



A 25-DAY CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL



The Promised Seed

Introduction



**“AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN,
AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED;
HE SHALL BRUISE YOU ON THE HEAD,
AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIM ON THE HEEL.”**

GENESIS 3:15

With these words in Genesis, God assured his wayward people that all was not lost. One day, the seed of the woman would come and crush the serpent once and for all.

But that enemy would not go down without a fight.

What follows in the biblical narrative is a story of warring seeds, filled with drama and suspense, as God’s people live in constant danger of being destroyed.

But what follows is also a story of God’s incredible faithfulness. He works through imperfect people and ordinary circumstances to preserve a people for himself.

I can think of no better way to orient our minds and hearts this Christmas season than to trace the Promised Seed from this announcement in Genesis to his appearance on the stage of human history. As we step out of the chaos and uncertainty of our present circumstances, we will see ourselves within this grand narrative in which our faithful God is always working.

Christmas is here! The Promised Seed has come.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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Core Christianity

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A Peek *at the* Ending

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

LUKE 2:1-7

HAVE YOU EVER READ A BOOK so filled with tension you were tempted to flip to the last page and find out how it ends?

Let's be honest. These last couple of years have us all living in that tension. We'd like to flip to the back of the book and see everything tied up in a little bow. We're ready to be done with pandemics and forest fires, political uncertainty and heated debates on Facebook. Even as we celebrate Christmas, hoping to bid farewell to this year, we're living in denial if we think January 1st will mark a sharp turn for the better.

Or, perhaps, as we look at our current circumstances, many of us don't even care about the ending. We'd rather just close the book altogether. Maybe burn it?

But Christmas is a season marked by hope. The weary world takes a deep breath; we lift our eyes, believing the words are true: The people in darkness will see a great light (Isa. 9:2).

This month, as we look to the story that's already been written in human history, we'll find confidence and hope. The same God who preserved his seed—the promised line through whom the Messiah would come—in order to accomplish our salvation is at work now.

It feels a little odd to kick off the Christmas season by jumping right to the main event. Over the next 25 days, we'll tell the story from the beginning—in Eden itself—and work our way back to this glorious climax, the moment when the Promised Seed finally appeared. But we're going to start by peeking at the ending to anchor our hope. The Promised Seed has come!

This passage in Luke 2 establishes a few details that set up the themes we're going to trace through this devotional:

- First, note the ordinary circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth: a government edict requires Mary and Joseph to make the journey to Bethlehem, putting them in the right place at the right time, according to God's good plan (vv. 1–3).
- Second, observe that Joseph was “of the house and lineage of David”—a key detail when we consider how this child was promised to come from a particular family tree, from the royal line—the seed—of King David (v. 4).



→ WHERE CAN YOU SEE AND CELEBRATE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?

Are you weary as you head into this season? Let's pray these truths will transform our perspectives and fill us with hope as we marvel at God's faithfulness on the pages of Scripture. The Promised Seed has come!

→ HOW HAS IT BEEN DIFFICULT FOR YOU
TO REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
THIS YEAR?

The Battle Begins

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

GENESIS 3:1-9

THIS ISN'T WHERE THE BIBLE begins, but it's where the battle starts.

God made Adam and Eve holy and happy. They had everything they could possibly need—a beautiful home, a loving family, food to eat, productive work to do, and the hope of eternal rest. And best of all, they had unrestricted access to God himself.

But the serpent was crafty, and with a little question he caused Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness to them. They rebelled against God, eating the forbidden fruit and bringing sin into the world. The consequences of their actions were devastating. They didn't just lose the peaceful and productive life they were given; they broke fellowship with God and brought the whole human race down with them (Rom. 5:12).

As we feel the weight of their disobedience to God, we should also feel their dread as they hide in the bushes. The Lord had warned Adam: On the *day* you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die (Gen. 2:17). And

now, God is coming. What will he do? He would be just to execute his judgment right then and there. The boundaries for Adam and Eve were clear: the consequence for their sin was death. So how will God respond to his wayward children?

Instead of bringing the hammer of immediate and final judgment, he asks a question: “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9)

This God made Adam and Eve. He knows every hair on their heads. He's not naive about what just took place in his garden. And yet he pursues his rebellious children. Even as they respond with finger pointing, God's judgment is not quite what we'd expect. He could have stopped the battle right then and there, destroying the man, woman, and serpent in one fell swoop. But instead, he asks a question.

His mercy is relentless. And his mercy is the foundation from which the rest of the story grows.

Born into the sin of our forebears, we too are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). We're foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various

→ REFLECT ON GOD'S MERCY IN THE GARDEN, NOT GIVING HIS CHILDREN THE PUNISHMENT THEY DESERVED. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN A RECIPIENT OF GOD'S MERCY?

The Line in the Sand

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

GENESIS 3:14–15

HERE’S THE PROMISE WE KEEP alluding to, but it doesn’t really sound like a promise.

The Lord curses the serpent directly: “Cursed are *you*,” he says to the tempter. Adam and Eve are guilty, and their actions will have consequences (which we’ll consider tomorrow), but God doesn’t curse them (see Gen. 3:16–19). Only the deceiver receives this direct pronouncement of judgment, as God declares, “You may think you’ve achieved some victory here, but the battle will rage on, and you will not win.”

When God puts enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his seed and hers, he’s not simply describing the battle that will follow. He’s making an important point: Though the serpent deceived the woman that day, he will not ultimately lay claim to her allegiance. With these words, it’s as if God places himself in front of his children and declares, “These are mine.” God will not allow the serpent to prevail. No, he promises to preserve a people for himself, a faithful seed he will set apart to call his beloved children.

But there will be a battle. The serpent won’t go down without a fight. And the war will rage even within God’s own people as sin leaves a mess in its wake. They will have to be rescued.

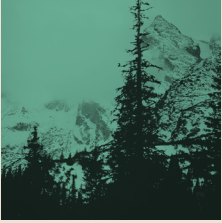
So God makes another important point: He will provide a Rescuer. One day, the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

As the biblical narrative goes forward, it tells the story of two seeds—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And it traces God’s faithfulness to keep these promises: to preserve a people for himself and to provide a rescuer to once and for all secure them as his. Here, in one of the darkest moments of human history, God assures his wayward children that all is not lost. If left to their own devices, they would remain aligned with the serpent, without God and without hope in the world. But instead, God whispers of a future hope: “Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name and you are mine” (Isa. 43:1).

If you have put your faith in Jesus, you are among the faithful seed God promised to preserve that day! Though we’re born into sin, the serpent has no claim on us. Our abundantly gracious God has sent his Son to redeem us, and he has declared that we belong to him.

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The Line in the Sand



REFLECTION

→ TAKE SOME TIME TO THANK GOD FOR HIS
ABUNDANT GRACE TO PROVIDE A RESCUER
FOR HIS PEOPLE. FOR YOU!

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But How?

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

GENESIS 3:16-21

WHEN GOD FIRST PLACED THE MAN and woman in the garden, he gave them a job to do. They were to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" (Gen. 1:28). When he placed the man in the garden, he charged him "to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15), and then he gave the man "a suitable helper" to partner with him in this work (Gen. 2:18). The man and the woman were created to be productive. Together, side-by-side, they would labor to bring about God's kingdom. But now the work that was meant to lead to their flourishing would be frustrating.

When God pronounces judgment for the man and woman's sin, he ties it directly to the work they were given to do. They were to be fruitful and multiply, but now there would be pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16). They were to subdue the earth, but now the earth would fight back, producing thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18). And, what's more, the partnership God gave the man and the woman in their work has been fractured as they hide in the bushes, pointing fingers at one another (Gen. 3:9-12).

We saw yesterday God's direct curse of the

serpent. In placing enmity between the serpent and the woman, God declared he would preserve a people for himself. He wouldn't relinquish Adam and Eve to the serpent's cause. From them would come a seed who would accomplish the great rescue mission necessary to reconcile these wayward people to their God.

But how is this going to happen if the man and woman aren't speaking to each other? Who will want to have babies in the face of certain pain? How will the human race survive if their food is consumed in thorns and thistles? The situation seems dire. God's creation, unraveled.

But we also saw that God is merciful. He doesn't execute the judgment of immediate death they deserved. And we see that again here: even as God pronounces the consequences of their sin, he continues to whisper hope:

- There will be pain in childbearing, yes, but there will be children! The man and the woman will be restored to one another. Marriage and family life will continue despite the fractures of sin.



REFLECTION

➔ WHERE HAS GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO BE
A RESTORER IN YOUR LIFE?

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But even as we lament the hardships of life in a fallen world, let's not neglect to marvel at God's great mercy in the midst of our pain. We are unravelers, but God is the Restorer. He's at work, even amidst the pain, accomplishing redemption, bringing about our good and his glory (Rom. 8:28–30).

The First Child

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth."

GENESIS 4:1-12

WE LEAVE THE GARDEN FILLED WITH HOPE.

All is not lost. A Rescuer will come.

Do you ever wonder what Eve must have been thinking as she travailed in the pains of labor for this first child? Each contraction would have reminded her of what her sin cost. And yet, as she held that new baby in her arms, wouldn't she have been filled with hope? She would have remembered God's words of promise, hoped for the Promised Seed to come.

But here is where the paths diverge. Two children represent two seeds: one will go the way of the serpent.

When Cain kills his brother, he solidifies his allegiance to the one who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). God responds with judgment that mirrors that of his true father—"Cursed are you," he says as he sends Cain away (Gen. 4:11; see also Gen. 3:14). And yet, as Cain is exiled from the covenant family, the Lord makes

an oath to preserve his life. He creates space for the line of the serpent to grow. We see in the verses that follow the development of the city of man: Cain's descendants build cities, have children, and develop culture (Gen. 4:17-22), even as they also rebel against God's order and justice (Gen. 4:23-24).

But then we all hold our breath and wonder. Is that it? Has the seed of the serpent prevailed in destroying the promised line, just one chapter after God's promise?

No. Adam and Eve have another son, Seth, and through his line, "People [begin] to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:25-26).

Through this tragic story of the first siblings, we see God's promise come into clearer view. Here's the ongoing conflict he foretold, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. When he gives Adam and Eve another son, he continues his promised line through whom

But in preserving both seeds, God creates the stage on which his plan of redemption will unfold. Believers and unbelievers alike will live side-by-side, developing a world that will one day house a stable with a manger, holding the newborn baby who will make his home among us and, one day, save us from our sin.

→ TAKE SOME TIME TO PRAISE GOD FOR HIS COMMON GRACE, THROUGH WHICH BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS ALIKE ARE GIVEN MANY GOOD GIFTS TO ENJOY.

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Is This *the* End?

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

GENESIS 6:5-8

THESE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS have been painful for many reasons, but one of the most difficult has been to see the way people talk to and about each other. The harsh rhetoric on social media, in our churches, and even at our kitchen tables is discouraging. We've all picked a side and there's no backing down. We're pointing fingers at one another, declaring the problem to be *out there*.

But what about the grief that comes when we take a step back and examine our own hearts? How often do we find we're really just the Pharisee standing beside the tax collector praying, "Thank you, God, that I'm not like them" (Luke 18:9-14). The problem isn't out there. It's *right here*.

We're only six chapters into the Bible, and the seed of the serpent has multiplied. People are wicked and corrupt, only thinking and doing evil continually. Once again, it looks like evil has the upper hand. It looks like the serpent has won.

But a faithful seed remains. There's a man named Noah, and he walks with God.

You probably know the story of Noah. He obeys God and builds an ark that keeps him, his family, and the animals safe from a big flood that destroys the rest of the earth. In this case, it actually seems like God stepped in and destroyed the serpent's line. Never mind the battle; it seems

like Noah is a new Adam—a fresh start for God's family tree.

But the problem was never simply sin *out there*. While God's people would be engaged in a battle with the seed of the serpent, the evil forces seeking to destroy God's plan of redemption, they were also engaged in a battle within. Noah and his family inherited Adam's sin problem, and so did we. After the flood, Ham commits an egregious sin and shows himself to be of the seed of the serpent, becoming accursed (Gen. 9:25). It's like Cain all over again. Even destroying the most wicked people on the face of the earth couldn't ultimately save God's people from their sin.

We needed someone more righteous than Noah.

After the flood, God promises never to destroy the earth again. This is his covenant of common grace: he "sustains and upholds the natural order and human society so that Christ could be born of a woman, and under the law, in the fullness of time."¹ By allowing the battle to continue, God is once again demonstrating his mercy, delaying his judgment so that all his people will be gathered (2 Pet. 3:9). "As long as the sun shines, the gospel will be proclaimed, and those were once lost will

¹ *Sacred Bond* by Zach Keele and Michael Brown, p. 82.

Is This *the* End?



be found in Christ.”²

God delayed his ultimate judgment and allowed the world to clamor on so that he could send his Son—more righteous than Noah—to once and for all deal with the problem of sin, not just out there but *in here*.

He sustained the natural order and human society so that wretched sinners like us could stumble into the back row of a church, hear the gospel proclaimed, and be brought from death to life.

REFLECTION

- HOW ARE YOU PRONE TO POINT TO SIN OUT THERE WHILE NEGLECTING IT IN YOUR OWN HEART?
- THANK GOD FOR HIS PATIENCE, IN DELAYING JUDGMENT SO THAT THE GOSPEL CAN CONTINUE TO GO FORTH.

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² *Sacred Bond* by Zach Keele and Michael Brown, p. 82.

The Promise Continued

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

GENESIS 15:1-6

WE SAW IN GENESIS 3:15 THAT God promised to keep a faithful seed for himself. Not everyone would be lost to the serpent, but humanity’s sin would have to be paid for. So he also promised to send a Rescuer—the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

When we get to Abram (later called Abraham), God’s promise begins to become more specific. It was always tied to a family—to Adam, Seth, and Noah—but now God narrows it further, to the family of Abraham, the patriarch from whom the nation of Israel would come. Here, God makes a gracious covenant with Abraham, promising him more descendants than he can count. Through his descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Why? Because among Abraham’s descendants will be the Promised Seed—the Savior of the world!

Remember that miracle baby in the manger? How do we get there from Abraham? Just like we’ve seen so far, in Abraham’s story we see God’s promised seed in danger of being wiped out by the seed of the serpent: Abraham is in danger from famine and Pharaoh, from his nephew’s foolishness and the evil of the surrounding

nations (see Gen. 12–20).

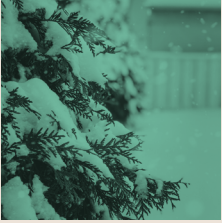
Beyond keeping Abraham alive, God will have to miraculously intervene to keep his promise. Abraham’s wife Sarah has been unable to have children, and now she and Abraham are very old. How can Abraham have many descendants, but no children?

In giving Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age, God shows that he will bear the burden for keeping his promise. He’ll work through impossible circumstances—for what’s impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27).

This is such good news for us. Our weaknesses, limitations, and failures can’t thwart God’s plan.

Scripture tells us that Abraham’s faith didn’t waver. He was “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (see Rom. 4:19–22). And this is the faith we pray for, though often it sounds more like this: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

The Promise Continued



REFLECTION

- WHAT WEAKNESSES, LIMITATIONS, AND FAILURES TEMPT YOU TO DOUBT GOD'S ABILITY TO COMPLETE THE WORK HE'S STARTED IN YOU?
- SPEND SOME TIME CASTING YOUR CARES UPON YOUR FATHER WHO CARES FOR YOU; ASK HIM TO HELP YOUR UNBELIEF.

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Pause *and* Remember

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

ROMANS 8:31-32

WE'RE GOING TO PAUSE our journey through the tale of two seeds to remember why we're studying it to begin with. We've seen so far how God has been faithful to keep his promises. He's at work through sinful people and impossible circumstances. He's literally orchestrating all the events of human history to accomplish his plan of redemption.

But how does this help us today? Isn't it enough to know Jesus was born, that he died for our sins, that he rose from the dead, conquering sin and death, and that he will come again? Why does it matter that we see the path that led there?

In our reading today, the apostle Paul uses something called a "greater to lesser argument." He says, "If this greater thing is true, then this lesser thing must be true, too." Here in Romans, Paul says, "How could you think God would hold out on you when he's already given you the very best thing he has, his very own Son?"

We can use the same argument as we work through this study: If God was faithful to keep his promises to his people, if he was powerful and wise enough to make all of history work towards his purposes, if he was good enough to use even the sinfulness and foolishness of his people to bring about their salvation, then how could we think he would do any less for us?

God will keep the precious and very great promises he has granted to us in Christ (2 Pet. 1:4). He has promised:

- To never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5)
- To sustain us in these light and momentary struggles, knowing that eternal glory awaits (2 Cor. 4:16-18)
- To finish the work he started in us (Phil. 1:6)
- To work in all things, bringing about our salvation (Rom. 8:28-30)

And all his promises find their "Yes" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

This study of the Promised Seed is meant to anchor our feet, steady our hearts, and lift our eyes. When we start to doubt that God is for us, when we question if he's with us, when we wonder what he's up to, we can remember that the same God who kept his promises from the beginning is at work in our lives today. The one who called you is faithful (1 Thess. 5:24).

08

Pause *and* Remember



REFLECTION

- HOW DOES LEARNING ABOUT GOD'S FAITHFULNESS THROUGHOUT HISTORY IMPACT YOUR FAITH AND TRUST IN HIM TODAY?
- WHAT ATTRIBUTES OF GOD HAVE YOU OBSERVED IN OUR STUDY THUS FAR THAT CAN ANCHOR YOU IN YOUR CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES?

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An Unlikely Sacrifice

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

GENESIS 22:1-14

ISAAC WAS THE CHILD PROMISED to Abraham and Sarah—the impossible child born to them in their old age, the first child in the line through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. But now, once again, that line is in danger. And this time the danger comes . . . from God himself?

God’s command to sacrifice Isaac must have been particularly confusing. And yet we see Abraham forging ahead, ready to obey God. In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews tells us what Abraham was thinking: he believed God was able to raise the dead (Heb. 11:19). Why did he believe that? Maybe it’s because the birth of

Isaac from a couple of old people was a lot like raising the dead in the first place. Abraham’s faith in this scene contains a good lesson for all of us: He believed God was faithful; he trusted God would keep his promises. So even when his circumstances seemed hopeless, he had a steady heart, trusting in the Lord (Ps. 112:7).

But this story is far more than an example of Abraham’s faith. Just like we peeked at Jesus in the manger to see where our story is headed, this account is a peek at Jesus on the cross. Isaac’s death is what we all deserve for our sin. Just as God provided a ram to die in Isaac’s place, so God provided his only Son to bear the penalty for sin

An Unlikely Sacrifice



we all deserve. And just as we read this story and wonder what God is up to, so we can look to the cross with faith like Abraham's. Though it seems like the promised seed has finally been destroyed, our faithful God has the power to raise the dead.

When the apostle Paul describes the hardships he faces, he uses the language of death. He writes, “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8–9). Though we may not have experienced the deadly peril of Paul, many of us have certainly despaired of life itself. We’ve cried out to God in pain, wondering how long it must last, if we’ll ever know joy again. We wonder with the psalmist if God will forget us forever (see Ps. 13).

But as Paul processes his suffering through the lens of God's faithfulness, he offers a perspective on his hardship: "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

God is at work in the mess. In the pain and loneliness, in the anxiety and fear, God is teaching us not to rely on ourselves but on him. This is the God who's proven himself worthy of our trust. He's the compassionate Father who bears with us in love; the God who provides the substitute we need; the God who provides grace to endure; the God who raises the dead.

REFLECTION

- WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW ARE TEACHING YOU TO RELY NOT ON YOURSELF BUT ON GOD?
- HOW DOES THE TRUTH THAT HE CAN RAISE THE DEAD COMFORT YOU IN YOUR STRUGGLE?

NOTES

The God of Misfits *and* Trouble-Makers

Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

GENESIS 25:19-34

ISAAC GROWS UP and marries Rebekah, and they have twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau is the oldest and, as a result, he has a birthright: he's the leader of the family. He will receive a larger inheritance, but he also has important responsibilities, like leading the family in worship of God.

Esau also should have recognized he was Abraham's grandchild—a descendant in the line of God's promise. It should have been a privilege to take on these special responsibilities as the firstborn, carrying on the promised faithful line. But Esau rejects them. Instead of placing his faith in God and clinging to the promised line, he sells his birthright for a bowl of soup.

Jacob isn't much better. He manipulates Esau

to trade his birthright, and later he deceives his father into giving him Esau's firstborn blessing (see Gen. 27:1–40). Esau is so angry he vows to kill Jacob. Once again, the family tree has split between two warring seeds, and the promised seed is in danger of being destroyed. Jacob flees for his life.

There's a lot more to Jacob's story, but here's the craziest part: God had planned from the beginning that Jacob, not Esau, would be the one to carry on Abraham's family line. Jacob—the deceptive second-born—has 12 sons who become the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. God renames him Israel because he is at the head of this great nation. This is the nation through whom God has promised to bless the world, through the line of

10

Jacob shows us that this faithful seed God has promised to preserve has far more to do with his faithfulness than theirs.

REFLECTION

- ## NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

The Forsaken Son

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

GENESIS 50:15-21

JOSEPH'S STORY STRETCHES from Genesis 37–50. It's probably one you're familiar with . . . the guy with the coat of many colors? Joseph is the favored son of Jacob, and his brothers sell him into slavery. Joseph ends up in Egypt and manages to rise in the house of his Egyptian master, only to be falsely accused of wrongdoing and thrown in jail. As Joseph sat in an Egyptian prison, he had to wonder if he was among the cursed seed. He would have known God's promise to his father Jacob, but here he is, separated from God's people and, it would seem, from God's care.

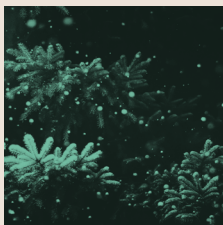
But the Lord has not forgotten Joseph. He's delivered from jail and rises in Pharaoh's house, providing leadership for the Egyptians during a famine. Remember the cursed ground of Genesis 3? God will not allow it to overtake his people. He places Joseph in Egypt where there is abundance and equips him to wisely steward the land's resources to build up a storehouse of food and supplies for the coming years. When all the surrounding nations run out, they turn to Egypt—to Joseph. And among those who come to Egypt

in search of food are Joseph's brothers.

When Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt, they don't realize they're standing before the brother they sold into slavery. After testing them, Joseph reveals his identity. He points them to God's faithfulness, declaring that God has allowed all these circumstances for their deliverance. Though sin had gained the upper hand in Joseph's brothers, it could not thwart God's plan. God was working through all the events of Joseph's life to ensure he was in the right place at the right time to bring about one end: the preservation of God's people.

We said at the beginning of our study that we were going to see how our faithful God works even through dire circumstances to accomplish his purposes. The life of Joseph puts this on grand display.

We often reflect on this story from Joseph's perspective—how he must have wondered if God had abandoned him, worried he'd been cut off from the promised line. His words above are a convicting demonstration of trust in God despite his circumstances.



And God did this so that the promised line would continue stretching toward another favored Son. This one, too, would be falsely accused, mistreated by those who were supposed to be his brothers, nailed to a cross. But even this act, meant for evil, God would use for good, to bring about the salvation of many.

→ HOW DO EACH OF THE CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY HELP US TO SEE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF GOD'S CHARACTER?

NOTES

NOTES

Unlikely Deliverers

Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. "Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them. Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

EXODUS 1:6-22

DID YOU SEE THE ECHOES of Genesis in that passage? God's people were fruitful and they multiplied. They filled the land—they were beginning to resemble the sand and stars God promised to Abraham. God is keeping his promise not only to preserve a people for himself, but to make them a great nation.

But, once again, there's a problem. The serpent is alive and well, and he's dead set on destroying God's people and canceling God's promise. And, once again, it looks as if he might succeed. As the Israelites multiply, Pharaoh fears they will overpower him. So he subjects them to hard labor as slaves, and when they continue to multiply, he orders the slaughter of their sons.

If the Egyptians kill all the baby boys, won't the promised seed be destroyed?

We said that we were going to see how our gracious God works through ordinary people to accomplish his purposes. And sometimes those ordinary people are the most unexpected ones.

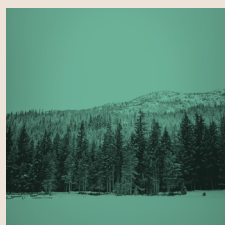
Pharaoh told the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys. *But don't worry about the girls*, he said. *What do they matter?*

See, God had a plan to raise up one of those baby boys as a deliverer who would lead his people out of Egypt and establish them as a nation—Moses.

But, first, his deliverer needs a deliverer.

So God chooses unlikely heroes. Shiphrah

12



Shiphrah and Puah likely didn't know how significant their role was. They had no idea their names would be recorded in Scripture. They were just fearing the Lord and doing their jobs. And because of God's work through ordinary and unexpected people like Shiphrah and Puah, the promised line would continue. God would deliver his people from the serpent's hand.

- WHO CAN YOU CELEBRATE AS SOMEONE GOD HAS USED AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GRACE IN YOUR LIFE?
- WHERE MIGHT HE BE CALLING YOU TO EXERCISE ORDINARY FAITHFULNESS, TRUSTING HIM TO WORK IN AND THROUGH YOU?

Let My People Go

Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. “You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. “When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. “The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.” So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did.

EXODUS 7:1-6

GOD HEARS THE CRIES of his people and he remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He remembers his promise to preserve his seed, to make them into a great nation who will bring blessing to the ends of the earth. He has raised up a deliverer, Moses, and he gives him the instructions he needs to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. But he also tells them there will be a battle. Pharaoh—with his hardened heart—is the serpent’s seed, bent on destroying God’s people. He will not give them up without a fight.

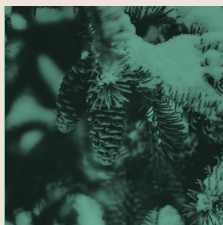
Moses and Aaron stand before Pharaoh and say, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, ‘Let my people go.’” But Pharaoh will not listen. So God sends plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians to show them he’s far more powerful than anything they worship. Finally, Pharaoh relents, and the Israelites pack up and go as quickly as they can, only to come to the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. It seems like God’s people will either be destroyed by their enemies or left to drown. Is this what the Lord meant by deliverance?

As the people stand before the Red Sea, they would be instantly aware of the impossibility of it

all. Who were they to think they could escape the grip of Pharaoh?

But hopefully by now we’re starting to see that every story with God’s people has the same ending. God is faithful! He rescues his people! He will keep his promises! He parts the Red Sea and his people walk to safety on dry ground.

Here’s a story God uses to build his people’s greater-to-lesser argument (see Day 8). Throughout Scripture, people point back to this miraculous deliverance at God’s hand. In case the Israelites have forgotten in their slavery who God is and what he has promised, these mighty acts serve as evidence for who he is. He’s the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He’s the God who keeps his promises. And he’s their redeemer—the one who buys them back from slavery and claims them as his people.



→ TAKE TIME TO READ AND MEDITATE ON
PSALM 135. DO YOU SEE THE WAY THE
PSALMIST USED THE GREATER-TO-LESSER
ARGUMENT?

- ## NOTES

NOTES

The Faithful Mediator

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. “Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

EXODUS 32:1-14

14

ONCE AGAIN, GOD has delivered his people from the hands of their enemies. The promised seed has multiplied into a great nation, just like God said. And so God gives this nation his Law, to show them how they’re to live as his people. He wants them to be set apart, not to live like the surrounding nations, not to find themselves mixed up on the wrong side.

This redeemed people of God—this holy nation, God’s treasured possession—is waiting for Moses to get back with the Law and they . . . give up hope and make a golden calf?

It’s so baffling, isn’t it? God has just proven himself to be powerful and faithful enough to keep his promises. The people walked across the Red Sea on dry land! But these mighty acts didn’t

Here's another reminder, just like the flood, that the problem of sin is within us. Though God's people have been rescued from their slave masters, they still need to be rescued from their sin.

But in this story we start to see a picture of how God will rescue his people. They'll need a mediator greater than Moses.

But God will remember his promise, and he will take the cost upon himself. He will pour out his wrath upon the Promised Seed, the mediator who will become the sacrifice. The faithful child will die for the faithless ones. The Promised Seed will pay for their sin once and for all.

REFLECTION

→ CONSIDER HOW MOSES PICTURES JESUS' WORK FOR YOU AS HE INTERCEDES ON BEHALF OF SINFUL PEOPLE.

NOTES

From Every Nation

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

GALATIANS 3:7-9

WE'VE WATCHED AS GOD'S promise narrowed to Abraham's family, which has now grown into the twelve tribes of Israel. Along the way God has preserved a remnant for himself, just like he said, and now he's made Abraham's descendants into a great nation—just like he said.

As we've traced the split of two seeds in our study so far, there's something important to note about the surrounding nations. Even though it looks like it's God's people versus the nations, we've seen that, since Adam and Eve's rebellion, sin infects everyone. Sometimes the threat to God's people came from themselves, sometimes from the effects of sin in the world. And, as we'll see tomorrow, sometimes the salvation for God's people comes from outside of them, from among the nations. It's not that the nation of Israel is perfect while the surrounding nations are evil. No, the serpent is cunning, and he uses whatever instruments he can to try to destroy God's people and his plan. The serpent's seed rises up from all directions, but God is patient and merciful—he redeems people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Remember God's promise to Abraham? He said that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God chose Israel as his instrument of grace to the world—through Israel, a redeemer would come to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation from their

sins. When God gave Abraham this promise, Abraham believed him. He had faith. And the New Testament tells us, "It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). That means anyone who believes God's promise of salvation in Jesus is counted among the promised seed, the people God is keeping for himself. Anyone—whether they belong to Israel or the nations.

And if you have put your faith in Jesus, then you belong to him, too, no matter your family line: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29).

REFLECTION

- ➔ DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH THE PICTURE OF GOD'S WRATH AND JUDGMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE?
- ➔ HOW DO THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD THAT WE'VE OBSERVED SO FAR COMFORT YOU?

15

From Every Nation



NOTES

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NOTES

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A Rescuer *from the Nations*

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. It was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. “It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate. Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. “When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. “Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” So the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.”

JOSHUA 2:1-14

WE’VE JUMPED AHEAD a bit in Israel’s story. God has led his people out of Egyptian slavery and he’s going to lead them into the land he promised to give them. But there’s a problem: that land is filled with their enemies, the Canaanites.

The Canaanites were a brutal, pagan people. They were known for their gruesome rituals, like child sacrifice, and their horrific treatment of their enemies. When the Israelites recognized who they had to conquer to get to the land God had promised them, it’s understandable they’d be terrified—except that God had just demonstrated

his incredible power in delivering them from Egypt. He’s been leading them day and night in the wilderness, providing them with food and drink. He’s given them his Law, demonstrating his continued mercy by providing the priesthood and tabernacle so they could make atonement for their sin and making it possible for God’s presence to dwell among them. The Canaanites might have been terrifying, but the Israelites had Yahweh—the covenant-keeping God who delivered them from Egypt—on their side!

Soon after God redeemed his people from

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Now that time had come. Joshua was the new leader of Israel, and they were getting ready to begin conquering the Promised Land. So . . . they send spies again to check things out. This should make us a little nervous. Why would they send spies again? Didn't they remember what happened last time?

But Rahab has heard about the God who delivered Israel from the Egyptians, and she believes he's the true God. So she picks a side. Instead of aligning herself with the serpent, she clings to the promised line.

Rahab has faith in the God of Israel and so she becomes one of Abraham's descendants, even joining the family tree that will lead to King David and then all the way to Christ (see Matt. 1:5).

Stories like Rahab's should fill us with gratitude and hope. There's a place for people like us in God's family! And, what's more, we don't stay "people like us." We're taken from the ash heap and seated among princes, given a brand-new identity as children of God, joining in the royal lineage of our Savior, the King.

→ WHAT DOES IT REVEAL ABOUT GOD'S PLAN AND CHARACTER THAT HE WOULD NAME RAHAB AS A DESCENDANT OF CHRIST?

NOTES

Pick a Side

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

JOSHUA 24:14-15

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISE to Abraham to give his family the land of Canaan. He gives the Israelites victory over their enemies and settles them into their new home. Their leader, Joshua, is now old and knows his days are coming to an end, so he stands before the Israelites one last time to remind them of all that God has done for them. He wants them to cling to their greater-to-lesser argument: the God who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, the God who provided for them in the wilderness for 40 years, the God who gave them victory over all their enemies, the God who kept all of his promises to them—this is the God they can trust. This is the God they are to obey. But Joshua knows there’s a battle still raging in the hearts of God’s people. He recognizes that being born an Israelite doesn’t mean the people belong to the promised seed. Just as the book opened with a woman from the nations choosing a side (Rahab), so Joshua calls the Israelites to pick a side. “Choose this day whom you will serve,” he tells them. Will you serve the serpent and worship the idols of the surrounding nations? Or will you cling to the promised line by faith? Will you serve the true God—the God of Israel—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

They pick God, of course. They agree he’s

been powerful and faithful. How could they ever forsake him? But, sadly, we’ve seen before and we’ll continue to see that the problem of sin remains. Despite the temporary peace Israel experiences in the Promised Land, they still don’t have the peace they need in their hearts—peace with God and salvation from their sin. Though the book of Joshua ends hopefully, the book of Judges tells us things go downhill fast: “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10).

The contrast between the Israelites’ resolve at the end of Joshua and those grievous words at the beginning of Judges is so jarring. Despite God’s continued faithfulness to his people, and despite their best efforts, the battle continues.



→ PSALM 145:4 SAYS, “ONE GENERATION SHALL COMMEND YOUR WORKS TO ANOTHER, AND SHALL DECLARE YOUR MIGHTY ACTS.” THOUGH THE ISRAELITES’ STORY REMINDS US THAT “UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THOSE WHO BUILD IT LABOR IN VAIN” (PS. 127:1), IT ALSO REMINDS US OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GOD’S FAITHFULNESS. WE ARE THE ORDINARY MEANS GOD WILL USE TO DRAW HIS PEOPLE TO HIMSELF!

NOTES

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Absorbed *by the* Nations

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."|

JUDGES 13:1-5

LIFE WASN'T GOING SO WELL for the Israelites in the Promised Land. The book of Judges shows us that God's people are stuck in a vicious cycle—they rebel against the Lord, so the Lord gives them over to their enemies. Over and over again, the Israelites' sin puts the promised line in jeopardy. But God is merciful. He allows the suffering of his people to cause them to remember him. In their distress, they cry out to the Lord, and he raises up a deliverer for them—someone who will lead them out of the hands of their enemies, and someone who will keep the promised line, God's holy nation, intact.

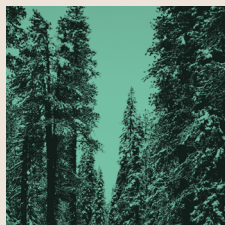
At this point in Judges, the Israelites have been ruled by the Philistines for 40 years. Later, we learn that life was actually pretty peaceful for the Israelites under the Philistines. They didn't cry out to God to be saved, because they didn't really feel that oppressed. In fact, this is a new danger for God's people—that they will be absorbed into the Philistines. They will marry Philistines, worship their gods, and give up their calling as God's chosen people.

Samson is the child promised to Zorah and Manoah in the passage above. God tells Zorah that

Samson will "begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Zorah must have thought that was strange. Did they need saving? The Israelites hadn't cried out for a deliverer, but God knew they needed one. And they needed one like Samson.

Samson wasn't a great guy. He didn't call God's people to forsake the ways of the Philistines and worship the one true God. No, God used Samson to pick a fight with the Philistines! By the time we get to 1 Samuel, the Israelites had become very aware that the Philistines were their enemies. Just like he did with Eve and the serpent, God drove a wedge between the seeds, claiming the promised line for himself. Despite their continued failures, he wouldn't let them be absorbed into the nations.

What's remarkable as we see the decline of God's people in Judges is God's continued patience. How long he bears with his faithless people! How long he continues to deliver them! He acts on their behalf even when they don't cry out to him. What a picture of God's love for us in Christ: "But God demonstrated his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).



NOTES

→ CONSIDER HOW GOD PROVIDED ISRAEL WITH HELP THEY DIDN'T KNOW THEY NEEDED. HOW MIGHT GOD WORK IN YOUR LIFE THIS WAY?

→ HOW CAN YOU THANK HIM FOR HIS KINDNESS TO YOU?

NOTES

A Familiar Story

He took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine. Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field." Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands." Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground. Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand.

1 SAMUEL 17:40-50

HERE WE HAVE A STORY OF LITERAL warfare between the two seeds whose larger, spiritual story we've been tracing. An epic battle between the two seeds. And it shows just how God works. On one side, you have a powerful warrior. He looks scary; he sounds scary; and when he wins, he will make sure Israel is no longer a nation. On the other side, you have this young shepherd boy who doesn't fit in the king's armor. All he has is a sling and stones. To anyone watching, the battle is already over. There's no contest. Obviously, the giant will prevail.

Isn't this how the story has gone so far? In order for God to keep his promise, he has to overcome barren wombs, cursed ground, slavery, and sibling battles. He has to overcome sin threatening his people, and the sin raging

within them. He has to deliver his people from their enemies and keep them from simply being absorbed by them. The seed of the woman looks like a little shepherd boy, standing before a giant, with only a few rocks in his hand.

But the battle is the Lord's.

The Lord gives David victory over Goliath, demonstrating once again that he's powerful enough to keep his promises despite all the odds stacked against him.

Even when his victor looks like a baby lying in a manger, the sovereign God of the universe cannot be thwarted.

19

A Familiar Story



REFLECTION

- WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CONTINUALLY USES UNEXPECTED MEANS TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE?
- HOW IS HIS GLORY PUT ON DISPLAY AS HE WORKS IN AND THROUGH YOUR WEAKNESS?

NOTES

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God's King

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”

2 SAMUEL 7:12-16

FROM THE SEED OF THE WOMAN to the seed of Abraham, Israel has become a great nation. From them will come a seed who will bring blessing to all the nations. Here we read that seed will come from the house and lineage of David, of the house of Judah. The Promised Seed will be a king! But David isn't the first king Israel chooses for itself. First, there is the tall and handsome, king-like-the-nations Saul. But he's a man of the people, not a man of God. When he disobeys God, God rejects Saul's family line and seeks out a man after his heart: King David. The problem is that Saul isn't willing to give up the throne so easily. He's determined to wipe out God's promised seed and put his own son upon the throne.

But Saul's son Jonathan knows better. While Saul seeks to kill David, Jonathan helps David escape, willingly forfeiting his position in order to cling to the promised line by faith. He picks a side.

It's a tumultuous path to the throne for David, but the Lord demonstrates how he works: a throne through suffering; glory through a cross.

There are two important things to see about God's promise that the seed of the woman will come from King David's line. First, it gives us big clues about what this Promised Seed will be like. David wasn't like Saul. He wasn't the mighty king

the people picked for themselves—he's from the small, insignificant town of Bethlehem. He's the youngest in his family, a lowly shepherd. But God uses what looks small and insignificant to the world to bring about his kingdom.

Second, it sets us up for what's about to happen in Israel's history. Up until now, God has been preserving his seed by keeping the nation of Israel from their enemies. But things are about to go downhill (again!). God's people are going to turn on him and on each other. Nevertheless, as the nation of Israel descends into darkness, falling apart from the inside, God will not allow them to be completely destroyed. 2 Kings 8:19 says, “Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.” God will keep his promise to David—and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

One day, on a quiet night in Bethlehem, the light of the world would come.

20



→ HOW MIGHT THIS ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE ENCOURAGE YOU IN THE HARDSHIPS YOU'RE FACING?

A Kingdom Divided

Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. Now when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it, he was living in Egypt (for he was yet in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon). Then they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, “Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.” Then he said to them, “Depart for three days, then return to me.” So the people departed. King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, “How do you counsel me to answer this people?” Then they spoke to him, saying, “If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.” But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him. So he said to them, “What counsel do you give that we may answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us’?” The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, “Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’” Then Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day as the king had directed, saying, “Return to me on the third day.” The king answered the people harshly, for he forsook the advice of the elders which they had given him, and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.” So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from the LORD, that He might establish His word, which the LORD spoke through Abijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

When all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; To your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David!” So Israel departed to their tents. But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

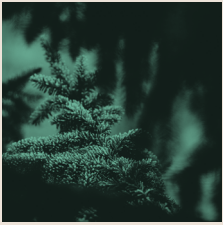
1 KINGS 12:1-17

21

AFTER DAVID DIES, his son Solomon reigns over Israel. Solomon is a good king—for awhile—and the kingdom of Israel prospers under his reign. But he had many wives from the surrounding nations, and they led his heart astray to other gods. So the very first king in David’s line,

Solomon, is also the first king about whom it’s said, “He did evil in the sight of the Lord.” After Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam takes the throne. But Rehoboam is a foolish king, and ten of the tribes of Israel break off from him and follow Jeroboam as their king, a servant under King

A Kingdom Divided



Solomon. So now we have two kingdoms: Israel and Judah.

Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, we see a series of kings over Israel and Judah. Time and time again, the kings of Israel do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, and the kingdom of Israel follows close behind. They forsake their God and worship idols. What's more, they reject God's promised line. It's not a Davidic king upon the throne in Israel, but the people don't care! So God intervenes. He removes kings and puts new ones in their place. He allows Israel to be overcome by their enemies. Eventually, they'll be carried away into exile.

The kings are not much better in Judah, though some are more faithful than others. But the kings of Judah belong to the line of David. They're the promised line, which God has sworn never to destroy. So, despite Judah's wickedness, God preserves his people. From the line of David, God will bring about his seed—his king. Even with the kingdom unraveling, God keeps a thread alive that will reach all the way to the King of Kings.

This moment in Israel's history is much like that moment when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. These were supposed to be God's people, and here they are turning on each other. Their kings were supposed to lead the way in faithfulness and obedience to God, but instead, many of them lead the way into worshipping idols, doing evil in the sight of the Lord. As we see God continue to preserve his seed through these tumultuous times in Israel's history, we ought to marvel at his incredible patience. Think back to all that we've seen so far. It's one thing for God to preserve his people from the evil around them, but from the evil within? Why does he persist in loving such a faithless people?

The apostle Paul reflects on the kind of mercy he received. He writes, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might

display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15–16).

When we look at Israel's history, we ought to find ourselves among them. We, too, quickly forsake the God who redeemed us and called us by name. We, too, turn to worthless idols for deliverance, safety, and meaning. We, like the Israelites, would have no ability to persevere if left to ourselves. We desperately need to be saved.

So Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. God's patience with the Israelites provides an example for all who are to believe in him for eternal life.

When we look at God's patience with this divided kingdom, we see his patient love toward wretches like us.

REFLECTION

→ WHEN WE SEE GOD'S PATIENCE TOWARDS US IN CHRIST, OUR FIRST RESPONSE OUGHT TO BE GRATITUDE AND WORSHIP. TAKE SOME TIME TO THANK THE LORD FOR HIS GREAT MERCY.

→ MEDITATING ON THE LORD'S PATIENCE ALSO GIVES FUEL FOR US TO BEAR WITH OTHERS IN LOVE (EPH 4:2). WHEN WE'RE IMPATIENT WITH OTHERS, WE'VE FORGOTTEN THE GOSPEL. TAKE SOME TIME TO CONFESS YOUR IMPATIENCE WITH OTHERS AND REJOICE IN THE FORGIVENESS THAT IS YOURS IN JESUS. WHO IS GOD CALLING YOU TO PATIENTLY LOVE TODAY?

NOTES

The Evil Queen

When Athaliah the mother of Abaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring. But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Abaziah, took Joash the son of Abaziah and stole him from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and placed him and his nurse in the bedroom. So they hid him from Athaliah, and he was not put to death. So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD six years, while Athaliah was reigning over the land.

2 KINGS 11:1-3

IN JUST A FEW SHORT VERSES, we have here the whole tale of two seeds. And we have in clear view how our gracious God works through ordinary people in the most dire of circumstances to accomplish his purposes.

This story in Judah's history brings us to a climactic point in the battle. Both Israel and Judah have been under wicked rulers, so God intervenes and brings judgment. He sends a military commander named Jehu to kill both the king of Israel and the king of Judah. In Israel, Jehu destroys all the king's descendants and becomes the new ruler. So when we see Athaliah do the same in Judah, we ought to be a little concerned. She's the seed of serpent, bent on destroying the royal line of King David and keeping the throne for herself.

But there's a girl named Jehosheba, the king's sister, and she picks a side. She rescues the king's son, Joash, and hides him away with his nurse until they can escape. Joash grows up hidden in the house of the Lord with Jehoiada, the priest, until God brings judgment against Queen Athaliah and the Davidic king is restored to the throne. The last remaining heir to the throne, Joash, is only seven years old when he becomes king of Judah!

Jehosheba belongs on our list of heroes alongside Shiphrah and Puah. She feared God and

not Queen Athaliah. And God used her to bring about our salvation.

The Scriptures testify to it over and over again: God will preserve his seed. He will keep his promises. He will rescue his people.

He will do it through a young girl willing to be used of the Lord, even when the only hope is a tiny baby.

REFLECTION

→ AS YOU REFLECT ON THIS STORY LINE WE'VE SEEN REPEATED THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, WHAT IS MOST SURPRISING TO YOU?

→ WHAT TRUTHS HAVE MOST ENCOURAGED YOU IN THIS SEASON?

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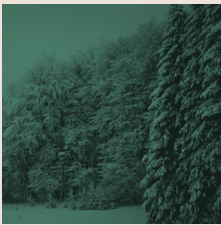
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The Evil Queen



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Exiled!

Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jeboiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he became king, released Jeboiachin king of Judah from prison; and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon. Jeboiachin changed his prison clothes and had his meals in the king's presence regularly all the days of his life; and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

2 KINGS 25:27-30

OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS, we've followed story after story of the Israelites turning away from God and turning on each other. We've seen the promised seed almost destroyed by the seed of the serpent, by the cursed ground, by the war raging within God's own people. God has been faithful; he's been patient. He's given his people his Law, clearly laying out his covenant with them. He's promised them blessings if they obey, but curses if they disobey. And as his people persist in disobedience, he pursues them, sending his prophets. They're like lawyers, bringing charges, showing how the people have broken God's Law. They call God's people to repent, to turn away from their idols, to return to the Lord. But God's people will not listen.

And so the Lord allows Israel and then Judah to be carried off by their enemies. Their temple is destroyed and they're taken into exile, removed from the land God had given them, stripped of their identity as a holy nation. After all this intervention from God to preserve them, it appears that his people have finally been absorbed by the nations. Has all finally been lost?

The book of Kings ends with God's people in exile, but there's still a whisper of hope. God has not forgotten his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob. He remembers his covenant with David. He intervenes on behalf of his people once again: For no apparent reason, the king of Judah finds favor in the eyes of his enemy, the king of Babylon. A Davidic king lives!

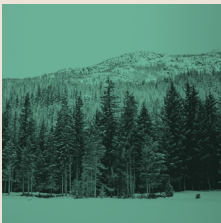
Isn't it remarkable? This is the miracle we'll have in mind as we turn back to the manger tomorrow. When a child is born of the house and lineage of David, it should catch our attention. The entire Old Testament has prepared us for this moment. Here's evidence that God is abundantly merciful. He's kept his promise. He's preserved his seed so that a Savior could come.

REFLECTION

- AS WE NEAR THE END OF OUR STUDY, TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO REFLECT ON WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED OVER THESE PAST FEW WEEKS.
- WHAT ABOUT GOD'S WORD HAVE YOU FOUND SURPRISING, CONVICTING, OR ENCOURAGING?
- HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIS CHARACTER?

23

Exiled!



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The Bruised Heel

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

LUKE 2:1-7

WE'RE BACK TO THE MAIN EVENT. We've traced the battle all the way from Genesis into the opening pages of the New Testament. God has graciously preserved his seed and continues to work in the ways we've observed over and over again: A baby has arrived to an unknown couple in an unimportant place. And that baby is the Savior of the world.

The Promised Seed.
The Final Deliverer.
The Snake Crusher.

But the battle isn't over. The serpent won't go down without a fight. First, Herod tries to kill all the baby boys, and Mary and Joseph are forced to flee to Egypt. Later, when Jesus begins his earthly ministry, there are many—his own people!—bent on destroying him. And eventually they'll succeed. They'll nail him to a cross.

They'll kill that Promised Seed they've spent so many years waiting for.

At the cross, it looks like the serpent has finally won.

But we've learned a lot over these last few weeks. We've seen how God works—through impossible circumstances and despite the weakness and

foolishness of his people. What looks like defeat is his victory. The snake has bruised the Savior's heel, but the Promised Seed will overcome death, crushing the serpent's head. He will secure salvation for his people.

REFLECTION

→ THIS CHRISTMAS, CONSIDER THAT PROMISED SEED LYING IN THE MANGER. CONSIDER THE TREK HE WILL MAKE TO THE CROSS. AND CONSIDER HOW THESE EVENTS ARE THE CULMINATION OF ALL THAT WE'VE TRACED THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT. GOD HAS KEPT HIS PROMISE. THE SEED OF THE WOMAN HAS PREVAILED. BY FAITH IN CHRIST, WE ARE COUNTED AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.

The Bruised Heel



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ROMANS 8:35-39

More *Than* Conquerors



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