



In the Beginning



Inside

2026: The Story of Jesus



ARTICLES

- 4 Seeing the Savior in Scripture | Kelsey Gjesdal
- 7 A Personal Journey | Emmanuel Huerta
- 8 Before Bethlehem | Moises Capetillo
- 10 From the Beginning | R. Herbert
- 12 It's All About Him | Ruhama Assefa
- 16 Jesus and Genealogies | Mike Wallace
- 18 The Line Leader | Kurt Lang
- 20 Melchizedek and More | Ron Bullis
- 30 The First Gospel | Daniel Flores

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Beginnings
- 15 Questions & Answers
- 23 David Discovers Jesus' Beginning
- 24 My Favorite Verse
- 25 Poetry — Dorothy Nimchuk
- 26 Best Practices
- 27 GC Ministries News
- 28 On Mission — Taking a Step Back
- 31 Last Word — Looking for "The One"

Scripture quotations

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Beginnings

"In the beginning. . . ." That's how the most important, and bestselling, Book of all time famously begins.

Welcome to 2026, readers! This BA is all about beginnings. It is not only the first issue of the new year but also the first in our "The Story of Jesus" series. Of course, *the greatest story ever told* has its own beginning. Or is it *beginnings*?

Beginnings are important. They lay a foundation and point the way forward. They introduce us to the main character and hint at what's to come. By God's grace, the story of Jesus has *four* beginnings! Or, rather, God provided four Gospels to tell the wonderful story of His Son. Each has its own beginning, even using that word directly or indirectly.

Matthew begins, "The book of the genealogy [*genesis*] of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." He wants us to know that Jesus is rooted in Israel's story and is, in fact, the Messiah, the heir of David's throne and long-awaited King.

Mark opens with "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark goes straight for the action of Jesus' ministry, good news that is grounded in the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the coming Lord who is the Suffering Servant.

Luke begins as a historian might, telling how his account of Jesus' story is based on "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:2). Luke has a genealogy of Jesus, too — going back to Adam. He situates Jesus within human history. He is one of us, and for us, as the compassionate Son of Man.

John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John takes us back before "in the beginning." Jesus was already there, creating all there will ever be. He is the divine Son of God.

Each beginning is essential. Each tells us something about who Jesus is and why His story is good news. Each gives context, connecting Him to what came before. But in the end, Jesus has no beginning. *He is the beginning, and end.* All in all.

— Jason Overman



Seeing the Savior in Scripture



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Our hearts will burn within us when we find Him.

by Kelsey Gjesdal

Four dust clouds puffed from the ground as I walked side-by-side with Cleopas down the road from Jerusalem. The seven-mile journey felt long — too long for weary feet. Not that my feet were really that weary; we'd barely started our journey. It was more like my heart was weary, dry like the dust rising and falling with our steps. Pointless.

Cleopas sighed. "How could we be so wrong?"

I shook my head. "Everything had lined up . . . till three days ago."

Neither of us spoke for a moment, the rhythmic plodding of our feet filling the air.

"Do you think they're right?"

"The women?" Cleopas asked.

I nodded. "I . . . don't know.

I mean, I've seen crucifixions before. You can't survive that. Rome wouldn't let you survive that horror."

"They didn't say He survived. They said He resurrected."

Another set of plodding feet joined ours, and I turned to see a man walk up next to me, not much older than I. He smiled warmly. "I couldn't help overhearing, and I'm intrigued. What have you two been discussing?"

Cleopas stopped dead still. The sadness etched on his face mirrored how my own heart felt. "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened these past few days?"

The man cocked his head. "What things?"

I almost laughed. How absurd anyone coming from Jerusalem wouldn't know! "The things about Jesus of Nazareth," I answered. "He was a prophet who did mighty deeds and spoke mighty words before God and all the people. But the chief priests and our rulers sentenced Him to death, and He was crucified. We were hoping that Jesus would redeem Israel, that He would be the Messiah. But it's been three days since all this happened."

Cleopas nodded. "Some of the women who followed Him went to His tomb early this morning and didn't find His body there. They claimed to have seen angels who said He was alive. Peter and John went to the tomb, and it was empty as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus anywhere."

The man shook his head sadly. "O foolish men! How slow you are to believe what the prophets foretold! Didn't the Scriptures say it was necessary for the Christ to suffer crucifixion and to enter His glory?"

I looked over at Cleopas, utterly confused. He just shrugged. The priests and rulers had always taught that the Christ would overthrow Rome. What was this man talking about?

The man began walking again and motioned for us to follow Him. "Let's go back to the Scriptures and start with Moses."

Pointing to Christ

The above story, adapted from Luke 24, tells of the Lord Jesus joining two men as they walked down the road to Emmaus. They were downcast after the Lord's crucifixion and perplexed that the women who went to the

tomb three days later found it empty. But Jesus had an answer for their confusion: The Christ was to suffer and enter His glory. Then Jesus expounded on the Scriptures about Himself (24:26, 27).

Jesus did this for a reason. The Old Testament Scriptures teem with prophecies of the coming Messiah. In fact, all the Old Testament is written to point us to Christ. Even before the foundation of the world, the Father planned for Christ Jesus to redeem us (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20). Jesus was not the backup plan; He was *the* plan, and the Old Testament reveals

Fulfilled prophecies

The first glimpse of the gospel is in Genesis. After the Fall, God promised to send someone to crush the head of the serpent that had deceived Eve (Genesis 3:15). Then God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins to cover their nakedness (v. 21), a shadow of our Messiah who would clothe our spiritual nakedness with His robes of righteousness (Galatians 3:27).

The rest of the Old Testament is filled with prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, all fulfilled by Jesus Christ:

Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:26-38);

“The Old Testament Scriptures teem with prophecies of the coming Messiah.”

that. On the road to Emmaus that day, Jesus walked His disciples through the Old Scriptures to show them this glorious truth.

Let's walk through a sampling of the many ways the Old Testament points to our Savior and proves that He came not to overthrow the Roman Empire, but to overthrow the empire of sin and death and restore us to a right relationship with God.

Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7);

Proclaim the good news, set free the oppressed, and proclaim the "favorable year of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 4:18-20);

Ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt (Zechariah 9:9; John 12:14, 15);

Be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18);

Die by crucifixion (Psalm 22; Matthew 27);

His clothing gambled away during His death (Psalm 22:18; John 19:24);

Refuse to fight to save Himself from crucifixion (Isaiah 53:7-9; Matthew 27:12-14);

No bones broken (Psalm 34:20; John 19:33);

Rise from the dead before His body could undergo decay (Psalm 16:10; Matthew 28).

Shadows of Jesus

Not only did Christ fulfill hundreds of prophecies, but the Scriptures are also full of shadows (called types) that point to Christ. These shadows are true events, objects, ceremonies, or structures that point forward to the truth of our coming Savior. Let's look at three of the many shadows in the Old Testament.

The ark. Just as the ark saved Noah's family from the judgment of the flood, Jesus saves us from the wrath of God to come. Just as the ark had one door, so there is only one way to salvation and a right relationship with God: through Jesus Christ.

The lamb. During the Jewish

feast of Passover, the Passover lamb was to be unblemished and have no broken bones. Jesus was our unblemished Lamb, without sin so He could pay the penalty for our sins in our place.

The bronze serpent. During one of the many times Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people. When they asked Moses to intercede for them to God, He commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a standard. If those who were bitten by the serpents looked to the serpent on the pole, they would live (Numbers 21). Similarly, Jesus was lifted up on a cross so that those who look upon the cross will be saved from their sins and granted eternal life.

Burning hearts

When the two disciples finished their journey to Emmaus, they invited the man who explained Scripture to them to stay and eat with them. When He blessed the food, their eyes were opened and they realized who

they had been traveling with: the Lord Jesus, alive from the dead forevermore! With their recognition, Jesus vanished from their sight.

Immediately, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem to share the good news with the rest of the disciples. "They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32).

The next time you sit down to read the Old Testament, look for Jesus in the pages. May our hearts burn within us as we see Jesus and the glorious gospel of grace in all of Scripture. **BA**

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But don't stop there! We have a whole archive of Extras! Here are the last three you might have missed:

Don't Doubt Thomas
by Mike Wallace



Not Just a "Wait"
Problem by Stephen
R. Clark



The Pursuit and Possession of Wisdom
by Denise Kohlmeier





A Personal Journey

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by **Emmanuel Huerta**

When I think about “The Story of Jesus” theme for this year, I realize that each of us has a unique relationship with the Lord: as the friend who is always by our side; as the Savior who transforms lives. This year, as we focus on His story, I want to reflect on what it means to follow Him.

I remember the moment I truly understood who Jesus was. I was in the hospital, feeling lonely and vulnerable. During that time, I remembered Jesus’ words: “Fear not, for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10). At that moment, I knew that He cares not only about the big problems of the world but also about my personal struggles and weaknesses. I wanted to follow Him.

Jesus’ story is full of such transformative encounters. The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) had a complicated history, but Jesus knew her heart. Instead of judging her, He offered her living water. That is the essence of Jesus’ story: a love that seeks us out, inviting us to leave our burdens behind and find a new beginning in Him. That’s just what the woman did.

To follow Jesus is not just a call to believe in Him; it is a call to live as He lived. In Mark 8:34, Jesus invites us to deny ourselves, take up His cross, and follow Him. We must set aside our preferences and desires and pursue the path He sets before us.

Often, this can be uncomfortable. It may mean loving those who are difficult or serving those in need when we don’t feel like it. But in those moments of sacrifice we find joy and purpose. Jesus

shows us that the path to true life is often filled with obstacles and that they can be opportunities to grow in our faith.

As we delve into studying “The Story of Jesus,” let us remember that we are not alone in this journey. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus interacted with individuals and formed a community. The disciples were a diverse, imperfect group, but Jesus united them in a common purpose. We as a church are that community.

Maybe this year some of us can join a small group or start a conversation with someone about our faith. Sharing our stories of Jesus with others strengthens our faith and can be a beacon of hope for those around us. The story of Jesus is our story, and together we can follow where He leads us.

I encourage you to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. What about Him inspires you? How can you apply His teachings? Remember that every small step counts. Jesus’ story is not an old tale; it is an ongoing journey of discovery, love, and transformation.

So as we move forward this year, let us open our hearts to what Jesus wants to teach us. Let’s allow His story to transform our lives and our community. And let’s do it together! **BA**

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Finding the Messiah in the
songs of David.
by Moises Capetillo

When we tell the story of Jesus, many of us begin in Bethlehem. We picture angels filling the sky, shepherds rushing to a manger, and wise men traveling from the East. But the Bible insists His story did not start in a manger. Centuries before the birth of Christ, the psalmists were already singing about a Messiah who existed before David, who would suffer, reign, and redeem the nations.

As I read through the Psalms, I can't help but picture them like a songbook that whispers the name of Jesus between every line. David may have thought

he was writing about his own experiences — about kingship, suffering, and shepherding — but the Spirit of God was revealing a greater King, a greater Sufferer, and a greater Shepherd.

I used to be mystified with the term *messianic psalm*. However, this is simply a title given to psalms that were written about our King Jesus — prophetic psalms speaking of His testimony to come. Once I understood this, I began to read the Psalms differently, not just as songs of David but as inspired previews of the Messiah's story.

Let me show you a few of these psalms where the Messiah steps forward from the shadows.

Eternal King: Psalm 2

Psalm 2 begins with the nations in an uproar. "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of

the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed" (vv. 1, 2).

That word *Anointed* is the Hebrew *Mashiach* — Messiah. This psalm is not just about David or any earthly king; it points to the Son of God. The psalm even records God's declaration: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" (vv. 7, 8).

The New Testament writers knew exactly who this psalm was about. Both Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 apply these words to Jesus. From the very beginning, God was telling us His Son would reign, not only over Israel but over the nations. And the psalm closes with a strong call: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, . . . Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (v. 12).

The Messiah is not a local ruler. He is the King of kings, enthroned before time, worthy of our trust today.

Priest Forever: Psalm 110

This psalm is quoted more in the New Testament than any other. David begins, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (v. 1).

Think about that. David, the greatest king Israel had ever known, calls this figure “my Lord.” He recognized Someone greater than himself, Someone already present.

Then verse 4 makes an incredible statement: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Unlike the priests of Levi who lived and died, this priesthood is eternal. Hebrews 7 explains that Jesus fulfills this psalm completely. He is both King and Priest, ruling with authority and interceding for us forever. David’s Lord was not just a future heir; He was the eternal Messiah seated at God’s right hand.

Suffering Savior: Psalm 22

If Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 show us the Messiah’s glory, Psalm 22 shows us His suffering. It begins with words Jesus himself quoted from the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (v. 1).

As you read on, the details are chilling:

They pierced My hands and My feet (v. 16).

They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots (v. 18).

All those who see Me

ridicule Me; . . . saying, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him” (vv. 7, 8).

Crucifixion wasn’t even practiced in David’s day, yet he described it with precision. This psalm shows us that the suffering of Jesus was not random; it was foreseen. From the beginning, God’s plan was for His Son to bear our sin.

Psalm 22 doesn’t end with pain but with hope: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You” (v. 27).

Through His suffering, the Messiah brings salvation to the world.

Everlasting Shepherd: Psalms 23 and 72

Psalm 23 may be the most quoted chapter in all the Bible. We recite it in worship and at funerals. We sing it in church. We preach it from the pulpit and whisper it in our meditations. David says, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” but in John 10, Jesus steps forward and says, “I am the good shepherd” (v. 11). Suddenly the psalm takes on even deeper meaning. The One who leads us beside still waters

and through the valley of death is not just David’s Shepherd. He is Jesus, our eternal Shepherd.

Psalm 72 takes this further, describing a King whose reign stretches from sea to sea, whose name endures forever: “His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed” (v. 17).

Who could this be but the Messiah? Solomon’s throne did not last. David’s kingdom eventually fell. But the Son of God endures forever.

Songbook of Jesus

When we open the Psalms, we are not reading just Israel’s hymnbook. We are reading prophecy. Every line points forward to Jesus. Psalm 2 shows us the eternal King. Psalm 110 reveals the Priest forever. Psalm 22 unveils the suffering Savior. And Psalms 23 and 72 remind us of the everlasting Shepherd.

The psalmists did not know the details of Bethlehem, Calvary, or the empty tomb, but they sang of a Messiah who was already writing His story into history. Jesus himself said, “All things must be fulfilled which

continued on page 14

“The Messiah is not a local ruler. He is the King of kings, enthroned before time, worthy of our trust today.”

From the Beginning

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The preexistent Jesus in the Gospel of John. by R. Herbert

In the opening passages of his Gospel, the apostle John gives us the most detailed description of the nature of God's Son in the whole New Testament. As most Bible readers know, John frequently organizes his key points into groups of seven. In a mere twenty-three verses in his prologue, he uses seven distinct and important titles of Jesus that affirm His divine nature: Word, God, Light, Son of God, Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

While all seven titles can be found in the Old Testament (even Word — see sidebar), the

apostle gives them new significance in stressing the divine nature and preexistence of Jesus.

Son of God

For example, in the Old Testament the title Son of God was plural (*sons*) for Israel and for some other groups (Genesis 6:2; Job 1:6, etc.). It was singular for both David and Solomon (2 Samuel 7:13-16, etc.).

But nowhere in the Old Testament do we find the spiritual implication that John invests in the title, that Jesus was, in the fullest sense, the literal and only Son of God. We see this, for example, in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

So when John writes in his prologue of "the one and only

Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14), he is making far more than a simple comment. John is tying Jesus to a part of the Scriptures that every first century Jew recognized: Exodus 33-34, where God identifies Himself to Moses: "The LORD . . . abounding in *goodness and truth*" (Exodus 34:6, NKJV, emphasis added).

Note that the Hebrew word translated "goodness" here can be equally translated "grace," so the parallel with "grace and truth" is direct. John stresses this connection again a few verses later in his Gospel in saying that "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17, NKJV).

Parallels

We can see a number of these parallels between God's interaction with Moses and Israel (Exodus 33-34) and the interaction of Jesus with His disciples and the people of Israel, stressed in John's prologue:

God dwelt in the tabernacle among His people (Exodus 33:10).

The Word "tabernacled" (the literal Greek) among people (John 1:14).

Moses beheld God's glory (Exodus 33:18-23).

The disciples beheld Jesus' glory (John 1:14).

The glory was full of goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6, NKJV).

The glory was full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

No one could see all of God's glory (Exodus 33:20).

No one has ever seen God (John 1:18).

God's glory was partially revealed to Moses (Exodus 33:23).

God's glory was partially revealed by Jesus (John 1:18).

John continues in his Gospel to emphasize the connection between the Old Testament Son of God and Jesus of the New Testament by showing us how Jesus lived: He continually exhibited grace. He welcomed and ate with sinners and tax collectors, but He also continually exhibited truth. We see Him condemning many of the outwardly religious of that day for their hypocrisy.

So in the expression "full of grace and truth," John gives a preview of the word portrait of Jesus he would be painting. He also shows us, by implication,

that the life of Jesus teaches us that we must have grace and truth in our own lives. It is not "either/or" but a unity of behavior and belief that is essential in the nature of the Son of God and of every true child of God (John 3:21, etc.).

Personal need

In addition to the importance of John's picture of Jesus that we're called to imitate (John 13:34; 1 John 2:6, etc.), the apostle stresses our need for the grace and truth that come from the Son of God. He writes, "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given" (John 1:16). And John quotes Jesus describing the Holy Spirit as "the Advocate . . .

whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth . . ." (15:26).

This is only one example of how John unpacks the concepts inherent in seven of the descriptive titles of God in the Old Testament and how they apply to Jesus as the Son of God. The prologue of the fourth Gospel is a rich mine from which we can, in our own personal study, extract many more understandings of the nature of the preexistent Son of God. **BA**

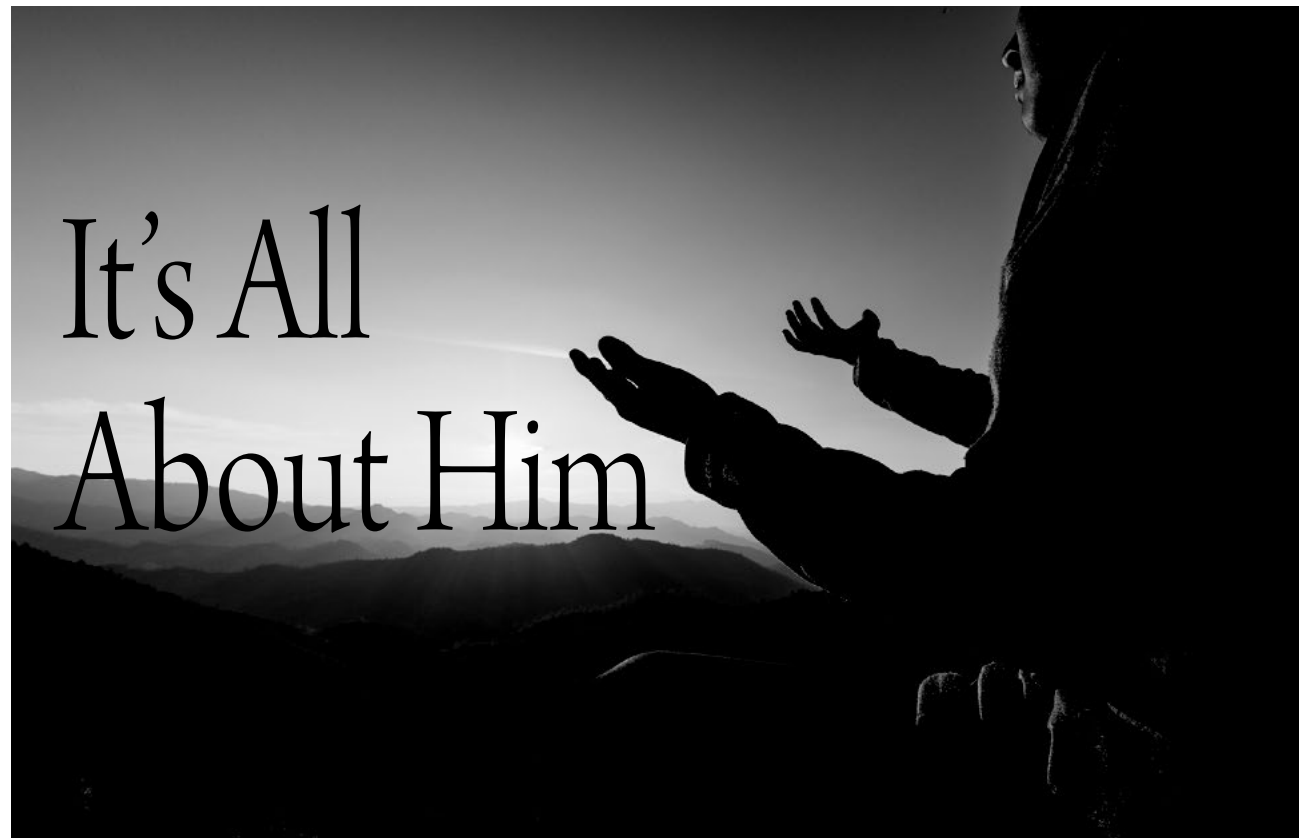
R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

The Word Before the New Testament

"In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). In the New Testament, only John calls Jesus the Word, and when he does, he uses the Greek term *logos*. It does mean "word" but also has much deeper implications.

The first century Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher Philo taught that the *logos* was the instrument through which God made the world. But while ancient thinkers like Philo saw the *logos* in the abstract as an invisible, unknowable "principle," John introduces us to the *Logos* as a person: the preincarnate Jesus. In doing so, he links the Greek idea of *logos* with the opening of the Hebrew Scriptures: "In the beginning . . . God *said* . . ." (Genesis 1:1, 3, emphasis added here and below) and the affirmation of the psalmist that "By the *word* of the LORD the heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6). John also assures us that the true *Logos* is not unknowable, but that He "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

— R. Herbert



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Before Bethlehem, the
Alpha and Omega.

by Ruhama Assefa

One afternoon I rushed home, desperate to open my Bible. My heart was heavy, weighed down by sadness, and I longed for relief.

I searched the pages for a verse that would perfectly match my situation, something to comfort me in the moment. Tears streaming down my face, I poured out my problems at the feet of my Lord.

But as I flipped through Scripture, something unexpected happened. A conviction struck deep within me, almost like a weight pressing against my heart

and mind. I believe it was the Holy Spirit. In that moment I felt ashamed because I suddenly saw what I had been doing — not just once but many times before. I wasn't really studying the Word of God for what it *said*. I was hunting for verses that would echo my feelings.

Don't get me wrong. There is nothing bad about running to God's Word for comfort. Scripture is our shield and our refuge. But I realized I was listening only for what I wanted to hear, rather than allowing the Spirit to speak what I needed to hear. I wanted my situation addressed, but I was missing the bigger truth: The Bible is not a book of quick fixes; it is the revelation of a Person.

That Person is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not just in the Gospels. He is there from the very

beginning. He is the eternal Word, the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is, who was, and who is to come. When we read the Bible only for verses to soothe us, we risk missing the greater reality: It's all about Him.

Eternal Christ

Many people, even Christians, don't always grasp this. Some see Jesus as merely a prophet or a historical figure who suddenly appeared in the New Testament. In His own day, many of the Jewish people — faithful students of the law, experts in Scripture — failed to recognize Him. They could not see that the Messiah standing before them was the same One promised through their beloved Scriptures.

And honestly, without the

Spirit's help, we would miss Him too. Knowledge of the Bible alone is not enough. There is a difference between knowing the facts of Scripture and truly believing them. Belief always leads to the acceptance of Christ himself.

This is why the truth of Jesus' preexistence matters so much. It shows us His deity, His eternity, His authority, and His humility. It roots our faith not in passing feelings but in the eternal plan of God. The prophet Micah once declared:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem. He stepped into history there, but He existed before time began. John's Gospel tells us "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (1:3). Paul adds, "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17).

Eternal plan

When Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), He was not just claiming wisdom or seniority. He was identifying Himself with the God who revealed Himself to Moses as I AM (Exodus 3:14). His words carried the weight of eternity. And yet, Philippians 2 reminds us that, though He was in very nature God, He humbled Himself to become man, even to the death of the cross.

In His prayer before the cross,

Jesus said, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). The cross was not an accident, not a tragic twist of fate. It was the unfolding of God's eternal plan, carried out by the One who shared glory with the Father before creation itself.

Continuous story

This is what struck me afresh in that moment of conviction: Life is not found in the Book itself but through the Book — in the Person the Book describes. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is one continuous story pointing to Jesus.

In Genesis, He is the promised Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head.

our iniquities. Daniel sees Him as the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven to receive everlasting dominion. Micah points to Bethlehem, declaring that the Ruler to come would be from ancient times.

And then, at last, the Gospels reveal Him in flesh and blood: Immanuel, God with us. The Old Testament whispers His name; the New Testament shouts it. The whole story is about Him.

Changed approach

Realization of this changes the way we read the Bible. When I see Jesus as the eternal Christ, I no longer come to Scripture just for a soothing verse, though God still comforts me through it. Instead, I come to meet Him, the one who was in the beginning

“The Bible is not a book of quick fixes; it is the revelation of a Person. That Person is Jesus Christ.”

In Exodus, He is the Passover Lamb whose blood brings protection and deliverance. In the wilderness He is the manna from heaven, sustaining His people with life. The psalmists sing of Him as the Shepherd who guides and as the King who reigns. Isaiah speaks of Him as the Suffering Servant, pierced for our transgressions and crushed for

and who will be at the end. His preexistence helps me trust, because His promises are not temporary but everlasting. It gives me hope because the One who existed before time holds my future securely. It humbles me because the eternal Word chose the path of humility for my salvation. And it moves me to worship because the Bible becomes not

just a mirror of my feelings but a window into His glory.

When I look back at that day when the Holy Spirit stopped me in my tracks, I realize it was grace. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' time read and memorized the Old Testament, yet many still missed seeing His messiahship. I can't judge them, because I do the same when I approach Scripture for my own ends. Without the Spirit opening our eyes, none of us would see. That is why we need to pray — for ourselves, for our loved ones, for the world — that spiritual eyes would be opened.

We long for others to know the love we have felt, the rest

we have received, and the peace that Christ has given us. But this comes only when we see Scripture not as a book of rules or comfort verses, but as the revelation of Jesus himself.

Finding Jesus

So now when I open my Bible, I remind myself that it's not just about finding something for my situation. It's about finding Him. Life is not in the pages but in the Person. From the first promise to the final vision, the Bible tells one story of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who was with God in the beginning and who will reign forever.

When we open the Bible this way, it becomes about beholding His glory. And we are changed.

As Revelation reminds us, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8). **BA**

Ruhama Assefa
writes from Addis
Ababa, Ethiopia.



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Before Bethlehem

continued from page 9

were written in the . . . Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).

And they were!

So next time you read or sing a psalm, remember: You are joining an ancient chorus that proclaimed Jesus long before Bethlehem. The Messiah of the Psalms is the same eternal Son we worship today — the King, Priest, Savior, and Shepherd who reigns forever. **BA**

Moises Capetillo

serves as the assistant director of GC Missions and senior pastor of the CoG7 in Albuquerque, NM, alongside his wife, Victoria, and six children.



Questions & Answers



What is the Incarnation, and why is it important?

The word *incarnation* comes from a Latin word that means “to be made flesh” (John 1:14). The Incarnation is the Christian belief that Jesus was the Son of God and son of man — truly human and truly divine. From eternity, the Son entered history and took on the nature of flesh from a virgin human mother and His divine Father. This is important because it is God’s design for the redemption of humanity. Incarnation is God’s act to restore people into a relationship with God and to grow them into the likeness of Jesus, the firstborn of God (cf. Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; 12:23; Revelation 1:5).

The doctrine of the Incarnation originates in John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The preexisting Word is identified as the one who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (v. 14), Jesus the Christ. The divine actions of Jesus recorded in the Gospels serve as evidence of His preexistence, such as forgiving sins, building His own church, and being worshipped alongside the Father. Likewise, Jesus’ own claims and references to His divine origin and preexistence serve as key evidence.

The Incarnation tangibly reveals God to humanity and demonstrates His intention for humanity. The Incarnation was necessary because, through the first Adam, created in the Garden of Eden, sin corrupted humanity. A sentence of death was pronounced upon all under the headship of the first Adam. The apostle Paul explains, “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

The apostle continues in the next three verses: “However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly” (vv. 46-48).

God’s justice and salvation of humanity required one who did not carry the headship of the first Adam as his father, but a sinless person in the flesh to fulfill the death sentence pronounced upon humanity through the first Adam. Jesus’ divine nature and human nature — the Incarnation — did that. As a man, Jesus would bear the judgment for humanity. He, without sin, became the substitute for the guilty, to stand in our place (cf. Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Further, the Incarnation positions Jesus to be both our Mediator and High Priest who overcame human sin and weakness and sympathizes with human struggles, as the book of Hebrews describes. The Incarnation establishes God’s permanent and eternal dwelling place with humanity. The first advent of Jesus the Christ by divine conception, His sinless life, His substitutionary atoning sacrifice, and His glorified resurrection are followed by His second advent to establish the glorified residence of God with humanity.

Finally, the Incarnation demonstrates a profound act of love and self-emptying sacrifice to show how much the physical world and human existence matter. It is through the Incarnation that humanity can see more clearly the character of God as Creator and Redeemer (cf. Isaiah 9:6; John 14:9; Philippians 2:6-8; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

— Elder Chip Hinds

The good, the bad, and the ugly in Jesus' lineage.

by Mike Wallace

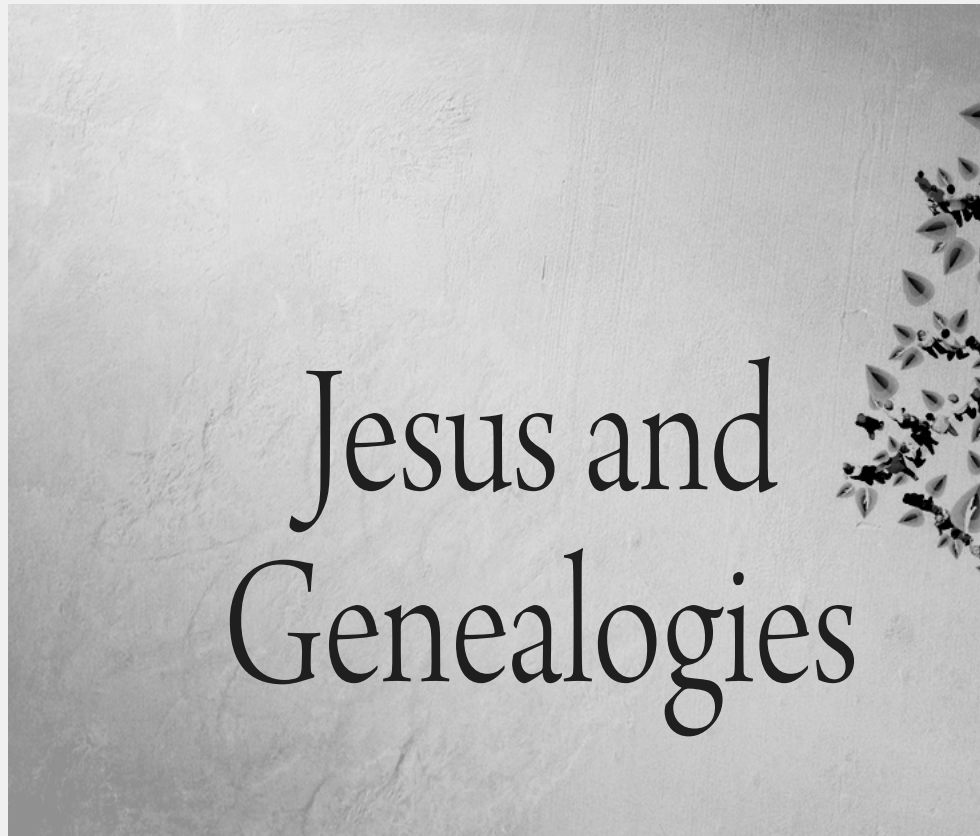
Many people are excited to study their family genealogies: *Where did we come from? Are we related to anyone famous?* I know several people who spend much of their time studying family history. One interesting group called Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness has hundreds of volunteers who go to cemeteries and look up family histories for folks. The discoveries are amazing and sometimes disheartening.

My wife has been trying to figure out my family history for years. Her only conclusion is that my family is not who we thought we were. However, it turns out that I am distantly related to actor Humphrey Bogart and journalist Tom Brokaw. After much research, it turns out her family and mine come from the same canton in Switzerland about three hundred years ago.

Genealogy studies can be exhilarating, exhausting, and disappointing. One never knows what they will find in their past.

Imperfect women

Matthew and Luke both delve into the genealogy of Jesus. As the Son of God, Jesus was perfect, but those He descended from were not. Fortunately, we have a loving, forgiving Savior in Jesus.



Jesus and Genealogies

Let's look at the five women listed in the genealogy of Jesus. Could your family history be like this?

Tamar (Matthew 1:3) was the daughter-in-law of Judah, son of Jacob. According to her story in Genesis 38, she was first married to the eldest son of Judah named Er. He died and she was given to Onan, who also died. Tamar was then asked to wait for the younger son, Shelah, to grow up so she could become his wife. Instead, Judah ignored her and did not fulfill his promise. Tamar secretly played the harlot with Judah (her father-in-law) and became pregnant with twins.

Rahab (Matthew 1:5), who lived in Jericho, realized the city would be destroyed by Joshua and Israel. The Hebrew *ishshā zonā*, used to describe Rahab in Joshua 2:1-24, literally means

"a prostitute woman." She is also possibly described as an innkeeper. In that day, innkeepers and harlots often had dual careers in the same home. Despite her way of life, Rahab saved the two spies sent by Joshua and was rewarded with God saving her entire family.

Ruth (Matthew 1:5) was not even an Israelite but was from Moab, an ancient enemy of Israel. Despite this, when her mother-in-law, Naomi, left Moab to return to Israel, Ruth insisted on going along to a foreign nation with completely different customs and culture. When Naomi told her to stay in Moab, Ruth's answer echoes "love" to this very day:

"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever



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you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16, 17).

God blessed Ruth: This foreigner became the great-grandmother of King David.

The wife of Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba, Matthew 1:7). One day, King David saw a beautiful woman bathing, and his lust got the better of him. As king, he had her brought to his bedroom and impregnated her. Though her husband, Uriah, was a loyal servant-warrior of King David, David had him killed and then married Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). Adultery, murder, palace intrigue. Eventually, after David's repentance (Psalm 51), Bathsheba

became the mother of Solomon.

Jesus reconciles us back to Himself through His grace, by our faith. It took His entering human genealogy to accomplish this grace, and He used imperfect men and women to do it.

Of the four mentioned so far in Jesus' genealogy, two are foreigners, two are harlots, one is an adulteress, and one a loving daughter-in-law from a foreign country. Faith is the common factor among them.

Mary

And now, the last in the long line of women.

Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:16), was chosen by God himself. She became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, having never "known" a man. Matthew quotes prophecy: "'Behold, the

virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'" (v. 23). When Mary hurried to share the news with her cousin, Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42).

Jesus, *God with us*, the Creator of all, was born to the human Mary!

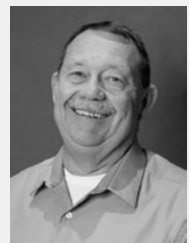
Adoption

In the realm of genealogy, we are all descended from Adam. Luke gives us the lineage of Jesus and concludes with "the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38). Jesus, the son of Mary, was the creator of Adam, the son of God. In His own genealogy we recognize Jesus to be both fully man and fully divine — God in the flesh.

Studying genealogy can be full of twists and turns and unexpected discoveries. No matter what we find, Jesus entered our earthly family tree so that we might be adopted into His eternal family tree (Romans 8:14-17). And that is all the family that really matters. **BA**

Mike Wallace, an elder in CoG7, is the senior spiritual advisor for the Colorado Springs, CO church and coordinator for the CoG7 in Montana.

He lives in Florence, MT, with his wife, Bonnie.





The Line

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by Kurt Lang

In my grade school, line leader was the coveted position. That person got to lead the class to lunch, to the gym, to the bus. If the teacher was wise, she would assign this position on a rotating basis, rather than wrestle with picking one from the sea of hands raised upon offering the position.

When I was a child, there seemed to be something special about this responsibility. Hind-sight, however, reveals the truth: We all love to be first. First to answer the challenging math question. First in the lunch line. First to recess to get the good swing. Being first garners attention. We like that too. First is the best. The best dodgeball player always gets picked before everyone else.

Line leaders are confident and proud. They know where they are going. The eyes of many followers are trained on them. They are the important ones.

Lines can have interesting applications to leadership. Everyone is a leader (except the last person), since there is someone

behind them following their direction. Everyone is a follower (except the first person), since there is someone in front of them showing the way.

John Maxwell understood this principle. He wrote a book entitled *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Law #13 is the Law of the Picture, which says that people do what people see. (So do monkeys!) If we want people to do and act a certain way, it is critical whom we put at the front of the line so they can see what that person does and emulate their action or character.

Author Steven Covey adds to this thought. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he lists one habit as “Begin with the end in mind.” In other words, whatever you want the last person in line to do, ensure that the first person in line does it so it gets passed on. (Hopefully, our line does better than the old Telephone game we used to play!)

Jesus: first and last

Of course, these lessons were born out of the ultimate authority, God’s Holy Scriptures. Jesus said, “Whoever would be great

among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45).

Our Messiah, Jesus, said to watch Him and do what He did, for others are watching you to see what you will do.

Paul also wrote, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV). These words reveal what Maxwell and Covey said: The end goal is to follow and then act like our Lord Jesus. For a couple thousand years, the line of followers has been lengthening. We can see only a couple of followers in front of us. But if we stick with the one who follows their leader closely, the last one in line will still be like the Line Leader.

God had that last person in mind when He began the process of calling His creation to be made in His image. And He chose the right Line Leader for the job who would not lead them astray: Christ. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13).

From even before the

Leader

beginning of time as we know it, Jesus the Son of God, was given the role of Line Leader. It starts with Him. It ends with Him. It's all about Him! Paul explains, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . . He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent" (Colossians 1:15, 18).

The firstborn of all creation. Somewhere in our church history, we would have thought that meant Jesus was created by God. Now we understand, as fits with the passage, that He was the beginning of creation. Creation's starting point came from the hand of the One who made it all. It was born of Him.

The Christ was also the firstborn from the dead. In due time, those who follow will receive the same resurrection.

Leader qualities

Why is it important that we understand that Christ Jesus is the beginning and that He is the first to rise from the dead? So that He might be preeminent in everything — first place in all

things, having paramount rank, dignity, or importance.

He is the Line Leader. He follows no one (except God the Father, of course! But we can count them together in our placement). He leads; we follow.

Special consideration must be given by those who lead others. Leadership does not make us important. Leadership does not make us look good in the eyes of others. Leadership is not a power ploy. The best leader is the best follower and the one who serves with the humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11).

Follow the Leader

And guess what? We are all leaders in some shape or form. Perhaps not by worldly position, but certainly in God's economy. So remember your place in line. Someone is behind you, even as you are behind someone else. We are all in the same role; only Jesus can be at the head.

Will you do as you were created to do: Follow the Line Leader and be formed into His image? He alone is worthy of our commitment. Just make sure the one in front of you is giving you the

correct image to follow. Make sure you are portraying your Jesus well so that the one behind you isn't led astray. And the last will be as blessed as the first! **BA**

Kurt Lang pastors the Eugene, OR congregation and is the English assistant dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*, unless otherwise noted.



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Melchizedek and More

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How Old Testament figures
soften our hearts for Christ.
by Ron Bullis

Have you ever asked yourself why the Old Testament tells so many stories about King David, Moses, Abraham, and other figures? One reason is that Christians find in those people a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Reading about them prepares us for our personal relationship with Christ.

Comparing Christ with Old Testament figures is almost as old as Christianity itself. Many in the early church regarded them as a prophecy or prefigurement of Christ himself. Later Christian thinkers, such as Jonathan Edwards, also viewed events in the lives of figures like David, Moses, or Joseph as foreshadowing the events of Christ's coming and His ultimate victory over sin and death. Making these connections

can bring our hearts closer to Christ's own heart.

King and priest

As a helpful illustration, consider an unusual and intriguing character. Genesis tells us that Abram (before he was Abraham) and four kings defeated five other kings. These kings had looted and kidnapped Lot, Abram's kin. In the immediate ensuing peace, King Melchizedek, whom Genesis described as a "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18), served wine and bread and blessed Abram. In the blessing, Melchizedek described his God as the "creator of heaven and earth" and said that this God "delivered your enemies into your hand" (vv. 19, 20).

The similarity between

Melchizedek and Christ starts as they are both king and priest. But Melchizedek is not just any king or priest. He presides over a peace settlement. Melchizedek's first act, according to the Genesis account, is to break bread and serve wine to those gathered.

This passage has strong connections to Christ's communion in the upper room. Melchizedek was not a priest of just any god but of the Most High God (El Elyon), the same name for God that Abram used. These connections between Melchizedek and Christ are more remarkable considering that he was a priest of the Most High God. Given this constellation of links, it is hard not to think of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews makes the priestly connection between Christ and Melchizedek explicit. Hebrews says that Jesus' high priesthood arises, not from any genetic connection to Aaron's priesthood, but from His sonship with God. Christ is our High Priest, not by regulation but by "the power of an indestructible life" (Hebrews 7:16). Through Christ's eternal relationship with God, Christ is God. In turn, we know and experience the power of God through our relationship with Christ.

Hebrews also refers us to Psalm 110:4 for the connection to Melchizedek. In it David praises God for victory over his enemies. He writes that the Lord God has anointed this human king as a "priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." God can choose whom He wants to be His priest, regardless of legal status, temple rules, or family history.

Benefits

How do these comparisons help us to have a closer relationship with Christ?

First, they soften our hearts. That is, in pondering their lives, we are drawn deeper into Christ's life. Sometimes it is hard to imagine that Christ loves us personally, cares for us individually, and responds to our needs intimately. But reviewing how God worked miracles in the lives of Old Testament figures acquaints us with God's graces in the lives of others. The more we become familiar with God's

inspired, we mean the whole Bible. The Scriptures record God's work in the Old Testament and demonstrate how God's work continues throughout the New. The Old Testament has wisdom and beauty that Christ himself was well acquainted with. In this way, both the Old and New Testaments form a unified and consistent record of God's work in our lives.

As we search the Scriptures and learn about the history of those times, we can feel assured of God's continued activity and become attuned to the variety of ways He works today through

“Both the Old and New Testaments form a unified and consistent record of God's work in our lives.”

action among these people, the easier it is to recognize how God is working in our own lives.

Second, God's gracious work in Old Testament figures invites us to think beyond ourselves and our circumstances. Sometimes we need a larger perspective. This "big picture" allows us to see God's overarching plan for the world and His people, which we are a part of.

Third, simply searching the Old Testament for foreshadowers of Christ acquaints us more with the Bible as a whole. When we say the Bible is sacred and

the Holy Spirit. Also, seeking Christ among the whole of Scripture strengthens our practice of seeking Christ in everything we do and sensitizes us to His continuing presence. Doing this takes practice and patience.

Now what?

First, we can search the Scriptures for how God is described. The names for God are not there for scholars only. The Holy Spirit placed such descriptions as King, Ruler, and Father in Scripture so we can feel closer to Him.

These words all denote a relationship. Digging a little deeper into Scripture, we can ask how these descriptions relate to others. Then we can ask ourselves how we respond if Christ is a Ruler, King, or Father in our lives. How does it feel, for example, to know Christ as a king?

Second, Christ himself can inform us how He is King or Father to us. Maybe He wants to be like King David or Melchizedek.

Third, we can meditate on the ways Christ renews and moves us — let our hearts feel what He feels and our minds think what He thinks. Christ came to save our whole selves: minds and emotions, intellect and feelings. Can we sense how we ought to think and feel before our faithful King and loving Father? Can we imagine ourselves acting like Him?

Finally, we can ask ourselves how Christ is like these things for the church and world. What does it mean for Him to be the Priest-King in peace and war? How do the prefigurements of Christ in the Old Testament inform us about the world around us? How do they inform our worship and praise of Christ today? Our answers will take us into a deeper relationship with Him that will transform us and the world around us. **BA**

Ron Bullis writes from Pisgah Forest, NC. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



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Thank you!

David Discovers Jesus' Beginning



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by Marcia Sanders

/// In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," David read to Skippy, who was always ready to listen to David. "Hmm . . . interesting," he mused.

"And the next verse says, 'He was in the beginning with God.' That's John 1:1, 2. And it gets even more interesting down here in verse 10, where it says, 'He was in the world, and the world was made through him.' This has to be talking about Jesus. Listen to verse 14: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.' Who else has had that glory?"

Skippy silently agreed, tail thumping.

"This is so cool! Let's see where else we can learn about Jesus' beginning," David said enthusiastically.

"What has you so excited?" Mom asked.

"Pastor mentioned in his sermon last week that Jesus was around before He was born to Mary. I was just reading the verses in John 1 that pastor mentioned, and it's really true!"

"Have you seen what else is recorded in the Gospel of John?" Mom asked. "For instance, check out chapter 17, verse 5, where Jesus is praying and asks His Father to 'glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.'"

"I've read that verse before but never really stopped to think about it," David said.

"If you think that's interesting," Mom continued, "check out John 8:58."

Flipping back a few pages in his Bible, David

read Jesus' words aloud: "'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' That makes it really clear. Do you know some more?"

"As a matter of fact, I do." Mom smiled. "And they're not all in John, although there are several more verses there we could check out. But let's leave John for a moment and look at Colossians 1:16."

"Okay." David began to flip pages again. "Let's see . . . 'For by him were all things created, in heaven and on earth, . . . all things were created through him and for him.' I don't think you could get much clearer than that!"

"And then there is Hebrews 1:2, where the writer says that God created the world through His Son," Mom added.

"This kinda goes along with what we were studying in Sabbath school last week about all of the many prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament," David commented. "Jesus was involved from the beginning of the world, and His Father told the prophets in the old times about His coming to earth — like He'd be born of a virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and that He'd be born in Bethlehem in Micah 5:2. The Bible all fits together so well. I just love reading and learning more about Jesus!" BA

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



My Favorite Verse

1 Samuel 16:7

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But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

by Florencia Garcia Morales

The Bible has the power to touch and change hearts. My favorite Bible verse, 1 Samuel 16:7, is an example of that. Even though I have read more heart-warming and heartbreaking verses in the Bible, I really love this one because it was one of my first steps toward God.

When I decided to live a life pleasing to God, I read the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. When I got to 1 Samuel 16:7, something in me changed. This verse refers to David when God chose him as king of Israel. At the time, David was a shepherd boy, the youngest of Jesse’s sons. God ordered Samuel to go to Jesse’s household because He had chosen a king from among his sons.

Before David appeared before

Samuel, all his older brothers were presented. Samuel, in a human reaction, went by the looks of the man and thought that one of the older sons was God’s anointed.

God’s response to Samuel’s thinking was that He does not look at physical appearance but at the heart. God was telling Samuel to stop focusing on looks and height. He rejected those and chose David, a young boy.

This showed me how God can use anyone to fulfill His plans. Most importantly, it reassured me that I was forgiven, that God saw who I really was, and that all I had to do was be faithful to Him.

This was a challenge. For a long time, the Bible was just another book to me, and a confusing one at that. I couldn’t make out what the words were saying; they seemed like riddles, so my

younger self opened the door to the devil and let him do as he pleased with me. I got knocked down many times, but I now realize that I had to go through all that to be the person I am today. Now my testimony proves that God’s Word changes you, and that is always for the better.

The Bible has now become my GPS on the way to eternal life. I am still working toward that goal every day. I am not the person I was, no thanks to me, the universe, or luck. It is thanks to the Creator who knows my young heart, just as He did David’s. By God’s grace I will continue walking the narrow path toward the future He has for me.

BA

Florencia Garcia Morales (19) attends the Corpus Christi-Violet congregation in Corpus Christi, TX.



Editor’s note: Starting with this issue, “My Favorite Verse” is a new column in the BA. Submit a reflection on your favorite verse to jason.overman@cog7.org.

The Edges of His Ways

Space. Darkness on the face of the deep
A circular horizon on the face of the waters
And a world hung on nothingness

Time. Boundary of light and darkness
Rule of sun, moon, and stars
Without Me nothing was made

Matter. The clay and the Potter
Sea life, birds, animals, and man
All fashioned, deemed as good

My path determined for Me
Before the world was
To save a world amok

The mere edges of His ways. How small a
whisper we hear
The unknown thunder of His power

Larger than space!
Older than time!
Greater than matter!

Dorothy Nimchuk

Best Practices



Sabbath school teachers (L to R) Terry William, David Haynes, Pastor Al Haynes, Keventon Davis, board chair, Dr. Maureen O. Vanterpool (front), and Newton Bailey (not pictured).

Making the Most of Sabbath School

At Treasure Coast CoG7 in Port St. Lucie, Florida, we started holding our adult Sabbath school (SS) classes online on Friday evenings during the pandemic. With active support of Pastor Al Haynes, we have continued to meet this way to review the weekly lessons from the Bible Studies for Adults.

We developed a model to promote attendance, engagement, shared understanding, and continuity, and we continue to refine that model. It is based on two main components: 1) One teacher is the designated leader each week, but for shared understanding, all the teachers meet to prepare for every lesson. 2) The SS superintendent assigns discussion questions in advance for selected individuals to prepare and present their responses.

Preparation. Led by Terry William, SS superintendent, SS teachers meet online every Monday evening to prepare for the upcoming lesson. He sets up the teaching schedule in which each teacher typically leads a lesson twice each quarter. The Monday evening session gives the teachers a chance to unpack the finer points of the lessons, to anticipate challenging questions that may be raised by the brethren on Friday evening, and to share information that may enhance the lesson further. While the scheduled teacher leads the lesson on Friday evenings, other teachers participate in the discussion. If the scheduled teacher cannot attend the preparation meeting on Monday evening, a substitute will lead the upcoming lesson on Friday evening.

This model makes it easy for us to share our understanding and to provide continuity by

substituting for each other in case of an unexpected situation. This worked out well for us more than once.

Engagement. To engage the brethren, we get commitments early each week from individuals who agree to prepare and present their answer to one of the “Talk About It” questions on Friday evening. Once the assigned person shares their answer during the lesson, the floor is open for further discussion related to that question. We have found that this is an effective way to promote thoughtful discussion.

Continued outreach. We constantly seek new ways to encourage attendance and engagement with the SS lessons. We’ve observed that the online numbers are similar to, and sometimes higher than, those we saw previously in person. Usually, friends of our congregation join us from elsewhere in the US or from overseas. In terms of engagement, some participants have requested more focus on application in our lessons, so we try to find ways to draw out implications for daily living whenever we see an opportunity. We will definitely pursue this, praying that the Lord will continue to inspire the lesson authors, SS teachers, and brethren through the Sabbath school lessons. **BA**

— Maureen O. Vanterpool

Editor’s note: How is your congregation using BAP products, like Sabbath school lessons? You can share your thoughts here on our “Best Practices” page. Send your ideas to jason.overman@cog7.org.



Calling All Auditors!

If you (or someone you know) have ever been interested in taking a class from Artios but didn't want the pressure of a grade, this is for you!

Starting with the 2025/2026 school year, auditing is being offered for select online courses.

What can I expect as an auditor? Auditors have access to all course materials, including satellite campus class sessions. Online class auditors are required to complete the reading assignments and the initial discussion posts. Additional class participation is optional.

How do I register? Register at <https://my.artioscollege.org/en/courses> and check what courses are available to audit.



Lord's Supper

Every year, we invite our brethren to help us with the design for the upcoming Lord's Supper. If you have graphic design or drawing skills and want to share your talents with our Conference, please email us at cog7media@cog7.org.

We are always seeking talent, and your skills are important for our church. Don't hesitate to connect. **Lord's Supper is Tuesday evening, March 31.**



COMMUNICATIONS

CREATE, COMMUNICATE, AND CONNECT WITH PURPOSE

Churchright and GC News Email

There are two consistent ways to learn about the latest news from across the Conference. Visit <https://churchright.org/> to read current and past issues of *Churchright*. You can also subscribe to our GC News email, delivered to your inbox every month. Contact <https://secure.cog7.org/news/>.

Training and Workshops

These are designed according to the specific needs of an area, district, or topic that requires attention. Each session lasts 1-3 hours, depending on the need, and includes a Q&A session.

To see the lists of workshops and training available today, check out our page: <https://cog7.org/media-services/>.



Bible Advocate Press

Adult Quarterlies

The BAP has added more helpful resources for your adult Bible studies! Explore our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@cog7> to watch lessons that will enrich your understanding and help you share with fellow class members or students. You can also view past quarterly videos at <https://cog7.org/videos/>.



Taking a Step Back

Local missionaries from our mission in Honduras, where there are 3,400 Church of God (Seventh Day) members.

by Ronald Rousseau

Sometimes you need a fresh perspective on something you've been doing a long time. To gain this, I highly recommend taking a step back, no matter where you are in life. It's important to do this periodically so you can see the big picture — where you are, where you're headed, and why.

I had a chance to do that when I became the GC Missions director in 2025. Getting a fresh perspective was more out of necessity. Such an opportunity often comes through dramatic experiences that force us to re-evaluate our current paths and the reasons behind our journeys.

As the new GC Missions team

came together, we decided to take a step back and share what we discovered.

Where are we now?

The ministries that come under GC Missions are
SHINE
Sustainability projects
Widows and Orphans
Missionary support (Cristo Viene)
Discipleship and education
Church planting

When we look at these ministries, we need to understand how they all work together to achieve the Great Commission to go and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone in the world (Matthew 28:16-20). How do they do this?

Here, I'll dive into one of the ministries and share some of the perspectives we learned during the process.

All about SHINE

Over twenty years old, SHINE stands for Serving Him in Nations Everywhere and is one of the most recognized ministries in GC Missions. It offers Church members worldwide the chance to participate in mission work — to step into the footsteps of Christ.

SHINE missions focus on evangelism and medical and dental services. We set up clinics in needy communities typically for five days. This is where we can do what Christ did and give to those who have great needs.

Something interesting happens when we do this. Missionaries

going on missions not only give to others but are also blessed, as are their home churches. These blessings ripple outward, affecting their ministry work and beyond. So stepping back, we ask ourselves, "Who will 'shine' in missions?"

Our SHINE members include
CoG7 members
Adult members
Core SHINE team
Evangelists

One thing we've noticed is that our mission team members are mostly adults, so we decided to make space for young participants and have been gradually increasing their involvement. In fact, we've set aside about 5 to 10 percent of our slots in each mission for young missionaries who are going on their first mission.

This has been incredibly successful! Many of these young people have gone on multiple missions and have even started doing missions in their local churches. They've all shared the positive impact of this.

Mission Immersion Training

That's why we're introducing the Mission Immersion Training (MIT) program, specifically designed to train young missionaries. The formula is simple: Train and do. We want to equip them with knowledge, spirituality, and practical experience through hands-on learning. And we would like to have a group focus on training.

Our goal is to train young missionaries to engage in spiritual disciplines so that they can become effective instruments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As of this writing, we are

planning the first MIT mission for the last week of December. About twenty-two missionaries will join us for this mission in Monterrey, Mexico. This is a pilot mission, and we're all excited to learn, teach, and be inspired by the Holy Spirit to serve, love, and share the gospel.

We hope this will be the start of something big that will lead to more mission work here in the United States, and even to church planting by these amazing missionaries.

Guidance and prayer

MIT is a new beginning of our work to fulfill the Great

Commission and sustain it. We invite you to join us as we take a step back and position ourselves to receive the guidance of the Spirit.

Please pray for all the ministries of GC Missions. We're thrilled about the work we're doing and are humbled to be a part of it. **BA**

Ronald Rousseau

is the director of GC Missions and superintendent of the Central District. He writes from Chicago, IL.



Jamaica Needs You

GC Missions has been working tirelessly with the Jamaican conference to know their urgent needs. We praise the Lord that up to this point, there are no reports of fatalities within our membership.

But there are immediate needs: water, food, bedding, toiletries, tarpaulin, cordless power tools, and portable power supplies to start repairing some of the roof damage in our churches and brethren's households.

Donations are welcome every day. You can donate the following ways:

- Zelle to give@cog7.org;
- check, mailed to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233 (make sure you write "GC Missions" on the memo line);
- online at <https://secure.cog7.org/giving/>.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was
upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face
of the waters.
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
And God saw that the light was good: and God divided the light

The First Gospel

© alexskopje | istockphoto.com

by Daniel Flores

Who hasn't longed for a relationship — in marriage, at work, or at church — where there is no pain or emotional distress? Who hasn't longed for a life free from guilt, from the fear of failure, and from that gnawing sense of disapproval for past sins?

For a time, Adam and Eve enjoyed a life free from the weight of sin and its consequences. Genesis 2:25 reveals a scene of their profound innocence: "The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." In Eden, before the Fall, there was no guilt, no hiding from God, no hiding from each other. Nakedness in Eden was transparency, trust, and perfect communion. Being unashamed was relationship without fear, judgment, and hurt.

But after the Fall, humans needed a reconciled life where shame no longer has the final say.

What can you say when you realize, like Adam and Eve, that you have failed — when temptation proves stronger than your resolve? How do you speak to the God who gave you life and filled creation with gifts for your joy? Perhaps you'd ask for forgiveness, promise to do better, and plead for another chance. But deep down, you know even your best promise is fragile, flawed, and broken. God knows too. He sees beyond words to the heart. And still, He offers grace.

That's why there in Eden, after the serpent's deception, God took the initiative. At that moment in the presence of Adam and his wife, the Creator made a promise that would bring hope in a time of chaos and pain:

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your

life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (3:14, 15).

Genesis 3:15 is called the *protoevangelion*, or "first gospel" — the promise of redemption. It is just the first in a long line of messianic prophecies that dot the Hebrew Bible. Christ is the promised seed. The serpent deceived humanity, but God vowed that one day Eve's offspring would deliver a mortal wound to the serpent's head. Though God would expel Adam and Eve from His presence, He did not want them to live without hope, without the assurance of victory over serpent, sin, and death.

Are you paying the consequences for sin? Did you think that nothing would happen if you disobeyed God, that no one would notice? Have you promised God that you would do better and change your ways? We all have, and we know that we can fail again. God knows this too.

The answer to this problem is not in you or me but in the promise God made in the garden and fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and coming of Christ the Lord. Repent and believe in the gospel of the kingdom of God. Don't believe the serpent's false promises. Decide today to believe in the promise of abundant life that is in Christ Jesus (John 10:10). **BA**

Daniel Flores is executive director of the Church of God (Seventh Day). He writes from McAllen, TX, where he lives and attends church with his wife, Kerina. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.





Looking for “The One”

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him (Luke 2:25).

While the accounts of the Gospels don’t reveal great detail about the life of Simeon, his story is one that instantly inspires, captures the imagination, and resonates within our hearts.

Simeon was a faithful man whose life was marked by service and intimacy with the Holy Spirit. He had great faith as he longed for, anticipated, and patiently waited for the Consolation of Israel — the promised Messiah — and the fullness of the kingdom of God.

Simeon was born near the end of what many refer to as the four hundred years of silence — the time between the last recognized prophet, Malachi, and the coming of John the Baptist, the forerunner to Christ. Four hundred years is an incredibly long period in our world. Yet Simeon’s hope did not waver as he looked for God to faithfully fulfill His promise that out of Bethlehem would “come forth . . . One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from . . . old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Simeon, being a student of God’s Word, lived in anticipation and hope of this Child, this Son who would be given, who would be called Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6).

Simeon’s faithfulness did not occur in a vacuum. In the short account concerning him, Luke was careful to highlight that his life was marked, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We read “the Holy Spirit was upon him,” that Simeon had received special revelation “by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ,” and further, that “he came by the Spirit into the temple” (2:25-27). It is both exciting and impossible to miss the connection between power, revelation, faithful service, and the Holy Spirit.

Simeon trusted the plan of God and longed for His redemptive work in a world marred and broken by sin. His spiritual life and strength were nothing short of an expression of the power of a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Simeon’s life was imprinted by holding the Word of God close, by walking in faith, and by keeping his eye on the One who was to come — the One who would leave His Father’s side and tabernacle among us in human flesh and blood.

Today, God is calling you and me to embrace and live with the same type of dynamic faith that characterized the life of Simeon. As with Simeon, each of us lives in a context of what is hoped for and unseen. And as with Simeon, we can live a life of strength, anticipation, faithfulness, service, and intimacy with God by the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit. May it be so!

— Greg Lincoln



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Welcome!

Whether you are a new member or have been with the CoG7 family a long time, discover some of what we offer.

Questions? Contact us at
cog7media@cog7.org.



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