

He was in a hurry. He had all the necessary papers to take to Damascus. They had made progress in ridding Jerusalem of this sect that threatened the traditions and religious teachings of his people. Now, however, it was spreading from Jerusalem to other parts of the world—the lies of this sect had to be stopped. Jesus of Nazareth was not the long awaited Messiah but an imposter. These letters that he carried from the authorities in Jerusalem gave him the power to turn over Jesus' disciples to imprisonment and death. There was no time to lose. Ahhhhhh—I can't see! The light is so bright—brighter than the sun. Who is speaking? **"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"**

"Who are you, Lord?" **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."**

With these words the life of Saul, a.k.a. Paul, changed not just for a lifetime, but forever. Jesus, whom he knew was dead, had just spoken to him. He was alive. He had been raised from the dead just as these disciples had witnessed. Many years later Paul would write to the Corinthian believers memories of Jesus' appearance to him:

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to

the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed." 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

After the shock of Jesus' appearing, he now listened to the disciples and their teachings. He realized that the long awaited Messiah must needs die for the sins of the people. The Messiah had to save his people from themselves and not from some foreign invader. The enemy was the sin and rebellion against God. Only with the salvation from sinfulness would the "Hope of Israel" become a reality. Only then would all nations be blessed through the offspring of Abraham. Only then would King David's throne be restored so that justice and peace and righteousness would fill the earth.

"Lord Jesus, I believe that you are alive. You are my Lord."...are the words that Paul

must have spoken when he finally heard and understood the message. So he who stood and held the coats of those who stoned Stephen became a missionary to the world. All the energy he had thrown into persecuting the disciples of Jesus he now threw into preaching and teaching the true hope of Israel that comes through Jesus Christ. Paul became the primary missionary to the Gentiles. With Barnabus, Mark, Timothy, and others he traveled throughout Asia, Greece, Macedonia, and Rome preaching and teaching. Chapters 13 through 28 of the book of Acts recounts this history. Also in the New Testament are recorded the letters that Paul wrote to the new Christian churches. He who had persecuted the people of Jesus now, himself, suffered for the sake of his Lord. He records the following in one of his letters:

"Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the

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city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

To the end of his life Paul continued to preach the gospel, that is, those things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Even near the end of this life when standing in chains as a prisoner before King Agrippa he declared:

"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to

God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen- that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." Acts 26:19-23

Finally, in Rome, and in chains, Paul pleaded with his people:

"Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.... For this reason I have asked to see you and

talk with you. *It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.*"From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Acts 28:17-23

Paul was a passionate man of action who thought he knew God's will until he met Jesus. Everything he thought he knew and believed changed in an instant when he saw and talked with the risen Lord. He now understood that everything that he knew from the Law and the Prophets and the Promises of God in the Old Testament had no meaning without the saving work of the true Messiah to save the people from their sins. With an indescribable conviction and belief in the living Christ, Paul's passionate action was turned into a life of bringing the message of Jesus to every possible person.

Bible Principles

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

As part of the Lord's Prayer, these well-known words have been used in prayer by millions of people for hundreds of years. In fact, in this prayer that Jesus taught his disciples it is the very first petition: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." What do these words mean? What is it that Jesus wants us to pray for? Is it just wishful thinking?

The phrase "kingdom of God" is found throughout the New Testament. Another very similar phrase, kingdom of heaven, is found only in the Gospel of Mat-

thew. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, it is like yeast mixed in dough, it is like treasure hidden in a field, it is near and calls for repentance, it is what Jesus was sent to preach and what he sent his disciples to preach. Many of Jesus' parables are about the kingdom. In Acts 8 Philip preached the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

What is the kingdom? Well, we learn two important things about the kingdom in this prayer. One, it is still to take place—Thy king-

dom come. Second, when the kingdom comes, God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. There will be a time when God's glory will fill not just the heavens but also the earth: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." **Habakkuk** 2:14. What else does the New Testament tell us about the kingdom?

1. Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that her son to be born would be given the throne of his ancestor, King David, and

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that his kingdom would never end: "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'" **Luke 1:30-32.** King David reigned over Israel and Judah for 40 years. This was a real kingdom with a king, a land, a capital city, a law and a people. This is the kingdom that Jesus was promised to inherit.

2. At the time of Jesus' trial, he told Pontius Pilate that although he is a king, his kingdom was not of this world but from another place: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." **John 18:36**
3. The disciples of Jesus understood that the kingdom that Jesus had preached to them was the restored kingdom of Israel: "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.....So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' **Acts 1:2-7**

4. The kingdom of God over which

Jesus will be king will take over the kingdoms of this world: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." **Revelations 11:15**

5. Jesus must return to the earth to inherit the promised throne. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." **Matthew 25:31-32**
6. Not everyone will be welcomed into this kingdom." Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (**1 Corinthians 6:9**) and "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." **Matthew 7:21**

This is just some of the information that is given to us in the New Testament but there are over 150 references to the "kingdom" in the New Testament. The Old Testament is in agreement with the New. Here are just a few verses:

Daniel 2:44-45 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

Zechariah 14:9 The LORD will

be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

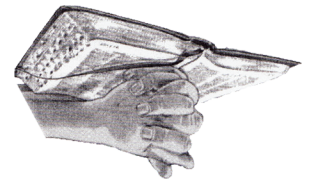
Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The Bible is full of promises and amazing descriptions of this coming kingdom. It describes the king as just and righteous, the promised land as beautiful and abundant, the entire earth as made new, and the people as blessed and living in peace. The earth will be full of the glory of God as the Old Testament prophets promised. One prophecy of the kingdom is found in **Isaiah chapter 60**:

"...I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land.."

Perhaps this is one of the passages that Jesus had in mind when he taught his disciples to pray: "**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**"

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Daily Bible Readings for January, February and March

Read the Entire Bible in One Year

Day	JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Gen 1,2	Matt 1	Exo 11,12	Matt 28	Lev 23, 24	Acts 24
2	Gen 3,4	Matt 2	Exo 13,14	Psalm 9, 10	Lev 25, 26	Acts 25
3	Gen 5,6	Matt 3	Exo 15,16	Psalm 11,12	Lev 27, Provb 7	Acts 26
4	Gen 7,8	Matt 4	Exo 17,18	Acts 1	Provb 8-10	Acts 27
5	Gen 9,10	Matt 5	Exo 19,20	Acts 2	Num 1,2	Acts 28
6	Gen 11,12	Matt 6	Exo 21,22	Acts 3	Num 3,4	Psalm 19,20
7	Gen 13,14	Matt 7	Exo 23,24	Acts 4	Num 5,6	Romans 1
8	Gen 15, 16	Psalm 1,2	Exo 25,26	Acts 5	Num 7,8	Romans 2
9	Gen 17,18	Matt 8	Exo 27,28	Acts 6	Num 9,10	Romans 3
10	Gen 19,20	Matt 9	Exo 29,30	Acts 7	Num 11,12	Romans 4
11	Gen 21, 22	Matt 10	Exo 31,32	Psalm 13, 14	Num 13,14	Romans 5
12	Gen 23,24	Matt 11	Exo 33,34	Acts 8	Num 15,16	Romans 6
13	Gen 25,26	Matt 12	Exo 35,36	Acts 9	Num 17,18	Romans 7
14	Gen 27,28	Matt 13	Exo 37,38	Acts 10	Num 19,20	Romans 8
15	Gen 29,30	Psalm 3,4	Exo 39,40	Acts 11,12	Num 21,22	Romans 9
16	Gen 31,32	Matt 14	Provb 3,4	Acts 13	Num 23,24	Romans 10
17	Gen 33,34	Matt 15	Provb 5,6	Psalm 15,16	Num 25,26	Romans 11
18	Gen 35,36	Matt 16	Lev 1,2	Acts 14	Num 27,28	Romans 12
19	Gen 37,38	Matt 17	Lev 3,4	Acts 15	Num 29,30	Romans 13
20	Gen 39,40	Matt 18	Lev 5,6	Acts 16	Num 31,32	Romans 14
21	Gen 41, 42	Matt 19	Lev 7,8	Acts 17	Num 33,34	Romans 15,16
22	Gen 43, 44	Psalm 5,6	Lev 9,10	Acts 18	Num 35,36	Psalm 21,22
23	Gen 45, 46	Matt 20	Lev 11,12	Psalm 17,18	Provb 11,12	Psalm 23-25
24	Gen 47, 48	Matt 21	Lev 13,14	Acts 19	Provb 13,14	Psalm 26-28
25	Gen 49, 50	Matt 22	Lev 15,16	Acts 20	Provb 15,16	Psalm 29,30
26	Provb 1,2	Matt 23	Lev 17,18	Acts 21	Deut 1,2	Mark 1
27	Exo 1,2	Matt 24	Lev 19,20	Acts 22	Deut 3,4	Mark 2
28	Exo 3,4	Matt 25	Lev 21,22	Acts 23	Deut 5,6	Mark 3
29	Exo 5,6	Psalm 7, 8			Deut 7,8	Mark 4
30	Exo 7, 8	Matt 26			Deut 9,10	Psalm 31,32
31	Exo 9,10	Matt 27			Deut 11,12	Mark 5

See page 5 for some thoughts on the daily readings.

www.dailybiblereader.com *Make it a habit!*

Is it the duty of Christians to “win back America for God”? Many Christians believe this to be what God wants them to do, and have spent a great deal of time, money and energy working towards this goal in the political and cultural arenas. Greg Boyd, in his book “Myth of a Christian Nation”, argues that this activity is at best a diversion from the true goal of all Christians, and at worst a form of idolatry.

Has America ever been what might be called a “Christian nation”? Boyd demonstrates that we have not. Throughout the history of European settlement many Americans have considered themselves Christians. And some aspects of Christianity have been an influence at some times on the beliefs and actions of its people and government. But there has never been a time when America has consistently behaved as Christ wants His followers to behave. We have broken almost every covenant we made with the Native Americans. We have enslaved and abused our Black brothers and sisters, we have slaughtered each other in a “civil” war, we have glorified war instead of seeking peace, and we have allowed the rich to oppress the poor.

Arguably America has done better than many nations. But we have still failed to be a “Christian” nation, if we judge ourselves by the teachings of Jesus. No nation upon the earth, including America, has ever been that “Kingdom of God” that Jesus

spoke of so often in the Gospels. All of the nations on earth throughout history have been part of the “kingdoms of this world.” It is these worldly kingdoms which were offered to Jesus by the tempter during his temptation (Matt. 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8). Jesus could have ruled the kingdoms of this world, even without anyone’s help. He told one of his companions that 12 legions of angels would be given to Him if He asked them of God (Matt 26:52-53) But Jesus never chose to create change through the political systems of the kingdoms of the world, or to change these systems directly.

Instead Jesus chose to live and teach a different way. The kingdoms of the world are based on “power over”, on obtaining and maintaining political and military power. The “Kingdom of God” is instead based on “power under”, on loving and serving others, even our enemies. And as Jesus demonstrated Himself, it can mean doing serving and loving even unto death.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7, Luke 6:20-49) is the most succinct statement of Jesus’s teaching about how His followers are to be. He says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on

the just and on the unjust.” Matt 5:43-46 (ESV)

The system of ethics that Jesus is describing is diametrically opposed to the way of the kingdoms of the world. Can we love people and also invade their country and kill them? Do we pray for those who persecute America? How many of us have prayed for Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda?

Does this mean Christians shouldn’t be involved in politics and government at all? Not necessarily, says Boyd. Your work for the Kingdom of God may lead you to participate in these.

But you must be careful to keep clear in all you do the distinction between the Kingdom of God, and the kingdoms of the world. Only Jesus, when He returns as King, can turn any of the kingdoms of the world into part of the Kingdom of God. That is not our responsibility. Instead we are to be citizens of the Kingdom of God, and follow what Christ said and did when He lived on Earth the first time.

The author recognizes that serving the Kingdom of God raises tough questions, which he addresses in the final chapter. In this reviewer’s opinion, his thoughtful responses are perhaps the best I’ve read, and notable for the way in which he brings his thoughts continually back to an understanding that followers of Christ are called upon to live and think differently than the way that

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Book Review: Myth of a Christian Nation

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we normally do so. We are to be a “new creation” in all aspects of our lives.

Greg Boyd has provided us with

a powerful reminder of what we as Christians are meant to be working towards. Not a “Christian America”, wrestled back to “Christianity” through politics and/or coercion, but rather the Kingdom of God, which will replace all the kingdoms of the world. He reminds

us that the Kingdom of God works very differently than the kingdoms of the world. Jesus taught us to serve and love others, even our enemies. The kingdoms of the world have their purpose, but all of them are temporary and far from perfect.

Thoughts on the Daily Readings

“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”

Isaiah 66:2

With the beginning of the New Year, the daily Bible readings start at the beginning of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Readings for the first quarter of the year include four of the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The New Testament readings include Matthew, the first of the four gospel books, the Acts of the Apostles and the letter to the church in Rome.

Genesis starts at the very beginning. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Before the heavens and earth there was God. Before the animals and the humans there was God. Genesis is the book of firsts: the first day, the first man and woman, the first sin, and the first promise. Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all part of the history of Genesis.

Exodus, the second book of Moses, tells the history of Moses and the saving of the people of

Israel from slavery in Egypt. The burning bush, the ten plagues, the first Passover, and the Ten Commandments are all found in this book.

Leviticus and **Numbers** continue the story of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as they travel through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. Matthew, the despised tax collector who became one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ, records the life of Jesus while on the earth. He was an eyewitness to Jesus’ three-year ministry, his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead and finally his ascension into heaven.

The Acts of the Apostles traces the footsteps of Jesus’ disciples who were sent by Jesus to preach the Gospel to the entire world. The word “apostle” means “one sent” and so the followers and disciples of Jesus became Apos-

ties when Jesus gave them this mission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:18-20

The Letter to the Romans was written by Paul the Apostle to the new believers in Rome. In it he writes concerning faith, salvation, grace, peace, and the love of God. One of the more well known verses is Romans 8:37-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Take a Bible Quiz

1. What does the word "Bible" mean?
2. How many books are in the Bible?
3. What is the longest chapter in the Bible?
4. What is the shortest verse in the Bible?
5. What book of the Bible never mentions God?
6. The Old Testament is a history of what nation?
7. Who was the Promised Land first promised to?
8. How many years did Israel wonder in the wilderness?
9. How many days was Jesus in the wilderness when he was tempted?
10. On what day were the sun, moon, and stars created?

11. On what day was man created?
12. How many Gods are there?
13. Who promised to come back to earth?
14. What are the wages of sin?
15. What is the first and most important commandment?
16. What is the second commandment?
17. How many sons did Jacob have?
18. What is Jacob's other name?
19. What does the name Jesus Christ mean?
20. God is _____.

Answers:

1. The word Bible comes from a Greek word that means "book".
2. There are 66 books in the bible.
3. The longest chapter is Psalm 119 with 176 verses
4. The shortest verse is John 11:35 – "Jesus wept."
5. The book of Esther does not mention the word "God" or "Lord"
6. Starting with Genesis chapter 11, the Bible traces the history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the nation of Israel.
7. Abraham received the promise that all the land that he could see would be given to him and his descendants. Genesis 13:14-17
8. The people of Israel wondered in the wilderness for 40 years.
9. Jesus was in the wilderness fasting for 40 days and 40 nights before his temptation.
10. The sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day according to Genesis chapter 1.
11. On the sixth day God created man and woman in his own image. Genesis 1:27-31
12. There is only one God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" Deuteronomy 6:4
13. Jesus promised to return to the earth in the last chapter of the Bible: Revelations 22.
14. "The wages of sin is death" is found in Romans 6:23
15. "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.'" Matt 22:37-38
16. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matt 22:38-39
17. Jacob had 12 sons.
18. Jacob was given the name "Israel" by an angel. His 12 sons were the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.
19. The name "Jesus" comes from the same Hebrew word as "Joshua" and means "God Saves". Christ means "anointed one" and refers to the Hebrew "messiah".
20. "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 1 John 4:16-17

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