

READ THE BIBLE FOR **LIFE**

READER'S GUIDE
TO THE BIBLE

Chronological Reading Plan

GEORGE H. GUTHRIE

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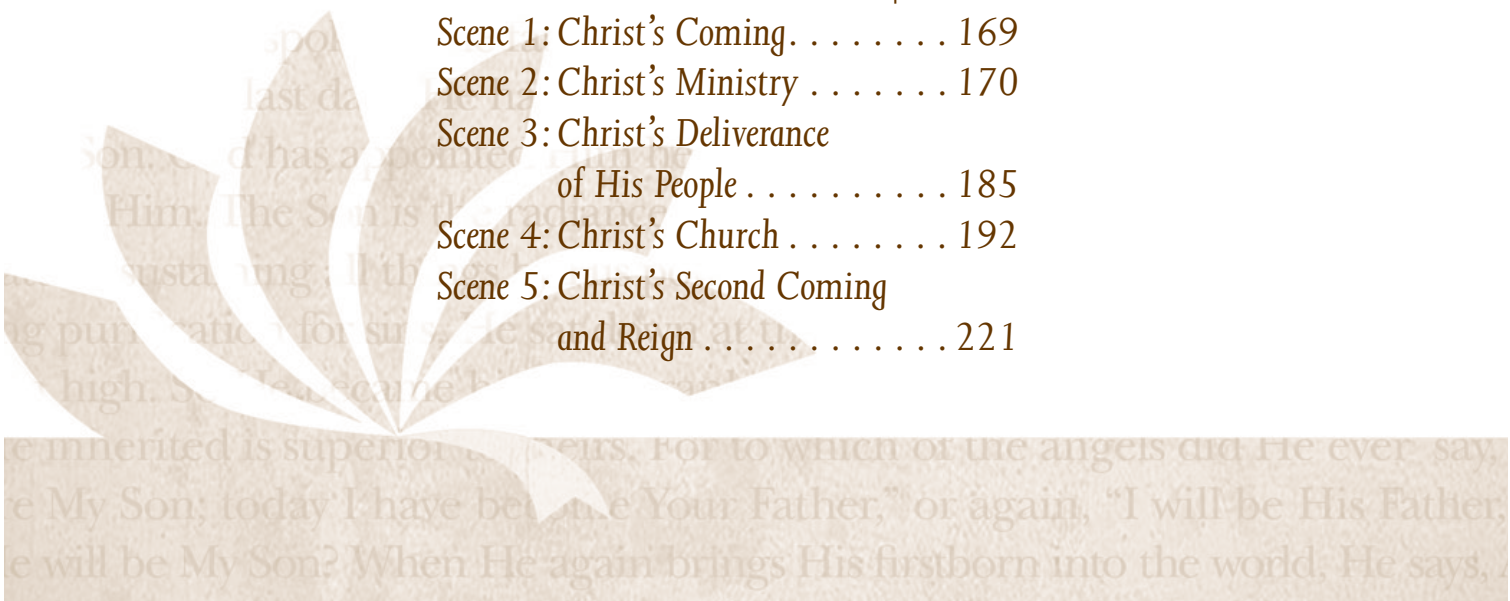
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The Author



George H. Guthrie serves as the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. A respected New Testament scholar and a deeply committed churchman, he is the author of numerous articles and several books, including *Hebrews in The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 1998) and “James” in *Hebrews–Revelation, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2006).

As the architect of the Read the Bible for Life biblical-literacy initiative, Guthrie has written or edited four tools, including this reader’s guide (LifeWay, 2011), the small-group study *Read the Bible for Life* (LifeWay, 2010), *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God’s Word* (B&H, 2011), and *Reading God’s Story: A Chronological Daily Bible* (B&H, 2011). Guthrie has participated in translation projects, such as the revision of the New Living Translation, and has served as a consultant on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Version, and the English Standard Version. At Union University he led in the establishment of and serves as Senior Fellow in the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, which is committed to promoting sound Bible reading, study, and interpretation in local churches.

Guthrie holds PhD and MDiv degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He and his wife, Pat, live with their two children, Joshua and Anna, near Jackson, Tennessee. The family attends Northbrook Church, which Guthrie and his wife helped plant and which he copastored for 10 years.

Foreword

I was sitting across the lunch table from George Guthrie. “I’m considering leading our church to read through the Bible together next year,” I said.

“It’s interesting that you say that,” Dr. Guthrie responded. “I’m developing a plan to help people and entire churches walk through redemptive history chronologically so that they can see the power of God’s Word and understand how their individual stories fit in God’s story.”

By the next week we were finalizing details for how our church could field-test what you now hold in your hand, *Reader’s Guide to the Bible*, an intentional, devotional, systematic journey through the history of redemption in Scripture. During the next year, starting at Genesis 1, the members of our church journeyed from creation to new creation. For the first time many of them saw how the different books of the Bible come together to form one story. This journey through God’s Word dramatically transformed the lives of individual followers of Christ and radically revolutionized our church.

Indeed, the Bible contains one grand story of one global God who is saving His people through one glorious gospel. *We need to know this story.* We need to see, understand, and comprehend how all of the pages of Scripture come together in one overarching plot. Such knowledge, penetrating both our hearts and our minds, is essential for growing in Christlikeness.

We need to experience this story. It’s not just about people thousands of years ago. It’s about you, me, and the people God is drawing to Himself all around us.

We need to tell this story. When we know and experience this story, we are compelled to give our lives to proclaiming this story to the ends of the earth.

Reader’s Guide is an invaluable tool for individual followers of Christ, small groups of Christians, and entire churches. Let this guide lead you to discover the boundless treasures contained in the Bible, God’s story, and let His Word change your life and your church for your great good and His great glory.

David Platt, Pastor
The Church at Brook Hills
Birmingham, Alabama

Introduction

Reader's Guide to the Bible gives you step-by-step guidance as you walk through the pages of God's Word day by day. This guide is laid out in a chronological reading plan and provides personal coaching in how to read the portion of Scripture suggested for each day. As you read, this guide will help you keep track of where you are in the story of Scripture and will provide help for reading the different kinds of literature found in the Bible. It will also help you understand especially difficult passages and will point to the significance of people, places, and events as they relate to the grand story of Scripture.

Here are some suggestions for getting the most from *Reader's Guide*.

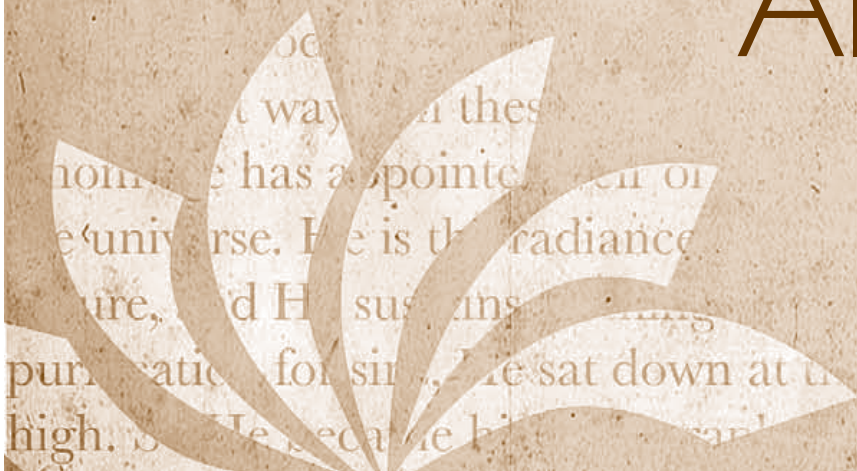
1. *Read at a specific time and place each day until it becomes a habit.* If you miss a day, make it up and keep going.
2. *As you start each week, read the introduction to that week.* Then read the brief commentary for that day before reading the passages from the Bible.
3. *Always keep the big story in view.* *Reader's Guide* is laid out in three acts and 17 scenes to familiarize you with the framework of the Bible's story. The headings at the top of each page remind you where you are in the story. You can use *Reader's Guide* with any Bible translation, but you might want to consider *Reading God's Story: A Chronological Daily Bible* (HCSB translation).
4. *Fill in the names of important characters on the timelines each week.* Three biblical timelines are inserted in *Reader's Guide*. As you work your way through *Reader's Guide* each week, you will find directions for writing on the timelines the names of key people who appear in the Bible readings that week.
5. *Read in community with others.* Small-group discussion questions are provided at the end of each week.
6. *Acquire tools to help you read the Bible better.* You can find free study tools at the Web site www.mystudybible.com. A sound study Bible would also be helpful. Other support materials are available at www.lifeway.com/readthebibleforlife.

I want to thank David Platt and The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, who field-tested *Reader's Guide* and wrote the small-group discussion questions you will find at the end of each week. Also, in addition to many good study tools, I found special help in *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002) by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart.

I pray that as you work your way through *Reader's Guide to the Bible*, you will understand God's Word better and be changed by it forever.

ACT I

God's Plan for All People



...inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did He ever
“You are My Son; today I have become Your Father,” or again, “I will
be His Father, and He will be My Son?” When He again brings His
born into the world, He says: “And all God’s angels must worship Him

WEEK 1

In our first week of readings, we will cover all of act 1 in the story of the Bible. This act consists of three scenes:

1. The creation of the world, with human beings as the pinnacle of that creation
2. The fall into sin and its consequences
3. The flood, the first expression of God's judgment on the human race as a whole, as well as His desire to preserve the life He created

Act 1 is very brief in comparison to the other two acts in the biblical story, but theologically, it is very important. In numerous ways act 1 lays the foundation for the rest of the Bible. In addition to the main events, we will see many expressions of God's desire to have a relationship with people and His grace when people sin. As you read, slow down and notice the details, including moments of tension and crisis, and how these are resolved. This segment of Scripture is packed with important themes that will continue throughout all of Scripture, including the central theme of covenant. As you read Genesis 1 and Psalms, allow the music of these passages to touch you and teach you things about God.



SCENE 1: CREATION: THE GOD OF ALL LIFE

DAY 1 Genesis 1–2

Notice ways the days of creation relate to each other: day 1 to day 4, day 2 to day 5, and day 3 to day 6. Days 1, 2, and 3 tell of God's creation of settings to be inhabited, while days 4, 5, and 6 introduce the characters that inhabit those settings. God built both beauty and order into His creation. There was also a progression in creation, a process climaxing in the creation of human beings. According to Genesis 2:2–3, God rested on the seventh day, blessed that day, and declared it holy. In declaring one day of the week special, God built order and rhythm into the weekly human routine.

Identify the order and rhythm of rest in your weekly patterns.

In Genesis 2 the author took one aspect of the creation account in Genesis 1—the creation of man and woman—and expanded on it. When you read narrative passages in Scripture, remember that God is the hero of the story.

How is God the hero in Genesis 2?

What does the passage say about the nature and beauty of marriage as God designed it?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part I: write *Adam* on line 1 and *Eve* on line 2 in act 1, scene 1.

DAY 2 Psalms 8; 104; John 1:1-3

Psalm 8, a reflection on Genesis 1–2, describes our worth and responsibility as human beings. Think about what this psalm means for us as modern believers. Notice the first and last verses of the psalm; God is the real focus here.

Meditate on the description of God in Psalm 104:1–9 and notice how the psalmist responds to God in verses 33–35. The psalms often use rich word pictures to communicate truth.

How did the author paint a picture using word pictures?

Notice how the words of John 1:1–3, which speak of Jesus as the Word, echo Genesis 1:1.

Read Genesis 1:1 again in light of John 1:1–3 and take a moment to worship Jesus as the Creator of all that is.



SCENE 2: THE FALL: REJECTING GOD'S VISION FOR LIFE

DAY 3 Genesis 3–5

Watch for the patterns of human sin depicted in Genesis 3–4:

- Temptation to question God's Word: "Did God really say ... ?" (3:1).
- The false promise of desire
- The experience of shame and consequences of sin

Also notice the attempt to blame others for sin, the refusal to take responsibility for sinful actions. Finally, notice that in chapter 4 the problem was not just with Cain's offering but with Cain himself; this is a key to understanding the story.

How do these stories reflect your own battle with temptation?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part I: write *Cain* on line 1 and *Abel* on line 2 in act 1, scene 2.



SCENE 3: THE FLOOD: GOD JUDGES AND MAKES A COVENANT TO PRESERVE LIFE

DAY 4 Genesis 6–7

Watch for details as you read today. Also keep the big picture in mind: the pervasiveness of sin and its devastating consequences. Notice what we learn about God in the first eight verses of Genesis 6, keeping in mind that He is the main actor in the story. Watch for expressions of God's grace and His desire to preserve life in the midst of judgment. Also notice what we learn about Noah as the story continues: he was a righteous man and walked with God. Noah's responses called for a great deal of trust in God in the face of cataclysmic events, yet at times it is difficult for us to trust God in minor events of everyday life. Perhaps Noah's walk with God was the key.

How might you express your trust in God today and learn to walk with God every day?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part I: write *Noah* on line I in act I, scene 3.

DAY 5 Genesis 8–9; Psalm 12

Read Genesis 8:15–9:7, discerning how these verses echo the first three chapters of Genesis.

Why might the author have included these echoes?

Now read chapter 9 and notice the differences from Genesis 1–3.

How do these differences develop the overall story of Genesis?

A covenant with God is often at the heart of the story of the Old Testament. A covenant is basically an agreement between two parties. God established a covenant with the Jewish people, first through Abraham, and then renewed it with various leaders throughout the Old Testament. The covenant stated that if the people kept God's law, He would be their God, and they would be His people.

What role does the covenant play in Genesis 9?

Reflect especially on verse 5 of Psalm 12. Worship God as One who rises up to help those burdened by evil people, providing a safe place for them. If you are being hurt by wickedness, cry out to God for help even as you worship.

DAY 6 Genesis 10–11

Genealogies in the Bible strike some readers as uninteresting. However, these are part of God's Word, and we can learn from them. Among other things, the genealogies give us a sense of the passing of time, moving the story along. We also get a picture of the connectedness of people and events in the Bible's narrative. This is not a patchwork of loosely connected stories but one story God is writing on the world. Meditate on the contrasts you find in Genesis 11:1-9. Now read the passage in light of Acts 2:1-21, noticing both the contrasts and the parallels with that passage. One problem reflected in Genesis 11 is that these people had an arrogant disregard for God's mandate to "fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1). Think about how that mandate was ultimately fulfilled through the church in Acts as it advanced the kingdom of God in the world.

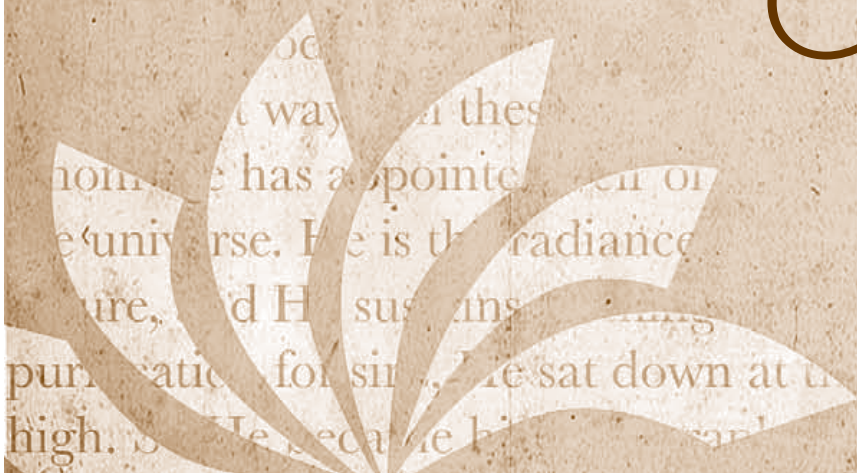
How are you called to participate in God's mandate to "fill the earth" by sharing the good news with others?

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List several big stories of the Old Testament that are often taught to children.
2. Describe a time you began to watch a movie in the middle. How did it affect the way you understood the plot? How might a lack of information about the beginning of God's story affect how we understand Scripture?
3. List all God created in the six days of creation. What does that account reveal about God's character? How should that revelation affect the way we live each day?
4. Read Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7. How is God's authority acknowledged and rejected in these events? Why did God bring judgment on Adam and Eve?
5. How does North American culture try to convince us that we have no judge? How do we think and act as if we were our own judges?
6. How did God show both judgment and compassion to Adam and Eve?
7. How do our need for redemption and God's compassion toward His people through Adam and Eve's story set the stage for God's acts throughout history?
8. Why is God's plan to redeem humanity the only one that has power to work?

ACT 2

God's Covenant People



inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did He ever
“You are My Son; today I have become Your Father,” or again, “I will
be His Father, and He will be My Son?” When He again brings His
born into the world, He says: “And all God’s angels must worship Him

WEEK 2

It would be hard to overstate the importance of this moment in biblical history. This week's readings take us halfway through act 2, scene 1 in the story of the Bible. This scene introduces Abraham as the father of the Jewish people and the patriarch with whom God made a foundational agreement (covenant). In the Old Testament stories, covenant is often at the heart of what is going on. Notice how God advanced and developed the covenant through Abraham's son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, and how God challenged each man's faith through moments of crisis that defined who he would be as God's representative. As you read, also notice the prominent role God played in the developing story. He was the main actor, moving the story along according to His grand design.



SCENE 1: THE PEOPLE: GOD CALLS A COVENANT PEOPLE

DAY 1 Genesis 12–13

Genesis 12 tells the story of God's calling Abram (whose name would eventually be changed to Abraham). Abram was born during a violent time in which nations constantly fought with their enemies. The aspects of God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 seem very countercultural for that time: God's people would be a blessing to other people groups!

How might this promise lay a foundation for the biblical emphasis on the way God's people should treat their enemies, a theme developed in both the Old and New Testaments?

Whom might you bless today? How will you do so?

Notice the movement from place to place and the importance of geography. Abram's relocation lays a foundation for the importance of the land of Canaan in the Bible's story. Look at a map in your Bible or in a Bible dictionary to trace Abram's journey.

DAY 2 Genesis 14–16

Genesis 14 recounts the rescue of Lot and the blessing given to Abram by Melchizedek. Notice that when the covenant with Abram was established in chapter 15, this encounter with God placed a greater emphasis on Abram's children and faith than we saw in chapter 12. Yet the story of the birth of Ishmael in chapter 16 showed the results of a lack of trust in God when Abram faced a delay in God's fulfillment of His promise. Rather than affirming

polygamy and the sexual use of concubines, God subverted these institutions in the Book of Genesis, showing that they are not the divine pattern. Nevertheless, God was gracious to Hagar and Ishmael, and He worked through the cultural patterns of the Ancient Near East.

With what delay are you presently trusting God?

Worship God for His grace as you struggle to trust Him with your wait.

DAY 3 Genesis 17–19

In Genesis 17 God reiterated the covenant, changing Abram's name to Abraham, meaning *father of a multitude*, and giving him the sign of circumcision. Genesis 18:19 emphasizes that God would fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham as Abraham's children lived out God's commands (see Gen. 12:1-3). Meditate on the fact that today God also uses circumcision as a sign of covenant (see Rom. 2:28-29), and God uses our obedience to His commands to fulfill certain promises to us today. In other words, God blesses us as we live according to His ways.

Is there any situation in your life now for which you are requesting God's blessings although you are not living according to His ways?

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 presents a clear picture of God's judgment on sin, while His rescue of Lot depicts God's compassion and desire to rescue.

Do you grasp the seriousness of sin? What evidence supports your answer?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part I: write *Abraham* on line 1 in act 2, scene 1.

DAY 4 Genesis 20–23

One subplot in the Book of Genesis is the choosing of the younger son instead of the older. In the Ancient Near East honoring the rights of the firstborn son was a dominant cultural practice. In Genesis God subverted this aspect of the culture by consistently blessing the younger son. God traced His covenant promise through Isaac instead of Ishmael because Isaac was the son of God's promise; Ishmael, on the other hand, was the product of human ingenuity. Notice the expressions of faith in God that are found in Genesis 22:3-10.

With what sacrifice are you currently being asked to trust God?

How does this part of the story of the Bible underscore God as the hero?

What details of the story seem most significant to you?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part 1: write *Isaac* on line 2 in act 2, scene 1.

DAY 5 Genesis 24–26

A new character enters the story today: Rebekah, who would become Isaac’s wife. Chapter 24 presents a beautiful story of God’s providence. Notice that the story of Rebekah focuses on God’s sure guidance and Rebekah’s willingness to follow God’s lead. This was a significant moment in the development of God’s people. At the end of chapter 25, Esau sold Jacob his birthright, which was the right of the firstborn son to a double portion of the inheritance from the father. Consider what this tells us about Esau (see Heb. 12:14-17): he was oriented to physical wants, undervaluing spiritual realities. Perhaps this is the reason God planned for His people to come through Jacob.

How might you demonstrate that you value the truly important things or people in your life?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part 1: write *Jacob* on line 3 in act 2, scene 1.

DAY 6 Genesis 27–29

Biblical families sometimes provide prime examples of dysfunctionality, showing us that God works with and through very imperfect people and their imperfect cultures. Read Genesis 27:5-13, about Rebekah’s role in Jacob’s theft of Esau’s blessing, in light of the broader context of today’s reading (especially Gen. 25:19-27).

How does the context help you understand Rebekah’s actions?

Take a moment to praise God for your family, warts and all, and to pray that God will work in and through you as a family in spite of your weaknesses and problems.

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Abraham took a risk to obey God. Discuss a situation in which you were forced to make an important decision without much information. How did you feel trying to make this decision? How did you feel about the final decision?
2. Read Genesis 12:1-9. How did God's call disrupt Abram's life? What securities did Abram leave behind? How did God's call lead Abram to fully rely on God?
3. Why is relying on God difficult for us? Why is it scary?
4. How do we ignore God's call on our lives when we claim not to have enough information? What things or people are we not willing to leave in order to obey God?
5. Which areas of life are the most difficult in which to obey God? How does our obedience testify to our relationship with Him?
6. What was God's purpose in blessing Abram and calling this nation to Himself as His chosen people? How is God's heart for the nations revealed in this covenant?
7. Read Genesis 15:1-6. How did Abram respond to this covenant reminder?
8. Summarize the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. How did God provide for Abraham? How did God later provide a sacrifice for us?
9. Look at God's covenant promises to Isaac in Genesis 26:23-25 and to Jacob in Genesis 28:10-17. How do you see God continuing to fulfill the covenant promise that He first made to Abraham?

WEEK 3

This week we will cover the last half of act 2, scene 1 in the biblical story, taking us through the remainder of Jacob's story and focusing especially on the story of Joseph's travails and triumphs in Egypt. This week look for recurring themes in the narratives about Jacob and Joseph. We have seen that Jacob's life was marked by deception. Yet notice the great integrity of Joseph's life; in his integrity he confronted and forgave the lack of it in his own brothers. Finally, this story is one of deliverance (from famine), but it also sets up the story of the great deliverance, the exodus, by moving Jacob's family to Egypt.

DAY 1 Genesis 30–33

Notice the progression of the story in today's reading.

1. In Genesis 30 both the resources and the sons of Jacob multiplied; he became rich in sons and material wealth.
2. Jacob then separated from Laban and moved his family back toward the land promised by God.
3. A crisis arose. Genesis 32:24–32 is a difficult passage, but we have clues about what was going on. Remember to watch for details when reading Old Testament stories. Jacob's name, the name of the tributary he crossed (Jabbok; see v. 22), and the word *wrestle* in Hebrew all sound very similar, so this was obviously a significant crossroads moment in Jacob's life. Jacob's wrestling with the angelic being, who was there representing God, had to do with who Jacob would be in the future; notice the change of his name to Israel, which means *God strives*. He had lived as a deceiver but was humbled here by the striking of his hip; he was blessed in this moment of struggle. Read this story as a turning point in Jacob's life and experience with God.

What does this passage teach you about a relationship with God and how blessing often comes from struggle?

DAY 2 Genesis 34–37

As you read the narratives in today's chapters, notice several dynamics. In the story of the rape of Dinah, watch for the motives of the various characters and how the craftiness of Jacob's sons defeated the craftiness of the local inhabitants of the area. The sons of Jacob took after their father, whose name means *deceiver*. Remember that covenant often lies at the heart of Old Testament stories. Genesis 35 is built around the renewal of the covenant with

Jacob and the confirmation of his new name, Israel. He was to chart a new course in life. The family dynamics in Genesis 37 echo earlier dynamics seen in Genesis. A father's loving one child more than his other children led to problems. Yet God worked through even the dysfunctionality of this family. Think about the fact that God uses less-than-perfect people and less-than-perfect families to accomplish His purposes. He can use you and your family if you will yield to Him.

How might God want to use you and your family?

DAY 3 Genesis 38–40

The story of Genesis 38 shows that the Israelites were beginning to assimilate the practices of the people of Canaan. This explains why God sent them down to Egypt, where their identity was maintained and refined. The practice depicted here is the law of levirate marriage (see Deut. 25:5-10), by which the brother or close relative of a childless husband who died would marry the dead brother's widow and have children with her. The story underlines that Judah was beginning to incorporate patterns of behavior into his life that were destructive and unrighteous.

Look for several statements about Joseph that are repeated in Genesis 39. They will tip you off to main themes in Joseph's story.

How can Joseph serve as an example to you today?

TIMELINE

Old Testament Timeline, Part 1: write *Joseph* on line 4 in act 2, scene 1.

DAY 4 Genesis 41–43

A dominant theme in the story of Joseph is the sovereignty of God as He orchestrates events in the lives of individuals and nations. He is the main actor or hero in these stories. Watch for key verses that emphasize this theme.

Also notice the emphasis on justice in these chapters. Joseph's brothers saw their treatment by this administrator of Egypt as an expression of God's judgment. Ironically, it was really an expression of God's grace as He prepared a way to preserve their lives.

Finally, identify the temporal setting of this section of Genesis—the time when the events took place.

Why might God have waited until this point to exalt Joseph?

How might God's purpose in Joseph's waiting relate to God's timing of events in your life?

Think about the fact that timing is of the Lord. God works out the timing of His work in the lives of His people.

DAY 5 Genesis 44–46

Today the story comes to a dramatic climax.

What elements of tension are built into the story?

How is the tension resolved?

We also see in this passage the grand means of God's fulfilling His promises to His people. Jacob and his whole family were preserved by the move to Egypt, and Joseph paved the way. As you read this section, look for various expressions of God's grace. Worship God today as a God of great grace for you.

DAY 6 Genesis 47–50

Because the Lord worked through Joseph on behalf of Egypt, the powers of the world (Pharaoh in Egypt) worked on behalf of God's people. Notice that Joseph worked as a force of blessing all the way to the end of the Book of Genesis.

Another key theme in Genesis is the blessing of children as a father was about to die. Notice ways Jacob's blessing of Joseph's children (see Gen. 48:13–20) was both similar to and different from Isaac's blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27.

How might you bless people around you today?