



## The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents and Guardians of St. John Neumann's Teens,

As you move through life and attempt to learn and grow as a parent, there are lots of resources that can help you along the way. There are books, articles, online classes, and groups you can join. We want to help point you to the resources and help you need to be the parent God has called you to be.

Catholic Christian parenting books can offer guidance on navigating various challenges, fostering a nurturing environment, and instilling Biblical principles in your family. Take some time to find a book that speaks to the specifics of what's going on in your family and read it. Short articles can encourage you and give you regular insight as you seek to lead your teens, so create a rhythm of finding articles or blog posts to read regularly. Online platforms and courses tailored for Catholic Christian parents provide a convenient way to deepen your understanding of parenting through a spiritual lens. Engaging with these resources can equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to navigate the complexities of raising teens in today's world while staying true to our Catholic Christian beliefs. We want to help you have the resources you need, hence, our **Online Parent Ministry**.

I would encourage you to actively seek out resources that align with our Catholic Christian values, remembering that growing as parents not only is a personal benefit to you, but it's also a gift you can give to your children. When you take advantage of all the tools at your disposal and become better parents, it has a tremendous impact on your family, and the faith and lessons you pass on could make a difference for generations. Embrace the opportunity to continually learn, grow, and deepen your faith and parenting skills as you navigate the role God has given you to lead your kids!

This week's **Online Parent Ministry Resource** is all about the Bible, its structure, history, and the story of our Salvation history. It can be read and shared with your teens – and you should read it, too! The Bible is one of the biggest gifts to our faith – we all should embrace it! I hope you this week's resource find it helpful!

Peace,

*James Gregory Curran*



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# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

## BIBLE GUIDE

### WHAT IS IT?

This "E-book" consists of four sections to give you a complete understanding of the Bible. Written with the teens of St. John Neumann in mind, they explain God's love story with a simple, clear, and brief explanation. The four sections are:

<b>What is the Good News?</b> .....	pg. 3
<b>What is the Bible?</b> .....	pg. 7
<b>What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?</b> .....	pg. 8
<b>Who is God's Family?</b> .....	pg. 12
<b>Why do we have FOUR Gospels?</b> .....	pg. 17

### HOW DO I USE IT?

My goal with St. John Neumann's Online Parent Ministry is to equip and encourage parents. Teens only benefit if their parents are faithful in attending Mass, be people of prayer, and devoted readers of Scripture. Your teens are watching you! I hope this E-book will encourage you and your teens to dust off your Bibles and believe the words in it.

- 1) **What is the Good News?** is God's Love Story in narrative form that starts at creation and ends with the hope of all things being made new.  
**Est. Reading Time: 10 Minutes**
- 2) **What is the Bible?** is a one-page, big picture description of the Bible itself, including its age, author, and volume. Think of this section as a blurb on the back of a book.  
**Est. Reading Time: 2 Minutes**
- 3) **What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?** is a four-page explanation of God's Love Story in four parts: Creation, Rebellion, Redemption, and the Coming Kingdom. Think of this section like the summary on the jacket of a hardcover book.  
**Est. Reading Time: 7 Minutes**
- 4) **Who is God's Family?** is a five-page explanation that covers the history of Israel to the early Church. Think of this section like an outline of the major characters in a movie. Plus, it includes a timeline!  
**Est. Reading Time: 10 Minutes**
- 5) **Why do we have FOUR Gospels?** is a two-page outline of the differences between the four books that focus on the life of Jesus. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.  
**Est. Reading Time: 5 Minutes**

# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



## WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

**A Story that starts at creation and ends with the hope of all things being made new.**

The Gospel is the incredible news that we aren't alone. There really is a God, and He really is on our side! He loves us and wants us to know Him. Against all obstacles, He's made a way for us to be part of His family!

At the beginning of the Story (which the Bible tells!), God already existed. He has existed forever! It's hard to wrap your mind around it! He's the one who created the Earth and everything in it—including us.

When He first made the world, He made the first man and woman (Adam and Eve). You can read all about it in **Genesis 1 and 2**. They enjoyed a close connection with each other and with God, who they loved and worshiped. Their lives were full of beauty and joy and togetherness (just like ours were meant to be!) God only gave them one "no." They weren't supposed to eat the fruit of a certain tree in the garden. The rule was there to protect them. They were okay with that - everything was so perfect! They loved the garden, each other, and the Lord.

But there was an enemy who came into the garden where Adam and Eve lived. He was against everything good, right, and beautiful in the world. Above all, he was an enemy of God Himself. The enemy wanted to steal, kill, and destroy every good thing that God had made—especially God's people. So, he came up to Eve one day and began to ask her sneaky questions.

He slowly placed thoughts of doubt in her mind. Was God really so good to her after all? Why had He given them that command about the tree? It would be so good for them to have the fruit—would the consequences really be so severe (death) if they disobeyed Him? Was the tree really that dangerous?

In the end, Eve allowed herself to be deceived. She also gave some of the fruit to Adam, and he willingly ate it, too. The effects were immediate and terrible! They had sinned (disobeyed, committed treason against God, who is the High King over all). They had let sin, darkness, doubt, and death into the world that God had given them.

God made a habit of coming to walk with them in the cool of the day. He came again, saying, "Where are you?" He knew what had happened. His beloved friends had betrayed Him. They believed His enemy instead of Him, even though He loved them with His whole heart.

In the end, the couple was cast out of their garden—their home—for punishment, but also their protection. By believing the enemy instead of God, Adam and Eve created consequences for the whole entire world. Death came to Adam and Eve and to all those who were born after them. Things would never be the same for the rest of history.



## WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

When God first made the world, there was no death. But now, because they had let it in, they would experience violence, wars, sickness, disease, famine, and destruction. People would betray each other just as they had betrayed God. They would learn to be cruel and to lie, and to hurt others' hearts. They would behave more like that awful enemy than the God that made them. Even the Earth began to fall apart as a result of their sin. It worked against them and even against itself. It groaned under the weight of the Fall (the coming of sin and its awful consequences).

Worst of all, Adam and Eve and all their children were separated from the presence of God because of their sin. Not only would they die physically at the end of their lives, but they would be dead spiritually, too. They were separated from God. Anyone who's not connected to God is spiritually dead. It's like when a flower is cut off; it can't live long. God is the source of all life. If we don't have His presence, we don't have life.

How do we know that God exists, you ask? Well, He has to give you faith to believe that He does. Ask yourself where all the amazing things in the world come from! Why is there color? Why does food taste so delicious? Why is your favorite smell so nice? Why are there things that make you laugh like crazy and other things that make you feel so much love?

Why are there sunsets? Why is there music? Why are there butterflies or wolves? One of the ways that God shows Himself is through all that He's made.

So, we have a problem. There really is a God. He really does know our hearts—every inch of them. But we have sinned against Him terribly—just like Adam and Eve did. They passed on the darkness of their hearts to us, and we make choices to obey the selfish darkness.

Do you ever lose control and do things you know aren't right? Do you ever find ugly thoughts in your mind toward someone else? Have you ever been mean because it felt good? God knows all of this. The sins that we commit are not just against other people—they're against Him. There are consequences for this because God is good, and He wants His Creation to be full of goodness, too.

One day, when King Jesus returns to reign, we will each be called to testify before His throne. We will all give an account of our lives. Do you think there's anyone who will be found innocent when God judges their thoughts, hearts, actions, and even our imaginations? Every single one of us will be found guilty of having cooperated with sin - in what we did to His people, ourselves, His world, and His good name. The punishment for guilt will be a fair one - death.

I know that sounds harsh, but let me ask you a question: do you like it when bad people get away with hurting others or taking someone else's things? We know in our hearts that someone has to pay when there's wrong done. That's because the justice of God has made an imprint on us. Deep down, we all know that there's a price to pay for sin.

No one can sin and be allowed to live in Heaven where God is—it wouldn't be a safe and beautiful and perfect place! It wouldn't be full of holiness and joy anymore.





If no one can go to Heaven on their own because of their sinfulness, where do they go? The only other alternative is a place outside of Heaven, where there is darkness (usually called Hell). Why is there darkness? Because God isn't there (He's the Light). It's a place reserved for that first enemy of God and all the spirits who helped him do his ugly work. When humans sinned, we joined the enemy's side. So, now we share in his punishment.

### **We have a problem, don't ya think?! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?**

God knew we would need rescuing. He couldn't give up His beloved people with no hope at all! He made a plan. He set it in motion back in the garden (on that day when Adam and Eve were forced to leave because of their sin). Already He was making promises about what He would do. At the right time, God Himself would come as a human. He would live a perfect life and die in our place, taking the full punishment for our sins. No one who believed in Him would ever have to die a spiritual death in the outer darkness (Hell) far away from His love and Light!

That plan is exactly what God put in motion. Jesus (God Himself) came as a human baby about 2,000 years ago. He was born in the land of Israel. He lived a perfectly sinless life and showed us what it looks like when someone loves and worships God with all His heart. He was God Himself (also called the Son of God—which is also one of the titles for a King)! He healed people and did incredible miracles. He showed who He was by various signs. He taught us many things about God and His way of life (you can read the stories in the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.) Many people loved Him and believed His words—that He had come to save them.

Sadly, some of the people you would have expected to love Him most didn't at all. They loved the darkness in their hearts instead of His goodness and light. Many of them believed that same awful enemy instead of God. They turned away from His love. The people in charge grew jealous of Jesus. Eventually, they formed a plot and had him killed for crimes He never committed. They executed Jesus by nailing Him to a cross. In those days, it was a death reserved for slaves and rebels. Jesus was neither one. He was God Himself.

Why did He allow this?! Because He was using it as part of His plan. This was how He would make the sacrifice! He would die for the very people who were having Him killed. Many of those who had followed and believed Him were devastated. Their dearest friend, their teacher, their leader, their hope, the Son of God (the true King, God Himself) was gone. They had thought that He was the fulfillment of all God's promises. All hope was lost.

But then, something SHOCKING happened! On the third day after His death, Jesus rose from the grave! Angels came to give the good news! He was alive - walking and talking and eating and spending time with people. More than 500 people saw Him! He had conquered death! The grave couldn't hold Him!

But that's not the end of the story! He's willing to share Himself, His life, with us, too! He died in our place so that we don't have to take our punishment when we stand before God in judgment one day. Jesus already took it for us. He'll credit His goodness to our account! Instead of an awful verdict, we'll get to thank Him and rejoice with Him in all the good that He did through our lives!

When a person believes that Jesus has died *for them*, He makes them new - they've been born spiritually! When they die





physically, they don't die spiritually! They will *immediately* be in God's presence! They'll never experience a moment without Him - forever! Their souls are with Him. Those who don't believe Jesus don't have that confidence. What a sad thing...

Did you know that the promises don't stop there? Jesus said that He's coming back to the Earth one day to reign as King! (He came as a humble servant the first time; the second time, He's coming as the High King!) When He comes back, He's going to *make all things new!!!* The heavens, the Earth, even our bodies. We'll live again (physically) as He lived again after His death! We'll be raised to new life like He was! We'll walk and talk and eat and play and do wonderful work as He did! All His children will be together!

All the joy isn't reserved for the next life! From the moment you begin to belong to Jesus, He starts making you new right then and there. He gives you a life of purpose, and you can serve Him every day. He gives you missions to carry out—people to love, things to care for, and friends to tell about Him. He begins to work through you to help the world grow more into what He meant it to be! He changes your heart to make it like His. Others begin to see Him in you. Most of all, you grow to know Him yourself. He's the source of all love and joy! He's your constant guide, friend, help, and Lord. He'll never leave you!

Are you willing to trust King Jesus with your whole heart, mind, and life? Would you like to ask Him to save you from your sin and the consequence of it - spiritual death? You can trust that He will make you His and carry you into His Kingdom. He'll forgive you completely and give you new life. He's the only one who can do that!

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# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

**The Bible is a 73-volume library of books that tells the story of God with His people. It invites us to join in the story, too!**

It shows us who God is, what He's like, and how to relate to Him. It shows us where the world came from, what went wrong (how evil and suffering got here), what God did to save the world, and where it's all going.

The Bible shows us ourselves - both the good and the bad. It tells us how we can be part of God's family, be forgiven by Him, and live our whole lives connected to Him. It shows us how to live! *(P.S. You might also hear people call the Bible "Scripture" or "the Word of God.")*

The Bible was given to us by God through a number of different writers at different times, and it's been faithfully passed on from one generation to the next!

Part of why we sometimes find it hard to understand the Bible is because it's so ancient! Its oldest parts are probably about **3,500** years old! *Whoa!* (We don't know the exact year because back then people didn't put dates on their books in quite the same way we do now.)

Even the Bible's youngest parts are almost 2,000 years old! *A lot has changed since then!*

We speak different languages than the original writers did. Our modern culture often works differently when it comes to government, jobs, sickness and health, money, and how men and women relate to society.

Our hearts and experiences have stayed the same, but a lot has also changed.

Every truth of the Bible still applies today—just as much as it did to the first readers! But sometimes we have to put in a little effort (and ask for God's help) to enable us to understand what it all means.

Knowing a bit of history helps. But one of the very biggest things we can do to help ourselves understand the Bible is to keep its big story in mind every single time we read!



# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

## WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

CREATION  
REBELLION (*GOING AGAINST GOD*)  
REDEMPTION (*RESCUE BY GOD*)  
COMING KINGDOM

### CREATION

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, we read how God started His family on Earth. He has so much love to give! He created the entire universe with great joy - every animal and every tree, the clouds, the stars, and the first people (Adam and Eve). It was all so beautiful and good!

Adam and Eve were set as God's representatives (the people made in His image) to care for the earth and join Him in developing it to its perfect fullness. They would partner with God to build a family to fill the Earth!

God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden He'd made for them. It was all so perfect!

### REBELLION

In **Genesis 3**, we read a really sad story. An *evil being* came to Adam and Eve and lied to them about God (especially to Eve). They were deceived (convinced of something untrue). They believed what this *evil thing* said more than they believed God. So, they broke His only commandment for them.

They chose to mistrust the One who loved and made them—the One from whom their whole lives flowed. Their action made a lot of terrible things begin to happen in

the world—death, sickness, frustration, violence, pain. And it didn't just happen to them. It happened to their children and their children's children that came after them. Even the earth itself and the animals suffered.

Sin (rebellion against God) separated Adam and Eve from the source of their life and their joy—God Himself. What God had made was now broken in pieces.

Evil had won for the moment...but because God is good, He couldn't allow evil to win in the end. You see, evil destroys things, but God gives Life.

Now the big problem was that God's beloved Adam and Eve had sin living in them! So, they had to experience the consequences of sin. It's scary to think about it, but did you know that we all have the same problem that Adam and Eve had? Every person since Adam and Eve (from moms, dads, grandmothers, sisters, Pastors, teachers, best friends to yourself) has sin in them just like Adam and Eve did. This sin leads us to leave God and go our own way. All of us are born with both sin and good living inside of us. Good (because of God's image) and sin (because of evil).

The sin in us separates us from God, and that causes a lot of pain and problems. We were supposed to be connected to God like





## WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

a branch is to a tree. He's our hope, our comfort, our protector, and our whole life! When we aren't connected to God, we begin to wither - to shrivel up and do and think worse and worse things. Sin does terrible things to us here on earth, but the Bible tells us that when we die, unless we've let God reconnect us to Him through Jesus, sin will complete its awful work then.

We'll be permanently separated from Him. That's the saddest and scariest thing that could happen! If Jesus hasn't forgiven us, we will have to take the punishment for all the things we did against God in this life. The Bible says that each of us will stand before Him one day as He looks over our lives. He will be our Judge. Not one person will be declared perfectly *innocent* (because we've all sinned—we've thought, said, and done evil things).

God is going to remove every trace of evil from His world, even when it's in us. The Bible says that in the book of Romans, "the wages (payment) of sin is death." Spiritual death is being separated from God.

*But that's not the end of the story!!!*

### REDEMPTION (RESCUE)

God didn't want any of us to be lost! He didn't want judgment to be the final word for anyone! So, God set about doing everything it took to get us back!

Most of the rest of the Bible tells the story of how He fought to bring us back to Himself! Right after Adam and Eve rebelled against Him and broke His commandment, God made a promise that He would one day crush evil itself (and crush the one that deceived Adam and Eve). He would punish evil in such a way that it allowed His people to go free! He would forgive and clean their record,

swapping His goodness for their wrongness. He would make a way for restoration (putting things back right).

There were many stages in God's plan to bring us back! After the promise to Adam and Eve, generations went by. (You can read about that in Genesis 1-11. Big things happened!)

God knows the perfect timing for everything, and eventually, the next phase was ready to begin! From the very beginning, God had planned to build a big family. It would fill the whole world—there would be people from every tribe, race, and country! Part of God's strategy for bringing that into being was to focus the bright light of His presence in one spot for a while. It would be like a flashlight shining the way back Home to Him! God would dwell brilliantly with one people, and by looking at them, everyone could see how good He was and how good it was to belong to Him.

### Here's how He did it!

In about 2100 B.C., God chose Abraham to be the start of a special family who would carry God's Light for all to see. He promised Abraham (who was very old!) that he was going to have a son! But that wasn't all! God said that this son would become a great nation. His descendants would be so many that they would be like the grains of sand on the beach or the stars in the sky! He promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (that's pointing to the purpose of Abraham's family and even more than that—to Jesus!). Abraham believed what God said! And God did it! The nation that God made through Abraham is called Israel. Israel became God's special "covenant people."

**What's a covenant?** There were many kinds of covenants when the books of Genesis



## WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

through Deuteronomy were written (which is where you can read about this). *The one we're thinking of here is a sort of special relationship that's like a contract between someone very great and someone who depends on them.*

The covenant tells what the great person will do, and how the person receiving the promise should live because of it. It spells out the consequences if either breaks their promise.

Why did God make Israel His special covenant family?

The goal was for everyone (every nation around) to see what it's like to be loved by God and want to come to Him as fast as they could! Israel was going to be God's light to all the nations! It was a very special privilege. He gave them His words (recorded in the Old Testament). He gave them His presence (which was focused at His Temple), His provision (meeting all their needs), and taught them about His way of living. He even gave them discipline when they needed it.

Over centuries and centuries, God continued to love them, even though they often didn't keep their part of the covenant. (The Old Testament tells us those stories.) Sometimes, God revealed future parts of His big plan. For example, many years later, He gave them a good king named David. God used that King to point toward King Jesus. God gave them prophets (truth-tellers with messages from Him) to remember His ways and even spot Jesus when He came. God promised Israel that it would really happen: people from every tribe, race, language, and nation would fill His family, and they would all be with Him forever.

He promised that one day, He would send a special Rescuer who would heal people, free them, and forgive their sin. God would come to be with them (in the

form of the Holy Spirit)! He would give them eternal (forever) life and all God's love. Things would change forever!

That all happened when Jesus came to earth. He lived in perfect connection with God, was crucified (killed) to take the punishment for our sin, and then God raised Him from the dead! In dying, He defeated death itself! He fulfilled many of the promises God made in the Old Testament! Jesus was the Plan all along!

When He died, He made a whole new covenant (the relationship contract between someone great and someone who depends on them) with us!

The way we respond to it is by believing Him! We trust what He's done for us! In this new covenant, God forgives of all our sin (our evil)—past, present, and future—and He makes us new! When God comes to live in us, He's always with us every minute of every day! God's love is so fierce that not even death can separate us from His love! Wow! That's really good news!

Now, God invites us to join His family of Light-carriers (He's expanded Israel to include everyone who will come!). We work to live as God does—with love! We introduce others to Jesus because He's the very best thing. He's everything! With our whole lives, we show and tell who He is. That's a high calling! We're joining God as He makes His family bigger and bigger!

You can read more of the story and some of its important characters in WHO IS GOD'S FAMILY?!?





### COMING KINGDOM (CELEBRATION!)

All of that is amazing, but the best is actually yet to come! There's one more really big chapter that shows us the grand finale of God's plan to restore the world.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He spent 40 days teaching His disciples (close learners), and then He went back to Heaven. Jesus' resurrection (rising from the dead) began His reign as the true King of the whole earth! He showed us His way of conquering (by service and love!).

One day, Jesus will return to Earth to establish His kingdom fully—in person! The Bible tells us that God's presence will be so bright we won't even need a sun or moon! The entire earth will be put back to right - even better than right, actually! All that evil has done will be torn away and burned. All the sickness, death, sorrow, and frustration brought about by sin will be erased. The world will be made new! And God's people will be new, too! Just like Jesus was raised from the dead, He's promised to raise us, also! That's right! We'll spend forever with Him! We'll eat, and drink, and play, and enjoy God, the world, and each other. We might even work, but it will be good and satisfying work!

God's story with humanity began in a garden (Eden) when He created Adam and Eve. Jesus prayed hard in a garden (Gethsemane) before He paid the ultimate price to save us. And in the new heavens and earth, there will be a garden, too!

Take some time to read **Revelation 21 and 22**! It's a beautiful vision of all things, finally being as God intended! It will be even better than ever! Anyone who wants to be there with King Jesus can be! All it takes is trusting that He makes you right with God once and for all.

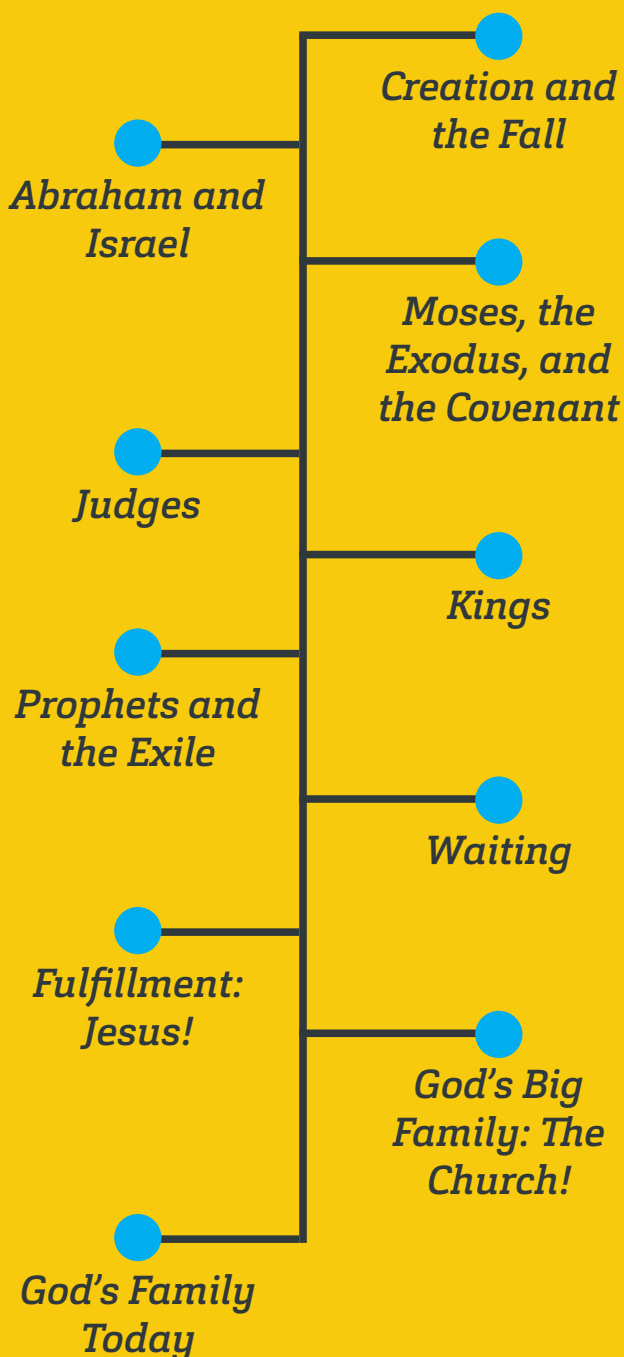


# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



## WHO IS GOD'S FAMILY?

### A HISTORY: ISRAEL AND THE EARLY CHURCH



### CREATION AND THE FALL (THE REBELLION AGAINST GOD)

When we read the Old Testament, we learn the story of God with His people leading up to Jesus. In **Genesis 1 and 2**, we hear how God made humanity (people) in His image to care for, rule, and fill the earth. They would be God's family and His representatives in the world—living out His ways and bringing the earth to its highest purpose.

But one short chapter later, we hear the sad story of how they were deceived (they chose to believe something untrue) and purposely broke God's only commandment. This disobedience brought a lot of sorrow into the world. (You can read more about the BIG story of the Bible in What is the BIG STORY of the Bible? It will give you background to help you understand every book of the Bible better!)

Adam and Eve's sin (against God) separated them and their descendants from God. But God had a plan to get humanity back—to rescue them. He wasn't going to leave us without any hope of being His forever! Part of God's plan, including making a family for Himself on earth that would show His light to people everywhere. They would be like priests to the rest of the world.

What's a priest? It's someone who serves people by helping them learn about and connect to God. This family would be huge—a whole nation (or people group)! There would be so many of them that they would be like the stars in the sky!





### ABRAHAM AND ISREAL

God started this family with one man - Abraham. God promised Abraham (who had no children and was quite old already) that he would have a son and from that son would come a whole nation! God also promised that one day He would lead His family to a special place all their own. The land would be amazingly fruitful! They would have all they needed. But it was also a place with a special purpose.

Important roads ran through this land, and people from other nations had to pass through it to travel almost anywhere. As they came through this special land, God hoped that they would see His goodness and how His family lived and want to join it.

God would focus His presence right there among His people (called Israel). It was going to be a bright light to every other nation so that they could see God. But God's plan also went far into the future! He told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed because of him. Israel was to be a part of that blessing. But it was also a reference to Jesus—the Messiah. The Messiah is a title for God's rescuer. **You can read about this in Genesis 12, 15, and 17.**

This news was amazing! God also told Abraham about something hard that was going to happen to Israel first. Through some specific events, they would become slaves in the land of Egypt. **You can read about all of that in the book of Genesis (especially starting in chapter 11) and in the book of Exodus.** God showed Abraham a vision of what He had planned for Israel and the hard parts that would happen. There would be about 400 hard and sad years (**Genesis 15**).

### MOSES, THE EXODUS, AND THE COVENANT

All of this came about just as God said it would. Abraham's descendants became a huge nation (nation really means a group of people in this case), but they were enslaved in Egypt under an unkind ruler - Pharaoh. Their lives were very difficult. But God heard their cries, and He kept His promises!

God sent someone to deliver them! His name was Moses. He was a prophet (someone who gives God's messages to the people). God freed Israel from Egypt and showed His mighty power! This is one of the biggest moments in the whole Old Testament (It's called "The Exodus")! The people were supposed to remember it forever with a special holiday! **You can read about this in Exodus (especially chapters 1-18) and Deuteronomy.**

God brought the people into the wilderness and made a covenant with them. A covenant is like a special relationship contract. In this case, it's a contract between someone very great and someone who depends on them. It was such a special privilege to be in a covenant with God!

The Bible calls this covenant "the Law" or the "Old Covenant." You may have heard of the Ten Commandments—that's one part of it! You'll hear about "the Law" or "the Old Covenant" again and again in the New Testament!

The covenant told the people how God would care for them and how God wanted them to live in response. It showed them what would happen if they lived in God's ways and what the consequences would be if they didn't. It gave them a temporary way to be forgiven for their sins (through the sacrifices which point forward to Jesus!).







“The Law” is God’s set of family rules! It also showed Israel how to fulfill its mission of showing God’s light to all the nations!

**You can read about this in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.**

God began to lead Israel toward the special land He’d promised to give them, but many felt scared and didn’t believe that He would do what He’d promised. So, they rebelled (went against Him), which led to some awful things! But God kept His word and brought the next generation of Israel’s people into the land He’d promised. It was called Canaan. **You can read about this in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.**

### THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

Years went by, and Israel pretty much forgot about God. They began to ignore His commandments. They broke His covenant over and over and over. God was very patient with them, and He continued to remind them.

Because He’s a good Father and King, He eventually sent painful consequences to help turn them back to Him. Israel was missing her God, her peace, and her whole purpose. **You can read about this in the book of Judges.**

### THE TIME OF THE KINGS

Eventually, a new chapter in the story came! About a thousand years before Jesus came, God gave Israel a King. Israel’s greatest King (King David) was a man after God’s own heart, and He used him to show them a little bit of what the true King from Heaven would be like one day.

God also promised that one of David’s descendants would always be on the throne of Israel. (Jesus was in the line of David! His mother, Mary, was one of David’s

descendants!) **You can read about this in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and parts of 1 Chronicles.**

### THE TIME OF THE PROPHETS AND THE EXILE

Many difficult things happened in the centuries that followed as God’s family chose sin instead of Him. The nation was torn in two after King David’s reign. The people again forgot God and ignored His ways.

So, God sent prophets (who spoke for Him) over many years to warn the people. He begged them to listen to Him and turn from their wickedness. But they wouldn’t.

So, God sent other nations to bring judgment on them. They took them away from their homeland into exile for about 70 years. It was so sad!

Israel should have been a light to the nations, but instead, God had to use those nations to discipline them and bring them back to Him! The temple of God was even destroyed! **You can read about these things in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi.**

God also spoke to the prophets with words of comfort. He told them that the punishment wouldn’t last forever.

God would bring Israel back to its land and restore it. He would even give them soft hearts—they would obey Him from the inside out! A descendant of David would one day be King again in Israel! **You can read about these things in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi.**





### THE TIME OF WAITING

God kept His word!

Even before Jesus came, many of Israel's people had been allowed to return home! The temple had been rebuilt. But the nation was still controlled by another government (Later, during the time of Jesus, it was the Romans.).

So, Israel waited for the time when God would send the Deliverer (His Messiah) to restore their freedom. There are about 400 years of waiting between the Old and New Testaments. It's actually called the "Intertestamental period." We don't have any record of God speaking during that time. It's almost like a huge deep breath of silence.

### THE TIME OF FULFILLMENT: JESUS!

When the moment came for God to send His rescuer, He had much bigger freedom in mind than just releasing them from the Romans! He wanted to free people from the grip of evil itself—from sin and its awful consequence of death! **(You can read more about that in *What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?*)**

God had promised (through the prophets) that a new chapter in the history of His family was going to come! He would be with His people in a new way! He would speak to them directly—not through prophets anymore. He would make their hearts clean from the inside out! They would love God and each other from the heart, and they would keep God's commands! Each person would fulfill what God had originally designed for Israel to be—a light to the nations! They would be completely forgiven because of Jesus' sacrifice.

So, when Jesus came, He wasn't starting a new religion! He was bringing God's plan and the Jewish faith to fullness! His teachings built on the instructions of the Old Covenant.

Remember "the Law" (the Old Testament code of how to live rightly in response to God's love)? Jesus said that He didn't come to abolish (get rid of) even a single word of it. He came to fulfill it - to bring it to its' highest purpose!

Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to Eve, Abraham, David, and the Prophets! All the threads of the story were coming together! He was the Messiah (the rescuer), the perfect sacrifice, the true King, and God Himself! Wow! **You can read more about this in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.**

### THE TIME OF GOD'S BIG FAMILY: THE CHURCH

But God didn't stop there! Pretty soon after Jesus gave up His life, rose from the dead, and went into Heaven, the Holy Spirit began to draw more and more people of different backgrounds to believe in Him! They all became a part of God's family. Many of them weren't Jewish!

The make-up of God's family grew more and more diverse. People began to come from every race and tribe! God was expanding Israel's family to include anyone who believes in Jesus! **You can read about this in the book of Acts (It's an incredible story!).**

All of this was so exciting and joyful! But there was also conflict. Not all of the Jewish people had believed that Jesus was really the Messiah (God's rescuer). Some Jewish leaders fought against Him (they had even been a part of having Him killed). And after He died, they kept fighting against His followers, too. **You can read about this in Acts (God even used the danger to bring about good things!).**



## WHO IS GOD'S FAMILY?

Even among those who believed in Jesus, there was a bit of confusion. Some people in Israel didn't realize that God's family really did include Gentiles (those who weren't in the family line of Abraham)! They didn't see yet that being in God's family wasn't about who your parents were, but whether you believed in Jesus, the Messiah! They were just beginning to realize that God's plan all along had been to welcome people of every kind into His household! It was truly great news! **You can read about this in Acts and Romans.**

One last problem you'll hear about (in Paul's letters) is that some people were trying to say that Gentile (non-Jewish) believers still had to keep the Old Covenant laws (its rules, holidays, etc.) if they wanted to please God. What those people didn't understand was that Jesus had made a whole New Covenant (relationship contract) by dying on the cross!

With His life, Jesus had fulfilled all the terms of the Old Covenant perfectly! It was done! God's instructions were now written on people's hearts! This New Covenant had so much freedom! **You can read about this in Acts, Galatians, Romans, Colossians.**

### GOD'S FAMILY TODAY

In summary, we can say that the history of Israel is Jesus' history too!

He created Israel, He's part of it, and He brought it to its' fulness! It's hard to see all the beauty of who Jesus is unless we see that whole story!

If you're a believer in Jesus, you're now part of the story, too! We've been made a part of the family of faith that God built through Abraham! We're in his family line by faith (**Galatians 3**)!

God has made Israel bigger and bigger, welcoming all who will come! Now we all share in the mission to love God and carry His light to everyone while we wait for His return! That's a beautiful calling! **You can read about this in Romans and Galatians.**



**This short list will help you remember the order of the story:**

***Adam and Eve***

***Abraham***

***Moses***

***David***

***The Prophets***

***Jesus***

***The Church***

# BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

## ? WHY DO WE HAVE FOUR GOSPELS?

**WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?** The word “gospel” means Good News!

The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the four gospels because they tell us that the Rescuer we’ve been waiting for all along has COME!

Each one tells us the *biography of Jesus, God Himself (!)*, who came in human form to give His life and save the world. They show us what He was like, how He treated people He met, His teachings, promises He made, miracles He performed, brave things He did to save us, and how people responded.

**WHY ARE THERE FOUR (AND WHY ARE THEY EACH A BIT DIFFERENT)?**

John tells us that if all the things Jesus did while He was on earth had been written down, there’d be so many books *the world couldn’t hold them! Whoa!*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John hand-picked scenes from Jesus’ life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (who is God). Each one chose stories and teachings of Jesus that help us notice something a little different about who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish.

Ancient biographies (*or really, really old stories that are true about people*) weren’t written in the same way they are now. People could choose to organize events by themes (such as “Jesus the King”) or rearrange the order to shine a light on a particular point they were making. That’s part of the reason why the Four Gospels

are a little different from one another!

The Gospels focus on special parts of Jesus’ life and mission or show us a certain part of His character (His heart).

**Matthew** helps us see how Jesus is the fulfillment (the coming together) and the continuation of the Old Testament story. He opens his biography of Jesus with a history of the generations of family members before Jesus. He wants us to see how every story has led up to His coming. Matthew quotes a lot of the Old Testament to help us make connections.

**Mark** highlights Jesus as the King—especially as the King who suffers to save His much-loved people. It shows Him as fully human and fully God, and SO FULL of power. He focuses a lot on the last week of Jesus’ life, His death as a sacrifice, and His resurrection (rising from the dead).

**Luke** highlights how Jesus accepts and loves people who weren’t always welcome in society—the sick, the poor, and even those who had lived lives that weren’t good by God’s standards (or even man’s). Jesus seeks those people like a shepherd searches for sheep that are lost from a flock. Luke gives us the most details of Jesus’ life (especially His birth and early years!).

**Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “the synoptic gospels.”** Synoptic means “having the same view.” These three books have a lot in common because they contain many of the same stories and use a familiar style of writing.





## WHY DO WE HAVE FOUR GOSPELS?

The Fourth Gospel writer, **John**, chose differently!

He has a unique way of storytelling. He shows us a lot of behind-the-scenes moments, like Jesus praying on the night before He was arrested and the special conversation that Jesus had with Peter after the resurrection (Jesus rising from the dead). John's book is full of word pictures and even poetry. It shines the light brightly on how Jesus is God! There's no one else like Him!

**God knew that it would take four different writers with different backgrounds, personalities, and understandings to give us the fullest view of Jesus!**

