

Gospel Messenger



Theme:

God's Eternal Plan

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eternity! And, you must recognize that eternity is much too long (never ending) to spend in the wrong place. For, even if you experience the best this life has to offer, your life will have been wasted if you miss out on what God has prepared for those who love Him (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 16:24-27)!

There are only two options as to where you will spend your eternity. First, the wicked will be sentenced to eternity in Hell (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:15; Revelation 21:8; Romans 1:18-32; 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21). This is a place depicted as terrible punishment, darkness, fire, weeping, gnashing of teeth, etc. Second, the righteous will be welcomed into eternity in Heaven (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 21:1-22:5). This is a place God has prepared for the righteous before the beginning of the world, a beautiful place where there will be no death, grief, crying, pain, or evil and we can forever live with God!

Everything about the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan is intended to prepare people to hear Jesus welcome them into the wonderful and eternal paradise of Heaven for all eternity, while the wicked will go away into eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46)! God's eternal plan provides the opportunity of salvation from sin through Jesus to everyone. Now, He has given you (and every person) the opportunity to choose to be part of His eternal kingdom, by submitting to Jesus (the Messiah) as King and obeying what the gospel requires of you. But, you must choose now – as the end of this world will be the beginning of eternity!

Lesson 1

The Beginning

The Bible is composed of 66 individual books, written over a period of around 1,500 years by about 40 different authors. It ranges from books of history to poetry to prophecy to letters and discusses the time from the creation of the world to around the end of the first century A.D. Certainly, the Bible is no ordinary book, as it is the book from God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)! The story of the Bible is the story of God's eternal plan and is the greatest story ever told – the true story about how God saves people (including you) from the greatest enemies we have ever faced. In this lesson, we want to consider the beginning of this eternal plan and Bible story.

1) In the beginning, God was. As the Bible opens and begins to discuss the creation of this universe, God already existed (Genesis 1:1). This God is the one who is eternal (always existing and never needing a creator, Revelation 4:8; Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2), all-powerful (having no limitation to His power, Genesis 1; 17:1; Revelation 19:6), all-knowing (having nothing He cannot know, Isaiah 46:9-10; Romans 11:33-36), and ever-present (having nothing that escapes His attention anywhere, Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 139:3-12). Three separate Beings possess this nature of being God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three have the same nature of being God and are fully united as God (John 1:1-3; Acts 5:3-4; Genesis 1:2, 26-27); yet are separate beings (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19-20).

2) In the beginning, God had a plan. God had a plan to redeem mankind from sin that is eternal in nature. Consider the following passages that speak of this plan (Matthew 25:34; Acts 2:23; 3:18; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:4; 3:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; 1 Peter 1:18-21. So, even before God created this world or people sinned, God had a plan that would offer eternal salvation through Jesus! However, this plan was once considered a “mystery,” as it was not fully understood in the Old Testament times as it can be understood today

(Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Today, you should appreciate that you can now know the mystery that has been revealed and that you can partake of (Ephesians 3:3-6)!

2) God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Genesis 1 records God's six-day creation of the heavens and the earth, and everything therein. In this, it is important to recognize the special way God created people in His image (as spiritual beings who can worship and serve God and survive physical death, vv. 26-27; John 4:24). After creating the heavens and the earth, God declared everything was "very good" (v. 31). Since God is entirely good and cannot have fellowship with sin (1 John 1:5; Revelation 4:8), this means God created a world that was free from sin. Then, God placed man in the Garden of Eden (a paradise on earth, Genesis 2:8-14) and created the woman for the man (Genesis 2:18-25). At this point, everything was perfect! However, you must pause to consider *why* the all-powerful and eternal God created the heavens and the earth in the way He did and created people in His image and with free will. Consider the following passages: Psalm 19:1; 57:5; 8; Isaiah 43:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Acts 17:26-27. God did this so that all creation would glorify Him! Particularly, God expects those who have been created in His image to choose to glorify and seek Him!

3) The fall. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He gave them a law to follow (Genesis 2:15-17). The law and consequence for breaking the law were both plainly identified. However, Satan enters the Bible story in Genesis 3 and works through the serpent to tempt Eve (vv. 1-5). He appealed to the physical desires of the woman to make breaking the law of God sound like a good idea. Tragically, Eve was deceived by Satan. She looked at the tree differently after the temptation and chose to violate God's law (sin, v. 6). Then, she gave it to her husband, who also sinned. Spiritual death (separation from God) occurred on this day as their relationship with God was changed and physical death and suffering also entered the world at that time (Genesis 3:16-24; 5:5). Finally, God also punished the serpent and Satan (Genesis 3:14-15). This records the first glimpse into

God so that we are not caught unprepared for His coming (Matthew 24:44; 25:13)!

2) The resurrection. Ever since death entered the world, death has been one of the great enemies of mankind we are hopeless to overcome by ourselves. But, Jesus demonstrated power over death (John 11:25, 43-44)! The ultimate way God assures us of deliverance from death is through Jesus's own resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Our resurrection, then, will happen when Jesus comes (John 5:28-29). Those who have died and are now in Hades (the realm of the dead, Luke 16:19-31) will be raised when Jesus comes (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 Corinthians 15:23). This resurrection will mark the day the last enemy is conquered (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), as Jesus has defeated sin through His death on the cross and will defeat death through the resurrection! Jesus will reign until this time when everything is subjected to God and then hand the kingdom over to God. Then, at this resurrection, God will provide a different kind of body for what comes next (a spiritual body, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58). This will be a triumphant day of victory for those who are citizens of Jesus's kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)!

3) The judgment. The final judgment of all mankind will happen when Jesus comes (Matthew 25:14-30, 31-46). At this time, Satan (the great deceiver of humanity and enemy of God and what is good) will also be eternally defeated by being condemned to Hell (Revelation 20:1-10; Matthew 25:41)! Every person who has lived on earth will also stand before Jesus's judgment throne on this day (Matthew 25:31-33). Every person will be judged for how he/she had lived while on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10), bow before and praise God (Romans 14:10-12), and nothing will be hidden from God (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Hebrews 4:13). This scene is pictured in Revelation 20:11-15. Specifically, each person will be judged according to his/her earthly works by what was written in God's word (the Bible, John 12:48).

4) Eternity. No one will escape the coming of Christ and the judgment! The eternity that each person will experience will be directly related to how he/she lived on this earth (John 5:28-29; Galatians 6:7-8). Appreciate that it is only because of God's eternal plan that anyone who has sinned can have the hope to experience anything good in

accomplished, all people throughout this world can be saved through Jesus and be a citizen of His kingdom. These who submit to King Jesus while they live on earth will then be granted entrance into God's eternal kingdom in Heaven when Jesus returns (2 Peter 1:11)!

Lesson 6

The End

As we continue exploring the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan, we want to overview how the story will end. The Bible speaks of a time when the end will come (1 Corinthians 15:24). Although God had created this world as a paradise that was free from suffering and death, all that changed whenever sin entered the world and God's eternal plan for saving mankind was activated. As there is significant sacrifice involved in God's eternal plan (from both God and those who obey Him), we should recognize how all this sacrifice will end.

1) Jesus's coming. Jesus foretold His future coming during the time He was walking this earth (John 14:1-3). For example, Matthew 24-25 talks extensively about His coming. Although the early section of Matthew 24 (vv. 1-35) applies to the destruction of Jerusalem that would take place in A.D. 70, the rest of these chapters does apply to Jesus's second coming (24:36-25:46). In them, we see that no one knows when this Day will come besides the Father (24:36), His coming will be like a thief in the night (24:42-44), and pictures of the Judgment Day scene are given (24:45-25:46). Jesus's coming was also foretold whenever Jesus ascended back to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11), as He will come in the clouds and everyone will see and hear Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 1:7). When Jesus comes, this world that is passing away (1 John 2:17; Matthew 6:19-21) will pass away, being destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10-13)! Since Jesus's coming is often compared to a thief coming in the night (Matthew 24:42-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), He instructs that we must be ready by living in a way that pleases

God's eternal plan, as it foreshadows all that would be accomplished through Jesus defeating Satan!

4) The problem of sin. Genesis goes on to detail how sin spread quickly as people multiplied on this earth (4:6-8; 6:5-8). This has continued today (Romans 3:10-18, 23). But, why is sin such a big deal that God had an eternal plan to deal with it? First, sin is the transgression of God's law, as people violate God's laws (1 John 3:4). Second, since God is entirely holy and pure, sin separates people from God (Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 John 1:5-7). Third, sin results in the punishment of eternal death in Hell fire (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8). Fourth, because those who sin deserve to spend eternity in Hell, it follows that people could not do anything to earn their own salvation and were desperately in need of a Savior (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9)!

God created the universe, the world, and everything in them in a perfect way. Yet, people chose to sin against God, which brought many consequences. With these foundational points established, the stage is set for the unfolding of God's eternal plan. How would God respond to the problem of sin? In the next lesson, we will see how God used the nation of Israel as a key piece in accomplishing His eternal plan of redemption!

Lesson 2

The Nation Of Israel

As we continue exploring the Bible story and God's eternal plan, we want to overview how God used a special group of people in a critical way for His eternal plan. In fact, the story of the Old Testament primarily deals with the way in which God used the nation of Israel to glorify His name and bring Jesus into the world. But, while there is a great deal that we can learn from the Old Testament story, we will be focused on how God is telling the story of redemption.

1) God's covenant with Abraham. As sin spread, God sent a worldwide flood to destroy wickedness and saved Noah and his family (Genesis 6-9). After the flood, God made it clear that He would do something special through Noah's son Shem (Genesis 9:20-27). One of his descendants would be the man named Abram (Abraham, Genesis 11:10-32). Then, God called Abraham to leave his homeland (Ur) and his family to go to the land God promised to give his descendants (the land of Canaan). Consider the three main promises God made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15): To make a great nation of Abraham's descendants, to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan, and to bless all people of the earth through Abraham's Seed. This third promise, in particular, has direct implications to the unfolding of God's eternal plan – as it would be through Abraham's descendants (the nation of Israel) that God would bring Christ into this world, thereby blessing all nations with the opportunity of salvation! However, when God made these promises to Abraham concerning his descendants, he was 75 years old and childless (Genesis 12:4; 15:1-5). Yet, God blessed Abraham with a son named Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7). Later, God proceeded to test Abraham's faith by commanding him to offer Isaac on the altar (Genesis 22:1-2, though God stopped Abraham from actually killing him). Abraham obeyed, concluding God would keep His promises even if God would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19)! For, God had promised to confirm the covenant with Isaac (Genesis 17:19).

Isaac went on to have twin sons (Jacob and Esau) and God extended the covenant to Jacob (Genesis 25:23; 28:12-15). Twelve sons were later born to Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel, Genesis 29:31-30:24; 35:16-21). These twelve children would become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Of these, God would bring kings (and ultimately Jesus) through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9-12). Much later, God would establish His covenant with David (from the tribe of Judah) and promise to establish an everlasting kingdom (as the Messiah/Anointed One would come through his lineage, Psalm 89:3-4).

and the city of Jerusalem. After Jesus had told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8), Jesus was taken up from them in the clouds into Heaven and took His seat on the throne at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 1:8). After this, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, demonstrating something special was happening and fulfilling prophecy (Acts 2:1-4, 14-21; Joel 2:28-32). Now directed by the Holy Spirit, the apostles preached to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem about how God had fulfilled His determined plan through Jesus, who they killed but He has raised up to be King to sit on David's throne at His right hand (Acts 2:22-36)! Some who heard this message wanted to know what they must do to be saved from rejecting the Messiah and King (Acts 2:37). They were taught to repent and be baptized (submitting themselves to the King, Acts 2:38-41). These who were humbly obedient to King Jesus were now counted as citizens of God's kingdom (reign/rule of Christ) and members of His church (collection of Jesus's saved people)! Then, these citizens of Jesus's kingdom continued living for the King, with others who submitted themselves to King Jesus being added to His kingdom and counted among the saved (Acts 2:42-47) – continuing even today!

4) How the rule of Christ impacts each person. The rule of Christ should impact each citizen of the kingdom of Heaven in deeply meaningful ways. For example, those who submit themselves to the rule of Christ are transferred from the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Christ should rule our thoughts so Christ's authority controls what we focus on (Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 4:8). Christ should rule our character so Christ's authority reigns in our lives so we become like Jesus (Colossians 3:5-10, 12-15; 1:27). Christ should rule our words and deeds so we only speak and do what the King approves (Colossians 3:16-17). And, Christ should rule our relationships so they will be useful in bringing glory to King Jesus through obeying Him (Colossians 3:18-21).

Christ's kingdom has now been fully established, with Jesus now reigning as King over a spiritual kingdom that will never end! Those who recognize Jesus as the Messiah and submit to His authority in their lives share in this kingdom. As we have watched God's eternal plan be

to a coming kingdom. Consider a few examples. Isaiah 2:2-4 pictures this kingdom as God's rule being like a mountain above all others that all people can flow to, identifies Jerusalem as the specific place where God's word would flow from, and as a kingdom of peace rather than one advanced by military strength (compare with Micah 4:1-8). Daniel 2:31-45 pictures an eternal kingdom God would establish during the days of a fourth kingdom (the Roman empire) that would be everlasting and fill the whole earth. Daniel 7:9-18 pictures the same four kingdoms (this time as beasts) and the everlasting kingdom that would be given to the Son of Man which would be a vast kingdom in which people from every nation and language would serve Him. While other passages could be considered, recognize that every prophecy made concerning the kingdom of God was fulfilled in the kingdom Jesus established. There is no other kingdom people should still be anticipating for God to establish besides the one that has been established!

2) The kingdom in the gospels. It's not just the Old Testament that taught about a coming kingdom. For example, John the baptizer taught that the kingdom of Heaven had come near, as the reign of the Messiah (King Jesus) was about to begin (Matthew 3:1-2). Then, the kingdom is often the subject of the parables (Matthew 13:10-11, notice throughout chapter 13), revealing the secrets of the kingdom to those who were spiritually focused and concealing them from those who were not (vv. 12-17, 34-35). Through these, Jesus appears to teach about three primary aspects of the kingdom of Heaven: The nature of the King (i.e. Matthew 18:21-35), the nature of the kingdom (i.e. Matthew 13:44), and the nature of kingdom citizens (i.e. Luke 10:25-37). Then, even beyond parables, the kingdom was a common theme of Jesus's teaching (Matthew 6:9-10, 33; Luke 18:16-17, 24-30, etc.). And, Jesus also indicated that He would build His church and kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19). This kingdom would be in existence within the lifetimes of many who were living at the time (Luke 9:27).

3) The day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Something very special happened in Acts 2 as it related to God's eternal plan – touching all three points we've been discussing of the Messiah, the gospel, and the kingdom. The context of this day involves the time of the Roman empire

2) God's covenant with the nation of Israel. God gave the nation of Israel that came through Abraham's descendants a written law to live by (Exodus-Deuteronomy). Ten commandments served as the foundation of this Law (Exodus 20:1-17). The law also consisted of regular sacrifices and a priesthood (from the tribe of Levi) to administer them. The people of Israel entered into this covenant with God, agreeing they would be His people and obey His laws (Exodus 24:3-8). Though God would always keep His part of the covenant, Israel was warned of consequences if they failed to keep their part and blessings if they did keep it (Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Leviticus 26). However, this Law was not designed to be a permanent system (Galatians 3:23-26). It was added because of transgressions until the Seed would come (Galatians 3:19). This Seed is Jesus (Galatians 3:16). Therefore, the Law of Moses was designed for a specific purpose, fulfilled that specific purpose, and has now been taken away (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:7-13). In fact, the sacrifice of bulls and goats could never take away sin and give life (Hebrews 10:4; Galatians 3:10-14, 21-22). Instead, the Law of Moses was a shadow of better things to come under the Law of Christ (Hebrews 9:1-10:18)! For, the Law of Moses was designed to lead the Israelites to faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:23-26).

3) A brief history of the nation of Israel. If we break the Old Testament story into a quick summary, we can see six major parts to the story. Part 1: The beginning. This tells of the creation of the world, the spread of sin, the promises made to Abraham and his descendants, and how these descendants come into the land of Egypt. Part 2: The exodus. This tells of how the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, brought out of Egypt, entered a covenant with God, and rebelled against God so as to wander in the wilderness. Part 3: The promised land. This tells how God brought His people into the land of Canaan and the oppression they experienced when they disobeyed God. Part 4: The united kingdom. This tells how three kings (Saul, David, and Solomon) ruled over a united nation of Israel and how the temple was built in Jerusalem. Part 5: The divided kingdom. This tells of how the nation of Israel divided into two separate nations (called "Israel" and "Judah") and the frequent rebellion of both nations against God. Part 6: The exile and return. This tells of how God punished Israel for their disobedience

by delivering them into Assyrian captivity, punished Judah for their disobedience by delivering them into Babylonian captivity, and then allowed a remnant to return to the land after this.

God's eternal plan is unfolding. We have watched its development through the promises and story of the Old Testament. Particularly, we have seen how God is telling His story of salvation through the nation of Israel. How would God use the nation of Israel to fulfill His greatest promise made to them (the Seed promise)? In the next lesson, we will learn about the Messiah God sent through Israel to save the world from sin!

Lesson 3

The Messiah

As we continue exploring the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan, we must recognize the significance of the Messiah (the Promised One, the Christ). Remember that sin separates people from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Since God is a holy and righteous God, He demands life as a payment for sin (Hebrews 9:22). However, the animal sacrifices required under the Law of Moses were not sufficient (Hebrews 10:4). So, God sent His only Son as the sacrificial Lamb to provide the opportunity of salvation from sin for everyone (John 1:29; 3:16)!

1) The Messiah in Old Testament prophecy. There are over 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. We have already considered Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:10 that are all fulfilled in Jesus. Consider some additional prophecies as a sample. Isaiah 7:13-14 prophesies the Messiah would be born of a virgin and that His name would be "Immanuel." Micah 5:2 prophesies the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and rule over Israel. Isaiah 9:6-7 prophesies the Messiah would come through David's lineage and reign over an everlasting kingdom, who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. Isaiah 53 prophesies

4) What the gospel requires. The gospel is not a message that accomplishes these things regardless of what people choose. Instead, it requires some things from us. For one, its message must be meekly received in that a person empties oneself to focus on whatever is required (James 1:21; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15). Second, the gospel must be believed so one is fully convinced Jesus Christ is the Son of God and offers salvation (Romans 10:17; John 8:24). Third, the gospel must be obeyed (James 2:24; Luke 6:46; Hebrews 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). The gospel requires people to repent of sin (Acts 2:37-38; 17:30-31), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10; Matthew 10:32-33), be immersed in water (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16), and then live faithfully for Jesus (Revelation 2:10; Romans 12:1-2).

The gospel of Jesus Christ centers around the salvation that has been made available through Jesus and the grace of God offered to all who obey the gospel through faith (Romans 1:1-6; 16:25-27). But, as we watch this plan unfold and the various components of it, what about the kingdom God has promised? We will focus on the nature of this kingdom and who are part of the kingdom in the next lesson.

Lesson 5

The Kingdom

As we continue exploring the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan, we want to overview the kingdom Jesus has established and calls all people to be part of. While there is a sense in which God has always reigned over His kingdom (Psalm 103:19; Exodus 19:6), there is another sense in which a kingdom was anticipated in connection with the Messiah (Isaiah 9:6-7). Unfortunately, while many misunderstand this kingdom (i.e. making it out to be a physical kingdom or lifeless institution), it simply refers to the reign/rule of God through Jesus Christ.

1) The kingdom in Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament did not just point people to a coming Messiah or new covenant, but also

previously a mystery people did not understand prior to its revelation, it has now been made known in the pages of the New Testament (Ephesians 3:3-6). This is described as a message of reconciliation, as it reveals the opportunity for reconciliation between God and all sinners (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Then, this message contains a far better law than what was available under the old covenant (which only contained shadows of what would be available through the gospel of Christ). In fact, the gospel contains the perfect law that provides freedom from sin (James 1:25; Hebrews 8:12; John 8:31-32)! Yet, while there are many messages about salvation that exist in the world today (as many different churches teach many different messages), God has only delivered one gospel and warned against accepting any other gospel (Galatians 1:6-9; Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:15-18; 2 John 1:9-11)! The Bible simply refers to “the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). This refers to the religious beliefs, teachings, and practices God approves and has fully revealed through the pages of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:5; Jude 1:3). This message of truth provides the pattern for every aspect of how we are to live to please God today (2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17). Anything different from this pattern makes us guilty of sin (1 John 3:4; 2 John 1:9-11; Revelation 22:18-19)!

3) What the gospel does. The gospel is not just an encouraging message about God’s love for people. Rather, it is powerfully designed to accomplish specific things. For example, the gospel calls sinners to God (John 6:44-46), teaching us who He is, what He has done for us, and why we should devote our lives to Him so we will experience the salvation, sanctification, faith, and glory He desires (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Second, the gospel converts/turns sinners to God (Acts 18:8) so we will live a life that is devoted to Him (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Third, the gospel saves sinners from spiritual death (Romans 1:16) so we will be forgiven of our sins and have eternal salvation in Heaven (James 1:21). Fourth, the gospel teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains people to live for Jesus (2 Timothy 3:16-17) so we can live fully pleasing to God (2 Peter 1:3).

what the Messiah would endure to provide victory over Satan and establish His everlasting kingdom. Namely, He would willingly offer Himself as a sacrifice for sins – so that we could be healed through Him! While this is just a sample of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, every one of them is fulfilled in Jesus (who proved Himself to be the Messiah; John 1:41-42; 4:25-26)!

2) The Messiah comes to earth. Many years passed from the time God first promised to destroy the works of Satan (Genesis 3:15) to the birth of Jesus. Yet, God never forgot His plan or His promises and waited for the right time to bring Jesus into the world (Galatians 4:4-5; Matthew 1:20-21). He was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:7; Micah 5:2) and came through the prophesied lineage (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). There was something special about Jesus, besides the fact He fulfilled prophecies. Particularly, Jesus was God living on this earth (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-3; Colossians 2:9), both the Son of Man (emphasizing His humanity, John 5:27) and the Son of God (emphasizing His Deity, John 1:49). He willingly left Heaven to come to earth and fulfill God’s plan – even to suffer and die (Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Then, just prior to Jesus’s birth, John was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1). This one was chosen by God to be sent before Jesus and prepare people for Jesus’s ministry (Matthew 3:3). John later declared Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:16-17).

3) The Messiah’s life. Jesus was the Master Teacher throughout His earthly ministry, focusing on saving the lost and teaching about His kingdom (Luke 19:10; Matthew 13:34-35). As He taught, He established the foundation for His new law, as the old law was being fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18). Another key to Jesus’s ministry was the many miracles He did (walking on water, cleansing lepers, healing the paralyzed, raising the dead, etc.). These supernatural events demonstrated that Jesus really was the Messiah and Son of God (John 20:30-31; Matthew 8:14-17). Then, while Jesus did possess the nature of being God, He was also fully human and experienced temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). Yet, He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15) and so was able to provide Himself as the perfect sacrifice to take away sin! Furthermore, Jesus did many other things during His life in addition to

the things recorded about His life in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (John 21:25). The things that have been written, however, were written to lead us to fully believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Son of God (John 20:30-31)!

4) The Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus knew He was going to die and how He would die (Matthew 16:21-23); yet He came anyways and went through it all! Even though He did not want to suffer, He was devoted to accomplishing His Father's will (Luke 22:42-44). So, He was betrayed, denied, and abandoned by His apostles and then arrested. After His arrest, He was unfairly tried by the Jewish Sanhedrin and Governor Pilate. He endured false accusations, was sentenced to death by crucifixion, and was severely flogged (Matthew 27:27-31). After all this, Jesus was crucified by being fastened to the cross with nails through His hands and feet (Matthew 27:32-56). In His last breaths, He declared that He had finished the plan God had sent Him to accomplish (John 19:30)! After He died, His body was taken off the cross and put into the tomb. Yet, while some may have thought Jesus had been defeated, remember God's promise to Satan in Genesis 3:15. On the first day of the week (the third day), Jesus rose from the dead just as He said He would (Matthew 28:1-10)! Then, He even appeared to many to prove His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). After 40 days on earth speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), He ascended to Heaven, with a promise to come again (Acts 1:9-11).

Through what Jesus accomplished, God has made salvation available to every person (Romans 5:6-11). Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies and accomplished the mission God had given Him. But, now that Jesus has made the perfect sacrifice at the right time, how would people come to believe in and obey Him for the salvation He offers and be part of His kingdom? We will watch God answer these questions over the next two lessons (in Acts through Revelation).

Lesson 4

The Gospel

As we continue exploring the story of the Bible and God's eternal plan, we want to overview the gospel's message God would use to tell people about their opportunity for salvation and what God requires from people to have that salvation. After Jesus's resurrection and prior to His ascension to Heaven, He gave some final instructions to His disciples about preaching the gospel throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Today, salvation hinges on learning and obeying this gospel message (Romans 1:16).

1) The gospel in Old Testament prophecy. Though not as prevalent as the Messiah, the gospel is also foretold in various ways throughout the Old Testament. Consider a few examples that point to what we can now recognize as the gospel. Genesis 12:3 prophesies about the way in which God would bless all people of the earth through Abraham's Descendant (which was accomplished through Jesus and referred to as preaching the gospel in Galatians 3:7-9). Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophesies about a new covenant that would be established and would replace the old covenant (Law of Moses) that was only temporary (Hebrews 8:7-13; Galatians 3:19-25). Joel 2:28-32 prophesies about a time of judgment for the enemies of God and a time of deliverance for those who submit to God's rule and call on Him (which was fulfilled when the gospel was preached and obeyed in Acts 2:16-41). While other passages could be considered, recognize that every prophecy made concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ was fulfilled. The old law has served its purpose, been fulfilled, been taken out of the way, and been replaced with the new covenant (which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, Colossians 2:14)!

2) The gospel is God's good news. The Greek word translated "gospel" means "good news." Certainly, there is no better news anyone can receive than the news about the salvation from sin that has been made available to all people through Jesus Christ! Although this was