

GOD WITH US

A Catholic Bible Study for Inmates

PART ONE

GOD WITH US

A Catholic Bible Study for Inmates

PART ONE Introduction to the Bible The Pentateuch The Historical Books

God Is With Me

When my day is lonely and depressing,
God is with me.

When my heart aches because I miss my
family, friends and loved ones,
God is with me.

When I overcome a hardship or problem,
God is with me.

When I receive that special letter or visit,
God is with me.

When my day is filled with hope and joy,
God is with me.

Contributed by an Inmate
of a Maximum Security Prison

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With Ecclesiastical Permission 2005

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GOD WITH US

Bible Study Instructions

Part One

Part One of the Bible Study contains:

- 1) Introduction to the Bible
- 2) Part One: A-The Pentateuch
- 3) Part One: B-The Historical Books

1) Read “Introduction to the Bible”

Do the “Review Test-Introduction to the Bible”

(All “Review Tests” are at the back of the Bible study book)

2) Read “Part One: A-The Pentateuch”

Follow the directions for each book of the Bible

Answer the “Study Page” after each book of the Bible

Do the “Review Test” after you have studied “Part One: A-The Pentateuch”

3) Read “Part One: B-The Historical Books”

Follow the directions for each book of the Bible

Answer the “Study Page” after each book of the Bible

Do the “Review Test” after you have studied “Part One: B-The Historical Books”

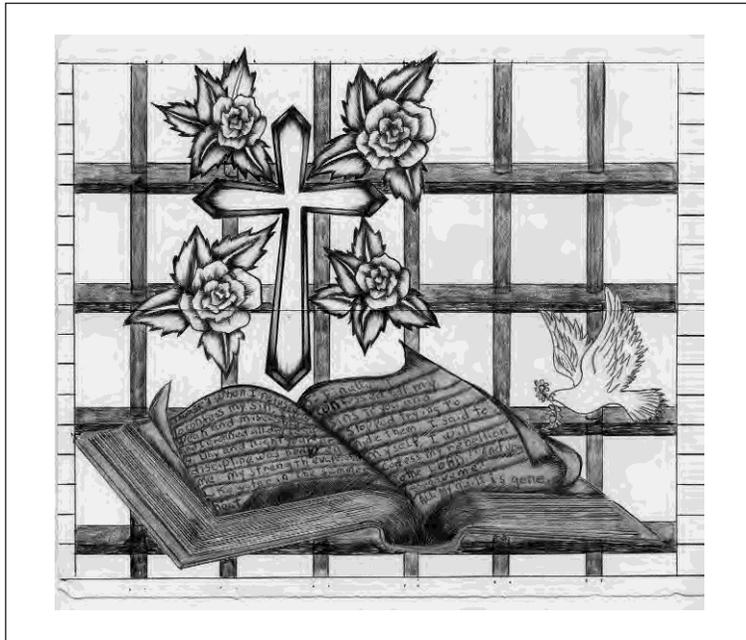
End of Part One:

- Tear out only the 3 pages called “Review Tests” at the back of the Bible study book after you have completed them
- Review and correct these pages with your study coordinator.
- Receive a certificate of completion for the section of the Bible study you have completed.

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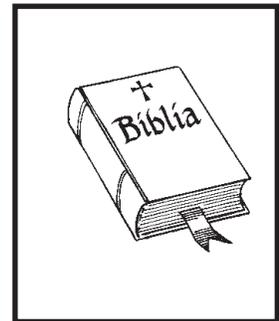
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INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE



How the Bible Came About

When we hold the Bible in our hands we hold a book that is not like any other book. It was not written all at once, but over hundreds of years. It was not written by one person, but by many human authors with God as their ultimate source. Although it looks like one book it is really 73 books written on separate scrolls. Over time they were put together to make the Bible as we know it. The word *Bible* comes from the Latin word *biblia* which means *books*. Included in these 73 books are *history, legends, drama, poetry, songs, proverbs, myths, prophecy, letters, and laws*.



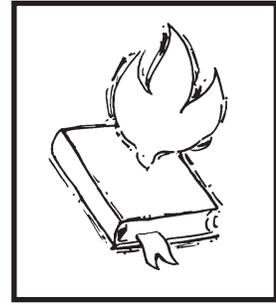
At first, the books of the Bible were not written in the same language, but in several: *Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek*. Eventually the books that were written in Hebrew and Aramaic were translated into Greek. Later, the entire Bible was also translated into *Latin*. Translating the books of the Bible was not an easy task. For example, the person who translated the book of *Sirach* from Hebrew into Greek explained: “*Words spoken originally in Hebrew are not as effective when they are translated into another language. That is true not only of this book but of the law itself, the prophets, and the rest of the books, which differ no little when they are read in the original*” (*Sirach, Foreward*). An example of this is found in John’s gospel where the English reads:

*“The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).*

In Hebrew and Greek the meaning of “*made his dwelling*” is closer to “*pitched his tent*.” These words sound familiar to people of the Bible who lived in tents. This simply shows that God used ordinary human ways to reveal and record his loving plan to save us, and remind us that *God is with us*.

Inspiration

The Bible is the only book in the history of the world that is *inspired by God*. God speaks to us through the human authors of the Bible. Their writings contain God's *word*, his message to people of every time and place. The Bible reveals who God is and how much God loves us. We read how God is our creator, our redeemer, and our sanctifier. God values us as his creatures and has faith in us. When we fail God forgives us, and gives us a new chance at a better life. As the Bible says, "*All scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16).



The Spoken Word

At first, the stories of the Bible were not written but passed on from one generation to the next by word of mouth. This is called *oral tradition*. In the story of the birth of John the Baptist the Bible itself describes how oral tradition works: "*Fear descended on all in the neighborhood...these happenings began to be recounted to the last detail. All who heard stored these things up in their hearts saying, 'Was not the hand of the Lord upon him?'*" (Luke 1:67-68). The people in those days had the habit of watching carefully what happened in their lives, looking for signs that God was acting on their behalf to guide and bless them. We can be like the ancient Israelites by taking a look at our own lives to see times when God helped us. If we think that God did not do this for us, maybe we can take a second look. Maybe we have missed seeing what God did for us because we were not paying attention, forgot about it, or were not wise enough at the time to know when it happened. Most likely, God helped us through another human being.

The Written Word

It also took a long time to write all the books of the Bible and to decide which books should be included in the Bible. This process took place over centuries both before and after Christ. There was some agreement in the early church over which books were inspired by God, but the list was not final until almost 400 A.D. During these early days of the church scripture passages, usually from the Old Testament, were read whenever Christians gathered to pray and celebrate the Eucharist. By the first century most of the books were translated into Greek which was a common language in the Roman empire. There also were some Latin versions in use. In 383 A.D. Pope Damasus asked St. Jerome to translate the Bible into Latin. The Pope chose him because of his love and respect for Bible study, and his knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. In fact, he had dedicated his whole life to studying the Bible. In a letter to a friend St. Jerome wrote: "*Read and learn as much as you can. Let sleep find you holding your Bible, and when your head nods let it be resting on the sacred page*" (Epistle 22,17,29). Translating the Bible was a huge task that took St. Jerome 15 years to complete. He translated some parts of the Bible from Hebrew, others from Aramaic and Greek. When it was finished it became known as the Vulgate version. In time it became the official translation of the church. St. Jerome said that those who read the Bible are able "*to look into the mind of the Creator*" (Epistle 30,13). All Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic, owe a great debt to St. Jerome for the work he did.



The Old Testament

Christians have given the name *Old Testament* to the first 46 books of the Bible. These books are

inspired by God, describe God's love for his people, and his plan of salvation. The Old Testament is a collection of books written by many authors over a period of hundreds of years. Some parts came about as early as 1200 B.C. Others were not added until much later. Many of the oldest parts of the Bible began as stories that were handed by word of mouth down from one generation to the next (oral tradition). In time they were collected and written down to preserve them.

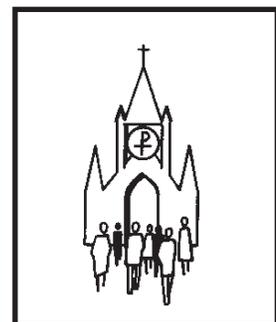
The books of the Old Testament are sacred for both Christians and Jews because they teach us about God. They teach us that God created the world, that God loves us, wants to be with us, and help us. Therefore God has made a covenant with us. If we obey and worship God, he will bless us. The many stories of the Old Testament give us examples of people who struggled with their faith, failed, and repented. We are strengthened by the timeless words of the prophets, the advice of the wisdom books, and uplifted by the poems and songs about God and his love for his people. Best of all, we learn that if we break God's laws but repent, we may have to suffer the consequences but God is willing to forgive us. Therefore, above all the Old Testament is a message of hope. Christians see in these books of the Jewish people the wonderful promise of Christ, the savior of the world.

Catholic and Protestant Versions

For centuries bibles were copied by hand, usually by monks. In 1452 A.D. a German person named Johann Gutenberg copied the Bible on a printing press for the first time. In the years that followed, there were more translations and printings of the Bible, especially when Protestants like Martin Luther broke away from the Catholic church. At that time several of the books were left out by non-Catholic translators because they did not think they belonged in the Bible. These 7 books (called *deuterocanonical*) are as follows: *Baruch*, *Judith*, *Tobit*, *1 Maccabees*, *2 Maccabees*, *Sirach*, and *Wisdom*. Some parts of Daniel and Esther were also left out. Luther did not include the books of *Hebrews*, *James*, *Jude*, and *Revelations*, in his version of the Bible, but later Protestants put them back. The King James Bible, an English version still favored by many non-Catholics today, was not printed until 1611, under the direction of the James I, who was the king of England. In our day, in a spirit of unity, Catholic and non-Catholic experts have worked together on new English versions of the Bible. However, most non-Catholic versions still do not include some of the Old Testament books which remain in the Catholic Bible. The Catholic Bible is the oldest version. It is the one all Christians used for more than 1,000 years after Christ.

The Bible and Tradition:

Non-Catholics often say: "*If it's not in the Bible we don't believe it.*" Catholics openly admit that not everything they believe is clearly expressed in the Bible. This may seem strange at first, but it is important to remember that the first Christians did not have the Bible as we have it today. The gospels were not written down until several years after Jesus died and rose from the dead. John's gospel was one of the last books of the New Testament to be written. The complete list of 73 books was not finally accepted until almost 400 years after Christ. So the church came first, before the Bible. And the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit decided which books would be included in the Bible. What Jesus taught the apostles was handed on to the early Christians (the church) through both preaching and writing. Preaching is called *tradition* and writing is called *scripture* (or the *Bible*).



The Catholic church believes that the truth that God reveals is like one river that comes from several streams: 1) ancient formulas of belief called *creeds*, 2) gatherings of the church called *councils*, and 3) the writings of inspired authors called the *Bible*. All of these streams come together to create what is called the *deposit of faith*. This deposit of faith is the rich source of knowledge and instruction that God

provides for our salvation. Over the centuries as the church grows in understanding of this deposit, it explains it for each generation. This is the teaching authority of the church, which guides its members with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding God’s truth is like going from a dark room into a bright light. It takes time for our eyes to adjust and see what is there. In the same way it takes time for our minds to understand totally what God has revealed. Jesus understood this. That is why he promised the Holy Spirit to always be with his followers: *“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth”* (John 16:12-13).

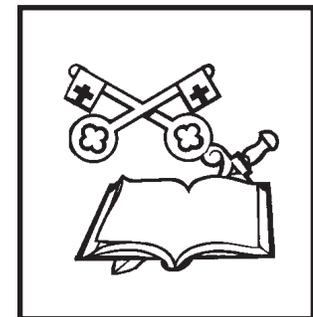
How Catholics Read and Interpret the Bible:

The Catholic church urges every member to read and pray with the Bible, to approach the Word of God with reverence and faith, and to make the Bible an important part of our daily journey through life. We need the Holy Spirit’s help because to do this we need an open mind and heart. Reading the Bible does not mean reading one page after another until we have read it cover to cover. The Bible is different than any other book. When we open the Bible we bring our selves and whatever is happening in our lives to God. If we have grief and pain, or feel angry or hopeless we bring these to God. The words we read encourage us, enlighten us, and heal us. This is why we ask the Holy Spirit for help—so that we can face the truth about ourselves. Too often (like some people in the Bible) we try to hide from God. However, it does no good to hide from God if we want our lives to be healed. As *Psalm 139:7* says: *“Where can I go from your spirit? from your presence where can I flee?”* Reading the Bible brings us into the light where we stand honestly before God. We will be changed as its words touch us in ways we never thought possible.



As Catholics we have some special attitudes and beliefs as we open our lives to the Bible. These Catholic beliefs come from the church’s memory of Jesus and his deep roots in the faith of Israel. We also live with a spirit of gratitude for the sacraments in which the faith community meets God’s mercy and love. The following are three ways in which the Catholic approach to the Bible is unique.

First of all, as Catholics we read any sentence or phrase of God’s Word, and try to be aware of the larger picture. In other words, it is important to keep in mind the different kinds of literature mentioned earlier. Keeping in mind whether a book is poetry, history, or a tale with a moral purpose helps us interpret the Bible more correctly. Each book has a *context - the place, time, language, and customs of the people* for whom each book was written. This helps us take certain phrases of the Bible seriously but not always literally. For example, when *Luke 14:26* tells the disciple to *“turn his back on his father and mother”* this is an ancient Jewish way of saying that following Jesus is more important than family relationships. For that reason Catholics do not always give a *literal* meaning to what is written. *Literal* interpretation can get the reader into problems. As another example, each of the four gospels describes the death of Jesus, but they do not give the same details. In *Luke* one of the criminals repents and is forgiven by Jesus. In *John* this is not mentioned. Common sense tells us that the criminal repented even though *John* does not tell us it happened. Another example is in *Genesis*, where there are two stories of creation. If we read them literally, we might think that the world was created twice. The fact is, the same reality is told twice, each time for a different purpose. Furthermore, Catholics read and understand the Old Testament in two ways—first in the light of the people of Israel, and then in the light of Jesus and his message. Jesus said, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill”* (Matthew 5:17). What Jesus teaches builds on or grows out of the old law, like a flower that grows from a plant. It comes from the plant but is very different from it. If something in an Old



Testament passage seems harsh or cruel, like the punishment of stoning for adultery, we must keep in mind both the customs of an earlier time and the example of Jesus. When a woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus he saved her from stoning and then told her: “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more” (John 8:11). At times Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance” (Matthew 5:38-39). He was using the old law as a stepping stone to a new and deeper understanding of following God.

Secondly, as Catholics we try to understand the history of things described in the Bible. It shows the larger pattern of God’s work in the world. Over the centuries the Holy Spirit guides human beings to a deeper understanding of a certain truth – like teaching a baby to walk step by step. Sometimes the same idea is repeated and developed from one book to another. For example, *covenant* has its own history throughout the Bible. The covenant with Noah (*Genesis* 9) was further developed with Moses on Mount Sinai (*Exodus* 24). Eventually a covenant in Christ’s blood was made at the Last Supper (*Mark* 14:24).

Finally, as Catholics we do not read the Bible as individuals only. We also are aware that we read it as members of the church—the community of believers. In the Bible we read how God heard the cries of the *people* and sent Moses to help them: “I know well what they are suffering” God tells Moses in *Exodus* 3:7. God continues to speak to us as a community. Whether we are alone or gather as God’s people for the *Eucharist*, we pray the Lord’s prayer as “Our Father.” During Mass we listen to and are nourished by God’s Word in the daily or weekly scripture readings. Only after that do we receive Christ as our personal Savior when we receive Communion. For those who pray the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the church’s official daily prayer, the Word of God, especially the *Psalms*, marks and enriches every part of the day.

How to Find a Bible Passage:

The Bible was not always divided into chapters and verses as it is today. In 1226, the Catholic Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, divided the text into chapters. Only in 1528-51 were the chapters divided into verses. Doing this made the Bible easier to read. Before that one line followed another and it was difficult to find parts or passages of the Bible. One of the first things to learn about the Bible is how to look up a certain passage. To do this, it is important to know how it is arranged.

The Bible is divided into *books*.

Each book is divided into *chapters*.

Each chapter is divided into smaller parts called *verses*.

Chapters and verses are given *numbers* to make them easy to find.

Here is an example of a Bible reference: *Mark* 5:21-22.

The *book* is Mark, the *chapter* is 5, and the *verses* are 21 and 22.

When someone copies a passage from the Bible it is written like this: “When Jesus had crossed again [in the boat] to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him” (*Mark* 5:21). The book, chapter and verse follow the passage to show where it came from in the Bible.

Cross References:

Sometimes the author of one book of the Bible uses a direct quote from another book of the Bible. Or the author says something that is a lot like another author’s words. When this happens, the Bible has what is called a *cross reference*. A cross reference is shown in one of three ways:

- 1) listed by itself in a footnote
- 2) placed in 1 of 2 columns with other references
- 3) listed without any comment at the bottom of the page

This is what the first cross reference looks like at the beginning of the gospel of *Matthew* which begins with the words: “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*” The first numbers on the left refer to chapter 1, verse 1:

1:1	Gn 5:1	(See <i>Genesis</i> Chapter 5 verse 1)
	1 Chr 17:11	(See <i>1 Chronicles</i> , Chapter 17 verse 11)
	Gn 22:18	(See <i>Genesis</i> , Chapter 22 verse 18)

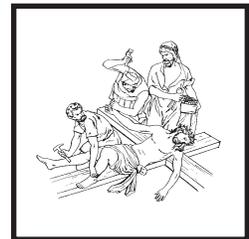
Footnotes:

When the Bible was translated into English the ancient Greek and Hebrew versions were used. These versions are very old and were copied by hand. As a result, the different versions are not always the same. Some words or sentences might be different. When this happens, the people who translate must decide which version to use. After they have decided, they also list the other versions in what is called a *footnote*. It is called this because it is placed at the bottom or foot of the page. The translators also use footnotes to show a word or phrase in the original language, or when the original language is not clear. They also use footnotes to add interesting details on the history or background of what is happening in the story.

Important Words in the Bible:

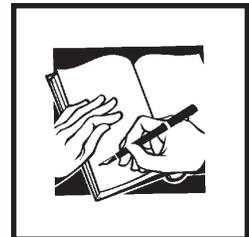
Blood:

In the mind of the ancient Israelites, blood meant life. This is not hard to understand, since any creature that has lost its blood dies. In fact the Old Testament states clearly why the Israelites used blood in their worship of God: “*Since the life of a living body is in its blood, I have made you put it on the altar so that atonement may thereby be made for your own lives, because it is the blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement*” (*Leviticus 17:11*). In the New Testament, the Bible tells us we are saved because Jesus was willing to shed his blood for us: “*This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins*” (*Matthew 26:28*). Jesus fulfilled that promise by shedding his blood and giving up his life.



Covenant:

The word *covenant* comes from a Greek word. In the Bible a covenant is a special relationship. It also is a *treaty or peace agreement* between God and his people. Like any treaty there are benefits to agreeing to live in peace with one another. In the sacred treaty with God we promise to remain faithful and obedient to God who forgives our sins: “*You shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your impurities...*” (*Ezekiel 36:28-29*). On the night before he died, Jesus shared with his apostles and all of us a covenant in his body and blood. The Eucharist fulfills the agreement God had with the chosen people many centuries before when He spoke to Abraham in *Genesis 12:3*:



*“All the communities of the earth
shall find blessing in you.”*

The Covenant also means *testament*, a word that is used to describe the entire Bible as the Old and New Testaments. It is a record of God's treaty with us. It is the valuable message God has left to us as his children. In our day we use the word testament in a legal way to speak about someone's *last will and testament*. This refers to the money or property that the deceased left behind for relatives or friends. In this sense, although God is not dead but living, the Bible is God's word which has been left for us to share and use for our benefit. It is a great spiritual treasure, worth more than any property or money.

Day of the Lord:

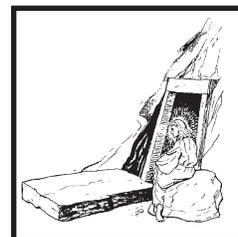
The words "*day of the Lord*" were used by prophets and writers in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. These special words were first used in *Amos 5:18*: "*What will this day of the LORD mean for you?*" Amos and the other prophets described it in different ways, but mostly as *a time in the future* when God would show his power and rescue those who were faithful to him and his covenant. The prophets also described it as a time when God would punish his people in order to correct them, or, show the wicked how powerless they were by allowing all kinds of disasters to happen: invasions by enemies (*Isaiah 10:5-12*) or locusts (*Joel 1:4-7*), earthquakes (*Joel 2:10*), darkness (*Amos 8:9*), and famine (*Ezekiel 5:13-16*). The time of punishment was followed by a time of reward and blessing for those who had been good, or, a time of forgiveness and restored blessings for those who had learned their lesson. More and more, the prophets spoke about a leader or messiah who would rule over this time of peace and blessing. He would be chosen from the line of David (*Isaiah 11:1-9* and *Jeremiah 23:5-6*).



Some passages in the Bible described the "*day of the Lord*" as a time when the living and the dead would be judged and given an eternal reward or punishment (*Daniel 12:1-3*), (*Isaiah 26:19*). The day of the Lord was mentioned in the gospels also (*Matthew 10:15* and *12:36*), *Mark 13:24-27*, *Luke 21:34-35*). *Matthew 24:29-31* described the "*coming of the Son of man*" and *Matthew 25:31-46* explained that people would be judged on how they treated others as if they were Christ himself. In his letters, Paul also connected the day of the Lord with the return of Christ at the end of time (*1 Corinthians 1:8*, and *1 Thessalonians 5:2*). The book of *Revelation* (16:14) described the day of the Lord in poetry and symbolism as a time when God would defeat the forces of evil for the last time. It was a day of victory for God and his people when a new heaven and earth would be created and there would be peace forever. *Revelation 22:20* ends with the church longing for the day when Jesus would return: "*Come, Lord Jesus!*"

Eternal Life:

Genesis calls God "*God the Eternal*" (*Genesis 21:33*). This means that God has no beginning and no end. God is the only one who was living before anything was created. Our lives are not our own making. They begin as a gift from God. *Psalms 119:89* says: "*Your word, LORD, stands forever.*" This means that God can be trusted. It also means that as God's living message, Jesus lives forever to remind all people in every time and place about God's love. As followers of Jesus we believe that we are made with a body and soul, and that even though our bodies die, our souls keep on living forever: "...*whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (*John 11:25-26*). Eternal life does not have to wait until we are dead, however. While we are on earth we can begin this never ending life by accepting the message of Jesus and letting it change our lives: "*Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ*" (*John 17:3*). Notice that Jesus says "*this is eternal life.*" *1 John 5:12* tells us: "*Whoever possesses the Son has life.*" For the Christian then, eternal life starts now with baptism and keeps growing until we reach heaven. It begins as soon as we accept and live by what Jesus has told us about God: "*God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him*" (*1 John 4: 16*).



Yet this love of God can't be separated from love for others: "whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). This life of love frees us from the slavery of sin. It continues to grow in us until our bodies die and we are with God and all who have died and live with God forever.

Fear of the Lord:

The word *fear* appears very often in the Bible. In the Old Testament we read how Moses met God in the burning bush. It was an awesome moment as God told him: "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Later in the desert, where Moses was teaching the Israelites to become the chosen people of God, he told them: "The LORD, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve" (Deuteronomy 6:13). In the New Testament, Jesus impressed people with his miracles. After Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead, we read that "Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, 'A great prophet has arisen in our midst,' and 'God has visited his people'" (Luke 7:16). This kind of holy fear or awe was brought on a power so great that it was beyond anything or anyone human. The only thing people could do was show reverence. We must remember to balance this fear or awe with the wonderful love for God who is kind and forgives us: "Fear not, I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10) and in another passage: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 43:1).



Grace:

Paul the apostle may be called the master of grace because he mentions this word more than any other person in the Bible. His letters are a good place to find out what this word means. The word *grace* comes from the Latin *gratia* which means a special kind of gift that makes us *attractive*. This is how Paul uses it in this passage from *Ephesians 2:8*: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from you; it is the gift of God." Paul says we have been saved, but from what? The answer is: we have been saved from sin – our own sin and the sins of the entire human race since the beginning of time. In order to understand grace we must take a step back and understand sin also. Grace is God's answer to human sin, so what is sin? Sin is like a disease which all human beings share.



Genesis tells the story of how the first man and woman chose their own way over God's. Because of sin, the human race got off to a bad start. It was like Dominoes - the first piece falls against the next one until a chain reaction brings the whole line of dominoes down. God did not create people to be sinners. However, God did give us a *will* so that we could be *free to love*. Without free will there could be no love. Free will has a built-in risk, however. It also allows us to choose what is bad and all that goes with it. So we sin by our own *choice*. Sin is both *private* and *social*. We sin on our own as individuals. We also share sin with others by giving in to group pressure, by being part of a group that does wrong. People sin against God by choosing their own way over God's wisdom and love. We do this by injuring or killing others, ruining their reputation, stealing what others have, getting drunk and causing harm, misusing sex, refusing to help those in need, and lying and cheating. We end up hating ourselves for what we have become. We hate others for what they have done to us or those we love. The list of crimes, cruelty, and injustices could go on and on. At its worst a life of sin kills our souls as well as the bodies: "the wages of sin is death" (*Romans 6:23*).

In spite of our sins there is hope for a better life. Paul writes: "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (*Romans 5:20*). God offers a way out of our prison of hate and lies through the door of love and truth. God gave us a gift (or *grace*) which we did not deserve. It was his only son conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus became one of us and by obeying his Father's will freed

us from our slavery to sin. Again Paul writes: *“Just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:19).

No matter what we have done to ourselves or others, we can be forgiven by God if we truly repent. This gives us hope for a new beginning and a better life. It is a hope based on God’s love and faith in us: *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). If we think that we are hopeless and cannot possibly be forgiven by God, we need to remember the criminal who was crucified with Jesus. At the last moment of his life he turned and said: *“Jesus, remember me”* and Jesus said: *“...today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:42-43). God is so determined to bring good out of evil, that even our sins work for good. As a solution to our problem, God sent Jesus to give his life as a sign of his mercy. That is why we can sing joyfully with the church at Easter time: *“O happy fault that merited such a redeemer!”*

Hand or Arm of the Lord:

There are many passages in the Bible that refer to the hand or arm of the Lord. In *Isaiah* 48:13 we read:

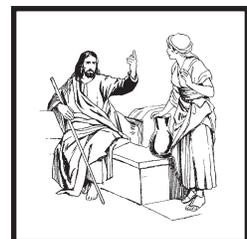
*“Yes, my hand laid the foundations of the earth;
my right hand spread out the heavens.
When I call them,
they shall stand forth at once.”*



This is way of speaking about God in a human way. However, God is a spirit and has no human parts like hands or feet. *Mark* 16:19 describes how Jesus returned to heaven after finishing his mission on earth: *“Then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.”* All these Bible passages help us understand what the right hand or arm meant in biblical times. God is described as using his right hand to create the world, to give or take away life. He also raises his hand or arm to protect his people from danger. If we understand what a king or ruler was like in the ancient world we will get an idea of what this means. There is a famous statue of Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome when Jesus was born. He stands with his strong, powerful right arm and hand raised in the air. His hand commanded armies that conquered the world. His hand protected the weak and the conquered, or condemned people to die. To the ancient mind, if the hand or arm of a human ruler was so powerful, what must God be like? That is why they pictured him with a powerful hand and arm.

Kingdom of God:

“Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ‘This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom of God was so important that everything Jesus said and did focused on it. In order to understand Jesus and why he lived, died, and rose from the dead, we need to understand the kingdom that he spoke about. Most people of his day were expecting a political leader who would lead their nation to power. Jesus did not want that kind of power. When the crowds began talking about making him king he would try to get away: *“Great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray”* (Luke 5:15-16). The kingdom that Jesus preached is a spiritual one of the heart and soul.

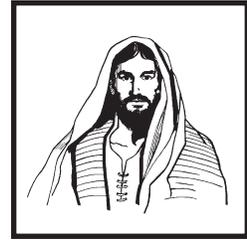


It is God’s sovereign action at work in the world. It happens whenever we live as brothers and sisters with God as our Father. Anyone can be a member of this kingdom. All it takes is a change of heart that means *repenting*—turning away from our sins like the criminal crucified with Jesus who begged *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”* (Luke 23:42). This kingdom is ruled by truth. Only the humble and sincere of heart can enter. Joining means accepting God’s forgiveness and agreeing to forgive others as we have been forgiven: *“Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful”* (Luke

6:36). God's kingdom has one simple rule: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34).

Messiah:

Messiah is Hebrew for the Greek word *christos*. From this word we get *christ* in English. It means *anointed* for God's service. When the early Christians began adding Christ to the name Jesus they did this because they believed he was the messiah. For hundreds of years after king David died the Israelites waited for a leader like him, a special leader to free them, unite them, and protect them. They longed for someone like David who would be strong and good, and make them into a great nation again. Because it had political meaning for many, Jesus hesitated to be called *messiah*. After the miracle of feeding thousands with a few loaves of bread, he fled because they wanted to make him king: "Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone" (John 6:15). After he rose from the dead, Christians believed Jesus was the messiah since he rescued humanity from sin. They recognized Jesus in the Old Testament prophecies about the messiah, such as:



*"The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me" (Isaiah 61:1)*

Name of God:

The followers of Jesus called him "Lord" both as a title of respect and as one equal to God. They used this title in the same way that the Jews used it for God. The Israelites knew God's name which he revealed to Moses in the burning bush, "I am who am" (Exodus 3:14). In Hebrew this was Yahweh. They respected this name so much that only the high priest would say God's name once a year in the temple. In the Old Testament *Lord* is used instead of *Yahweh*. If we know someone's name we can get their attention even if they do not know us. They turn toward us when we say their name. When we introduce ourselves we tell the other person our name. We call out someone's name when we need help. In *Psalms* 91:14 God says:

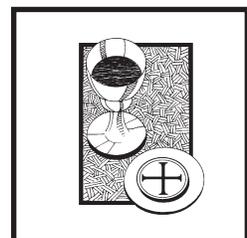


*"Whoever clings to me I will deliver;
whoever knows my name I will set on high."*

Families or friends often have special names for one another. We use these private names as a way of keeping close. Jesus taught us a special name for God. He brought us closer to God by telling us to call him *Abba* (which means *pappa* or *daddy* in Aramaic). Toward the end of his life at the last supper Jesus said: "I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world..." (John 17:6). Now as Christians we have a new understanding of God as we use this name. Instead of an awesome, unspeakable name for God, we have a very familiar and personal one as children of God's family. No other religion on earth speaks to God in this way.

Sacrifice:

When the ancient Israelites offered a gift to God it was something that was important or special to them. It was a way of saying to God that he was above all creatures as their Creator and that they owed everything to him, especially the gift of life. They offered God many kinds of gifts as sacrifices as a sign of love and respect. Incense was burned as a sign of prayer rising to God: "Let my prayer be incense before you" (Psalm 141:2). This is something the Catholic church continues today. Sometimes animals and their blood were offered. At other times bread



and wine were given to God. At harvest time, the first grain and fruits were given to God as a reminder that he alone is the creator of all things: *“For everything is from you, and we only give you what we have received from you” (I Chronicles 29:14)*. If the offering was totally burned by fire it was called a *holocaust*. If part of an offering was given to God by burning it, and part of it was eaten by the priest and people, it was called a *communion* sacrifice. It was like sharing food with God - as a way of sharing friendship.

These ancient sacrifices were not enough. They only pointed to the day when someone would offer a perfect sacrifice. That day came when Jesus offered himself on the cross. Although innocent, he suffered to free humanity from the fear, guilt and loss of hope caused by sin: *“But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice” (Hebrews 9:26)*. His sacrifice is the turning point of human history. Because the sacrifice of Jesus is eternal, when Catholics gather for the Eucharist (the *Mass*), they are present at the same sacrifice of Jesus. We offer ourselves with Jesus to God. The bread we offer and share in communion is the Body of Jesus. The cup we offer and share is his blood. This is why the Eucharist is the greatest prayer we on earth. There is no other prayer like it. It is the sacrifice that is greater than all others; it is the sacrifice of Christ himself offered once and for all.

Salvation:

All of us have dignity and value because we have been created by God. As his children God wants us to be happy and free. However, because we have free will we get ourselves into trouble or become so lost that we can't find our way. We do things that cause trouble for ourselves and others. Much of our trouble comes from the misuse of drugs, alcohol, sex, money, or power. We also are frightened by the fact that we will die some day. We often try anything to get away from thinking about it. However, none of these things brings us the real joy and happiness we are looking for. When our lives hit bottom, then we long for a way out of our misery. we cry out like the apostle Paul: *“Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me...?” (Romans 7:24)*. We have no one to turn except God for help as *Isaiah 45:22* says:



*“Turn to me and be safe,
all you ends of the earth,
for I am God; there is no other!”*

Once we accept that we are powerless to save ourselves and must rely on God, our minds and hearts begin to heal. We discover a new way of living, and begin to change as a person. It is like going from the dark into the light. We see people and things in a new way. We discover how valuable we are in God's sight. In fact, we are so valuable to God that he sent his Son to live, suffer, die and rise from the dead to save us from our sins and the fear of death. He has promised a place for us in heaven: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1-2)*. Salvation is meant for everyone. God *“wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth./ For there is one God./ There is also one mediator between God and the human race,/ Christ Jesus, himself human,/ who gave himself as ransom for all” (I Timothy 2:4-6)*. Salvation is not something that simply happens to us without any effort of ours. Each of us has a part to play in it by *repenting*. This means we turn our lives around by believing in God, obeying God's will, and showing by our kindness toward others that we are a changed person. Once we have repented and been forgiven by God, we become partners with God in bringing the message of forgiveness to others. Before Jesus returned to his Father, he told his followers to take God's saving message to others: *“you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)*.

Son of God:

The title *son of God* is used in both the Old and New Testaments. It was used for great persons like the

kings of Israel because the people believed they were chosen by God to rule as *Psalms* 2:6 states:

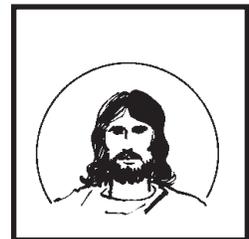
*"I myself have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."*

Son of God also was used for a person who obeyed God faithfully, and trusted in him completely: *"See how he is accounted among the sons of God"* (*Wisdom* 5:5). More than anyone else, Jesus earned this title because he was so faithful in carrying out God's will. He is the perfect example of a human being *at one* with God. At his baptism, God said: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (*Matthew* 3:17). This describes the special bond between Jesus and his Father. The soldier who witnessed the death of Jesus said: *"Truly, this was the Son of God!"* (*Matthew* 27:54). Finally, Jesus is called the Son of God because he shares equally God's own divine life: *"No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him"* (*John* 1:18).



Son of Man

Jesus spoke about himself many times as the *Son of Man*. On the one hand, it was his humble way of calling himself a human being. This is how it was sometimes used in the Old Testament: *"Son of man, stand up!"* (*Ezekiel* 2:1). This also is how Jesus used it when he said of himself: *"The Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head"* (*Matthew* 8:20). Jesus also used it to describe how he reached out to other human beings: *"The Son of Man came...a friend of tax collectors and sinners"* (*Matthew* 11:19). For the apostles who at first were not sure who Jesus was, deeper understanding came when he calmed the storm at sea: *"What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and sea obey?"* (*Matthew* 8: 27). Later on when Jesus asked: *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* Peter spoke up for all of them and said: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"* (*Matthew* 16:13,16). In this key passage *Son of Man* is linked with the titles of *Messiah* and *Son of God*. As the time for his death drew near he used this title to show how he would suffer but triumph in the end: *"He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly...be killed and rise after three days"* (*Mark* 8:31). *"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (*Matthew* 20:28).



In *Daniel* this title described a special person of great spiritual power who would come at the end of time to rule over God's kingdom *"shall not be destroyed"* (*Daniel* 7:14). In the gospels it expressed the triumph of Jesus over death as well as his second coming. At his trial Jesus stood before his accusers as they condemned to die, and foretold his future glory (*Matthew* 26:64). This title appeared some 70 times in the New Testament. It was greatly revered and gave the first Christians hope as they suffered for the sake of Christ as shown in the death of Stephen the first martyr: *"But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"* (*Acts* 7: 55). For other passages about Jesus as the *son of man* read *Matthew* 17:9, 17:22, 20:28, 24:29-33, 25:31-46, *Mark* 8:38-9:1, 9:31, 10:45, 14:62.

Spirit:

The Hebrew word for *spirit* is also translated into English as *breath* or *wind*. In *Genesis* the Spirit was present at the beginning of creation: *"a mighty wind swept over the waters"* (*Genesis* 1:2). The Spirit or breath of God also brought life to the first human being: *"the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being"* (*Genesis* 2:7). At certain times, the Spirit guided the chosen people by raising up special leaders to be kings or prophets. The great prophet Ezekiel explained it like



this: “*then the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me*” (Ezekiel 3:24). In this way God’s Spirit kept the people faithful.

The Spirit at the creation of the world was also the same Spirit that appeared at the beginning of the Christ’s life and work which is sometimes called the *new creation*. When Jesus came out of the water after his baptism, “*He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him...*” (Matthew 3:16). After this happened the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray. When Jesus began his public ministry he took the words of the prophet Isaiah as his own in *Luke 4:18*:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor:
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free...”*

Jesus promised to send the Spirit as an advocate (or helper) once he has rose from the dead and returned to his Father: “*When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me*” (John 15:26). Finally, at Pentecost, the Spirit arrives “*like a strong driving wind*” (Acts 2:2) and “*they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak*” (Acts 2:4).

Word

In the first lines of John’s gospel (*John 1:1-3*) Jesus is called the *Word*:

*“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 came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.”*



In ancient Greek, *word* or *logos* was used to explain everything. Today we say, “*That’s the final word?*” we mean it is all we need to know about something. Jesus is the head of creation. He always has been with God and is God. That is what Jesus meant when he said: “*Before Abraham came to be, I AM*” (*John 8:58*).

Since time began people wondered what God was like. Was there more than one God? Was God good or bad, mean or kind? How should they behave toward God? In the Bible God answered these questions. He revealed himself to patriarchs, prophets, and leaders like Moses who bowed before God in the burning bush. The entire Old Testament builds up to the point where Jesus arrives as the messiah, just as God promised. Jesus is the Word that God speaks to humanity as if to say, “*I can tell you in one word who I really am—Jesus.*” Jesus was the final word on prophecy, law, sacrifice, and commandments. Jesus is the final *Word* on who God is and what God is like. Studying the words and deeds of Jesus take us deep into the heart of God. Jesus explained the word of God better than anyone: “*Your word is truth*” (*John 17:17*).

Books of the Bible

The Old Testament

Book	Abbreviation	Page	Book	Abbreviation	Page
Genesis	Gn		Proverbs	Prv	
Exodus	Ex		Ecclesiastes	Eccl	
Leviticus	Lv		Song of Songs	Sg	
Numbers	Nm		Wisdom	Wis	
Deuteronomy	Dt		Sirach	Sir	
Joshua	Jos		Isaiah	Is	
Judges	Jgs		Jeremiah	Jer	
Ruth	Ru		Lamentations	Lam	
1 Samuel	1 Sm		Baruch	Bar	
2 Samuel	2 Sm		Ezekiel	Ez	
1 Kings	1 Kgs		Daniel	Dn	
2 Kings	2 Kgs		Hosea	Hos	
1 Chronicles	1 Chr		Joel	Jl	
2 Chronicles	2 Chr		Amos	Am	
Ezra	Exr		Obadiah	Ob	
Nehemiah	Neh		Jonah	Jon	
Tobit	Tb		Micah	Mi	
Judith	Jdt		Nahum	Na	
Esther	Est		Habakkuk	Hb	
1 Maccabees	1 Mc		Zephaniah	Zep	
2 Maccabees	2 Mc		Haggai	Hg	
Job	Jb		Zechariah	Zec	
Psalms	Ps		Malachi	Mal	

The New Testament

Book	Abbreviation	Page	Book	Abbreviation	Page
Matthew	Mt		1 Timothy	1 Tm	
Mark	Mk		2 Timothy	2 Tm	
Luke	Lk		Titus	Ti	
John	Jn		Philemon	Phlm	
Acts of the Apostles	Acts		Hebrews	Heb	
Romans	Rom		James	Jas	
1 Corinthians	1 Cor		1 Peter	1 Pt	
2 Corinthians	2 Cor		2 Peter	2 Pt	
Galatians	Gal		1 John	1 Jn	
Ephesians	Eph		2 John	2 Jn	
Philippians	Phil		3 John	3 Jn	
Colossians	Col		Jude	Jude	
1 Thessalonians	1 Thes		Revelation	Rv	
2 Thessalonians	2 Thes				



*God called out to him from the bush, Moses! Moses!"
He answered, "Here I am."*

Exodus 3: 4

PART ONE

A - THE PENTATEUCH

This first part of the Bible is called the *Pentateuch*, from the Greek word *penta* for five. The Jewish people call it the *Torah*, a Hebrew word that means law or instructions on how to live. The word Pentateuch is a Greek word that means *five* books. They are: *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. Although the books in this part do offer a guide for living a holy life, they tell the story of how the universe was created, how God chose a special people, how Moses led them out of slavery and gave them the 10 commandments. Because these books have so much to do with Moses, the greatest leader of the chosen people, they are sometimes called the Books of Moses. This does not mean that he wrote them. The human authors of these first five books of the Bible are not known.

Genesis describes what happened before history began, how God created the world. However, in Genesis 12 the history of the chosen people begins. It tells the story of how God made friends with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who were the ancestors of the chosen people (later called *Hebrews* or *Israelites*). God also promised to make the chosen people a great nation and promised them a land of their own.

In the beginning of *Exodus* the chosen people are living as slaves. God's help arrives when Moses leads them out of Egypt toward their promised land. While they wander in the desert God enters a special agreement with them at Mt. Sinai called a *covenant*. From then on they are the *people of the covenant*. This covenant guides them on how to worship and obey God. If they live by this covenant they will be blessed by God. If they fail to keep it they will meet disaster. *Leviticus*, *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* provide more stories about the chosen people in the desert. It provides more details about the laws and proper worship. The Pentateuch ends with the people camped near the banks of the Jordan river where they are ready to cross over to the promised land.



GENESIS

• Overview _____

The word *genesis* means *beginning*. It tries to explain not so much *how* God created life as *why* he created it. In other words, Genesis does not give a modern scientific explanation of life. The first human beings were called *ish* (man) and *isha* (woman), to show their closeness in the beginning. The ancient creation story lays down the basic beliefs of our religion: *There is only one God. God created the world from nothing, people are made in the image and likeness of God, God cares for people and promises to save them.* Genesis also describes how sin entered the world for the first time, when Adam (*ha adam*-man of clay in Hebrew) and his wife (*Eve*-life) tried to become independent of God. Their first sin (original sin) was followed by the sin of Cain who murdered his brother, and the sins of many generations of people after them. By the time of Noah, God planned to destroy humanity with a great flood. Only Noah and his family were saved in the ark, a large wooden boat. From them the entire human family began to spread over the earth. Eventually, a member of this human family was chosen by God to be the father of his chosen people. His name was Abraham. Through his descendants Christ came to save the world. Genesis ends with the story of Joseph who saved his people from starvation, even though he was sold into slavery by his brothers. We do not know who wrote Genesis, but we do know that Abraham and his descendants lived during 2000 to 1500 B.C. (Before Christ).

• Outline of Genesis _____

Creation, the First Sin, the Flood, the Beginning of Nations (Chapters 1:1 to 11:26)
Abraham (Chapters 11:27 to 25:18)
Isaac and Jacob (Chapters 25:19 to 36:43)
Joseph and his Brothers (Chapters 37:1 to 45:28)
The Israelites in Egypt (Chapters 46:1 to 50:26)

• Passages to Read _____

Chapters 1 and 2 (Two stories of creation)
Chapter 3 (Sin enters the world)
Chapter 6:5 to 8:22 (Noah, the flood, and God's promise)
Chapter 12:1-7 (Abraham's call) and Chapter 15 (God's covenant with Abraham)
Chapter 37 (Jacob's sons send their brother Joseph into slavery)
Chapter 45 (Joseph and his brothers are reconciled)

• Thoughts for Prayer _____

We are made in God's *image and likeness*. *Make us holy like you, Lord.*

The ark that saved Noah and his family from the water of the flood stands for the church which saves us through the water of baptism. *Thank you God for the gift of the church.*

God tested Abraham and his faith was a model for all of us. *Make our faith strong, O God.*

Joseph forgave and fed his family in the face of starvation like Jesus who feeds his people with the Eucharist. *Jesus, we are hungry for your forgiveness and love.*

Genesis Study Page

Question 1. *"This Noah did; he carried out all the commands that God gave him"* (Genesis 6:22). Noah listened and built the ark while others went their way. Can anyone save us but God?

Question 2. *"Abram put his faith in the LORD"* (Genesis 15:6). Like all God's friends, our faith will be tested. Does this make our faith stronger or weaker?

Question 3. *"No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham"* (Genesis 17:5). Like Abraham God has called us to be his friends. How has God changed our lives?

Question 4. *"Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good"* (Genesis 50:20). Joseph saw how God used his slavery to save his family. Has God brought good out of bad in our lives?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Genesis:

Self-Esteem

Understanding Self-Esteem *"God looked at everything he made, and he found it very good" (Genesis 1: 31).*

Self-esteem is believing we have value because we are created by God who *"does not make junk."* It means understanding ourselves as human beings, accepting God's forgiveness when we make mistakes. We need self-esteem to survive. Without it we do not have the skills to live with peace and happiness. Poor self-esteem means constantly judging or even rejecting our selves. Living like this brings pain on ourselves, and in this pain we turn inward on our selves or outward on others. We blame our selves or others, get angry with ourselves or others, keep away from others or brag about our selves, make up excuses for ourselves or bury our feelings in drugs or alcohol. God wants us to live with dignity and self-respect. Poor self-esteem is just a way of thinking. We have the power to change it.

Defending Ourselves *"The truth will set you free" (John 8:32)*

From the time we were children someone may have taught us to put ourselves down. We may feel angry at this person, but there is no law that says we must live by the past and keep on hurting ourselves. Putting ourselves down as adults only hurts ourselves. We defeat this put-down by shining the light of truth on it, calling it a lie, and confronting it with a strong self-defense. As Jesus said, *"The truth will set you free" (John 8:32)*. Every time we start to put ourselves down we must defeat this with the truth. The truth is, we are made in God's image. We are so valuable that God's Son died for us. We were like a bird caught in a net and God wants to set us free, to become the person we are meant to be.

Facing Criticism *"Once you were 'no people,'
but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10).*

We may be addicted to the critic in our heads because it seems to protect us. If we are afraid of getting hurt by trying something new, it holds us back and keeps us "safe." We pay a price for this however because we do not learn from our mistakes. The trick is to catch ourselves when our critic says: "you're no good, ugly, boring, stupid, you can't do anything right, you're nobody." Yet we are somebody! Every time we talk to ourselves like this we destroy a little more self-respect. Recognizing and stopping our thoughts as soon as they start is very important. When someone else criticizes us, we must decide if it is true. If it is not, we can let it go. If it is true, we can accept it as an opportunity to change. Accepting and working with true criticism never reduces our self-esteem. In fact, the person has done us a favor.

Building Self-Esteem *"Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12: 31).*

Building self-esteem does not mean that we will not make mistakes. Human beings are a mix of strength and weakness. When we make mistakes, we accept responsibility and try to make things better, learning from our mistakes. Learning to forgive our selves and others does not mean we approve of what has been done. It means we admit we have done wrong, and try our best to correct it. We must see ourselves as God does, *"you are precious in my eyes...because I love you" (Isaiah 43:4)*. We have a choice: tear ourselves down, or build ourselves up. Building self-esteem means understanding that God created us with basic needs: to feel loved, to belong, to feel safe, and to feel good about ourselves. We build self-esteem when we learn to meet these needs in healthy ways, giving our selves and others respect.

Read and Pray the Bible

Read *Psalms* 8 for the Bible's description of human beings as God's creation, especially verse 5:

*"What are humans that you are mindful of them,
mere mortals that you care for them?"*

Why is poor self-esteem against the will of God?



EXODUS

• Overview ---

The second book of the Bible is called *exodus* - a Greek word that means *departure*. It tells the story of how God's chosen people - the Israelites - departed from Egypt where they were slaves by passing through the sea. This is the Passover which Jesus celebrated on the night before he died, and which the Jews still celebrate today. Exodus also tells how the people lived in the desert for 40 years before they reached their homeland. During that time God gave Moses the ten commandments on Mount Sinai and made a covenant with his people. Moses also taught the people how to worship God. He showed them how to build a dwelling tent for God, and place the altar of sacrifice and the sacred ark in it. By teaching them laws for every part of their lives, he showed them how to live as a community. Although at times they grumbled and complained, and even forgot the wonderful things God did for them, he changed them into a holy nation. No one knows who the author of Exodus is, but it is one of the most important books of the Jewish religion. Bible experts think that the events described in Exodus took place about 1200 years before Christ.

• Outline of Exodus ---

The Israelites in Slavery (Chapters 1:1 to 12:36)
The Exodus and Passover (Chapters 12:37 to 18:27)
The Covenant at Mount Sinai (Chapters 19:1 to 24:18)
God Pitches his Tent among the People (Chapters 25:1 to 40:38).

• Passages to Read ---

Chapter 1: 1-14 (The Israelites are turned into slaves)
Chapter 2 and 3 (The birth of Moses, his crime of murder, God's call in the desert)
Chapter 12 (The Passover meal and departure from Egypt)
Chapter 14 (Crossing the sea)
Chapter 16:1-15 (God feeds the people in the desert)
Chapter 17:1-7 (God provides water from a rock)
Chapter 20:1-23 (God gives the people 10 commandments, as the *Sinai covenant*)
Chapter 40 (The sacred tent where God lived with the people)

• Thoughts and Prayers ---

Although Moses killed someone, God chose him to lead his people. *Use us for good, God.*

God spoke to Moses on holy ground revealing his name. *We are on holy ground too, Lord.*

The Israelites escaped by passing through the sea. *Bring us through our trials, God.*

Christ is the new passover who led us from death to life. *Save us by your cross, Jesus.*

Because he loves us, God gives us laws to live a full life. *Teach us to live by your will, God.*

Exodus Study Page

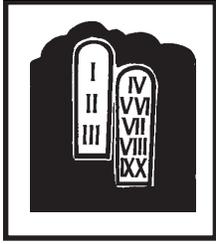
Question 1. *"You will know that I, the LORD, am your God when I free you" (Exodus 6:7).*
Can we be slaves to people or things by our addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex or power?

Question 2. *"I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them" (Exodus 3:7-8).* Do we believe God cares and can deliver us from whatever makes us slaves?

Question 3. *"All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do" (Exodus 24:7).*
What would our lives be like if there were no commandments or laws?

Question 4. *"Here in the desert the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses" (Exodus 16:2).*
Sometimes in our hearts we feel like we are lost in a desert. Where is God then?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Exodus:



The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-17

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.

What are the idols and false gods in our lives?

Drugs, power, possessions, sex, pride?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Who is God? Why should we respect God's name? How do we dishonor it?

3. Remember to keep the Lord's day holy.

What can we do behind bars to set aside Sunday as God's day?

4. Honor your father and your mother.

What have we learned from our parents? Was it life-giving or life-threatening?

Can we be a father or mother to ourselves - the kind of parent we needed and want to be?

5. You shall not kill.

How can we keep anger from turning into violence?

Does beating up someone, or threatening them dishonor this commandment?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

What is the purpose of sex? When is it right? When is it wrong?

When is it harmful to ourselves or others? What is true love?

7. You shall not steal.

What is "restorative justice"? Can we give back what we stole?

If we can't give it back, how can we make things right?

How is cheating like stealing?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Is lying during testimony or an interview, or getting someone

in trouble by twisting the truth against this command?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

Do we see others as sex objects or as persons?

What does it mean to be a man? To be a woman?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Why do we always want more? Why do we want

what other people have? Are we happy once we get it?

Like true religion, the commandments are about *relationships*. The first four focus on God, and the remaining six deal with how we treat people. In all of them God calls us to be holy, healthy and happy. What do you think Paul meant in *Galatians 5:14* when he wrote: "*For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*"



LEVITICUS

• History

The third book of the Bible get its name from the Greek words that begin it. It describes all the duties that belonged to the priests who offered sacrifices, took care of the sacred things used in worship, and cleaned the holy place where the altar and ark were kept. It is a “how to” book for the priests of the Israelites, but it also reminded the people and their leaders that they were *set apart as God’s chosen people*. It was the duty of the priests to encourage the people to remain true to God. The rituals, which are about values, reminded them that God loved them and saved them from slavery. Through his laws, he protected them and cared for them. If they obeyed him and kept themselves pure and faithful, they would live a happy life. Today, the Catholic church has sacred rituals called the *seven sacraments*. They also remind us that we are God’s beloved people. As Christians we gather around the altar to offer the sacrifice of Jesus in the Eucharist. In this sacrament we recall how God saved us from the slavery of sin. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confession we are cleansed of our sins through God’s forgiveness. The priests of the Israelites offered thanks to God, sprinkled animal blood on the people when they prayed for God’s blessing and forgiveness. In Jesus, the Son of God and our brother, we have the perfect priest. He sacrificed his own life for us so that so that our sins could be forgiven. The blood he shed on the cross seals the new covenant between God and us. It is an agreement that will never end, because it has been sealed with the blood of Jesus, God’s Son.

• Outline of Leviticus

The Kinds of Sacrifices (Chapters 1:1 to 7:38)
The Ordination of Priests (Chapters 8:1 to 10:20))
Laws of Purity (Chapters 11:1 to 16:34)
Laws for All God’s People (Chapters 17:1 to 20:27)
Laws for Priests and Festivals (Chapters 21:1 to 25:55)
The Blessings of Keeping Vows (26:1 to 27:34)

• Passages to Read

Chapter 19:1-19 (The main idea of Leviticus - the holiness of God and his people)
Chapter 23: (The Sabbath and the five days kept holy by the people)

• Thoughts for Prayer

God faithfully guided his people while they were in the desert. *We place our trust in you, God.*

Leviticus taught the people how to worship God. *Let us adore you as you deserve, God.*

True religion means care for the poor and the weak. *Help us remember those in need, Lord.*

Leviticus Study Page

Question 1. *"For I, the LORD, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy"* (Leviticus 11:44). What can we do to make ourselves holy like God? How does God behave?

Question 2. *"I, the LORD, am your God"* (Leviticus 23:43). What does it mean to live by these words?

Question 3. *"It is the blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement"* (Leviticus 17:11). When Jesus shed his blood on the cross, what did it mean for us? (Read *Mark 14:23-24*).

Question 4. *"You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart"* (Leviticus 19:17). What does Jesus teach us about hatred and love in *Matthew 5: 21-25*?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Leviticus:



NUMBERS

• History

This book of the Bible is called *Numbers* because it records how many people belonged to the Israelite nation while they lived in the desert. One count was taken near the beginning of their stay in the desert.

The other was taken toward the end of their journey. It also is the story of how God made them stay in the desert for almost 40 years before they were ready to enter the promised land. God did this because they grumbled so much against Moses and God. It took many years with Moses as their teacher to change them. God gave the people laws to live by as a guide for their happiness. Gradually they changed from a complaining, impatient crowd at the bottom of Mount Sinai, into a united, obedient people ready to do God's will. Only then were they allowed to enter the promised land. The early Christians found symbols of Christ in this book. When Moses struck the rock with his staff (20:2-13) and water flowed from it for the people to drink, Christians saw this as a symbol of the water that flowed from the side of Christ when he was pierced by the soldier on Calvary. In the same way, when the bronze serpent was lifted up to heal the people (21:4-9), the first Christians believed that this stood for Christ who was lifted up on the cross in order to heal the world.

• Outline of Numbers

Moses and the People Depart from Sinai (Chapters 1:1 to 10:10)

The People Wander in the Desert (Chapters 10:11 to 25:18)

The People Gather Before the Promised Land (Chapters 26:1 to 36:13)

• Passages to Read

Chapter 6:22-27 (The priestly blessing)

Chapter 8:15-23 (The fiery cloud guides the people)

Chapter 11:1-17 (Moses and the burden of leadership)

Chapter 20:2-13 (God provides water from the rock)

Chapter 21:4-9 (The bronze serpent heals the sick)

Chapter 27:12-23 (Joshua is named as the new leader)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Friendship with God grows deeper as it is tested on the journey of life. *May our friendship with you grow stronger every day, God.*

God answered the people's prayers in his own good time, when they were ready for God's answer not theirs. *May all our prayer be only for your wise and holy will, Lord.*

God was patient with the people, taking them step by step through the desert. *May you be patient with us and guide us, Lord.*

After they left Egypt God's people forgot his saving deeds for them. *Let us never forget everything you have done for us, God.*

Numbers Study Page

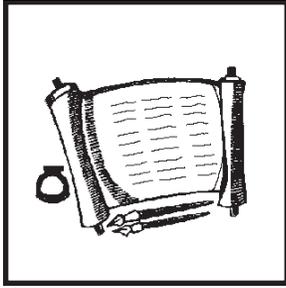
Question 1. *"I cannot carry this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me"* (Numbers 11:14).
How has our following of God been tested by responsibility?

Question 2. *"Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!"* (Numbers 11:29).
As followers of Christ have we ever had to speak up for what is right?

Question 3. *"With their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God"*
(Numbers 21:4-5). Like the Israelites are we impatient with God when we don't get our way?

Question 4. *"Is this beyond the LORD's reach? You shall see now whether or not what I have promised
you takes place"* (Numbers 11:23). As we look at our lives, can we see what God has done for us ?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Numbers:



DEUTERONOMY

• History

The name *Deuteronomy* means *second law*. This does not mean that there were two different laws for God's chosen people. It means that this book tells one more time how God's sacred law was given by Moses to the people. The events described in Deuteronomy take place at the end of their journey in the desert, just before they entered the promised land. Moses gathered the people together and recalled the mighty deeds God had done for them. He also reminded them of the laws God gave them in order to live a good life. He told them how much God loved them by making a special *covenant* with them as the chosen people. They were not just any people, they were God's people. They were saved by God, taught by God, and blessed by God. They had followed Moses out of slavery and stayed with him in the desert where they were tested. Now at last they were ready to take the next big step on their long journey. Moses said good-bye to them because he was going to die before they left the desert. He would not go with them but they would have a new leader chosen by Moses to take his place. Moses died on the mountain after he looked at the promised land in the distance. He died with a peaceful heart because even though he himself was at the end of his life, he had been a faithful leader, and his people were about to enter the promised land.

• Outline of Deuteronomy

Moses Reviews God's Deeds for the People (*Chapters 1:1 to 4:49*)

Moses Recalls the Commandments and Laws (*Chapters 5:1 to 26:19*)

Moses Prepares the People for the Promised Land (*Chapters 27:1 to 30:20*)

The Last Words and Death of Moses (*Chapters 31:1 to 34:12*)

• Passages to Read

Chapter 10:12-22 (Love and service of God)

Chapter 26: 16-19 (The covenant with God)

Chapter 30: 11-20 (God's command and the people's choice)

Chapter 34:1-12 (The death of Moses)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Each of us has a "*promised land*" that God has intended for us. *Show us how to get there, God.*

God walks with each of us on our journey of the heart. *Be with us and strengthen us, Lord.*

We do not live by bread alone. *Every word that comes from your mouth give us life, God.*
(See *Deuteronomy 8:3*)

Out of love for us, God provides laws for our own good. *Help us live by your laws, loving God.*

"Every place where you set foot shall be yours" (*Deuteronomy 11:24*). *Your grace is everywhere, Lord.*

Deuteronomy Study Page

Question 1. *“Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of?”* (Deuteronomy 4:32).
When we are loved someone values us. How valuable are we knowing that God loves us?

Question 2. *“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse”* (Deuteronomy 30:19).
The choice is ours. What do we choose and why?

Question 3. What is the *“Great Commandment”* that Moses taught his people
(Deuteronomy 10:12), and that Jesus also taught his followers?

Question 4. God’s law *“is something very near to you, already...in your hearts; you have only
to carry it out”* (Deuteronomy 30:14). Have we searched our hearts and found God’s law?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Deuteronomy:

PART ONE

B - THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

The *Pentateuch* (first five books of the Bible) ended with God's people gathered near the Jordan river. They are ready to cross over to the promised land. Before Moses died he appointed Joshua to be their leader. Joshua would lead them as they entered the land and claimed it as their home.

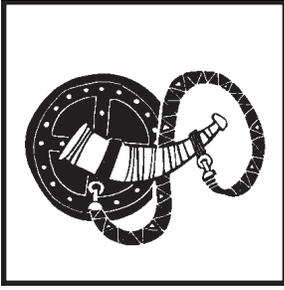
This next part of the Bible is called the *historical books* because they describe the history of God's people after they crossed the Jordan river and lived in the promised land. In the Catholic Bible these books are: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees*.

Although they are called historical, they are not history as we understand it today. *Tobit, Judith* and *Esther* are more like historical novels. That is, they tell a story set in a well-known time and place, but the characters may not be real. Just like the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which teaches the reader about slavery in the United States before the Civil War, the historical books teach what life was like for God's people who struggled to live by God's covenant during very difficult times.

The historical books cover a long period of time, from about 1250 B.C. to 150 B.C. Some of the most important events during this time were as follows:

- *Joshua and the 12 tribes of God's people enter and settle the promised land*
- *The 12 tribes decide to be ruled by one king (David is the most famous king)*
- *The kingdom is divided into Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south).*
- *In time both kingdoms are conquered and the people taken into exile*
- *The people of Judah return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple*

Rather than history as we know it, the historical books are more concerned about how God acted in the lives of the chosen people. They show how God blessed them, warned them when they disobeyed, and helped them recover after they failed.



JOSHUA

• History _____

This book takes its name from *Joshua*, the leader Moses gave to the people before he died. Joshua, whose name in Hebrew means *God saves*, was a very faithful person. He was faithful to the ideals of Moses, faithful to the well-being of the people, and faithful to God who inspired him. He led the people of God courageously across the Jordan river into the promised land. Although they walked into an uncertain future, with many trials ahead, they placed their trust in God, encouraged by Joshua. He helped the twelve tribes gain the land, divide it among themselves, and settle it. He reminded them that even though the land was precious their friendship and covenant with God was even more important. He warned them not to water down their religion by taking on the habits and practices of the pagans around them. They were set aside by God to be a special people. Their future depended on their faithfulness to God. They must hold strongly to God's plan for them. Only this would give them peace and prosperity. Toward the end of his life, when Joshua was preparing the people for his departure in death, he told them to decide whether they would remain faithful to their God or follow the ways of the nonbelievers. He and his family intended to remain faithful to God who had been with them since they left Egypt, traveled through the desert, and reached the promised land: "*As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15).

• Outline of Joshua _____

The Israelites Fight for the Promised Land (Chapters 1:1 to 12:24)

The Land is Divided Among the Tribes of Israel (Chapters 13:1 to 22:34)

The Final Words of Joshua, His Covenant, and His Death (Chapters 23:1 to 24:33)

• Passages to Read _____

Chapter 1:1-18 (The people prepare to cross the Jordan. God is with them wherever they go)

Chapter 3:1-17 (Preparation and crossing of the Jordan river)

Chapters 4 - 22: (Conquest and division of the land)

Chapter 23:1-16 (The people must remain loyal)

Chapter 24:1-33 (Before Joshua dies he reminds the people of God's deeds)

• Thoughts for Prayer _____

In our baptism we made life-long promises. *We will keep our word to you, Lord.*

We are tempted to worship the false gods like possessions, security, power, and esteem. *Keep us faithful to you in all things, God.*

In faith we are traveling toward the promises of Christ. *Strengthen us on our journey, Lord.*

Our failures and mistakes remind us of our weakness. *Remind us of your constant mercy, God.*

It is hard to face an uncertain future. *Be with us as we cross the river in faith, Lord.*

Joshua Study Page

Question 1. *"I will be with you as I was with Moses; I will not leave you nor forsake you"* (Joshua 1:5).
When the promises others made to us are broken who is always with us?

Question 2. *"It is the LORD, your God, himself who fights for you, as he promised you"* (Joshua 23:10). What can we do when we realize that God is fighting for us and strengthening us?

Question 3. *"If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve...
As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15).
Do we serve the Lord, ourselves, or others?

Question 4. *"You are your own witnesses that you have chosen to serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:22).
Without showing off, how can we let others know we are Christians?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Joshua:



JUDGES

• History

The book of *Judges* got its name from the twelve military leaders. These special leaders helped God's people after Joshua died and until their first king ruled over them. The book describes a time in the history of the chosen people that often was violent and sinful. It shows what happens when people forget about God and go their own way.

When the people lived by God's commands and treated one another well, there was peace. But when they did whatever they wanted and disobeyed God's laws, things began to fall apart. As the author of *Judges* told the story of Israel's ups and downs, he repeated the same words: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best" (17:6 and 21:25). As a result the tribes began going to war with one another and destroying each other's homes. When things were at their worst and the people repented, God sent them strong leaders to guide them out of their misery. Then the blessings of peace and order returned. Because *Judges* gives more details about six of these leaders they are called *major judges*: Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. We are not told much about the other six so they are called *minor judges*. *Judges* covers the period from the death of Joshua to the time of the first king, about 1100 to 1000 B.C.

• Outline of Judges

The Israelites Continue to Fight for the Land (Chapters 1:1 to 3:6)

The Judges of Israel and Their Deeds (Chapters 3:7 to 12:13)

The Story of Samson (Chapters 13:1 to 16:31)

Sin and Destruction in the Land (Chapters 17:1 to 21:25)

• Passages to Read

Chapter 2 (The people forget God's deeds and fall into the hands of their enemies)

Chapter 13-16 (Samson's birth, deeds, and death)

Chapter 17 (A story of misguided religion)

Chapter 20:20-48 (The tribes of Israel at war with one another)

Chapter 21:25 (A closing remark)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Like the Israelites, we may feel unable to save ourselves. *We feel powerless to overcome our addictions without help and strength, Lord.*

So often we slip back into our same old ways. *Help us keep our good intentions and remain loyal to you always, God.*

Some people practice their own kind of religion, or even worship Satan. *We will worship you, and you alone, Lord.*

Over time we may forget everything God has done for us. *We will recall your kindness, God.*

In *Judges*, the tribes turned against each other. When we feel frustrated about our lives, we often take it out on someone else. *Teach us to change our anger into positive energy, Lord.*

Judges Study Page

Question 1. *“The Israelites again offended the LORD” (Judges 13:1).*
The people failed over and over again. In our own lives, what sets us up for failure?

Question 2. *“Find out the secret of his great strength, and how we may overcome and bind him so as to keep him helpless” (Judges 16:5).* When and where are we most likely to give in and fail?

Question 3. *“But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a savior, Ehud son of Gera” (Judges 3:15).* Who are the people God has sent to help us when we were in trouble?

Question 4. *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best” (Judges 21:25).* What happens to us if we live without God and the church to guide us?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Judges:



RUTH

• History

This simple, beautiful story took place as it says “*in the time of the judges*” (*Ruth* 1:1). It seems like a breath of fresh air after the book of Judges described so many stories about a dark and violent time in the history of God’s people. It comes as a relief to find out that in the midst of such troubled times, there were good people like those in *Ruth* who went about their daily lives believing in God and caring for one another.

The friendship and loyalty of Ruth and Naomi, her mother-in-law, are examples of God’s spirit at work in the hearts of those who are open to him. Boaz also is described in this story as a wise and upright man, who sees the goodness in the heart of Ruth and welcomes her into his home as his wife.

Ruth and Boaz are also important figures in the Bible for another reason. They are the great-grandparents of King David who became the greatest king of Israel.

The Book of Ruth can be summed up as a lesson in love for God and devotion to our loved ones, even those who come from outside our familiar circles.

• Outline of Ruth

Ruth Refuses to Abandon her Mother-in-law (Chapter 1:1-22)

Ruth Works in the Fields of Boaz (Chapter 2:1-23)

Ruth Tries to Win the Heart of Boaz (Chapter 3:1-18)

Ruth and Boaz Become Husband and Wife (Chapter 4:11-22)

• Passages to Read

Chapters 1 to 4 (The entire book of *Ruth*)

• Thoughts for Prayer

The good example of others gives us a ray of hope. *Strengthen us by the goodness of others, Lord.*

Even in the worst situations, love and friendship can survive. *Help us to survive by love, God.*

Selfless love can change us as well as those around us. *Give us the courage to reach out, Lord.*

Like Ruth, God’s people must be our people. *Bring us together in faith and forgiveness, God.*

When we are separated from our loved ones it is hard to take care of them. *Keep us devoted to those we love, Lord.*

Ruth Study Page

Question 1. *“Once in the time of the judges there was a famine in the land”* (Ruth 1:1).
When things around us seem hopeless, can we still believe God has a plan?

Question 2. *“Your people shall be my people, and your God my God”* (Ruth 1:16).
Where do we find God’s people and how do we know who they are?

Question 3. *“Listen, my daughter! Do not go to glean in anyone else’s field”* (Ruth 2:8).
How does our baptism call us to work for God?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Ruth:



1 SAMUEL & 2 SAMUEL

• History

These books are named after *Samuel*, a holy man and great prophet, who played an important part in the history of God's people. The interesting events described in these books took place during the years after *Judges* until the nation was ruled by its first king, Saul. *1 Samuel* begins with the story of Samuel's birth, calling by God to be a prophet, and how he became the spiritual leader of the people. Although God was not happy about it, the people wanted a king to rule over them. They chose Saul as their king, and Samuel anointed him. At first Saul was a good king and had the people's trust. Gradually he disobeyed God and things began to fall apart. He was suspicious of those around him, especially the young warrior David. Saul tried to kill him, so David lived in hiding with his men. David had the chance to kill Saul, but he did not do it out of respect for Saul's authority. *1 Samuel* ends with Saul's suicide in battle.

2 Samuel describes how David ruled after Saul's death as Israel's greatest king. David's story is one of great love and whole-hearted devotion to God. David loved music and wrote beautiful songs in honor of God. Several psalms were written by him (See *2 Samuel* 22). David was not perfect, however. Power brings temptation and David sinned greatly as a result. He committed adultery, and then had the woman's husband killed in battle. Afterward, the prophet Nathan boldly faced David with the truth and he repented. The authors of *1 and 2 Samuel* are not known, but they may have been written during King Solomon's time. At first they were written as one book. Eventually they were divided into two books as we have them today. *2 Samuel* 7:12-17 contains one of the most important prophecies of the Old Testament: "*Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me*" (v.16). Through these words of Nathan God promised David that his family line would produce a messiah to rule God's people forever. Such was God's loving plan for the day when Christ was born.

• Outline of 1 & 2 Samuel

The History of the Last Two Judges: Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1 to 7:17)

Israel Has Its First King (1 Samuel 8:1 to 12:25)

The Story of Saul and His Death (1 Samuel 13:1 to 31:13)

David Becomes the King of Israel (2 Samuel 1:1 to 24:25)

• Passages to Read

1 Samuel 3 (The story of Samuel the prophet)

1 Samuel 9:1 to 10:24 (Saul becomes Israel's first king)

1 Samuel 31 (The tragic death of Saul)

2 Samuel 1:1 to 5:5 (David becomes the next king)

2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:15 (David sins and repents)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Samuel gave his entire life to serving God and his people. "*Here I am*" is our prayer too, Lord.

Despite Saul's hatred and threats, David would not kill him. *Give us the strength for peace, Lord.*

Despite his weakness and failings, God kept David as his friend. *Forgive us as your friends, God.*

Through each of us as Christians, God's promise of a messiah is fulfilled. *Come, Lord Jesus!*

David served God with his whole heart. *We want to give our hearts to you, God.*

1 & 2 Samuel Study Page

Question 1. *"Here I am."* (1 Samuel 3:4). God calls everyone to his service. Are we open to what God is calling us to do? Are we ready to answer like Samuel?

Question 2. *"I have sinned against the LORD"* (2 Samuel 12: 13). Although we have failed, can we turn to God like David with a sincere heart?

Question 3. *"Though the LORD delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the LORD's anointed"* (1 Samuel 26:23). What are some non-violent ways we can face our enemies?

Question 4. David told the priest *"I cannot offer to the LORD my God holocausts that cost nothing"* (2 Samuel 24: 24). Is there something we can offer to God that cost us something?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel:

Bullying

Understand Bullying *"My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked,
from the clutches of the violent" (Psalm 71:4).*

Bullying happens today just as it did in the time of the Bible. In 1 Samuel 24 we read how David tried to avoid fighting with Saul who was trying to kill him. Bullying is an all too common experience. People may physically or verbally intimidate and harass others for many different reasons. Violent backgrounds and the pressures of living in unhappy circumstances contribute to bullying. Whatever the reasons, being bullied can be very painful. The Bible can help us think about how to handle bullying.

Face Reality *"From the foes I dread protect my life." (Psalm 64:2)*

Once we accept the reality of suffering in life we can then begin to deal with it. Realizing this can help us come to acceptance and peace with the difficult reality we face. We first must recognize that we can never fully control how others treat us. Because of this, there is no guarantee that any one strategy to deal with bullying will be completely successful. What we do have control of is our reaction to what happens. We have a choice about how to respond. This is not easy, but with reflection and learning there is hope. Being bullied by another person does not mean that we deserve such treatment or even caused it. But we must deal with the problem in a way that makes life better for us.

Work at a Plan *"I will take no action against you." (1 Samuel 24:14)*

The reality is that some people will bully others. The following strategies might help us from becoming targets for bullies. We must think about our actions and how they may or may not provoke the bully. Being aware of "danger zones" will help us avoid times and places where others might be more likely to be violent. Bullying may happen where supervision is low. Being with others who are safer or less likely to bully may also reduce the chance that we will become targets. We can learn who the bullies are and study how they operate. Some individuals seem to avoid getting bullied. What do they do and how might we use them as a role model to reduce our chances of being targeted? We can talk with our friends and others about how they deal with this problem. We know our situation best, so we must think about the consequences before we make choices. When we face someone who wants to force us to do something, we can try to stay calm, keep refusing to do what they want no matter what they try, and not let them make us feel stupid or guilty for not doing what they want. Some people even use humor to defuse the situation. If possible, we can call on God silently to strengthen us: *"The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame" (Isaiah 50:7).* We are not the first or the last of Christ's followers to have our courage tested.

Look for positive outlets and support *"Be my rock and refuge,
my secure stronghold;
for you are my rock and fortress" (Psalm 71:3).*

Some programs or opportunities may be safe havens from other more violent situations. For example, there may be a job or educational activity we can participate in with others who also are trying to avoid trouble. We can look for opportunities to associate with people who are less likely to bully.

Strive for inner peace *"Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:15).* Improving ourselves through education, reading, physical activity, and prayer can give us with the inner strength to deal with stress, including bullying. Such activities also help us feel better about ourselves.

Read and Pray the Bible:

Read 1 Samuel 21:11-16. Notice the humorous way in which David dealt with a very dangerous problem. Psalms 34, 64 and 71 also offer spiritual support for people facing violence.



1 & 2 KINGS

• History _____

1 and 2 Kings also were written as one book at first. *1 Kings* begins with the last days of David, his farewell words and death in 961 B.C. Then it moves quickly to the story of David's son, Solomon, and how he followed his father as king. Solomon was a wise and good king for many years. He was the first to build a large and beautiful temple for

God in Jerusalem. In time, however, his wealth and power corrupted him. By the time of his death, his great kingdom was ready to split apart. Shortly after his death, Solomon's son took the throne but was a terrible ruler. As a result, 10 of the 12 tribes broke away and formed *Israel* in the north with Samaria as their capital. The other 2 tribes formed *Judah* in the south and kept Jerusalem as their capital. From then on, each of them had their own kings and their own places of worship. In *2 Kings* the stories of each kingdom continued. They often attacked each other and had to fight with invaders. It was during the evil reign of King Ahab that Elijah and Elisha were sent as prophets. In 721 B.C. the Assyrians captured and completely destroyed Samaria and led thousands into exile. At one point, King Hezekiah and Jerusalem narrowly escaped destruction at the hands of the Assyrian army which was gathering outside the city. Before they captured it, an "an angel of the Lord" (perhaps a plague) struck them down and saved the day. Eventually, however, the kingdom of Judah also fell to the Babylonians. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was burned, the temple destroyed, and thousands were taken into exile in Babylon. The great kingdom of David and Solomon was gone. Only a small group (or *remnant*) was left behind in Judah to fulfill God's promises. Looking back over the history of the kings, many of them misused their power, and forgot about God and his covenant with the people.

• Outline of 1 & 2 Kings _____

Solomon Rules a United Kingdom (*1 Kings*, Chapters 1 to 11)

The Kingdom Divides in Two (*1 Kings*, Chapters 12 to 22)

The Divided Kingdoms and their Rulers (*2 Kings*, Chapters 1 to 17)

The Final Days of Judah and God's Remnant (*2 Kings*, Chapters 18 to 25)

• Passages to Read— _____

1 Kings, Chapter 3 (The Wisdom of Solomon)

1 Kings, Chapter 8 (Dedication of the temple and Solomon's prayer)

1 Kings, Chapter 11 (Solomon's last days)

1 Kings, Chapters 15 to 19 (Elijah and Elisha the prophets)

2 Kings, Chapter 17 (The Assyrians conquer Samaria)

2 Kings, Chapter 25 (The Babylonians destroy Jerusalem.)

• Thoughts for Prayer _____

A group or a community that ignores God and his commands, will eventually fall apart.

May we never forget you, Lord.

A sincere heart and a humble belief in God are the best ways to walk the road of a happy life.

Let us walk by your truth, and with faith in you, God.

Our decisions will be good and wise if they are made with prayer and based on God's will.

We want whatever is your will, Lord.

1 & 2 Kings Study Page

Question 1. *"The kingdom escaped me and became my brother's"* (1 Kings 2:15). We are not wealthy and powerful, but how do we struggle to get ahead, or push our way to the top?

Question 2. *"If you now lighten the harsh service and the heavy yoke your father imposed on us, we will serve you"* (1 Kings 12:4). Solomon forgot the people's good and made himself rich. How do we take advantage of others to make ourselves feel important?

Question 3. *"None were left among the people of the land except the poor"* (2 Kings 24:14). When Jerusalem was destroyed, only a poor, small group of God's people was left. Can God use us for his plan even though we are small and weak?

Question 4. *"He did evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his forebears had done"* (2 Kings 24:9). Time and again, God's people failed. Can we turn to God and begin again after we fail?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Books of 1 and 2 Kings:



1 & 2 CHRONICLES

• History

1 Chronicles begins with long lists of the tribes and families of God's people. These lists went all the way back to Abraham and even Adam. Because so much had been destroyed and nearly forgotten during their exile in Babylon, the people needed to restore their family roots. These lists helped them connect with their past and the promises God made to their ancestors. They found comfort in knowing that they were still God's chosen people like their ancestors were. The story of King David was so important to the people that it was told again, with a special focus on Israel's temple and worship. It was true that when David was king he sinned and repented, but he also was admired as a great leader who protected the nation. The author also recalled David's love for God. For instance, David took special care of the ark of the covenant. When it was brought into the city, he danced before it with joy. After he built a palace for himself, he realized that God was dwelling in a tent. So he began to prepare a temple where God could be worshiped. He gathered stones, rare wood, and precious metals. Although he died before he had the chance to build it, he was regarded as the *founder* of the temple. *2 Chronicles* continues with the building of the temple by King Solomon. Many of the stories of *1 and 2 Kings* are repeated. The good kings of the past are remembered for their faithfulness to God and their care in bringing the people back to God. Such stories encouraged the people who had suffered greatly during their exile in Babylon. The author was trying to help them understand that God was still with them, just as he was with their ancestors. They also were God's people and could count on his covenant and love.

• Outline of 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Family Lines of God's People (1 Chronicles, Chapters 1 to 9)
David the King and the Plan for God's Temple (1 Chronicles, Chapters 10 to 29)
Solomon's Rule and the Building of the Temple (2 Chronicles, Chapters 1 to 9)
The Kingdom is Divided (2 Chronicles, Chapters 10 to 28)
The End of the Kingdoms and Return from Exile (2 Chronicles, 29 to 36)

• Passages to Read

1 Chronicles, Chapters 13, 15, and 17 (David cares for the ark and plans a temple)
1 Chronicles, Chapters 28 and 29 (David's preparations for the temple)
2 Chronicles, Chapters 1 to 9 (Solomon's reign and the building of the temple)
2 Chronicles, Chapter 29 and 30 (King Hezekiah begins a reform)
2 Chronicles, Chapters 34 and 35 (King Josiah continues the reform)
2 Chronicles, Chapter 36 (The people are exiled, but return home after 70 years)

• Thoughts for Prayer

At first, God told David he did not need a temple to be built for him.
We your people are the living stones of your temple, Lord.

When David gave his own fortune for God's temple, he asked: *"Who else is willing to contribute generously this day to the LORD?" (1 Chronicles 29:5).* Give us generous hearts and not hold back any good deeds in your service, Lord.

After the temple was finished God said: *"My eyes and my heart also shall be there always" (2 Chronicles 7:16).* We are your people, God. Look on us and keep us in your heart always.

1 & 2 Chronicles Study Page

Question 1. *“These were the sons of Israel”* (1 Chronicles 2:1). Many people trace their ancestors and make a family tree. Who was our own ancestor in the faith, who brought us to belief in God?

Question 2. *“Everything is from you, and we only give you what we have received from you”* (1 Chronicles 29:14). Like David, what have we received from God that we can give back?

Question 3. *“They burnt the house of God”* (2 Chronicles 36:19). After Jerusalem was destroyed, the people were taken to Babylon where they had no temple.
Can our faith survive and grow stronger in hard times even without a church building?

Question 4. *“We are at a loss what to do, hence our eyes are turned toward you”* (2 Chronicles 20:12). As the king faced a *“vast multitude”* of enemies he turned to God.
When we feel powerless in the face of our problems can we turn to God for help?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles:



EZRA & NEHEMIAH

• History _____

Like *Samuel*, *Kings* and *Chronicles*, these two books were originally one book. They describe what happened during the years 538 to 430 B.C. after the people returned home from exile in Babylon. *Ezra* the priest and *Nehemiah* the governor carefully guided the people's religious and everyday lives during those years. *Ezra* reminded them that they were God's chosen people and must live by God's laws. Being the chosen people sometimes was a struggle, however. It was not easy to obey God's commands at all times. Sometimes it was hard because they were surrounded by others who worshiped false gods or no god at all. It was a real problem when one of these people was a husband or a wife. *Nehemiah* provided an excellent example of a wise leader who faced serious problems but turned to his faith in God for strength. He was in charge of rebuilding the city and its walls. He also gave total support to Ezra as he taught the law and the proper worship of God to the people. With the guidance of these two great leaders, the people were restored to their homeland and to the true worship of God.

• Outline of Ezra & Nehemiah _____

Ezra

The People Return and Rebuild the Temple (Ezra, Chapters 1 to 6)

Ezra Arrives to Help the People (Ezra, Chapters 7 to 10)

Nehemiah

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds Jerusalem (Nehemiah, Chapters 1 to 7)

The People Renew the Covenant with God (Nehemiah, Chapters 8 to 10)

Nehemiah Continues to Rebuild and Reform (Nehemiah, Chapters 11 to 13)

• Passages to Read _____

Ezra

The people begin to rebuild the temple (Chapter 3)

Ezra returns and restores the people (Chapter 7)

Ezra's prayer to God (Chapter 9:5-15)

Nehemiah

Nehemiah returns to rebuild the city (Chapters 1 and 2)

Ezra reads the law to the people (Chapter 8:1-11)

• Thoughts for Prayer _____

Although we live with others who do not believe, we can rely on God to strengthen us.

Keep our hearts and minds fixed on you, God.

No matter how far away we go from God, we can turn to him and he will bring us home.

Help us return to our senses, and find our way back to you, Lord.

After the people heard the law they went home and celebrated. They shared their food with those in need because they understood the law. *Let us worship you by sharing what we have with those in need, God.*

Ezra & Nehemiah Study Page

Question 1. *“Despite their fear of the peoples of the land, they replaced the altar on its foundations and offered holocausts to the LORD on it, both morning and evening” (Ezra 3:3).* When we live with those who don’t believe in God, or say God doesn’t matter, how can we live by faith anyway?

Question 2. *“Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read” (Nehemiah 8:8).* Why must we read the Bible with God’s church guiding us?

Question 3. *“Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!” (Nehemiah 8:10).* How does God’s forgiveness of our sins give us strength to rejoice?

Question 4 *“I am too ashamed and confounded to raise my face to you, O my God, for our wicked deeds are heaped up above our heads and our guilt reaches up to heaven” (Ezra 9:6).*

Can anyone stand before God without guilt?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah:

Addiction

Understanding Addiction *"A person is a slave of whatever overcomes him" (2 Peter 2:19).*

The apostle Peter also went to the heart of addiction when he said that we are a slave to whatever overcomes us. Addiction means the enslavement of self. In other words, we are powerless to overcome our need for whatever it is. We can be addicted or slaves to many things: money, power (the desire to be number one, to be in control), sex, possessions, alcohol, drugs. Addiction doesn't always mean to drugs or alcohol. Many people in our society are addicted to spending or to work. They try to repeat the "rush" by buying something new or getting ahead of others. "Spend-aholics" can't stop even after they are deep in debt and their bills are out of control.

The person who is addicted has an emotional and spiritual illness. The addicted person is turning to a substance or a behavior to solve problems they cannot correct. The person may have tried to stop the addiction on his or her own. Addiction can be a serious, life-threatening problem needing immediate treatment.

Dealing with Addiction *"You are slaves of the one you obey" (Romans 6:16).*

The process of recovery begins with seeking outside help such as a support group, counseling, and a treatment program. We have to face reality when dealing with ourselves or another person who is addicted. Others can support us in doing that. When someone we know and care about is addicted, we may be part of the problem if we try to deny it. We tell ourselves, "things really aren't that bad" or we punish or bribe them, threaten them, or preach to them. Or, we allow ourselves to cover up or make excuses for their behavior. We may even try to take over their responsibility for it.

We can be part of the solution if we talk about it with someone who is trained to deal with addiction. Pray for patience to live one day at a time. Recovery does not happen overnight. Realize that there will be setbacks and relapses. We can "step back in love" if we don't do for the person what only they can do for themselves.

Healing Our Hearts *"At a time when you did not know God, you became slaves to things that by nature are not gods" (Galatians 4:8).*

Human beings walk around with a hole in their hearts. The hole echoes with big questions: Who am I? Do I have a place in this world? What is the meaning of life? Can I love and be loved? Why do we suffer and die? It is as if we are looking for the other half of ourselves. We try to fill this hole with all kinds of people, things and experiences. We run to pills, the bottle to medicate it. Or we are afraid of this hole and run from it by being over-active.

In the end, after we have tried everything else, we learn that the hole in our hearts is only healed by God. No thing, drug, alcohol or person can fill this deep need for love and meaning. Only God has enough love to fill it, and enough mercy to heal it.

Pray and Read the Bible

"We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin" (Romans 6:6).



TOBIT, JUDITH & ESTHER

• History

The three books that follow are not history but novels. If we went to a book store today we would find them on the shelf called “fiction.” These stories are set in biblical times, but the names and even some of the places are not always real. Today we would begin such stories with the words, “Once upon a time.” After Ezra and Nehemiah’s time,

God’s people were invaded by one army after another. In 336 B.C. Alexander the Great spread his Greek empire over most of the known world. After he died, they were ruled by either the Seleucids or the Egyptians as they fought each other for power over the area. In 167 B.C. a Seleucid ruler named Antiochus forced everyone to live and worship like Greeks. He placed a stature of the Greek god, Zeus in the temple. He made the religious customs of God’s illegal. Anyone who refused to obey his changes was put to death without mercy. Sometime during these trying times, the authors wrote *Tobit*, *Judith*, and *Esther* to encourage their readers who were trying to survive and remain faithful to God. The men and women described in *Tobit*, *Judith*, and *Esther* inspired those who read these books to stay loyal to God, to live by God’s laws, to trust in God to guide them and deliver them. *Tobit* and *Judith* are accepted by the Catholic church as inspired books of the Bible. For the people then and for us today, *Tobit* is an example of faith and reverence for God, devotion to God’s worship, and care for one’s family and the needy. *Judith* shows heroic courage as she goes among the enemies of God’s people and slays their leader while he is asleep. When the soldiers wake up to find their leader dead, they flee. The story of *Esther* helps the people celebrate their survival and God’s protection throughout the many years of their history: “*God remembered his people*” (*Esther*, F:9). The Book of *Esther* was written in two forms: Hebrew (Chapters 1-10) and Greek (Chapters A-F).

• Outline of Tobit, Judith & Esther

Tobit

The Trials of Tobit and Sarah (Chapters 1 to 6)

Tobiah’s Journey and Marriage (Chapters 7 to 9)

Tobiah’s Return, Tobit’s Cure, and Death (Chapters 10 to 14)

Judith

Dangerous Times for the People (Chapters 1 to 7)

The People Are Delivered (Chapters 8-14)

Victory and Celebration (Chapters 15 to 16)

Esther

Esther in the King’s Palace (Chapters A to B)

Esther Helps Her People (Chapters 4 to 5)

The People Are Saved and the Feast of Purim (Chapters 6 to F)

• Passages to Read

Tobit, Chapter 4 (Tobit prepares his son for the journey)

Judith, Chapter 8 (A woman of strength and beauty)

Esther, Chapter 7 (The enemy is overthrown)

Esther, Chapter 9:20-28 (Esther and the feast of Purim)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Esther ends with the words “*God remembered his people*” (F:9) *We are not alone, God. You are with us.*

Tobit, Judith, and Esther Study Page

Question 1. *“For he scourges and then has mercy;
 he casts down to the depths of the netherworld,
 and he brings up from the great abyss.
 No one can escape his hand” (Tobit 13:2).*

Is it a good thing when our lives of sin begin to fall apart? Where is God during all that time?

Question 2. *“Be mindful of God, and at all times bless his name” (Tobit 14:9).*
Many things happen to us that do not make sense, or are very painful.
During these times why is it important to remember God and to bless his name?

Question 3. *“By a woman’s hand he confounded them” (Judith 16:5).* Judith and Esther were examples of faith, courage, and love for God’s people. The Old and New Testaments also tell about other women who were examples. What are their names? Why are they remembered?

Question 4. *“You alone are God. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you” (Esther C:14).* Sometimes people say: *“I’m so far down the only way is up.”* Is God with us even when we are not thinking of God? Even when we hit bottom and no one seems to care, are we really alone?

Please write down other thoughts you may have about the Books of Tobit, Judith, and Esther:



1 MACCABEES

• History

1 Maccabees was written about 100 years before Christ by a Hebrew author. It was named after one of the heroes of the book, Judas *Maccabeus*, a name that means “hammer.” Judas and four of his brothers (John, Simon, Eleazar, and Jonathan) continued the revolt that Mattathias their father started against their foreign rulers. Their king wanted everyone to believe and act like pagans, so they punished and killed God’s people for practicing their own religion. When things were at their worst, the people wondered, “*Why are we still alive?*”(2:13). The heroic family of Maccabees and all who joined their revolt said: “*If we...do not fight...for our lives and our traditions, they will soon destroy us from the earth*” (2:40). *1 Maccabees* provides a history of how the people remained faithful to God and the covenant of their ancestors during a very cruel time. This book was meant to inspire all those who struggle for the right to practice their belief in God and his ways, especially when there is pressure from the group to give in and “belong.” *1 and 2 Maccabees* are accepted by the Catholic church as inspired books of the Bible. These two books are not found in Protestant versions of the Bible.

• Outline of 1 Maccabees

The Invasions and Persecution (Chapter 1)
Mattathias Inspires His Sons to Fight (Chapter 2 and 3)
The Temple Is Restored (Chapter 4)
Judas Maccabeus Continues the Struggle (Chapters 5 to 9:22)
Jonathan Leads the People (Chapters 9:23 to 12)
Simon the High Priest (Chapters 13 to 16)

• Passages to Read

Chapter 2 (Mattathias begins the revolt)
Chapter 4 (After the victory the temple is cleansed)
Chapter 16 (The end of the Maccabees)

• Thoughts for Prayer

Like the Maccabees and their followers, we must choose between the true God or the false gods that can never give us life and happiness. *May we always choose life with you, God.*

Self-preservation is a deep instinct. Simon told his people: “*Far be it from me, then, to save my own life in any time of distress*” (1 *Maccabees* 13:5). *May our love for you be stronger than fear, Lord.*

When the temple was profaned, God’s people purified it. Our bodies are temples of God. Through drugs, alcohol, and sex we have threatened our health, or ruined the beauty of our bodies. *Rebuild our bodies and souls with your healing and peace, God.*

1 Maccabees Study Page

Question 1. When things are at their worst, we may wonder like God's people, "*Why are we still alive?*" (1 Maccabees 2:13). At such times why is it important to remember that even if no one else seems to think so, we are precious in God's eyes?

Question 2. "*We will not obey the words of the king nor depart from our religion in the slightest degree*" (1 Maccabees 2:22). In times of trouble and confusion, God raises up leaders for his people. Who are the people we can turn to for guidance and wisdom in our lives?

Question 3. "*When the time came for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons: 'Arrogance and scorn have now grown strong; it is a time of disaster and violent anger'*" (1 Maccabees 2:49). In the darkest hour, when others are arrogant and violent, is God powerless? (Read verses 50-64).

Question 4. "*Today he is exalted, and tomorrow he is not to be found, because he has returned to his dust, and his schemes have perished*" (1 Maccabees 2:63).

In all of history, what human evil has outlasted the plan of God's wisdom and love?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of 1 Maccabees:



2 MACCABEES

• History

2 Maccabees also was written about 100 years before the time of Christ, but it was written in Greek not Hebrew. The author filled in more information about the history of God's people as told in *1 Maccabees*.

This book focuses on what happened during the last days of Onias the high priest and the struggles of Judas Maccabeus. It also blamed those who were not faithful to God and his worship for the bad things that happened to the rest of the nation. The stories were told to give courage to those who were suffering at the hands of nonbelievers, or because of the traitors in their midst. The author tells how God's people were punished for practicing their religion, and how the sacred Place (the temple) was profaned. It was used by their enemies for worshipping a pagan god. It also tells again how Judas Maccabeus came to the rescue of the people and overturned their enemies. In the words of the martyrs (who died for their faith), the people were encouraged to keep their hearts strong and remain faithful even if it meant great suffering. Even if they died they knew that God would give them eternal life. *2 Maccabees* supports the Catholic church's practice of praying for the dead. *1 and 2 Maccabees* also were read by the early Christians to give them comfort and strength when they were tortured and killed for their faith in Christ.

• Outline of 2 Maccabees

Chapters 1 to 2:18 (Letters to God's People in Egypt)

Chapter 2: 19-32 (The Author's Remarks)

Chapter 3 to 7 (The Temple is Profaned)

Chapters 8 to 10:8 (Purification of the Temple)

Chapters 10:9 to 15:39 (The People Are Persecuted Once Again)

• Passages to Read

The author's remarks (Chapter 2:19-32)

The sufferings of the people (Chapter 7)

Prayers for the dead (Chapter 12:38-46)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"The LORD, however, had not chosen the people for the sake of the Place, but the Place for the sake of the people. Therefore, the Place itself, having shared in the people's misfortunes..." (2 Maccabees 5:19). You share our suffering, God.

"He never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with misfortunes, he does not abandon his own people" (2 Maccabees 6:16). We will never be without your kindness, Lord.

"I beg those who read this book not to be disheartened...these misfortunes...were meant not for the ruin but for the correction of our nation" (2 Maccabees 6:12). You correct us because you love us, God.

2 Maccabees Study Page

Question 1. *“Even if, for the time being, I avoid the punishment of men, I shall never, whether alive or dead, escape the hands of the Almighty”* (2 Maccabees 6:26). Do we truly understand that what we do or think is always seen by God? Does God want to punish us or give us life?

Question 2. *“They implored the LORD to look kindly upon his people, who were being oppressed on all sides; to have pity on the temple...to have mercy on the city...to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; to remember the criminal slaughter of the innocent children...and to manifest his hatred of evil”* (2 Maccabees 8:2-4). What is our Christian duty to pray for others? How does it change us?

Question 3. The author of 2 Maccabees encouraged the people not to lose heart in the midst of their trials. How can our trials be *meant not for our ruin but for correction?* (See 2 Maccabees 6:12).

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of 2 Maccabees:

Abuse

What is abuse? *"The LORD...saves those whose spirit is crushed" (Psalm 34:19)*

Studies show that many inmates have been abused in their own past. When they were young they were yelled at and beaten, neglected or sexually abused by an adult—often by someone who should have cared for them. Those who been abused know what it is first hand. It is harm that one person inflicts on another person who is innocent and often defenseless. Abuse takes many forms. It can be verbal, mental, physical, sexual, or the result of neglect. Very often people are abused by someone who is supposed to love and care for them. This abuse is even more confusing and hurtful. Many people were abused as children but it also happens to adults. It happens to young and old, girls and boys, women and men. The abusers can be parents, relatives, church or community leaders, counselors or teachers. It happens among the rich and the poor. Often, those who have been abused when they were young become abusers when they grow up.

The Effects of Abuse *"Do not be conquered by evil" (Romans 12:21)*

Abuse leaves us confused, insecure, and isolated. We feel alone and powerless with our pain. We also feel sad because instead of someone loving us they have used us to vent their own feelings. Deep down we are angry because our dignity as a human person has been offended. The abuser "had their way with us" and left us feeling betrayed and broken. We may be confused and question our worth: What's wrong with me? Why did someone do this to me? Did I deserve this? Abuse leaves us feeling fearful and unprotected because our home, community, or church is supposed to be a safe place. We may feel alone because no one helped us. We grieve over the loss of our innocence, our childhood, our marriage or our freedom. As children we learned to give in and not fight back. If it happened often enough when we were young it may have created a pattern in our relationships—we continue to find people who are not healthy for us. Our needs are not important to them—only their needs matter. We do this because it is all we know. We do not believe there is anything better for us since we were treated like trash. If we saw others abused, we feel guilty about not helping them. We carry all these wounds in our hearts.

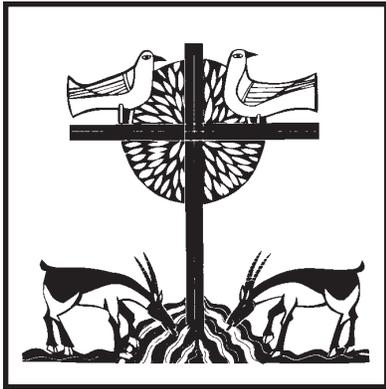
The Road to Recovery *"Of your wounds I will heal you" (Jeremiah 30:17)*

We need to heal these wounds for many reasons. Our unhealed past harms us. Past hurts are still there and anger and grief poison our present life. The cycle may repeat itself—we may continue to be a victim or abuser. To overcome the past, we must remember and relive what happened. It is good to realize that despite our abuse we were strong enough to survive. Recovery takes time. We must be patient with ourselves and not get discouraged with how long it takes to feel good about ourselves. Our goal is to break old patterns of thinking and acting in order to take charge of our lives and move on.

1) We can ask for help—from God to strengthen and guide us, and from others like support groups and trained counselors. 2) We can heal past abuse by re-living the memories (when, where and who abused us). 3) We can learn from what happened, to end the cycle of abuse; we can protect ourselves and help others. 4) We can confront our abusers, placing blame where it belongs—not on ourselves. We did not cause the abuser's behavior. 5) We can forgive ourselves and let go of self-blame. We claim our right to be alive and happy. We are not the trash. We are somebody with a God-given life. 6) We also can try to forgive the abuser. That is possible only after facing our memories and anger. Forgiving does not mean condoning the abuse. It is a way of saying: "I have not forgotten what you did to me; in forgiving you, you no longer have power over me." This cannot be forced. It may come only in time and with God's grace. Forgiving does not deny the past. It helps us get free of what binds us, so we begin to really live with joy in the present and with hope for the future.

Read and Pray the Bible

Read *1 John* 4:18 for the Bible's teaching about fear and love.



PRAYERS OF THE BIBLE

“...from your delightful stream you give us to drink.
For with you is the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9-10).

When we turn to the prayers of the Bible, we truly are praying in the Spirit, because the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Not only are they beautiful prayers written a long time ago, but they are still full of meaning for people today. Another reason they are special is because they were known and used by Jesus and the apostles. Remember, Jesus and the apostles were Jews, so they turned to the writings of Old Testament to inspire them and help them pray. The

prayers of the New Testament are a great treasure because they were given to us by Jesus, Mary, and the apostles themselves. We have their own words to teach us how to pray.

Prayers of the Old Testament

Prayer of Moses (*Exodus* 15:2-18)

Prayers from Selected Psalms

Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143: The Seven Penitential Psalms

Psalm 22: The cry of Jesus on the cross

Psalm 23: God our shepherd

Psalm 25: God our help

Psalm 27: Trust in God

Psalm 34, 121: God our protector

Psalm 40: Doing God's will

Psalm 42, 63, 84: Longing for God

Psalm 62: Trust in God alone

Psalm 90: Time and eternity

Psalm 96: Praise for God's glory

Psalm 103: Praise for God's goodness

Psalm 130: A prayer for pardon

Psalm 139: God sees and knows us

Psalm 142: Prayer of a prisoner

Psalms 148, 150: Praising God

Prayer of Judith (*Judith* 16:1-2 and 13-16)

Prayer of gratitude (*Isaiah* 12:1-6)

Prayer of deliverance from evil (*Sirach* 51:1-12)

Prayers of the New Testament

Prayer of Mary (*Luke* 1:45-55)

Prayer of Zechariah (*Luke* 1:68-79)

Prayer of Simeon (*Luke* 2:29-32)

Lord's Prayer (*Matthew* 6:9-13)

Prayer of Jesus at the last supper (*John* 17:1-26)

Prayer of Jesus in agony (*Matthew* 26:39,42)

Prayer of Jesus on the cross (*Luke* 23:46)

Prayer of Consolation (*2 Corinthians* 1:3-4)

Prayer of God's blessing (*Ephesians* 1:3-6)

Prayer for others (*Ephesians* 3:14-21)

Prayer for fellow Christians (*Ephesians* 6:23-24)

Prayer of new birth (*1 Peter* 1:3-5)

Prayer of praise (*Jude* 24-25)

The Holy Land in the Old Testament





REVIEW TEST

Introduction to the Bible

After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. How many books are in the Bible? _____
2. Name 10 kinds of books that are in the Bible: _____

3. Why is it not easy to translate the Bible?

4. *Oral tradition* means the writings of the Bible that were handed on.
(Circle one) True False
5. List the 7 books that were included in the Catholic Bible, but left out of the non-Catholic Bible:

6. What is *preaching* called? _____ What are the *writings* called? _____
Which one came first in the history of the church? _____
7. What is meant by the *context* of each book of the Bible?:

8. Why do Christians value the books of the Old Testament?

9. What do the letters B.C. stand for? _____
10. When using the Bible, what does the abbreviation *1 Kgs* stand for? _____
11. The Bible is divided into books, chapters and _____.
12. At first, what three languages were books of the Bible written in? _____
13. The Bible (scripture) is inspired by _____.
14. How many books are in the Old Testament? _____
15. The first Christians did not have the Bible as we have it today. (Circle one) True False
16. Which came first, the church or the Bible? _____
17. We need the guidance of the _____ to interpret the Bible.
18. In the Bible a *covenant* is a _____ between God and his people.
19. *Messiah* is Hebrew for the Greek word *Christos* (*Christ* in English). It means _____ for God's service.
20. The title *son of God* is used only in the New Testament. (Circle one) True False



Review Test

Part One: A-The Pentateuch

After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. What is the *Pentateuch* and why is it called that?

2. The books that make up the Pentateuch are *Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus,* and *Judges*.
True or False (Circle one).
3. What does the word *Genesis* mean? _____
4. God created the world from _____
5. Abraham was the father of the _____ people.
6. Name the 3 *patriarchs* (founding fathers) of the chosen people:

7. Who sold Joseph into slavery? _____
8. What is the *name* for himself that God told Moses from the burning bush?

9. God made an *agreement* with the chosen people while they were in the desert. What is another word for this? _____
10. Why was *blood* used in the rituals of the Old Testament? What did it stand for? _____

11. The Ten Commandments (also called the Sinai Covenant) were first written on tablets of _____.
12. The second book of the Bible is called *Exodus*, a word that means _____.
13. The feast of *Passover* celebrates the escape from slavery of God's people by passing through the sea.
(Circle one) True False
14. The *ark of the covenant* was a special tent where Moses lived. (Circle one) True False
15. What is the main idea of *Leviticus* 19:1-9? _____.
16. In *Numbers* 9:15-23 what goes before the people to guide them?
_____.
17. In *Numbers* 20:2-13 Moses struck a serpent with his staff. (Circle one) True False
18. The name *Deuteronomy* means _____.
19. Before Moses died on the mountain he looked at the _____ in the distance.
20. In *Deuteronomy* 10 Moses taught the people the great _____.



REVIEW TEST

After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. Before Moses died he appointed a *new leader* to take the people into the promised land. What was his name? _____
2. What *period* of the chosen people's history do the historical books describe?

3. How many historical books are in the Catholic Bible? _____
4. List all of the historical books: _____

5. Some of the historical books are not history as it happened. They tell a story set in a well-known time and place in order to teach a lesson but the characters may not be real. (Circle one) True or False
6. After awhile the 12 tribes decided they wanted to be ruled by a king. (Circle one) True or False
7. Who is remembered as the greatest king in the history of the chosen people? _____
8. What great king was known for his wisdom and for building the first temple? _____
9. This woman, famous for her loyalty, was the grandmother of king David. What is her name?

10. Eventually the 12 tribes divided into 2 separate kingdoms. What are the names of these kingdoms?

11. How many *major* judges were there? _____ How many *minor* judges? _____
12. In *Judges* 16 what was the secret of Samson's great strength? _____.
13. The books of *1 and 2 Samuel* are named after a man who was a _____ and a _____.
14. When David was a young man why did he live in hiding? _____.
15. The prophet named _____ faced David with the truth of his sins.
16. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken to exile in _____.
17. Ezra and Nehemiah were both priests. (Circle one) True False
18. Three of the historical books are novels. What are their names? _____.
19. Which of the Maccabees started the revolt against the foreign rulers? _____.
20. How did reading *1 and 2 Maccabees* help the early Christians?
_____.

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