

I M M E R S E

The Reading Bible®

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L A R G E P R I N T



*MESSIAH*

*Almighty God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
grant, we pray,  
that we might be grounded and settled  
in your truth  
by the coming of your Holy Spirit  
into our hearts.*

*What we do not know,  
reveal to us;  
what is lacking within us,  
make complete;  
that which we do know,  
confirm in us;  
and keep us blameless in your service,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

I M M E R S E

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L A R G E P R I N T

# MESSIAH



Tyndale House Publishers  
Carol Stream, Illinois

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— Welcome to —

# I M M E R S E

## The Bible Reading Experience

The Bible is a great gift. The Creator of all things entered into our human story and spoke to us. He inspired people over many centuries to shape words into books that reveal his mind, bringing wisdom into our lives and light to our paths. But God’s biggest intention for the Bible is to invite us into its Story. What God wants for us, more than anything else, is that we make the Bible’s great drama of restoration and new life the story of our lives, too.

The appropriate way to receive a gift like this is to come to know the Bible deeply, to lose ourselves in it precisely so that we can find ourselves in it. In other words, we need to immerse ourselves in it—to read God’s words at length and without distraction, to read with deeper historical and literary perspective, and to read through the Bible with friends in a regular three-year rhythm. *Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience* has been specially designed for this purpose.

*Immerse: The Reading Bible* presents each book of the Bible without the distractions of chapter and verse markers, subject headers, or footnotes—all later historical additions to the text. The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, is presented in a single-column format with easy-to-read type. To provide meaningful perspective, book introductions give historical and literary context, and the books are often reordered chronologically or grouped with books that share similar ancient audiences. Every feature in this unique Bible enhances the opportunity for readers to engage with God’s words in simple clarity.

A more complete explanation of this unique Bible presentation can be found in the articles that begin on page 483 at the back of this volume.

# A SACRED SAGA

## The Bible's Drama in Six Acts

The goal of Bible reading is to understand the sacred writings in depth so we can learn to live them well. There are several steps on this journey to life-changing wisdom. One is to recognize that the Bible is a collection of many different kinds of writings—stories, songs, letters, prophecies, works of wisdom, apocalyptic visions, and more. And since these writings are complete literary works, they are best read as whole books, each with its own distinctive message, spiritual truths, and literary character. It is also important to remember that these books were written to people who lived in particular historical situations in the ancient world. So to understand them well, we need to strive to understand each book in its original historical and cultural setting.

Overall, the Bible has two overarching goals: to tell the Story of God's plan for his world and then to invite us into that Story. More than anything else, the Bible is a saga—the long, dramatic history of how God has been working with humanity to achieve the thriving life he's always wanted for his world. So a major factor in reading the Bible well is reading it as God's big Story. All the books in the Bible come together to narrate this Story—past, present, and future. In concert, they take us through numerous ups and downs—big moves forward for God's purposes, then devastating setbacks and losses. But God's saving goal remains the same throughout—the redemption and flourishing of his entire creation.

Reading the Bible as this Story requires that we recognize that it is progressive in its revelation. As the Story advances, its light grows. Greater redemption and deeper fulfillment are revealed act by act. The full revelation of God's purposes for humanity cannot be lifted from any single page in the Bible. The essence of stories is that they *move on*.

To be specific, the Bible's big Story is moving toward Jesus. It is in the appearance and work of the Messiah that we find the clearest and most definitive revelation of who God is and what he's doing in the world. As the powerful opening to the book of Hebrews says: "Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. . . . The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God."

God is summoning us all to embrace his sacred words, learn his Story, and then enter into it. The Bible's saga unfolds as a six-act drama, and its major movements are outlined below.



— *Act One:* —

## WORLD'S GENESIS

The Bible's drama opens with God creating the heavens and the earth, but at first they are unformed and unfilled. The first creation story reveals a God who pushes back the power of anarchy and disorder with his Word. God speaks and brings order by forming the world into a well-arranged structure. Then he fills the spaces he creates with all the beauty and wonder of the universe. At each step, God is said to observe that his world is "good." Then at the end, he observes that it is all "very good."

God creates one set of creatures in his own image—humans. This means that we were made to represent God's good, life-giving rule to the rest of the world. God built collaboration with us into the Story from the very beginning. He is the Creator, the most powerful actor in the Bible's drama, but he has decided to do things together with humans as the Story moves forward. We are made to reign—over the world but under God. The human race will determine the shape and direction of things more than any of God's other creatures. What happens to the creation depends on the role we play in the saga.

Then we learn another crucial element in the drama: "On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work." In the writings of the ancient world, when deities were said to *rest*, it meant that they had taken up residence in their temple (see Psalm 132). This key moment at the world's beginning reveals to us that God considered his world to be his home, the place where he would live.

The entire biblical Story will happen in the place God has chosen for his temple, working with his image bearers to achieve his purposes. Heaven and earth were always meant to be united—one home for God and his people together. The Bible's Story is built on the foundation of God's good creation, which includes full, flourishing life in God's world, with all its members properly related to their Creator and to each other.

— *Act Two:* —

## HUMANITY'S REBELLION

The image of a well-watered, creature-filled paradise is quickly shattered. God is there, walking through the garden in the cool part of the day, looking for the man and woman. But they are hiding from him, fearful of the consequences of their act of distrust and rebellion. They have been misled and deceived by God's enemy—the serpent and Accuser—turning away from God to become a law unto themselves. Rather than following the wisdom of the One who made the world, the people have decided to go their own way.

So Adam and Eve are thrust from God's garden and blocked from

returning. They will now face a land and a life apart from God's blessing. This is the first of many exiles in the Bible's big Story—people forced from their homes and away from God's presence. In a real sense, the Bible's entire Story is about God's work to bring humanity back to his garden, his dwelling place, his temple home.

From this point on, humanity's wrongdoing is presented as a radical departure from God's founding vision. The Story goes quickly downhill with all the well-known failures of human history on full display. Jealousy, hatred, vengeance, loneliness, shame, and acts of violence all come to play their destructive parts in the drama. God's heart is broken. In a major divine reset, he even decides to wipe humanity from the earth in a great flood, saving only Noah's family and a pair of each of the earth's animals.

Humanity has fallen into disrepair; they still rule the world, but very badly. The creation is wounded. Where abundant life in and with God was intended, sin and death now invade and infect everything. God's efforts to overcome this rebellion create the primary conflict in the Bible's ongoing drama. Restoration and reconciliation are what God will be striving for, and always with humanity as his intended partner.

But we're early in the saga, and at this point it's more about questions than answers. Will God in fact be able to quell the revolt? Can humanity be healed and restored, drawn back into faithful relationship with the Creator? How could this possibly happen? What will God's plan be? What about everything else God made? Does the rest of creation have a future beyond this calamity?

——— *Act Three:* ———

## ISRAEL'S QUEST

What happens in the Bible is a series of ongoing steps by the Creator to re-establish what he intended from the outset. God's Story is big, encompassing all things, but it is also always personal.

God calls a man, Abram (later called Abraham) from Ur of the Chaldeans, and brings him to a new land, a new future, a new hope. God starts by making promises: *You are small now Abram, but I will make you great—your name, your family, and your blessing, which will be for everyone.* The seed for humanity's renewal and the creation's restoration is planted with this one man and the family and nation that will come from him—the twelve tribes of Israel.

These promises from God fit a regular pattern in the Story. Big moves forward happen when God makes covenants or agreements at key moments in the Story. These covenants start with God making pledges but also include the expectation of a faithful response by his people. We see this next when Abraham's descendants are in deep distress in Egypt. They are outside of the land God promised them and have become a nation of slaves. So

God comes down to act with power to save his people, working with a new leader, Moses. God then makes a covenant with the entire nation of Israel at Mount Sinai.

This decisive action for Israel also creates another pattern that will show up in the Story—*exodus*. The word means “departure,” but in the Bible it comes to represent all the elements of God’s salvation for Israel:

- freedom from slavery and oppression;
- a covenant relationship between God the Father and his children;
- the revelation of God’s instructions for living;
- God coming down to live among his people in the Tabernacle or Temple;
- the provision of manna (bread) in the wilderness;
- offerings and sacrifices to atone for sins and reconcile God and his people;
- the gift of a promised new land filled with God’s blessings.

Israel is now to be a “display” people—a nation of priests and a light to all nations, showing the world who God is and what it means to follow him. The land of Israel is meant to be a re-creation of God’s garden at the beginning of the Bible. Working with one nation, God sets out to recover his original intentions for all creation.

Most of the First Testament is a commentary on Israel’s faithfulness (or not) to this vocation. Sadly, Israel regularly fails, breaking God’s covenant by ignoring his instructions for justice and right living and by worshiping other gods. The people of Israel, like Adam and Eve at the beginning, often choose to do whatever they think is right in their own eyes.

But God is patient and keeps reaching out to his people. Through his servants the prophets he both invites and warns his people to stay faithful to their covenant relationship with him. He makes another covenant with Israel’s great King David, promising that his offspring will have an enduring kingdom and will rule forever. Israel’s hope is tied to this royal line. The prophets envision a future king who will honor God, teach God’s ways, and defeat Israel’s enemies.

Abraham’s family has been raised up to undo the downfall of Adam and Eve. But Israel persists in idolatry and injustice, refusing to repent and become the nation God called them to be. In anger and dismay, God is compelled to force Israel into exile in Babylon, away from his presence in the Temple. The nation is invaded, Jerusalem is smashed and burned, and the people are once again enslaved. This is devastating for the Bible’s Story. Israel was meant to be God’s answer, the means by which blessing comes back to all peoples. But now God’s plan seems in shambles.

Once again, the Story is filled with questions: Can Israel be saved? Can this entire drama be saved? Has God’s plan for redemption failed? Can he find a way to bring his favor, healing, restoration, and life back to his broken world?

— *Act Four:* —

## KING'S ADVENT

In the years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Empire of Rome was already proclaiming its own version of the good news. The gods, it said, had ordained that the powerful and virtuous leader Caesar Augustus should rule the world. He is “a savior for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere. The birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the gospel [good news] that has come to men through him” (from the Priene Calendar Inscription in Asia Minor, ca. 9 BC). The world is a place of competing stories, and Rome’s story is the dominant one when Jesus enters our saga.

By this time Israel has been suffering under foreign domination for several centuries. The people are wondering when God will finally fulfill all his ancient promises to them. Different groups are offering various visions of Israel’s future. The Pharisees and teachers of the law urge people to get more serious about following Israel’s distinctive way of life under God’s law. Zealots advocate violent rebellion against Rome. The leaders running the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple protect their power by making compromises with their Roman overlords.

Into this tumultuous world comes a new rabbi, a wandering teacher who makes a single astonishing claim: The reign of God is returning to this world. This means Israel’s long exile is ending. God is offering the nation forgiveness and renewal. Jesus demonstrates the truth of his message with mighty signs, showing that God’s Spirit is with him. Jesus heals, forgives, raises the dead, and overpowers the dark forces that have been harming God’s people. In both word and deed Jesus announces the arrival of God’s Kingdom.

The leaders with other agendas reject the invitation and work to undermine Jesus, so his words of welcome turn to words of warning. A great catastrophe will come upon the nation if this last and greatest messenger from God is rejected. The opposition persists, and the conflict with Israel’s leaders comes to a head while Jesus is in the city of Jerusalem.

In his final week, Jesus’ identity is revealed openly, not just as a rabbi or prophet, but as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Jesus claims to be the Son of David. He had been baptized in the Jordan River, symbolizing a new beginning for the nation. He had chosen twelve disciples as a sign that the twelve tribes of Israel were being reborn. Now he claims authority over the Temple and cleanses it by driving out the merchants selling sacrifices there. This happens during Israel’s annual celebration of the Exodus, and Jesus shares a final Passover meal with his disciples. He means for this to show that he is about to initiate a great act of rescue and salvation—a new exodus. Jesus tells his followers that his death will launch the new covenant with Israel promised by the prophets. This is the decisive moment for God’s Kingdom to come with power.

Finally Israel's leaders arrest Jesus and hand him over to the Romans for execution. He is nailed to a cross, with a sign that mocks him as "The King of the Jews." It certainly looks as though Jesus has lost his bid to establish God's rule and that he is no king after all. But three days later he is vindicated, rising from the dead and appearing to his disciples.

It turns out that Jesus willingly went to his death as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Through this sacrifice, he wins a surprising victory over the spiritual powers of darkness. Rome was never the real enemy. Jesus has taken on sin and death directly—ironically, through his own death—emptying them of their power over humanity. His resurrection confirms his triumph. This unexpected story of Israel's Messiah reveals God's long-term plan. All the earlier covenants were leading to this one. The life and ministry of Jesus brings all the narrative threads in the Scriptures together into a single, coherent Story. Through Jesus, God has launched his new creation.

— Act Five: —

## COMMUNITY'S CALLING

Israel was chosen in order to bring blessing to all peoples. Israel's Messiah is the One through whom this ancient promise comes true. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, now with authority over all things—this is the centerpiece and fulfillment of the Bible's long and winding tale. The work of Jesus—sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit—is where the Story finds the redemption and restoration it's been leading toward all along.

But how will the world hear this good news about the victory of Jesus? When the risen Jesus first appeared to his disciples, he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." The followers of Jesus have been given a mission. To a world enslaved by evil powers, caught in wrongdoing and idolatry, now freedom and forgiveness are to be announced. To a world confused by misplaced allegiances, Jesus is to be proclaimed as Lord and King. To a world divided by social, ethnic, and tribal differences, a single new humanity in God's family is to be disclosed. Abraham's family—renewed through the Messiah—is commissioned to bring this message to all creation.

The mission of God expands through the birth and growth of new communities of Jesus followers. Faith and loyalty to Jesus are now the key marks of the renewed people of God. These believers are God's new temple, the place where he dwells. God is worshiped in Spirit and in truth. God's justice is embraced; his love is lived out. By not only believing in Jesus but also following his teachings and walking in his ways, God's people are remade in his image. They are called back to the original human vocation of reflecting God's gracious rule to the creation.

We are living in this act of the Bible's drama today. If we are true to our calling and restoration in this second Adam—that is, in Jesus—we will follow his pattern of suffering servanthood for the sake of others. We are called to appropriately improvise our own roles in God's saving Story based on what we have learned by reading the Scriptures in depth. In community we work out together what the way of Jesus looks like in the new places and situations where God has placed us. And we continue to pray and long for the return of our King.

——— *Act Six:* ———

## GOD'S HOMECOMING

The Bible's Story begins with God pushing back the powers of chaos and disorder to create a place of beauty and goodness. But the powers returned, bringing wrongdoing and rebellion into God's creation-temple. God's image bearers failed him. The entire narrative since then has been about God working, striving, and even fighting to cleanse and reestablish his intended home. The decisive turn comes when the Creator actually becomes a creature himself, completely joining with his people to help and empower their battle against evil.

The finale of this great drama still lies ahead of us. The Servant-King will return to join his people once again. Jesus will appear as the world's rightful Judge and Ruler, setting all things right. Evil will be destroyed and creation renewed. The world's bondage to sorrow and pain and its slavery to violence, death, and decay will be overturned once and for all. All things will be made new. The glory of God will fill the entire cosmos—his temple. The victory of the God of life will be complete.

God's people will be raised from the dead in fully human, fully restored physical bodies. They will reengage their first calling—to be Spirit-filled, God-worshiping, culture-making citizens of God's new heavens and new earth. Peoples from every tribe, language, and nation will walk by God's light and bring splendor and glory into God's city—the new Jerusalem. God will come down and make his home with us here in his reawakened creation.

"Arise, O LORD, and enter your resting place, . . .  
may your loyal servants sing for joy."  
from PSALM 132

— Introduction to —

# MESSIAH

**THE FINAL QUARTER OF THE BIBLE** describes the fifth covenant that God made with humanity. This covenant flows directly from the ones that came before it. But at the same time, it presents such a contrast to those old covenants that our Bibles are divided into two “testaments” (another word for “covenant”) to express this difference. The First Testament, comprising three-quarters of the Bible, describes the life of God’s people—Abraham and his descendants, the ancient nation of Israel—under the first four covenants (made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David). The New Testament centers on the story of Jesus the Messiah, the culmination of the First Testament’s long history. The work of Jesus resolves all the narrative threads of the Bible as he fulfills God’s intentions for Israel, for humanity, and for creation.

The prophets of Israel had said that a new covenant of a different kind was on its way. As Jeremiah put it: “‘The day is coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors . . . I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts.’” And Isaiah announced, “People from many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob’s God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.’” This would fulfill God’s covenantal promise to Abraham: “‘All the families on earth will be blessed through you.’”

All these things that the prophets foretold are fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus. In him, God came to earth as a human being both to show and to teach his ultimate intentions for humanity and creation. Jesus explained and lived out the deepest meaning of the Scriptures and their story of God’s people. He also offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice both to bring peace between God and humanity and to make peace between all people possible.

The story of Jesus is told from four different perspectives in the Bible books known as “Gospels” (“gospel” means “good news”). All four authors desired to portray the vastly rich and meaningful story of Jesus from a perspective that would resonate with their original audiences. Luke and Mark are written primarily to Gentiles (non-Jews), who are less familiar with the history and traditions of Israel. (Luke is actually the first part of a two-part work along with the book of Acts, which tells the story of Jesus’ earliest followers.) The Gospels of Matthew and John are likely written to Jews who are familiar with Israel’s previous story.

The other books of the New Testament, mostly letters, are also written to these different groups. In this edition, books of the New Testament that aren’t Gospels are grouped with the Gospel that shares a similar audience. Paul’s letters were sent to Greek-speaking followers of Jesus who were mostly Gentiles, and thus are fittingly grouped with Luke–Acts. Luke often traveled with Paul to share the Good News. We present Paul’s letters here in the likely order that they were written. Because Mark’s Gospel is based largely on the apostle Peter’s memoirs, it is grouped with the letters that Peter sent from Rome and a similar letter from Jude. Like the Gospel of Matthew, the books of Hebrews and James address Jewish believers, so these three books are grouped together. Finally, the writings of John (the Gospel and three letters) are grouped together as they were originally addressed to the same communities.

The book of Revelation is unique among the New Testament books in its historical setting and literary genre. Nevertheless, like all the other books of the New Testament, it’s a “revelation from Jesus Christ,” and its content centers on him. It is placed last in this edition because it provides a fitting conclusion not only to the New Testament but also to the entire Story of the Bible. As the book of Revelation draws to a close, God brings his purposes for humanity and creation to their final culmination in “a new heaven and a new earth.” We are left with the grand promise that all will be made new in Christ.

This fresh arrangement of the books highlights the depth of the New Testament’s fourfold witness to Jesus the Messiah. The Son of God, who fulfills all the longings and promises of the collected Scriptures, can be viewed here through the rich variety of lenses provided by the books of the new covenant.



## IMMERSED IN LUKE - ACTS

**THE LONGEST STORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**—one that fills a quarter of its pages—was originally addressed to one person. The author dedicates this two-volume series, covering the life of Jesus and the early church, to the “most honorable Theophilus.” This Greek name shows that he was a Gentile (non-Jewish), and his title suggests he was likely a Roman official.

This history of the early Christian movement was written in the mid-60s AD, right around the time when the Roman government first became hostile to Jesus’ followers. Theophilus may have been facing pressure to forsake his allegiance to Jesus. At the same time, some Jewish believers were questioning the place of Gentiles in a movement devoted to a Jewish Messiah. So Theophilus would no doubt welcome the reassurance that what he’d heard about Jesus was genuine and that the Good News really was intended for Gentiles like himself.

Luke was in a unique position to answer these questions. He had worked closely with Paul, who brought the message of Jesus to Gentiles living throughout much of the Roman Empire. Luke was able to tell important parts of the story from firsthand experience. And since he was educated and literate, he could also research and record the movement’s history.

The Good News of Jesus invited Jews and Gentiles to unite into a single new family. So believers from all backgrounds benefited from Luke’s account of God’s story of salvation for the whole world, which had come to surprising fulfillment in Jesus.

The first volume—Luke—begins with a prologue about the remarkable circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth and early days. From its start, the story shows how Jesus was sent as both the long-promised King of Israel and the Savior of the whole world.

After the introduction, Luke is divided into three main parts:

The first section describes Jesus’ early ministry in Israel’s northern region of Galilee, where he announces “the Good News of the Kingdom of God.”

Luke then portrays Jesus taking the journey south toward Jerusalem, where he fulfills his calling and destiny. Along the way, Jesus continues

to show how the coming of God's reign on earth means freedom for the oppressed and a welcome for outsiders.

The third section shows Jesus' mission coming to its climax in Israel's ancient capital of Jerusalem. During the Jewish Passover festival, his enemies conspire to have him executed on a Roman cross. But Jesus then rises from the dead with royal authority, winning God's great battle against sin and death.

The second volume—Acts—describes how the first community of Jesus' followers brought the message about him to all nations. In six different phases, the Good News about Jesus breaks through some significant barrier as it advances. Each phase ends with a version of the summary statement: "God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased."

*Phase one:* The message breaks through a linguistic barrier as the Jerusalem community welcomes Greek speakers (pp. 61-70).

*Phase two:* The message breaks through a geographic barrier by spreading into Judea and Samaria (pp. 70-77).

*Phase three:* A significant religious and ethnic barrier is broken when the community welcomes Gentiles (pp. 77-82).

*Phase four:* Another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News moves into Asia Minor (pp. 82-89).

*Phase five:* Yet another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News spreads into Greece, the cultural center of the ancient Mediterranean world (pp. 89-94).

*Phase six:* The Good News about Jesus the Messiah reaches all the way to Rome—the very heart of the empire (pp. 95-110).

In this way, Luke–Acts completes its twofold movement. First, Jesus went to Jerusalem to complete his great work through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Second, the persecution of his followers brought the Good News about Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome. In this combined story, it is revealed that Jesus is Israel's promised King and the world's true Ruler.

# LUKE



Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.



When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will

turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail.”

Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Mary responded,

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,

and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One is holy,

and he has done great things for me.

He shows mercy from generation to generation

to all who fear him.

His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

He has brought down princes from their thrones

and exalted the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away with empty hands.

He has helped his servant Israel

and remembered to be merciful.

For he made this promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and his children forever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

"What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it

reflected on these events and asked, “What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has visited and redeemed his people.  
He has sent us a mighty Savior  
from the royal line of his servant David,  
just as he promised  
through his holy prophets long ago.  
Now we will be saved from our enemies  
and from all who hate us.  
He has been merciful to our ancestors  
by remembering his sacred covenant—  
the covenant he swore with an oath  
to our ancestor Abraham.  
We have been rescued from our enemies  
so we can serve God without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness  
for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son,  
will be called the prophet of the Most High,  
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.  
You will tell his people how to find salvation  
through forgiveness of their sins.  
Because of God’s tender mercy,  
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
and to guide us to the path of peace.”

John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

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At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,  
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby

Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,  
as you have promised.  
I have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared for all people.  
He is a light to reveal God to the nations,  
and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

When Jesus’ parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him.

Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn’t miss him at first, because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn’t show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

When they couldn’t find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

His parents didn’t know what to think. “Son,” his mother said to him, “why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.”



“But why did you need to search?” he asked. “Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they didn’t understand what he meant.

Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

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It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Tracoonitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
 ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!  
 Clear the road for him!  
 The valleys will be filled,  
 and the mountains and hills made level.  
 The curves will be straightened,  
 and the rough places made smooth.  
 And then all people will see  
 the salvation sent from God.”

When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”

The crowds asked, “What should we do?”

John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”

Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”

He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”

“What should we do?” asked some soldiers.

John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

John also publicly criticized Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, for marrying Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. So Herod put John in prison, adding this sin to his many others.

One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry.

Jesus was known as the son of Joseph.

Joseph was the son of Heli.

Heli was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

Levi was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Jannai.

Jannai was the son of Joseph.

Joseph was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Amos.

Amos was the son of Nahum.

Nahum was the son of Esli.

Esli was the son of Naggai.

Naggai was the son of Maath.

Maath was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Semein.

Semein was the son of Josech.

Josech was the son of Joda.

Joda was the son of Joanan.

Joanan was the son of Rhesa.

Rhesa was the son of Zerubbabel.  
Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel.  
Shealtiel was the son of Neri.  
Neri was the son of Melki.  
Melki was the son of Addi.  
Addi was the son of Cosam.  
Cosam was the son of Elmadam.  
Elmadam was the son of Er.  
Er was the son of Joshua.  
Joshua was the son of Eliezer.  
Eliezer was the son of Jorim.  
Jorim was the son of Matthat.  
Matthat was the son of Levi.  
Levi was the son of Simeon.  
Simeon was the son of Judah.  
Judah was the son of Joseph.  
Joseph was the son of Jonam.  
Jonam was the son of Eliakim.  
Eliakim was the son of Melea.  
Melea was the son of Menna.  
Menna was the son of Mattatha.  
Mattatha was the son of Nathan.  
Nathan was the son of David.  
David was the son of Jesse.  
Jesse was the son of Obed.  
Obed was the son of Boaz.  
Boaz was the son of Salmon.  
Salmon was the son of Nahshon.  
Nahshon was the son of Amminadab.  
Amminadab was the son of Admin.  
Admin was the son of Arni.  
Arni was the son of Hezron.  
Hezron was the son of Perez.  
Perez was the son of Judah.  
Judah was the son of Jacob.  
Jacob was the son of Isaac.  
Isaac was the son of Abraham.  
Abraham was the son of Terah.  
Terah was the son of Nahor.  
Nahor was the son of Serug.  
Serug was the son of Reu.  
Reu was the son of Peleg.

Peleg was the son of Eber.  
Eber was the son of Shelah.  
Shelah was the son of Cainan.  
Cainan was the son of Arphaxad.  
Arphaxad was the son of Shem.  
Shem was the son of Noah.  
Noah was the son of Lamech.  
Lamech was the son of Methuselah.  
Methuselah was the son of Enoch.  
Enoch was the son of Jared.  
Jared was the son of Mahalalel.  
Mahalalel was the son of Kenan.  
Kenan was the son of Enosh.  
Enosh was the son of Seth.  
Seth was the son of Adam.  
Adam was the son of God.

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’”

Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the LORD your God  
and serve only him.’”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you.  
And they will hold you up with their hands  
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’”

When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

*Introducing*

# I M M E R S E

## The Reading Bible

Many people feel discouraged in their Bible reading. The size and scope (not to mention the tiny fonts and the thin pages) intimidate new and seasoned readers alike, keeping them from diving into and immersing themselves in the word of God. The Bible itself is not the problem; how the Bible has been presented to readers for generations is.

Our Bibles currently look like reference books—a resource to put on the shelf and consult only when needed. So we read it like a reference book: infrequently and in small pieces. But the Bible is a collection of good writings that invite us to good reading—and it's God's word! There is an urgent need today for Christians to know the word of God, and the best way to do so is by reading the Bible. However, we need to understand the Bible on its own terms. We need to become deeply acquainted with whole books by reading them at length. And we can learn how to read the Bible well by altering a few of our current Bible reading habits.

First, we need to think about the Bible as a collection of writings written in various literary forms known as *genres*. Each literary form, or genre, used in the Bible—such as a poem, story, or letter—was chosen because, along with the words, it works to communicate truths about God to real people. (See “The Literary Forms of the Bible,” p. 487, for a further explanation of some of these genres.) A complete book can be composed in a single genre, or the author may use several genres to tell one story. And even when books of the Bible are made up of several different compositions, as in the book of Psalms, those components are drawn together in such a way as to give each book an overall unity as a distinct work in itself.

Second, recognizing that the Bible is made up of whole books that tell a complete story, we should seek to understand the Bible's teaching and live out its story. To help readers better understand and read the Bible as whole books, we've removed any additives from the Bible text. Those additions, while inserted with good intentions, have accumulated over the centuries,

changing how people view the Bible and, therefore, what they think they're supposed to do with it.

Chapters and verses aren't the original units of the Bible. The latest books of the Bible were written in the first century AD; however, chapter divisions were added in the thirteenth century, and the verse divisions we use today appeared in the middle of the sixteenth century. So for the majority of its history, the Bible had no chapters or verses. They were introduced so that reference works like commentaries and concordances could be created. But if we rely on these later additions to guide our reading of the Bible, we often miss the original, natural structure. This also puts us at risk of missing the message and meaning of the Bible. For this reason, we have removed the chapter and verse markers from the text. (We do, however, include a verse range at the top of each page, allowing for easy reference.)

This edition also removes the section headings that are found in most Bibles. These are also not original but the work of modern publishers. These headings create the impression that the Bible is made up of short, encyclopedic sections. So, like chapters and verses, they can encourage us to treat the Bible as a kind of reference work rather than a collection of good writings that invite good reading. Many headings may also spoil the suspense that the inspired storytellers sought to create and use to such good effect. (For example, a heading that often appears in the book of Acts announces in advance "Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison.")

So, in place of section headings, *Immerse: The Reading Bible* uses line spacing and graphic markers to simply and elegantly reflect the natural structures of the Bible's books. For example, in the letter known as 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses twelve issues in the life of the community in Corinth. In this edition, double line breaks and a single cross mark off the teaching Paul offers for each issue. Single line breaks separate different phases of the longer arguments Paul makes to support his teaching. And triple line breaks with three crosses set off the opening and closing of the letter from the main body. By contrast, the section headings in a typical Bible divide 1 Corinthians into nearly thirty parts. These divisions give no indication of which parts speak together to the same issue or where the letter's main body begins and ends.

Modern Bibles also include hundreds of footnotes and often include cross-references throughout the text. While these features provide information that can be helpful in certain settings, there's a danger that they, too, can encourage us to treat the Bible as a reference work. Constantly going back and forth between the text and the notes doesn't really qualify as being immersed in reading the Bible.

Third, the order in which the books appear is another important factor in reading the Bible well and at length. For the majority of the Bible's

history, its books were not arranged in any fixed order. Instead, they were placed in a great variety of orders, depending on the needs and goals of each presentation. In some cases, books from the same time period were put together. In other cases, similar kinds of writing were set side by side. And often the Bible's books were organized according to the way the community used them in worship.

The order of books that we know today didn't become fixed until near the time of the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. This ordering has many drawbacks. For example, it presents Paul's letters in order of length (longest to shortest) rather than in the order in which he wrote them. Also, in this order, the books of the prophets are divided into groups by size, and the smaller books are then organized based on phrases they share. This arrangement puts them out of historical order and sends the reader swinging back and forth between centuries. And there are many other similar concerns in what we know as the traditional order.

This edition returns to the church's longstanding tradition of arranging the Bible's books to best meet the goals of a given presentation. To help readers delve deeper into the Story of the Bible, it places Paul's letters in their likely historical order. The books of the prophets are arranged in similar fashion. Furthermore, the collection of prophetic books is placed immediately after the story of Israel because the prophets were God's messengers to the people during the unfolding of that story. The remaining books of the First Testament, known traditionally as the "Writings," are placed after the prophets and arranged by type of writing. The introductions to the various groups of books in this Bible will explain more about how they are arranged and why.

Finally, some complete books of the Bible were broken into parts over time. The books of Samuel and Kings originally made up one long book, but they were separated into four parts so they would fit conveniently on ancient papyrus scrolls. The books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are similarly the divided parts of an originally unified composition. In this edition, both of these two longer works are put back together as Samuel–Kings and Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah. Luke and Acts were written as a unified story of the life of Jesus and the birth of the community of his followers. These two volumes had been separated so that Luke could be placed with the other Gospels. But since the two parts were meant to be read together, they have been reunited here as Luke–Acts.

All of this is presented in a clean, single-column format, allowing each of the Bible's basic units to be read like the books they are. The lines of Hebrew poetry can easily be seen, and stories, proverbs, letters, and other genres can readily be identified. In short, *Immerse: The Reading Bible* takes

full advantage of good visual design to provide a more authentic encounter with God's sacred words.

It is our prayer that the combined effect of these changes to the visual layout of the Bible will enhance your reading experience. We believe these changes serve the Scriptures well and will allow you to receive these books on their own terms. The goal, after all, is to let the Bible be the book that God inspired so it can do its powerful work in our lives.



## THE LITERARY FORMS OF THE BIBLE

Just as God's word uses existing human language, the inspired authors also employ existing human literary forms that enable words to be arranged in meaningful ways. These different types of writing are called *genres*.

Today most of us are probably more familiar with the concept of genre from watching movies. By watching the opening scene, we can identify whether it's a Western, a science fiction thriller, a romantic comedy, or a documentary. Once we know what kind of film it is, we know what expectations we should have about what can or can't happen, how things are likely to develop, and how we should interpret what is being shown. These expectations, created by previous films and respected by filmmakers, are like an agreement with the audience about how its message will be communicated and should be interpreted.

Likewise, the Bible's authors and editors, through God's inspiration, used and respected the genres of their day. We may be able to recognize some of them as similar to genres we know today, but others may be less familiar.

Since understanding genres is critical to reading the Bible well, we will describe the key types below. The compositions that reflect these genres make up either whole Bible books or smaller sections of larger books, so some Bible books are written partly in one genre and partly in another. (Many of the genres introduced here will be further explained in the introductions to books or sections of the Bible.) As indicated below, the specific genres employed in the Bible can be divided into two general categories of writing: prose and poetry.

### PROSE GENRES

- **Stories.** Narrative—or stories—weave together events in a way that shows they have a larger meaning. Typically, a story situates the reader in a place and time and then introduces a conflict. This conflict intensifies until it reaches a climax, which is followed by a resolution.

Narrative is the most common genre used in the Bible, emphasizing

that God primarily makes himself known through his words and actions in specific historical events. The Bible doesn't teach about God merely in the abstract; its historical narratives are intentionally shaped to highlight key points about God and how he relates to people and the world.

The Bible features two special types of stories-within-stories. Sometimes a person will tell a story to illustrate a point about the larger narrative that person is in. These stories are called *parables* and were a favorite teaching tool of Jesus. They usually describe real-life situations but sometimes can be fanciful, like Jotham's parable in the book of Judges, which uses talking trees as the characters. People in a story may also relate *dreams* and *visions* that they've had. In this case they're not making up a story but reporting one they've seen. This subset of narrative speaks in pictures and uses symbols to represent realities.

- **Apocalypse.** Meaning "unveiling," apocalypse is an ancient genre structured as a narrative but composed entirely of *visions* employing vivid symbols which a heavenly visitor reveals to a person. These visions disclose the secrets of the spiritual world and, often, the future. The book of Revelation is a complete apocalypse, while the book of Daniel is split between narrative and apocalypse. Elements of apocalypse also appear in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah.
- **Letters.** About one-third of the Bible's books are letters that were originally written by one person to another person or to a group. Letters in the Bible, following the form of ancient letters, have three parts: the opening, the main body, and the closing. In the opening, writers typically give their name, say who they're writing to, and offer a word of thanksgiving or prayer. The main body deals with the business of the letter. In the closing, the writer extends greetings, shares prayer requests, and offers a prayer for God to bless the recipients. Letters in the Bible are typically used by leaders to present their authoritative teaching to a community when they aren't physically present.
- **Laws.** Also known as commands, these are instructions for what to do in specific situations in order to live as God intends. Less frequently, laws are statements of general principles to follow. Many biblical laws have been gathered into large collections, but sometimes they are placed within narratives as part of the resolution after a conflict. God's instructions are most often presented in the Bible as part of his covenantal agreements with his people, contributing to his larger saving purposes.
- **Sermons.** These are public addresses to groups that have gathered for worship or for the celebration of a special occasion. They typically explain the meaning of earlier parts of the Bible's story for people living

in a later part of that story. Most sermons in the Bible are found within narratives, but the book of Hebrews comprises four sermons that were collected and then sent out in the same letter.

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons by Moses to the people of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Parts of it take the form of a *treaty* that high kings would make with the kings who served them. The Ten Commandments are a miniature version of that kind of treaty.

- **Prayers.** These are addressed to God and are usually offered in a public setting in the Bible, though sometimes they are private. They can include praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests.
- **Lists.** Many kinds of lists are found in the Bible. One of the most common types, *genealogy*, is a record of a person's ancestors or descendants. The Bible also includes lists of things like offerings, building materials, assigned territories, stops along journeys, court officials, population counts, and so on. Lists in the Bible are not merely informative but usually make a theological point or provide verification of someone's connection to God's people.

## POETRY GENRES

Hebrew poetry is based not on the repetition of sound (rhyme) but on the repetition of meaning. Its essential unit, the couplet, features a form of parallelism. One line states something, and the next line repeats, contrasts, or elaborates on the first line, intensifying its meaning. This feature is sometimes expanded to a triplet (three-line unit) for greater emphasis.

Poetry frequently uses metaphors and other figurative language to communicate messages with greater strength and emotion.

- **Proverbs.** These are short sayings, typically two lines in length (though sometimes longer), that teach practical lessons for life in God's world. Proverbs are not necessarily promises about how things will work out; mainly they are descriptions of wise ways to live.
- **Songs.** Poetry set to music. In the Bible, songs are used primarily for celebration or for mourning (in which case they are called *laments*). They are often found within narratives, but some books of the Bible are whole collections of songs.

*Psalms* are songs used by people gathered for worship. These songs are most often addressed to God as prayers set to music.

- **Oracles.** These are messages from God delivered by prophets. In the Bible, oracles are most often recorded in poetry; originally, they may

have been sung. Some oracles are in prose, but even those often use symbolic language similar to dreams and visions. Most biblical oracles are found within larger collections from the same prophet; however, the book of Obadiah consists of a single oracle.

- **Poetic dialogue.** Utilized in a number of ancient writings, poetic dialogue is a conversation in which each participant speaks in a form of poetry. In the Bible, this genre is found only in the book of Job.

Reading the Bible well starts with recognizing and then honoring each book's genre. Following this practice will help prevent mistakes in interpretation and allow us to discover the meaning that the Bible's creators originally intended.

# ISRAEL

DURING THE TIME OF JESUS



# 8-Week Reading Plan

**Reading Plan Instructions:** Always read to the largest break on the page where each reading ends. If there is more than one largest break, go to the last one. If no breaks appear on that page, read to the bottom of the page.

## Week 1 Luke

Day 1	pp. A15-12
Day 2	pp. 13-27
Day 3	pp. 28-37
Day 4	pp. 37-47
Day 5	pp. 47-59

## Week 2 Acts, 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Day 6	pp. 61-70
Day 7	pp. 70-82
Day 8	pp. 82-94
Day 9	pp. 95-110
Day 10	pp. 111-123

## Week 3 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans

Day 11	pp. 125-135
Day 12	pp. 135-148
Day 13	pp. 149-164
Day 14	pp. 165-175
Day 15	pp. 177-190

## Week 4 Romans, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy

Day 16	pp. 190-202
Day 17	pp. 203-214
Day 18	pp. 215-224
Day 19	pp. 225-241
Day 20	pp. 243-255

## Week 5 Mark, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude

Day 21	pp. 257-268
Day 22	pp. 268-279
Day 23	pp. 279-292
Day 24	pp. 293-301
Day 25	pp. 303-310

## Week 6 Matthew

Day 26	pp. 311-324
Day 27	pp. 324-336
Day 28	pp. 337-345
Day 29	pp. 345-358
Day 30	pp. 358-366

## Week 7 Hebrews, James, John

Day 31	pp. 367-377
Day 32	pp. 377-387
Day 33	pp. 389-396
Day 34	pp. 397-411
Day 35	pp. 411-423

## Week 8 John, 1-3 John, Revelation

Day 36	pp. 424-437
Day 37	pp. 439-452
Day 38	pp. 453-459
Day 39	pp. 460-471
Day 40	pp. 471-482

## 4 QUESTIONS TO GET YOUR CONVERSATION STARTED:

1. What stood out to you this week?
2. Was there anything confusing or troubling?
3. Did anything make you think differently about God?
4. How might this change the way we live?

More Immerse resources available at [ImmerseBible.com/Messiah](http://ImmerseBible.com/Messiah).

# 16-Week Reading Plan

**Reading Plan Instructions:** Always read to the largest break on the page where each reading ends. If there is more than one largest break, go to the last one. If no breaks appear on that page, read to the bottom of the page.

## Week 1 Luke

Day 1	pp. A15-6
Day 2	pp. 6-12
Day 3	pp. 13-19
Day 4	pp. 19-27
Day 5	pp. 28-32

## Week 2 Luke

Day 6	pp. 32-37
Day 7	pp. 37-43
Day 8	pp. 43-47
Day 9	pp. 47-52
Day 10	pp. 52-59

## Week 3 Acts

Day 11	pp. 61-66
Day 12	pp. 66-70
Day 13	pp. 70-77
Day 14	pp. 77-82
Day 15	pp. 82-89

## Week 4 Acts, 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Day 16	pp. 89-94
Day 17	pp. 95-103
Day 18	pp. 103-110
Day 19	pp. 111-117
Day 20	pp. 119-123

## Week 5 1 & 2 Corinthians

Day 21	pp. 125-129
Day 22	pp. 129-135
Day 23	pp. 135-142
Day 24	pp. 142-148
Day 25	pp. 149-158

## Week 6 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans

Day 26	pp. 158-164
Day 27	pp. 165-169
Day 28	pp. 169-175
Day 29	pp. 177-185
Day 30	pp. 185-190

## Week 7 Romans, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians

Day 31	pp. 190-196
Day 32	pp. 196-202
Day 33	pp. 203-206
Day 34	pp. 207-214
Day 35	pp. 215-220

## Week 8 Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy

Day 36	pp. 220-224
Day 37	pp. 225-232
Day 38	pp. 233-241
Day 39	pp. 243-247
Day 40	pp. 249-255

## Week 9 Mark

Day 41	pp. 257-263
Day 42	pp. 263-268
Day 43	pp. 268-274
Day 44	pp. 274-279
Day 45	pp. 279-285

## Week 10 Mark, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude

Day 46	pp. 285-292
Day 47	pp. 293-297
Day 48	pp. 297-301
Day 49	pp. 303-308
Day 50	pp. 309-310

## Week 11 Matthew

Day 51	pp. 311-318
Day 52	pp. 318-324
Day 53	pp. 324-329
Day 54	pp. 330-336
Day 55	pp. 337-340

## Week 12 Matthew

Day 56	pp. 340-345
Day 57	pp. 345-351
Day 58	pp. 351-358
Day 59	pp. 358-363
Day 60	pp. 363-366

## Week 13 Hebrews, James

Day 61	pp. 367-371
Day 62	pp. 371-377
Day 63	pp. 377-381
Day 64	pp. 382-387
Day 65	pp. 389-396

## Week 14 John

Day 66	pp. 397-402
Day 67	pp. 402-408
Day 68	pp. 408-413
Day 69	pp. 413-418
Day 70	pp. 418-423

## Week 15 John, 1-3 John, Revelation

Day 71	pp. 424-430
Day 72	pp. 430-437
Day 73	pp. 439-446
Day 74	pp. 447-452
Day 75	pp. 453-459

## Week 16 Revelation

Day 76	pp. 460-464
Day 77	pp. 464-467
Day 78	pp. 467-473
Day 79	pp. 473-478
Day 80	pp. 478-482