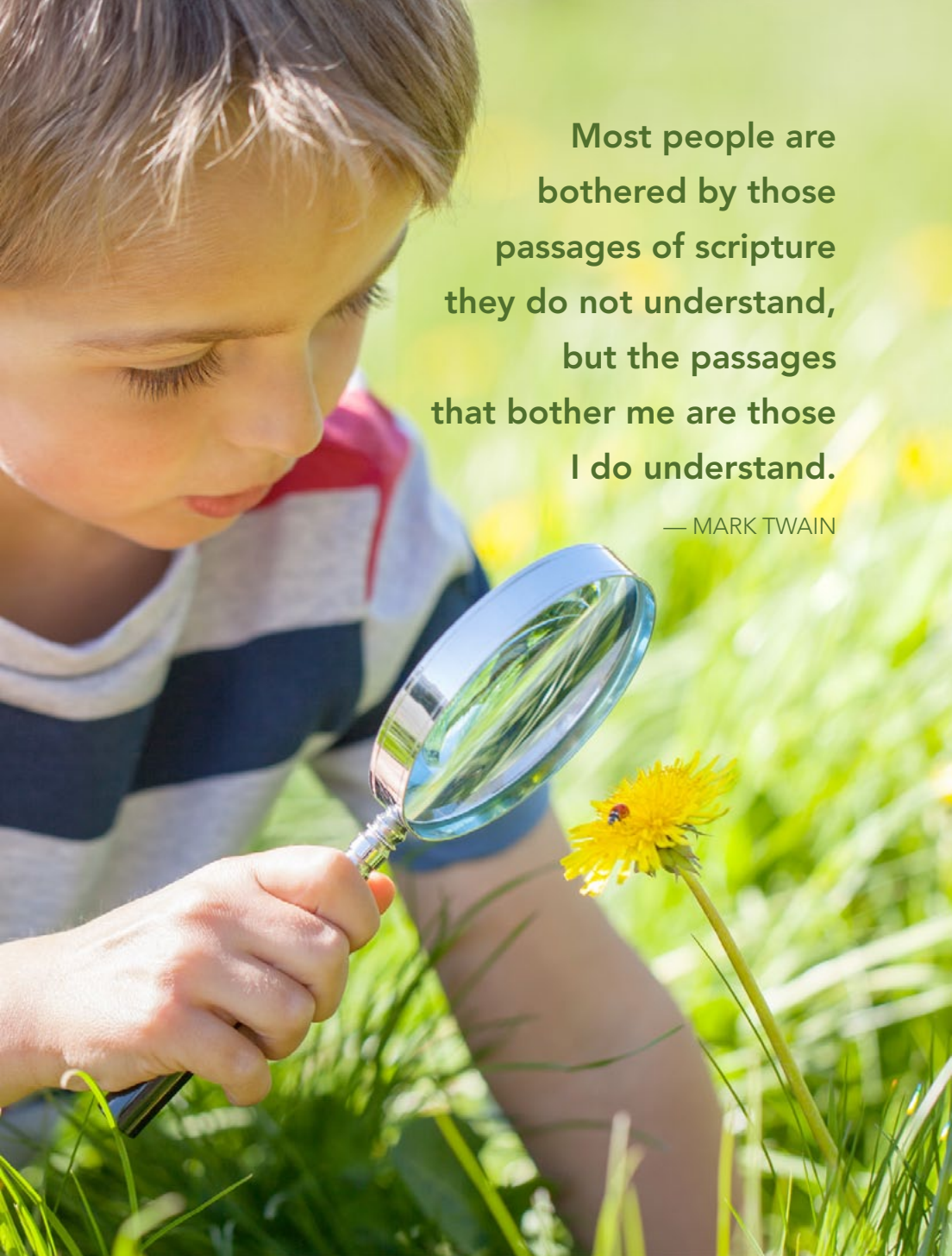


EPIC



The Story that We Find Ourselves In

A young child with light brown hair is looking through a magnifying glass at a dandelion in a field. The child is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background is a bright, sunny field of green grass and yellow dandelions. The magnifying glass is held over a single dandelion flower, which has a small red ladybug on it.

**Most people are
bothered by those
passages of scripture
they do not understand,
but the passages
that bother me are those
I do understand.**

— MARK TWAIN

EPIC

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With every step of our lives
we enter into the middle of a story
which we are certain to misunderstand.

— G.K. CHESTERTON

Introduction

Ever walk into a movie in the middle? You're lost. "Who is she? Why did he say that? Isn't she with them? I thought she was with them ..."

Sometimes life feels that way. Who are all these people? Why did that happen? And me — why am I here? Is there a point? Or, as Forest Gump asked Lieutenant Dan, "... are we all just floatin' around kinda accidental-like, like a feather on a breeze?"

It's difficult to know your part in the story if you don't know the story that you find yourself in.

And then there's "the Bible." A collection of 66 different ancient documents spanning 1000s of years written by dozens of authors. It can feel as confusing as life itself!

And yet, inspired by God's Spirit, those documents tell one seamless story of creation, failure, and redemption.

That's what this simple book is about. In 10 brief chapters you'll discover the flow of God's Epic Story. And with it, you'll come to a fuller understanding of your own story, and the chapter that's now yours to write.

Each chapter captures part of the flow of the Story of the Bible. What's happening, how it fits together. Sometimes a chapter spans 100s of years. Other times, just a generation or two. And with each chapter, there's about a week's worth of readings from the Bible, so you can open up your own Bible and read the Story for yourself.

So dig in. Read at your own pace. Make notes. Raise questions. Then read some more.

It's our hope that these readings will expand your understanding of the entire Bible, the flow of this Great Story we find ourselves in, and whet your appetite to dig deeper and devour even more on your own.

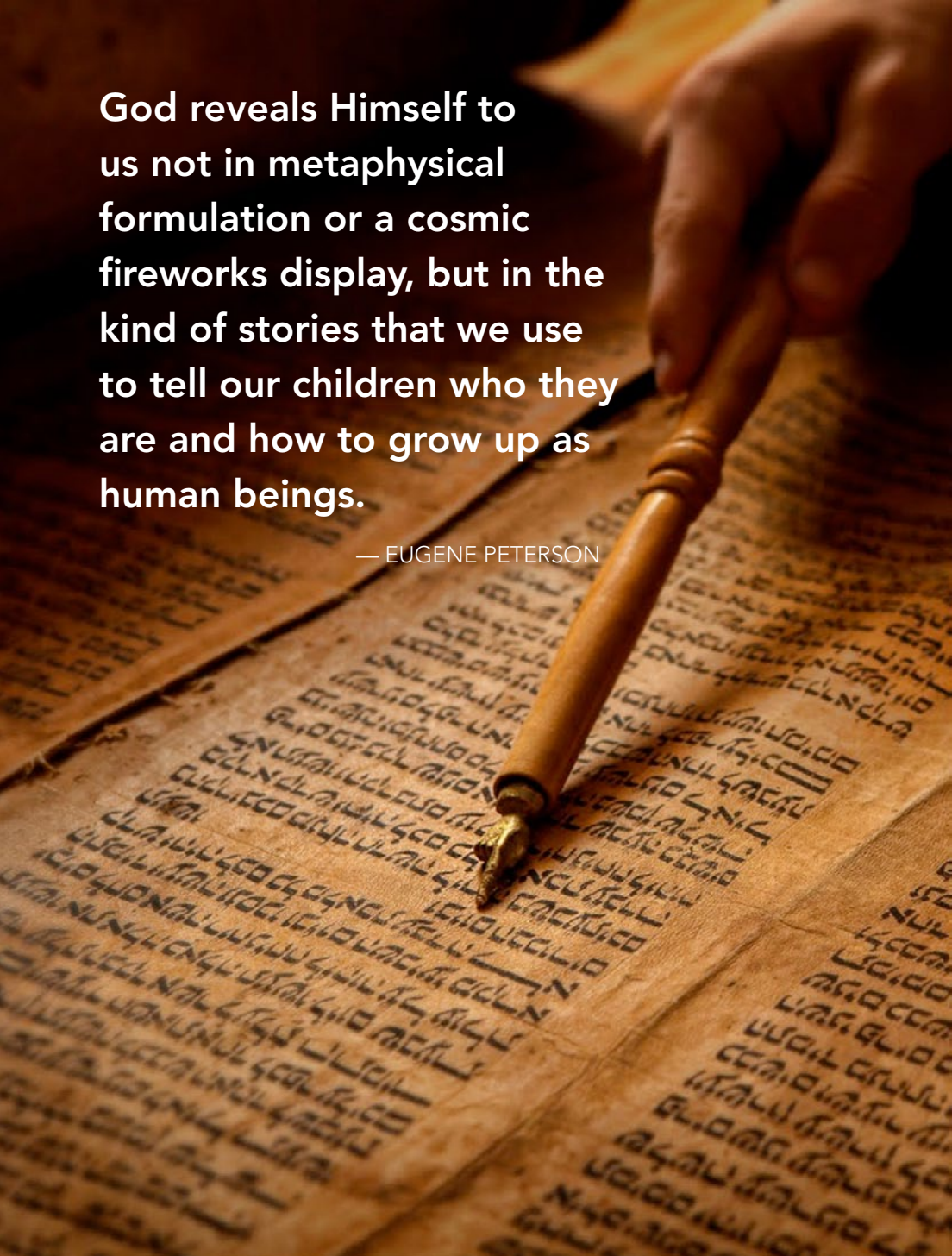
TerraNova Church

Fall 2015

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God reveals Himself to us not in metaphysical formulation or a cosmic fireworks display, but in the kind of stories that we use to tell our children who they are and how to grow up as human beings.

— EUGENE PETERSON



**In the beginning God
created the heavens
and the earth.
And God saw all that
He had made, and
it was very good.**

— GENESIS 1



In the Beginning

(Genesis 1 - 2)

The story opens on a desert scene. The year is 1500 BC. God's people are preparing to cross the Jordan River and enter the "promised land." But there's a problem. For the past 40 years, they've been living in the desert, in isolation. This desert has served as a kind of incubator for them, as God has taught and shaped them to become an uncommon people on the face of the earth. A people who will direct others to Him.

But the land they're about to enter is filled with people who believe bizarre and horribly destructive things about life and gods and themselves ... And so Moses begins to prepare them, with "instruction." The word "Torah" means "instruction," and it's the title given to the first 5 books in the Bible. And his instruction begins ... in the beginning.

As we open the Bible, we meet a Creator God who is so powerful that He simply speaks to the darkness, and there's light. Speaks to the chaos, and there's order and beauty. Speaks to the emptiness, and it teems with life. And this

Creator is not only powerful; He is good. With care, He fashions a beautiful, utopian environment for His creatures to thrive. And then He creates the climax of His good creation: human beings; male and female. Created to rule over and care for His good creation. And at every turn, He kicks back and enjoys it. Takes it all in. Celebrates. Calls it "very good."

And as Chapter 1 of our story comes to an end, the man and the woman are living in unbroken unity — with each other, caring for each other; with their home, as the planet cares for them and they care for the planet; and ultimately and most importantly, with this Powerful and Good Creator who extends His own community and oneness to them. Everything is as it should be. It's "all good."

**The sun, with all those planets revolving
around it and depending on it,
can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had
nothing else in the universe to do.**

— GALILEO GALILEI



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 1:

__ Genesis 1:1-2:3

__ Genesis 2:4-25


__ Acts 17:16-32

__ Isaiah 40

__ Psalm 139

__ For further reading, check out: Psalm 19,
Psalm 104.

NOTES:



All that we call human history
— money, poverty,
ambition, war, prostitution,
classes, empires, slavery
— is the long, terrible story
of man trying to find
something other than God
which will make him happy.

— C.S. LEWIS

The Story of *Eden*

(Genesis 3–11)

Chapter 2 opens in The Garden of Delight (Eden). God has made a beautiful home for His newly forming “community” to enjoy each other and Him. The man and the woman are “naked and unashamed” — a picture of simplicity, innocence, vulnerability, authenticity.

But then, there’s a serpent. It’s sudden appearance strikes a foreboding tone. And the serpent begins to call into question the goodness of God’s heart. In a world of “yesses,” he points out the singular “no,” and manipulates the woman into believing that God has held out on them. She bites, and then her husband does as well. And everything changes.

Shame. Alienation. Blame. Pain. They hide from each other. They hide from God. And God comes seeking and asking.

What they did not, could not have foreseen or understood, though, was that in that moment, everything “fell.” Because of its intrinsically connected nature — because

the whole of creation was made to exist in interdependent unbroken unity — when one part of it fell, the whole of it was sent reeling. The relationship between the man and the woman, their relationship with the earth and its creatures, their relationship with God Himself — it becomes fractured. Broken. “Cursed.”

This is part of our story for which we need no proof. This is the story we wake up in every morning. Famine, disease, genocide, cancer, birth defects, greed, revenge, spite, envy, divorce, war, natural disasters, death ... The masterpiece — and true, we can still see signs of that everywhere, as well — has been vandalized. At times, almost beyond recognition. It's ... heartbreaking.



**You have come into a hard world.
I know of only one easy place
in it, and that is the grave.**

— HENRY WARD BEECHER

Chapter 2 comes to a close with a downward spiral of darkness and pain, as generation after generation of Adam & Eve's children act out every dark and ugly thought and motive that you and I have ever had. We wonder if there's any hope for this beautiful Masterpiece that God created. If He will ever experience the loving community that He intended His creation to live in with Him. But God is ever the seeker, ever the rescuer ... and He never gives up.

The rest of the Story is the story of God's relentless pursuit of a fallen, messed up creation. His desire to bring it all back together again.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 2:

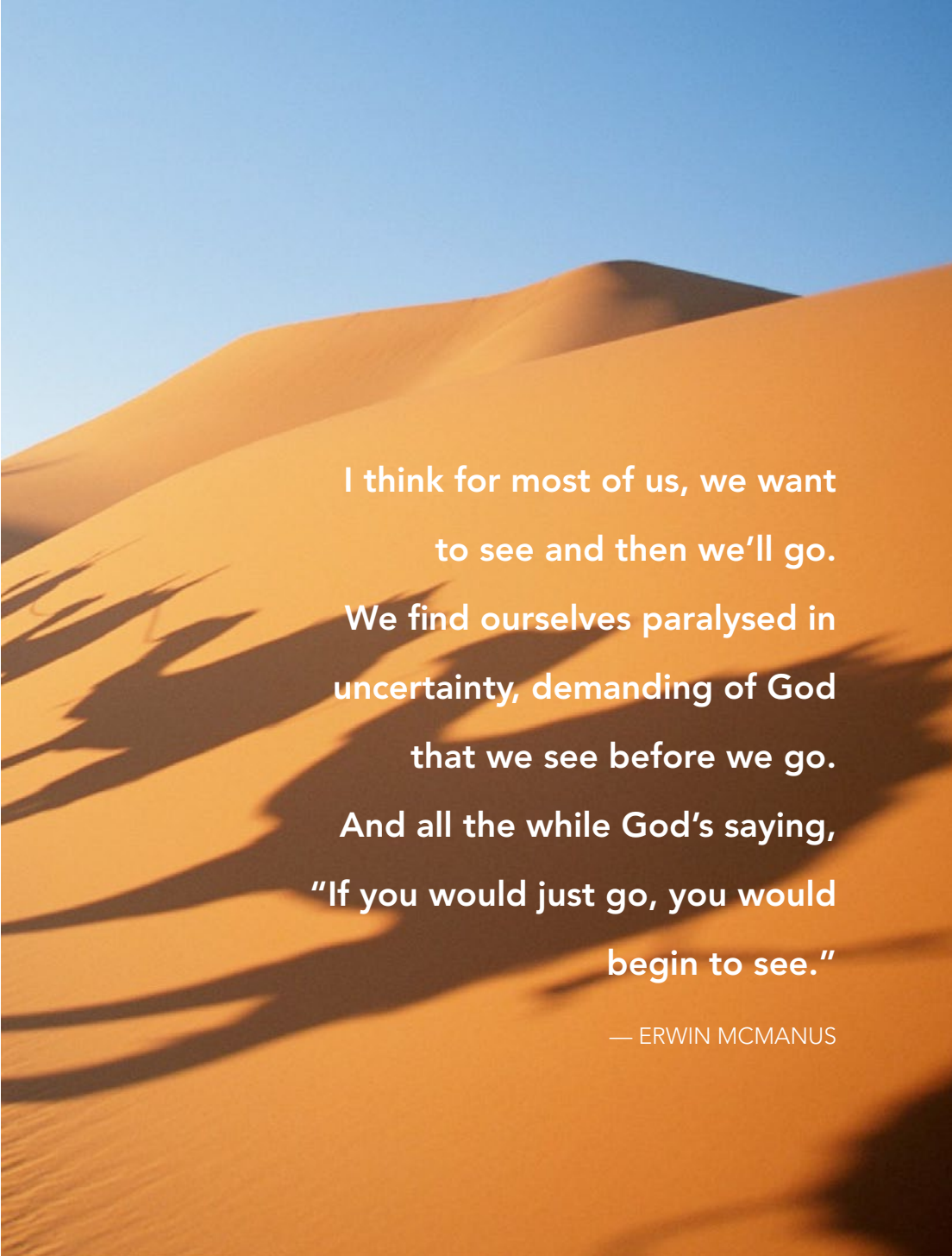
__ Genesis 3:1-24

__ Genesis 4:1-16

__ Genesis 6:5-22

__ Romans 3:9-26

__ Psalm 51



I think for most of us, we want
to see and then we'll go.
We find ourselves paralysed in
uncertainty, demanding of God
that we see before we go.
And all the while God's saying,
"If you would just go, you would
begin to see."

— ERWIN MCMANUS



The Blessing Machine

(Genesis 12-50)

Chapter 3 opens in the year 2000 BC, in a land that is now modern day Iraq, near the border of Kuwait, and we see the craggy face of a single man: Abram. His name means "Exalted Father," which is ironic, since he and his wife can't have kids. And God singles out this man — who comes from a long line of idol worshippers — and extends to him the calling and promise of a lifetime:

"Leave all of this," God says. "Leave your homeland, everything you've ever known. Leave your father's house and his idols. Leave the place where you've made a name and a business for yourself. Come away with me. And I will bless you, and I will make you a great nation, and give you a great name, and through you and your family I will bless every other family on earth. Abram, you will become a blessing machine."

And Abram does! He leaves. He follows God into the wild unknown. (When Abram asks God where this land is He's taking Him to, God answers: "I'll tell you when we get there.") And so Abram enters into a journey of faith — learning how to trust God implicitly, regardless of the risk. And God seems at times as interested in shaping Abram's life (whose name He changes to Abraham — "Father of Many") as He does in rescuing His fallen Creation. As Abraham learns to trust, God blesses. A son ("Isaac" means "He laughs" — Abraham and Sarah highlighting God's sense of humor?), then wealth, strength, influence, joy, honor ... And Abraham blesses others in turn.

But as Chapter 3 comes to a close, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, and his 12 sons and their families move to Egypt to escape a terrible famine. And though they seem hopeful and relieved, we know better. Egypt is the land where they will become slaves. Is this right? Is this what God has in mind for His Blessing Machine?



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 3:

__ Genesis 11:27-12:7; 15:1-6

__ Genesis 17

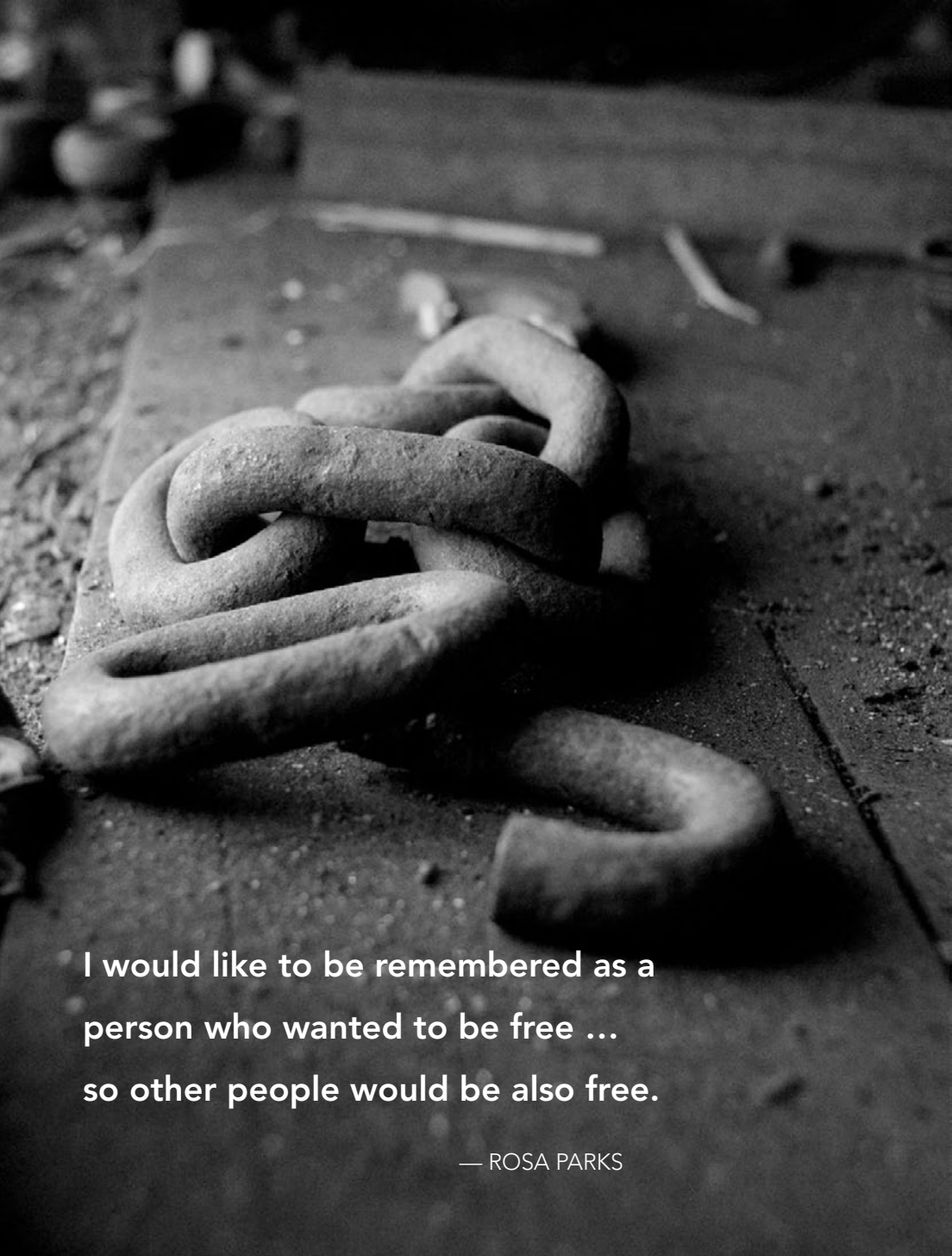
__ Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

__ Genesis 22:1-19

__ Romans 4:1-3,16-25

__ For further reading, check out: Genesis 37,
39-50 (Joseph's story).

NOTES:



I would like to be remembered as a
person who wanted to be free ...
so other people would be also free.

— ROSA PARKS

Get Free to Be

(Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

Chapter 4 opens almost 500 years later; roughly 1500 BC. Abraham's family has grown into a large nation of people known as "the Hebrews" ... so large that Egypt feels threatened by them and subjugates them to a cruel form of slavery. The Hebrews begin crying out to God for deliverance and God raises up an unlikely deliverer named Moses.

After a series of incredible displays of power and superiority over Egypt's so-called "gods" (known as "the 10 plagues"), the Pharaoh finally releases the Hebrews from their slavery. They follow Moses far into the desert, to Mt. Sinai—to the same place where Moses first met God a few months earlier in a burning bush. There, God introduces Himself to this nation He's delivered. (The whole scene has an "I guess you're wondering why I called you here" feel to it.)

At Mt. Sinai God explains why He set them free: He loves them, they're His most treasured possession. Then He gives them a choice: (1) go it on your own from here; or (2) become my people. They choose #2. And that's when

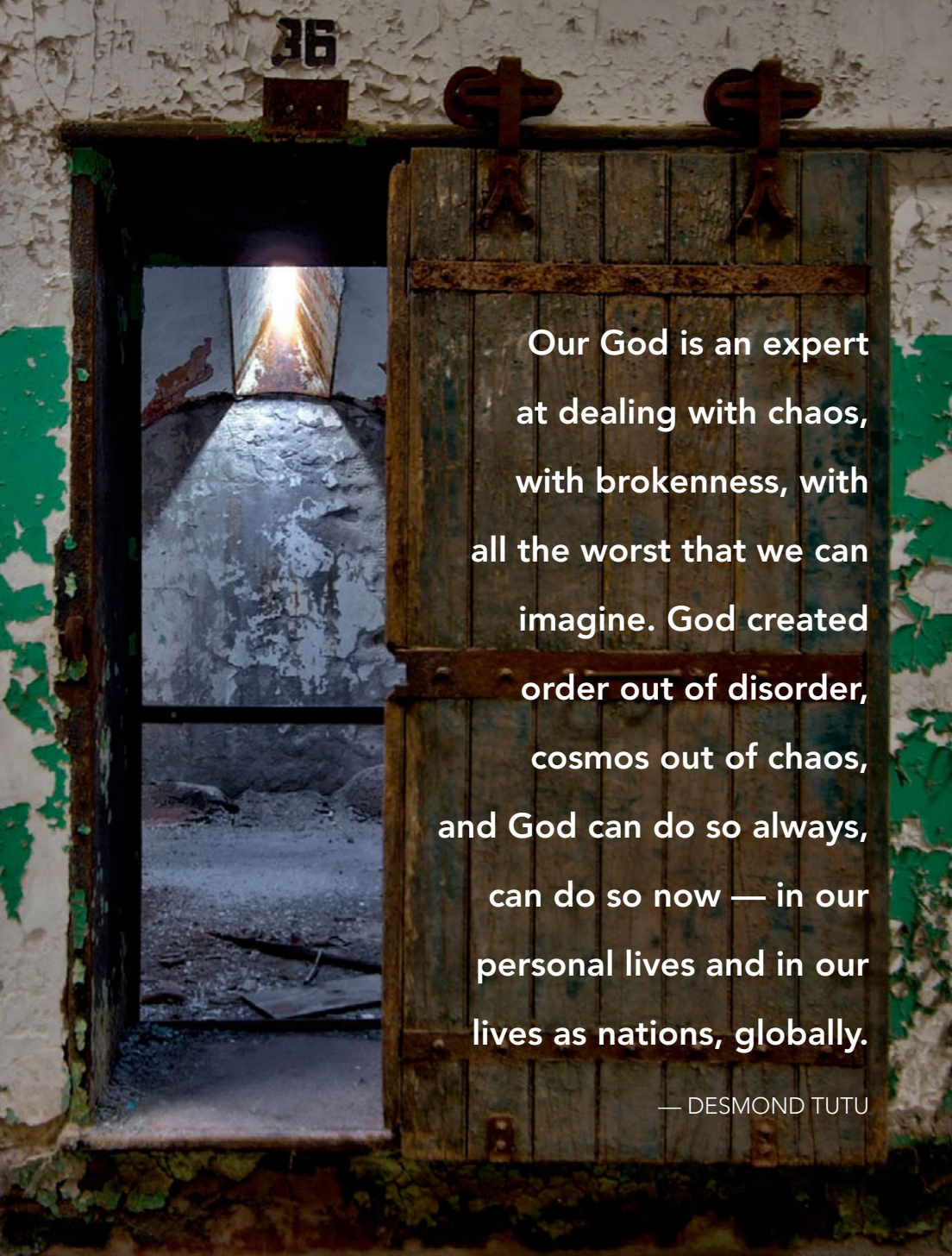
God casts a vision for them. A vision of an entirely different kind of nation. A showcase nation. A people who live completely differently, in the blessing and holiness of God, and show the world what it looks like to live life in right relationship with Creator God. Their uniqueness is summed up in His "law." They will be an *uncommon* ("holy") community:

- Uncommon devotion to and singular worship of One True God
- Uncommon commitment to righteousness and integrity
- Uncommon culture of compassion — their care for the poor, the outsider, the less fortunate

They will become the blessing machine, and God will turn the nations toward Himself. Everybody enthusiastically agrees.

They set out from Mt. Sinai (in the book of Numbers) as an organized nation, ready to embrace their destiny. But this nation struggles to trust, struggles to believe that if they're different they'll be ok. They constantly fear, constantly take matters into their own hands, constantly do it their way (or, more accurately, everyone else's way -- the way everybody does it). After one failed attempt to enter their Promise Land (Numbers 13-14), they wander in the desert till that entire generation dies.

36

A photograph of a weathered wooden door with a bright light shining through a hole in the wall behind it. The door is made of vertical wooden planks and has two large, dark metal hinges at the top. The wall is white with peeling paint, and there is a small number '36' above the door. The light from the hole creates a strong contrast, illuminating the interior of the door and casting shadows on the wall.

Our God is an expert
at dealing with chaos,
with brokenness, with
all the worst that we can
imagine. God created
order out of disorder,
cosmos out of chaos,
and God can do so always,
can do so now — in our
personal lives and in our
lives as nations, globally.

— DESMOND TUTU

As Chapter 4 comes to a close, the people stand on the brink of the Promise Land a second time. A new generation, ready to enter, ready to trust. Moses gathers them together for one final speech, a speech we call "Deuteronomy." And in Deuteronomy (literally, "second law") Moses explains the whole thing to this new generation one more time. "Here's who you are. Here's what God did and is doing. Here's what you must remember. Because it's easy to be different in the desert, in isolation, when all you can do is trust God. But when you get in there and things are good and you don't think you need God so much anymore and your new neighbors think all your differences are weird, you're going to be tempted to blend in. Don't do it! Don't forget who you are!"

Will they? Will they remember who they are and be the unique, showcase people of God? Will they display the holiness and blessing of God to their world? Or will they forget? Moses' final speech leaves us cautiously optimistic.



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 4:

__ Exodus 1:1-2:10; 2:23-25

__ Exodus 3:1-4:17

__ Exodus 13:17-14:31

__ Exodus 19:1-8; 20:1-21

__ Deuteronomy 8

__ For further reading, check out: Numbers 13
& 14; Deuteronomy 6; Psalm 105.

NOTES:

Come, let us worship and bow down.

**Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,
for He is our God.**

**We are the people He watches over,
the flock under His care.**

— PSALM 95





Face Down Devotion

*(1st & 2nd Samuel ... with commentary from Psalms,
Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)*

It's now 1000 BC. The 12 disjointed families, or "tribes," of Israel (tracing their family lineage back to Jacob's 12 sons) have lived in the Land for 100s of years now. But they never seem to be clicking on all cylinders. The solution to all of their problems seems obvious to them: "We need a king! Everybody else has a king -- a human king, not their god. We want a human king too! That's what we really need around here."

And so God — their true king — acquiesces. Saul is the 1st king to be appointed. But he never has what it takes (though he looks the part). The 12 tribes are never truly brought together in a unified whole. There's no working central government. Israel continues to struggle with constant border disputes and attacks by her neighbors, as well as disunity and conflict within. But then the prophet Samuel anoints a young shepherd boy named, David.

As it turns out, David is one of these rare individuals in history. He trusts God boldly, at times seeming utterly fearless. He's a warrior, a musician, a politician, the kind of leader that inspires selfless devotion in others. Above all, David loves God. As imperfect as he is, he is fully devoted to God. A face-down follower.

David unites the 12 tribes into a nation, defeats the enemies who are raiding the borders, establishes Jerusalem as the capitol, and brings the Ark into the city (establishing a central place of worship as well).

And for a time — under David's reign and then under his son, Solomon's reign (a period of about 80 years) — it seems like Israel is living the dream. They're wide open to God, and God is blessing them, and the nations are noticing. They are becoming a light to the nations. Will God now have the people through whom He can restore His broken planet to Himself? Is this it?

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 5:

__ 1Samuel 16:1-13

__ 1Samuel 17

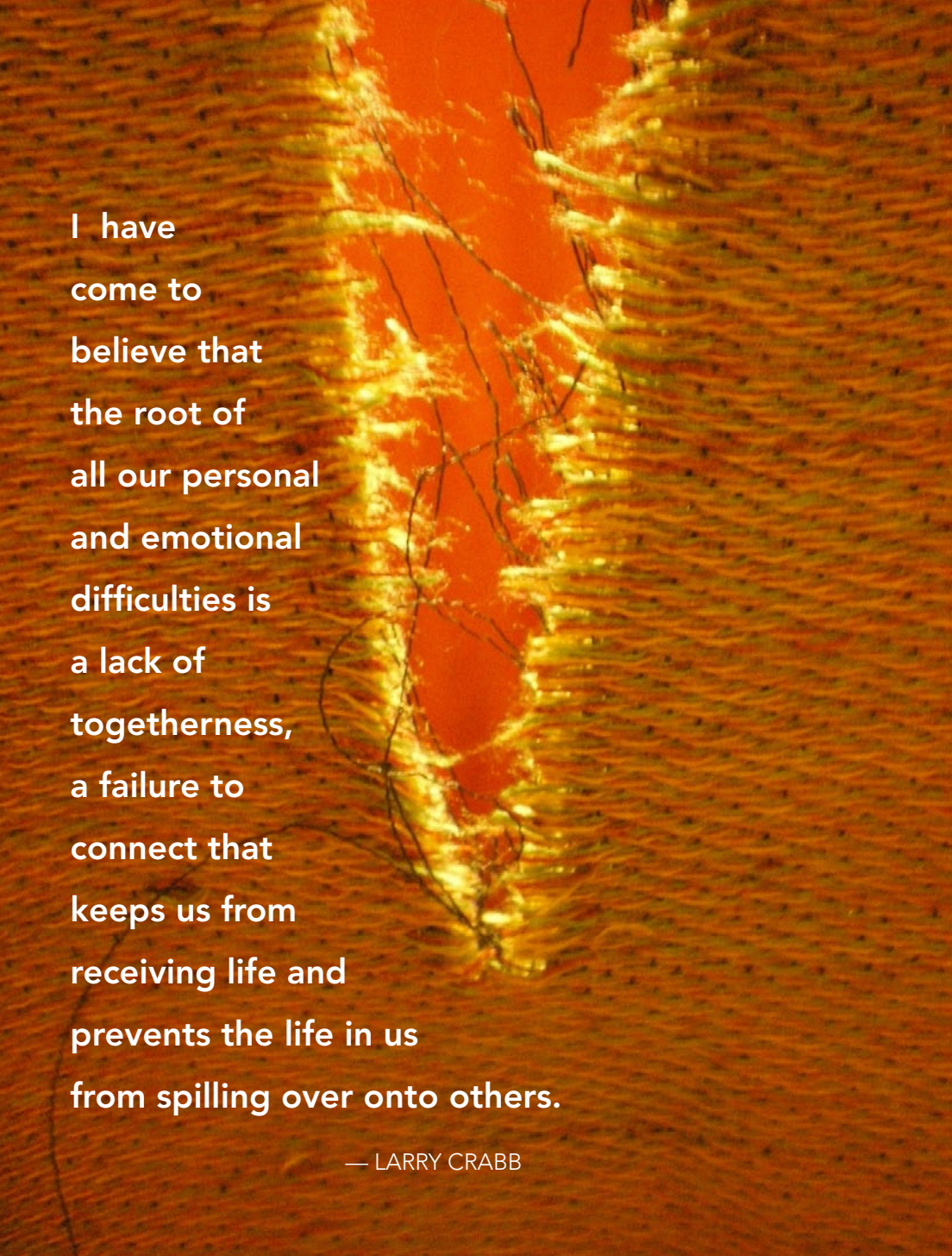
__ 2Samuel 5:1-5; 2Samuel 6

__ 2Samuel 11:1-12:12

__ Psalm 23

__ For further reading, check out: Psalm 78;
1Samuel 20; Psalm 103.

NOTES:



I have
come to
believe that
the root of
all our personal
and emotional
difficulties is
a lack of
togetherness,
a failure to
connect that
keeps us from
receiving life and
prevents the life in us
from spilling over onto others.

— LARRY CRABB

What Tears Community in Two

(1st & 2nd Kings)

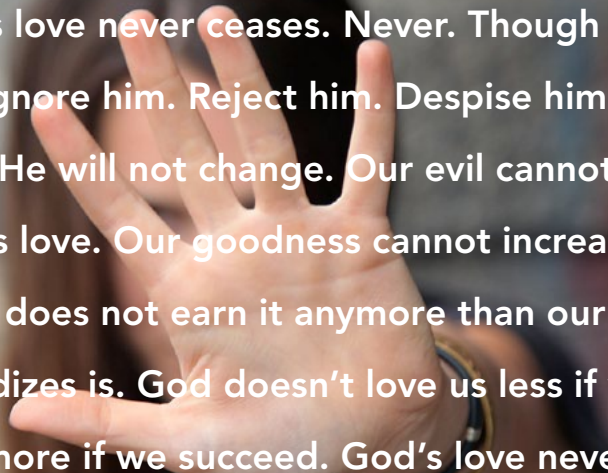
Chapter 6 opens with some sad news. Solomon, David's son, lacks the full devotion of his father. He doesn't live with the same Face Down Devotion that his dad had. Instead, he gets caught up in the power and wealth that God gives him. Kings and powerful people all around him want his friendship. And they want him to marry their daughters (a really common way in the ancient world to make a treaty with another country).

So he does. All of them. 100s of them. And then he allows them to bring their gods into Jerusalem with them so they won't feel so homesick. (What?!?) And then he begins to offer some sacrifices to them as well. You know, just to keep his wives happy. No big deal. (*Isn't this the way it goes for all of us? One little decision after another?*) Until he's finally gone so far as to offer sacrifices to Molech, the god who demanded human babies as a sacrifice.

Once again, the dream is dashed. God solemnly informs Solomon that he has destroyed the uncommon community, and after his death the nation will be ripped in two. At the same time, a prophet comes to a young man named Jeroboam (a leader in Solomon's kingdom) and promises that God will make him like David and give him half the kingdom of Israel, if Jeroboam will trust Him.

Solomon dies, and his son Rehoboam becomes king. It sounds like there might be a last chance for him. 10 of the 12 tribes — the 10 from the north — come to him and ask for relief. Solomon has driven them hard, worked them hard, taxed them hard, even made them his slaves. If Rehoboam will just lighten up, the people will serve him always. But Rehoboam is proud. His ego (and his friends) tells him that to lighten up would be weakness. And so he comes back to the 10 tribes with his answer: he will be even HARDER on them than his father! That's their last straw. 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel split off and form their own country that day.

(The other 2 tribes in the south stay with Rehoboam. From this point on in the Story, the 10 tribes of the north are called "Israel" and the 2 tribes in the south are called "Judah.")



God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes is. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

— MAX LUCADO

And who do the 10 tribes of the north turn to? Jeroboam. The prophet was right! But Jeroboam has a problem. Jerusalem — where everyone goes to worship God, offer their sacrifices and celebrate the great feasts — Jerusalem is located in the south, in "Judah." Jeroboam is afraid. If the people travel south a few times a year to worship God and offer sacrifices, won't they become homesick? Won't they start to think that they should rejoin Judah and become one nation again? And then what will they do to him?! Kill him? God told him that He would make him a king like David, give him a reign as lasting as David's. But can Jeroboam trust God and let it go?

Sadly, no. Jeroboam decides to create two new centers of worship to replace Jerusalem and the temple that Solomon built there. And in these two new places of worship, he builds golden cows — just to give the people something to focus on. (The surrounding nations often used statues of cows to represent their gods.) Jeroboam considers it a minor concession. God is horrified.

As chapter 6 comes to a close, the Golden Age is over — within just 50 years of David's death. The nation is divided in half. Idols and other gods are everywhere. And for the next 200 years, the 2 nations of Israel and Judah ride a slippery slope downhill. And it all started with lust and power and ego and pride and an inability to truly and fully trust in God. *Hmmm ... sound familiar?*



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 6:

__ 1Kings 3

__ 1Kings 8:1-9:9

__ 1Kings 11:1-13, 26-43

__ 1Kings 12

__ John 13

__ For further reading, check out: 1Kings 17-19 ; also the Book of Proverbs, much of which was written by Solomon, David's son.

NOTES:



The Fair Principle

(2 Kings with commentary from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel)

They were called to be an Uncommon (“holy”) Community:

- Uncommon devotion to and singular worship of One True God
- Uncommon commitment to righteousness and integrity
- Uncommon culture of compassion — care for the poor, the outsider, the less fortunate

But one by one their uncommonness dissolved; unraveled ... until ... they were simply no longer God’s Covenant Community. There was nothing uncommon left.

The North (“Israel”) finds itself in a complete tailspin of spiritual compromise. Rather than embracing their identity, becoming who they are, they seek to become “common.” To blend in. King after king is murdered or overthrown. The story reads like something out of modern day 3rd world countries — coups and murder and violence and civil wars and refugees ... And the running description given to each

one of them: "They were even worse than the kings before. They were even more evil. More self-serving."

722 BC. 200 yrs after the country was ripped apart in civil war, the empire of Assyria devoured the Northern Kingdom ("Israel") — destroyed it's cities, killed it's leaders, exiled it's people. The north is obliterated.

You'd think the people of the south ("Judah") would pick up the clue phone: "Alright, God! We get the picture! Message received! We'll change, we'll trust you, we'll be the uncommon people you've called us to!" But they didn't. Instead, ironically, the fact that they did NOT get destroyed by Assyria planted in their heads a particularly destructive delusion. They began to think: "Jerusalem is like a 'magic city' — magically protected by God. He would never let *His* city, *His* temple get obliterated ... *it just means too much to Him!*" No matter how much the prophets warn them, they can't take it seriously. God's way too invested in this to let it go.

Then it happened. 600 BC. In a series of 3 invasions, the mighty empire of Babylon swooped down and destroyed Jerusalem. Carted off everything of value. Dragged away into exile every citizen with power, money, education, or influence. Destroyed the city, leaving no stone on top of

another — the temple, political buildings, the great wall around the city. Everything is destroyed. They learned the Pain Principle the hard way: God will allow His people to experience whatever pain is necessary in order to shape their character not to *pay* them back, but to *win* them back.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 7:

__ Isaiah 5

__ Jeremiah 18

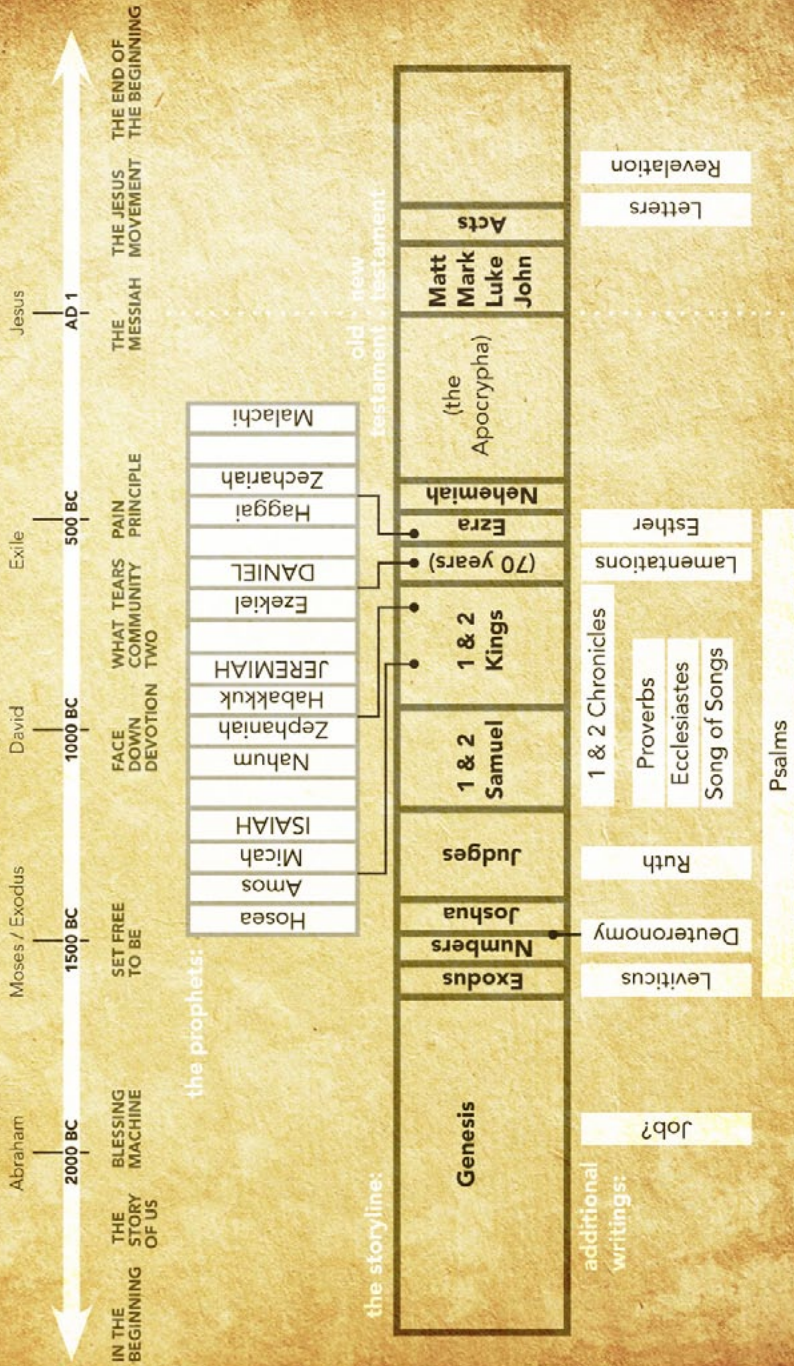
__ Jeremiah 38

__ 2Chronicles 36

__ Isaiah 11-12

__ For further reading, check out: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 106; Daniel 1-6.

Chronological Order of the Books of the Bible



INTERLUDE

Waiting... for Someday

(Ezra, Nehemiah with commentary from Haggai,
Zechariah, Malachi)

From all appearances, it's GAME OVER.

But God wasn't done with His community of people. Not yet. The prophets Ezekiel and Daniel speak into this context to shape the consciousness of the community and bring redirection & hope. *It's not over yet!*

Jeremiah had said this exile would last 70 years, and sure enough ... 70 years later (miracle of miracles) Cyrus, king of Persia conquered the Babylonian empire overnight and decreed that the people of Israel should return to Jerusalem & rebuild the temple. Which they did! A truly amazing, unexpected turn of events that left people giddy with excitement (Psalm 126 was written here.)

But the return from exile didn't fulfill expectations. In fact, it was a complete letdown. So the people of God enter a long season of disappointment, futility, and despair.

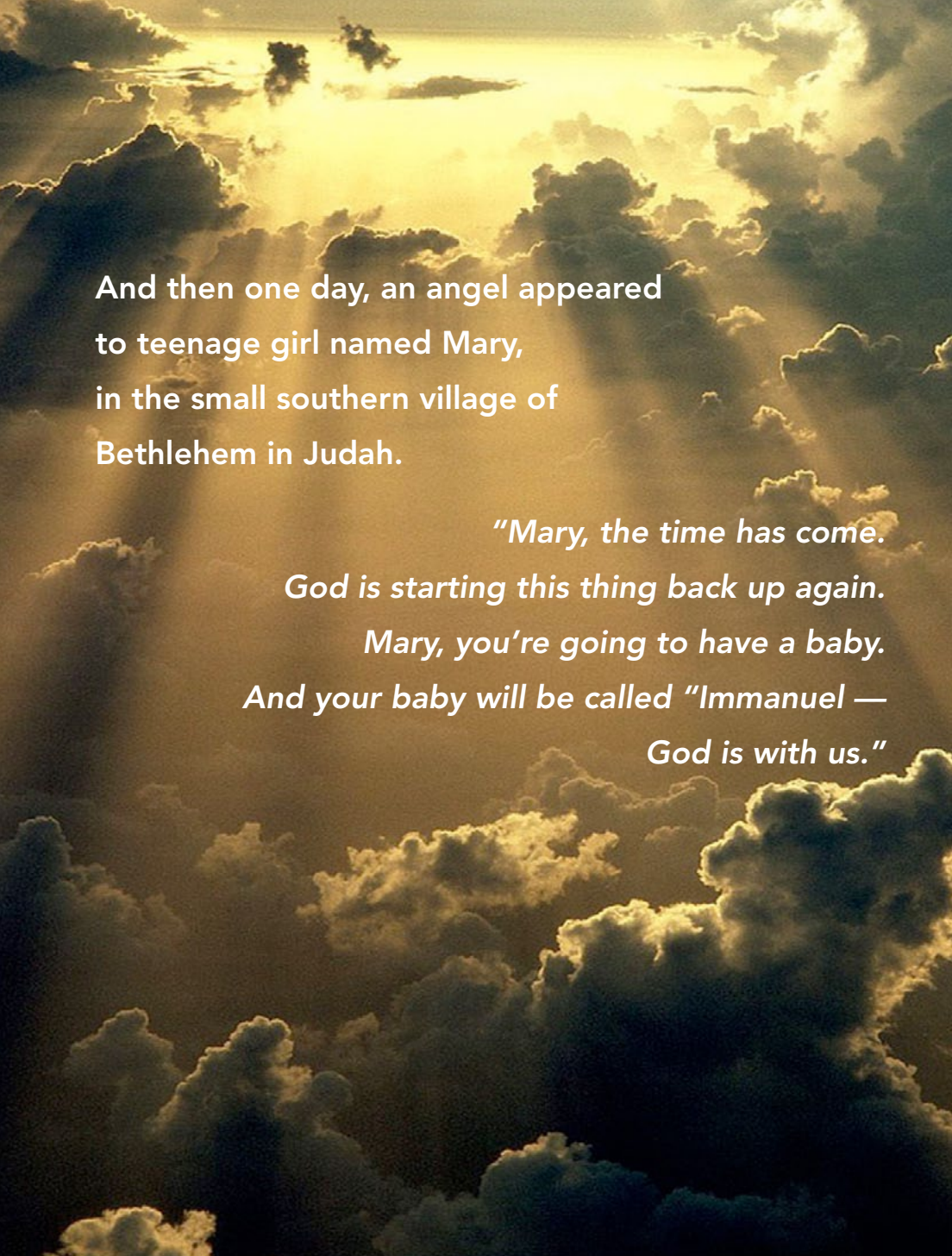
This is how the Old Testament draws to a close — with the people of God waiting ... hoping ... for SOMETHING ... Believing that someday God will break through once again. That there will come one “like David” who could restore their nation to that “Golden Age.”

An expectation arose. A “Messiah” — an anointed one, a deliverer — would come from God and establish the “kingdom of God” on earth. And everything would be the way it was supposed to be again. Someday.

As the Greeks conquered the Persians and swept over the known world depositing Greek language and Greek thinking everywhere they went ... As the Roman eagle rose in the West and “Augustus” absorbed the Jewish homeland ... The people waited.

For 400 years they waited.

And then one day, an angel appeared to teenage girl named Mary, in the small southern village of Bethlehem in Judah. “Mary, the time has come. God is starting this thing back up again. Mary, you’re going to have a baby. And your baby will be called “Immanuel — God is with us.”



And then one day, an angel appeared
to teenage girl named Mary,
in the small southern village of
Bethlehem in Judah.

*“Mary, the time has come.
God is starting this thing back up again.
Mary, you’re going to have a baby.
And your baby will be called “Immanuel —
God is with us.”*

I do not at all understand
the mystery of grace —
only that it meets us where we are
but does not leave us where it found us.

— ANNE LAMOTT



The Messiah

(Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

30 years later, this Jesus shows up in the southern desert, at the River Jordan, and is baptized by a smelly, bed-head looking prophet named John, nicknamed “the baptizer.” Jesus steps out of that river and begins to announce a message of revolution:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” He said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

— Mark 1:14-15

“It’s happening!” Jesus is saying. “God’s world is now breaking in upon this world. The time has come! Men and women everywhere are being invited to return to God. To “repent” (that is, change the direction of their lives) and enter this new way of life!”

But this “Kingdom” was not the kingdom people were expecting. This was not a return to David — a kingdom of powering up over the Romans. This was a return to Eden —

to live God's way. Life with God in God's world the way it was meant to be.

Jesus began to gather students ("disciples" / apprentices) to be trained in this new way. And He began to demonstrate with His own life and actions this way of life. He went on a full frontal attack against the spiritual forces that brought pain and destruction to God's world and His people. Many began to believe He was the long-awaited Messiah.

He lived a life of full devotion and trustful responsiveness to His Father's will; a life of love and compassion for the outsider. In other words, Jesus modeled and fulfilled the dream — the original dream for life. (Hence His often-repeated title, "Son of Man," which could be loosely translated "the True Human.")

But in all of this and in every way, Jesus was a huge threat to the status quo (and still is!). And so under cover of night a few years later, He was betrayed, arrested, and crucified. Dead. No question about it.

Normally, that would be end of that story.

But 3 days later — according to every piece of historical evidence available and confirmed by countless eye-witnesses — the most unbelievable (seriously) thing happened.

If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure,
God would have sent an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness,
so He sent us a Savior.

— ROY LESSIN



This Jesus rose from the dead.

He gathered His students together, explained everything to them (He actually took them through the entire story, front to back, check out Luke 24:25-27, 44-48). Explained that His death was no accident. That it had to be this way. The Messiah had to suffer and be crucified. All of this had been necessary to bring forgiveness and peace and life-change to everyone and anyone. In so doing, He had injected the cure into the bloodstream of this diseased creation. The power of the curse was broken. The restoration of God's creation had begun.

And then He told them: Now it's your turn!



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 8:

__ John 1

__ Luke 4

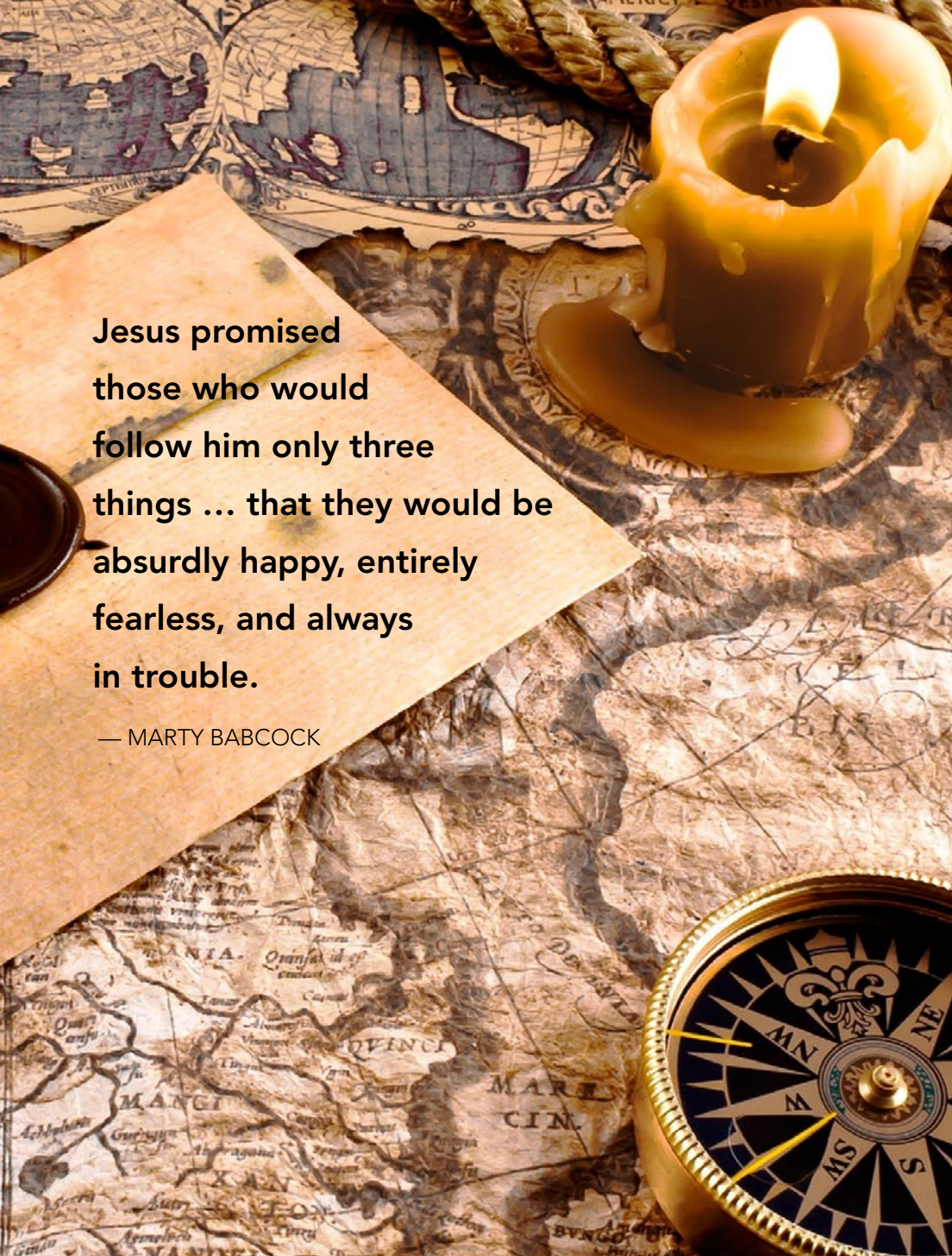
__ John 3

__ Mark 14:32-73; Mark 15

__ Matthew 28

__ For further reading, check out: Acts 3;
Colossians 1.

NOTES:

A collage of nautical-themed items. In the top right, a lit candle with a bright flame sits on a piece of parchment. Below it, a brass compass with a blue face and gold needle is visible. The background is a textured, aged map with various geographical labels like 'MANGI', 'MARE CIN', and 'XAAV'. A piece of parchment is draped across the left side of the image.

**Jesus promised
those who would
follow him only three
things ... that they would be
absurdly happy, entirely
fearless, and always
in trouble.**

— MARTY BABCOCK

Caught in Between

(Acts with commentary from letters of NT)

Jesus sent His students into the world (Matthew 28:16-20), telling them: “Communicate this message you’ve been taught to everyone everywhere— invite them all into this kingdom way of life and train them how to live just as you’ve been trained.”

And the Jesus Movement began.

The Book of Acts (“Acts of the Apostles”) tells of the dramatic spread of this movement from Jerusalem, around the Mediterranean, to Rome itself. As this movement spread, revolutionary communities were birthed in cities and towns in every nation. Letters were written by leaders like Peter, John and Paul back to these communities, giving them guidance on practical matters and training them in the way of Jesus. Letters that were collected, copied, and passed on.

And these followers of Jesus came to see that they were part of something BIG. Something that had actually begun long, long ago ...

As one of them wrote:

God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to His good pleasure. And this is His plan: At the right time He will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. — Ephesians 1:9-10, 22-23

God is bringing it all back together again, restoring and healing His fractured creation. He's bringing everything back together under the "head" of Christ. And He's doing it ... through us. We, the Church, are the fullness of Christ, the One who fills everything. We are now the presence of Jesus in the world.

And so the movement, and the story, continues ...

We live in a fractured, fallen world. We still feel the pain and effects of the fall. But it will not always be this way. We

are "caught in between." The restoration of all things has begun, but it is not yet complete.

And in the meantime, God has begun to draw people into His life — the "kingdom of God." We can be trained and transformed to live the life of Jesus and carry that life to others — as His "body," bringing Jesus with us wherever we go. As we do, we're part of the solution; part of the way God is restoring all things. In each instance of redemption, compassion, reconciliation, or justice, we're bringing just one more thing "together" under His "head." This is our story now.

And as we do, we're looking forward to the full & final restoration of all things ...

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 9:

__ Acts 2

__ Hebrews 11:1-12:3

__ Romans 8

__ Ephesians 4

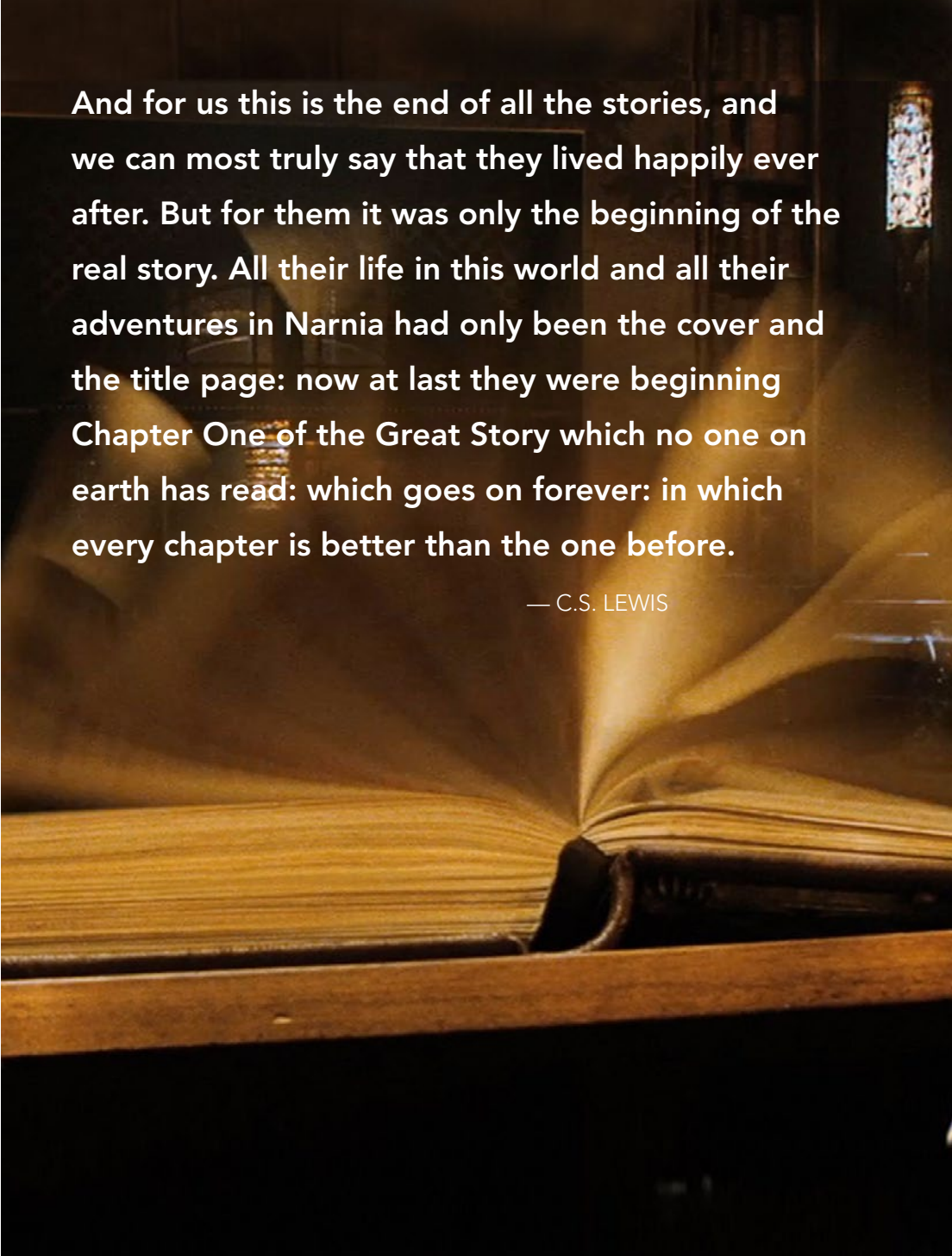
__ 1Peter 1-2:12

__ For further reading, check out: Ephesians
(the entire letter was written to young churches about what it means to be the church!)

NOTES:



3



And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

— C.S. LEWIS

The End of the Beginning

(The Revelation)

The story ends with one of most interesting books of all — an “apocalypse,” as this style of literature has come to be known. Though it strikes us as strange, this kind of writing was one of the most popular genres of it’s day. Part science fiction, part fantasy, part political cartoon.

John, the last living original follower of Jesus, sits exiled on a desert island. And with prophetic insight and brilliant imagery he foretells the utter collapse of world’s greatest empire, Rome. Then beyond that, his vision fast-forwards to the day when God’s beautiful plan — begun so long ago in a garden, waylaid & vandalized for centuries, would finally reach its fulfillment, its consummation.

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God

Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

— Revelation 21:1-4

John describes in the scene that follows a "Return to Eden" ... and beyond. There's a river that flows through (not a garden, but) a city. On either side, trees of life grow. And the leaves of the trees are for healing of the nations.

Creation is restored, the oneness of all things restored, the original glory of humanity is restored. And we will rule for all eternity. Rule as we were created to rule in the beginning. And for the first time since Genesis 2, everything is the way it's supposed to be.

(It's been said that if you could remove all the pain, all the sorrow, all the disappointment and failure and sin from the human story, you would be left with Genesis 1 & 2, and Revelation 21 & 22 — the first 2 and last 2 chapters of the Bible. Open your Bible up and read these 4 chapters together.)

This is where our story is heading. This is where your story is heading.

And when you know that, you can know who you are and why you're here. You can know the context to your story. And you can become part of God's bigger story to bring restoration and healing to His fractured creation.

So ... what chapter will you write with your life today?



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR CHAPTER 10:

__ Isaiah 65:12-25

__ 1Thessalonians 4:1-5:11

__ 2Peter 3

__ Genesis 1 & 2

__ Revelation 21 & 22

__ For further reading, check out: Revelation
4-5; Matthew 25.

NOTES:



It's the story of an artist whose greatest creation, his life's work, has been stolen and vandalized — destroyed nearly beyond recognition. But instead of scrapping it and beginning all over, he pursues his lost masterpiece until he finds it in some back alley heap. And then he begins the caring, patient and tedious work of restoring it to its original beauty.

It's the story of a father who loves his son more than his own life. But the son rejects the father's love, robs him blind, takes off with the intent of never being seen again. But the father's love can never let his son go. So he uses all his resources to pursue his lost son until he finds him in a hovel — drunk, addicted, broke, and disease-ridden. And when he sees him, the father runs to his son, weeping, throws his arms around him, nurses him back to health and strength, and invites him back into his home.

It's the story of love and loss, failure and redemption. It's your story and mine. The story we find ourselves in.

Discover the flow of this story, the epic story of the Bible, in 10 very brief, easy to read chapters.