

# God's Unfolding Kingdom...

(An Old Testament Survey Using God's Unfolding Kingdom)

## Introduction

The Bible, even though made up of 66 different “books” and divided into two testaments, commonly called the Old and the New, is really one united story. It is the story of God’s love for His people. This year you will be studying the Old Testament. In this course it is presented as a story of a Kingdom, God’s Kingdom. We will see that God the King has desired to establish a kingdom of holy people making the earth a holy place.

From the Book of Genesis to the Book of Malachi, you will learn to tie the different themes and stories of the Old Testament back to this idea of holy people and holy place. You will learn to identify how the pieces play into the larger plot, and you will see this plot growing to a crescendo that culminates powerfully in the person of Jesus Christ.

As you begin your study of God’s kingdom, you may feel like you are entering a different world: an ancient world of emperors and conquest, bloody rituals and treaties, pharaohs and slaves. And that is precisely what the Old Testament is: a different world. You will see that it takes greater study to understand this world accurately than you may have previously anticipated. But if you take the time to delve into the ancient historic and literary background, the authors’ original meaning will shine through more clearly, making your own application of these truths that much more powerful. The fact that the Old Testament is distant from our modern world and modern values means that it is able to give us an alternate vision of reality. You will come to see that our world is controlled not by the global economy, not by celebrities or politicians or the Internet, but by one supreme ruler: the royal son of David.

Our goal is to move you beyond merely knowing about God’s kingdom to participating in God’s kingdom. Since true faith involves the whole person—the head, heart, and hands—each lesson is designed to involve components of knowledge, conviction, and living. When you truly grasp the beauty of God’s kingdom, your heart will be stirred, and you will desire to use your life in service to it.

The story of God’s kingdom being established here on Earth stirs our hearts because it is an epic tale of good versus evil. It contains all the elements of suspense, heartbreak, violence, betrayal, and love that make for the best film or novel. You will be challenged and compelled by the radical nature of the kingdom. You will encounter a God who is not just a friend who helps you in your troubles, but a king who created you and makes demands of you. He is not content to let you lead a comfortable life, focused on fulfilling your dreams. Rather, he conscripts you into the service of his kingdom, fulfilling God’s plan for the world. He will not settle for half your heart. He is intent on turning your life upside-down and reorienting it around his kingdom. The radical nature of what you will encounter disrupts your neat categories and compels a fresh hearing.

However, the story of God’s kingdom will not only stir your heart but also will move your hands to action. You will see that God gave you an important mission to spread his kingdom here on Earth. You have the high status of being commissioned by the King to carry out his purposes. How you use your time and your talents is of great importance because you can either have influence for eternity as you build up an everlasting kingdom—or you can live only for yourself. Your actions are significant. The message of God’s kingdom changes how you live.

### How to Work Through This Course

This course is divided into SEVEN units:

- Unit 1 The Pentateuch: God Chooses Israel to Be His Redeemed People
- Unit 2 The Pentateuch: God Redeems Israel and Expects Covenant Loyalty
- Unit 3 The Histories: Israel Is Established as a Kingdom
- Unit 4 The Writings: The Poetry and Wisdom of Ancient Israel
- Unit 5 The Histories: The Fall of Israel
- Unit 6 The Histories: Israel in Exile
- Unit 7 The Prophets: Israel's Failure Yet Future Hope

Completion of these units will be done in just under 70 lessons. However, you may find that some lessons will take more than one day, so do not feel rushed to get through the material. Daily lessons will consist of an opening teaching time, some readings from your text and the Bible, an occasional activity, some note-taking, and some reflection questions to help you apply what you are learning. Maps are also located at the back of the text. Feel free to reference this section frequently to help you better understand the location of the many places mentioned in the Old Testament.

The lessons are best illustrated through the following chart:

Theme		God's Kingdom																																																																																																												
Stages		Creation of God's Kingdom		Fall of God's Kingdom														Redemption of God's Kingdom																																																																																												
Units		God Chooses Israel to Be His Redeemed People (Unit 1)				God Redeems Israel and Expects Their Covenant Loyalty (Unit 2)				Israel is Established as a Kingdom (Unit 3)				Israel Falls, Breaking Covenant with God (Unit 4)				Israel Is in Exile (Unit 5-7)																																																																																												
Books of the Bible		Lessons																																																																																																												
Genesis	God Creates the World	4	Exodus	God Redeems Israel in the Exodus	3	Leviticus	Rules for Holy Living	8	Numbers	Judgment and Mercy	9	Deuteronomy	Love the Lord!	10	Joshua	Conquering the Promised Land	1	Judges	Portrait of a Judge	4	Ruth	God's Plan for His Kingdom	5	1 and 2 Samuel	Chosen to Anoint the King	6	1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles	Failed Start to Kingship	7	Daniel	A New King for Israel	8	Esther	The Golden Years	9	Ezra- Nehemiah	The Consequences of Sin	10	Major and Minor Prophets	The Glory Years	11		Dividing the Kingdom	1		Early Kings of the Northern Kingdom	2		Israel's Baal Worship	3		Israel Sent into Exile	4		Judah: The First 150 Years	5		A Case Study of a Godly King: Hezekiah	6		Judah's Decline	7		The Fall of Judah	8		Daniel: Life in Exile	1		A Babylonian Repent	2		The Fall of Babylon	3		Esther: An Introduction	4		Esther: A Dramatic Conclusion	5		The Exiles Return	6		Relearning God's Law	7		Rebuilding the Walls	8		Nehemiah's Reforms	9		An Introduction to the Prophets	1		The Lives of the Prophets	2		Reasons for Exile: Injustice	3		Reasons for Exile: Israel's Leaders	4		The Hope of Israel: End to Exile	5		The Hope of Israel: Jesus	6

At the end of each unit you will write a test. The test will be automated (with the exception of Test 7): that is, as soon as you complete it, it will be immediately graded and your results returned. Also at the end of each unit you will complete another assignment. This might be a series of short answer questions, a brief essay, or a response to a personal application question. You can either write this portion of your evaluation on the same day as your test OR on the next day. As we said, you will have plenty of time to complete the course, so work at a pace that best assures your success. As you study each unit, you will be assigned Bible reading to be completed. At the end of each unit, we ask you to complete the confirmation form that states that you have indeed read these passages. Make sure you do this because it counts as part of

your final grade for the course. Your final grade will be determined based on the following percentages: Unit Tests (40%), Unit Assignments (40%), and Bible Readings (20%).

Please follow the outline as presented and give it your very best effort. God requires it of you. All the best!

## Unit One

### **The Pentateuch: God Chooses Israel to Be His Redeemed People**

#### **Unit Highlights**

1. The Old Testament lays out the plot of the story that Jesus came to resolve. We cannot gain a proper understanding of Jesus apart from the Old Testament.
2. Our goal in reading Scripture is to find the authors' original meaning and to apply it to our lives.
3. To find the original meaning, we must read Scripture in context, asking who the author and audience were, what the historical context was, and what type of literature it is.
4. The theme of the Old Testament is God's plan of redemption through the nation of Israel.
5. Genesis 1–11 sets up the need for the nation Israel, while Genesis 12 through the Book of Malachi present the story of the nation Israel.
6. In telling the story of Creation, Moses emphasized the sovereign kingship of the universe's Creator and contrasted this with the weak pagan gods of surrounding cultures.
7. God created humans in his image to spread his kingdom around the world by multiplying (creating holy people) and ruling over the Earth (creating holy place).
8. The themes of holy people and holy place will resound throughout the Old Testament.
9. Adam and Eve had the choice of remaining under God's kingship or becoming their own lords. Their sin brought devastating consequences on all creation.
10. Sin worsened after the Fall, as seen in the line of Cain, the flood, and the tower of Babel (Genesis 4–11).
11. God began his plan of redemption in Genesis 12 by calling Abram, promising to make him a great nation—Israel—that would bless all the nations of the Earth.
12. God's promise of multiplying Abram's descendants (holy people) and giving them Canaan (holy place) shows that God had not abandoned his original purpose for humanity. Israel was now to fulfill it.

13. Israel was to be God's redeemed people, once again spreading God's kingdom and spreading the news of redemption to other nations.

14. The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons show examples of both faith and sin. But God remained faithful to his covenant, even when his people were disobedient.

NOTE: These highlights correspond to the key point for each lesson in this unit. It would be wise to make sure you understand them before you write your unit test.

We will read the Book of Genesis looking for the author's original message to his ancient audience. This entails looking frequently at the ancient context: an age of empires, of conquering kings, of godlike pharaohs, and of kingdoms administered through covenants. It was in this context that God revealed himself to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As the opening book of Scripture, the Book of Genesis answers the basic human questions: Where did we come from? What went wrong with the world? What is the remedy? We can summarize the answer of Scripture in three words: Creation, Fall, redemption.

1. Where we came from: The world was *created* by God to be his kingdom.
2. What went wrong: Evil entered the world through the *Fall*, when humans sinned against God.
3. What the remedy is: God set out on a long path to *redeem* humanity and the world.

**Creation.** Genesis opens by revealing God as a great and loving King who created the world to be his beautiful kingdom. He created humans as the highest and most valuable creatures in his creation. He wanted them to be images of God, acting as loving rulers over the world. God gave humans a glorious mission to fulfill: to spread his kingdom all around the world. And at first, humans had a wonderful relationship with God, with each other, and with creation (Genesis 1–2).

**Fall.** God allowed humans to be tempted by evil to see if they would freely choose to continue loving him. Humans began to think that life would be better if they could be their own kings and not have to obey God. Satan tempted them to become their own masters, and they turned against God. This brought evil into the world so that it was no longer a beautiful kingdom. Jealously, hatred, and violence polluted God's good creation (Genesis 3).

**Redemption.** God had created humans to be in a loving relationship with him and to join him in turning this world into a beautiful kingdom. But because humans aligned themselves with evil, they were now fighting against God and ruining his kingdom (Genesis 4). Even after God judged humanity through the flood and started the world afresh (Genesis 6–9), humans turned right back to evil (Genesis 11). So how could God redeem them and turn them back toward himself? God chose to start the process by working with just one people group—Israel, the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 12–50).

Israel would be a representation of all humanity. Knowing the depth of human sin, God would pour his efforts into teaching this small group, helping them see the wickedness of their rebellion, offering them sacrifices of atonement, and patiently loving them back into relationship with him. Then, Israel would serve as God's ambassadors to bring the news of redemption to the rest of the world. The Book of Genesis gives us just the beginning of the story of Israel in the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Book of Exodus tells how Israel was redeemed and formed as a nation.

## Lesson 1

### *Approaching the Old Testament*

#### Background to the Lesson

The goal of this lesson is to establish the importance and relevance of the Old Testament to us today. The Old Testament has the power to energize and strengthen our faith. While the Old Testament is certainly ancient, it is not outdated. It is the story of God's eternal plan of redemption for humanity, so it is eternally relevant!

This lesson will cover several mistaken notions that many people have of the Old Testament—e.g., that it is legalistic, harsh, and at odds with the New Testament. The Scriptures show that Jesus was in harmony with the Old Testament. He honoured it as God's perfect Word and wanted to restore its true and proper meaning, which some teachers had distorted. Jesus showed that the Old Testament was not about legalism and harshness; it is about a holy God who demands obedience and who promises his love to all who will trust and obey. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal a gracious God who offers forgiveness and redemption. The Old Testament, just as much as the New Testament, required inward, heartfelt obedience from God's people, not mere externals.

Keep an eye out this year for simplistic contrasts between the Old and New Testaments that would undermine the unity of God's plan of redemption. Sinners have never been able to earn God's forgiveness by obeying his laws; neither have we ever been able to obey God without the help of the Holy Spirit. Repentance and faith in God's promised sacrifice has always been the path of redemption.

The Bible is one unified story that never contradicts itself, but it is also a story that matures as it unfolds. For example, some people have misunderstood the Sermon on the Mount to think that Jesus disagreed with the Old Testament. (See Matthew 5:38–39.) Notice, however, that Jesus never disagreed with what was "written" but only with what was "said" about it—i.e., the misinterpretations.

God's plan of redemption looked different in different stages, as does a child growing into an adult. It may seem that the people of the Old Testament had more laws, ceremonies, and sacrifices than we have today, but that is because they were in an earlier stage of God's plan of redemption. Just as children have more rules and boundaries that fall away as the children grow and mature, so the people of the Old Testament needed more pictures and symbols of redemption because they did not yet have the fulfillment: Jesus.

#### Bible Study and Application

So let's take a look at what Jesus had to say about the Old Testament. In Jesus' day, the term *law* or *Law and Prophets* was a way of referring to the Old Testament. Similarly, *Scripture* also referred to the Old Testament, since it was the only part of the Bible that existed at that time.



**To make Jesus' message about the Old Testament clearer, cross out the bolded terms and substitute the term *Old Testament* every time it is referenced as you read.**

1. Matthew 5:17–19: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the **Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the **Law** until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

2. Luke 24:44–45: He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.**” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the **Scriptures.**

3. John 5:39–40: “You study the **Scriptures** diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very **Scriptures** that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

4. Matthew 22:37–40: 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. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the **Law and the Prophets** hang on these two commandments.”

5. 2 Timothy 3:15–17 (from Paul to Timothy): “From infancy you have known the **Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All **Scripture** is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

**Now consider the following statements. Decide which are true and which are false and use one or more of the above verses to support your answer. The answers are found at the end of this lesson. DON'T PEEK! Answer the questions first and then see how you did.**

1. The Old Testament points people toward eternal life and salvation.
2. The New Testament is sufficient for equipping us in our faith.
3. The Old Testament is all about a loving and holy God who calls his people to love him by living holy lives.
4. Everything the Old Testament taught was good.
5. Only the New Testament is about Jesus.

6. We can break the Old Testament's commandments, since we're in the New Testament now.

So you can see that there is great harmony between the Old and New Testaments; they both reveal the same God and the same plan of salvation. God did not change who he is or what he values and requires. Sometimes the Old Testament does seem very far removed from today. That society had laws and ceremonies that we no longer practice. How can we understand this? One way is to understand that the stages of life can look very different (seed versus oak tree, baby versus adult). But it's still the same tree, the same person, and the same DNA. That's true of the Bible, too. God is the same, people are the same, and God's plan of redemption is the same. But the Old Testament was an earlier stage, so it looks different.

To understand this better consider some rules you had to follow when you were young that you don't have to follow any more. For example, do you remember having to hold your parents' hands when you crossed the street? Was that a good rule when you were little? Yes, of course it was. Was it based on a good principle? Yes. Should you totally ignore that rule today? No, you should remember and follow the principle you learned from it even though you may not still hold your mother's hand when you cross the street anymore. The principle is still good. Be careful crossing the street!

### Independent Study and Reflection

Now read pages 10 and 11 in your text and answer the three questions at the end in your notebook. Answers will vary so we have not included any suggested responses but make sure you do indeed take time to answer them as they could come up in a future assignment.

Answers for True and False Activity

1. *The Old Testament points people toward eternal life and salvation. **TRUE, 2 Timothy 3, John 5***
2. *The New Testament is sufficient for equipping us in our faith. **FALSE, 2 Timothy 3***
3. *The Old Testament is all about a loving and holy God who calls his people to love him by living holy lives. **TRUE, Matthew 22***
4. *Everything the Old Testament taught was good. **TRUE, 2 Timothy 3; it was all God-breathed.***
5. *Only the New Testament is about Jesus. **FALSE; notice Luke 24, John 5—the Old Testament is also about Jesus.***
6. *6. We can break the Old Testament's commandments, since we're in the New Testament now. **FALSE, Matthew 5. The Old Testament commands still apply to us today, unless the New Testament says Jesus completed a command and we no longer need to.***

## Lesson 2

### *The One Big Story*

#### Background to the Lesson

This lesson centers on finding the one meta-narrative that ties together all the narratives of Scripture—the one big story tying together the small stories. Various words could describe the Bible’s major themes: *redemption, God’s love, covenant, God and his people*. You may wonder, then: Why the theme of God’s kingdom? Wouldn’t the best theme simply be Jesus?

First, the choice of God’s kingdom is not arbitrary; it is the theme settled on by biblical scholars who make it their specific study to tie the parts of the Bible to the whole.

Second, the theme of God’s kingdom is all about Jesus. In Luke 4:43 Jesus said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” God sent Jesus to proclaim this kingdom and enlist his followers into it. Or as Mark’s Gospel describes it, “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near’” (Mark 1:15). The gospel message we believe is good news about God’s kingdom, brought in Jesus.

Jesus could proclaim that the kingdom was now at hand—and make this kingdom the central point of his preaching—because he knew that his audience understood about this kingdom. They were a biblically literate group who knew the Old Testament. So Jesus could now proclaim his connection to and fulfillment of the Old Testament concept of God’s kingdom.

In Reflecting on the Kingdom of God, Stephen Wellum says, “Even though the term ‘kingdom of God’ is not found in the OT, the idea is everywhere.” An idea that is so central to Jesus and the entire NT must be and is “firmly rooted in OT teaching and expectation.” In the same book, Graeme Goldsworthy agrees that the theme of Jesus’ preaching was also the theme of the Old Testament—“I cannot agree with those scholars who are nervous about proposing the kingdom as central to the biblical message on the grounds that the term ‘kingdom of God’ does not occur until the New Testament. The particular phrase might not be a feature of the Old Testament but the concept is central to it.”

Yes, Jesus is the focal point of all Scripture. But who Jesus was and what he came to do demand explanation—explanation that is provided through the Bible’s big story of the kingdom. So we will see that as we study individual Old Testament lessons this year, they are tied first to a kingdom theme and then to Jesus. This will explain with much greater depth who Jesus is and what he came to do, making Jesus the true culmination of a grand story stretching from creation.

## Bible Study and Application

When you think of the Old Testament, no doubt, you could list many stories that are contained there. But what do these stories have to do with each other? What binds them together? For example, what does the story of David and Goliath have to do with Ruth and Boaz? It can be hard to make all these pieces of the puzzle fit together. We are going to look at how the ideas of holy people and holy places come to equal God's kingdom. To better illustrate this follow the link to a video from Christian Schools International that will help show you what we mean.

<https://vimeo.com/296941215>

Now that you have watched the video, we hope you have a better idea of how the theme of God's Kingdom runs through the entire Bible and is rooted our study this year of the Old Testament. Of course, to study God's Kingdom we first of all have to consider who God is.

### Who Is God?

Who is God, and why should we praise him? Read these psalms to see how God is primarily characterized in Scripture. Is he most often called our friend, our parent, or our king? Note the bolded terms.

**Psalm 47** <sup>1</sup> Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. <sup>2</sup> For the Lord Most High is awesome, **the great King over all the earth.** <sup>3</sup> He **subdued nations** under us, peoples under our feet. <sup>4</sup> He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. <sup>5</sup> God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of **trumpets.** <sup>6</sup> Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to **our King,** sing praises. <sup>7</sup> **For God is the King of all the earth;** sing to him a psalm of praise. <sup>8</sup> **God reigns** over the nations; God is seated on his **holy throne.** <sup>9</sup> The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for **the kings of the earth belong to God;** he is greatly exalted.

**Psalm 93:1-2** <sup>1</sup> The Lord **reigns,** he is **robed in majesty;** the Lord is **robed** in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure. <sup>2</sup> Your **throne** was established long ago; you are from all eternity.

**Psalm 103:19-22** <sup>19</sup> The Lord has established his **throne** in heaven, and **his kingdom rules over all.** <sup>20</sup> Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones **who do his bidding, who obey his word.** <sup>21</sup> Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. <sup>22</sup> Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in **his dominion.** Praise the Lord, my soul.

**Psalm 99:1-5** <sup>1</sup> **The Lord reigns,** let the nations tremble; **he sits enthroned between the cherubim,** let the earth shake. <sup>2</sup> Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. <sup>3</sup> Let them praise your great and awesome name — he is holy. <sup>4</sup> **The King is mighty, he loves justice**

— you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right. <sup>5</sup> Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

**Psalms 22:27-28** <sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will **bow down before him**, <sup>28</sup> **for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.**

**Psalms 9 (selections)** <sup>1</sup> I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. <sup>4</sup> For you have upheld my right and my cause, **sitting enthroned as the righteous judge**. <sup>5</sup> You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. <sup>7</sup> **The Lord reigns forever**; he has established his **throne for judgment**. <sup>8</sup> He **rules** the world in righteousness and **judges** the peoples with equity. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. <sup>11</sup> Sing the praises of the Lord, **enthroned** in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. <sup>12</sup> For he who avenges blood remembers; <sup>16</sup> The Lord is known by his acts of justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. <sup>19</sup> Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. <sup>20</sup> Strike them with terror, Lord; let the nations know they are only mortal.

Of course the Bible uses many different images for God (shepherd, helper, friend, father). But the primary way God is described in all of these psalms is as a king. Calling him *Lord* means he is *Master*. References to his *power, majesty, control, rule, reign, throne, etc.*, all point toward **kingship**. This is not to belittle the softer images of God, such as a friend or helper. But it is important to remember that he is a kingly friend and a kingly helper, worthy of adoration.

Even though this is a course on the Old Testament it is appropriate to take a few moments to consider the New Testament? The Bible never uses the term King Jesus. Is it appropriate to call Jesus a king? Consider this... Since Jesus is God, whatever is true of God is also true of him. Jesus is often called “Lord,” which means “master” and “king.” In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” In John 18:36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Revelation 11:15 says, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

When early Christians said “Jesus is Lord,” this really was a claim to kingship. At the time of the Roman Empire, citizens were supposed to say that “Caesar is Lord.” But Christians believed that Jesus was a higher king than Caesar. So you see this idea of kingship and kingdom really does extend through the whole of the Old and New Testament.

Let’s take a few minutes now to think about the concept of Kingdom. Answer the following questions in your notebook. Then compare your answers to the suggested responses at the end of this lesson. **DON’T PEEK!**

### Thinking Kingdom

1. What are some alternate ways of describing kings and kingdoms?
2. Why is a king addressed this way? What do these words convey?
3. If God is a king, who are his subjects? What is his domain?
4. What unique privileges and prerogatives belong only to God?
5. As a king, what sorts of demands does God make of people?
6. How do you think people generally respond to the idea that God is king over all?
7. How do we often try to make God more democratic—more of a prime minister or president than a king?
8. Even though God is an absolute ruler—an emperor, really—in what ways is he different from other emperors?
9. How should we respond as a result?

### Independent Study and Reflection

After you have compared your answers in this exercise to the suggested responses at the end of this lesson, read pages 12 and 13 in your text and answer the reflection questions on page 13 in your notebook. Suggested answers are included at the end of this lesson but please try to provide your own thoughts first.

Thinking Kingdom  
(Suggested Answers)

1. *What are some alternate ways of describing kings and kingdoms? Alternate words for king include royalty, the crown head, monarch, emperor. Kings rule over a land, called their realm or domain. Kings rule over people, called their subjects. Kings have unique privileges, such as power, control, and authority. Kings make demands of their people, such as loyalty, obedience, money, service, and fighting for him. A king is addressed as “Your Majesty,” “Your Highness,” “My Lord,” “My Liege.”*
2. *Why is a king addressed this way? What do these words convey? They convey that the king is high and exalted, not common or lowly, and that we owe him our loyalty and obedience.*
3. *If God is a king, who are his subjects? What is his domain? All living creatures, especially humans, are his subjects, and the whole universe is the realm over which he rules.*
4. *What unique privileges and prerogatives belong only to God? Answers may include that he controls the entire universe; by his power he can simply speak and creation does his bidding. He has the authority to set boundaries and declare what is what in a way that no one else can.*
5. *As a king, what sorts of demands does God make of people? Answers may include that he requires our loyalty, obedience, honour, worship, etc. He will one day have every knee bow to him.*
6. *How do you think people generally respond to the idea that God is king over all? Answers may include that many find it offensive to think that God makes demands of us or believes that he de-merits all our worship and praise. That is not very democratic!*
7. *How do we often try to make God more democratic—more of a prime minister or president than a king? Answers may include that we water down his claims and his demands to make them more negotiable. We make it sound as though he really exists for just us: to help us fulfill our dreams and desires.*
8. *Even though God is an absolute ruler—an emperor, really—in what ways is he different from other emperors? Answers may include that he is far more loving and gracious; he did not create the universe only for his own pleasure but also for our enjoyment. He ordered the universe in such a way that we would find great joy when we live to his glory.*
9. *How should we respond as a result? Answers may include that we should have great joy and gratitude that someone so powerful, who controls the destiny of the universe, would nevertheless bestow so much love and honour on us.*



### Suggested Answers for Reflection Questions

- 1. Many Christians have found fictional stories of kingdoms—such as Lord of the Rings or the Chronicles of Narnia—to convey the truths of Christianity very powerfully. Non-Christians are also moved by fairy tales of kings and kingdoms. Identify at least three stories in this category. (Answers may include Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Aladdin, The Princess Bride, King Arthur and Camelot, etc.)*
- 2. If we viewed our sins as actual rebellion against the King of the universe, how would that change our perspective? (Answers will vary.)*
- 3. What are some ways that your behaviour and thoughts should change in light of seeing God as the great and loving King of the universe? (Answers will vary.)*

## Lesson 3

### *Preparing to Read God's Word*

#### Background to the Lesson

The main point of this lesson may sound elementary: “Our goal in reading a text is to find the author’s intended meaning.” This idea is far from the consensus viewpoint in many of today’s universities, which promote the idea of reading texts through whatever lens is important to us as modern people. Whether you encounter it as “Reader-Response Theory” or “deconstruction,” you will confront the idea that meaning is subjective to each person. In fact, their interpretation of Scripture has probably already been influenced by it. Even in church school or Bible studies, the question is often; “What does this passage mean to you?” It is difficult to challenge viewpoints that are out of keeping with the author’s original intention; it can seem arrogant to assert that Scripture actually has an objective meaning. The problem with a subjective orientation is that God gave the author a message to communicate, and this message is no longer authoritative if we interpret it however we choose. While finding the author’s meaning can be difficult, this is all the more reason to accompany our reading of Scripture with prayer—so that the Holy Spirit might enlighten our minds.

Subjective methods of interpreting Scripture have come into the church from more well-intentioned directions. There are stories of famous Christians who have flipped open the Bible, put their finger on a verse, read it apart from context, and enjoyed a positive outcome. The snippet from Scripture led the person to make a wise decision. While God can work even through random methods of decision making—rolling a die, pointing at random, ignoring the context—this is not the wisest method for making decisions, nor is it the way that Scripture was intended to be read.

This lesson will encourage you to read Scripture in its historical and literary context, keeping author, audience, and genre in mind. The Bible did not fall from heaven into our laps, so we must acquaint ourselves with this background information to gain the fullest understanding of its meaning.

#### Bible Study and Application

To illustrate this consider the following fictional review of a movie.

*“I’m not sure what the director of Crying Babies was thinking when he made this film, but it definitely wasn’t of the audience members who spent \$10 to see it. Three hours of sitting through this mindless drivel drove many people to make the excellent choice of leaving. Don’t go see it!”*

Now imagine you are looking at a movie poster for the film. It just has the words *excellent choice* displayed, along with the reviewer’s name. What do you think about that movie poster?

Obviously it is wrong and misleading. Now it is true that the author did use the words ‘Excellent choice’, but there is something wrong with the way these words were used. The reviewer’s words were taken out of context and they lead to a false impression about the film.

The application for this course is that you could create some movie posters of the Bible just like this. Consider this one: ‘There is no God.’—The Bible (Psalm 14:1). Do you think the original author was actually teaching that there is no God? Of course not! However, we can find the true meaning if we look at the context. What does the Psalm actually say? It says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

You see how reading just one verse in the Bible is like pulling a quote out of context. You might completely misunderstand it! Some Christians think that we can flip open the Bible and whatever words our finger hits is God’s direct message to us today. But we could come up with strange beliefs that way, such as “There is no God.” That is why we should always read Scripture in context—to figure out what the author originally meant.

A better way to structure your reading of Scripture might include choosing a book of the Bible, reading through the chapters from beginning to end, and even reading the background information given in a study Bible. If, for example, you were going to read one of the letters or epistles in Scripture, what facts would be important to know as we read? You would want to know who the original author was. You would want to know who the original audience was. You would also want to know the setting (time and place).

So the goal in reading Scripture is first to find the original meaning and then to apply it to our lives. We find the original meaning by figuring out what the author was trying to teach his audience. Here is a brief example.

Suppose you are going to read Daniel 6. You want to focus on the original meaning that the author was trying to convey. You might ask the following questions:

*“Who do you think the author was?” (Daniel.)*

*“Who do you think Daniel’s audience was?” (Daniel was writing for the Jewish people who were in exile.)*

*“Looking at the opening chapter of Daniel, what challenges did the Jewish people face while they were in exile?” (They were living in a pagan land, so they faced the challenge of whether they would remain faithful to God and keep their religious traditions. The Jews faced religious persecution while in exile.)*

*“What message or theme do you think those Jewish hearers of the story of Daniel in the lions’ den gained?” (Answers include that Daniel obeyed God faithfully even at the risk of his own life, and God protected him. Thus they, too, were to obey God even when it was difficult and trust him for their protection. God would take care of his covenant people.)*

You could then use Bible commentaries and other sources to learn more about the story of Daniel and how other scholars look at the passage.

You then want to apply the meaning of this passage to your life. What did God say to you today through the story of Daniel and the lions' den? Are you undergoing persecution like the original audience? Probably not, but God still expects you to put him first in our lives, even if doing so causes you harm or loses your popularity. God also still takes care of those he loves, though he may not always do it in such a dramatic way as this. Finally, like Daniel, our faith should be so evident to others that there is no question of our belief in God.

This is reading and applying a passage of Scripture in context.

### Independent Study and Reflection

Now read pages 14 and 15 in your text and answer the reflection questions on page 15 in your notebook. Suggested answers are included at the end of this lesson but please try to provide your own thoughts first.

**READ GENESIS 1 BEFORE YOU BEGIN LESSON 4.**