

# His Story - My Story

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## Introduction

“If you can’t recall it, then you don’t really know it,” challenged Dr. Grant Lovejoy. He urged his Chronological Bible Storying class to learn and tell from memory the stories of the Bible. Many believers today know bits and pieces of God’s story but few can tell the story of the Bible.

Noted author and speaker, Larry Crabb, recognized this dilemma and determined to know God’s story for himself, “In 2006, after knowing Jesus for a half a century, after years of active involvement in church, I realized I knew bits and pieces of Bible truth, lots of principles and lots of doctrine, but I didn’t really know the story it told.” Crabb explained the danger of not knowing God’s story, “Without story truth, I’ll flirt with atheism, struggle with unbelief, pray without passion (except maybe anger), remain devoted to my story, and continue in hopeless addiction to myself.”<sup>1</sup>

“Biblical faith is largely a matter of memory,”<sup>2</sup> stated Bruce K. Waltke. He continued his discourse on remembrance by quoting another theologian:

Abraham Joshua Heschel says, “Much of what the Bible demands can be comprised in one word: Remember.”<sup>240</sup> To remember is not simply an empty mental act. Heschel argues, “To ‘remember’ means literally to re-member the body, to bring the separated parts of the community of truth back together, to reunite the whole. The opposite of re-member is not forget, but dis-member.”

<sup>240</sup>A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1951), 61.

Tim Keller ascribes our “dis-membered” understanding of the Bible to the fact that we “read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories, each with a “moral” for how we should live our lives. It is not. Rather it comprises a single story telling us how the human race got into its present condition and how God through Jesus Christ has come and will come to put things right.” He further states, “The Bible repeatedly shows us weak people who don’t deserve God’s grace, don’t see it, and don’t appreciate it even after they have received it . . . that is the great biblical story arc into which every individual scriptural narrative fits.”<sup>3</sup>

Many believers may know the message of various New Testament books and perhaps a book or two from the Old Testament but they don’t know the story line of the Bible. No other book is dis-membered and studied in like manner.

Understanding the story of the Bible is like putting together a puzzle. The *picture on the puzzle* box guides the puzzle-solver as he joins together the pieces inside the box so that he recreates the picture on the outside of the box. First, he isolates the *corners and straight* edges from the other pieces and puts them together to provide the framework for the remainder of the puzzle. Then he separates the *remaining pieces* by colors. Using the photo on the box, he is now ready to fit those

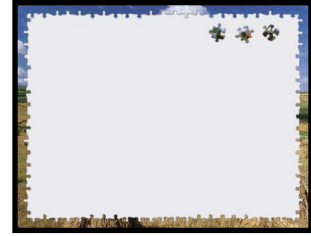
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<sup>1</sup> Larry Crabb, *Real Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 322.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 36-37

various pieces into their appropriate spot. Many believers, however, try to understand the Bible by looking at their favorite books of the Bible repeatedly without understanding and appreciating the purpose that particular book serves in God's story. They don't know the story of the Bible (the picture on the box cover) nor do they possess the corners and straight edges of the Bible (how each of the sixty-six books of the Bible fit into the story).



This work seeks to provide the puzzle box cover, corners, and straight edges to God's story so that those interested in knowing and telling God's Story have a structure into which they can place the various pieces of the Bible that they already know.

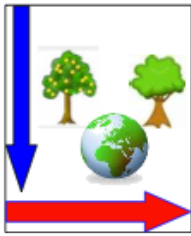
Breaking up the Bible story into fourteen eras enables believers to understand the "big story" of the Bible so that they can remember and tell the story of the Bible. This book uses a symbol to capture the message of each era. To the attentive reader, a number of truths, like pulled threads in a garment, weave their way throughout all the eras and tie the eras together:

- 1) God speaks about future things (the vertical blue arrow) and fulfills His promises from generation to generation (red horizontal arrow) through people written into His story, who—though flawed—simply believe God's promises and act in faith.
- 2) God longs to dwell among His people and provides a way by which He can dwell among them (sacrificial system). God demonstrates His redemptive intentions by killing an innocent animal to cover guilty man's nakedness. God establishes that the way to Him is always through the shedding of the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty. Man must trust in the covering provided by God instead of the covering of his own making.
- 3) Man's rebellion and flaws do not prevent God from accomplishing His ultimate redemptive purposes from one generation to the next.
- 4) Observing God's work in transforming sinners into saints allows others to understand the process of spiritual formation.
- 5) God works through pagan nations and their leaders to fulfill promises made regarding His people and the land of Canaan. God looks for those who dare to believe Him. And, He mocks those who think that they are autonomous and can foolishly live independently of God. No one can restrain His hand, either in the heavens or upon the earth (Daniel 3:4-5).
- 6) God values women and often inserts *unlikely* women into His story.
- 7) Man lives at a constant crossroad. Will he hold to God's promises and walk with God by faith and obey Him, or, driven by unbelief, will he rely upon what he sees in the physical realm and rebel against Him?
- 8) Sexual sin and idolatry always characterize spiritual declension.

Bible literacy plays a crucial role in protecting God's people from spiritual declension. Moses wrote *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* and commanded that this **Book of the Law of Moses** be read in its entirety to the congregation of Israel once every seven years that, "They may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). To keep the promises *alive* and the awareness of God *real*, Israel was commanded to hold feasts celebrating God's redemption annually. God established other systems that were to be maintained to remind man of his sinfulness, his need for forgiveness, and God's holiness (the sacrificial offerings, the Levitical priesthood, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Tabernacle, etc.).

God's people must know His story. And, they must tell His story. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

## Creation Era (Approximately 2,000 years of history, Genesis 1-11:26)



**The Spirit World** God created this world in which we live. He also created spirit beings who are powerful but invisible to man. One spirit God created was very wise, very powerful, and very beautiful. God assigned to him a special work, to guard God's holy throne in heaven. But this spirit soon became filled with pride because of his great beauty. He desired to take God's place in heaven and rule over all the other spirits God had created. He even said, "I will be like the Most High." This spirit being led a rebellion among the other spirits.

Because of their wickedness and rebellion those spirits who joined him were driven from heaven. The spirit who rebelled against God we know today as *Satan, Lucifer, and the serpent*. His name means *adversary*. The spirits who follow Satan are called *demons*. (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12b-17)

Satan is a deceiver, a liar and the father of lies, and a murderer. He seeks to destroy humanity by persuading them to question God's goodness, to doubt His Word, and to rebel against God. Demons are very powerful spirits. They deceive man by pretending to be good, even by impersonating the dead. They torment man from the inside by plaguing them with fearful and destructive thoughts. They also cause some illnesses.

God is more powerful than any created being. Satan knows that he has been defeated and that his time is short, so he is filled with hatred and works furiously against man by sending his demons to prevent man from believing that God is good and loves man.

One of the oldest stories in the Bible (*Job*) clearly teaches that Satan answers to God. This story reveals that God establishes boundaries in which Satan can work. God limits Satan and his demons' power over those who believe and follow God, but all others are under his sway or influence.

Most of the spirits remained loyal and obedient to God who created them. God uses these spirits or angels as His messengers to warn man against sin, to bring words of judgment whenever man sins, and to bring good news. Angels are very powerful and wise but they are not to be worshiped.

### Creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created the earth empty and formless and over the following six days, He simply spoke and the "things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

At the beginning of each day, God spoke and the heavens were formed and then filled with order and life. God created all the animals and the plants and He commanded that each plant and animal reproduce after its kind. On the sixth day, God created animals, and man was His final creation—

what He called “very good.” He created man in the image of God, male and female. He created the man from the dust of the ground, formed him, and breathed His very life into him. He blessed them and commanded them to reproduce and fill the earth with more God-image bearers. He commanded them to have dominion over all animal life.

When God created **Adam**, the man, He placed him in the Garden of Eden, assigned him the task of naming the animals, and gave him specific instructions regarding the garden. God put two special trees in the middle of the garden, **the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil**. God told Adam that he could eat from all the trees in the garden except for **the tree of knowledge of good and evil**, because if Adam ate from it, he would surely die.

When Adam had finished naming the animals, he realized that he, out of all creation, was alone. So God put him to sleep; and while he was sleeping, God took one of his ribs and made him a helper comparable to him—a woman. God established marriage in the garden—the man and his wife together as one flesh. God commanded them to reproduce according to their kind, and they walked with God in the garden, naked, and without any shame.

One day, **the serpent**, who was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, spoke to the woman and said, “Did God really say you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” The woman answered and said, “We may eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden, except for the tree in the middle of the garden, for God has said, ‘You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You shall not surely die, for God knows the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good from evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, she gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Neither one considered what God had spoken to Adam regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Immediately their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. In their shame they hid from God, because *they were afraid of Him*.

So the Lord came and called out to Adam, “Where are you?” Adam said, “I heard Your voice, and *I was afraid* because I was naked, and I hid.” Instead of being honest with God about his sin, he blamed his wife. So the Lord asked the woman, “What have you done?” And the woman blamed her disobedience on the serpent’s deception.

So the Lord cursed the serpent and made a promise about the woman: her seed would one day bruise the serpent’s head, and the serpent would bruise his heel. Then God promised that the woman would experience pain in childbirth, and she would struggle with being under her husband’s rule. God promised Adam that the ground was going to be cursed for his sake, that he would have to work hard against the ground for his food all the days of his life, and that he would one day return to the ground from which he came—he would die a physical death. In His mercy, God made

a promise regarding a Coming Seed who would destroy Satan and restore humanity. God slew a “good,” innocent animal, and with its skin, He covered the shame of their nakedness. In His mercy, God prevented man from going back into the garden and eating from the tree of life, and being separated from Him forever.

### **What does the Creation and Fall story teach about God and man?**

- God is good.
- God desires relationship with man based on trust. When man sins and runs from God, God seeks him out and asks him questions so he will confess his sin and experience the restoration of the relationship. Man tends to hide from God and blame others for his own sinful actions and attitudes.
- God makes promises He intends to fulfill.
- God gives instructions that affect future generations.
- Man was made for relationship with God and with others. God gave him the ability to choose God over other things. Ever since the Fall, man lives by sight instead of by faith in God’s Word and character.
- Adam doesn’t reference God’s instructions when he receives the forbidden fruit. Spiritual declension always occurs in the hearts of those who disregard what God has said.
- Man falls into the hand of the enemy when he entertains doubts of God’s goodness and makes a decision based upon what he sees instead of on what God has said. God’s instructions to Adam regarding the two trees in the garden required faith in God on Adam’s part. Instead of walking by faith in the goodness of God, Adam chose to live by sight.
- Man often refuses to trust God (to believe that He is good), and this is why man does not obey God.
- The evidence on earth of man’s broken relationship with God is man’s broken relationships with women and with others.
- Man’s sin destroyed his relationship with God. As a result, man lives in fear of others and of the spirit world. The evidence of broken harmony with God is the fear, shame, and guilt experienced by all of humanity.
- Man’s hope lies in God’s promise of the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. God’s mercy is seen in His covering man’s shame and His preventing man’s eating from the Tree of Life and living forever in his sinful state.

- At its heart, sin is living independently of God and adhering to the wisdom offered by this world and its dominator (James 3:13-18; 1 John 5:19). It is acting out of self-awareness instead of God-awareness.

## **Second Generation**

Just as God had commanded, the man and his wife began to be fruitful and multiply; they had children, born in the image of Adam. Their firstborn, **Cain**, was a farmer, and their second-born, **Abel**, was a shepherd. When the time came to worship God, Cain offered the fruit of the ground, and Abel offered the firstborn of his flock. God looked at Abel's offering with pleasure, but He did not regard Cain's offering. Cain became so angry that even his face changed. God came to Cain and asked, "Why are you so angry that your face has changed? If you do well, won't you be accepted? But if not, sin lies at your door, and it desires to rule over you, but you must rule over it."

So Cain took his brother out into a field and killed him. Again, God came to Cain and asked, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain responded, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God said, "What have you done? Your brother's blood calls out to Me from the ground where you spilled it." So God cursed Cain and told him that his life would be hard and that he would now live in fear and outside of the presence of God as a fugitive and vagabond.

Cain said, "My punishment is too great! You have driven me out of your presence, and I am going to live in fear all my days upon the earth. And when men see me, they will kill me!" So God set a mark on Cain to protect him. Then Cain went out from the presence of God. He knew his wife, began to have children, and created cities. His sons took multiple wives and murdered those who hurt them, and they created a world for themselves away from the presence of God. They had music, art and creativity, and they learned to live outside of God's presence.

Then Adam and his wife, **Eve**, had another son, and they named him **Seth**. They understood that through him the seed would come who would crush the head of the serpent. Through Seth's descendants, men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

## **What does the Second Generation teach us about God and man?**

- Man can only come to God by God's way. God establishes the substitutionary system whereby the innocent dies on behalf of the guilty. God does not accept other sacrificial systems.
- When man sins and lives in fear, God still seeks him out.
- God is merciful and treats man better than he deserves.
- Man either follows in the way of Abel (faith) or Cain (works). Abel came to God God's way, while Cain sought to maintain his independence by coming to God his own way.

- God provides hope and a future by keeping His promises made to Adam, Eve, and to the serpent.
- Cain, like many today, happily lived outside of the presence of God.
- Sin always affects future generations.

## **The Flood**

Both the descendants of Cain and Seth began to multiply and fill the earth. Instead of being full of God-image bearers, the world became corrupt and filled with violence. Some of Seth's descendants called upon the name of the Lord and walked with God. Some of Seth's descendants, however, noticed the beauty of Cain's female descendants and began to intermarry with Cain's descendants, so that the world became corrupt, and the thoughts of men's hearts were filled with evil all the time. God grieved in His heart over man's sin, so He promised to destroy man from the face of the earth. But one man, **Noah**, found grace in God's sight, because he walked with God. God promised to destroy all flesh from the earth with a flood, except for Noah and his family, and God commanded Noah to build a very large boat. Noah's faith in God moved him to obedience to God.

It took Noah 100 years to build the boat, and at God's command, Noah filled the boat with two of every unclean animal and seven of every clean animal. Noah entered the boat, and God closed the door, and then it began to rain. The rain came down, and the fountains of the deep gushed up, and it rained for forty days and forty nights, till even the tops of the highest mountains were covered. All flesh died on the earth—every animal and man. The waters flooded the earth for 150 days, and God sent a wind to dry the waters. God opened the door of the boat and released Noah and his family. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered one of every clean animal to God as a burnt offering on the altar. When the Lord smelled the soothing aroma, He said, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the thoughts of his heart are evil from his youth." God made a covenant with Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by flood, and He placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His covenant to remind man of God's His faithfulness.

Noah's sons and their wives had children and began to repopulate the earth, and his descendants, not wanting to obey God by filling the earth, stayed in one place and built a huge tower, called **Babel**. So the Lord scattered all the people over the face of the earth and confused their language, creating many languages so that they could not understand one another.

## **What does Noah's story teach about God and man?**

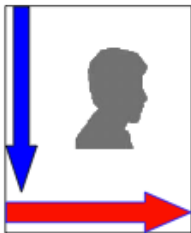
- God hates and judges sin.
- God is merciful and preserves the righteous.
- All who do not walk with God by faith will be destroyed.

- With every generation, man's sin becomes worse.
- When men make marriage arrangements and decisions solely based upon a woman's beauty it is to his detriment. And, when the godly intermarry with the ungodly it dilutes the effect of righteousness upon earth.
- God intended to fill the earth with God-image bearers. After the fall the earth is filled with violence and corruption from people who do not bear God's image.
- Men seek to exist outside of the presence of God by creating a life support system independent from God.

### The Book of Job

Many theologians place the Book of Job early in the Patriarch Era. Though Job possessed only the biblical stories of the Creation Era he expressed great faith in God. These stories gave Job enough truth about God to develop a robust faith that took him through his trials.

### The Patriarch Era (Approximately 360 years)



Ten generations after the flood passed, God spoke to a man named **Abram**, whose father was an *idol worshiper*. God promised Abram that He would bless him and make him a great nation, although Abram was 75 years old and his wife, **Sarai**, could have no children. God promised Abram that He would give him **a land—the land of Canaan**. God promised that He would bless those who bless Abram, curse those who curse Abram, and that in Abram's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God also told Abram that his descendants would go into captivity for four hundred years, and that God would bring them out of captivity to the land that God had promised him. God's promises demanded faith on Abram's part and Abram simply believed God. At that point, God changed his name to **Abraham** and God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness.

After ten years of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, Sarai succumbed to unbelief, persuaded Abraham to sleep with **Hagar**, her maidservant, who then bore a son, **Ishmael**. He was not the child of promise.

God commanded Abraham and his male descendants to be circumcised as a physical reminder of His promise that one day one would come who would fulfill the promises of God. For twenty-five years, Abraham trusted God to fulfill His promise regarding a male heir, and God gave him a son through Sarah named **Isaac**.

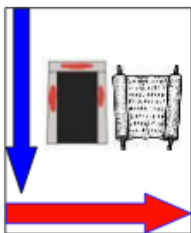
God began to keep his promise to Abraham through succeeding generations. Isaac had two sons, **Jacob and Esau**. God promised that the older son would serve the younger. Isaac's younger son,

**Jacob**, had twelve sons. The eleventh son, **Joseph**, was given two dreams about the future and had to wait thirteen years for God to fulfill them. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him as a slave to Egypt, trying to keep his dreams from being fulfilled. God delivered Joseph in Egypt, where he eventually became prime minister. Through Joseph's position in Egypt, God brought all of Jacob's family together during a time of famine. Before his death, Jacob blessed all of his sons. Jacob promised his son, **Judah** (through Leah), that from his descendants would proceed kings, a lawgiver, and Shiloh (the Messiah).

### What does the story of the Patriarchs teach about God and man?

- A gap exists between the promises of God and the fulfillment of His promises. During this gap man must learn to walk with God by faith.
- Things are never as they appear in the natural realm. Circumstances are the least reliable gauge to spiritual reality.
- The sanctification process. God takes a man as he is and changes him over time as God orchestrates his circumstances and demonstrates His covenant faithfulness.
- God binds Himself to the promises He makes regarding the future (a coming Redeemer, the obtaining of the land of Canaan, and a nation).
- God's giving of detailed instructions reveal His knowledge of the future and His determination to fulfill promises made to past generations.
- Flawed people do not prevent God from fulfilling His promises; rather, He receives great glory for accomplishing His purposes through unlikely participants.

### The Exodus Era (Approximately 430 years)



Over the next four hundred years, Abraham's descendants multiplied in Egypt, and the Egyptians used them as slaves, as God had foretold Abraham. Abraham's descendants lived in Egypt for 400 years until the Egyptians treated them harshly and killed their baby boys because they were afraid of them. Abraham's children, the Israelites, called out to God in their misery. God heard their cry and raised up a deliverer named **Moses**. God sent ten plagues on the Egyptians until they released the Israelites. Each of the ten plagues showed God's power over *the gods of Egypt*, proving that God is more powerful than *any idol or evil spirit*. In the tenth plague, God promised to send death to every firstborn child in Egypt. He promised to spare any household that took a spotless lamb (**The Passover Lamb**), killed it, and put its blood on the doorposts of the house. The blood on the doorposts would announce that death had already come to the house (through a substitute lamb). In this way, God delivered Israel out of Egypt. He

parted the Red Sea and dried out the ground so that His people could walk across; He then brought the sea back to destroy the pursuing Egyptian army.

Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness because they refused to trust God, even though He brought them out of Egypt just as He promised. He provided food and water through miracles, but they complained about God anyway. He went before them by day “in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.”

In the first year of their travels, God gave Israel His laws, including the **10 Commandments**. He also gave them dietary instructions, instructions **about the tabernacle (Tent of Meeting), the priests, the sacrifices, the annual feasts of celebration (the Passover, etc.), marriage (and intermarriage), and the future**. God spoke His 10 Commandments directly to the people, and God wrote His 10 Commandments on tablets of stone. In God’s 10 Commandments, He ordered the people to have no other God but Him, and in another commandment, He ordered the people not to make idols in the image of any earthly thing. God commanded that they worship Him only.

While God was giving Moses the remainder of His laws, the Israelites turned away from God and called Moses’ brother, **Aaron**, to make them an idol to worship. They wanted a *god they could see*. God told Moses that He would kill the Israelites because of their idol worship, but Moses stood between God and the people and asked Him to show them mercy. God punished them so they would stay away from idols, but God allowed them to live. After their sin, Moses led the people to build the tabernacle, fulfill the priesthood, offer the sacrifices, and keep the celebrations.

God promised His people a Prophet like Moses who would someday lead His people. God also commanded that a golden container (box) be built to hold the tablets of the 10 Commandments, a bowl of the food that God had provided in the wilderness, and the rod of Aaron, God’s priest. This container was the **Ark of the Covenant**, a physical symbol of God’s presence among His people. Once a year, on the **Day of Atonement**, the blood of a slain bull was to be sprinkled on the lid (the mercy seat) to remind the people of sin’s penalty for their sins (the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty).

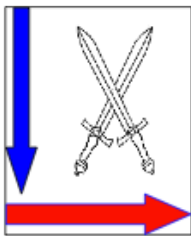
God also gave them instructions for the future, when they would want a king. He raised up a leader to take them into the promised land—Moses’ assistant **Joshua**. Before the Israelites went into the Promised Land, God gave them the **Blessings and the Curses**, which they were to recite in the new land: blessings to enjoy the land and live in it forever if they followed and trusted God, and curses of drought and captivity from enemies if they turned from God to worship idols and evil spirits and commit sexual immorality.

Concerned about continual Bible knowledge, Moses commanded that the **Book of the Law** be read to the entire congregation once every seven years. He also spoke of the day when Israel would want a king like the peoples around them and instructed those future kings to write their own copy of the **Book of the Law** from which they were to read all the days of their life.

## What does the Exodus/Wilderness story teach about God and man?

- God hears the cries of His people and raises up men to lead them out of their oppression.
- God delights to dwell among and lead His people.
- While God works redemptively on behalf of His people, He also judges those who oppress them.
- God gives instructions for future scenarios and generations.
- Bible literacy prepares God's people to embrace God's providential work in their lives.
- God gives instructions which serve their purpose in the "now" but have value for future generations.
- Man needs laws to guide spiritual and social behavior. Laws do not change the heart but they establish righteous standards to reveal man's sinfulness and his need for salvation.

## The Conquest Era (Approximately 50 years)



Under **Joshua**, God delivered the land into the hands of His people. He divided the land into twelve sections and led Israel to conquer the peoples of the land. God used Joshua to fulfill the promise that He had made to Abraham regarding the land of Canaan in Genesis 15.

Israel's first battle (at **Jericho**) offered Israel an opportunity to see God demonstrate His power. God met with Joshua and gave Him precise instructions for taking the city—instructions that made no sense and required faith on his part. God had Israel march around the city walls for 7 days and caused the walls to collapse at the sound of His people's shout on the seventh day. Out of this large walled city only one woman and her family were saved. **Rahab** exhibited extraordinary faith in the God of Israel because she had heard of His exploits for Israel as they left Egypt, lived in the wilderness for forty years, and how He protected them from the people on the other side of the Jordan River.

Joshua loved God; he began his leadership role by exalting **the Book of the Law of Moses** (1:8) and ended his leadership by reciting Israel's history and God's faithfulness. He recorded His final exhortation in the **Book of the Law of God** (24:26). He lived his life in the shadow of God's Word. Joshua was faithful in his task and as long as Joshua was alive, the people followed the Lord. When he died, they began to worship *the idols of the people who had lived in the land*, and they turned away from God.

## What does the Conquest story teach about God and man?

- Godly leaders must mentor leaders who are Biblically literate for future generations.
- God's people are mostly followers and need strong godly leaders to prevent them from drifting and disobeying God.
- Though men entertain good intentions, without godly leaders who proclaim His Word, they follow after foreign gods.
- God rescues people who put their trust in Him, even if they are from pagan nations.

### The Judges Era (Approximately 300 years)



Following the death of **Joshua** a new generation rose up who did not honor God nor follow His ways. Because the Israelites kept turning away from God to worship the idols of the people of the land, they spent the next two-hundred and seventy-five years in a series of **sin cycles**. They would worship idols (sin) and God would give them into the hands of their enemies (slavery and oppression). They would live under oppression until they finally humbled themselves and cried out to God for help (supplication). In response to their humility, God would raise up **a judge** to deliver them from their enemies (salvation). As long as the judge was alive, the people followed God and lived in peace, but when the judge died, the people turned back *to idols*, and God gave them into their enemies' hands again until they called on Him.

Seven times, over this two-hundred and seventy-five year period, the Israelites turned away from God, and God raised up fourteen judges (notable judges include a woman named **Deborah**, **Gideon**, **Jephthah**, **Samson**, **Eli**, **Samuel**) to deliver them when they cried out for mercy. Their times of oppression lasted from seven to forty years. The people also asked several of the judges to reign over them as king, fulfilling the word that God had promised Moses (when they would ask for a king-Deuteronomy 17:14ff). **Ruth** and **Naomi's** story occurs during one of the sin cycles. Naomi flees Israel during famine and returns when she hears that bread again is in the land. This coincides with the provisions in the **Blessings and Curses** listed in Deut. 28. Ruth has a son by Boaz (descendant of Judah). Their great-grandson will become Israel's second king.

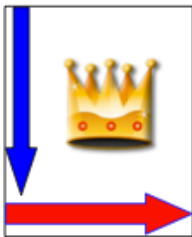
Horrible sexual sin and crimes occur during this period of Israel's history. This era is also marked by a corrupt priesthood. (Even Moses' own grandson—Judges 18:30)

#### What does the Judges era teach about God and man?

- Spiritual declension occurs in the absence of a godly priesthood and the proclamation of God's Word.

- Man in his pride will live under oppression for many years before he will humble himself and cry out to God.
- Man would rather live under oppression than to have God reign over him as King.
- God raises up and uses women as prophets, judges, and military leaders. God not only gives leadership roles to women but He brings unlikely women into His story.
- God responds to the humble cries of His people.

## The Kingdom Era (120 years)



At the end of the time of the judges, God gave a barren woman, **Hannah**, a son whom she named **Samuel**. Samuel ruled as Israel's last judge and first post-Judges prophet. He anointed Israel's first king in 1051 BC. **Saul**, the king, was everything the people thought they wanted in a king: he was handsome and a head taller than other men and he came from a prosperous family. Man sees the outside, but God looks at the heart. Early in Saul's reign, God told Samuel to tell Saul to destroy all the Amalekites, a tribe who had attacked Israel in the wilderness four hundred years ago. Had Saul taken the time to read the **Book of the Law** he would have read about the prophesied destruction of the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:17). Instead of obeying God, Saul spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, and he spared the king, Agag. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul blamed the people for his disobedience, and Saul's disobedience cost him the kingdom.

God then raised up a shepherd boy named **David**, a descendant of **Judah**, the youngest of eight sons, who had known God from his youth and had experienced God's deliverance and power as he defended his father's sheep from a lion and a bear. On the outside, David did not look like a king, but though man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart. One day, when all of David's brothers were at war in Saul's army, David's father sent David to see how his other sons were doing. David obeyed his father. When David reached the army, he saw that Saul and his army lived in terror of Goliath, a mighty warrior in the Philistine army. Through faith in God, David volunteered to fight this giant warrior, and he killed Goliath. The people of Israel fell in love with David, and Saul became jealous of David's success. For the next thirteen years, Saul tried to kill David, until Saul himself died in a battle against the Philistines.

David became king in 1011 BC, reigned for forty years, and successfully led Israel in many battles. He brought the **Ark of the Covenant** to the city of David, **Jerusalem**. He loved God, loved God's Word, and wanted to build God a **temple** as a permanent dwelling place for God among His people. God did not allow David to build the temple, because he was a man of war, but God said that David's son **Solomon** would build the temple, and that God would build David an everlasting

house—a king who would sit on his throne forever. So David spent the rest of his life collecting materials to build the temple.

When God gave Moses **the Law**, four hundred years earlier, God instructed the people on what a king should be like. The king could not go back to Egypt for horses to build himself an army, the king could not be a foreigner, could not take multiple wives, and could not amass wealth for himself. The king also had to take the **Book of the Law** and write his own copy in his own hand, and he had to read the law every day of his life. David loved the Law of God, meditated on it, and wrote many *psalms* (songs) about God.

Although David loved the LORD and His Word, he took a vacation from God and sinned grievously by committing adultery with **Bathsheba**, the wife of one of his mighty men. He then staged the man's death and married **Bathsheba**. God confronted David through his prophet, **Nathan**, and David repented in deep brokenness. The first son of their adulterous relationship died but their second son, **Solomon**, succeeded his father to the throne of Israel.

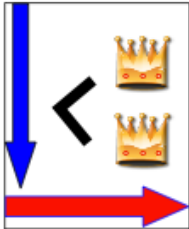
Solomon recognized early on that serving as Israel's king required the manifest wisdom of God; when God asked him what he wanted, Solomon requested wisdom. God honored his request, and God's wisdom upon Solomon's life distinguished him among all the kings of the earth. The book of **Proverbs**, **Song of Songs** and **Ecclesiastes** are records of Solomon's great wisdom. Solomon fulfilled his father's wish and built a temple for the Living God. Solomon, however, did not follow the regulation given for kings regarding the taking of many wives. He had 300 wives and 700 concubines and as a result, his heart turned away from God.

### **What do the Kingdom Era stories teach about God and man?**

- God and man differ on the qualities necessary to lead His people.
- Hardness of heart and rebellion rob men of leadership effectiveness.
- God fulfills promises made to individuals. His promises to individuals always serve His greater purpose of fulfilling promises, regarding the land and His people, made to others in past generations.
- God's promise to David that he would be king of Israel depended on God's activity.
- Spiritual declension occurs in the lives of those who neglect their God-given responsibilities and God's Word.
- Even those who walk with God are capable of doing the most heinous acts. Their response, when confronted over their sin, reveals their true attitude toward God.
- Leaders need the wisdom of God upon their lives to carry out their tasks.

- When man disregards God's righteous standards, he always suffers from the consequences.

## The Divided Kingdom Era (Israel 209 years; Judah 345 years)



When **Solomon** became king in 971 BC, he spent the first seven years of his reign building God's temple. Afterwards, he married foreign women, amassed wealth, built an army, and began to follow his wives' idols instead of the living God. He violated the regulations regarding a king's character that God had given Israel through Moses in the wilderness (Deut. 17). At the end of his reign, **Jeroboam**, one of Solomon's generals, led a rebellion and then fled to Egypt.

Solomon's son, **Rehoboam**, became king. When the people asked him to reduce their taxes, he listened to young men's advice instead of old men's advice. His addition to their burden created a mutinous situation. **Jeroboam** came back from Egypt and took advantage of the people's anger, and ten tribes broke away from Rehoboam to follow him instead, dividing the kingdom into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

**Jeroboam**, to keep control of his ten tribes, established a new religion, based on the worship of idols he had brought from Egypt. He mixed idol worship with the worship of the true God. Using the feast days and sacrifices of Israel to worship idols, he established two places to worship these idols, and he established a priesthood not based on God's law. Because Jeroboam led the people to worship idols, he fell under God's curse, and his whole family died. Forever after, he was known as Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, and his name became a mark of shame. Some of the people in the 10 tribes returned to the southern kingdom to worship the true God.

Nineteen kings ruled after Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom; each king acted wickedly and worshiped idols. God sent the northern kingdom **prophet after prophet (Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Jonah, and Amos)**, who performed miracles and called people to turn from idols back to the living God. The people never returned to God; thus, God raised up the Assyrians against Israel and sent them into captivity away from their land in 722 BC. This fulfilled the promises that God had made Israel in the **Blessings and Cursings**.

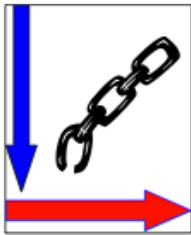
In **the southern kingdom of Judah**, the people followed God as long as they had a king who followed God and loved His Word, but, one day, one of the kings of Judah married a wicked princess from Israel, the daughter of **Ahab and Jezebel**, the most wicked king and queen from the north. This princess influenced the king and his people to follow idols and serve evil spirits, and God sent **prophet after prophet (Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk)** to call His people back to Him. These prophets prophesied of a righteous king from David's line who would rule His people in righteousness and save His people from their sins. The prophet **Jeremiah**, who had prophesied about this coming King, also prophesied that the sins of the people of Judah

would send them into captivity for seventy years, that the temple would be destroyed, and that they would serve their enemies again. Instead of turning away from *idols* and to God, the people listened to the words of false prophets and continued in their sin. Jeremiah also prophesied of a time when God would take His law and write it on people's hearts, and not just in the Books of the Law. **Isaiah** also prophesied of a coming Messiah and the cutting of a new covenant.

### What do the Divided Kingdom stories teach about God and man?

- Wise men may go astray when they don't keep God's laws.
- No one is above the law.
- Listening to foolish counselors brings problems men can't foresee (captivity and bondage).
- Rulers use worship to bind people's hearts to themselves; good kings lead them to worship the true God, while evil kings lead their hearts away from God.
- Men who lead people away from God bring lasting shame to themselves.
- God sends prophets to call people back to Himself.

### The Captivity Era (70 years)



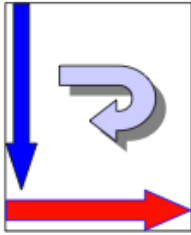
In 586 BC, the king of Babylon invaded Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah, and took many of the Jews captive to his capitol city of Babylon. In the midst of this turmoil, God raised up and spoke through **prophets** to lead His people. Among the captives of Babylon, **Ezekiel** prophesied about God's return to His people. In the royal courts of Babylon and, later, Persia, **Daniel** prophesied about the **Son of Man who would rule in Heaven**. In Judah, **Jeremiah** prophesied about God's promise to return his people to their land after 70 years. He called the people to trust God and not to run away back to Egypt. Jeremiah told the people that God had plans of peace for them rather than calamity, to give them a future and a hope.

### What do the Captivity stories teach about God and man?

- God keeps His promises of judgment as well as of blessing.
- God shows mercy to His people even in their judgment.
- God does not forget His people; rather, He sends prophets to speak to them and give them comfort.

- Out of the darkest days of Israel's history come some of the brightest promises.

## Return Era (Approximately 85 years)

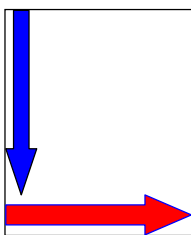


After the 70-year period, God raised up a king named Cyrus (about whom **Isaiah** prophesied). He sent the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem—just as God had said—to rebuild the city and the temple. When the people grew weary of the work, God spoke through the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** to call them to finish the temple. When Jewish captives living in Persia were threatened by a powerful person in King Ahasuerus' government, God raised up a Jewish girl, **Esther**, as the queen of the Persians to save her people from certain death. God also raised up **Ezra**, a faithful priest, to return His people to the land He had promised Abraham. Ezra, along with the godly governor **Nehemiah**, led the people to observe the Book of the Law, to worship God, to rebuild the temple and the city, and God protected them from their enemies by His power. *The hold of idols on the people was broken.* For the rest of Israel's history, they never again turned to images made by man; however, the prophet **Amos** (prophesying to Israel) had warned the people that there would be a four-hundred-year famine of the hearing of the Word of God. The last prophet of this period, **Malachi**, called the priests to honor God with their sacrifices and called the people to honor God with their tithes

### What do the Exile stories teach about God and man?

- God sends revival to His people when their leaders teach His Word and they obey.
- God keeps His promises of return for His people.
- God uses prophets to keep alive their motivation to obey Him.
- God sometimes uses harsh judgments to break persistent sin among His people.
- God uses people in strategic places to give His people deliverance.

## The Silent Era (400 years)



After the prophet **Malachi** wrote his message, it seemed that the heavens became silent. For the next four hundred years, no prophet spoke. The people of Israel built schools to learn the Word of God, and out of these schools came a tradition of scribes who interpreted the Books of the Law and led the people to follow their interpretation of God's Word rather than God's Word itself. Schools with different interpretations rose up, including the Pharisees and the

Sadducees. The nation fell under the control of the Greeks (during this time the Old Testament was translated into Greek), then the Egyptians, then the Romans. For these four hundred years, the people lived in hope of a **coming Messiah, a Son of David**, who would deliver them out of all captivity and reign over them forever.

### **What does the Silent Era teach about God and man?**

- Though God is silent, He is not inactive.
- Men are led away from God and unprepared for God's activity when they follow man's interpretations of God's Word rather than knowing it for themselves.
- God works in the political realm, elevating and demoting for His redemptive purposes

### **The Gospel Era (Approximately 33 years)**



The Silent Era concluded when an angel of God appeared to an old priest and told him that he and his barren wife would have a child who would turn the hearts of parents to their children and prepare Israel for their God, as the prophet **Isaiah** had prophesied 700 years ago. When this priest's wife was several months pregnant, the angel of God appeared to a young virgin engaged to a godly man named Joseph, and promised this girl, **Mary**, that she would have a child by **the Holy Spirit** who would save His people from their sins. His name would be **Jesus**. Mary believed God and gave birth to a son whom she named **Jesus**.

**Jesus** lived a sinless life for thirty years as a carpenter. When Jesus was about thirty, his cousin, **John the Baptist**, the son of the priest, began preaching in the wilderness about **the Lamb of God** who would take away the sins of the world and establish **the kingdom of God**. Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize Him into the Jordan to fulfill all righteousness; when Jesus came out of the water, **the Holy Spirit** came upon Him as a dove, and God Himself spoke from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

After Jesus was tempted for forty days in the wilderness and resisted **the devil**, He began to do miracles. As **Isaiah** had prophesied, Jesus gave hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, and preached the good news to the poor. Jesus healed thousands, fed thousands, forgave sins, cast out demons, and proclaimed the kingdom of God. He did everything that pleased God, His Father, and He committed no sin, making Him the perfect, innocent Lamb of God, spotless just like the lamb sacrificed at the Exodus.

Jesus called **twelve men** to Himself and trained them to make followers and to teach them everything He had commanded. Part of Jesus' preparation for His disciples was to prepare them for his death for sinners. Commoners and sinners loved Jesus, but He was rejected by the religious

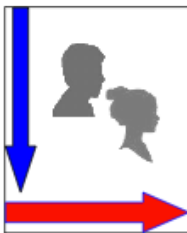
crowd (the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees**). After three years of threats and accusations, the religious crowd had Jesus arrested, falsely accused, and tried as a criminal. They turned Him over to the Roman government who mocked and shamed Him, and crucified Him on a cross between two thieves. Though He had never sinned, He died on the cross as a sinner, as Isaiah prophesied, “We all like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each of us to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, just as He had promised.

Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might become God’s righteousness. The perfect Lamb of God died and took away the sins of the world. Jesus crushed the head of the serpent!

### **What does the Gospel Era teach about God and man?**

- God’s promises may take a long time to fulfill, but He always keeps them.
- God intervenes in human history to right sin’s wrongs and to cause hope.
- God demands a payment for sin, but He also provides the payment He demands.
- God uses human sin to accomplish His divine purposes.
- God provides the sinless, spotless Lamb as a substitute—the innocent in the place of the guilty.

### **Jesus, Legalists, Sinners, and Women**



Jesus Christ reached out to both men and women who were condemned and rejected by the religious establishment. Harlots experienced His forgiveness, demon-possessed men and women were set free, sick men and women were healed, and widows experienced His care. Jesus’ relationship with sinners fulfilled his mission “to seek and to save that which is lost.” Their response to His extravagant love was demonstrated on numerous occasions, such as when women washed his feet and dried them with their hair or when they poured expensive perfume upon His feet. Women were the first ‘evangelists’ carrying the good news of His resurrection to his disciples.

Jesus reached out to the ‘sinners’ of His day. While Solomon had said, “There is not a just man on the earth who does not sin,” the Jews considered certain occupations (such as tax-collectors) and certain types of people (lepers, harlots) to be sinners. Jesus reached out to these people, ministered to them, preached the good news of salvation to them, and even ate with them. When

the religious crowd criticized Him for this behavior, He responded, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

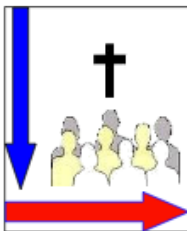
At the same time, He regularly scolded those who believed that they were righteous through their works or that they did not need a Savior because of their status. These legalists (people who believe that they can achieve or keep righteousness through works) received Jesus' most fearsome condemnation because they saw themselves as better than others. When Jesus healed the man born blind, He rejoiced that those who are blind see, but sorrowed that those who think they see are blind. The legalists who heard Him asked, "Are we blind?" He responded, "If you would say you were blind, you would see; but because you say, 'we see,' your sin remains."

Jesus invested much of his last eighteen months preparing his disciples for his death and resurrection. He commissioned them to take the good news of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world.

### **What do the Jesus, Legalists, Sinners and Women stories teach about God and man?**

- Legalists refuse to come to God His way. Theirs is a works-based righteousness.
- Legalists attack those who disagree with them.
- Legalists condemn others.
- Jesus loves and accepts men and women who have needs.
- Sinners who recognize their need of Jesus find forgiveness in Him.

### **The Church Era (Began at Pentecost and continues today)**



During the time when Jesus taught His disciples He foretold of the day when He would form His disciples into communities called churches. These communities would be built on the confession that Jesus is the Christ. When Peter confessed Jesus as Christ, Jesus responded with the words, "And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) **Churches** are composed of believers who confess that Jesus is the Christ.

These new believers spoke so often about Jesus that they were called **Christians**. Just as Jesus had promised, they met together in communities called **churches**. These churches consisted of baptized believers in Jesus who united for the specific purposes of worshiping Jesus as Lord, teaching and training His followers in His Word, fellowshiping together in this new life, and

proclaiming His message to their neighbors and the nations. God gives believers spiritual gifts so that they can serve Him in the church—all the gifts build up the church.

God gifted certain men as **Apostles, teachers, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers** to equip His new people as they grew in grace. These gifted leaders taught the Word to the followers, guarded the new churches from false teaching, and proclaimed Christ's message to those who knew Him not. God raised special servants, **James, Peter, John, Paul and Jude**, who wrote numerous letters to these new churches. These letters helped the new believers understand God's purposes, dealt with error, spiritual warfare, the role of women, etc., in the new churches, and taught clear truths about the person and work of Jesus. **Paul** pictured these new churches as a temple where God dwells, as a field where God works, as His body with many members but one Head, and as His bride.

The earliest stories about Jesus passed orally from one believer to the next. They remembered accurately the life, the teachings, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Eventually God the Holy Spirit guided certain Apostles or the companion of Apostles to preserve these Gospels in written form. **Matthew** wrote to the Jews of Jesus the Messiah, **Mark** wrote to the common people of Jesus the Servant, **Luke** wrote to the cultured Gentiles of Jesus the Son of Man and **John** wrote of the Savior of the world, the Son of God.

#### **What do the Church stories teach about God and man?**

- Redeemed men and women are empowered by the Holy Spirit to manifest Christ in their individual lives and in their corporate lives to a lost world.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to anyone who will believe.
- The church exists as Christ's body on earth.
- The church functions by worshiping God through Jesus, equipping God's people to live for Jesus, and reaching to unbelievers to make known to them the love of Jesus.
- Individual members submit to the work of Christ in His body for the mutual good of the church; they use their gifts and talents for Him in the body.
- Churches who fulfill Jesus' purposes glorify God as a working body, a beautiful temple, and a lovely bride—all image-bearers of Christ.
- God preserved the Gospel message for the good and redemption of future generations.

## The Missions Era (Murder of Stephen begins the persecutions of the church and the dispersion of the church)



Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He issued one final instruction to His followers: “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20) and one final promise, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Forty days after His ascension, as the believers were meeting together, **the Holy Spirit** came on them in power, giving them the ability to speak boldly about Jesus. They spoke about Jesus to Israelites from many nations, people of other nationalities, religious leaders, kings, governors, and even the government of the empire. God fulfilled His promise He had spoken through the prophet **Jeremiah** to put His law in believers’ minds and to write it on their hearts. Jesus’ followers took His message to Jews in **Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria**, and **the ends of the earth** in their day. His followers went to the whole known world proclaiming the good news of His death for sinners and His resurrection with power that proved His defeat of sin and death.

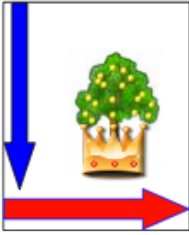
**Peter** and some of His other followers took His good news to the Jews. **Philip**, an early follower, shared the good news of Jesus with a man from North Africa, who then took the good news to his own people. **Thomas**, another follower, went east with the good news, eventually establishing a church in India. **Paul**, an apostle chosen out of time, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus as he was traveling to arrest Jesus’ followers, became one of Jesus’ greatest workers, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and planting churches throughout Asia Minor (Southern Europe) and the rest of the Roman Empire.

The Mission Era continues to this today and the Great Commission still stands to be obeyed by all followers of Jesus Christ.

### What do the Mission stories teach about God and man?

- The Holy Spirit has come to enable and embolden men and women to follow Jesus Christ and to take His Gospel to the ends of the earth.
- Everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed people turn from their sin and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

## The End Times Era



John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, suffered a great deal of persecution because of the good news of Jesus. In his last years, he received a vision from God. This vision, the Revelation, told of the new heavens and new earth, the judgment to come, the fulfillment of His promises regarding the people of Israel, the return and eternal kingdom of Christ, the salvation of the church, and the complete victory over *the evil one—the crushing of the head of the serpent*.

John's final vision in the Book of the Revelation chapter 21 reveals the New Jerusalem where there is no more temple—God is the **Temple**; no more Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—Jesus is the **Tree of Life**; no more darkness—Jesus is the **Light**.

### What do the End Times stories teach about God and man?

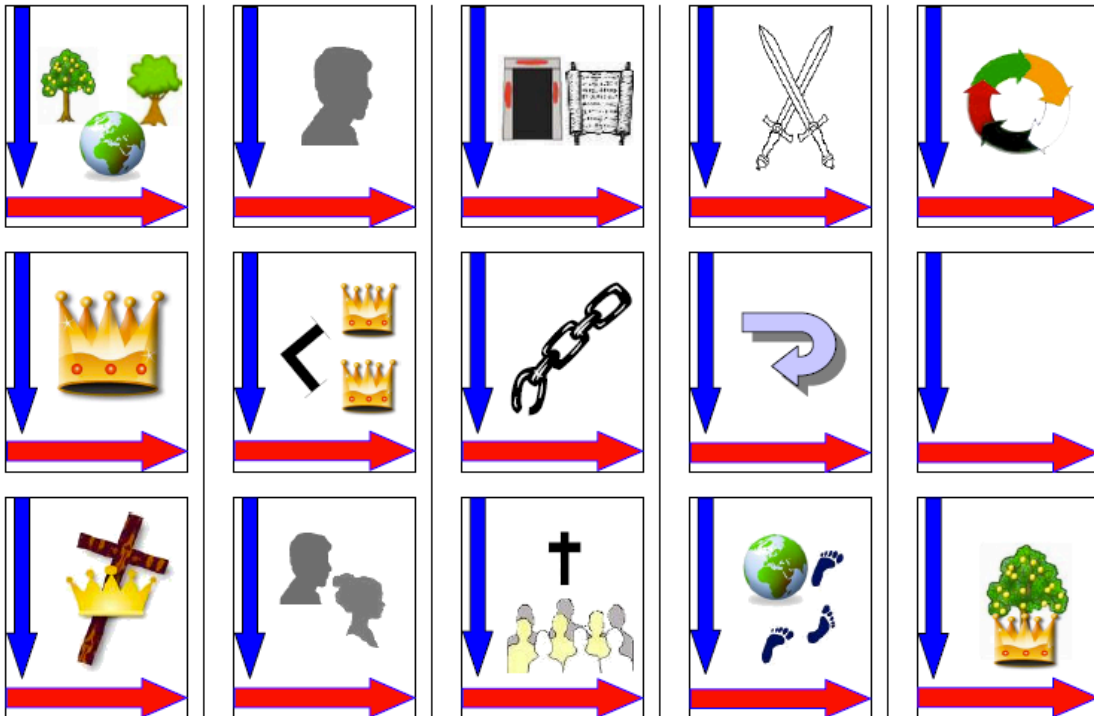
- The judgment of God upon sin, sinners, Satan, demons, and the world as we know it should motivate believers to live joyful, sacrificial, and holy lives.
- Confidence in Christ's ultimate victory gives hope to believers when they face persecution during hard times.

### Summary

#### What does the story of the Bible tell us about God and man?

- God initiates relationships with people.
- When people sin, God seeks them, for reconciliation, not for condemnation.
- Man must come to God on God's terms and in God's way.
- God's way for man to come is through the shedding of the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty.
- God is longsuffering. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
- God always intended to save people through the perfect Lamb of God, His Son Jesus Christ.
- Those who trust in God don't need to fear evil spirits.
- God loves us more than we can possibly understand.
- Man is an enemy of God in his heart.

- Man was made for and is incomplete without a relationship with the God who made him.
- Every person must come to God in faith, trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord, to join God's family.
- What does the story of the Bible tell us about the world?
- God created the world good. When sin entered the world, it corrupted every part of the world and was dominated by evil spirits.



### Acknowledgments

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