

PERSPECTIVE

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GOD IN THE FLESH

25 | CHRISTMAS
DEVOTIONS

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God in the Flesh: 25 Christmas Devotions

God created the world out of nothing. He gave his people the Law. He dwelt among them in the Holy of Holies. He spoke, he protected, and he loved. Of all his mighty acts, none is more stunning than the truth that God took on flesh. Is there anything more wonderful than the incarnation?

Ultimately, the incarnation is amazing because it makes the cross of Christ possible. Therefore, the birth of Jesus is not serendipitous—a happy accident. It is God's glorious plan, decreed before the foundation of the world and promised throughout the Bible. Every page of Scripture calls out the name of Christ!

People throughout the world will soon be celebrating Christmas. Sadly, for far too many, it's little more than an excuse to put up lights, wrap presents, and have another

feast; but for true believers, Christmas is evidence that God always keeps his promises.

For the next few days, as you and your family prepare for another Christmas, take this walk through the Bible. Meditate on the following passages listed. Read the brief commentary. Then take a few minutes to answer the questions provided. As you do, remember Christ is the promised Priest, the promised Prophet, the promised King, and the promised Son of God. All this means he is the Savior who can take away the sins of the world—including yours.

Meditate each day on who Christ is and you will better understand why Christmas matters.

THE PROMISED PRIEST

Day One—Genesis 12:1-9

Genesis is the book of the Bible where we learn about creation, Adam, the flood, and Noah. Later in the book we learn about Joseph and his time in Egypt, but the heart of this great book is the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2.

Here we find that God didn't let sin have the last word. Far from it! God had a plan to start something new with Abraham. Though this one man, the head of a single family, God promised to make a great nation. Not only

that, through this nation God planned to bless the whole world.

On Pentecost, just a few days after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the nations came to Jerusalem. Jews from all over the world gathered and saw God's Spirit descend on the disciples, allowing them to speak in languages they had never learned. In Acts 3:24, Peter explained how the promise God made to Abraham had finally been fulfilled by Jesus. In Christ, the nations are truly blessed.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What makes God's promise to Abraham so special?
- ✦ How do we know Abraham believed God's promise?
- ✦ In what ways do you see the nations blessed, today, because of Jesus?

Day Two—Genesis 14:17-24

One of the least known but most important episodes in Abraham's life is recorded in Genesis 14. Abraham had settled in the middle of Canaan, in Hebron, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Five kings from the far north formed raiding parties and devastated villages along the eastern edge of Canaan. This band of kings, led

by Chedorlaomer, sacked the towns of Sodom and Gommorah on the southern tip of the Dead Sea.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived in the city of Sodom until he was kidnapped by Cherdorlaomer's men and taken to the north. When Abraham found out what happened he flew into action. He took over three hundred of his men,

raced after Chedorlaomer, fought and won, saving Lot and returning home.

Abraham stopped in the Valley of Shaveh, in-between Jerusalem and Hebron. There the king of Sodom and the king of Salem, Melchizedek, met him (verse 17). In verse 21 he asked Abraham to return all the people of Sodom who were kidnapped, but he told Abraham to keep everything else. But Abraham won't accept anything except the food he ate.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What do you learn about God from Melchizedek's blessing in verses 19 and 20?
- ✦ God helped Abraham defeat a powerful enemy. In what ways is Abraham an unlikely hero? (Hint: look at Genesis 13)
- ✦ Melchizedek is superior to Abraham, and yet God chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation, not Melchizedek. Why does God use unlikely people to accomplish his plans?

In verse 18, Melchizedek is called "priest of God Most High." This is the first time the word "priest" is used in the Old Testament. Melchizedek is both a priest and a king. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and in verse 20 Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek. Clearly, Abraham saw Melchizedek as his superior, and he naturally gave him a tenth of everything he had.

Melchizedek is a mysterious figure. He appears in this episode with no mention of his parents and he then he disappears, never to be heard from again. Whoever he was, he is clearly wonderful.

Day Three—Psalm 110:1, Mark 12:35-37, Acts 2:36

King David wrote Psalm 110 around 1000 BC, about a thousand years after Abraham. A lot has happened since then! The twelve tribes spent 400 years in captivity in Egypt. God led them to the Promised Land, gave them his Law, and established the sacrificial system. These sacrifices were to remind the people that God is holy and they are not.

Look again at verse 1 of Psalm 110. Isn't this strange? David, the king of Israel, is writing. Yahweh is God's

personal name, translated L-O-R-D in most Bibles, but whom did David refer to when he wrote, "my Lord"? Whoever he is, he must be greater than David since David calls him "Lord."

Jesus loved to quote Psalm 110. In Mark 12:35-37, Jesus argued that the Messiah couldn't merely be David's son because David called him Lord. Peter loved this passage too, and on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached that Jesus is the Lord of Psalm 110:1 (see Acts 2:36).

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord?
- ✦ How can we show with our lives that Jesus is Lord?
- ✦ Why is it surprise that the Lord come to the earth as a baby?

Day Four—Psalm 110

In Psalm 110:1, David predicted the coming of Jesus, who is the Lord; but Genesis 14 comes into play, too. David said in verse 4 that the coming Messiah will not only be a king, he will be a priest. Why would David refer to his Lord as a priest?

David was very familiar with priests in his day. The priests knew that people needed forgiveness and made sacrifices for the people. They taught how forgiveness could only come through the shedding of blood. However, the animal sacrifices were insufficient and had to be offered year after year.

David knew it wasn't just the people who need priests to offer sacrifices on their behalf. Even the king needed a priest to offer sacrifices for him. David was a sinful man who deserved God's judgment, and he knew his only hope was for the priests to make sacrifices on his behalf.

Perhaps this is why David recalled Melchizedek from Genesis 14. David remembered that once, his forefather Abraham had encountered a man who was a king/lord and a priest. David seemed to understand the coming Messiah would be like Melchizedek: Lord and Priest. David looked forward to Jesus—our Great High Priest.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean to be sinful?
- ✦ Why is it important to understand we are sinful?
- ✦ Why couldn't the blood of animals bring lasting forgiveness? (Hint: Hebrews 10:4)

Day Five—Hebrews 7

In the Old Testament only Levites, men from the tribe of Levi, could be priests. The priests received tithes from the people and made sacrifices on their behalf.

This priesthood was created long after Abraham met with Melchizedek in Genesis 14. The Levites descended from Abraham, who gave a tithe to Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews made an interesting observation about Melchizedek: “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever” (Hebrews 7:3).

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ How is it that Jesus could do what so many priests before him could not do?
- ✦ In what ways does Melchizedek point forward to Jesus Christ?
- ✦ How do you know you need a priest like Jesus to help you?

Melchizedek is a name consisting of two Hebrew words. The first word is *melech*, which means king. The second word, *tsadik*, means righteousness. Melchizedek literally means, king of righteousness.

Unlike the priests of old, Jesus did what they could never do: he gave himself up as a perfect sacrifice to a holy God. Through this one sacrifice, Jesus took away the sins of everyone who would ever put their trust in him. He is a great high priest, the one Melchizedek resembled.

THE PROMISED PROPHET**Day Six—Deuteronomy 18:15-22**

Deuteronomy, meaning “second Law”, is a collection of sermons Moses preached on the plains of Moab before Israel crossed into the Promised Land. Most of the book is Moses restating the Law for God’s people. Moses had reached the end of his ministry. His final gift to the people was to teach them how to live wisely in the land God gave them.

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses promised that God would raise up a new prophet for the people. The Israelites must have been sad and anxious at the thought of losing Moses. God had spoken to them through Moses for years. It’s saying goodbye to someone you love, even if you knew they were just staying for a short visit. How much harder it was for Israel to lose their faithful and trusted prophet? When Moses spoke to them, they knew it was God’s Word.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ How do you feel when you have to say goodbye to someone you love?
- ✦ Why would the people have been encouraged to know that God would send them another prophet?
- ✦ Today, God speaks to us through the Bible. How do you study the Bible today?

Day Seven—Deuteronomy 18:15-18

Notice the kind of prophet Moses said God would raise up. He would be a prophet like Moses (verse 15). What was Moses like? We know he was a deliverer: he is the one God used to lead Israel through the Red Sea. We know Moses was a provider. God used him to give food and water to Israel—even when the people grumbled.

Perhaps most importantly, we know Moses was the voice of God for the people. Read Deuteronomy 18:18 carefully, “I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I commanded him.” This is the fundamental duty of a prophet—bringing God’s Word to

the people. Moses did more than deliver God’s Word; he delivered the people. He provided for the people, and he spoke to the people.

Can you think of someone else who delivers, provides for, and speaks to God’s people? Jesus delivered us from bondage to sin (Romans 6:17; 11:26). Jesus, our deliverer, didn’t just give bread to his people; He is the bread of life. He is the provider (John 6:35), and Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). When we listen to Jesus speak to us in the Bible, we are listening to God.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ In what ways have you seen God deliver you?
- ✦ How have you seen God provide for you?
- ✦ Where do you encounter God’s Word?

Day Eight—Psalm 74:1-9

Moses died, and after him came many other prophets. Men like Joshua, Samuel and Nathan. We remember Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea, too, but there was none like Moses.

Sadly, the people stopped listening to these prophets. The people rebelled against God. They often turned to others who told them what they wanted to hear. They even called them prophets—but they weren’t prophets at all; they didn’t give the people God’s Word.

As a result of their sin, God stopped sending prophets. Read Psalm 74:9 carefully, “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.” When the people sinned against God, God stopped speaking to them. Some of the people must have remembered Moses’ promise of a prophet greater than him (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), but that prophet had yet to come.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ When are you tempted to stop listening to God?
- ✦ Does your sin ever make it hard to hear God speak to you through his Word? Why?
- ✦ How does pursuing holiness help you hear God?

Day Nine—John 1:19-21; 6:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-2

In John we find the people waiting for a prophet. Moses promised long ago that a prophet would come. At first the people thought John the Baptist was the promised prophet. After all, John told the people to repent and follow the Lord just like the prophets of the Old Testament.

When Jesus did miracles, people wondered if he was the prophet. Moses had also provided bread in the wilderness. When Jesus gave bread it made the people

think a new Moses had arrived. They were right, though Jesus wasn’t ready to tell them everything yet. A new and greater Moses had come into the world. Jesus didn’t deny it.

No wonder the author of Hebrews begins by explaining how God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ. In the past, God made himself known through the words of Moses; but now, God speaks through the living Word, King Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What should you do when you don't desire to read God's Word?
- ✦ How does the Bible equip us to fight sin?
- ✦ Why does God choose to speak to us in Scripture?

Day Ten—Acts 3

When Peter and John healed the lame man, everyone was amazed, but Peter gives Jesus all the credit and refers to him as the Author of Life (verse 15). There was no confusion in Peter's mind. The son of Joseph and Mary is Immanuel, God in the flesh. It is through the power of Jesus' name, it is through faith in the Author of Life, that healing came.

When Peter wanted to drive home his point, he made one more connection. Peter told the crowd that Jesus is the prophet Moses promised way back in Deuteronomy

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ When was the first time you truly understood who Jesus is?
- ✦ What are some ways Jesus is like and not like Moses?
- ✦ Why do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?

18. Jesus is the prophet we are supposed to listen to. He is the one we need because it is through faith in his name alone that we can have everlasting life.

When we celebrate Christmas, we remember the incarnation of God. We remember the fact that God, in his wisdom, took on flesh and became the prophet we truly need. This prophet did more than speak to us; he spoke to God for us by dying on the cross in the place of sinners just like us.

THE PROMISED KING**Day Eleven—Judges 21:25**

"In those days there was no king in Israel." These are the days of the judges, and they are dark days in Israel's history. Do you remember the promise God made to Abraham that frames the whole of the Bible? Through Abraham's descendant, "all the families of the earth" will be blessed (Genesis 12).

Throughout the rest of Genesis we meet Abraham's offspring: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. With Joseph's help, the entire family found refuge in Egypt. A few hundred years later, however, Israel was still in Egypt—no longer guests, but slaves to Pharaoh.

Moses led the people to the Promised Land (this is covered in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy), then Joshua, successor to Moses, led Israel into Canaan.

During all these years, Israel had no earthly king. They had God as their king and God appointed rulers, known as judges, to lead the people under his perfect authority. After Joshua, in the days of the judges, the people rejected God over and over again. Each generation moved further and further away from God. Instead of doing what is right in God's eyes, they did what was right in their own eyes.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ Kings have authority. Who has authority in your life?
- ✦ It's hard to do what is right in the eyes of someone else. Why do we want to do what is right in our own eyes?
- ✦ Why do we need godly authority in our lives?

Day Twelve—1 Samuel 16:1-13

Saul served as Israel's first king, but he was not a good king. He loved himself more than he loved God. As a result of his bad leadership, God rejected him and raised David to be king. Samuel, the prophet of God, grieved over Saul's failure (verse 1), but God told him to stop grieving. Samuel had work to do. God wanted him to anoint the next king.

God sent Samuel to Bethlehem and told him to find Jesse. Jesse was a father with many sons. These sons were strong and experienced leaders. Jesse knew Samuel was looking for a king, and he had all his sons present themselves to Samuel—all except one.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ Why did Samuel pass over all of Jesse's other sons?
- ✦ God raises the most surprising people to leadership. Why is this important?
- ✦ How can you know if you are a person after God's own heart?

Jesse left David in the field tending to the sheep (verse 11). It didn't cross Jesse's mind that Samuel might select David to be the next king. David was the youngest, the least experienced of all of Jesse's sons. However, David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

Samuel explained to Jesse that God's criteria for leadership are different than ours. "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature," said Samuel, "For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outside appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (verse 7)

Day Thirteen—2 Samuel 7:1-11

In this passage, David is the established king of Israel. He led the nation through several battles. He was a tested leader. He settled in Jerusalem, built a palace for himself, and decided it was time to build a temple for the Lord, but God objected (verses 4-7). It was not for David to build God a house.

God was not angry with David. God reassured David of his love and care for him (verse 8). In fact, God reminded David of the promise he made to Abraham long ago.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ God knew that David would fail as a king (see 2 Samuel 11), and yet God promised to be with him and to bless him. Why is God so gracious to David?
- ✦ Every single person fails God (Romans 3:23). What are some ways you have failed God?
- ✦ How is God gracious to his people through Jesus Christ?

David is a descendent of Abraham and so David received the same promise when God said, "I will make for you a great name" (verse 9).

God's kindness to David is clear. Not only will God give David a great name, but God will also make his land safe (verse 10), and God will provide David rest from his enemies (verse 11). God promised to be very good to David, the king of Israel.

Day Fourteen—2 Samuel 7:12-17

There are two ways to understand this passage. Either God is saying from David onward, there will always be a king sitting on the throne of Israel. Alternatively, God is telling David that one day there will be a king over Israel who will reign forever and ever.

The first option is not very good since we know that shortly after David, the kingdom of Israel fell apart. His son, Solomon, became king, but he sinned. After Solomon, Rehoboam became king. Under Rehoboam's leadership the kingdom was torn up by civil war.

Eventually there was so much sin in the land that both kingdoms were conquered. The throne of Israel was without a king.

Therefore, God must be telling David that one of his sons will become king and when that son is anointed king, he will reign forever and ever. This is exactly what we find promised in Psalm 89:3-4, in Psalm 110:5, and in Isaiah 9:7, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with

justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.” Jesus is the forever king God promised to

David in 2 Samuel 7.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ Where in your life is there a lack of peace?
- ✦ Why do you think Israel looked forward to a forever king?
- ✦ What are you looking forward to?

Day Fifteen—Luke 1:32

When Jesus was born, the people of Israel lived under the Roman rule. This made faithful Jews very sad. Some of them wondered if God had forgotten them and may have begun to doubt that God was even real. More than anything, they wanted the forever king to come.

In the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we find over two hundred references to the kingdom of Christ. Sometimes it’s called the kingdom of heaven, sometimes it’s called the kingdom of God, but it’s always clear that Jesus is the king.

The early Christians rejoiced in the knowledge that their king now reigned on his throne forever and ever. Paul told the church in Colossae what God had done for them through Jesus: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

In heaven, every Christian will worship Jesus as the forever king: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). Jesus deserves forever praise because he is the forever king!

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ A good king serves his people. How did Jesus serve as king (see Mark 10:45)?
- ✦ A good king deserves praise. When and how do you praise King Jesus?
- ✦ A good king deserves obedience. What does it look like to obey King Jesus?

THE PROMISED SON

Day Sixteen—Isaiah 6:1-7

God called Isaiah to be his prophet. The book of Isaiah is all about Isaiah’s ministry to the southern kingdom of Judah. Many years before, a civil war split Israel into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Judah has its own king, a man by the name of Hezekiah. Isaiah ministered during Hezekiah’s reign, about 300 years after the time of King David. By this time, the eighth century BC, the northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed.

Isaiah can be a confusing book, and it’s important to understand it’s not in chronological order. Chapters 1-5 are about how Assyria invaded the southern kingdom of Judah in 701 BC. Assyria destroyed everything except the capital of Jerusalem. Chapter 6 is a flashback to the day God called Isaiah into ministry. In chapters 7 and 8, Isaiah promised a son who will be born of a virgin. Chapters 9-12 are a prophecy about a future when God will provide that forever king. In chapters 13-35 Isaiah spoke of a day when God will judge the nations for

unbelief. In chapters 36 and 37, Isaiah took his readers back to reign of Hezekiah, a king who humbly asked for God’s help. Chapters 38 and 39 are also about Hezekiah, only during a time he was not so humble. He showed off all of his wealth to Babylon, who eventually attacked Jerusalem. In chapters 40-66, Isaiah predicted a future full of judgment but also salvation and heaven.

God clearly used Isaiah to prepare the people for coming judgment and salvation. Did Isaiah deserve to be called by God for this task? No, he knew himself to be “a man of unclean lips” (verse 5). But God, in his kindness, gave Isaiah a vision of his holiness (verses 3 and 5).

To truly be God’s servant, Isaiah had to be forgiven. Read verse 7 carefully, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” In all of his preaching, Isaiah understood what we need more than anything else is for our sin to be taken away.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean to say that God is holy?
- ✦ Why was Isaiah so scared when he saw the vision of God?
- ✦ How can we have our sins atoned for (hint: 1 Peter 2:24)

Day Seventeen—Isaiah 7:1-12

Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, was the king of Judah before him. Chapters 7 and 8 of Isaiah are a flashback. In Isaiah's day, Assyria was ready to destroy Jerusalem. The people of God had sinned, and the attack on Jerusalem was part of God's judgment against his people. But how did things get so bad? Part of the answer is the terrible reign of King Ahaz.

Isaiah told of a day when Judah was threatened (verse 2) and God sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz what to do (verse 4). He was to be careful, to be quiet, to not be afraid, and to

trust God to protect his people. God even offered to give Ahaz a sign (verses 10-11), but Ahaz unwisely refused (verse 12). Ahaz didn't want to be quiet and wait; he wanted to act.

Ahaz was one of the worst kings to ever sit upon the throne. Instead of trusting God, he reached out to the king of Assyria for help (see 2 Kings 16:7). Ahaz led himself and his people to rebel against God. He refused to be still and to wait upon the Lord (Psalm 46:10).

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean to be still and trust the Lord?
- ✦ Why are we quick to act and slow to pray?
- ✦ In what ways did Jesus model patience?

Day Eighteen—Isaiah 7:13-17; Psalm 2:7-12

In Isaiah 7:1-12 we saw Ahaz refuse to ask the Lord for a sign. The LORD rebuked Ahaz. God promised to give Ahaz a sign anyway. Part of the sign would come in judgment of Ahaz (verses 16-17). Ahaz should have trusted the LORD instead of foreign kings!

There is another part to the sign. Verses 14 and 15 tell us of a virgin woman who would conceive and bear a son without the help of a man. She would have a son called, Immanuel, which means, "God with us." This boy would "eat curds and honey." In other words, he wouldn't be rich—this is the food that poor people ate.

Ever since the days of David, the people had been expecting a forever king. However, Isaiah told them to

expect a son, a son who will not be dressed in royal robes but will be from a common family.

It is normal in the Old Testament to refer to the king as the son of God (see Psalm 2:7-12). The king of Israel had a unique relationship with God because the king had the responsibility of representing God to the people. That's why the kings would refer to God as their father (see Psalm 89:26-27).

No one would have expected a son to be born of a virgin, and no one would have expected the coming king to come from a common family. But that is the strange and wonderful news God had for Ahaz and for us.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ In what ways are sons like their father?
- ✦ Who is the father of the son promised in Isaiah 7?
- ✦ In what ways is Jesus like his Father?

Day Nineteen—Isaiah 9:1-7

God told Ahaz the son to be born would be no ordinary son. Isaiah wrote in verse 6, “the government shall be upon his shoulder.” Though he will be born of flesh, he is in his essence God himself: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” This Son, who is God, is also the long-expected King. “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no

end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom” (verse 7).

The coming Son will bring “a great light” (verse 2) and great joy (verse 3). This unexpected Son is the source of hope because he will defeat all of Israel’s enemies and bring justice and righteousness to the land forever and ever.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it look like to walk in darkness?
- ✦ How can you tell when someone is full of joy?
- ✦ Why are Christians so happy?

Day Twenty—Matthew 1:18-25

In many ways the book of Isaiah is unpacking the promise of the Son we first saw in Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah 9:6-7 we see the Son is Mighty God. In Isaiah 11:1-3 we are promised “a root from the stump of Jesse.” David, as Jesse’s son, was the root from the stump of Jesse. In other words, we are promised a son of Jesse and David who will take the throne. In Isaiah 42:1-4 we are told the son will be a servant—a humble and gentle man who will bring forth justice in an unexpected way. It is clear he won’t reign with the blast of a trumpet, at least not at first. He will reign from a cross.

When the angel came to Joseph, it would have been hard for him to understand everything he was told. His future wife Mary would conceive, but without the help of a man. Her son would be “from the Holy Spirit” (verse 20). His name would be Jesus—which is the same name as Joshua, a name that means, “Yahweh saves.”

Perhaps by reading Isaiah, Joseph could begin to understand what it meant that Jesus “will save his people from their sins” (verse 21).

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean to say Jesus is Immanuel?
- ✦ Why is it important that Jesus had no earthly father?
- ✦ How did Jesus save his people from their sins?

THE PROMISED SAVIOR

Day Twenty-One—Romans 1:16-18

What did Jesus come to save us from? Some emphasize how Jesus came to save us from the power of Satan. This is partially true. Paul said when a believer is saved God takes him out of the domain of darkness and transfers him into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). The domain of darkness is Satan’s dominion. Others emphasize how Jesus came to save us from sin. This is partially true as well. Sin is a violent enemy. Paul called it “the sting of death” (1 Corinthians 15:56), but there’s more to the story.

all born sinners, we all deserve God’s wrath. God would be absolutely just to punish us for our sin forever and ever.

But God, in his kindness, provided another way. The gospel is his power for our salvation. Gospel literally means “good news.” God sent his only begotten Son into the world, the God-man, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and die on the cross in the place of sinners like us. To prove he has the power to conquer sin and death, Jesus rose from the dead. Now, everyone who turns and trusts in him will be saved. This is the gospel.

Jesus came to save us from the wrath of God (Romans 1:18). God is perfectly holy, and he hates sin. As we are

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ When was the first time you heard the gospel?
- ✦ When did you first understand you deserved God's wrath?
- ✦ Have you ever turned and trusted in Jesus Christ?

Day Twenty-Two—John 1:29

John the Baptist understood that Jesus came to do a great work. He knew enough to call Jesus the Lamb of God (verse 29). Jesus is more than the Great High Priest who offered a sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice. All of the sacrifices we read about in the Old Testament find their fulfillment in Jesus, the perfect and final sacrifice. The wrath of God didn't magically disappear. Jesus absorbed it and took it upon himself. That's what it means to say that Jesus is the sacrifice.

Christmas is a wonderfully festive time. It's full of bright lights, presents, and good food. It really is a blessing to spend time reflecting upon the arrival of Immanuel. The Christian knows as joyous as Christmas is, there is a somber truth we must keep in mind. For Jesus to save us he had to die, and that's why John called him the Lamb of God.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ For what reason did Jesus come into the world?
- ✦ Why would Jesus come to earth knowing it was a death sentence?
- ✦ How do we know Jesus was a perfect sacrifice?

Day Twenty-Three—Philippines 2:1-7

Writing from a prison cell, Paul called on the church in Philippi to remember the incarnation. Paul had been a Pharisee of Pharisees—he knew the Old Testament Law inside and out. He knew all about the promises of a great priest, a greater prophet, a greater king, and a greater son. Moreover, Paul had seen the risen Christ. He knew Christ is the one Israel had been waiting for.

His trials paled in comparison to that of his Savior who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

Paul wrote as a man who had lost his freedom. The Roman authorities humbled him, but what did it matter?

What is the Christian response to such a humble Savior? Paul explained in verse 3, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ What does it mean that Jesus “made himself nothing”?
- ✦ What did Jesus give up by “being born in the likeness of men”?
- ✦ How have you been humbled?

Day Twenty-Four—Philippians 2:8-11

Jesus' birth made his death possible. He became a human being so he could die in the place of human beings. All of the Old Testament promises point forward not only to Jesus' birth, but also to his death. As a great priest, Jesus offered up his own body as a complete and final sacrifice for sins. As the prophet, Jesus is the Word we preach. As the king, Jesus displayed servant leadership—laying

down his life for his flock. As the Son of God, Jesus laid down his life in obedience to his heavenly Father.

But the story did not end with Jesus' death! The Father “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (verse 9). Jesus conquered sin and death and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. Therefore, he deserves all of our praise.

Discussion Questions:

- ✦ Why don't more people bow down to Jesus as Lord today?
- ✦ What does it mean to say the cross is the point of Christmas?
- ✦ How can we show thanks for Jesus' work on the cross?

Day Twenty-Five—John 1:1-5

Jesus is God in the flesh. He is called the Word of God, and he has always been with God. But more than that, Jesus is himself God. This is a mystery, but it is a wonderful mystery. Christians worship one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is equally God. They are one! God did not need us to be happy. He wasn't lonely. He is eternally happy in himself; but God, in his love, chose to make us. And when we sinned, because he is love, the Father sent his only-begotten Son into the world to save us.

John wrote that in Jesus is life (verse 4) and because life is in Jesus, he can give life away. This Christmas Day we have a special opportunity to remember why Jesus came into the world—Jesus took on humanity so that the spiritually dead could gain everlasting life. John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

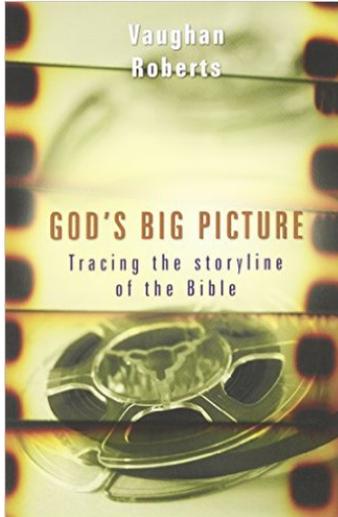
Discussion Questions:

- ✦ How has your understanding of Christmas changed over the years?
- ✦ What are you thankful for today?
- ✦ How do you know you have eternal life?

God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible

Written by Vaughan Roberts

Bookstall Price \$13



It's no secret that the Bible is a unique work—66 different books, written over the course of 2,000 years with 40 different authors, yet all the inspired Word of God. Understanding the Bible as a whole can seem daunting. Vaughan Roberts provides an excellent resource in *God's Big Picture* to encourage and help us as we seek to know the Lord through his Word. In this book, Roberts uses the theme of the Kingdom of God (described as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing”) to provide a framework for understanding Scripture.

At the genesis of creation, man lived under God’s rule and enjoyed his blessing, yet chose disobedience and creation suffered devastating consequences. In his grace, God promised to reestablish his kingdom on earth partially through the history of Israel, and finally and perfectly in Jesus Christ. Roberts uses this framework to guide the reader section-by-section through Scripture, connecting the context to the ultimate redemptive work of Christ.

God's Big Picture pointed me to the great gift God has given us: his Word. The more we seek to know and understand Scripture, the more we can know God himself. This book is an excellent tool to aid believers in the knowledge of God through his Word. It is helpful for equipping believers (new and seasoned) to read the Bible intelligently and comprehensively. I recommend this book for anyone seeking to understand how the Bible functions as a unified whole. I can be easily overwhelmed by the vastness of Scripture, and I found *God's Big Picture* to be helpful in overcoming this without oversimplifying truth. The framework provided for approaching Scripture gives the reader historical clarity and encourages worship through a relational pursuit of Christ as believers seek to live as God’s people, in God’s place, under his rule and blessing.

– RECOMMENDED BY ABBEY TILLMAN

Excerpts from the Book

1

“Any unifying theme that is used to help us to see how the Bible fits together must arise out of Scripture itself, rather than being imposed upon it; and it must be broad enough to allow each part to make its own distinct contribution. The theme of the kingdom of God satisfies both requirements.”

–The kingdom of God, p. 21

2

“God has not changed. He is still the God of infinite love, but he is also a holy God who hates what is evil and gets angry when he sees it. His judgment on his people in the Old Testament should warn us against being complacent, as they were. It is a foretaste of a far more terrible judgment to come at the end of time.”

–The prophesied kingdom, p. 98

3

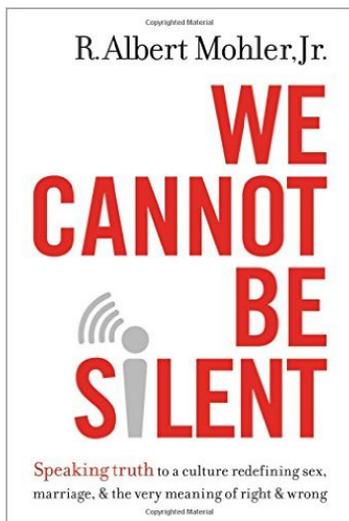
“All the promises of the kingdom of God are fulfilled in Christ; he is God’s people, God’s place and God’s rule.”

–The present kingdom, p. 115

We Cannot Be Silent

Written by Albert Mohler

Bookstall Price \$17



In many of his recent speeches and writings, Albert Mohler makes frequent use of the phrase “moral revolution.” Mohler, the President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, describes the moral revolution as one that is redefining sexual morality and uprooting the traditional view of marriage held for centuries. In his book, *We Cannot Be Silent*, Mohler delves deep to explore this moral revolution: how and when it started, how we got to where we are today, and where we are potentially headed from here. He organizes his thoughts into ten helpful and easy to

read chapters. Mohler leaves no doubt that the church is facing a rapidly changing culture and will need to be able to winsomely share the good news of Jesus Christ with an increasingly hostile audience.

The tenth chapter, “The Hard Questions,” would be reason enough to recommend this book. But before I get to that, the preceding nine chapters walk the reader through the history of this moral revolution. Even though it may seem that much of this change happening around us, from same sex marriage to transgender issues, is all very recent, its roots trace back many years. Mohler clearly and methodically unpacks this in great detail. He then uses the rest of the book to direct his focus to the implications of this revolution on the church and how we should respond. He encourages believers to continue to be “truth tellers” and remain faithful to the teachings of God’s Word. He calls for us to be compassionate and loving. He emboldens us to continue preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and to pursue holiness. His tenth chapter concludes by presenting thirty hard questions that many of us face in this moral revolution, along with his succinct answers. I would encourage you to read through *We Cannot Be Silent*, and I’m confident that you will be helped by it.

– RECOMMENDED BY RICKY HUTCHINS

Excerpts from the Book

1

“This new revolution presents a particular challenge to Christianity, for a commitment to the authority of Scripture and to revealed truths runs into direct conflict with the central thrust of this revolution... We are facing nothing less than a comprehensive redefinition of life, love, liberty, and the very meaning of right and wrong.”

–In the Wake of a Revolution, p. 1-2

2

“The church must overcome some of the reflexes it has absorbed from cultural Christianity and ‘Christian’ moralism. When we go to a Little League game in order to see our own children or grandchildren play and see a lesbian couple cheering on their son, we need to overcome the isolationist instinct to stay away from that couple. To the contrary, we need to sit alongside them, thankful that we have the unearned opportunity to establish a friendship and a relationship with people we know need the gospel of Jesus Christ—the same gospel we need.”

–The Compassion of Truth, p. 176

3

“We are called to be the people of the truth, even when the truth is not popular and even when the truth is denied by the culture around us. Christians have found themselves in this position before, and we will again. God’s truth has not changed. The holy Scriptures have not changed. The gospel of Jesus Christ has not changed. The church’s mission has not changed. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.”

–A Word to the Reader, p. 22



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