The background of the cover is a collage of historical documents. At the top left, there's a fragment of a parchment with the word 'HILLET' visible. Below it, a scroll of parchment is partially unrolled, showing Hebrew text. To the right, another scroll is rolled up. In the foreground, a vertical strip of parchment with Hebrew text is visible. The overall theme is ancient manuscripts and historical texts.

Be INSPIRED

40

Days of Devotional
for Lent

SCOTT CARROLL PhD
and TODD A. HILLARD

Be Inspired – 40 Days of Devotional for Lent

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Be Inspired



inspired [in-spīrd] (adjective)

To be moved and propelled to do something significant, as if by supernatural or divine influence.



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INTRODUCTION

40.

Yes, it's just a number, yet 40 is significant in special ways. The number 40 is mentioned 146 times in the Bible. It often refers to a set time of searching, trials, testing, devotion, or transition for the people of God.

Moses, for example, lived 40 years in Egypt and then wandered for 40 years in the desert before God used him to lead his people out of slavery. Moses was also on Mount Sinai for 40 days on two different occasions as he sought the will of God for the future — and ultimately received the first *written* words of God in the Ten Commandments.

In Noah's time, 40 days of rain washed away the evil residue of preceding generations and marked a fresh start for humanity.

Jesus spent 40 days alone, without food, in the wilderness before his ministry officially began. The Son of God was led into the desert by the Spirit of God where he unquestionably experienced deep fellowship with God the Father. During these 40 days, he prepared for his future ministry as he navigated through intense temptations by the evil one.

Certainly, these 40 days were a time of great struggle, testing, and introspection. And yet each of these days marked a new beginning. It is no coincidence that the annual remembrance of Lent is traditionally 40 days in length. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and comes to a vibrant conclusion at Easter during the remembrance of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Practiced in many ways throughout Christendom, Lent can be a special time to focus on God and our relationship to him.

Yes, the number 40 has a great legacy. This is why we invite you into a new, special, 40-day experience. This discovery will be inspired by truths *within* the Bible, and it will also reveal the history *of* the Bible itself. This, perhaps, is the great untold story of human history and our relationship with God. It's the history of the leather scrolls of the

Hebrews and the sheets of ancient papyri of the early Christians. It's the history of the technologies and sacrifices that made the Bible the most significant document in the world...and it's the story of the men and women who shed sweat and tears and blood for God's Word, protecting it with passion and precision so that we can read its timeless truths today.

THE MOST IMPORTANT BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Throughout the next 40 days, you will discover amazing Bibles from history. From the oldest to the newest, from all corners of the world. Yet, of all the Bibles in history, one stands out as the most significant and most important:

Your Bible.

Yes, when you grasp the history of the Bible while immersing yourself in the message of the Bible, you can be inspired on a deeper level than ever before as you READ, REFLECT, and RESPOND, interacting with God's Word in a personal way. By engaging with your Bible, the next 40 days will be an intimate time of discovery of the powerful truths within Scripture.

Indeed, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

So let the discovery begin, and may God have his way with us for 40 days as we allow His inspired Word to speak to us in new ways. In the end, may we be inspired to live more vibrant lives, with deeper faith, for the causes of eternity, to His glory.



Scott Carroll



Todd A. Hillard

Be INSPIRED

DAY 1

IN THE BEGINNING

GENESIS 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

GENESIS APOCRYPHON



This manuscript was discovered in 1947 in secret caves hidden in cliffs above the Dead Sea in Israel. It was among thousands of scrolls and fragments that had been placed in clay pots by an eccentric group of Jews who were trying to protect them from the Romans who invaded their area in the year 68 AD.

These fragments are the earliest-known copies of the book of Genesis in Hebrew. They date to around the time of Christ and preserve the description of the first three days of creation. Although the dark text is difficult to read in natural light, the black-and-white photograph enlarges

the text and was taken using infrared lighting, making it much easier to read.

DEVOTION

Everything has a beginning. Science has now proven that the universe hasn't been around forever and that all time, space, and matter had to have a beginning. So the earth had a beginning too, as did life and each of our lives.

The Bible also had a beginning. In fact, on the way to becoming the most important document in history, the Bible had multiple beginnings. It was written by more than 40 authors over a span of 1,500 years on three continents, and it spans history like no other document. It is the uncontested best-selling book in the world. Approximately five *billion* copies have been printed, with hundreds of millions more in digital formats. Except for basic clothing, it is the most commonly owned object across the globe. So where did it begin?

The Bible was being created as God “breathed” his words into the minds of men and had them write down just what he wanted. The Bible itself claims that all Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) and many English translations use the word “inspired by God” to describe this. In our journey to “Be Inspired,” it is only fitting that we begin our 40-day journey at the beginning of the Bible, which records the beginning of all matter, space, time, life and humanity. Because it is here where we first see the beginning of the creative power and love of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is here where we first see God's desire to have a relationship with each of us.

READ

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day..... So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Genesis 1:1-5, 27-28

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

John 1:1-5, 9-14

REFLECT

- How often do you think people *really* wonder about the beginning of all things?
- If you asked your family why God created them, what do you think they would say?
- Do you think it's possible that God wants to create a new beginning for you in the next 40 days?

RESPOND

God,

As I begin this 40-day adventure to “be inspired,” I humbly ask that it would mark a new *beginning* in my relationship with you. I thank you that you have revealed yourself through your words, and I thank you that your words are still alive today. I simply ask that you create in me a hunger for your words and a deeper relationship and fellowship with you.

Amen

THE GREATEST OF BLESSINGS

NUMBERS 6:24

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

KETEF HINNOM SILVER AMULETS



These texts, known as the Ketef Hinnom Silver Amulets, are two miniature scrolls written on silver foil. They were discovered at a burial site near the Old City of Jerusalem overlooking the infamous Valley of Gehenna. They date to around 600 BC, and they are the oldest portions of the Bible discovered to date. They were made during a time of great upheaval in Judah during the failed Assyrian attempt to conquer Jerusalem. Amulets like these were put in a case and worn around the neck.

Their remarkable discovery in 1979 confirms the accuracy of the transmission of the biblical text, since they are virtually identical to the words we read today. Enlarged images enhance the texts; transcriptions and translations can be seen behind the objects. The larger amulet contains the Aaronic (Priestly) Blessing, a powerful message of encouragement from the book of Numbers.

DEVOTION

Life is tough. There is no question about that. Modern technology and instant communication ensure that we see the most recent images of the latest wars, famines, and earthquakes. And that's just on the outside. Inside our hearts and minds, we are troubled and worried about many other things.

It's very interesting that these silver amulets, the earliest known portions of Scripture in the world, were found in a burial site. It doesn't take much imagination to put ourselves in the place of the people who were laying to rest the bodies of their loved ones. We don't have to wonder why they buried them with the hopeful message that the Bible contains. Nothing like death challenges us to look for hope beyond what we can see, feel, touch, and do.

When this passage was originally written, the people of God were wandering in the barren wilderness of Sinai for 40 years. In the midst of the desert struggle, God told Moses to tell Aaron to pray a blessing over the people — a blessing of hope in the middle of their struggle: “May the LORD bless you and keep you...”

These types of blessings and prayers are found all through the Bible, usually in the middle of very tough days. Paul, in particular, regularly prayed blessings over young Christians, asking for the very best from God for them.

It's wise to ask for these blessings and pray these kinds of prayers because truly, God is our only hope in life and in death.

READ

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:

‘May the LORD bless you
and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you
and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor
and give you his peace.’”

Numbers 6:22–26

I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called — his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him.

Ephesians 1:16–19

REFLECT

- What do you think most people would say is the harshest thing going on in the world right now?
- Do you think your co-workers would rather be delivered *from* tough times, or experience God's peace and power to get *through* tough times?
- What is your reaction to tough times?

RESPOND

God,

I turn to you now as my ultimate source of hope in this world and in the world beyond. Although I in no way deserve them, I still ask for your blessings. I ask that you would open my heart to receive the love that you have for me. I ask that I would find rest for my soul in my relationship with you in the midst of this crazy uncertain world... in the midst of the difficult circumstance I am facing today.

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY **3**

THE POWER OF LOVE

DEUTERONOMY 6:5

And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

KAIFENG TORAH



This stunning scroll contains the “Torah,” the first five books of the Bible. A scroll like this would have been among the first biblical scriptures in China. Hand-copied on the skins of approximately 40 sheep, it is nearly 100 feet (30 meters) long. It was brought to Asia by Jews who settled in Kaifeng, China at the end of the Silk Road sometime between 100 and 900 AD.

The synagogue in Kaifeng was flooded and burned several times, destroying precious scrolls and manuscripts. Very few survived. By the 1860s, the synagogue was totally destroyed and only portions of biblical texts survived. Three stone inscriptions provide interesting details about their early history.

Over time, the Jews were gradually assimilated into Chinese culture while preserving some vestiges of Jewish customs and traditions. There may be as many as 500–1,000 people who claim Jewish heritage in Kaifeng, and 40–50 still practice some form of Judaism.

The Kaifeng Jews are a living testimony to God's care for his people and their unquenchable faith as they spread to the farthest reaches of the earth.

DEVOTION

Nearly 2,000 years ago, when Jewish immigrants began to filter into China along the Silk Road, they brought with them their most important and valuable of possessions: the Hebrew Torah scroll. Like no other document in the world, Torah scrolls define the heartbeat of the Jewish people and make up the foundation upon which the Christian faith is built. When Jesus was asked, "Which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" (Matthew 22:36), he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 from the Torah, from a scroll just like this one from Kaifeng. This passage is called the "Shema," which means, "Hey! Listen!"

What is the most important command from the most important religious document in all of Judaism? It's the command to love God with everything we have.

But this love doesn't start with us. The Bible teaches that God is love, the only pure source anywhere, and we can only love God and others because of his love for us.

Yes, like the Jews who immigrated to Kaifeng, every day God commands us to enter into a new territory of our hearts, in an ever-deepening love relationship with him. That's why we were created. That's our highest call.

READ

“These are the commands, decrees, and regulations that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. You must obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy, and you and your children and grandchildren must fear the LORD your God as long as you live. If you obey all his decrees and commands, you will enjoy a long life. Listen closely, Israel, and be careful to obey. Then all will go well with you, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

“Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:1–9

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So, we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love because he loved us first.

1 John 4:16–19

REFLECT

- Some people believe the driving force behind all human behavior is the need for love, acceptance, and purpose. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Do you think the Christian community around you strive to love God with everything?
- What are some of the limits of your own love?

RESPOND

God of Love,

I would like to grow in my love for you. I would love to be able to say that I love you with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind. But I confess that I can't. My love is selfish and imperfect. You, however, love with perfect love. Please change me so that I can go beyond my current limits of love with you and others.

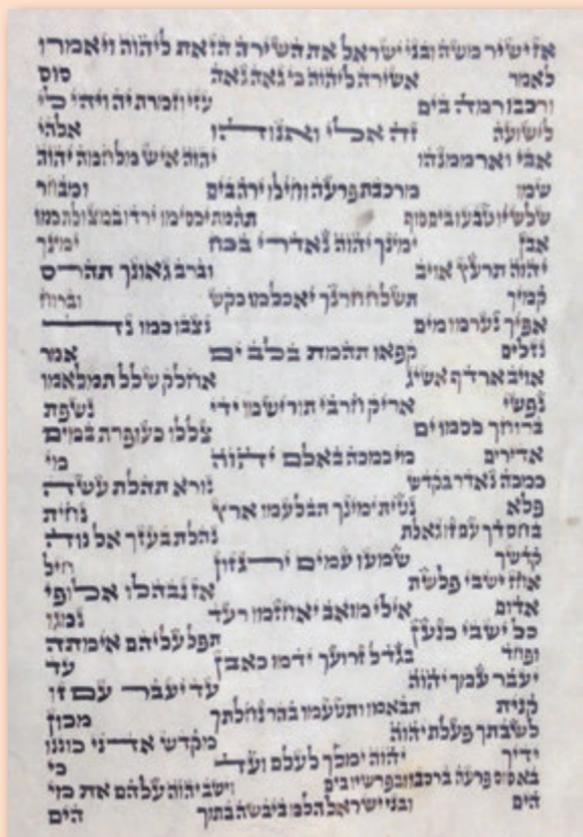
Amen

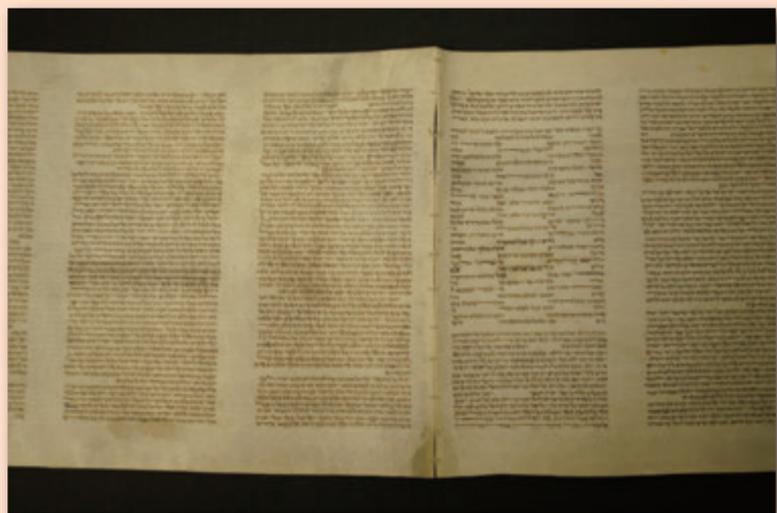
TEMPTATION 101

GENESIS 3:4-5

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

KAUNASTORAH





TEMPTATION 101

This elegant miniature Torah was written in its entirety by the same scribe, around 1650. The lettering is so fine that it was written with hairs and stunning precision. It was copied in Kaunas, Lithuania. Over a quarter-million Jews were murdered there during World War II. This scroll was well known in its day. Famous rabbis took great pride in having the privilege to read from it. At an incalculable risk to his wellbeing, the owner of this Torah went to great efforts to preserve it. He hid it when he was sent to a concentration camp. Miraculously, both he and the scroll survived. After World War II, the Torah was taken to Israel and sold on the art market, eventually to a private collector.

This Torah is a precious example of how the Bible has survived the most sinister attempts to destroy it.

DEVOTION

After the creation account in Genesis 1, the Bible describes a period of time when Adam and Eve lived in peace, harmony, and complete intimacy with God. Like friends, they walked through the garden communicating with him directly day by day. But it wasn't to last. Like fresh meat in a hunter's snare, Satan strategically placed bait in the minds of humans — a temptation that would become the downfall of humanity, not just there in the Garden of Eden, but for every moment of every day to follow: "You can become like God, knowing good and evil!"

They took the bait, and so do we. As individuals, we do it every time we judge our neighbor. And we don't have to look far to see how entire societies, like the Nazis, can think they have the right to choose who is good and who is evil, and then slaughter those they think are wrong. In his letter to the Romans, Paul quotes five different passages in the Hebrew Bible that describe this ugly condition. It's not pretty, and we see it around us (and if we are honest, we see it *in us*) constantly.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to matter what ethnicity we are, religion we practice, or continent we are from. The horrific atrocities that

took place in Lithuania (where well over 90 percent of the Jews were exterminated) are only one example of what we are capable of.

Perhaps the survival of this miniature scroll can be a reminder that, short of the intervention of God in our lives, we are nothing but a globe full of corrupt judges with distorted views of good and evil, executing judgments on others as best we are able.

READ

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground — trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden — except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give

TEMPTATION 101

her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Genesis 2:8–9,15–17; 3:1–7

Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jew or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. As the Scriptures say,

“No one is righteous — not even one.

No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.

All have turned away; all have become useless.

No one does good, not a single one.”

“Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies.”

“Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them.

They don’t know where to find peace.”

“They have no fear of God at all.”

Romans 3:9–18

REFLECT

- What is in the news headlines today? How does it reflect humanity's tendency to judge what is good and what is evil?
- Think about a broken relationship you know of. How did the tendency to try to judge "like God" contribute to that brokenness?
- How do you see yourself trying to judge others like God or exercising power over them?

RESPOND

God,

You and you alone are the righteous and true judge. Only you have complete understanding of every situation and only you have the power to intervene properly. Please show me some of the ways that I try to judge like you, and show me the ways that I try to execute power over people like only you can. Please replace these sinful tendencies with your love.

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY 5

A FALLEN WORLD

GENESIS 3:17

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you.”

SPANISH INQUISITION TORAH



This is a very rare Hebrew Torah scroll from Spain. In the Sephardi tradition, it is written on “gvil” skins which use the full depth of the hide and have a soft, suede feel. Like most Torah scrolls it took the sofer (Jewish scribe) a full year to copy it.

This is one of only a handful of Torah scrolls that survived the Spanish Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition was a brutal tribunal established to identify and punish religious heresy. While other tribunals in the past had tried to force the masses to convert to their doctrines, the Spanish Inquisition far surpassed earlier inquisitions in its atrocities. It was instituted by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) and began in France.

Tens of thousands of Jews were burned at the stake and hundreds of thousands were forcibly converted to Christianity. Their books and scrolls were destroyed. Few documented Spanish Torah scrolls survived those terrible times. This Spanish Torah likely may have been carried to safety in North Africa during this very period.

DEVOTION

It’s hard to grasp the full effect of “the fall” of humanity and our propensity to execute our judgments on others. Fear of Jewish influences led Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in 1481 to petition the pope for permission to instigate an inquisition in Spain. Punishments included confinement to dungeons, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and execution. In the 13C, Jews were included in the Inquisition. Thousands were killed and their books and scrolls were destroyed. Jews that hadn’t been killed and didn’t convert were forced to deport to North Africa on ships. Ironically, the final deportation took place in 1492, on the same day and from the same port that Columbus set sail on his maiden voyage of the Atlantic Ocean.

Yes, the consequences of our sin are many. They are the natural curses of a broken relationship with God. In the Garden of Eden, peace, provision, and intimacy with our God was the norm. In Torah scrolls like this one from Spain, God spelled out the curses that would now define

A FALLEN WORLD

our earthly existence. The final consequence listed is physical death. From then on, life would end with a sting and tears, *“for you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”*

Yet, even here, don't we see God's grace and mercy in our future? Is it possible that God instituted death on earth as a loving end to our constant struggles in this fallen world? Is it possible that he has opened a door to the possibility that we might be joined with him again, perfectly, for all eternity?

READ

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, *“Where are you?”*

He replied, *“I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”*

“Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. *“Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”*

The man replied, *“It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”*

Then the LORD God asked the woman, *“What have you done?”*

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. *“That's why I ate it.”*

... Then he said to the woman, *“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”*

And to the man he said, *“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains.*

By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

Genesis 3:8–13, 16–19

The wages of sin is death.

Romans 6:23

REFLECT

- What do you think people from religions other than yours think about you? Why do you think they think that?
- If you asked your best friend why life is so hard, what might they say?
- Do you tend to see death as a blessing or a curse? Why?

RESPOND

God,

I ask that you would give me a clearer picture of why life is the way it is on this earth. Please help me understand the evil that exists on this earth and how I contribute to it. I need your strength and your wisdom as I navigate through this cursed and fallen world today. And I pray that you would begin to put a new hope in my soul for what lies beyond the grave.

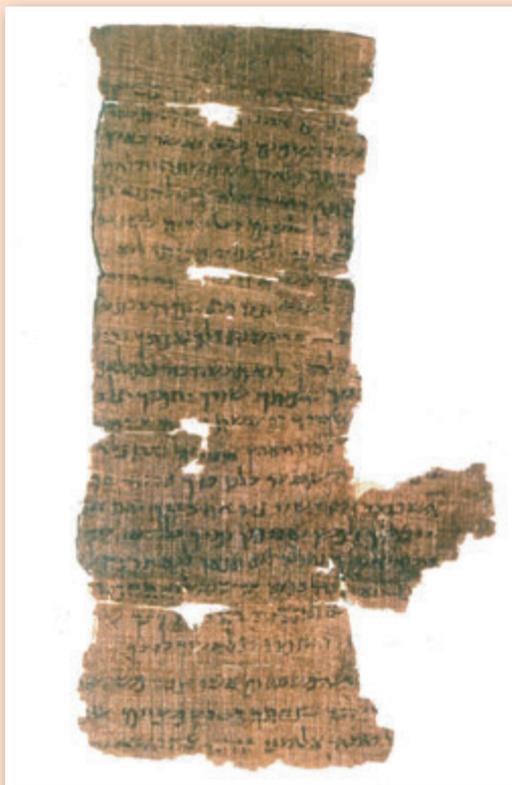
Amen

WRITTEN IN STONE

EXODUS 34:28

Moses remained there on the mountain with the LORD forty days and forty nights. In all that time he ate no bread and drank no water. And the LORD wrote the terms of the covenant — the Ten Commandments — on the stone tablets.

NASH PAPYRUS



This is the earliest-known text of the Ten Commandments and the Shema (Deuteronomy 5:6–21) dating to approximately 150 BC. These two verses form the foundation for the Jewish faith — the law and an uncompromising adherence to believing in one true God. It is one of four papyri known as the Nash Papyrus.

Papyrus is made from stems of the *Cyperus papyrus* reed. Split strips of the stems are placed side by side, then another layer is placed on top at a right angle. The two layers are pressed together while the stems are moist, then dried while they are under pressure. Papyrus was less expensive than the skins used for scrolls, but it also decomposed quickly in damp and humid conditions.

This celebrated Hebrew papyrus is 24 lines long with a few letters missing on the outer and inner margins. It contains the Ten Commandments followed by the beginning of the Shema. The text of the Ten Commandments combines parts of the version from Exodus 20:2–17 with parts from the Deuteronomy 5:6–21 passage. The text is dark and very difficult to read in natural light. The black and white photograph enlarges the text which was illuminated with infrared lighting, making the text more readable.

DEVOTION

When Adam and Eve “fell” by making the choice to try to become like God on their own, setting their own standards for good and evil, the consequences were devastating for them and for us. Gone was the intimate fellowship and one-on-one interaction they enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. From then on, human interaction with God was limited to sporadic supernatural events and the words of a handful of isolated prophets through whom God occasionally spoke directly.

That all changed at Mount Sinai when God initiated a new form of communication with his people: the written word. The account is dramatic. Moses and the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, in limbo between Egypt and the promised land. God led Moses high

WRITTEN IN STONE

onto a mountain where he was given a long list of specific instructions. After even more drama (during which the first tablets containing God's word were smashed), God himself wrote 10 universal commands on two tablets...and, for the first time ever, the words of God were available in hard copy.

Over the centuries, speaking through prophets, historians, poets, and preachers, God expanded the scope of his written word to include 66 books that are accepted by the vast majority of Christians around the world. Some traditions include others books, but the 66 are the common core. They include the writings of Moses and other prophets, poetical works, and historical accounts. Letters are included too. Altogether, they comprise one incredible document that records the words of God and the history of his interaction with humanity.

The apostle Paul, a Jewish rabbi who had a dramatic conversion to Christ, eventually wrote most of the letters that are included in the New Testament. He was clear about the importance of Scripture. "It's all inspired by God," he said. And for nearly 2,000 years, his inspired words have resulted in inspired lives as followers of God apply these truths under the guidance and in the strength of God.

READ

Then the LORD told Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones. I will write on them the same words that were on the tablets you smashed. Be ready in the morning to climb up Mount Sinai and present yourself to me on the top of the mountain. No one else may come with you. In fact, no one is to appear anywhere on the mountain. Do not even let the flocks or herds graze near the mountain."

So Moses chiseled out two tablets of stone like the first ones. Early in the morning he climbed Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands.

Then the LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him; and he called out his own name, Yahweh. The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out,

“Yahweh! The LORD!

The God of compassion and mercy!

I am slow to anger

and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.

I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.

But I do not excuse the guilty.

I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected —

even children in the third and fourth generations.”

Moses immediately threw himself to the ground and worshipped. And he said, “O LORD, if it is true that I have found favor with you, then please travel with us. Yes, this is a stubborn and rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity and our sins. Claim us as your own special possession.”

The LORD replied, “Listen, I am making a covenant with you in the presence of all your people. I will perform miracles that have never been performed anywhere in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people around you will see the power of the LORD — the awesome power I will display for you. But listen carefully to everything I command you today. Then I will go ahead of you and drive out the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites ...

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down all these instructions, for they represent the terms of the covenant I am making with you and with Israel.”

Moses remained there on the mountain with the LORD forty days and forty nights. In all that time he ate no bread and drank no water. And the LORD wrote the terms of the covenant — the Ten

WRITTEN IN STONE

Commandments — on the stone tablets.

Exodus 34:1–28

But you, Timothy, certainly know what I [Paul] teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra — but the LORD rescued me from all of it. Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived.

But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

2 Timothy 3:10–17

REFLECT

- In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of written communication?
- If your confidence in the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible increased, how would that affect you?

RESPOND

God,

I can only thank you for bringing your word to us as you have. Please, make changes in my heart that reflect your desire to communicate directly with me through your written word. As I read it, please help me to see it in new ways. Open my mind to receive the things you want to tell me, and make me willing to apply your truths day by day.

Amen

THE POINT OF THE BIBLE

JOHN 5:39

[Jesus said,] “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!”

CAIRO GENIZAH LEAF EXODUS 22:4-29



With exception to the Dead Sea Scrolls, this manuscript is the earliest-known Hebrew copy of Exodus 22:4–29, dating to 800–900 AD. For some verses not preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls, this leaf is actually the earliest copy. The leaf was once part of a very early, large Hebrew book. It contained small textual notes called “masorah” which you can see written in the columns. The script is square and elegant. This is one of the earliest witnesses to the format of the text as laid out by Aaron Ben

Ashur of Tiberius, Israel, in the mid-9th century.

When the lettering or skins of Hebrew manuscripts become too worn out to be able to accurately preserve the texts, they are considered “pasul” which means “declared unfit for Jewish ceremonial use according to rabbinic law — defective and untrustworthy, and set aside in a storage area called a “genizah” (Aramaic for closet). A number of important discoveries have come from genizahs, but the find of the Cairo Genizah was one of the greatest discoveries of all time, equivalent to the discoveries of Tutankhamun’s Tomb and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over 300,000 Hebrew manuscript fragments were found there in the late 1800s.

DEVOTION

Can you imagine what it would have been like to discover the Cairo Genizah? Think about what it would have been like to be the first person to see and understand the significance of this astounding repository of ancient manuscripts. Even now, a hundred years later, many of the items have not been researched. Some of the boxes containing manuscripts haven’t even been opened in decades. Who knows what amazing discoveries are yet to be made? It could take many lifetimes to find out.

The Bible itself is a lot like the Cairo Genizah. It is a virtually bottomless source of information. But that can be part of the problem, because all of that information can be overwhelming and cause us to miss the point.

Those who *only* try to keep all the rules in the Bible miss the point. In fact, the Bible says that it’s impossible to keep all the rules it contains (James 2:10). Exodus 22 is a good example of that. It is a solid list of instructions, many of which make a lot of sense. Yet people who make the rules their *main* focus can easily become legalistic and self-righteous.

Others try to primarily gather all the knowledge they can from the Bible. There’s nothing wrong with that, except that the Bible itself says

that knowledge can make you very arrogant (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Thankfully, Christ made it very clear what the point of the Bible is. “The scriptures point to me!” he said.

Yes, like the Cairo Genizah, the Bible is an endless source of guidance and knowledge. Yet anyone who wishes to live an inspired life should never, ever forget the point.

READ

But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.” So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, “It is through obeying the law that a person has life.”

But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.

Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised.

Is there a conflict, then, between God’s law and God’s promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so

to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:10–13, 19, 21–28

So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God...

“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

John 5:16–18, 24, 39–40

REFLECT

- Can you think of examples of well-meaning people who have become arrogant or self-righteous because they missed the point of the Bible?
- In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of God's laws and biblical knowledge?
- Do you see any of the negative aspects of legalism in your own life?

RESPOND

God,

I really do want to experience you and your word in new ways. In the process, I pray that you will guard my heart from legalism and arrogance. Starting right now, focus my life in new ways on the point of your Scriptures, that I might come to experience Jesus more and more as my source of true inspiration and life.

Amen

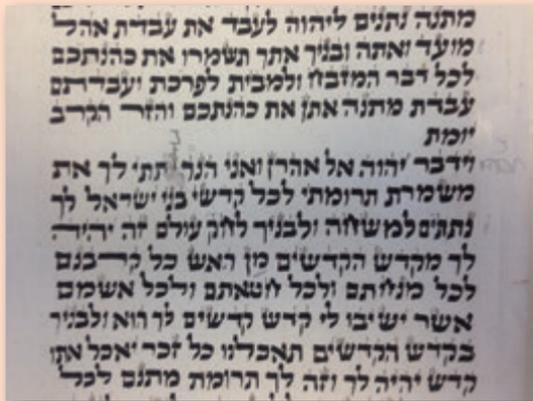
THE POWER OF CORRECTION

PSALM 139:23-24

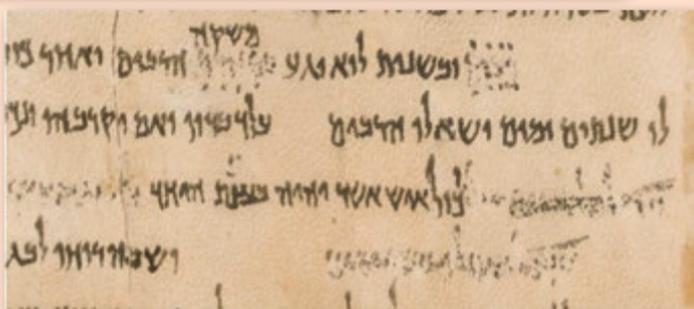
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

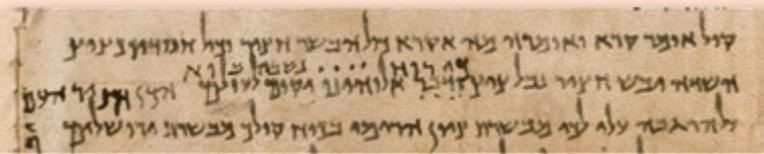
Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

HEBREW SCROLL CORRECTIONS



THE POWER OF CORRECTION





Jewish scribes copy scriptures with meticulous care. These sofers go through rigorous training under the careful guidance of a mentor. They are required to learn *thousands* of rules, most having to do with the distinct shape of letters. The training is done to safeguard the transmission of the Hebrew Bible, and even though modern printing and digital formats the tradition is still alive and well.

Some people believe that sofers never make any errors. Some believe that if an error is ever made, the skin (or panel) is thrown out. Some even say the entire scroll is discarded.

In reality, sofers do make mistakes. Some are as simple as slips of the pen. Perhaps a word is misspelled, left out, or accidentally copied twice. Many errors are corrected immediately before the ink has a chance to dry. Most are caught before the scroll is ever put into religious service. Then as the scroll is read each year over hundreds of years, every letter and every word is scrutinized to make sure the whole scroll is as accurate as humanly possible.

THE POWER OF CORRECTION

DEVOTION

The process of ongoing correction results in astounding precision in the transmission of Hebrew scrolls. Far from eroding our confidence in the transmission of the scripture by Jewish sofers, these corrections should bolster our confidence in the process and in the result: the copy reflects the original as closely as possible. God promises that, in spite of our mistakes, shortcomings, and failures, he will never forsake us or reject us (Deuteronomy 31:6). Instead, he has a process of correction designed to remove aspects and actions of our lives that are not pure representations of Jesus, who he is shaping us to reflect.

Psalm 139 is a beautiful picture of this process. King David is writing here (and anyone who knows his story knows that there were lots of corrections that needed to happen in that man's life). He made some of the biggest blunders in biblical history and yet God called him "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). In this Psalm we don't see stinging wrist slaps or angry punishment; rather, we hear a natural conversation that takes place between David and God. It's almost as if they are walking together in open conversation. David writes openly and honestly — he asks with the expectation that God will, in any way he chooses, communicate back to David the corrections he wants to make in him. In David's life, sometimes those corrections came through God's written word, through the nudge of the Holy Spirit, or even the confrontation of a close friend.

READ

O LORD, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.
You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD.
You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.
If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.

I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night —
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.

THE POWER OF CORRECTION

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!

Your workmanship is marvelous — how well I know it.

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.

They cannot be numbered!

I can't even count them;

they outnumber the grains of sand!

And when I wake up,
you are still with me!

O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!

Get out of my life, you murderers!

They blaspheme you;

your enemies misuse your name.

O LORD, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?

Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?

Yes, I hate them with total hatred,
for your enemies are my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Psalms 139

REFLECT

- Does the fact that God knows everything about you give you peace or make you nervous?
- Do you believe that God will answer you if you pray this prayer?
*Search me and show me what is in my heart.
Test me and show me my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you.
Lead me along the path of everlasting life.*
- When God shows you a mistake that he wants corrected, do you attempt to make the correction yourself, or do you trust in God to make the correction?

RESPOND

O God,

Please give me the willingness to allow you to make the corrections you want in my life. I can't make these changes on my own. Left to myself I will make the same mistakes over and over again. So I ask you to make the corrections that you want to see. I will follow as you lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Amen

ETERNAL WORDS, TEMPORARY LIVES

ISAIAH 40:7-8

The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD. And so it is with people. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

ISAIAH SCROLLS



These two scrolls are of the Book of Isaiah. Recent copies of the Isaiah scroll are rare. This copy was made in the Polish ghetto of Siedlce. The synagogue in the ghetto was burned by the Nazis on Christmas Eve 1939. A few scrolls were saved in advance. The Siedlce Isaiah Scroll dates to the 1800s, so it's not that old, and its text conforms identically with the standard Hebrew text used today.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are composed of thousands of manuscripts, mostly small fragments. Twenty-two copies of Isaiah have been identified, including a near-complete manuscript called the Great Isaiah Scroll or 1QIsa. This scroll is 24 feet long (7.3 meters) and dates to around 150 BC. It is one of the most significant and powerful manuscripts ever discovered.

When the texts of the Great Isaiah Scroll are compared with the Siedlce Isaiah Scroll, there are only about 60 noteworthy differences, amounting to nearly one per chapter. None of these have any bearing on doctrine or theology. This underscores the great care by which the Bible text was copied over the centuries.

DEVOTION

There is no question that the Bible contains amazing history, fascinating messages, profound prophecy, and doctrines that can transform a person's life. But does any of that matter if we aren't confident that the words of the Bible are the original words that God intended us to have?

Perhaps the number-one objection to the Bible is not what it says, but rather that the Bible was changed over time and we can't trust it. Think about it. Why would someone consider what the Bible says if they aren't sure that it has been accurately transmitted to us? For generations, those who believed in the Bible simply had to accept it by faith. But now, we can establish the trustworthiness of the Bible as fact.

These two Isaiah scrolls are a stunning example. One scroll was

ETERNAL WORDS, TEMPORARY LIVES

hidden away for nearly 2,000 years in an unknown cave in the Middle East. The other was copied from other copies that were copied over many generations in Europe. And yet there is no substantial difference in the text. That's very, very significant. These two scrolls were separated by thousands of miles and many generations; yet, the text was copied and transmitted almost identically. Those are facts that should strengthen our faith. And the Isaiah scrolls are not the exception; they are the norm. As more and more biblical documents are discovered and researched, the same pattern continues: We find amazing consistency between the oldest manuscripts of the Bible and the ones that have been handed down to us over the generations.

It's hard to over-emphasize the importance of that. It means when you go to the Bible, you can accept it as a trustworthy copy of what the original writers wrote. And that's important because the Bible contains such powerful messages that apply to us moment by moment, every day, and even into eternity.

Consider these excerpts from just one chapter, Isaiah 40. Read it, reflect on it, and then respond to God about the messages he has given to you.

READ

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God.

Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,

"Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!"

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!"

A voice said, "Shout!"

I asked, "What should I shout?"

“Shout that people are like the grass.

Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field.

The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the

LORD.

And so it is with people.

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Who is able to advise the Spirit of the LORD?

Who knows enough to give him advice or teach him?

Has the LORD ever needed anyone’s advice?

Does he need instruction about what is good?

Did someone teach him what is right

or show him the path of justice?

Haven’t you heard? Don’t you understand?

Are you deaf to the words of God?

“To whom will you compare me?

Who is my equal?” asks the Holy One.

Look up into the heavens.

Who created all the stars?

Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

The LORD is the everlasting God,

the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

He gives power to the weak

and strength to the powerless.

Even youths will become weak and tired,

and young men will fall in exhaustion.

But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength.

They will soar high on wings like eagles.

ETERNAL WORDS, TEMPORARY LIVES

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40: 1, 3–8; 13–14; 21–27; 28–31

REFLECT

- Do you think most people would think differently about the Bible if they knew it has been handed down to us accurately? Why or why not?
- Pick out the two different verses from this passage that impact you the most.
- How could these truths change your thoughts and actions today?

RESPOND

God,

I sincerely thank you for the process you used to preserve your words for all generations. And I thank you for the proof we have through manuscripts like the Dead Sea Scrolls, which confirm that your word was transmitted to us accurately. So now I ask for perspective. Please, help me to grasp the truths that you are pointing out to me from Isaiah 40, and then, by the power of your Spirit, use these words to change my life.

Amen

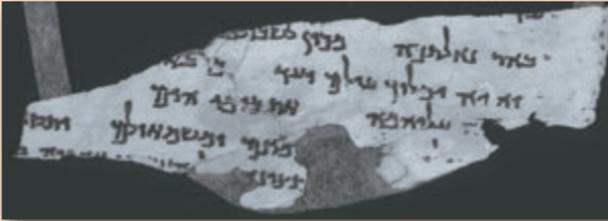
THROUGH THE SEA

EXODUS 15:13

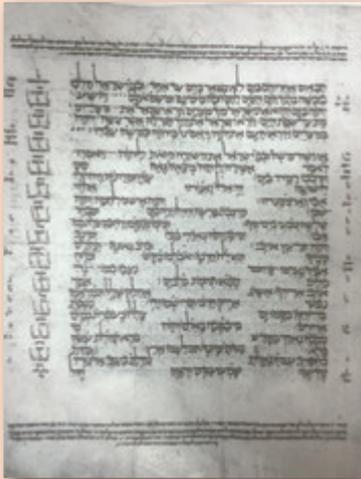
With your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed.

In your might, you guide them to your sacred home.

SONG OF THE SEA



Dead Sea Scroll, approx. 100 BC



Leningrad Codex, 1000 AD



Modern Torah, 1900 AD

Exodus chapter 15 contains the “Song of the Sea” commemorating God’s dramatic deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians through the parting of the Red (or Reed) Sea and drowning their pursuing enemies by the returning of the waters.

Because it is a song, it has a special layout in the text of Torah scrolls. Some say that the pattern of the layout resembles the parting of the sea with the Israelites passing through in the midst. Others say that the pattern resembles a wall made of overlapping bricks vividly symbolizing that the hope of God’s deliverance is like a bulwark — a fortification symbolizing God’s protection. In either case, this passage was laid out in a special way from the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls (dating between 250 BC and 70 AD) and modern times.

The pictures show the passage 1) in a manuscript of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2) in the Leningrad Codex, the earliest complete copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew dating to the beginning of the 1000s, and 3) in a modern Torah scroll. This vividly indicates that texts were copied accurately and other features also have been carefully replicated. This redoubles our confidence in the transmission of the text.

DEVOTION

Conventional wisdom says, “The Bible has been changed over time and you cannot trust it.” The evidence says, “The Bible has been transmitted with exceptional accuracy!”

The preservation of Scripture over thousands of years is really stunning. These three manuscripts of the Song of the Sea were separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles. They were copied from copies of copies of copies on different continents in completely different eras...and yet, the text is preserved the same — even the formatting is preserved. It’s a powerful witness to God’s faithfulness and the sofers’ passion and precision.

Yes, the evidence shows that God preserves his word. He preserves

his people too. The words and formatting show how we can trust in the accurate transmission of the Bible, and the words themselves show us God's care for us. Throughout the Bible we see so many instances of God leading his people through difficult times. And throughout Scripture we see time and time again how we are called to trust in his word rather than in our own understanding.

Every day we get to make a choice between who we will follow. Will you follow your own wisdom? Or will you seek the wisdom of God and follow his lead?

READ

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD:

"I will sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has given me victory.
This is my God, and I will praise him —
my father's God, and I will exalt him!

The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is his name!

At the blast of your breath,
the waters piled up!
The surging waters stood straight like a wall;
in the heart of the sea the deep waters became hard.

"The enemy boasted, 'I will chase them
and catch up with them.

I will plunder them
and consume them.
I will flash my sword;
my powerful hand will destroy them.’
But you blew with your breath,
and the sea covered them.
They sank like lead
in the mighty waters.

“Who is like you among the gods, O LORD —
glorious in holiness,
awesome in splendor,
performing great wonders?

You raised your right hand,
and the earth swallowed our enemies.

“With your unfailing love you lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your might, you guide them
to your sacred home.

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain —
the place, O LORD, reserved for your own dwelling,
the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.
The LORD will reign forever and ever!”

When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and charioteers rushed into the sea, the LORD brought the water crashing down on them. But the people of Israel had walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground!

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced. And Miriam sang this song:

“Sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;

he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.”

Exodus 15:1–3, 8–13, 17–21

My child, never forget the things I have taught you.

Store my commands in your heart ...

Never let loyalty and kindness leave you!

Tie them around your neck as a reminder.

Write them deep within your heart.

Then you will find favor with both God and people,
and you will earn a good reputation.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart;

do not depend on your own understanding.

Seek his will in all you do,

and he will show you which path to take.

Don't be impressed with your own wisdom.

Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

Proverbs 3:1, 3–7

REFLECT

- Conventional wisdom says that we cannot trust God's word. The evidence proves otherwise. What do you think conventional wisdom says about trusting God with your life?
- Consider Proverbs 3:5: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.* Do you think God can give you *his* understanding in certain situations? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Are you facing situations where you have to choose between depending on God's word or depending on your own wisdom and knowledge?

RESPOND

God,

By the power of your Holy Spirit, will you give me the willingness to trust you in whatever circumstance I am in, particularly when I'm standing on the edge of dangerous waters? Give me the desire to seek your wisdom in your word as I face difficult challenges. With your unfailing love, lead me. In your might, guide me. And please give me the faith to trust you when things don't turn out the way that I want.

Amen

THE POWER OF PROPHECY

ISAIAH 53:6

*All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the LORD laid on him
the sins of us all.*

SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH



This fascinating manuscript was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is known as “The Signs of the Messiah” (or 4Q521). This document was written well before the time of Christ. It contains a list taken, in part, from Isaiah 35 and 61. It contains prophecies which were thought to be signs of the coming Messiah. Excerpts include:

The heavens and the earth will obey his Messiah ...

Take strength in his mighty work, all ye who seek the LORD.

Will you not find the LORD in this, all ye who wait for him with hope in your hearts?

He will release the captives, make the blind see, raise up the downtrodden.

THE POWER OF PROPHECY

He will heal the sick, resurrect the dead, and to the poor announce glad tidings.

He will leave the holy ones, he will shepherd them ...

The Qumran community lived at the base of the cliffs where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. The community had separated themselves from the rest of society so that they could pursue what they believed was the purest form of their Jewish religion. They had great expectations that the Messiah would come.

DEVOTION

Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61 are just a few of dozens of passages from the Old Testament that speak of the coming Savior. Isaiah 7:14, for example, prophesies that he will be called “Immanuel” (which means, “God with us”). Micah 5:2 predicts that he will be born in Bethlehem. Psalm 22 describes how he will be crucified. Isaiah 53 is a powerful example of prophecy about Jesus. If you didn’t know it had been written around 700 BC, you would believe that you are reading an historical account that looks *back* at the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The details are so accurate, that skeptics claimed the book of Isaiah must have been written after the time of Christ. Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the caves near Qumran, and hard evidence emerged that the book of Isaiah was written before the time of Christ.

The implications are staggering. Not only is prophecy clear evidence for the supernatural inspiration of Scripture, but it sheds profound light on the power, knowledge, and heart of our God. God had a plan to redeem fallen humanity. He would come to earth, then live and die as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The Qumran community was occupied until it was destroyed by the Romans in 68 AD. Tragically, there is no evidence that the people of the community ever embraced Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

READ

Who has believed our message?

To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?

My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot,
like a root in dry ground.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance,
nothing to attract us to him.

He was despised and rejected —

a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.

He was despised, and we did not care.

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;

it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,
a punishment for his own sins!

But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God's paths to follow our own.

Yet the LORD laid on him
the sins of us all.

He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.

THE POWER OF PROPHECY

No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.
He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.

But it was the LORD'S good plan to crush him
and cause him grief.
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.
He will enjoy a long life,
and the LORD'S good plan will prosper in his hands.
When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,
he will be satisfied.

And because of his experience,
my righteous servant will make it possible
for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear all their sins.

I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier,
because he exposed himself to death.
He was counted among the rebels.
He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels.

Isaiah 53

REFLECT

- In your opinion, which of these prophecies is most stunning? Why?
- God clearly had a plan for redemption in place, and it was a plan that had great cost. How does that make you feel?
- Let God search your heart for a few moments. Are there sins in your past that you feel God can't, or won't, forgive? How do those feelings relate to the truth that "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all"?

RESPOND

God,

I bow my heart before you now. I kneel in awe of the fact that you clearly knew, before it happened, how Christ would come to this world and lay down his life as the perfect sacrifice for all of our sins...for all of my sins. I lay before you now the very worst of my sins. I thank you, from the deepest corners of my heart, that you paid the price for those sins and have forgiven me according to the plan that you had from all eternity.

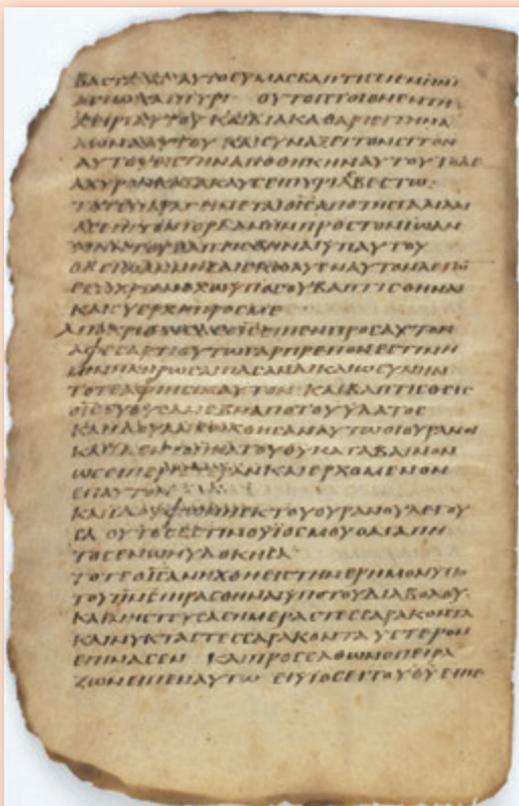
Amen

THE BATTLE OF WORDS

MATTHEW 4:10

“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.’”

CODEx WASHINGTONIANUS



This stunning codex contains the first four books of the New Testament in Greek. It dates to 300–400 AD. Because of its beauty, the manuscript is in the Smithsonian Institute in the Freer Gallery of Art. It was acquired in Egypt in 1906 by Charles Lang Freer and may have come from a monastery in the vicinity of the pyramids. The text was apparently copied from several manuscripts by two scribes.

The ending of the Gospel of Mark includes a unique insertion referred to as the "Freer Logion." It is not found in any other manuscript. The insertion reads:

And they excused themselves, saying, "This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits [or: does not allow what lies under the unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]. Therefore reveal thy righteousness now" - thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, "The term of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was delivered over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more in order to inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.

Apart from this unusual insertion, the codex is referred to as a consistently cited witness of the first order for the study of the New Testament text.

DEVOTION

Thousands of hand-written portions of the New Testament exist today. Some of them, like Codex Washingtonianus are very old. Older and older portions of the New Testament continue to be discovered and identified on a regular basis. This data can be compared to show where any additions, deletions, or mistakes might have been made as the documents were copied and spread throughout the world. For example, it is unlikely that the insertion in Codex Washingtonianus was in the original gospel written by Mark since no other document contains it.

This massive amount of data, and our ability to compare it with itself, can give us great confidence in what the original texts of the New Testament contained. And that's important because the Bible isn't just words; it's a weapon — a powerful weapon to be used in the battle between good and evil. Nowhere is this more graphic than in a confrontation between Satan and Jesus himself. It's likely that Satan was fully aware of God's plan to redeem his people. He tried to derail that plan by tempting Jesus...and he tried to use the Bible to do it.

READ

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.’”

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Matthew 4:1–11

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

Hebrews 4:12–13

REFLECT

- What kind of temptations did Satan try to use against Jesus?
- Are you aware that Satan might be trying to derail God’s plan for *your* life? What specific temptations is he placing in front of you?
- Are you willing to quote God’s word, like Jesus did, to defend yourself against Satan’s temptations?

RESPOND

God,

I confess that I am very vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. I believe that you have a plan for my life, so in the name of Jesus I humbly pronounce:

“Get out of here, Satan, for the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.’”

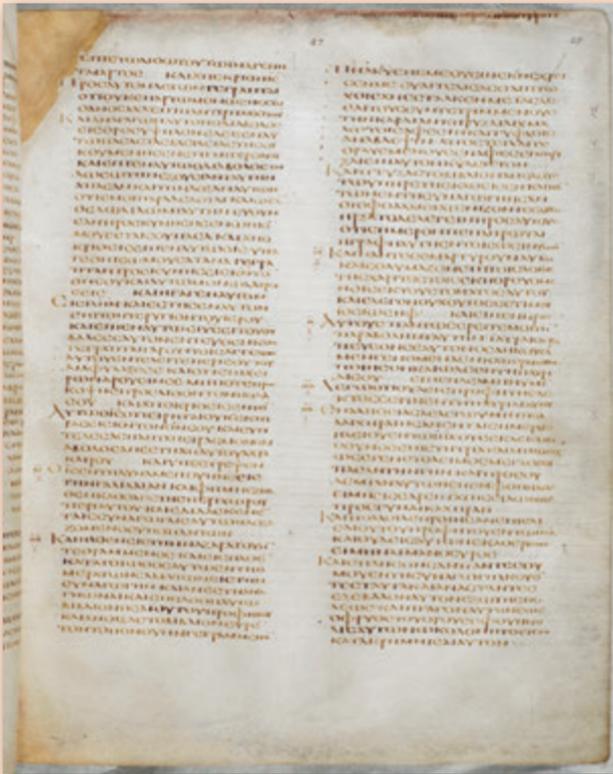
God, you are the one that I want to worship and serve. I trust you to provide for me and protect me today. Please don't lead me into the temptations of the kingdom of this world. Focus my passions on your kingdom and your plan as we continue this 40-day adventure together.
Amen

THE PROPHECIES FULFILLED

LUKE 4:20-21

All eyes in the synagogue looked at Jesus intently. Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

CODEx ALEXANDRINUS



THE PROPHECIES FULFILLED

This magnificent manuscript preserves the earliest complete Old Testament in Greek. It also contains extensive portions of the New Testament in Greek. It dates to around 400 AD and is nearly 600 years older than the oldest complete Old Testament in Hebrew. The manuscript was gifted in the 1600s by the Patriarch of Alexandria (where it got its name) to the King of England. It is one of four complete or near-complete Greek copies of the Bible dating to around this time.

This page preserves Luke 4:4-28. It also preserves fascinating examples of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. After the temptations in the wilderness, Jesus enters the synagogue of Nazareth. In Luke 4:18 (at the top of the right column) he reads from Isaiah 61, which states that the Messiah will do many miracles. The small dots in the inner margin at the top indicate a quotation from the Old Testament, here from Isaiah 61.

DEVOTION

The Bible says that Jesus was “praised by everyone” early in his ministry. And why not? He fed the masses, and he proclaimed a message about setting the captives and the oppressed free. The blind were being healed and some people were even being raised from the dead. What was not to like about this man? Everyone liked what he *did*, but would they be willing to accept who he *is*?

Jesus’ popularity began to shift in the synagogue in Nazareth the day he read from Isaiah 61 and then proclaimed that he, himself, was fulfilling that prophecy of the Messiah. It was a pivotal moment. It was the first line that he drew in the sand. He was doing miracles not just to help people, but to prove that he was the LORD.

Understandably, plenty of people were skeptical. Even John the Baptist, whose life’s purpose was proclaiming that the Messiah was coming, had his doubts. Those who had been baptized by John in preparation for the Messiah’s coming were enthusiastic and excited. But another group, the leaders of the elite religious establishment...well, their response was very, very different.

READ

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself' — meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown."

LUKE 4:14–24

THE PROPHECIES FULFILLED

John's two disciples found Jesus and said to him, "John the Baptist sent us to ask, 'Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?'"

At that very time, Jesus cured many people of their diseases, illnesses, and evil spirits, and he restored sight to many who were blind. Then he told John's disciples, "Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard — the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. And tell him, 'God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.'"

After John's disciples left, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people who wear beautiful clothes and live in luxury are found in palaces. Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare your way before you.'

I tell you, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of God is greater than he is!"

When they heard this, all the people — even the tax collectors — agreed that God's way was right, for they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan for them, for they had refused John's baptism.

Luke 7:20–30

REFLECT

- What two prophecies of the Messiah are mentioned in these two passages?
- What did Pharisees and legal experts have to lose if Jesus was the Messiah? In your opinion, why did they reject God's plan?
- Do you think most people want God's help, but don't want to bow to him as LORD? Why or why not? Give examples from your own life.

RESPOND

God,

As I continue this journey into your word, I ask that you gently reveal my motives for following you. Then show me the areas of my life where I have not allowed you to be LORD. Please show me right now and then, by the guidance of your Spirit, make me willing to submit this to you.

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY **14**

THREE DAYS IN THE BELLY

MATTHEW 12:40

For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

MINOR PROPHETS SCROLL



This is an extremely rare Hebrew scroll of the twelve Minor Prophets. The scroll dates to the 1800s. The Minor Prophets are filled with predictions relating to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The scroll was miraculously rescued from a synagogue in the ghetto of Siedlce, Poland, that was ransacked and burned down by the Nazis on Christmas Eve 1939. An ink stamp indicates that this is where the scroll came from.

Many prophecies concerning the life and ministry of Jesus come from the Minor Prophets. For instance, Jesus indicated that his death and resurrection were foreshadowed by Jonah. In Matthew 12:39–40 he

states: “But the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights”

The scroll is open to the account of Jonah and the great fish that swallowed the runaway prophet; Jonah’s rising after three days out of the belly of the fish; and finally, Jonah’s preaching to, and the repentance of, the ruthless Assyrians in their capital of Nineveh.

DEVOTION

After intense study of the Scriptures, many ancient rabbis believed that two different Messiahs were coming. One was the “Son of David” who would conquer the earthly enemies of God’s people. Like King David triumphed over the military oppressors of Israel, the Jews of Jesus’ day yearned for the “Davidic Messiah” who would crush the humiliating Roman rule over their land and free them from horrendous, iron-fisted oppression.

But many rabbis also saw a second Messiah in the scriptures whom they called the “Son of Joseph” (referring to Jacob’s son, not Jesus’ earthly father). Joseph had endured betrayal by his brothers and suffered great hardship and humiliation in Egypt before being elevated to a leadership position and, eventually, saving his own people — descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — from starvation. As the rabbis struggled with these two portraits of the Messiah, some concluded that there must be two messiahs on the way. But is it not reasonable to conclude that the same Messiah could come twice, with a different mission each time?

And that’s where the Jonah parallel comes in. Just as Jonah was in “the belly of the great fish,” Jesus would be in “the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” Jesus never claimed he would be a “Davidic Messiah”... at least, not the first time around. The second time he will come to conquer (Revelation 19). The first time he came to seek and save

THREE DAYS IN THE BELLY

the lost, one soul at a time (Luke 19:10) by giving his life as a ransom for many.

READ

Then the Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus. But Jesus knew what they were planning. So he left that area, and many people followed him. He healed all the sick among them, but he warned them not to reveal who he was. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning him:

“Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen.
He is my Beloved, who pleases me.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
He will not fight or shout
or raise his voice in public.
He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
Finally he will cause justice to be victorious.
And his name will be the hope
of all the world.”

Then a demon-possessed man, who was blind and couldn't speak, was brought to Jesus. He healed the man so that he could both speak and see. The crowd was amazed and asked, “Could it be that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah?”

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.”

But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the

sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here — but you refuse to repent. The queen of Sheba will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Now someone greater than Solomon is here — but you refuse to listen.”

Matthew 12:14–23, 38–42

REFLECT

- If you had lived under brutal Roman occupation, do you think you would have embraced Jesus as the Messiah?
- In what ways do you wish for a conquering messiah who fixes all your problems?
- In your opinion, why is God’s plan better? Why is it best that he came to suffer first before he comes to conquer?

THREE DAYS IN THE BELLY

RESPOND

God,

I praise you for who you are. You are eternal. You are all-knowing. You have all the power. Yes, sometimes I wish that you would come and conquer all evil, and fix the things that are broken in my life and in the world around me. But I thank you, sincerely, for giving me and others in this world the opportunity to respond to your love and forgiveness first. I look forward to your return, when you will right all wrongs. Between now and then, use me in any way you wish to bring glory to your name.

Amen

ENTERING TRIUMPHANT

LUKE 19:38

*“Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD!
Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!”*

CODEx VATICANUS



ENTERING TRIUMPHANT

This spectacular codex dates to the 300s AD and contains a virtually complete copy of the Greek Old Testament (often called the “Septuagint” or the “LXX”) and the New Testament, including Matthew through 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews 1:1–9:13, and James–Jude. It lacks the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, and Revelation.

The manuscript has long been recognized as one of the earliest and most important witnesses to the biblical text, second only to Codex Sinaiticus. The manuscript may have been kept together in Caesarea with Codex Sinaiticus until the 500s. It found its way to Italy from Constantinople in the 1400s. The manuscript has been housed in the Vatican Library since 1475.

This manuscript preserves one of the earliest accounts of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

DEVOTION

As the news about Jesus’ miracles spread, his popularity soared. The crowds grew in size as he fed thousands. The emotions grew more passionate as he healed the sick and raised the dead. A woman even poured a whole vial of expensive perfume over his head. The public displays of affection culminated the day Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, just as the prophet Zechariah had predicted around 520 BC.

This wasn’t just any king. This was a king from the people, for the people, who loved the people, and who had come to establish a new kind of freedom and deliverance. Just prior to his entry, Jesus had shared plenty of somber words with some visiting Greeks as well. Clearly, Jesus was fully aware of what was going to happen in the week ahead.

Yet the prophet Zechariah had encouraged the people of Israel to be joyful, to get excited, because the promised one — the holy one sent from God, the long-awaited king — was coming. The day it actually happened, the people came out just as the Bible said they should. An impromptu processional of celebration erupted.

READ

Rejoice, O people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you.
He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey —
riding on a donkey's colt.

Zechariah 9:9

Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration paid a visit to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. They said, "Sir, we want to meet Jesus." Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels — a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

"Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But this is the very reason I came! Father, bring glory to your name."

John 12:20–28

After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. "Go into

ENTERING TRIUMPHANT

that village over there,” he told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The LORD needs it.’”

So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?”

And the disciples simply replied, “The LORD needs it.” So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on.

As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

“Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD!
Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!”

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”

He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!”

Luke 19:28–40

REFLECT

- In your opinion, why do you think the people celebrated Jesus at this point in his ministry?
- Jesus has some serious words for the Greeks who came to meet him. Re-read that part of the passage. How do these words impact you?
- Can you think of a symbolic way to enthusiastically welcome Jesus into your midst today?

RESPOND

God,

Today I rejoice and shout in triumph: my king, Jesus, has come to me! He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey's colt! I celebrate him as my messiah, who performs miracles. Show me how to "care nothing for life in this world" and focus on living for you. Today, by the guidance and power of your Spirit, lead me so that I can follow you in any direction you wish to take me.

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY **16**

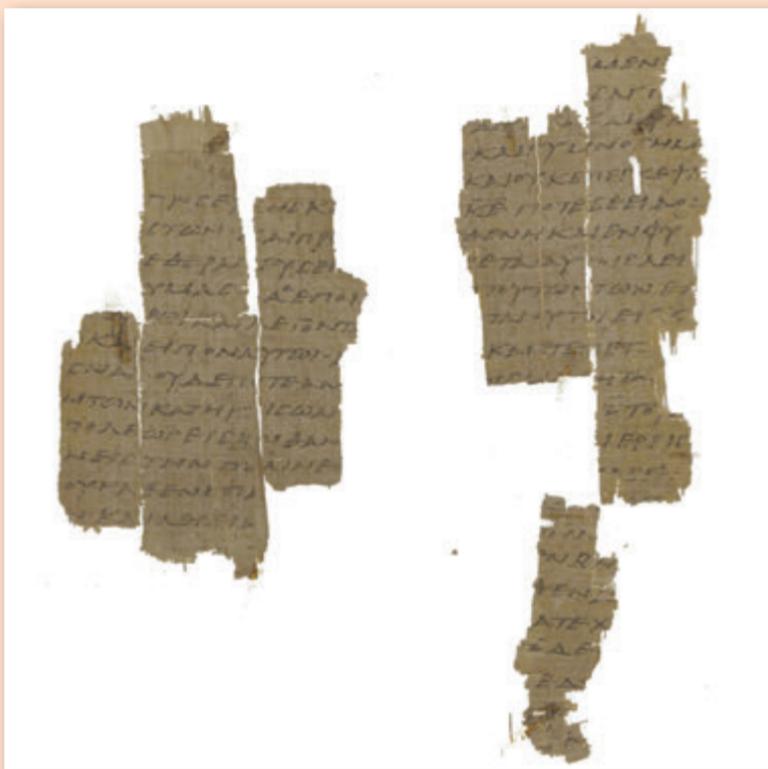
WHO DID IT?

MATTHEW 26:21-22

"I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, LORD?"

PAPYRUS 45



Papyrus 45 is an early Greek New Testament manuscript which is a part of the Chester Beatty Library housed in Dublin, Ireland, and several other locations. It was copied in Egypt around 250 AD. The manuscript originally consisted of 220 pages and measured roughly 10 inches by 8 inches. Only 30 pages survive.

The manuscript was acquired in Egypt by Alfred Chester Beatty in the first half of the 1900s. It contains the texts of Matthew 20–21 and 25–26; Mark 4–9 and 11–12; Luke 6–7 and 9–14; John 4–5 and 10–11; and Acts 4–17. The manuscript is in poor condition. All of the pages have breaks in the text with very few complete lines. The leaves of Matthew and John are the smallest.

This papyrus preserves the earliest known evidence for the dramatic events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus, including Jesus' prediction of his own death, Mary's anointing of Jesus for burial, Judas' agreement to betray Jesus, and the institution of the "Last Supper."

DEVOTION

The name "Judas" has become synonymous with betrayal, treachery, and weakness. He has gone down in history as part of the conspiracy that led to the murder of Jesus. But should he really get the blame for what happened on the cross?

The Bible and its account of the Last Supper helps answer this question. Certainly, Jesus said someone would betray him. Judas asked, "Am I the one?" and Christ seemed to accept his confession at the table. In addition, as Jesus broke the bread and passed the wine, Luke's gospel records Jesus saying to the *whole group*, "This is my body, which is given for you," and "my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you" (Luke 22:19–20).

The broader context of the Bible gives more context for who is responsible for Jesus' death. Romans 3:10 makes it clear that no one is righteous, not one. Each and every one of us has turned away from God

and chosen our own way (Isaiah 53:6). So, in a very real way, each of us has betrayed Jesus; and, because of our betrayals, “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned but he died for sinners to bring *you* safely home to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Maybe it’s time to rethink who is responsible for the death of Jesus. Yes, Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities that night. But doesn’t each of us betray him every day?

READ

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “As you know, Passover begins in two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

At that same time the leading priests and elders were meeting at the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, plotting how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the Passover celebration,” they agreed, “or the people may riot.”

... Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests and asked, “How much will you pay me to betray Jesus to you?” And they gave him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?”

As you go into the city,” he told them, “you will see a certain man. Tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.’” So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there.

When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the twelve

disciples. While they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, “Am I the one, LORD?”

He replied, “One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!”

Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, “Rabbi, am I the one?”

And Jesus told him, “You have said it.”

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take this and eat it, for this is my body.”

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, “Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words — I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26:1–30

REFLECT

- Would your friends be willing to see an innocent person die in their place? Why or why not?
- Can you think of specific ways that you betray Jesus on a regular basis?
- It has been said, "If you were the only person on earth, Jesus still would have come and died for you." Do you agree with that?

RESPOND

God,

I am amazed by your love for me. Your body was broken because of me. Even though I didn't deserve it, you shed your blood for me. Open the eyes of my heart to see how amazing this is. I am the one who betrays you and yet you gave your life for me. Help me embrace this kind of love and live a life worthy of your sacrifice!

Amen

A BATTLE OF THE WILLS

MATTHEW 26:39

“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

CODEX CLIMACI RESCRIPTUS



This fascinating manuscript contains important biblical texts and stunning hidden mysteries. It is a “palimpsest” (parchment manuscript leaves that have been recycled). The original writing was rubbed off and a second layer was written over it. This makes the top layer easy to read but the layers underneath nearly invisible. Great strides have been made using a new technology called “multi-spectral imaging” to recover the underlying texts, revealing words of great interest.

The top writing of this 137-leaf manuscript is in Syriac and contains two works from the 500s AD by John Climacus, an abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery located at the foot of Mt. Sinai. During the 800s, a scribe recycled parts of eight previously used manuscripts. Two of these contain Greek texts preserving portions of the Old Testament and of the Gospels. Its Gospels preserve a text with some interesting variations

A BATTLE OF THE WILLS

from the standard Gospels. The other six recycled manuscripts contain the world's largest collection of texts in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, a dialect of Aramaic close to the language Jesus would have used. The Aramaic manuscripts date back to the 500s.

The underlying text of this beautiful, mysterious leaf preserves the earliest account of the Last Supper in Aramaic.

DEVOTION

Early in Jesus' ministry, during the Sermon on the Mount given from a hilltop, Jesus taught "the LORD's Prayer." For thousands of years followers of Jesus have recited this prayer and used it as a model. It starts off this way:

Our Father in heaven,
 may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

It's interesting that Jesus not only taught how to pray this way, but when things really mattered for him, this was the way that he prayed too. The Last Supper was a real turning point for Jesus. Most of his earthly ministry was now behind him, and the cross loomed in front of him. After supper, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus, the Son, poured out his heart to the Father with honesty, transparency, and emotion.

Yes, on a mountain Jesus taught us all how to pray. But it takes it to a different level when we see him live out that teaching himself in a garden.

READ

Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done." When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open.

So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. Then he came to the disciples and said, "Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look — the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here!"

And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss." So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Rabbi!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.

Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for."

A BATTLE OF THE WILLS

Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

Matthew 26:36–50

REFLECT

- Do you think most people's prayers are filled with personal requests *and* surrender to God's will?
- Jesus knew he was destined for the cross. What do you think about him asking God to take that away?
- Do you feel comfortable pouring your heart out honestly, with transparency and passion like Jesus did? Why or why not?

RESPOND

God,

Just as Jesus did, I am pouring out my desires to you right now.

But, Father, above all things, may your name be glorified. Use my circumstances to further your kingdom here on earth. You are a good God, you know things that I have no idea about. So in these situations, I ask for your will, and not mine, to be done. Thank you for setting me free from the limits of my desires. I trust you and rest in you now.

Amen

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

JOHN 18:37-38

Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked.

P52 JOHN RYLAND'S MANUSCRIPT



This is the most famous fragment of the New Testament in the world. It contains parts of seven lines of John 18:31-33 on the front (or recto) side and parts of seven lines from verses 37-38 on the back (or verso) side. The fragment is written on papyrus (a paper-like substance made from pressed reeds) and preserves the dramatic interview of Jesus by Pontius Pilate, who served as the representative of the Roman Emperor Tiberius in Judea from 26-36 AD. But that is not what makes it so famous. The papyrus is the earliest known text of the New Testament in Greek dating from sometime between 100 and 140 AD.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

Reading of the recto (surviving text in **bold**)

the Jews, "For us it is not permitted to kill anyone," so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying what kind of death he was going to die. Entered therefore again into the Praetorium Pilate and summoned Jesus **and said** to him, "Thou art king of the **Jews?"**

Reading of the verso (surviving text in **bold**)

a King I am. For **this I have been born** and (for this) I have come into the **world so that I would testify** to the truth. Everyone who is **of the truth** hears of me my voice." **Said to him** Pilate, "What is truth?" **and this** having said, again he went out unto **the Jews** and said to them, "I find **not one** fault in him."

It is commonly assumed that John wrote his Gospel and Epistles in the 90s. Should this papyrus fragment date to the first half of the 2nd century, it would date very close to the original composition of the Gospel, making this a remarkable piece of evidence for the early transmission of the text.

DEVOTION

Truth matters. Truth aligns our life with reality. Without truth, we cannot find our way or discover meaning in life. To a world that is filled with so many broken promises and confusion, Jesus said, “My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10).

But how do we know that the Bible is an accurate record of the words that Jesus originally said? What’s the truth about *that*? Manuscripts like the P52 manuscript give us the answer. This precious fragment on papyrus was copied within decades of the original, and when it is compared to later manuscripts and the ones we use today, they match almost perfectly. And John Ryland’s manuscript isn’t the exception. Thousands of papyrus fragments of the New Testament exist, and very early fragments are still being discovered.

While being interviewed by Pilate, Jesus said, “All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.” Pilate retorted by asking, “What is truth?” The words of Scripture themselves give us the answer:

The very essence of your words is truth (Psalm 119:160).

“I am the way, the truth and the life.” (Jesus, John 14:6)

In this mixed-up world, any seeker of truth can now find their way to the truth in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ.

READ

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going.”

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

“No, we don’t know, LORD,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

John 14:1–6

Jesus’ trial before Caiaphas ended in the early hours of the morning. Then he was taken to the headquarters of the Roman governor. His accusers didn’t go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn’t be allowed to celebrate the Passover. So Pilate, the governor, went out to them and asked, “What is your charge against this man?”

“We wouldn’t have handed him over to you if he weren’t a criminal!” they retorted.

“Then take him away and judge him by your own law,” Pilate told them.

“Only the Romans are permitted to execute someone,” the Jewish leaders replied. (This fulfilled Jesus’ prediction about the way he would die.)

Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked him.

Jesus replied, “Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?”

“Am I a Jew?” Pilate retorted. “Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”

Pilate said, “So you are a king?”

Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, “He is not guilty of any crime. But you have a custom of asking me to release one prisoner each year at Passover. Would you like me to release this ‘King of the Jews’?”

But they shouted back, “No! Not this man. We want Barabbas!”
(Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

John 18:28-40

REFLECT

- Where do most people in your community go to find truth?
- Does the abundance of manuscript evidence help you trust the Bible as a reliable source of truth? Why or why not?
- Can you restate John 14:6 in your own words? What does this mean to you?

RESPOND

God,

I believe that truth matters. I sincerely praise you for not leaving us on our own to guess our way through life. Thank you for the reliable truth of your word. Thank you for Jesus Christ, and how he embodies truth and life.

I ask that in just one area of confusion today, you would give me clarity and direction. Show me from your word, from the life of your son Jesus, what is the right thing to do in this situation.

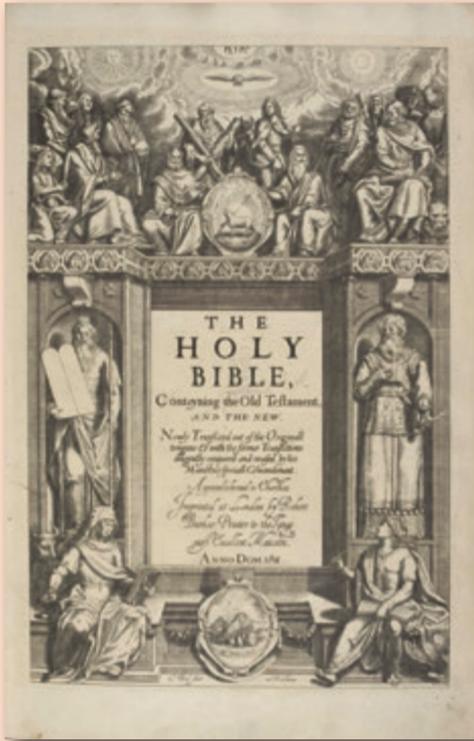
Amen

AN UNCOMMON JOY

MARK 15:24

Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross.

KING JAMES BIBLE



The King James translation (or “King James Version” [KJV]) of the Bible may be the most influential version in history. More copies have been printed than any other translation, and the way it influenced the English-speaking world is unsurpassed.

King James I of England commissioned a new translation of the Bible in 1604 in response to a need to replace previous authorized English translations. Forty-seven translators worked for seven years to produce the Bible, which was first published in 1611 by the king's printer, Robert Barker.

At King James' instruction, the translation was made to conform to the beliefs of the Church of England. But the KJV eventually became the dominant translation for Protestant use as well. The English language has changed significantly over the centuries, and the "King's English" reads awkwardly to those who aren't familiar with this older dialect of English. Nonetheless, the KJV is still widely revered by millions of people.

DEVOTION

The Bible, by far, is the most printed book in all the world. And the King James version is the most printed translation of the Bible in any language. Think about the resources King James allocated for just this one translation. Forty-seven translators working for seven years! Yes, throughout history, the Bible has faced overwhelming odds. Huge amounts of resources were required to create it. Great powers have attempted to destroy it. Philosophical movements have tried to discredit it. And yet it not only survives, but thrives as the best-selling, most widely translated and distributed book year after year.

What is it in this book that would compel someone to die for it? What is it that drives people to live for it? It can't be the pages and the ink; it must be the message. And most certainly, one of the core messages of the Bible revolves around the cross. Some call it "the scarlet thread of redemption." It's the theme that runs from Genesis to Revelation, from the fall in the Garden of Eden to the new heaven and new earth.

The sacrificial blood of Christ, shed on the cross, is one of the central themes that drives the Bible's message and sustains its high status among people all over the world. It's a message that invites us to pick up our

own crosses and follow Christ into an uncommon joy. That joy is the reason Jesus endured the cross, and at the cross we can find that joy for ourselves.

READ

Because of the joy awaiting him, he [Jesus] endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

Hebrews 12:2b

The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters (called the Praetorium) and called out the entire regiment. They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. Then they saluted him and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it.

Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross.

Mark 15:16–24

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

He never sinned,
nor ever deceived anyone.
He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.
He personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross
so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right.
By his wounds
you are healed.
Once you were like sheep
who wandered away.
But now you have turned to your Shepherd,
the Guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21–25

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Matthew 16:24–26

REFLECT

- Besides the essential theme of the cross, can you think of other reasons why the Bible has been so successful?
- How do you think a person's purpose in life relates to his or her willingness to endure pain?
- Jesus endured the cross because of "the joy that awaited him." Why does that seem strange? Why does it seem to make sense?

RESPOND

God,

Most of us see the cross as a horrific instrument of death, which it is. Open my eyes to see it as Jesus saw it, something that led to awaiting joy as he fulfilled his purpose for the world and for me. Please help me to understand Jesus' sacrifice and why he willingly offered himself for the world...for me. Fix my hope on this future joy as I pick up my own cross and seek to find true joy and true life in you.

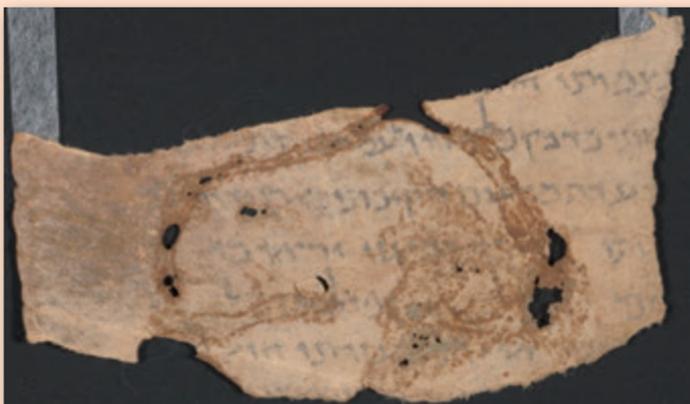
Amen

FINAL WORDS

MATTHEW 27:46

At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

DEAD SEA SCROLL FRAGMENT OF PSALM 22



The Dead Sea Scrolls, found in the caves near the Qumran community, continue to reveal a tremendous amount of information about the biblical text. The majority of the caves were discovered between 1947 and 1955. Some believe that even more caves existed in the region but have since collapsed and await discovery. Psalm 22 is a well-known psalm filled with predictions of the Messiah and is quoted by Jesus and the Gospel writers in the New Testament. The discovery of this psalm in the Dead Sea Scrolls has helped scholars resolve some controversies that had emerged about the reading of the text. This fragment is in Hebrew. On the cross, Jesus quoted it in Aramaic, quoting the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament, called the Targum. Here in this intimate exchange, Jesus cries out in his mother tongue to the Father.

DEVOTION

Some accounts in the Bible are recorded more than once. When it comes to the pivotal events of the life of Christ, God saw fit to inspire four different people to tell his epic history from four different viewpoints. The four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell the same history, from different viewpoints, written to different groups of people. The result is a stunning multi-faceted account of what happened. It's the life of Jesus in surround-sound, the work of God in quadraphonic. This is powerfully evident when we look at Jesus' final words spoken from the cross. Each gospel writer captures different things Jesus said, and Jesus himself quoted from Psalm 22. Amazingly, the Dead Sea Scroll fragment described above could have been in Jerusalem at the time, if it wasn't already in the Qumran community just a few dozen kilometers away.

From these different viewpoints we get images, through their words, of the full picture of what happened on the cross that day. Quoting Psalm 22, Jesus expressed an acute sense of loneliness, when (many theologians theorize) God the Father had to separate himself from the sin of humanity that God the Son bore on the cross.

In the midst of extreme agony, we also hear from Jesus' unwavering heart — his concern for the welfare of his mother, his desire to see his tormentors forgiven, his words of comfort to the thief hanging beside him, and his fulfillment of all that the prophets had said would happen. As exposure and suffocation brought him to the end, he acknowledged that "it is finished" and he has completed this part of his mission as the suffering Messiah. With that, he releases his spirit back into the hands of his Father who had temporarily abandoned him.

READ

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

Psalm 22:1

Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified — one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

... Then he [one of the criminals] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:32–34a, 42–43

Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.” And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

John 19:25–27

The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock.

At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Matthew 27:41–46

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!"

John 19:28–30a

By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words he breathed his last.

Luke 23:44–45

When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

Mark 15:39

REFLECT

- What do you think about Jesus quoting Scripture in the midst of such agony?
- If you were in Jesus' position, could you have asked God to forgive those who were killing you?
- If you were in the Roman officer's position, what would you have concluded about Jesus?

RESPOND

God,

Thank you for giving me this multifaceted account of the final hours of Jesus' life. Use it to give me a deeper, more somber appreciation for what he did for me on the cross that day. I can't show that kind of compassion and forgiveness on my own. I ask that you would give me your strength, by the power of your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name, to be willing to be compassionate and forgiving to all who sin against me. And I pray that, like the centurion, I would boldly acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God.

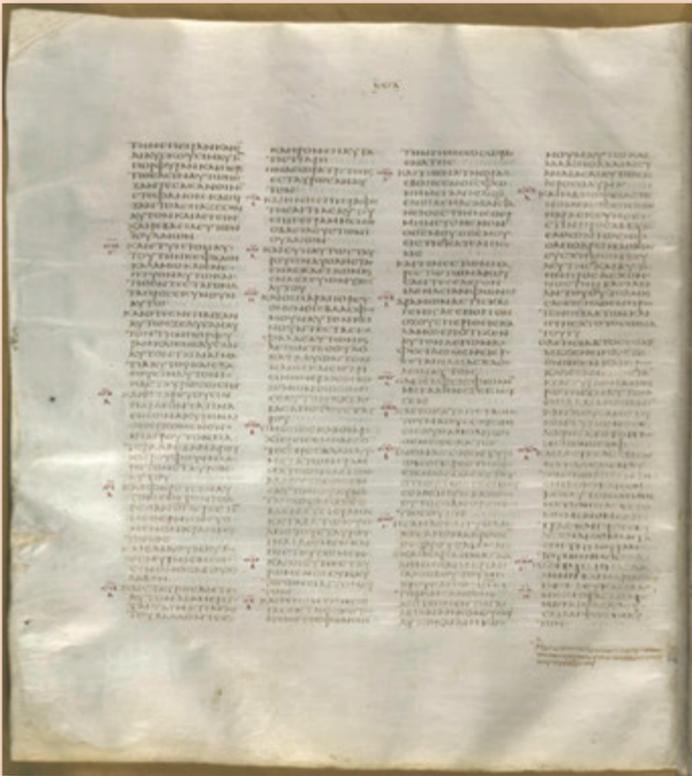
Amen

THROUGH THE CURTAIN

MARK 15:37-38

Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

CODEx SINAITICUS



THROUGH THE CURTAIN

This remarkable biblical manuscript was discovered in the mid-1800s at Saint Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai by a German Bible scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf. He speculated that Codex Sinaiticus was one of the 50 copies of the Bible commissioned by the Roman Emperor Constantine after his conversion to Christianity. Indeed, it is one of four surviving manuscripts in Greek containing most of the Bible dating to that time.

Codex Sinaiticus preserves approximately half of the Old Testament and the complete New Testament in Greek. It dates to the mid-300s AD. The Old Testament text is 650 years earlier than the earliest surviving complete Hebrew Old Testament. This gives it enormous value for the study of the text of the Bible.

Scholars consider Codex Sinaiticus to be one of the best Greek texts of the New Testament, and it forms the basis of the New Testament for modern translations of the Bible.

DEVOTION

The Bible is filled with precious words with deep implications. We can be thankful that God has preserved manuscripts like Codex Sinaiticus to give us confidence that the Bibles we hold in our hands today are accurate transmissions and translations of the original words that God gave those who penned it. Because the Bible isn't just history or philosophy, it's alive.

The book of Hebrews is very clear about this, calling Scripture "alive and powerful" (4:12), and this special letter is a profound testimony to the great changes that were brought about by the cross. Written to the Hebrews, he draws compelling contrasts between the way things were, and the way things now can be because of Christ's sacrifice. These transformations include the realization of Christ's deity (1:8), Christ taking on the role of our personal high priest (Chapters 3, 5, and 7), the institution of a second covenant (Chapter 8), and a compelling call to live by faith (Chapter 11).

Chapter 9 describes the most sacred place in all of ancient Judaism, the “Holy of Holies” or the “Most High Place” — the inner chamber of the great Temple where the presence of God dwelt in a particularly powerful way. A gigantic curtain separated this place from the rest of the Temple. In order to enter, the priest had to perform an intricate and demanding process of purification and animal sacrifice. Everything had to be done just right to be able to go into the Most Holy Place; even then, just one man could go, and only once a year.

But at the moment Jesus died, that curtain that separated humanity from the special presence of God was torn, ushering in a new era of access to God through the blood of Jesus.

READ

Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Mark 15:37–38

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people’s bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deed so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

THROUGH THE CURTAIN

Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says,

"This is the new covenant I will make
with my people on that day, says the LORD:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."

Then he says,

"I will never again remember
their sins and lawless deeds."

And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Hebrews 9:13–15, 10:10–25

REFLECT

- Re-skim this passage and find new things that Christ's sacrifice accomplished for you. How can those truths impact your life today?
- If it wasn't for Christ, how confident would you feel entering into the Most High Place?
- How would your prayers change if you truly believed you "can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus"?

RESPOND

God,

Right now, as an act of faith, because of what Christ accomplished on the cross (and not on the merit of anything I have done myself), with humility and gratitude, I pray to you boldly and with confidence. I thank you that animal sacrifice is no longer necessary since Christ was the ultimate, final sacrifice for my sins. What he accomplished on the cross is absolutely wonderful. I worship you for completing this amazing plan to redeem me.

Amen

PHYSIOLOGY, NOT JUST THEOLOGY

JOHN 19:36-37

These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, "Not one of his bones will be broken," and "They will look on the one they pierced."

HEEL BONE WITH CRUCIFIXION NAIL



Crucifixion was a widespread method of execution practiced in the ancient world, perhaps originating with the Persians. There were many methods of crucifixion. The method as we know it today was developed by the Romans. The most detailed and well-known account of crucifixion is the execution of Jesus Christ. Despite the documented fact that the Romans crucified thousands, virtually no physical evidence survives of the brutal practice.

In 1978, archaeologists excavating a tomb in Jerusalem discovered an ossuary (a repository for bones used in Jewish burials between 100 BC

and 100 AD). It contained the bones of a young man named Yehohanan ben Hagkol. The bones tell a grim story. Two nails were hammered through where the forearm and wrist connected. Another nail, bent on the tip, was pounded through the two heel bones which had been gathered together and turned sideways.

Yehohanan had to pull with his arms and pivot up on the nail through his heels to breathe. The victim was suffering from a cruel beating, loss of blood and fluids, exposure to the elements. Every breath was an agonizing effort. To hasten death, the shin bones were compound-fractured and the victim eventually asphyxiated.

This replica shows the nail through the heel of Yehohanan and provides the only physical evidence for crucifixion.

DEVOTION

There is just something about physical evidence. It's one thing to be able to tell people about the history and the accuracy and the authority of the Bible. It's another thing to be able to show that to them. When you can roll out the scroll or point out details in a piece of papyrus, something happens. "Truth" becomes tangibly real. Physical evidence takes us beyond theology and philosophy and forces us to interact with objective reality.

Thousands of preachers have described the graphic horrors of Roman crucifixion. There are plenty of reasons why this was a preferred mode of execution. It lifted the victim high above the crowd so that everyone could see and fear it, and think twice about defying the iron fist of Roman rule. But all these descriptions leave something to the imagination. Movies and paintings give hypothetical imagery to the agony of the cross; but these, we know, are just artists' renditions. The biblical descriptions of what happened to Christ fill in some of the gaps as the writers of the gospels share graphic physiological details surrounding his death.

That's all well and good, but there is still something about physical

PHYSIOLOGY, NOT JUST THEOLOGY

evidence that narrows the gap between faith and fact. For when you see the bones of Yehohanan, and you see the spikes in his forearms and ankles, and peer into the ossuary where his loved ones placed his remains, the crucifixion of Christ becomes real on a whole different level.

READ

It was the day of preparation, and the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath, because it was Passover week). So they asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by ordering that their legs be broken. Then their bodies could be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also can believe.) These things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures that say, "Not one of his bones will be broken," and "They will look on the one they pierced."

John 19:31–37

As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver

once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."

Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Matthew 27:57-65

REFLECT

- Do you think your friends and family make a distinction between faith and fact, between what's physical and what is spiritual?
- In your opinion, do the physiological details in the gospel accounts make the crucifixion seem more real?
- How do you think your faith would have been affected if you had been standing among the crowd and experienced, first hand, the crucifixion of Jesus?

PHYSIOLOGY, NOT JUST THEOLOGY

RESPOND

God,

I don't want my faith to just be theological. I don't want my spiritual life to be separate from my physical life. Thank you for these bones and this nail which remind me that the crucifixion was real. Guide me as I ponder the biblical account and this new evidence that confirms the crucifixion was a real, physical event with real, life-changing spiritual implications.

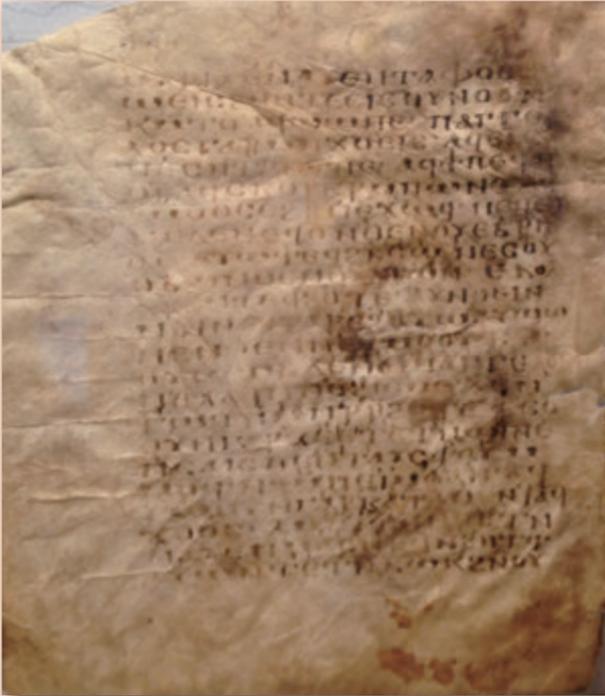
Amen

AN EMPTY TOMB AND A NEW LIFE

ROMANS 6:4

And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

COPTIC RESURRECTION ACCOUNT



Coptic was a language of the Egyptian people, many of whom were converted to Christianity. Coptic was originally devised to write the Bible. The language employed the Greek script and a few extra letters to transcribe Egyptian hieroglyphs into this alphabetic script. This

AN EMPTY TOMB AND A NEW LIFE

manuscript leaf (or page) comes from a small-format book which likely contained the four Gospels.

This leaf contains portions of Matthew 27 on the recto (or front) and the beginning of Matthew 28 on the verso (or back). The verso records the dramatic account of Mary Magdalene and the other women going to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. They intended to anoint his dead body; but, to their utter astonishment, they found the tomb to be empty. An angel appeared and told them Jesus had risen and that they should tell the disciples the good news.

This Coptic manuscript was probably intended for private devotional use, given its small format. It was composed around the 400s AD, making it one of the earliest accounts of this foundational passage.

DEVOTION

It's hard to imagine the swing of emotions that took place in the lives of the followers of Jesus on the day of Christ's resurrection. The night before was filled with grief, crushed expectations, and fear of losing their own lives. Any lingering hopes that Christ would be a conquering Messiah were shattered. And no one seemed to understand the implications of the cross, that it had been a great triumph for the suffering Messiah.

Unquestionably, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a great physical miracle that literally shook the earth. As his body was restored and his spirit returned, the laws of nature were reversed and human destiny was transformed. Where sin and death entered into the world through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the resurrection of Christ brought the possibility of a new, remarkable kind of life. And no one, it seemed, saw it coming.

Yet, there it was, an empty tomb. The stone had been rolled away, soldiers had fled, and angels shone like the sun to make the proclamation. Women made the discovery and Jesus would appear to

them as they rushed back into Jerusalem. Then he appeared to Peter, the disciples, and then more than 500 people at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). His resurrection was well witnessed, clearly documented, and poorly refuted. And it has transformed human history, one soul at a time.

The results of this miraculous event cannot be overstated. The apostle Paul and others throughout the New Testament were used by God to explain, as best as human words can, the tremendous implications of Christ's resurrection upon our lives, both after his death and right now. Christ was raised from the dead "by the glorious power of the Father" so today each of us "may live new lives."

Because, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

READ

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the LORD came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee,

AN EMPTY TOMB AND A NEW LIFE

and they will see me there.”

Matthew 28:1–10

And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.

Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

Romans 6:4–18

REFLECT

- Re-read this passage; but before you do, ask God to open your heart and help your mind to understand some of these astounding personal implications of the resurrection.
- Pick just one of the implications that you find most significant right now.
- How should this truth change the way you think and act today?

RESPOND

God,

I humble myself before you now. The resurrection, and all of its implications, are just too great for me to be able to understand on my own. I ask that, beginning today, you would give me a deeper relationship with your living word. Together, with you, I want to explore these stunning truths and powerful mysteries. By your great power, I believe that I can live a new life because of the resurrection of Jesus. Lead me in that new life today.

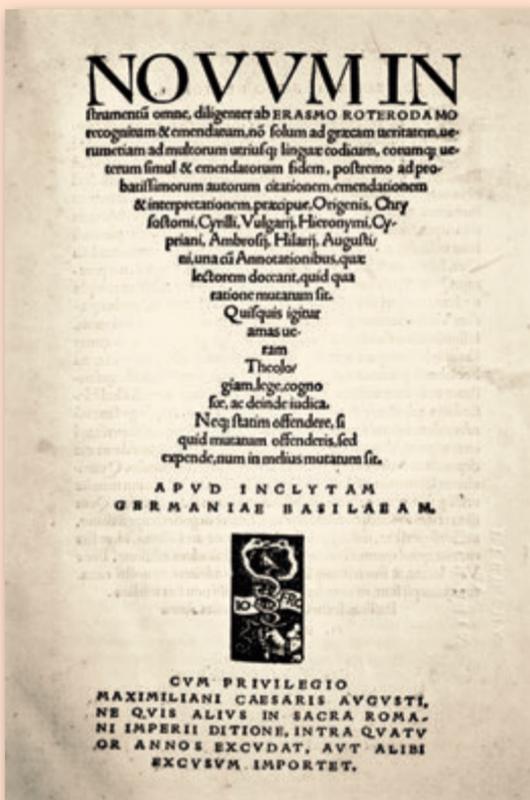
Amen

DOUBTERS WELCOME

JOHN 20:25

But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (ESV)

ERASMUS NEW TESTAMENT



Desiderius Erasmus was an eminent Christian humanist scholar. He printed the first Greek New Testament, published in 1516. Rather than making a “literal” word-for-word translation, he created a “paraphrase” to smooth out the sentences and use common words. It was wildly popular. Five editions were eventually printed. The Greek text is side by side with the text of Erasmus’ own Latin translation of the New Testament. The Greek manuscripts he used as sources were few in number, of a later date, and relatively inferior to the manuscripts translators have access to today. Erasmus’ Greek New Testament became the primary source for the translation of the New Testament for over 400 years.

DEVOTION

After Mary Magdalene saw the tomb was empty, she rushed back to tell the disciples. An angel in blazing white told her Jesus had risen from the dead (Luke 24:6) and yet, when she got to the disciples, she said that the body was missing and someone had taken it away (John 20:2). She wasn’t the only one that appeared to have a hard time believing. The disciples didn’t believe Jesus had been resurrected either, and several of them ran to the tomb to verify. If it was true, this would be the best news that the world had ever heard. They had seen Jesus raise others from the dead. Was it possible that he could have been resurrected after three days of death?

Thomas didn’t think so, and, understandably, he wanted proof. He wanted to see and touch Jesus’ wounds for himself. He is now referred to as “Doubting Thomas.” However, when Jesus appeared to the disciples and Thomas touched his wounds, he made a powerful confession of belief, calling Jesus “my LORD and my God!” (John 20:28).

Thankfully, God accommodates for our lack of faith. There’s plenty of room in this world for those who believe, yet struggle with doubt and disbelief. Consider the man who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus (Mark 9:17). Jesus told him that if he believed, his son could be

healed. The father responded with words of beautiful honesty, “I believe, but please help my unbelief!”

We might be tempted to look at Erasmus, who devoted his life to the translation of God’s word, and think that he never struggled in his faith at all. But honestly, is there a single one of us that doesn’t regularly wrestle with doubt? Jesus welcomes those with weak faith and strong doubts. And that’s a really good thing, because there is plenty of “Doubting Thomas” in every one of us.

READ

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the LORD!” Then she gave them his message.

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the LORD! Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, “We have seen the LORD!”

But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as

before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My LORD and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

John 20:18–29

One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."

Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth.

"How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father.

He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can."

"What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes."

The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable

DOUBTERS WELCOME

to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!"

Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.

Mark 9:17–27

REFLECT

- In what ways have you clearly "seen" God? In what ways do you wish you could see him more?
- Do you have a particular area where your doubt is strong and your belief is weak?
- Are you comfortable telling God about it, like the father of the possessed son told Jesus?

RESPOND

God,

I believe, help me overcome my unbelief.

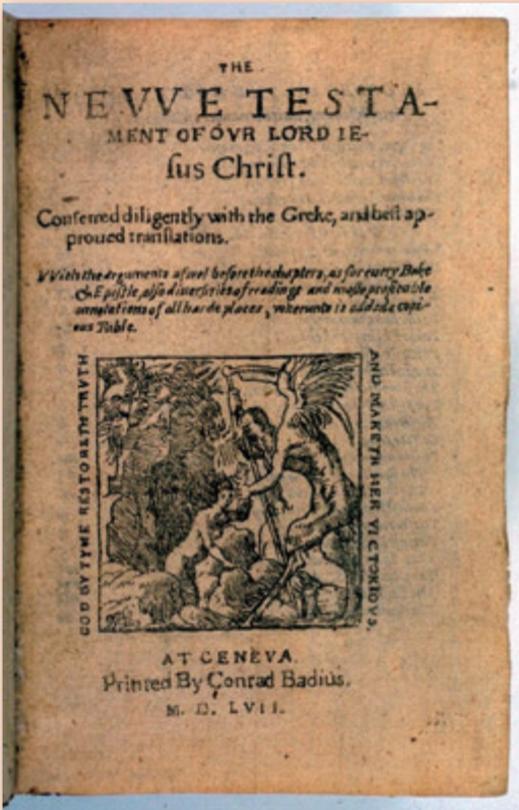
Amen

ABBA'S CHILD

Galatians 4:6

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."

GENEVA BIBLE



Queen Mary I of England and Ireland ruled from July 1553 until her death in 1558. She violently opposed the Reformation. The execution of scores of Protestants earned her the name "Bloody Mary." Many Protestants fled for their lives to Geneva, Switzerland, which became a center for Protestant biblical scholarship and reform.

In Geneva, a new English translation of the Bible was published and made available to the general public. The monumental work was supervised by William Whittingham, with the collaboration of several prominent scholars. The translation included study guides, such as notes, cross-references, book summaries, maps, tables, and indices.

Due to its accessibility, the Geneva Bible was extremely popular. Over the next 84 years, more than 150 editions were issued. This was the version of the Bible that Shakespeare quoted from and that the Puritans brought to the New World.

DEVOTION

The Geneva Bible was a pioneer of the modern study Bible. It was translated to be read and designed to be studied. And Bible study is important, because to live a truly inspired life, we must understand who we truly are. And the only one who truly knows us is God. That is one of the reasons William Whittingham and others were so passionate about the Geneva Bible, because the Bible is the only written source that can tell us who we are from God's perspective. One of the words that tells us who we are is the word "Abba." It's an Aramaic word, closely related to Hebrew, and Aramaic was the household language of Jesus. Technically, "Abba" refers to a male parent, but it doesn't translate into "father" in the formal sense. There is no English equivalent for the word that gets at both the intimacy of it while maintaining awe and rightful respect for God the Father. Perhaps it is best rendered *Abba Father*. It's a loving relationship that's reflected in this term that might be heard from a child calling out to his father coming home from work. That's what a child would shout when he was in need of help. It's what a child would call his father

when he was holding him close at night. And that is what Jesus, the Son of God, proclaimed when he called out *Abba Father* in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Abba, Father” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” — Mark 14:36

So, who are you? You are a beloved child of the one we can call Abba Father. Knowing God on this personal, intimate level will change your understanding of who you truly are. Because the Bible says we are his children, whom he deeply loves. And we live in a world full of rejection, so knowing this — our identity in our dear Abba Father — from a Bible we can trust makes all the difference.

READ

He [Jesus] came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

John 1:10–13

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will

ABBA'S CHILD

reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

Romans 8:14–25

Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Galatians 4:1–7

REFLECT

- Do you think more people view God as a slave-driver or a loving father?
- What was your father like? Do you think that has influenced your view of God?
- Are you comfortable using such an intimate expression as Abba Father to relate to the almighty, all-knowing God of the universe?

RESPOND

Abba Father,

Thank you for giving me your word so that I can know who I am from your perspective, which is the most important perspective of all — the perspective of a loving, adoring father. Please make this powerful truth real in my mind and in my heart. I want to understand your love for me and experience life like your child. As my Abba Father, thank you for always having your arms open wide to welcome me. It is my joy to run to you, not because I want something from you, but simply because you are my loving Father and I want to be close to you and love you more.

Amen

FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS

ISAIAH 1:18

“Come now, let’s settle this,”

says the LORD.

“Though your sins are like scarlet,

I will make them as white as snow.”

CODEX VATICANUS



This manuscript has long been recognized as one of the earliest and most important witnesses to the biblical text, and dates to the 300s AD. When it came to the Vatican library in the 1400s, it was fiercely protected, and very few people ever saw it, which added to its mystery. It is the most famous manuscript in the entire Vatican Library. It is viewed as the best manuscript in the ancient “Alexandrian” form of the New Testament.

DEVOTION

Codex Vaticanus is valuable because of its age. It is also valuable because it contains much of the Old Testament and New Testament. That’s important for scholars and for anyone who wants to understand Jesus and the cross. We really need to see the full picture of Scripture, beginning to end, to fully understand God’s redemptive plan. The writer of the book of Hebrews introduced his letter by talking about God’s plan from beginning to end as well. He reviewed how God spoke through the prophets first, and then through Jesus Christ, who washed away our sins with his blood.

God said many times in the Old Testament that he would cleanse our sins. The beginning of the book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Christ, is just one example where God said he will wash away our sins and make us clean and pure. Christ fulfilled the prophecies, and the apostle John applies it to today: 1) Don’t deny your sin; 2) confess it to God; and 3) God will forgive your sin and cleanse you from it. That process, repeated countless times throughout a lifetime, is essential to living an inspired life.

READ

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.

Hebrews 1:1–3

Listen to the LORD, you leaders of "Sodom."

Listen to the law of our God, people of "Gomorrah."

"What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?"

says the LORD.

"I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams

and the fat of fattened cattle.

I get no pleasure from the blood

of bulls and lambs and goats.

"Learn to do good.

Seek justice.

Help the oppressed.

Defend the cause of orphans.

Fight for the rights of widows.

"Come now, let's settle this,"

says the LORD.

"Though your sins are like scarlet,

I will make them as white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson,

I will make them as white as wool."

Isaiah 1:10–11, 17–18

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

1 John 1:1-10

REFLECT

- Do you think more people would be honest about their sins if they understood the forgiveness of God and the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus?
- Ask God to reveal a specific sin in your life. Perhaps it is something hidden that you have never shared with anyone (probably because of the guilt and shame you feel).
- If you confess that sin to God, what does the Bible say will happen?

RESPOND

God,

You know all things — all the good and all the bad about me. I am eternally thankful that you have forgiven me for the things I have done, and even the things I have not yet done, that go against your will. Please search my heart and show me any sinful areas of my life. I bring this specific sin to the foot of your cross right now. Thank you for washing me clean by the blood of Jesus and making me pure. Now, by the power of your Holy Spirit, please take control of this area of my life. Live through me in a way that will bring glory to your name.

Amen

PASSIONATE PRESERVATION

MATTHEW 5:18

“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.” – Jesus Christ

FÜRTH TORAH



PASSIONATE PRESERVATION

This stunning Torah dates to the 1500s and was copied in the large format used in synagogues. It is in excellent condition, considering its age. It comes from Fürth, a small town outside of Nuremberg, Germany, which had a vibrant Jewish population prior to the Holocaust. The scroll was buried and hidden away from the Nazis and found after WWII when workmen were digging in, or in the vicinity of, a synagogue that was part of an orphanage. The Torah provides a remarkable story of survival and sacrifice, but not all the details are known.

We do know that on the 9th and 10th of November, 1938, widespread violence was unleashed by Nazis in Germany. In one night, over 1,000 synagogues were destroyed. In Fürth alone, at least 105 Torah scrolls were destroyed in multiple synagogues as bonfires burned out of control. It is believed that a rabbi, who taught at an orphanage attached to his synagogue, hid the scrolls prior to the onslaught. But we may never know for sure, because although the Scriptures themselves survived, the rabbi and his entire congregation died in concentration camps.

DEVOTION

The process by which the Bible came to us didn't just involve the passion and precision of scribes who faithfully copied each word through meticulous traditions. The process involved people who were willing to live out the message *in* the Bible, no matter how contrary that message was to typical human thinking, and no matter what it cost.

Our natural instincts tell us to save our own lives, avoid persecution, judge others, and fight back when we are wronged. Yet the Bible survived because of the devotion of people who trusted God to live differently. They were willing to lay down their own lives, endure persecution, love others, and take the road of peace and forgiveness.

There's no greater example of this than Jesus himself. In perhaps the most famous sermon on earth, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus put words to this radical way of thinking and acting. He looked at the direction

that humanity normally goes and said it's time to turn around and go backwards, in the opposite direction. The rabbi and his congregation in Fürth are just one example of thousands who were willing to live this "upside-down life" to stay true to God's word, even as they gave their lives to preserve it.

The process and the people involved allowed Jesus to confidently proclaim that not a single detail, not even the smallest stroke of the quill, would ever disappear from his word.

READ

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and

PASSIONATE PRESERVATION

lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

“You are the light of the world — like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

Matthew 5:1–19

REFLECT

- Can you think of other examples of people who lived and died for the Scriptures and the message they contain? What do you think inspired them?
- What is your gut reaction to Christ's "Sermon on the Mount"?
- If you were to pick one area of your own life that you would like to see God turn upside-down, so that you could live more consistently with his commands, what would it be?

RESPOND

God,

I thank you for preserving your written word for me today. Thank you for the process and the people who lived and died protecting the scrolls and the codices that you used to transmit your word to me accurately today. Please give me a deep appreciation for this every time I read a verse of your Scripture. Thank you that not one detail of it has been lost. Please live through me like you lived through these people, those who were willing to live with purpose, passion, and sacrifice.

Amen

PSALM 119:89

Your eternal word, O LORD, stands firm in heaven.

PSALM CODEX



This is an extremely rare Hebrew manuscript of the book of Psalms (called the “Tehillim”). It contains the beautiful lyrics to worship and meditative songs that God gave to King David and others. This stunning book was copied and made in the town of Mladá Boleslav, near Prague, in 1719. Mladá Boleslav was one of the oldest Jewish communities of Bohemia. It was the seat of many famous rabbis.

The manuscript is written in a large format for use in the synagogue by the “cantors” who sing the songs in a melodious, poetic way. The reading of the Psalms is still an important part of daily worship in the synagogue. The handwriting in the manuscript is highly skilled and

artistic. The title page is artistically rendered with King David playing his harp at the center top. The manuscript opens with a prayer for recitation before each of the Tehillim, followed by a list of specific Psalms for each day of the week and festivals. Two prayers to recite after the Tehillim appear at the end of the manuscript, as well as a prayer for the sick.

DEVOTION

The book of Psalms is found right in the center of many Bibles. If someone randomly opens the Bible to the middle, they will likely find the heart-gripping Psalms. Maybe that's coincidence...maybe not. In a very special way, the Psalms are the central heartbeat of the word of God. They are a compilation of song lyrics by King David and a few others who were touched by the Holy Spirit in a unique way. The writers shared their deepest feelings, concerns, and praises. When we read the Psalms, we see a reflection of our own hearts — it's as if God had them written so that we could put words to our innermost emotions and thoughts.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the whole Bible. It is broken up into sections, each one labeled with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. One by one, each section illuminates the power and the value of God's word. It is like a symphony devoted to the melody that the Bible plays in our lives.

As you read these Tehillim, imagine them being sung in the ancient synagogue of Mladá Boleslav nearly 300 years ago. Ask God to make their music come alive and then listen to it as it echoes in your own soul.

READ

Aleph א

Joyful are people of integrity,
 who follow the instructions of the LORD.
Joyful are those who obey his laws
 and search for him with all their hearts.
They do not compromise with evil,
 and they walk only in his paths.
You have charged us
 to keep your commandments carefully.
Oh, that my actions would consistently
 reflect your decrees!
Then I will not be ashamed
 when I compare my life with your commands.
As I learn your righteous regulations,
 I will thank you by living as I should!
I will obey your decrees.
 Please don't give up on me!

Beth ב

How can a young person stay pure?
 By obeying your word.
I have tried hard to find you —
 don't let me wander from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart,
 that I might not sin against you.
I praise you, O LORD;
 teach me your decrees.
I have recited aloud
 all the regulations you have given us.

I have rejoiced in your laws
as much as in riches.

I will study your commandments
and reflect on your ways.

I will delight in your decrees
and not forget your word.

Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.

Help me understand the meaning of your commandments,
and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.

I weep with sorrow;
encourage me by your word.

Keep me from lying to myself;
give me the privilege of knowing your instructions.

Give me an eagerness for your laws
rather than a love for money!

Turn my eyes from worthless things,
and give me life through your word.

Your eternal word, O LORD,
stands firm in heaven.

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.

I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again:
I will obey your righteous regulations.

Powerful people harass me without cause,
but my heart trembles only at your word.

I rejoice in your word
like one who discovers a great treasure.

Let me live so I can praise you,
and may your regulations help me.

I have wandered away like a lost sheep;
come and find me,
for I have not forgotten your commands.

Psalm 119:1–18, 27–29, 36–37, 89, 105–106, 161–162, 175–176

REFLECT

- Pick out one or two verses from this passage that mean the most to you right now.
- Do you think it's strange that song lyrics and poetry are included in the Bible? Why or why not?
- Think of how songs and poetry are a part of your life already. What makes them special?

RESPOND

God,

Thank you again and again for entrusting me with a trustworthy Bible that can lead me into truth. I now ask you that it would also lead me into song. I sincerely pray, from the bottom of my heart, that you would transform my Bible reading into worship. When I read your living words, make them come alive like a song in my heart — like the inspiration of great poetry. May the melody of the Bible's truth reverberate through my life and into the lives of others.

Amen

SCRIPTURE'S SHEPHERD

JOHN 10:10

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.”

ASHKENAZI ESTHER “MEGILLAH” SCROLL



This scroll contains the entire book of Esther (often called the “Megillah”). This scroll contains the dramatic account of the deliverance of the Jewish people from destruction in Susa, a city in Persia, around the year 480 BC, when, through the brave obedience of a beautiful girl, God preserved his people from an evil Persian named Haman.

This particular scroll not only records the history of Queen Esther

(and the evil attempts to destroy her people and God's word), but it actually survived a very similar history. The scroll dates to the 1600s. It was copied by Ashkenazi Jews, likely in Lithuania, where hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered in World War II. Just as Haman had attempted to destroy the Jews centuries before, Hitler attempted the same only a few decades ago. Although we will never know the exact details of the scroll's history, it somehow survived before being taken to Israel after the war.

The Esther account is read each March during the Feast of Purim. The historical account reminds us of the indestructibility of God's word and his people despite attempts throughout history to destroy both.

DEVOTION

From the Garden of Eden to Susa, through Nazi Germany into today, evil forces have always attempted to destroy God's people and his word. It may surface through oppressive political regimes, or enemy armies, or even family members and friends who attempt to destroy our faith and undermine God's truth.

But this is just the surface of a deeper struggle. There is a deeper force of evil who seeks to steal and kill and destroy. Everyone is targeted. We struggle "against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). On our own, we are defenseless in the face of these attacks — like sheep being stalked and consumed by hungry, ferocious lions and wolves (1 Peter 5:8). Our enemies seek to steal, kill, and destroy, and there is really no way we can protect ourselves.

Thank God that's not the end of the story. Jesus said he is the good shepherd (John 10:11), the one who came to give us life; to guide us; to protect our hearts, minds, and souls eternally, no matter what happens to our bodies here on earth. Yes, the attacks will come; we may even be walking through a dark valley toward death, but the LORD is the great

shepherd who will guide and protect our souls in the midst of life's battles. And we know he is truly good because he laid down his life for us, his sheep.

READ

The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.

Psalm 23:1, 4-5

"I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith. For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.... I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

John 16:1-2, 33

"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name

and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:1–10

REFLECT

- In your opinion, do most people believe that evil has a spiritual source?
- What do you think are the best qualities of a really good shepherd?
- What qualities of a good shepherd do you see in Jesus?

RESPOND

God,

Thank you for revealing the evil forces behind the battles I face every day. Thank you for being honest with me and never promising that these attacks will go away. Thank you that you can give me a rich and satisfying life no matter what is happening to me. I choose to praise you, worship you, and follow you now as my great shepherd. Thank you for your word and your presence in my life!

Amen

BY FAITH

ROMANS 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

WYCLIFFE BIBLE PAGE



This is a beautiful, hand-copied page from a Wycliffe Bible. Wycliffe Bibles could be considered works of art. The calligraphy is astounding and many pages include beautiful illustrations and designs. But these careful artistic features aren't the most important thing about Wycliffe Bibles at all.

John Wycliffe believed that every Christian should be able to study the Bible for themselves, but the religious leaders were strongly opposed to laymen having access to the Bible in the “vernacular,” the everyday language. But Wycliffe stood firm, saying, “It helps Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ’s sentence.” Around 1382, he translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English. The translation was revised in in the 1390s to make it even more readable.

Wycliffe and his followers, called Lollards, were persecuted as heretics for their revolutionary ideas. Many were tortured and burned at the stake, some with their Bibles hung around their necks. Wycliffe died before the onset of the persecution, but he left an indelible impression on all who follow Christ.

DEVOTION

John Wycliffe (1320–1384 AD) was considered one of Oxford’s leading theologians and philosophers. He helped lead a protest that would reform Christendom forever — the Protestant Reformation.

Wycliffe believed that every Christian should have access to the Bible. Only Latin versions were available at the time, and even those were only available to the priests and the wealthy. He backed up that conviction with an unprecedented effort to translate the Bible into everyday language with the help of his good friend, John Purvey. “The laity ought to understand the faith,” he said, “and since the doctrines of our faith are in the Scriptures, believers should have the Scriptures in a language familiar to the people.”

The church aggressively opposed his work. They declared, "By this translation, the Scriptures have become vulgar, and they are more available to lay, and even to women who can read, than they were to learned scholars, who have a high intelligence. So the pearl of the gospel is scattered and trodden underfoot by swine."

Wycliffe responded, "Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English. Moses heard God's law in his own tongue; so did Christ's apostles."

Forty-three years after his death, church officials exhumed Wycliffe's corpse, burned his remains, and scattered his ashes into the River Swift. But his desire for every person to read the Bible continued to spread like a wildfire. A chronicler observed, "So the brook carried his ashes into the Avon River; the Avon into the Severn River; the Severn into the narrow seas; and then into the ocean. The ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed throughout the world."

READ

Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved. I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is LORD and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same LORD, who

gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”

But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “LORD, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

Romans 10:1–4, 9–17

REFLECT

- Do you think the work and sacrifice of Wycliffe was important? Why or why not?
- According to this passage, what must someone do to be saved from their sins?
- Where are you in your own faith journey?

RESPOND

God,

Thank you, sincerely, for giving me the opportunity to hear the “Good News” about Christ in my own language. Thank you for the Bible and people who share its truths with the world. Please, I ask you to give me the ability to understand this passage, and to hear what you are saying to me through it. By the power of your Spirit, in the name of Jesus, show me where I stand with you.

Amen

GOING THE DISTANCE

HEBREWS 10:35-36

So do not throw away this confident trust in the LORD. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

GUTENBERG BIBLE LEAF



This is a page from a Gutenberg Bible, a landmark publication that changed the history of the world. Johannes Gutenberg was a goldsmith from the German city of Mainz. He is credited with inventing the movable typeset printing press in the West. A more basic variation of the printing press actually originated in Asia centuries before.

Gutenberg took the wine press and combined it with a mechanism that locked individual letters (or “fonts”) into place under the stamp of the press. The fonts were coated in ink. Paper was placed over the fonts, and the press pressed the paper against the fonts. The amazing result was a complete page printed in a matter of minutes, rather than hours or days.

This simple invention gave rise to the mass production of words. This “printing revolution” was a crucial juncture leading to the Modern Era. It gave birth to the Renaissance and sent shock waves across the globe.

Gutenberg’s first printed book was the Bible, which he printed around 1455. About 150 copies of the Bible were made on his press. It took months of work, but without the press it would have taken decades and decades to accomplish the same result through hand-made copies.

DEVOTION

Gutenberg will always be remembered for his success. He has been praised as one of the greatest innovators in history. His impact was astounding — probably far more significant than he ever could have dreamed. Lesser-known are the hardships he endured. He faced bankruptcy, mounds of debt, and the hostile takeover of his press by a trusted investor. Later in life, he lived in exile far from his home. Gutenberg needed a tremendous amount of endurance. It was a long and difficult road. At many junctions along the way he needed to find the hope and the strength to keep going on. The same is true for anyone who desires to live an inspired life.

The writer of Hebrews wrote a list of things that can give us courage and strength. The words offer powerful spiritual perspectives that give

real reason for not giving up. *“Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s will,”* he wrote. He said that our life is like a long race, and how do we keep going? We do it by keeping our eyes on Jesus. Jesus knew the eternal joy that awaited him, and that’s why he was able to endure the excruciating pain of the cross. As we bear our own crosses for his glory, his example will give us the endurance to keep going too.

READ

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

So do not throw away this confident trust in the LORD. Remember

the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Hebrews 10:19–36, 12:1–4

REFLECT

- Do you know of anyone who has overcome a long series of obstacles in order to accomplish something important? What were some of the things they did to keep going in the face of hardship?
- According to this passage, what are some of the things that we can do (and what did Christ do) to find endurance?
- What is the most discouraging thing that you are facing right now, the thing that could tempt you to give up in the race God has called you to?

RESPOND

God,

I thank you and I praise you for being intimately involved in my life. I'm so grateful that you didn't give me something to do and then leave me alone to try to do it on my own. Everything I have comes from you: my hope, my confidence, the people who encourage me.... LORD, in a very real way today, empower me to keep my eyes on you. Let me see you for who you are in my life and in powerful ways. Give me a moment-by-moment awareness of your presence around me and in me.

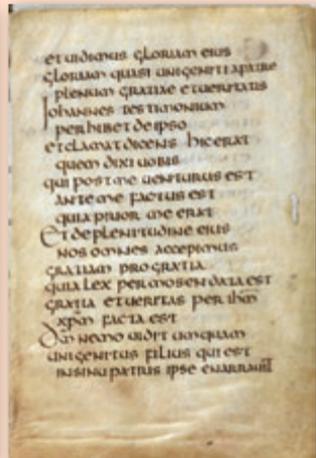
Amen

THE POWER OF SACRIFICE

PHILIPPIANS 2:16-17

“Hold firmly to the word of life ... I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God...”

TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT



William Tyndale, an English scholar, was the first to translate the Bible into English from the original Greek and Hebrew texts. Tyndale became a leader in the Protestant Reformation and had close ties with Luther. He wished to make the Bible available to all, undermining the Roman Catholic Church's control over the interpretation of the Scriptures and defying the laws of England that supported the church's position.

Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was secretly published in 1526. In 1531, he published his translation of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses at the beginning of the Bible) from the Hebrew. In 1535 he was betrayed by a friend and arrested. He revised his New Testament secretly while in prison, ever striving to make it more exact to the meaning of the original. It has been rightly noted that Tyndale

THE POWER OF SACRIFICE

had a masterful ear for the English language and rendered the Hebrew and Greek with the skill of a poet. It is arguable that Tyndale had more influence on the English language than William Shakespeare.

In 1536 he was convicted of heresy and executed by strangling. His body was then burned at the stake. As he died, he prayed that the King of England's eyes would be opened. The prayer was answered two years later when King Henry authorized the Great Bible for the Church of England; this Bible was largely comprised of Tyndale's own work. His translation of the Bible significantly influenced later important translations, including the King James Version of the Bible. Over 80 percent of his translation found its way into the King James Bible, the most widely published version of the Bible in the world.

DEVOTION

Because of people like William Tyndale, we have amazing access to God's word through translations we can understand. We can now download hundreds of different translations of the Bible on our phones for free. It's hard to imagine what it cost people in the past. With Bibles in our hands, we can personally engage the history, truths, and principles that describe God's amazing way to live.

One of those principles is the principle of sacrifice. Many people sacrificed their own lives, as Tyndale did, so that others could have access to the Bible. The Bible says "we gain when we give." It tells us that if we try to save our life, we will lose it; if we give up our life, we will find it. This type of sacrifice was ultimately modeled by Christ, who was the author and perfecter of a new kind of faith that sets people free like nothing else.

The Apostle Paul expands on some of these works in his letter to the Philippians. As he does, he reveals something very, very important: the *source* and *power* behind an inspired life.

READ

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is LORD,
to the glory of God the Father.

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

THE POWER OF SACRIFICE

Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

Philippians 2:1–18

REFLECT

Consider two verses imbedded in the passage:

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

- According to these verses, who does the true work that shows the result of your salvation?
- Who should give you the desire and the power to do these kinds of works?
- Who will get the glory for this kind of work?

RESPOND

God,

I accept your invitation be inspired “to be moved and propelled to do something significant, as if by supernatural or divine influence.” I refuse the temptation to live by my own desires or to do these kinds of works in my own power, because I know that would lead only to me trying to glorify myself. I can’t live this kind of life on my own. Please give me the wisdom and the willingness to trust in you and you alone to give me the desire and the power to live as you want me to. Please show me right now the next good work you want to do through me; then, please, give me the desire and power to do it. And then, to you alone be the glory!

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY **33**

CHRIST'S COMMAND

JOHN 15:12-13

"This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

CHINESE HARMONY OF THE BIBLE



This remarkable Chinese Bible resides in the British Museum. It has touched many, many lives throughout the generations. The manuscript was first found by Joshua Marshman, a colleague in China of William Carey, who is considered the “Father of Modern Missions.” The manuscript was donated to the British Museum by Sir Hans Sloan, who had received it from a certain Mr. Hodgson of the East India Company who had procured it in 1788–89.

William Willis Moseley found the manuscript in the British Museum. It inspired him to write “A Memoir on the Importance and Practicability of Translating and Printing the Holy Scriptures in the Chinese Language; and of circulating them in that vast Empire.” This paper, in turn, inspired several people to focus their lives on Chinese translations. The Chinese manuscript was then used by the first translators, including Robert Morrison, the “Father of the Chinese Bible.” Morrison’s personal copy of this manuscript is preserved in a special collection in Hong Kong.

The manuscript contains a “harmony of the Gospels.” The four gospels are printed side by side so easy comparisons can be made.

DEVOTION

The teachings of Jesus were not popular among many in the Jewish religious establishment. On several occasions, they tried to trick him into say something that would get him into trouble. But he never did. He often responded in a way that revealed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. One day they asked him what was the greatest commandment. Jesus answered with the *Shema* from the Torah:

“‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Love is always at the core of Jesus’ teaching. He said that the second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor like you love yourself.” Jesus not only taught love, but he lived love. A harmony of the Gospels, such as the Chinese manuscript in the British Museum, makes side-by-side comparisons of the four Gospels, allowing us to easily see how this theme of love is woven throughout the teaching and life of Christ.

Bible translators such as Robert Morrison taught and lived a life of sacrificial love for God and others. Perhaps they were doubly blessed for their work, for not only were they able to love others through their work, but their work helped ensure that the message of God’s love would be spread to people of all tongues and nations.

READ

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:34–40

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I

have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:1–17

REFLECT

- Re-read this passage. In what ways does the theme of love show up?
- What motives besides love could drive people into religious work?
- Can you think of one person who needs to experience God's love flowing through you today?

RESPOND

God,

Please transform my heart to be more like your heart. I don't want to just talk about love, I want to love you and those around me with *all* of my heart, soul, strength, and mind. I want to be willing to lay down my life when necessary. I know that the only way that can happen is through you. I can only love because you first loved me, so let your love flow through me today.

Amen

BEAUTIFUL FEET

ISAIAH 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news ...

MORRISON'S BIBLE



Robert Morrison has been called the “Father of the Chinese Bible.” Working from the Chinese harmony of the Gospels, he began improving the existing parts of the Chinese translation of the Bible as well as translating new portions that were not available in Chinese at all. His work was then printed using woodblocks. In this painstaking process, the surface of the wood was cut away with chisels and knives and sandpaper

BEAUTIFUL FEET

until only the letters remained. This process was made even more complicated because the letters had to be created in a perfect mirror image of what would be printed on the page. When the carving was complete, it was covered with a thin layer of ink and then pressed onto the paper. The Bibles were distributed at great risk due to persecution. The printer even pasted a false label on the paper cover to disguise its contents.

Morrison intended his Bible to be a faithful, literal translation from the original languages. However, he was never fully satisfied with the translation and immediately made preparations for a revision. In a letter to the Bible Society, he wrote: "I make it my daily study to correct the Chinese version of the Scriptures; and my brethren of the Ultra-Ganges Mission are requested to note down whatever may occur to them as an error or imperfection in the translation. These are sent to the college and preserved, or immediately employed, as may appear best."

DEVOTION

The Morrison Bible is a stunning example of teamwork and what can be accomplished when a crew of committed people come together for a common purpose. The translation process was tedious, and it required countless hours of scrutinizing the text to determine its meaning before choosing the best Chinese characters to communicate that meaning. And then there was the expense of getting it printed. The amount of time it took to carve out each letter is almost inconceivable in our world of instant communication. And yet that's what they did, often paying for the work out of their own pockets. Bibles like the Morrison Bible are a work and sacrifice of love so that the message of God's love can spread throughout the earth.

The prophet Isaiah said people like Morrison and his team have "beautiful feet." Paul, quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, reiterated the process that is required to spread the good news so that someone can call on the name of the LORD and be saved. "The message is ... on your lips and in

your heart," he said.

May God show us our part on the team to help spread that message to those around us and those at the furthest corners of the world.

READ

But I will reveal my name to my people, and they will come to know its power. Then at last they will recognize that I am the one who speaks to them."

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,
the good news of peace and salvation,
the news that the God of Israel reigns!

Isaiah 52:6-7

"The message is very close at hand;
it is on your lips and in your heart."

And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is LORD and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same LORD, who gives generously to all who call on him. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is

why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “LORD, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

Romans 10:8–17

REFLECT

- Do you know of a team that has “beautiful feet” in the way the prophet Isaiah describes?
- In your opinion, what qualities must each team member have to make a team effective?
- What qualities has God given you that can help a team?

RESPOND

God,

I ask that you would make me a person with “beautiful feet” as part of a team that brings the good news to people who need to hear it, particularly those who have never heard it before. Today, please show me just one specific way that I can help spread your written word, the Bible, to those around me and to those at the ends of the earth.

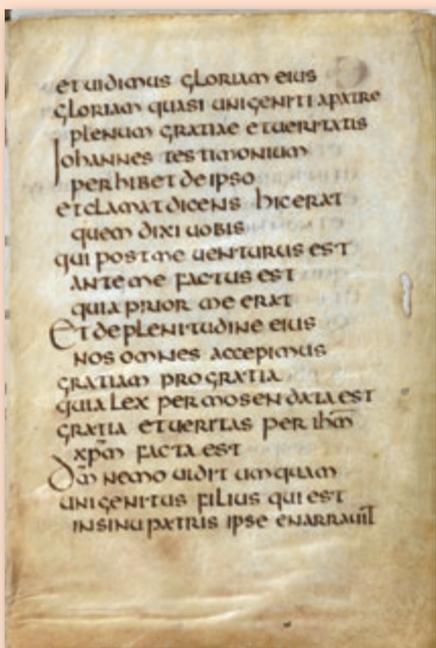
Amen

TEMPLES OF FLESH

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself ...

LATIN VULGATE



The early Latin translation of the Catholic Bible was called the *Vetus Latina* (or “Old Latin”) version. Many different versions of the translation were in distribution, causing an enormous degree of theological confusion. In the year 382 AD, Pope Damasus I commissioned a scholar named Jerome to standardize the Latin text.

What started as a “revision” of the Gospels evolved into a work that took 23 years to finish. Jerome moved from Rome to Bethlehem to learn Hebrew and Aramaic. The Latin Vulgate was the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into the common language of the people. It was the definitive translation of Scripture for a thousand years until the Protestant Reformation, and it is still important 500 years later. The Vulgate arguably has had one of the longest-standing influences of any translation of the Bible. Most theological terms come directly to modern vocabulary via Jerome’s Latin translation.

DEVOTION

The significance of the Latin Vulgate is hard to overstate. Jerome’s devotion to the process involved his whole life. And the result was that God used him to bring confidence to the message that could change the lives of the masses. As his trustworthy Latin translation became available, an entire culture of people was able to hear, read, and contemplate the Bible. Finally, they were able to search the Scriptures for themselves, learn key biblical doctrines, and apply those doctrines to their lives.

This was critically important for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus gathered his disciples and told them what was going to happen. The news that he would soon be leaving left them fearful and devastated. To comfort them, he told them about the coming Holy Spirit: “...he lives with you now and later will be in you...”

Jesus spoke clearly about this coming spiritual reality, but it was a mystery that went beyond physical logic. At the time, the disciples seemed to understand almost nothing he was saying about the crucifixion, resurrection, and Holy Spirit. As events unfolded, the disciples began making connections between what Jesus had said and what was happening around them. Finally, in the upper room (Acts 2), they experienced what Jesus had foretold. The “Comforter,” “Advocate,” and “Counselor” Jesus promised had come.

TEMPLES OF FLESH

Prior to that day, the Holy Spirit interacted with human beings only on special occasions, and the Spirit dwelt in a very special way in the Holy of Holies, the inner chamber of the Jewish Temple. The Apostle Paul used that understanding of the Temple to describe a spiritual reality that would have been blasphemous and unthinkable prior to the crucifixion and resurrection.

READ

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans — I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

... And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative — that is, the Holy Spirit — he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

"I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.

John 14:16–29

But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the LORD Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

You say, “I am allowed to do anything” — but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the LORD, and the LORD cares about our bodies. And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our LORD from the dead.

Don’t you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? ... But the person who is joined to the LORD is one spirit with him ...

Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:11–20

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (NASB)

1 Corinthians 3:16–17

For we are the temple of the living God. As God said, “I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

2 Corinthians 6:16b

REFLECT

- How different would your life be if you didn't have a translation of the Bible in a language you can understand?
- The disciples had a very difficult time understanding many of the things Jesus was telling them. Why is it still difficult for us to comprehend the truth about the Holy Spirit being in us?
- Christians often speak of trying to "get closer to God." Does that language make sense when the Holy Spirit is all around us and in us? Why or why not?

RESPOND

God,

Thank you for the work of translators like Jerome, who dedicated their lives to your word so I can read it, ponder it, and apply it in my daily life. Still, I need you to explain these truths to me. These spiritual realities are too amazing for my physical brain to comprehend without your help. Somehow, make them real so I can live by them.

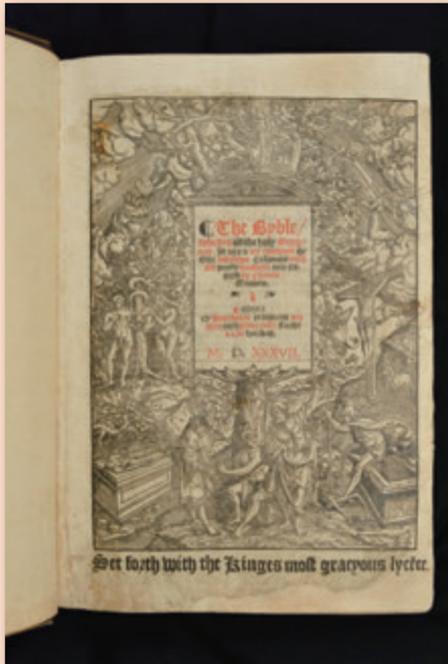
Amen

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

GALATIANS 2:20

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

MATTHEW'S BIBLE



John Rogers published the Matthew's Bible in 1537. He combined William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and Tyndale's translation of portions of the Old Testament, with the remainder of the Old Testament as translated by Myles Coverdale. The Bible was published under the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew to avoid persecution by the

authorities, who forbade, under the penalty of death, printing the Bible in the English language. The work could not be done safely in England, so it was printed in Paris and Antwerp.

Rogers added his own translation of the apocryphal “Song of Manassas.” Matthew’s Bible, as his work is called, links together the sequence of major current English translations of the Bible. It continued and preserved Tyndale’s work and served as a basis for later important translations.

Rogers was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake in 1555. He was the first Protestant martyr to be executed by the Queen of England known as “Bloody Mary.”

DEVOTION

Martyrs like John Rogers are often commended for having deep faith that made them willing to give up their own lives. But what if Rogers and other Christians, like us, don’t really own our lives at all? Or what if we really aren’t who we thought we were in the first place?

Most of us would agree that since God owns everything in the universe, he owns our lives as well. But the Bible speaks of a deeper, more profound transformation that happens to those who are believers. The prophet Ezekiel may have predicted it when he told Israel they would be getting new hearts. Jesus said it must happen if we are to “see the kingdom of God.” Paul wrote several times about a fundamental change that has taken place.

May God guide our thoughts towards what his word describes as these mysterious, but very real changes that have happened to us.

READ

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

Ezekiel 36:25–27

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.

John 3:1–8

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of

earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

Colossians 3:1–4

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:16–18

For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law — I stopped trying to meet all its requirements — so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

Galatians 2:19–21

REFLECT

- Do you think most people believe that they own their life? Give examples.
- How would you, in your own words, describe the transformation that these verses talk about?
- How can these truths strengthen us when we face persecution and death?

RESPOND

God,

I believe that you are the rightful owner of everything that exists in this universe. You created it. You created me and I belong to you. Now, please help me ponder these deeper truths about who I really am in you, who you are in me, and the mystery of living a totally new life because of what Jesus did when I was crucified with him and he came to live in me.

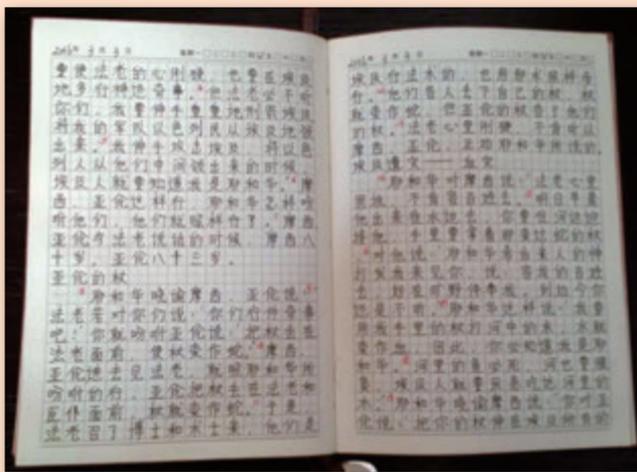
Amen

THE GREAT CO-MISSION

MATTHEW 28:19

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

HAND-TRANSCRIBED RADIO BIBLE



During the Communist revolution in China, the reading of the Bible was strictly forbidden, missionaries were expelled or imprisoned, and followers of Christ were persecuted. Many Bibles were destroyed, and it was very difficult to get printed copies of the Bible into the country. Then, radio ministries transcended the borders. Through shortwave and longwave frequencies, the Bible was read for people to hear.

This amazing Bible was transcribed by hand from the daily Bible readings that came over the airwaves.

DEVOTION

Through the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the first phase of his mission as the suffering Messiah. In the days following the empty tomb, he had strategic gatherings with his followers to explain to them what would happen next. He would be leaving, but the Holy Spirit would be coming. A new age with a new mission was just beginning for those who follow Christ.

“Go and make disciples of all nations” he said. “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the ends of the age.”

He was calling them, and us, into a unique partnership. In English, it’s been called the Great Commission — a co-mission that advances through a synergy between God and his people.

The radio ministry that projected God’s word into China over the airwaves is a great example of this. The real heroes of this story were the engineers. God used them to create a technological conduit through which God’s truth could spread. They certainly didn’t look like typical missionaries, but when they used their gifts and skills as part of the greater body of Christ, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the mission was accomplished.

After Jesus gave the Great Commission, in a dramatic exit he was taken up into the clouds. The suffering Messiah’s mission was complete. But as the disciples gazed into the clouds, angels stood among them and proclaimed, “He will be back.”

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him — but some of them doubted!

READ

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:16–20

In my first book I [Luke] told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “LORD, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among

them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Acts 1:1–11

REFLECT

- Jesus told his disciples to go to the ends of the earth, but then he told them to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. Why do you think he told them to wait?
- What are your skills and passions — the things you’re good at and that you really like to do? Can you think of ways that those skills and passions could be used in partnership with God to further the Great Commission?
- What do you think should be the primary focus of our lives during the current “age” — the years between the suffering Messiah and the conquering Messiah?

RESPOND

God,

I believe that you created me a certain way. You have given me certain gifts and certain skills for a reason. I want to partner with you today. I believe your Spirit is with me always, so guide me and lead me. Show me how you want me to further your mission today in big or small ways to your glory.

Amen

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

ESTHER 4:14

“Who knows if perhaps you were made royalty for just such a time as this?”

BARROW CHINESE EMBASSY MEGILLAH



This stunning miniature Esther scroll (or Megillah) was produced in Italy and sold in China in 1794. It contains beautiful illustrations of the story of Esther, and how God used her to save his people. By indication of a family emblem at the beginning of the scroll, it was produced for a famous family of Jewish printers who had reinstated Hebrew printing in Mantua, Italy, in the 1700s. The border of the scroll is decorated with a floral motif and grapevines. There are supplemental blessings to be read before reading Esther and prayers at the end of the scroll as well.

The scroll is accompanied by a letter from a Jewish scholar dated to March 18, 1849. The letter indicates that the scroll was purchased in

China in 1794 by Sir John Barrow, who served at the first British embassy in China between 1792–1794. The scroll was likely a prized possession of a Chinese Jewish dignitary who sold it to Barrow. It is a remarkable emblem of Judaism in China in the colonial era. This elegant miniature Esther scroll, produced in Italy, made its way to China where it was eventually acquired by the first British Ambassador to China.

DEVOTION

This beautiful scroll contains the account of Esther. Both the words and the beautiful illustrations document how God used a simple young girl to accomplish his purposes. He used her gifts, her skills, and her bravery for specific purposes at specific times.

In many ways, Esther was an unlikely candidate for such a mission. She was an orphan. She was a minority. She was a girl in a violent man's world. And yet God chose to use her...just as he chooses to use each one of us.

The Bible clearly says that in Christ we are a "chosen people," "royal priests," and part of a "holy nation" for such a time as this. Furthermore, we are called "Christ's ambassadors" who "speak for Christ."

None of this is by our own doing. Like all ambassadors, we were appointed to that position by a higher authority. We have authority as priests, not because of anything that we have done, but because of who we have become in Christ. By trusting in God and letting him live his life through us, our own mission awaits.

Esther was called to royalty by God for a specific job at a specific time. Sir John Barrow was commissioned by a higher power to speak on behalf of Britain in a foreign land. And you are called as a royal priest and ambassador to your world.

READ

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say,

"I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem,
chosen for great honor,
and anyone who trusts in him
will never be disgraced."

Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone."

And,

"He is the stone that makes people stumble,
the rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you had no identity as a people;
now you are God's people.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Once you received no mercy;
now you have received God's mercy."

1 Peter 2:4–10

If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:13–21

REFLECT

- What does the label “royal priest” and “ambassador” tell you about your roles in this world?
- According to this passage, “Christ’s love controls us.” Why do you think that is important in your role?
- Do you have a clear purpose for your life? If someone asked you what you are living for, what would you say?

RESPOND

God,

I sincerely ask that through your word and your Holy Spirit, you would show me moment by moment why I am here “for such a time as this.” I ask that you give me clear guidance so I can do what you want to do through me today. If it’s your will, show me the bigger picture so I might be able to grasp the bigger vision for my role as your priest and ambassador.

Amen



This book is called a Taj Torah or “the Crown of the Torah.” Like all Torah scrolls, it contains the first five books of the Bible. It was produced in Yemen and dates to the 1600s. It illustrates the dedication that Yemenite Jews had to the study of the Torah. The Taj Torah was commonly divided into two volumes. This book contains Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The Hebrew text of the Torah scroll is always written without vowels, called an “unpointed” text. This Taj has the “pointed” Hebrew text, following a precise system of dots and dashes, representing vowels, that was developed by the Masorete scribes of Tiberius between, approximately, 500 and 1000 AD.

The Hebrew text of the Taj is accompanied by two other translations integrated between the verses. One of the translations is the Aramaic translation by Onkelos called the “Targum.” The other translation is the celebrated “Tafsir” Arabic translation of the Torah, transliterated with Hebrew letters by Sa'adya Gaon.

This volume also contains textual notes, a commentary by the sofer (or scribe), and the commentary of the great Jewish sage Rashi integrated on the bottom of the page.

DEVOTION

It takes a full year to read the Torah if you follow the Jewish tradition of reading it section by section every week. The end of the Torah captures Moses' final days and final words. Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy records the song that Moses sang to the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 33, he spoke a blessing over God's people, and then he went up from the plains to a mountaintop where he could see all the lands that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It's a powerful account. We would be wise to think about it. Because one way or the other, sooner or later, we will follow in these footsteps of Moses as we live out our last days on earth. What would we want to sing? What would we want to speak over those we love? How would we want to look back on our life and view what God has promised and done? Yes, we would be wise to ponder that moment so we can live with death in mind today. Looking ahead to that day gives us a vital perspective from which we can live an inspired life today. Are you living for something that is worth dying for? You should be, because one way or the other, your life is going to end.

In the end, only a few things will remain: God, the souls of humanity, and his word. This future reality should challenge us to live strategically, purposefully, and with a full focus on eternity.

This can be a daunting, intimidating challenge. How can we live like this? In reality, we can't. But God can. Only he can draw us, teach us, nurture us, and enable us to live an inspired life. We must simply allow him to do so.

In traditional Jewish readings of the Torah, these words are recited at the end of each of the five books:

הַזַּק! הַזַּק! וְנִיתְהַזֵּק

Hazak! Hazak! Venithazek!

It means, “Be strong! Be strong! And we will be strengthened!”

By the grace of God, an inspired life is lived in moment-by-moment dependence on *his* strength, not ours. His word says that when we are weak he is strong, and that we can even be proud of our weakness because that is when the power of Christ can rest on us (2 Corinthians 12:5–10).

The Bible is filled with promises of God’s strength. He will give it to those who trust in him. It’s a promise you can take to the grave.

READ

So to keep me [Paul] from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

Three different times I begged the LORD to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7–10

I look up to the mountains —
does my help come from there?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth!

He will not let you stumble;
the one who watches over you will not slumber.
Indeed, he who watches over Israel
never slumbers or sleeps.

The LORD himself watches over you!

The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.

The LORD keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.

The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever.

Psalm 121:1–8

The LORD is my light and my salvation — so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?

Psalm 27:1

But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. (NASB)

Psalm 37:39

As soon as I pray, you answer me; you encourage me by giving me strength.

Psalm 138:3

Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

Matthew 19:26

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power,
love, and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7

The Final Song of Moses:

“Listen, O heavens, and I will speak!

Hear, O earth, the words that I say!

Let my teaching fall on you like rain;

let my speech settle like dew.

Let my words fall like rain on tender grass,

like gentle showers on young plants.

I will proclaim the name of the LORD;

how glorious is our God!

He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect.

Everything he does is just and fair.

He is a faithful God who does no wrong;

how just and upright he is!”

Deuteronomy 32:1-4

REFLECT

- Do you think most people live with death in mind? Why or why not?
- How could pride hinder someone from trusting in God's strength?
- In your opinion, how does trusting in the strength of God, and not your own, open new possibilities for living a vibrant, obedient life?

RESPOND

God,

I humbly *confess* that in my own strength it is impossible to live a life that *pleases* you...a life that allows you to work in and through me. I ask that you break my pride and give me the humility to trust you and receive your strength to live moment by moment. I can't do this, but you can. Live through me in any way that brings glory to your name. I want to be strong. May you and you alone be the one who strengthens me.

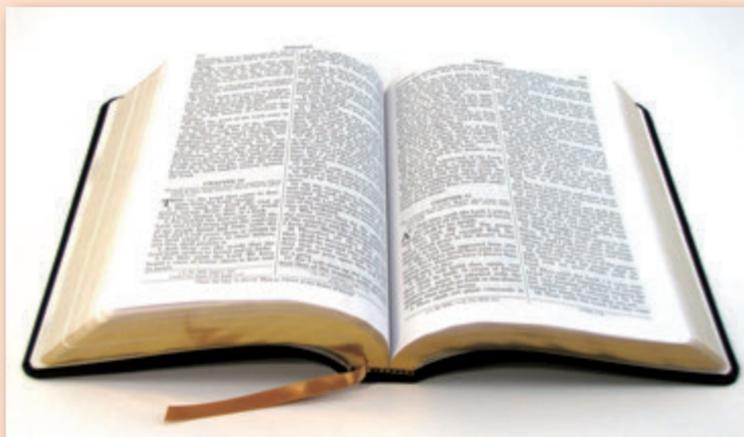
Amen

THE MOST IMPORTANT BIBLE IN THE WORLD

REVELATION 22:21

“May the grace of the LORD Jesus be with God’s holy people.”

THE BIBLE IN YOUR HAND



Over the course of this 40-day journey, you have been introduced to a handful of the most stunning Bibles in the world. From forgotten caves on the edge of the Dead Sea to a secret storage facility in Cairo, Egypt; from ancient Hebrew scrolls and silver amulets to small fragments of papyri; the history of the Bible envelops the history of the past.

But what happens today? What will happen tomorrow? The answer lies in the most important Bible of all: the one that you hold in your hand right now. Whether it is on your smartphone, on a tablet, or on the well-worn paper pages handed down to you by a parent, always remember this: It’s not the ink, the skins, or the paper that make the Bible special; it’s the *words* that are living and active which show us how to live a life that is wholly pleasing to and led by our God.

DEVOTION

We started our journey in Genesis 1:1, the very first verse of the Bible. We end it in Revelation 22:21, the very last verse of the Bible. In between, we've investigated some fascinating artifacts and looked at some very inspiring people. Gutenberg, Tyndale, Wycliffe, Morrison, Moseley...the stories of people like this reveal the passion and precision with which Scripture was preserved and passed on from generation to generation. These were the men and women of the past who lived and died for God's word. Because of the way God worked in their lives, we can now read how he works in *our* lives. We can read the history of the creation and the temptation to become "like God, knowing good and evil." In these pages, we read about the redemption of humanity in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can study the mysterious truth about the Holy Spirit who is around us and in us, and who empowers us to do the will of God.

Because of the Bible, and only because of the Bible, we can, if we choose, BE INSPIRED. We can "be moved and propelled to do something significant, as if by supernatural or divine influence."

That's part of the plan. Because although there were amazing Bibles and amazing people in the past, each one of us will be used by God to influence the present and shape the future. We are the next link in the chain of his mission on earth. We are the ones that he will use to form the legacy for the generation that follows.

Through a God-given vision, the Apostle John wrote the last words in the Bible. God gave him a grand picture of the future, of the new heaven and the new earth that will be established when Jesus, the Messiah returns a second time. That vision of the future can have a profound influence on how we live our lives today.

READ

Then the angel showed me [John] a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there — no need for lamps or sun — for the LORD God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

Then the angel said to me, “Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The LORD God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon.”

“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book.”

I, John, am the one who heard and saw all these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said, “No, don’t worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this book. Worship only God!”

Then he instructed me, “Do not seal up the prophetic words in this book, for the time is near. Let the one who is doing harm continue to do harm; let the one who is vile continue to be vile; let the one who is righteous continue to live righteously; let the one who is holy continue to be holy.”

“Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

THE MOST IMPORTANT BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life. Outside the city are the dogs — the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshippers, and all who love to live a lie.

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let anyone who hears this say, “Come.” Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life. And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the words of prophecy written in this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. And if anyone removes any of the words from this book of prophecy, God will remove that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!”

Amen! Come, LORD Jesus!

May the grace of the LORD Jesus be with God’s holy people.

Revelation 22:1–21

REFLECT

- How should this vision of the future impact the focus of our lives today?
- In your opinion, what is the most inspiring message in the passage?
- Imagine that Jesus is speaking directly to you when he says, “Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life.” As you take the next step of your journey with Jesus, what are you thirsty for?

RESPOND

God,

I thank you for the power of your living word from beginning to end. Thank you for the people of the past whom you used to preserve your words so that I could hold them in my hand today. I am thirsty, God. May my thirst always pull me back to you, to your word, where I find the living water that I need for the next step of my journey. I trust you to lead me and empower me to live an inspired life. May your son, LORD Jesus, come soon to conquer evil and make things right. Until then, may your grace be with me every step of the way.

Amen

Be INSPIRED

DAY

41-80

40 MORE DAYS

40. Yes, it's just a number, yet 40 can be a significant number in special ways. It is our hope that these last 40 days have been a special experience. We hope that you've discovered not just information about the history of the Bible, but have been inspired by truths within the Bible. But this isn't the end. This can be just the beginning. Another 40 days of discovery awaits. And then another 40. And then... You have "The Most Important Bible in the World" in your hand. Guided by God's Holy Spirit, a *lifetime* of discovery awaits.

How do you proceed? You can continue doing the same thing we've been doing. By now you've already established a pattern of interaction with God's living word. Now you can apply this approach to the Scriptures using any passage you want:

READ: Who said it? What did they say? Where were they? When did it happen?

REFLECT: What does this mean for me? Ask yourself questions about the text and how it relates to your life.

RESPOND: Interact with God and his Spirit about the text. Speak openly, as if in a regular conversation. Listen quietly to God's spirit in you, and be ready for him to lead you and empower you to do specific things for the glory of God and his living word.

The 40 chapters below can get you started. May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be glorified in your life as your journey continues.

DAY 41: Psalm 104

DAY 42: John 1

DAY 43: Genesis 1

DAY 44: Isaiah 43

DAY 45: Psalm 8

DAY 46: Genesis 3

- DAY 47: Mark 1
- DAY 48: Psalm 139
- DAY 49: Luke 1
- DAY 50: John 3
- DAY 51: Psalm 51
- DAY 52: 1 Peter 1
- DAY 53: Romans 5
- DAY 54: Ephesians 2
- DAY 55: James 3
- DAY 56: Matthew 5
- DAY 57: 1 John 2
- DAY 58: Psalm 77
- DAY 59: 1 Peter 4
- DAY 60: Matthew 6
- DAY 61: 1 Corinthians 13
- DAY 62: 1 John 4
- DAY 63: Matthew 18
- DAY 64: Proverbs 1
- DAY 65: 2 Timothy 2
- DAY 66: Philippians 2
- DAY 67: Galatians 5
- DAY 68: Psalm 117
- DAY 69: Luke 24
- DAY 70: 1 Corinthians 15
- DAY 71: Proverbs 7
- DAY 72: Hebrews 10
- DAY 73: Proverbs 8
- DAY 74: Luke 8
- DAY 75: Proverbs 25
- DAY 76: 1 Peter 5
- DAY 77: Hebrews 12
- DAY 78: 2 Timothy 4
- DAY 79: Psalm 150
- DAY 80: John 21