



ACTS

family guide



A LETTER TO PARENTS

You may be wondering why we used a flame as a logo for this guide. The entire narrative of Acts revolves around the expansion of the early church as the Holy Spirit propels the people outward. This first started when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples as fire (Act 2:3). In the Old Testament, Israel followed the Spirit as a flame at night. In the New Testament, we have the fire within us.

This guide is designed to be used not as a *replacement* to our Sunday worship time, but a *supplement* to it. As Pastor Russ preaches through the book of Acts, you can reference this at home to debrief and unpack things further as a family. You will find family journal pages for each chapter.

There are also sections toward the back that are for parents to help you understand and put together the bigger story of the Bible and the gospel.

We pray that it serves you well!

WHAT IS INCLUDED



- Acts resources
- Bible study methods
- family journals
- Big Story section featuring answers to big questions





BEFORE READING ACTS

One of the best ways to read and understand Acts is to first read and understand the book of Luke. To pick up and begin Acts 1:1 without first reading Luke is akin to reading the final Harry Potter book without reading the first six. There will be many unanswered questions and mass confusion.

Think of it like this: If the Bible were not published as one book, Luke and Acts may be sold as 2 volumes of a single work.

WEBSITES & APPS



Bible Project
Website & App



Spoken Gospel
Website

Also has video devotionals





LANDING PAGE

Our website is slowly becoming something to visit more and more for the resources we are cultivating for you. Visit the landing page for Acts at firstsbc.com/ACTS and you will find an abundance of resources from intro videos, to more specific studies, to a PDF of the family guide.

firstsbc.com/ACTS

VIDEO RESOURCES



Bible Project
Acts 1-12 Overview



Village Church
Pentecost



Bible Project
Acts 13-28 Overview

Spoken Gospel
Acts Intro



Bible Project
Luke – Acts Series
Shows the thread of Luke's
Gospel to Acts as one story





READING THE BIBLE FOR NOOBS

The title above may sound silly to you, but your preteen or teenager sure understands it and connects with it. Below you will find a guide on how to read the Bible. It follows a simple method that is easy to remember. The next page gives other ways to apply this.

This is the observation, interpretation, application method repackaged to be easier to remember. We pray it helps out!



READ

what does it say?



REFLECT

what does it mean?



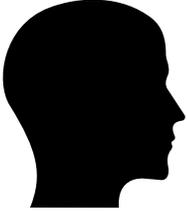
RESPOND

how should it change me?





4 H'S APPLICATION



HEAD

how does this passage change the way I think about God?



HEART

how does this passage change the way I love God?



HANDS

what does this passage call me to do specifically or what in my life needs to change?



HABITAT

how would my changed actions impact those around me?





SPEC ANALYSIS

S

is there a sin to confess?

P

is there a promise to proclaim?

E

is there an example to follow?

C

is there a command to obey?





ACTS PRAYER

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T

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S

upplication





BOOK SUMMARY

..... **ACTS**

ACTS



SETTING

Acts comes after the four gospels (the accounts of Jesus' life) and before the first epistles (letters to churches or some of their members). The epistles include books like Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Corinthians.

Acts tells us the exciting story of how the Church got started, and it's the second in a two-part series. The first part of the series was the book of Luke!

Though the author of Acts doesn't give us his name, the first verse gives us a really good clue that it's Luke himself!

Luke was a doctor and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. As you go throughout the New Testament epistles, you'll be reading lots of Paul's letters to the churches, and you'll hear a lot about him in Acts!

Did you know?!? God used Paul and Luke to write most of the New Testament! Wow!

As you're reading Acts, you'll hear the names of many cities that Paul writes to later on in the epistles. And you can still visit a lot of those ancient cities today!!!



ACTS



OVERVIEW/THEMES

In Acts, we get to see how Jesus continued His work after He rose from the dead and went into Heaven. Our story picks up soon after Jesus' resurrection (rising from the grave)! He went right to work through the Holy Spirit's presence, building His family and strengthening them! This family would be made up of all kinds of people, eventually from all over the world!

In Acts, we get to hear how the Gospel (the good news about Jesus) started moving out and out and out from Jerusalem (where Jesus died) to the whole world! God used the apostles (those close disciples we read about in the gospels) to carry the message, and He brought many others alongside them too! He gave them the power to heal the sick, tell others His message clearly and with courage, and even sometimes raise people from the dead! He gave them the strength to do special things at just the right time! God showed the people that He was with them through the Holy Spirit just as much as He was when Jesus was there. A whole new chapter in the big story of God's relationship with His people was unfolding!

In the past, God had focused the bright Light of His presence in one place (among the family of Israel) so that everyone could see how good He is and want to come and be a part of it! Now, God was going to put His presence *inside everyone who believed in Jesus*.

People wouldn't need to go to a Temple or be in Israel to find Him—He would be with every believer all the time. When His people gathered together as a family, He would be present by His Spirit, no matter where they were! All that God had meant Israel to be...

- people who shine with His light and show people the Way
- people who know Him from the heart and enjoy the privilege of belonging to Him
- people who get a front-row seat to His work in the world

...was now open to anyone who would come to Jesus by belief and be forgiven! The Christians would be like priests in the world—helping others come home to God and love and worship Him. The time that Acts tells about was really exciting! So many promises God made in the Old Testament were finally coming true.

You'll notice as you read the stories that sometimes those who don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah (God Himself, the Rescuer, and King) are angry at those who do believe it. Often the Christians in the book of Acts are in serious danger. Some are badly hurt by those who are against them, and some are even killed because they talked about Jesus or did something brave or kind in His name. But God took the terrible things that happened and worked them for good! The suffering (called



ACTS

persecution) caused the Christians we read about in Acts to spread out from Jerusalem and carry the Gospel even farther!

One of the important points in Acts is how diverse (full of different kinds of people) God's family became! This brought some confusion at first. We also meet the Apostle Paul (he also went by Saul—his Hebrew name). You'll hear about the dramatic way he met Jesus! It's an exciting story and one that changed the history of the Church and even the world. (Did you know that Paul lived through a shipwreck? You can read about it in Acts 27-28!)

Some of the other people you'll read about in Acts are James and Peter (they were both close disciples and friends of Jesus), Timothy (you'll hear about him in some of Paul's letters, too!), Barnabas (who was an amazing encourager), and Stephen (whose life and death played a big part in the story).

HOW TO USE

The same Holy Spirit we read about in Acts lives in everyone who has trusted Jesus as their Rescuer/Forgiver/God. Wow! God calls us to follow Him, listen to His instructions through the Holy Spirit and His word, be brave in loving others and showing them Jesus, enjoy being a part of His family, and thank Him for the amazing promise of life with Him forever!

Acts is the history of how the Church got its start! It's about God's work in the world. We're now a part of that, too. This is His story—"history!"





READING PLAN

..... **ACTS**

ACTS



FAMILY READING PLAN

our family name

○ Chapter 1

Jesus Goes Into Heaven, Judas' Replacement Is Chosen

○ Chapter 2

The Holy Spirit Comes, And God's Family Expands

○ Chapter 3

God Uses Peter To Heal A Man And To Tell The Good News

○ Chapter 4

Consequences For Faithfulness; Prayer And God's Answer

○ Chapter 5

God Is Serious About His Family; The Apostles Testify (And Suffer)

○ Chapter 6

Stephen Is Seized And Put On Trial

○ Chapter 7

God Gives Stephen The Power To Testify And To Die For His Sake

○ Chapter 8

God Takes What Was Evil And Uses It For Good

○ Chapter 9

Jesus Tackles (And Saves) Saul; The Spirit Works Through Peter

○ Chapter 10

God Welcomes New People Into His Family

○ Chapter 11

Peter Explains What God Has Done; God Blesses The Church

○ Chapter 12

Peter Escapes From Prison! God Brings Judgment On King Herod

○ Chapter 13

The Missionary Journey Of Paul And Barnabas

○ Chapter 14

Paul And Barnabas Meet Trouble But Strengthen The Churches

○ Chapter 15

Growing Pains, Questions, And A Sad (Temporary) Split

○ Chapter 16

Timothy Joins The Team; The Lord Sends Them On A Mission!

○ Chapter 17

Paul Reasons With The Greek Philosophers

○ Chapter 18

God Sends Friends And Helpers

○ Chapter 19

God Does Miracles Through Paul; The Idol Makers Riot

○ Chapter 20

A Very Sad Parting

○ Chapter 21

Paul Goes To Jerusalem

○ Chapter 22

Paul Addresses The Jerusalem Crowd

○ Chapter 23

Paul At The Sanhedrin (The Religious High Court); A Deadly Plot

○ Chapter 24

Paul On Trial Before Governor Felix

○ Chapter 25

Paul On Trial Before Festus

○ Chapter 26

Paul's Defense Before King Agrippa And His Sister Bernice

○ Chapter 27

A Big Disaster In Which God Shows His Control

○ Chapter 28

Paul On The Island Of Malta And In Rome





FAMILY JOURNALS

..... ACTS

Jesus Goes Into Heaven, Judas' Replacement Is Chosen

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...

FIND IT

(vs.8) This is the theme verse of the book of Acts! 1) What does it say? 2) What would they receive? 3) What are they now empowered to do? "Be a witness" means being someone who has seen something and can tell about it.

WORTH A NOTE

Sometimes a few details can bring things to life! Verse 9 says that Jesus was taken into the clouds. Clouds in Scripture often signal the presence and majesty of God (like in Ex. 40:34, Luke 9:34-35). Look at Revelation 1:7. How will Jesus return? One more special detail to note. How did the disciples determine God's will for Judas's replacement? (vs. 23-26). First, they _____ (v24), second they (v26) _____. Casting lots was an Old Testament way that God showed people His choice in a matter. We don't have to do this anymore because the Holy Spirit has come!



The Holy Spirit Comes, And God's Family Expands

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

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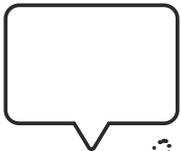
HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 1-13) In Verse 2, what sound did they hear? The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. In both languages, the word for "spirit" can also be translated as "wind" or "breath!" The Holy Spirit (God Himself) had come to live in His people forever (v3). They would each be like a temple of the Holy Spirit! What appeared on people's foreheads? Fire often represents the presence of our holy God (ex: Ex 3:2). In vs. 5-12, what amazing thing did God cause to happen?

WHAT STOOD OUT

Three large vertical boxes with dotted outlines for highlighting key details from the text.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

A large grey rectangular area for writing thoughts or drawing.

This story inspired me to...

RESPONSE

(vs. 42-47) What was God's family (the church) doing? What do you notice about how they treat each other? Make a list. Then take a few minutes to ask God how you can love others in His family with that level of care.



CHAPTER 3

ACTS

TODAY'S DATE

God Uses Peter To Heal A Man And To Tell The Good News

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

RESPONSE

(vs. 1-9) What stands out to you in this story? How would you feel if you were this man? What would you want to say to the disciples and God? (vs. 9-10) How did the people respond? Briefly look ahead. How does Peter use this opportunity? *Old Testament connection. Look at Isaiah 35:6. How does this event correspond to the promise of what will happen when God begins to restore all things?

FIND IT

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

(vs. 11-26) God speaks through Peter to help people see Jesus as the fulfillment of O.T. prophecies and pictures. There are at least five different titles or describing words given to Jesus in this passage. Look carefully. How many can you find? What did you learn about Jesus from this passage?

This story inspired me to...



Consequences For Faithfulness; Prayer And God's Answer

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WORTH A NOTE

In Verses 1-3, why were the religious leaders "disturbed?" In v2, what were the apostles proclaiming? Look at v3. What did they do with them? How many people had believed? (v4) Whoa! That only counts men! This likely means that they were counting by households. So, there could have been thousands more people! By what power was Peter proclaiming the truth? (vs. 7-8) Verse 12 is really important. How many ways to salvation are there? (v13) What do they notice about the men? In Verses 14-21, with what command (and in what predicament) were they left? Do you think they'll do it?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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This story inspired me to...

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RESPONSE

(vs. 23-37) How did the apostles and the rest of God's family respond to this scary problem? What did God do? How did the believers live because of God's power moving among them? Wow! How does what you've seen here change your thoughts on what you're going through or what makes you afraid?



God Is Serious About His Family; The Apostles Testify (And Suffer)

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

Blank space for writing a summary of the chapter.

FUN FACT

(vs. 17-42) This is an awesome story. Read it and then retell it in your own words. Try to remember as many details as you can! Interesting facts: The Sanhedrin (v27) could have people put to death. The apostles were testifying before the scariest religious court in the land. (v34) What is the man's name who saves the day with his cool-headed wisdom? This man happens to be the rabbi (Jewish teacher) who trained Saul (who we know by his Roman name Paul)!

WHAT STOOD OUT

Three large vertical boxes with dotted lines inside, intended for students to write or draw what stood out to them.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

A large grey rectangular area for writing thoughts or drawing.

This story inspired me to...

HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 1-10) Whoa! This is an intense story! (v3) Why were Ananias and Sapphira judged (punished)? Their sin was that they lied to God! Satan is called "the father of lies." The Lord is serious about His family's character being a reflection of His and not the enemy's. This was a strong example to the church that God takes our hearts and choices seriously (v11).



Stephen Is Seized And Put On Trial

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS









HISTORY

(vs. 1-6) What problem do we hear about in vs1? What's that about? The church was made up of Jewish people who spoke Aramaic (a more traditional language closer to Hebrew) and those who spoke Greek because they lived in other lands before returning to Israel. There were probably numerous other cultural differences between these two groups, too. Unity (togetherness) is really important in the family of God, and so is caring for those who need help (in that day, widows were some of the most vulnerable people). Here we see the church organize to promote unity and care and make sure that the apostles can teach the good news!

HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 7-15) Make a list of what you learn about Stephen in this passage. Where did he get his wisdom and power? What happened to him? With what was he charged? Was it true? What does v15 tell you about how he looked because of God's presence? (Look at Exodus 34:29-35 if you have time!)

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



God Gives Stephen The Power To Testify And To Die For His Sake

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

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WORTH A NOTE

How do they take this? (vs. 54-59) What stands out to you about Stephen's death? List what you see. What does he say as he's dying? Of whom does this remind you (see Luke 23:34, 46)? Who does it say approved of Stephen's death? Yes! This is Paul! Saul is his Hebrew name! Interesting fact: The New Testament often talks of a believer's death as "sleep" because it's not permanent! Jesus will raise us one day when He returns—just like He was raised!

BACKSTORY

(vs. 1-53) What did the religious leaders accuse Stephen of doing (vs. 11-14)? God uses Stephen to answer them in a remarkable way. (vs. 51-53) He shows them that THEY are the ones who don't believe the Old Testament law and prophets! God wants even the hard-hearted religious leaders to be saved, so He uses Stephen to tell them that they're not actually on God's side at all!

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

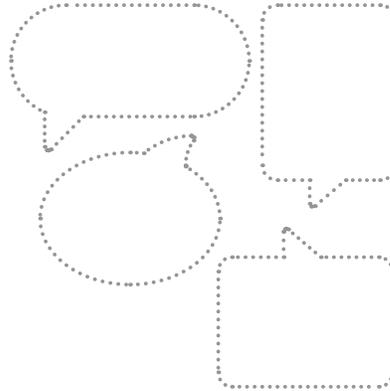
This story inspired me to...



God Takes What Was Evil And Uses It For Good

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

FAV WORDS



RESPONSE

(vs. 1-4) What happened after Stephen died?
The family of God was persecuted (attacked because of their faith in Jesus), so they scattered. What did they do wherever they went?! (v 4). How do you think God was using this evil to bring about good? How does this help fulfill Acts 1:8?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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This story inspired me to...

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PICK ONE

There are two major stories found in the rest of this chapter. One is about a sorcerer who wants the power he sees in the disciples (which we know is the Holy Spirit!), and the other is about an angel of the Lord sending Philip on a mission! Read both and then pick one to retell in your own words. What stood out to you? How is the power of God on display in that story?



Jesus Tackles (And Saves) Saul; The Spirit Works Through Peter

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

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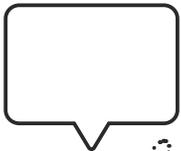
HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 1-19) This is a great story! Read the passage slowly, and then stop to record what you notice. Who did God use to restore Saul? How would you have felt if you were that man? God treasures faithful obedience like that of Ananias. (v16) What will God show Saul (Paul)? Wow! *A couple of notes: 1) What's a synagogue? A place where Jewish people gathered and studied the Scriptures. 2) Who does the voice say is being persecuted (vs. 4-5)? Jesus takes it very seriously when His family is suffering for their faith in Him. What is done against them is also done against Him!

WHAT STOOD OUT

Three large, empty rectangular boxes for recording what stood out in the passage.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

Large grey area for writing thoughts or drawing. Includes the prompt: "This story inspired me to..."

PICK ONE

Read vs. 19-31 and 32-43. These are both amazing stories. Pick one to read a second time. Read slowly and write about how you see God's power working in the situation.



God Welcomes New People Into His Family

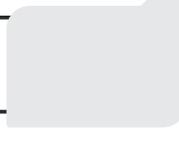
SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS









BACKSTORY

Read vs. 1-23. In the Old Testament, God-focused the light of His presence in one place—on the family of Israel. He gave them His Law to teach them how to be holy, relate to Him, and live out their calling as a Light to the nations. He wanted people everywhere to see it and come to Him! Part of the Law made some food off-limits or “unclean.” In the New Testament, the food laws were fulfilled and no longer needed because of Jesus’s work. Peter didn’t know that yet. God uses these familiar rules to show him that EVERYONE can now come into His family by faith—both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). The Centurion (an important Roman military man) was a Gentile. What do you think will happen next?

RESPONSE

Remind yourself what happened in vs. 1-23, and then read the rest of the chapter. What stands out to you? What surprised you? How does Peter explain the gospel (the good news)?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



CHAPTER 11

ACTS

TODAY'S DATE

Peter Explains What God Has Done; God Blesses The Church

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

BACKSTORY

(vs. 1-18) Circumcision was the sign that someone was a part of Israel (God's family, which was now expanding to include Gentiles—see the note for Ch. 10). From now on, the sign of being in God's family would be baptism rather than circumcision. Sometimes Luke or Paul will refer to people as "the circumcised believers." When they use this term, they are talking about Jewish people who have believed in Jesus as the Messiah (the Savior and King).

HISTORY

Read vs. 19-30. Summarize what happened. God gave Agabus special insight for the moment. What was it? Fun fact: you can read about Emperor Claudius online. Luke does a great job of recording historical details!

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



Peter Escapes From Prison! God Brings Judgment On King Herod

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WORTH A NOTE

This is such a great story! Unfortunately, it begins on a very sad note. Who was killed? He is the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred (killed for his faith). Who was James's brother? ____ (He is the same John who wrote one of the gospels, the book of Revelation, and the letters of 1, 2, 3 John. This was the same John who leaned against Jesus at the Last Supper.) Herod realized that having James killed had made him really popular with people in power, so he had Peter arrested—probably meaning to have him killed, too. What happens next? (Read v-19) What do you notice?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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This story inspired me to...

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HIGHLIGHT

The power of God is on such display in this chapter! God is sovereign (that means He's King—He's in full control!) Think back: how do you see that in the story of Peter escaping from prison? Next, read the rest of the chapter. How does God's power show up in judgment against Herod?



The Missionary Journey Of Paul And Barnabas

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

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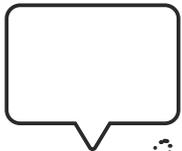
HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 42-52) What happened to Paul and Barnabas? How were they treated? Why? What does vs1 tell you about how they felt? At first glance, it doesn't seem to make sense that they would have joy. But many times, God gives us joy in the middle of very hard circumstances because we know that we've served Him faithfully. Only God can give that kind of strength in the midst of suffering. (If you have time, read Acts 5:40-42. It's a great example of this kind of joy!)

WHAT STOOD OUT

Three large vertical boxes with dotted lines inside, intended for students to write or draw what stood out to them.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

A large grey rectangular area for writing or drawing thoughts inspired by the story.

This story inspired me to...

FUN FACT

(v. 9) From this point on, Saul goes by Paul. Paul was his Roman name. (It wasn't unheard of to have both.) Paul was beginning to minister to the Gentiles often, and it seems that maybe he began to use his Roman name to connect with them more easily.



Paul And Barnabas Meet Trouble But Strengthen The Churches

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS





FAV WORDS





WORTH A NOTE

Read vs. 1-3. What happened in v2? What did Paul and Barnabas do in response (v3)? Whoa! What courage! God's Spirit gives His people boldness to proclaim His message, love people, and serve Him even when it's difficult. Continue reading through v7. What do you see?

HIGHLIGHT

Verses 8-19 is a crazy story! Read it and then retell the story in your own words. Who did the people think Paul and Barnabas were? Zeus and Hermes were Greek gods. The people had faith, but in something that wasn't real at all! How did Paul respond when he realized what they were doing (v14)? Tearing clothes was a sign of grief in his culture! How does Paul explain the truth to them? He's careful to use things that will make sense for them even though they don't know the story of Scripture yet. What happened to Paul afterward (v19)? What did he do (v20)? Wow!

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



Growing Pains, Questions, And A Sad (Temporary) Split

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 19-35) Why does the Bible mention those four things? Each one would have kept a Jewish Christian (who might still be keeping the old practices of the Jewish customs and the Old Testament) from being able to eat a meal of friendship with another person (according to the Law). They are removing the barriers to togetherness in the church! All the believers were saved only by faith in Jesus, and they were learning how to live for Him! * Extra: The Bible isn't afraid to tell the Truth, including the ugly parts. What sad thing happens in vs. 36-41? P.S. John Mark was Barnabas's cousin. He and Paul will work together again in the future.

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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- 2
- 3

This story inspired me to...

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BACKSTORY

(vs. 1-18) Whoa! What's going on here? First, turn back to the family journal notes for Chapter 10 and 11. Look at the first note for each one. They'll give you some helpful insight! The Jewish believers were coming to understand that God was expanding His family, Israel, to welcome in Gentile believers! Should they keep the old family practices? It was a new chapter in God's story. He was helping them understand what to keep and what was finished by Jesus' work!



Timothy Joins The Team; The Lord Sends Them On A Mission!

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

FUN FACT

(v. 10) Did you notice the use of the word "we?" Who is now in Paul's group for this second missionary journey? Luke, the writer of the story, has joined the team! These are firsthand reports. Who else did God choose to send with Paul and Silas (v 1-3)? Timothy would become one of Paul's closest co-workers throughout the years. In fact, Paul would one day send him on a very important mission to help the church in Ephesus. The books of 1 and 2 Timothy are letters from Paul to Timothy while on that assignment!

HIGH LIGHT

Verses 16-40 is an amazing story! Read it and retell it in your own words. What question does the jailor ask (v30)? How would you have answered him? Take a moment to think about it. What does Paul say? (v31). Have you done that?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



Paul Reasons With The Greek Philosophers

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

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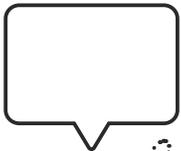
WORTH A NOTE

(vs. 16-32) God uses Paul to skillfully reason with the philosophers to help them understand the good news about Jesus. He starts with familiar topics (vs. 22-24). What is his opening point (vs. 22-24)? But Paul doesn't leave them there. He goes on to show them that God is not like any of their idols! He even quotes their poets to help his point along. We can learn a lesson from Paul about meeting people where they are and talking to them about Jesus! What stands out to you from what Paul said?

WHAT STOOD OUT

Graphic organizer with three columns and two rows for notes.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

Grey shaded area for writing thoughts.

This story inspired me to...

Grey shaded area for writing inspiration.

FIND IT

Luke is very careful to mention women's roles in the story. That wasn't a very common thing to do in the culture of his day, but he did the same thing in his gospel, too! How many times in this chapter does Luke mention a woman or women?



God Sends Friends And Helpers

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

HISTORY

(vs. 1-3) Why did Priscilla and Aquilla come from Italy? Luke does a great job recording historically accurate details! Emperor Claudius had kicked all the Jewish people out of the city of Rome in A.D. 49! God used this unfortunate event to introduce new co-workers to the team to carry the gospel forward! (By the way, Rome is over 750 miles away from Corinth! They came a long, long way!)

FUN FACT

(v. 11) How long did Paul stay in Corinth? The New Testament includes two letters that Paul later wrote to the Corinthians! In v12, Luke gives us another historical detail. Who does he say was in charge in those days? We know that Gallio was proconsul in A.D. 51-52. These are real places and people! Read the rest of the chapter and see how God worked through Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos.

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



God Does Miracles Through Paul; The Idol Makers Riot

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

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HIGHLIGHT

(v. 11) Who was really doing the work? (v13) The Bible tells us that not only are people opposed to God, but some spirits are His enemies. Scripture says that the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion." Demons are spirits who cooperate with the devil's purposes. Here's what we need to know: they're NO MATCH for Jesus! We see this over and over in the four gospels! It's Jesus' power that conquers evil every single time. You can call on Him for help always!

A NOTE

.....
WORTH

(v. 4) What is "repentance?" It's turning back to God and humbling ourselves. It's admitting that we were wrong (and God is right, good, wise, and true). When we repent, we reject or turn away from our old way of being and thinking. We accept God's help to be holy in His sight. We relate to Him as our Father. Look up Acts 3:19. What does it say will come when we repent?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

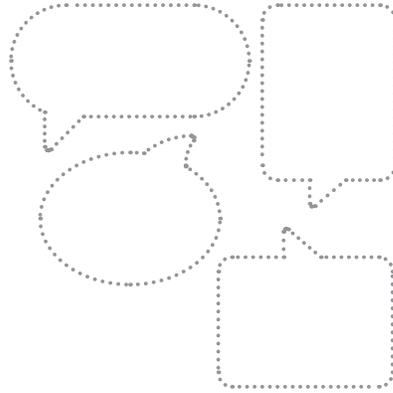
This story inspired me to...



A Very Sad Parting

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

FAV WORDS



RESPONSE

(vs. 7-12) What a wild story! Retell it in your own words! How do you think miracles like this helped people believe the good news about Jesus?

Empty box for writing a response.

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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This story inspired me to...

Three horizontal dotted lines for writing an inspiration.

HISTORY

(v. 1) What uproar is Luke talking about? Look back quickly at Chapter 19. Fun Fact: The theater where the riot happened is still in Ephesus (19:29)! Next, read 20:1-6, 20:13-38. How long had Paul ministered there (v31)? He'd established very strong relationships in Ephesus. What stands out to you from Paul's words to the elders (leaders) of the church? How would you sum it up? How would you describe their emotions?



Paul Goes To Jerusalem

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

Blank space for writing a summary of the chapter.

BACKSTORY

(vs. 1-15) What future is awaiting Paul? How does he know? Can you think of someone else who knew that he was going to His death via Jerusalem, but that God was sending Him anyway (Luke 18:31-33)? The Holy Spirit chose to move Paul's life in a direction that honored, and in some ways, paralleled or reminded people of Jesus. Can you think of anyone who tried to warn Jesus not to go to His death? See Matthew 16:21-23.

WHAT STOOD OUT

Three large rectangular boxes with dotted outlines for writing notes on what stood out in the chapter.

FAV WORDS



A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

Large grey rectangular area for writing thoughts or drawing.

This story inspired me to...

Large grey rectangular area for writing how the story inspired the reader.

HIGHLIGHT

Read v16 through the end of the chapter. How does the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to make the most of his opportunity? One of the patterns we see in Acts is that God takes awful circumstances and uses them for good. Here He opens an opportunity for many people to hear the Truth!



Paul Addresses The Jerusalem Crowd

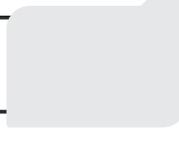
SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS









HISTORY

Things to know for Verses 1-21: 1) Aramaic was a language related to Hebrew. Though Paul could speak both Greek and Aramaic, he chose Aramaic in this case because he was signaling to the people that he was a Jew—just like them. 2) Paul makes it really clear that Christianity is not a new religion. It is Judaism fulfilled—the promises of God in the Old Testament have come true in Jesus! He is where the whole Story was going all along! The problem is that many of the Jewish people didn't believe that Jesus was the Savior for whom they had been waiting.

BACKSTORY

(vs. 22-29) How does the people's treatment of Paul remind you of the way that people treated Jesus in the days before His death? (John 15:18-25 is coming true. Turn there if you have time.)

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



Paul At The Sanhedrin (The Religious High Court); A Deadly Plot

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

HISTORY

In Chapter 22, God used Paul's Roman citizenship to help him escape immediate danger from the government. Now in Verses 1-11, he has to go before the Sanhedrin—the religious high court. We met them in Acts 5. Remember how Gamaliel saved the day at that time? They had the power to order someone's death (In fact, they condemned Jesus!) The Sanhedrin was made up of men from two different sects (groups with differing views). Paul very wisely pits them against each other to help his cause. He knew that the Sadducees didn't believe in angels or resurrection!

RESPONSE

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

Verses 12-35 is a great story! Read it and then retell it in your own words. What do you notice? How would you feel if you were Paul? Fun Fact: Herod's palace's ruins at Caesarea (where Paul was held) are still there. You can visit!

This story inspired me to...



Paul On Trial Before Governor Felix

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

FUN FACT

In Acts 9:15, when God saved Paul, he gave Ananias a prophecy about Paul's future. What did it say? (P.S. this is a different Ananias than the one in Ch 24!) As you read Chapters 24 and 25, notice the number of Roman (Gentile) rulers before Paul as he gives testimony! How is God causing His word about Paul to be fulfilled? We can always trust that what God says will come true in the end!

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

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This story inspired me to...

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HISTORY

(v. 22) What is Christianity called in this verse? (vs. 24-27) What does Paul share with Felix and his wife? Even though Paul is on trial, he still cares for their souls! We know from history that they had done some ungodly things. Paul wants them to believe in Jesus and be saved! For what is Felix hoping (v26)? How long does he keep Paul? In A.D. 59, Felix was called away to Rome.



Paul On Trial Before Festus

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...

HISTORY

Read vs. 1-22. Sum up what happens in your own words. Any Roman citizen had a right to appeal to Caesar. Caesar isn't a first name, but a title (like "President"). The reigning Caesar at that time was Nero, who would later go on to be one of the very worst persecutors of Christians. FYI, Bernice is King Agrippa's sister. Agrippa is the Jewish king who was being permitted to rule some areas under Roman control.

WORTH A NOTE

Sometimes we look at our situations and think that things aren't moving along as they should be. Here, we can see that God uses Paul's long imprisonment to allow him to share the gospel. (Paul wrote a lot of his letters from various prisons!) Are there any circumstances in your life in which you need to trust God? Ask Him to give you His perspective on things.



Paul's Defense Before King Agrippa And His Sister Bernice

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

HIGHLIGHT

(vs. 23-24) The Messiah (or Savior, "Anointed One") is the "first" to do _____?!? Jesus was raised from the dead forever! And He's going to do the same thing for all who belong to Him!!2 Corinthians 5:8 tells us that when we die, we're immediately in His presence! Nothing can separate us from Him, even for a single moment! But that's not all! He will raise our bodies, too, when He returns one day! We'll be fully alive with Him for all eternity! *For More Info: Look at 1 Corinthians 15:12-58. To see what Jesus' raised body was like (and therefore what ours might be like, too), look at John 20-21! (Spoiler: He ate and walked and talked and everything!)

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

- 1
- 2
- 3

This story inspired me to...

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RESPONSE

Read Paul's defense before King Agrippa. Pay close attention as you read. See how many points of Paul's defense you can retell from memory! Then check to see if you forgot anything!



A Big Disaster In Which God Shows His Control

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

WORTH A NOTE

Read Chapter 27. Look for ways in which you can see that nothing can stop God's plan—not even a disaster! P.S. Notice the word “we”—that means that Luke was on the voyage, too. It seems that he stayed with Paul through his entire imprisonment. What a faithful friend and co-worker in the gospel.

HIGH LIGHT

How would you describe Paul's emotions and attitude during this story? Why do you think he was so calm? How does God give Paul wisdom? How did the sailors respond?

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



Paul On The Island Of Malta And In Rome

SUMMARY *(write or draw)*

WORTH A NOTE

(vs. 1-6) What happened to Paul after they came ashore on Malta? How did the people interpret it? Isn't it crazy how fast people's opinions change? (vs. 7-10) How did God use this opportunity to minister to the people of Malta? (Fun Fact: Malta is a beautiful island! You can look up pictures of "Saint Paul's Bay" online. That's where people believe the shipwreck occurred!)

WHAT STOOD OUT

FAV WORDS

RESPONSE

Verses 11-30 tells us about the rest of Paul's journey to Rome and his time in house arrest. Paul was allowed to have companions while he waited to see Caesar. He was able to proclaim the gospel! Read the final part of the chapter, paying special attention to the last sentence. May that be true of all of us! What has stuck with you the most about the book of Acts? Stop and give God thanks for what you've learned.

A place for thoughts *(write or draw)*

This story inspired me to...



BIG **QUESTIONS.** **SIMPLE ANSWERS.**

What is the
BIG STORY?

Why do we have
four gospels?



What is the
Good News?

What is the Bible?

Who is
God's Family?

Practical, Easy-To-Use Devotionals Made for Families.

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

GUIDE

WHAT IS IT?

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

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

HOW DO I USE IT?

This e-book works in conjunction with the M2P FAMILY BIBLE SERIES.

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 worshipped. 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 (convinced of what was wrong). 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 had 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.

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 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 you 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!

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is a 66-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 understand what it all means.

Knowing a bit of history helps. *(That's why we'll give you a tiny bit for each book.)* 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 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



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 about 50 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!

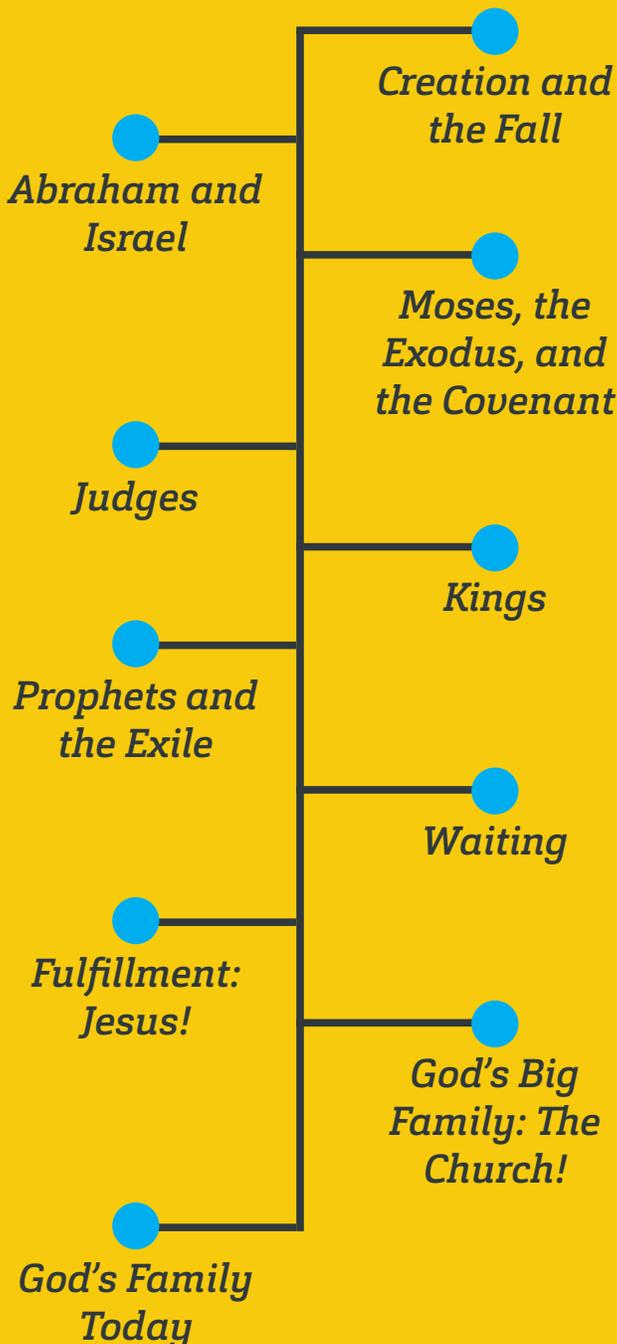
Take some time to read Revelation 21 and 22! It's a beautiful vision of all things, finally being as God intended! It will be even better than ever! Anyone who wants to be there with King Jesus can be! All it takes is trusting that He makes you right with God once and for all.

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 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!).**



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 similar style of writing.

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!

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