

# Hope for God's Kingdom...

(A New Testament Survey)

## 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 New 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 Matthew to the Book of Revelation, you will learn to tie the different themes and stories of the New Testament back to Old Testament story. Specifically you will learn why Jesus Christ had to come and that he is the only hope for God’s Kingdom.

Just like the previous study of the Old Testament, you may feel again like you are entering a different world. You will re-enter the story of Israel, this time in first-century Palestine, where Israel remains in exile under the Roman Empire. The local scene is dominated by competing Jewish sects and Herodian kings, but over it all hangs the shadow of the Roman Empire—the last and greatest of all ancient kingdoms, the pagan empire that could make the whole world do its bidding. Somehow, through temple, law, and a coming messiah, the people of Israel hoped and longed for the overthrow of their pagan captors and the fulfillment of God’s promises to restore their nation. For it was through Israel’s restoration that salvation would come to the rest of the world.

It was amidst these national hopes and dreams that a prophet from Galilee—Jesus of Nazareth—came announcing good news: Israel’s redemption was coming! God would finally fulfill his promises for a kingdom of holy people and holy place. But the good news came with a jarring twist: God would indeed bring down Israel’s greatest enemy—not the Roman Empire, but the sin and rebellion that had caused Israel’s exile—an enemy that was still alive and well inside God’s people. Jesus announced the coming of God’s kingdom in a way that was unexpected and, often, unwelcome. He announced a very different kingdom from what anyone would have anticipated—a kingdom that welcomes enemies instead of crushing them, that exalts the lowly while rejecting the noble—a kingdom where conventional wisdom is turned on its head! It was to be a kingdom of paradox, led by the most unusual king ever seen in history: One who came as the servant of all, who came to conquer by dying.

This year you will see all the Old Testament themes of holy people and holy place coming together in Jesus. You will see Jesus fulfilling Israel’s mission by being the perfect holy person, who was righteous in every way that Israel had failed. You will learn to see Jesus as the perfect holy place, the temple where God and humanity could finally commune, only because of a cleansing sacrifice. You will see Jesus’ great act of redemption as a new exodus, bringing God’s people out of their slavery to sin and the forces of evil.

However, it is hoped that this year you will not just learn *about* God's Kingdom, but will embrace Christ and see that faith involves the whole person – head, heart and hands. Jesus calls us not just to know him, but to follow him, to serve him, to be obedient to him. Pray for as heart that joyfully serves your Saviour as you live in God's Kingdom.

### How to Work Through This Course

This course is divided into SEVEN units:

- Unit 1 Setting the Stage
- Unit 2 The King Arrives
- Unit 3 The King Accomplishes Redemption
- Unit 4 The Gospels: Four Portraits of Jesus
- Unit 5 Acts: The Church Spreads Christ's Kingdom
- Unit 6 The Epistles: The Church as a New People
- Unit 7 Revelation: A Coming King and New Earth

Completion of these units will be done in just 60 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 New Testament.

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

### **Setting the Stage**

#### **Unit Highlights**

1. Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament plot centering on the kingdom of God being established here on Earth.
2. Israel failed to establish God's kingdom and spread it to other nations.
3. Jesus proclaimed that he was ushering in God's kingdom.
4. Jesus came as an Israelite to redeem scattered, exiled Israel.
5. The people of Israel were under the dominion of the Roman Empire, a pagan nation.
6. Persia had controlled Palestine at the close of the Old Testament, but the Greeks and then the Romans gained control during inter-testamental times.
7. Palestine had a period of independence after the Maccabean revolt, a defining moment in Jewish history.
8. Jesus was born during the Pax Romana, a time of peace under Caesar Augustus.
9. Greek was the universal language at that time.
10. Palestine was small, but its location was important. Its economy was largely based on agriculture.
11. The New Testament was written to record the testimony about Jesus and to encourage churches in continuing the mission he had given them.
12. The New Testament books can be divided into histories, letters, and prophecy.
13. The more we know of the historical background to the New Testament, the better equipped we will be to find its meaning.
14. The entire New Testament was authored during the time of the Roman Empire.

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.

This opening unit seeks to tie the New Testament story back to the Old Testament story. Since the Old Testament makes up 75 percent of Scripture, we must review the plot that was already in motion in order to understand why Jesus had to come. We will be reminded that the Old Testament story centers on the kingdom of God being established here on Earth. God had commissioned humanity with filling the Earth with holy people and turning it into a holy place, making it his kingdom. After humanity rebelled against God's kingly rule, he nevertheless created a plan of redemption centering on the nation of Israel. The Old Testament tells the story of Israel: the small, representative group that was to be God's new holy people, living in a new holy place and spreading God's glory to the rest of the world. It is this project that was left hanging in the balance because of Israel's failure to remain faithful to God. We must see that Jesus came as the answer to the question: How will Israel—and through Israel, all humanity— be redeemed? The rest of this course will answer that very question as we unfold how Jesus brought Israel's mission to completion and then passed it on to his followers, the church. Through Jesus, God's kingdom has finally come to Earth.

This unit also gives you the tools for a deeper study of the New Testament by providing you with the literary and historic context of the New Testament. You will begin by examining the New Testament's literary background, learning when the books were written, how to best interpret them, which genres they include, etc. You will then gain historical background leading up to a study of the Gospels. You will learn about the rise of the Greek and Roman empires during the inter-testamental period and see how God used these empires to prepare the world for the coming of his Son. You will then focus more intently on Palestine, learning about its geography, history, culture, and the people who lived there. Special attention will be paid to Jewish religious groups.

## Lesson 1

### *The Plot Hung in Suspense*

#### Background to the Lesson

We often study the Old Testament separately from the New Testament, but this approach involves some pitfalls. We too often easily lose sight of the overarching narrative that connects the two and overlook how the Old Testament plot propels us forward into the New Testament. We would rarely stop a movie at the height of suspense, just before the resolution. But we often do this with our study of Scripture. Or perhaps the problem is that we don't see the Bible as one large story with one unified plot, the way we do with other stories and movies. We know that Jesus came to fulfill certain symbols or promises from the Old Testament, but not how he came to fulfill the entire Old Testament itself. We focus on the few pieces of the Old Testament that we know Jesus fulfilled—the animal sacrifices, the priest-hood, etc.—but we aren't clear how to connect Jesus with the Book of Leviticus or how to connect the Book of Leviticus with all the other Old Testament books. We lack a meta-narrative (overarching story) to tie all the smaller stories together.

This New Testament course builds on our other Bible course, an Old Testament Survey called, *God's Unfolding Kingdom*, and continues the same overarching story begun in that course. This lesson will review the Old Testament story of God's plan to build a kingdom here on this Earth. This plan for a glorious kingdom began at Creation, when God told humanity to multiply and have dominion over the Earth, filling the world with holy people and making it a holy place. The plan appeared to be over when humanity rebelled against God, but God in his grace began a work of redemption. He called one particular family—Abraham's family—to be his redeemed, holy people once again living in a holy place. This nation of Israel was then supposed to spread redemption beyond the land of Canaan, so that all nations would hear and be brought to the Lord (Genesis 12:3).

But unfortunately, Israel proved to reflect the rest of humanity. Even with all the opportunities they had been given to be forgiven of their sins and enjoy a covenantal relationship with God, Israel repeatedly turned away from God, like an adulterous spouse. They didn't just "commit sins"; they abandoned their relationship with God. Israel, the hope of salvation for the rest of the world, ended in failure and exile. Was God's plan of redemption over? The last Old Testament prophets promised that God still had a plan for Israel, but how that plot would be resolved was left hanging in suspense.

## Bible Study and Application

The New Testament seems to be the part of the Bible that Christians feel most comfortable with. Consider for a moment why you think that is. But the New Testament makes up only the last 25 percent of Scripture, while three-fourths of the Bible's story is in the Old Testament. Therefore to not understand the Old Testament is like watching a two hour movie but missing the first hour and a half. It makes it very difficult to understand the last half hour if you've missed most of it. Similarly, you're not going to understand the New Testament well if you don't know the Old Testament. Just as a movie has a plot and then a resolution, so the Old Testament lays out the Bible's plot and the New Testament lays out the resolution: Jesus.

If you completed our Old Testament Survey using *God's Unfolding Plan*, you learned to put all its stories together into one big story. Some of the key terms used to summarize that story were: *God's kingdom*, *holy people*, and *holy place*. In this course you learned that God has always wanted this Earth to be a holy place full of holy people. He wants to rule over holy people as their king. Watch the following **Kingdom Diagram** video clip [Kingdom Diagram](https://vimeo.com/296941215). Or found here...

<https://vimeo.com/296941215>

So you see in order to understand the New Testament, you need to understand the Old. It's one whole story with a beginning, middle, and end. All good stories follow this pattern. To see if you understand this pattern in the Old Testament, complete the following exercises in your notebook. Once you have finished, check your answers with those found at the end of this lesson.

### The Old Testament Story

First, write the following words horizontally in your notebook:

Beginning

Conflict

Middle

End

Using the following write the word that best corresponds with the terms above:

The Fall

Exile

Creation

Israel

Now answer the following questions in your notebook using the best term from the list:

- Turning away from God
- Reigns of David and Solomon
- Abraham
- Israel in Exile

1. What was the start of Israel?
2. What was the highest point in Israel's history?
3. What led to Israel's slide downwards?
4. How did the Old Testament end?

Check your answers before reading further.

Hopefully you found the exercise pretty easy. But it does give you a skeleton overview of the story. To flesh out the story a little more consider the following plot points:

**Start of Israel:** God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him holy people (descendants) and a holy place (Canaan).

**Slope Upward or Rising Action** (As Israel is being established and reaching its height):

- a. The exodus—God rescued Israel from Egypt and led them to Canaan (the Holy Land).
- b. The conquest—God gave Israel the land of Canaan to be his holy place.
- c. Prophets—God revealed himself and his plan of salvation through Moses and other holy prophets.
- d. Priests—God set up a system of sacrifices administered by holy priests so that Israel could be forgiven.
- e. Kings—God set up a royal line through the house of David so that Israel would have a holy king to help them advance God's kingdom.
- f. Height: The reign of David and Solomon was the highest point in Israel's history; its fame was starting to spread to other nations. The temple was established as God's holy place.



**Slope Downward or Falling Action:**

- a. Solomon and Israel's other kings turned away from God.
- b. The nation turned to idol worship; they didn't just "sin"—they abandoned their relationship with God.
- c. The Israelites were no longer holy people, and Canaan was no longer a holy place, so God punished them through exile (invasion and scattering).

**Ending:** Israelites were living in exile, scattered throughout pagan empires. Some (not all) Israelites believed in God's promises and were waiting for God to rescue them as the prophets foretold.

Now you have a pretty good outline of the Old Testament story and are ready to move to the rest of the narrative...the portion of Scripture known as the New Testament.

Independent Study and Reflection

Now read pages 10 and 11 in your text and answer the three questions on Page 11 in your notebook. Once you have completed that assignment, check the suggested answers found at the end of this lesson.

**READ Daniel 2 BEFORE YOU BEGIN LESSON 2.**

### Answers for The Old Testament Story

First, write the following words horizontally in your notebook:

*Beginning*

*Conflict*

*Middle*

*End*

*Creation*

*The Fall*

*Israel*

*Exile*

Now answer the following questions in your notebook using the best term from the list:

1. *What was the start of Israel? Abraham*
2. *What was the highest point in Israel's history? Reigns of David and Solomon*
3. *What led to Israel's slide downwards? Turning away from God*
4. *How did the Old Testament end? Israel in Exile*

### Suggested Answers for Reflection Questions

1. *Why can't we just stick to a study of the New Testament? Why will the lessons keep going back to the Old Testament? (Since the Old Testament makes up 75 percent of Scripture, it lays out the plot. We can't really understand or value the resolution without knowing the plot. Similarly, we cannot understand Jesus until we understand what he came to fulfill.)*
2. *Why did God focus his efforts on just one nation (Israel) for the majority of the Old Testament? (Israel was God's plan for redeeming humanity. They were to be the "rescue group"—God chose them out of the rest of the world so that they would be different and holy, and so others would see this and be drawn in. God wanted them to restart his kingdom of holy people living in a holy place. They were to spread around the Earth and bring the news of redemption to all nations.)*
3. *Why was Israel's exile such a devastating event for believing Israelites? (God seemed to have undone his work for Israel. They lost their status as a nation and lost their land. It wasn't just Israel's fate but the world's fate that was devastating. What would become of God's plan of redemption? How would his promises be fulfilled?)*

## Lesson 2

### *Approaching First-Century Palestine*

#### Background to the Lesson

There had been much conflict in Palestine in the years before Jesus' birth. The Maccabees had rebelled against their Greek Seleucid rulers, reacting violently against the desecration of the temple and other rules that were not in keeping with the Jewish faith.

The Jews longed to be free from foreign, pagan rule. The Jewish people were united in their distrust of Rome, but they were allowed to carry out their religious practices and have some voice in how they were governed.

#### Bible Study and Application

Approximately 400 years passed between the closing of the Old Testament record and the opening verses of the New Testament. This time is known as the intertestamental period.

To get a concise overview of this period read pages 12 and 13 in your text. This reading excludes two other kingdoms that had earlier ruled over Israel - Assyria and Babylon. The Assyrians had been used by God to send the Northern Kingdom into exile. The Assyrians were known as a strong cruel, people that treated their enemies horribly. They were followed by the Babylonians who God allowed to carry the Southern Kingdom of Judah into exile. They were not as brutal as the Assyrians but they still scattered the people they conquered among their various conquered nations. They were succeeded by the Persians, then the Greeks and finally the Romans.

Your reading for today, Daniel 2, provides a vision of five powerful kingdoms. The head of gold refers to the Babylonians. They conquered and scattered the Jews but a small remnant eventually returned to Palestine. The chest and arms of silver were the Persians. God used them to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Next, the belly and thighs were the Greeks. Under the Greeks language and culture become more unified. This later allowed for the rapid spread of the Gospel message under the Romans. The Romans are represented in the visions by legs and feet of iron and clay. It was under the Roman rule that Jesus Christ was born. It was a time of relative peace in the world and the well built Roman roads allowed ease of travel and a connection for all points in the Empire. This, too, facilitated rapid spread of the Gospel message. The final kingdom mentioned in the vision is one that God will set up and will never be destroyed (vs 44). It is represented in this vision by a rock that is cut out of the mountain not by human hands.

### Independent Study and Reflection

You have already read pages 12 and 13 in your text. Now 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.

**READ Matthew 2 BEFORE YOU BEGIN LESSON 3.**

### Suggested Answers for Reflection Questions

1. *List three characteristics of the Greek empire. (Answers include that Alexander conquered other nations quickly, that Greek became the universal language, and that Greek culture spread.)*

2. *What difficulties did the Jews face when the Seleucids instead of the Ptolemaics took control of Palestine? (The Seleucids tried to force the Jews to worship Greek gods. Worship of Zeus in God's temple in Jerusalem led to the Maccabean revolt.)*

3. *How did the Jews feel about the empires that ruled them? (They were angry about being ruled by foreign powers because they wanted to be free to live and practice their religion as they desired.)*

## Lesson 3

### *Politics and Geography in Palestine*

#### Background to the Lesson

The narrow strip of land that is Palestine held great significance during Old and New Testament times. Trade routes through Palestine linked the kingdoms of the north and west with Egypt. Many nations throughout the history of Israel and the Jews fought for control of Palestine; the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans all understood the significance of controlling this small strip of land.

At Jesus' time, Palestine had been under Roman control for more than 50 years. The rule of Herod the Great, son of Antipater, was sanctioned by the Romans. Herod showed an uncanny ability to remain in favour with the Romans when rapid change among leaders was the norm. Herod oversaw massive building projects throughout Palestine; remains of many of these projects still stand. Some of Herod's building projects took place in Jerusalem, where he rebuilt the temple, parts of the city walls, and a palace for himself, along with a citadel that allowed him to monitor Jerusalem.

Herod was not satisfied with a palace only in Jerusalem. He had numerous palaces in other locations, along with a mountain fortress. Herod the Great also built theatres, amphitheatres, and aqueducts. His aqueduct at Caesarea was designed to take water from the Mediterranean Sea into the city. The water ran into the city in a tunnel supported by a series of well-designed arches. In Caesarea, Herod built a fortified harbour equipped with a dock and sea wall. Herod the Great would remain as king in Palestine until shortly after the birth of Christ, when his sons would rule over areas of Palestine.

#### Bible Study and Application

Many wars in history have been fought over disputed land. The idea of geography has perhaps in one way or another contributed to just about every war and conflict that we can name. For example many wars have been fought as a means to expand nations. Other wars have been fought to gain control of prime trade routes. Others have been fought to control fertile soil and water, especially rivers or the sea. Sometimes war has been waged over areas that seem particularly geographically protected. Finally, the presence of resources such as gold or oil can lead to war. Palestine has traditionally been a prime location for conflict due to its position geographically. Historically it was caught between other powerful nations and in Jesus' day it was at the crossroads of prime trade routes. Roads were good...people travelled...the Gospel went forth.

### 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 Mathew 16:1-12 BEFORE YOU BEGIN LESSON 4.**

### Suggested Answers for Reflection Questions

1. *What were the three regions in Palestine? Describe each region. (The first region was Galilee to the north, where the Jews had more interactions with Gentiles. The second region was Samaria in the center; the Jews despised the Samaritans. The final region was Judea to the south, which included Jerusalem.)*
2. *Why did the Jews dislike the Samaritans? (Answers include that they tried to keep the returning exiles from rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.)*
3. *After reading Matthew 2, provide examples of Herod the Great and his sons' influence on the story of Jesus' birth and Mary and Joseph's decisions. (Answers include that Joseph received a dream warning him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. After Herod's death, another angel appeared to Joseph telling him he could return to Palestine. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee to avoid being in the region ruled by Archelaus.)*