.

Paul first visited the Ephesians near the end of his second missionary journey. Ephesus was *the* commercial center of Asia and under a strong influence of pagan worship (the temple of Diana) and magic. It makes sense that Paul would want to return for the sake of the gospel, which he does on his third missionary journey. In fact, he stays in Ephesus for three years while the Lord blesses his ministry with the spread of Christianity. (Interestingly, the church in Ephesus would later become the home church to the Apostle John, and his most well-known student/disciple, Polycarp).

The letter to the Ephesians is one of four "prison epistles": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Each refers to Paul's imprisonment in Rome (the first imprisonment, AD 60-62) and share some similar thought and style.

Unlike Paul's more direct and controversial letter to the Galatians, his letter to the believers in Ephesus contains no rebuke. It was not written to correct any specific errors or concerns, but to suggest to the Ephesians proactive ways they can live in order to prevent future problems. Paul was encouraging the Ephesians to continue in the

process of daily maturity in Christ. This was the best advice for protecting the church and ensuring that Christ was the basis for every practice.

This six-chapter letter reads as follows:

Chapter 1-3: The *position* of the Christian. An emphasis from heaven down. There are zero imperatives or direct commands in these first three chapters. Focus: Believers already possess a full inventory of heavenly riches.

Chapters 3-6: The *practice* of the Christian. An emphasis from the home out. There are 35 imperatives or direct commands in these last three chapters. Focus: Believers should live in accordance with their possessions.

ACCESS message on [EPHESIANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, September 27, 2020

PHILIPPIANS. MOTIVATED BY THE PRIZE



KEY SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. –Philippians 3:13b-14

KEY WORD(S): Life in Christ.

KEY THEME(S): Joy. Contentment. Unity.

CONSIDER & APPLY: An epistle of joy, Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is one of great encouragement and practicality. Thought to be one of four letters written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (along with Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon), the overarching tone is that of gratitude, affection, and gentle exhortation to protect the unity of the church against legalism and false teaching by way of a pursuit to Christlikeness. In short, only in Christ are genuine unity and deep joy possible.

While there appeared to be no major issues among the believers in Philippi, Paul does take the opportunity to caution the church against false teaching and those who would disrupt the unity—a great reminder for all of us, even when things appear to be going well.

As encouragement, Paul provides testimony of his own circumstances and the lessons he has learned regarding contentment and joy (the well-known, "I have learned to be content ..." 4:11-12, followed by the well-known, often misused, source for this contentment, "I can do all (these) things through him who strengthens me" 4:13).

A key theme throughout this letter is that of living in Christ: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" 1:21. Also, through life in Christ we find humility (2:1-11), we find examples of how and why to go about our life (2:12-18), and we find righteousness through faith in Christ (3:1-11).

This four-chapter can be easily read in one sitting—as it was intended—as follows:

Chapter 1: An account of Paul's circumstances and his gratitude toward the Philippians.

Chapter 2: An appeal to have the mind of Christ.

Chapter 3: An appeal to have the knowledge of Christ.

Chapter 4: An appeal to have the peace of Christ.

ACCESS message on [PHILIPPIANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, October 4, 2020

COLOSSIANS. OLD SELF VS. NEW SELF



KEY SCRIPTURE: COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. –Colossians 3:8-10

KEY WORD(S): In Christ Alone.

KEY THEME(S): Preeminence. Sufficiency. Supremacy.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The preeminence of Christ is the focus of Paul's letter to the Colossians. *Preeminence* is surpassing of all others, the superiority. The letter to the believers in Colossae is considered the most **Christ-centered epistle** in the New Testament. The terms preeminence and supremacy are often used to describe Paul's instruction on *who Jesus is* and *what he has accomplished*.

The letter to the Colossians was written in part to refute a heresy that was threatening believers in Colossae (2:8-23). False teachers had introduced a religious system that combined elements of Greek philosophy, Jewish legalism, and Oriental mysticism (what a combination, huh?), and Paul was determined to present **Christ as superior** to all of them.

Paul explains Christ's deity in several ways, including: Lord of Creation (1:16-17), Head of all principality and power (2:10), Author of reconciliation (1:20-22, 2:13-15), Source of power (1:11, 29), Redeemer and Reconciler (2:11-15), the embodiment of full deity (1:15, 19, 2:9), Creator and Sustainer of all life (1:16-17), Head of the church (1:18), resurrected God-Man (1:18, 3:1), all-sufficient Savior (1:28, 2:3, 3:1-4).

At River Oaks, we often refer to Colossians 1:28-29 as a missional passage for the ministry of discipleship. It reads: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." That is our calling, proclaiming Jesus as superior, preeminent, all-sufficient in order that we, and those we have been called to shepherd, grow in Christlikeness daily. That is our *why*, our toil, and struggle. Amen.

This four-chapter letter will read much like Ephesians, with the first half doctrinal teaching and the second half application:

Chapter 1-2: The supremacy of Christ (*doctrine*).

Chapter 3-4: Our submission to Christ (*practice*).

ACCESS message on [COLOSSIANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, October 11, 2020

1 THESSALONIANS. BEWARE THE NIGHT



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11, 23-24

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. –1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

KEY WORD(S): Preparedness

KEY THEME(S): Set Apart. Purity. Day of the Lord.

CONSIDER & APPLY: A key emphasis in the letters to the Thessalonians is to keep hope alive. The origin and early activity of the church in Thessalonica is found in Acts 17. It was on Paul's second missionary journey that he and Silas traveled to this great Macedonian seaport city to spread the gospel. The initial visit was not without controversy and conflict. Even after the missionaries departed, Thessalonian believers would face much of the same persecution faced by Paul and Silas.

With these early letters, written around AD 50-51, Paul sends a much different message than he had in the only prior letter recorded in Scripture—Galatians, circa AD 49. Rather than a direct and fiery condemnation of issues in the church, the letters to the Thessalonians (1&2) are filled mostly with commendations, words of encouragement and praise for the church's faithfulness and love, despite persecution. They are letters of **keeping hope alive with a perspective of the Lord's second coming and our hope of eternal glory.**

All five chapters of **1 Thessalonians** reference the **return of the Lord**, with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 providing one of the most complete and illuminating of all Scripture. There are other doctrinal references, but not in-depth teachings. Paul is genuinely concerned for these believers—for both their physical and spiritual well-being. He is thankful for their steadfastness and eager to join them in their sanctification.

Though just as loving, the **second letter to the Thessalonians** is written with more urgency and concern than the first. **False teaching around the Lord's second coming** has led to much anxiety and, in some circles, much laziness relative to kingdom labor and Christlike testimony. A richer teaching on the Lord's return is central to this letter,

including great reassurance for those who trust in the Lord.

The Day of the Lord. It is the anticipated hope of glory that awaits all believers. The second coming of Jesus motivates our desires to live in Christ now, to endure persecution, and to pursue holiness. May our anticipation be guided by biblical truth and not cultural influences and false teaching. And like the Thessalonian believers, may we grow in our faithfulness and love for one another. Amen.

ACCESS message on [1 THESSALONIANS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, October 18, 2020

1 TIMOTHY. TRAINING IN GODLINESS



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-16

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. –1 Timothy 4:7-8

KEY WORD(S): Godly Leadership.

KEY THEME(S): Training Manual. Servanthood. Endurance.

CONSIDER & APPLY: In Paul's letter to Timothy we find a **godly leadership training manual**. Recalling that Paul had distributed letters to several churches (including the church in Ephesus) during his first imprisonment, it is understood that, following his release, Paul visited these same churches before traveling to Macedonia. In 1 Timothy 1:3-7, we see that as Paul journeyed on from Ephesus, he left Timothy with the believers there to deal with several issues, most notably, false doctrine and lack of leadership.

The first letter to Timothy is best described as a leadership manual. We can think of it as Paul saying: "Timothy, I know I left you with great responsibility and a heavy burden, but here is how you can go about it."

In this manual are instructions for dealing specifically with the Ephesians. Paul would speak to erasing and correcting the false teaching, safeguarding the public worship, and developing stronger leadership among the Ephesian believers. 1 Timothy 6:3-5 is a good example of false teachers and "different doctrines."

This manual also includes instructions for godly leadership in general. It's not simply what is needed to correct and rebuke (i.e., what should not be done), but also what is needed to be a godly leader in all scenarios, as a faithful servant of the Lord. 1 Timothy 4:6-16 is a good example of being a model "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

First Timothy is the first of the personal letters that we come to in the biblical canon, although many believe the letters to Timothy to be some of the final that Paul would write. The aged apostle's wisdom, inspired by the Spirit,

is as relevant today for Christian leaders, laborers, and the church as it was then for Timothy. May we all read these words, embrace these words, and be encouraged to "fight the good fight of faith" 1 Timothy 6:12. Amen.

ACCESS message on [1 TIMOTHY](#) from River Oaks Community Church, October 25, 2020

2 TIMOTHY. IN THE LAST DAYS



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. –1 Timothy 3:16

KEY WORD(S): Enduring Leadership.

KEY THEME(S): Training Manual. Servanthood. Endurance.

CONSIDER & APPLY: A Final Word. It's often been said that when a dying man or woman has something to say, it is wise to listen carefully. When time is running out and advice is handed out, it is generally some of the best of the best. A lifetime of experience comes down to these final thoughts. In the second letter of Paul to his spiritual son, Timothy, this is the scenario. A dying man, imparting some final words of encouragement and wisdom. We would all do well to listen closely.

Paul has been back in prison for some time after writing his first letter to Timothy. While it's unknown how much time has passed (due to the uncertainty of dating 1 Timothy), it is generally agreed that this second letter was written around AD 67, within a year of his death. The cruel emperor Nero was in charge and persecution against Christians was at a high level. Paul tells Timothy that he is going to trial and it doesn't look good. He knows his days are limited, and he has one more letter in him: "Dear Timothy,"

While Paul's situation has changed, Timothy's has not. He is still in Ephesus ministering in the midst of hardship and opposition. Paul writes Timothy a letter of encouragement and endurance, stressing the importance of godly living, of preaching the Word in and out of season, and in preparing for greater rejection of truth in the future.

Underlying all of this is Paul's emphasis on God's Word, the foundation for which Timothy can endure, preach, and withstand opposition. This is some of the best of the best: "Continue in the things you have learned," "for what you have firmly believed," "for what can make you wise for salvation"(Timothy 3:14-17).

This four-chapter letter is especially personal and genuine in tone. As you read, you might notice the letter divided as follows:

Chapters 1-2: Persevere in Present Testings: Remember your responsibilities and character as a faithful minister for the gospel.

Chapters 3-4: Persevere in Future Testings: There is a day of apostasy coming; be ready and continue to preach the Word.

ACCESS message on [2 TIMOTHY](#) from River Oaks Community Church, November 1, 2020

PHILEMON. LIVING IN THE "ONE-ANOTHER"



KEY SCRIPTURE: PHILEMON 1-25

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints. –Philemon 4-5

KEY WORD(S): Forgiven.

KEY THEME(S): Equality. Restoration. Brotherhood.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Considering its length, we might think of this epistle as Paul's postcard to Philemon. The question we explore with the shortest and most personal of all Paul's letters is whether or not **Christian brotherly love can overcome situations of extraordinary tension and difficulty?** Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, indicates that, not only *can* it overcome, it *must*. We are to receive—and forgive—all brothers and sisters of Christ as if we were receiving Paul himself. Regardless of the circumstances, when genuine repentance is offered, we forgive as Christ forgave us.

In short, Philemon had been converted under the teaching of Paul, perhaps during the third missionary journey, through an encounter in Ephesus. Philemon was apparently wealthy enough to host the local church services at his house (v. 2) in Colossae. He was also an owner of a slave, Onesimus.

Paul writes that Onesimus had stolen from Philemon, run away from Colossae, and met up with him in Rome (apparently during Paul's first imprisonment, when these prison epistles were written: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Most importantly, Onesimus had come to Christ and become a believer.

Paul encourages Onesimus to return to Philemon and to seek reconciliation, ensuring that any debt will be repaid. Paul encourages Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother. In all of this, we notice the godly wisdom of Paul in mediating reconciliation. It might remind us of the beatitudes and "blessed are the peacemakers," especially when we read how this peacemaking will bless Paul; he writes that Philemon will "refresh my heart in Christ" (v. 20) by responding in this way.

Finally, it's important to note that while the letter is a personal plea to Philemon, it is actually *addressed to the entire church*. This is a teaching moment for a larger circle of believers. It might also be an accountability moment, or at least an opportunity for the church to pray together over a situation that would impact the witness of the Colossian church and her maturity in Christlikeness.

ACCESS message on [PHILEMON](#) from River Oaks Community Church, November 8, 2020

HEBREWS. SHADOWS OF SACRIFICES COME FULL CIRCLE



KEY SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 10:1-18

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. –Hebrews 10:12-14

KEY WORD(S): A Better Way.

KEY THEME(S): Sacrifice of Christ. Endurance.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Substance is superior to the shadows. While there is mystery around the authorship and date of this elegantly-written and carefully-constructed letter to the Hebrews, there is no mystery around its objective: to **present Christ as superior to all** of the shadows, types, and sacrifices previously instituted by God among the Jewish people. Hebrews is a "sermon of sermons," preaching Christ as having fulfilled all that had come before.

Based on the assumed knowledge of the Old Testament sacrificial system, references to key figures within Judaism, and the many contrasts between Christianity and the Jewish faith, the letter to the Hebrews is believed by most to be exactly that, a letter to Jewish Christians. In fact, the letter references that these were not novices in their faith, but they had endured hardships for having stood up for Christ in "former days" (Hebrews 10:32-34).

However, now they were in danger of drifting back to practices and beliefs of Judaism. They had become "dull of hearing" (5:11) and were at risk of "growing weary and fainthearted" (12:4-12). In other words, with persecution and persuasion, perhaps from family and friends, the old ways (the shadows and sacrifices of Judaism) were becoming more and more attractive.

To this threat the author makes clear that Christ is much greater and more worthy to endure, to run the race, to stand firm. Christ is superior to prophets, even Moses, to angels, to priests, to the old covenant, to any sacrifice, to everyone and everything. Jesus Christ is the Divinely-Human Prophet, Priest, and King. He offers the supreme sacrifice, priesthood, and covenant. Interestingly, the word "better" is used over a dozen times, while "perfect"

and "great/greater" are also prominent.

ACCESS message on [HEBREWS](#) from River Oaks Community Church, November 15, 2020

JAMES. NO WORKS? DEAD FAITH.



KEY SCRIPTURE: JAMES 2:14-26

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. –James 2:14, 26

KEY WORD(S): Genuine Faith

KEY THEME(S): Tests. Character. Perseverance.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The Epistle of James focuses on the evidence of genuine faith. It is a handbook of instruction in practical faith, written to Hebrew Christians outside of Palestine, or as James writes: "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (James 1:1). It is often referred to as a "just the facts," no excuses, rubber-hits-the-road letter on the evidence of genuine faith. In other words, throughout James we learn that "actions speak louder than words" and if we are going to "talk the talk, we had better walk the walk."

The letter of James is both one of the most popular and most direct. It's as if followers of Jesus know they need to be reminded of the "faith without works is dead" truths, even if it stings.

As a general overview, James is writing to reinforce that true faith, genuine saving faith, is an active faith. Further, an active faith is a maturing faith. To James, an undeniable truth of being raised to a new life in Christ is that true faith bears fruit, and bearing fruit bears more consistent fruit.

In our reading of James it's important to realize that James is not referring to a works-based religion. He is not at odds with the Apostle Paul. Rather, James knows what John Calvin expressed years ago when he elegantly reconciled James and Paul: "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith that justifies is not alone." That sort of faith actively works, bears fruit, and matures.

As the most practical book in the New Testament, it is not a surprise that James has been compared to the Wisdom books of Scripture, most notably Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It is similar stylistically, in places, and with

similar language throughout. The concept of "hevel" (Ecclesiastes, "mist, vapor, vanity, empty") is the theme in chapter 4 while human wisdom (Proverbs) is the theme in chapter 3. A more detailed outline includes:

Chapter 1: The Test of Faith

Chapters 2-4: The Characteristics of Faith

Chapter 5: The Triumph of Faith

ACCESS message on [JAMES](#) from River Oaks Community Church, November 22, 2020

1 PETER. OUR HOPE IS ALIVE



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 1:3-12

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. –1 Peter 1:3-4

KEY WORD(S): Suffering.

KEY THEME(S): Salvation. Submission. Hope.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The First Letter of Peter sheds some light on how we can reconcile salvation, submission, and suffering. When we face trials and persecution of various kinds, we have two choices (according to Peter): we can either grow through these difficulties or we can grumble. In Peter's first letter to Jewish believers throughout Asia Minor, he reminds them of their roots and the foundation of their faith. He then encourages them to grow in Christ despite the hardships that exist and that are certain to come.

The Apostle Peter writes these mostly Hebrew Christians from Rome (i.e., "Babylon," 5:13). Because of his mention of Mark, and since we know Mark was in Rome to visit Paul (Colossians 4:10), most see the letter as written around AD 63. This place/date makes perfect sense, as this would have been just a year, maybe months, before the outbreak of great persecution under Nero in AD 64. In other words, Peter saw the writing on the wall and felt the inspired call to deliver this message.

The encouragement from Peter to **endure hardships, trials, and persecutions** was not simply that believers are to passively "hang on." It was far from this. Peter systematically builds the case that to endure without wavering was to recall the gift of our salvation (1:1-2:12). Because of that gift, believers are not only to submit to authorities and relationships in Christlike humility (2:13-3:12), but are also to anticipate and prepare to suffer for righteousness sake, committed to Christ in doing good (3:13-5:14).

If the letters to Timothy from the Apostle Paul are to be considered something of a training manual in godly leadership, then the first epistle of Peter to believers would be a training manual in **godly suffering**. Suffering

does not move us to self-pity. Quite the opposite. In times of persecution (particularly for our faith), we *rejoice* in that we can share in the suffering of Christ (4:12-14), and we *endure* through the strength of our salvation and the great hope that is our eternal inheritance. How great a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ and to suffer in great Christlikeness.

ACCESS message on [1 PETER](#) from River Oaks Community Church, November 29, 2020

2 PETER. THE QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE LIFE



KEY SCRIPTURE: 2 PETER 1:1-11

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—2 Peter 1:5-8

KEY WORD(S): False Teaching.

KEY THEME(S): Heresy. Mockery. Caution.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Peter's main message: Beloved, be diligent ... and beware. While Peter's first letter to the mostly-Hebrew believers of Asia Minor dealt with challenges from outside of the church (persecution), the second letter addresses challenges from within the church (**false teachers**). Difficulties brought on by unbelievers can be painful for Christians, but divisiveness and defection among believers are devastating. This is a similar message we saw with many of Paul's letters: Peter now addresses it.

Based on the generally-agreed timing of this second letter, it is likely that Peter is writing from prison in Rome just after the outbreak of Nero's wave of persecution began, around AD 64. It is also likely that this would be his final letter, as a result of an imminent martyrdom on the horizon (AD 65/66). Much like 2 Timothy would be Paul's final instruction and encouragement, so would be Second Peter for Peter. Meaning, when a dying man speaks (or writes), we would do well to listen very carefully.

One of the key words in this letter is "**knowledge**." Peter is adamant that to defend the church against heresy and the "greed and false words" (2:3) of these teachers who "promise freedom, even as they are captive to corruption," (2:19), *a believer must know certain things*.

First, a believer must know their **salvation** (2 Peter 1:3-11). Peter says, "Don't forget you were cleansed from your former sins" and "called to his own glory and excellence." To daily affirm our salvation is necessary in identifying falsehood.

Next, a believer must know the **Scripture** (2 Peter 1:12-21). Here we are told that the Word is a "lamp shining in a dark place" to which we would "do well to pay attention." Peter also provides insight into the Holy Spirit's inspiration in Scripture (2:21).

Thirdly, a believer must know the **adversaries** (2 Peter 2:1-22). By solidly standing on our salvation and knowing Scripture, believers can better identify and beware of the characteristics of those who deceive God's people and distort God's Word.

Finally, a believer must know the **future** (2 Peter 3:1-18). The Day of the Lord is coming, so "be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (3:14). Wow, that's all that needs to be said on that.

ACCESS message on [2 PETER](#) from River Oaks Community Church, December 6, 2020

1 JOHN. PERFECT LOVE



KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4:7-21

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. –1 John 4:19-21

KEY WORD(S): Fellowship.

KEY THEME(S): In the Light. In Works. One Another.

CONSIDER & APPLY: The emphasis of First John is the fellowship of believers. To fully appreciate both the depth and simplicity of First John, some contextual background is helpful. Though the Gospel of John reveals an extraordinary sense of spiritual insight into this "beloved disciple of Jesus" (John 20:2), there is much more to the life and ministry of John that occurs over the next sixty years of life after his time with Jesus.

The Apostle John was known to have been one of the pillars of the "Jerusalem church" (Galatians 2:9) throughout the time of Paul's missionary journeys and letters (AD 50 - AD 65). However, at some point prior to Emperor Domitian's reign of persecution (AD 94-96), John had relocated to Ephesus and become a leader of many of the churches in this region (Think about Revelation and the seven churches; it's likely these were under his influence).

John was the oldest living of the apostles, and by the time he authors his first of three letters, he is much the father/grandfather-figure of many believers. John's wisdom, experience, and spiritual maturity are all well-documented by those who were discipled by him, such as Polycarp, Ignatius, and Papias.

From this context, John writes this letter to believers within his churches what it means to be in fellowship with God—genuine **fellowship with God** that results in genuine **fellowship with one another**. John has discovered that living in the simple truth that God is light, love, and life, he has enjoyed a deep fellowship with God that he desperately wants others to experience. John declares in his greeting his resolve for them: "That you might have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son" (1:3).

In this deep and simple teaching, John describes the *basis* of fellowship (1:1 - 2:27) and the *behavior* of fellowship (2:28 - 5:21). Within these two major themes, John will touch on the conditions, cautions, characteristics, and consequences of genuine fellowship.

"And now, little children, abide in Him" (2:28). This is John's encouragement for a daily walk with Jesus.

ACCESS message on 1 [JOHN](#) from River Oaks Community Church, December 13, 2020

JUDE. MERCY TO ALL-THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT



KEY SCRIPTURE: JUDE 1-2,17-25

And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. –Jude 22-23

KEY WORD(S): Fight for the Faith.

KEY THEME(S): False Teaching. On Guard. Doxology.

CONSIDER & APPLY: Jude focuses on the value of our being on guard and contending for the faith. Paraphrasing: "*To my brothers and sisters in Christ. I was determined to write you a letter about one of the most important subjects we can discuss: the common blessings we share through our salvation. However, there is something more urgent. I plead with you to fight for the integrity of the gospel, defend your faith, and the truth you have learned. Why? Because deceptive individuals have made their way into your membership and are profaning the gift of grace that God has given us through Jesus, our Lord!*" (Jude 1-4)

And that is the greeting from Jude, the brother of Jesus and James, in this letter to a group of believers who had been infiltrated, right under their noses, by heretical teachers. While only 25 verses, this brief letter is intensely concerned with the threat of false teaching and the believers' response to that threat.

Interestingly, before the resurrection, Jude does not believe that his brother Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. (John 7:1-9). However, he is with the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Have you ever noticed how those who would deny Christ (Jude, James, Paul, or even Peter in a low moment) become especially passionate when it comes to defending the good news regarding Christ, his work on the cross, and the legitimacy of God's grace.

Combining the theme of Second Peter with the directness of James, Jude is direct and powerful, despite its brevity. In true *One Story* form, Jude uses Old Testament examples of apostates and their doom (Cain, Balaam, Korah). He affirms that God will judge those who distort the truth in heresy, and then he provides examples of how they distort the truth by their practices (Jude 5-16).

After exposing false teachers, Jude instructs believers in how they can be on guard: -Remember, false teachers are coming (they will always be around), protect yourself by becoming mature in your faith, and show mercy and compassion on those who are victimized (Jude 17-23).

ACCESS message on [JUDE](#) from River Oaks Community Church, December 20, 2020

REVELATION. BACK TO THE BEGINNING!



KEY SCRIPTURE: REVELATION 21:1-4,22:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. –Revelation 21:1

KEY WORD(S): Victory!

KEY THEME(S): Second Coming. Judgment. Worship.

CONSIDER & APPLY: In Revelation, the victory of Jesus is unveiled. As we come to a close of this *One Story*, through the Bible in a year, sermon series, and study, we do so by arriving full circle to a place of perfection, holiness, and the presence of God. As Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of consummation. The unified whole of God's redemptive history as revealed in Scripture is now complete. From an original garden to a new garden, the revelation of Jesus, shared with the Apostle John, is our window into this place of eternal and restored hope and glory.

Revelation, technically a "letter" to the seven churches in Asia, 1:4), is best categorized as a writing of apocalyptic genre. It is a work of literature intending to "unveil" or "disclose" something that had previously been hidden. The apocalyptic styling introduces various signs and symbols, creatures and events, as a means of uncovering a very literal meaning.

While there are many difficult challenges with interpreting Revelation, the ultimate aim of the inspired work is to emphasize three distinct visions and one distinct message. John writes of:

The Distinct Visions:

1) **The things that he has seen (1:1-20):** The introductory passage introduces the initial vision of the glorified Christ and instructions to write.

2) **The things that are (2:1-3:22):** The condition of the seven churches of Asia.

3) **The things that will take place (4:1-22:21):** The bulk of the vision provides insight into God's judgment, the Second Coming, and the eternal state of a new heaven and new earth.

The Distinct Message:

Jesus is victorious and worthy of all worship. This is an especially hopeful message during a time of heavy persecution and struggle for Christians under Emperor Domitian's reign, AD 94-96.

ACCESS message on [REVELATION](#) from River Oaks Community Church, December 27, 2020

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