

Getting to know your Bible – Part 2

Getting To Know Your Bible

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Tonight, I would encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew chapter 8. Now, I don't want to cause any type of confusion. You may be thinking, hold on, I thought we're gonna study a portion of the Old Testament tonight, why are we in Matthew chapter 8? I'll explain that in just a moment, but tonight before we dig into God's word we are about to venture on a study of a section or a portion of the Bible that has caused much discussion, much debate, and much division. Now I realize all of the Bible causes that in people's life but particularly when we talk about the first five books of the Bible, and even more so what we know as the book of Genesis, it causes a whole lot of those concerns in our lives. So tonight, before we address the subject matter, let's pray that the Lord would be as he promises, not the author of confusion in our life.

Lord Jesus, your word says that you're not the author of confusion. Lord, tonight we're going to address an area of text of your word that has caused much confusion throughout time, not because you caused it, but because sinful man has. God, I pray that you would give us clarity, and I pray that you would give us a focus upon your word that sees your word and hears your word as written by you. May you take all of the distractions, may you take all of the secondary and tertiary opinions and somehow just remove them from our hearts and mind. It is in the name of Jesus Christ. We pray. Amen.

Tonight, if you were not with us last Sunday night, let me kind of give you a big picture of where we're on Sunday evenings at least this calendar year. I'm sure many of you are aware that there is a challenge that we've kind of laid forth this year for us as a church body to individually place one of the chapters of God's word in our heart, but collectively to take all 1,189 chapters of God's word and as a family of faith to have all of that placed within our hearts. And by the way, I realize that it's 1,189 chapters in the Bible but if you break up Psalm 119 in its 22 respective sections, you actually have 1,210, okay?

Now let me give you an update as of a few moments ago, of those 1,210 chapters, as of this moment, 904 of them have been reserved. Our original plan was to have the totality of scripture reserved by Easter. I think we may make it by President's Day. But we're grateful and we're excited about that and as I'll speak to you later, if you're not a part of it, we wanna encourage you to do so. When it comes to placing God's word in our heart, I cannot think of any negative reason of why you would not want to do so. Okay? It's just hard. It's difficult. But difficult things are easier when we do it together.

That being said, on Sunday evenings this year, one of the things I want to do is I'm doing somewhat of a collective study in these first couple of months of getting to know your Bible and this is so apropos, because I know this isn't going to shock you, but when we opened up the portal for people to reserve their respective chapters, all the beloved chapters went very quickly. The New Testament's already been reserved. But you know what section has hardly been touched? One of the ones we're going to talk about tonight. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. I mean, what good Baptist wants to memorize that, right? Numbers and Deuteronomy. One of the things we're going to discover tonight is this, though, all of the foundation of our New Testament faith is rooted in these books and some of the most famous stories in all the Bible are actually within the pages of this, and so this isn't about talking you into reserving one of the tough chapters, one of the things I want us to realize is one of the traps we fall into as believers in Jesus Christ is we typically start our Bible study in Matthew and end in Revelation. Oftentimes we don't go back into the Old Testament and see the foundation, the roots of our faith, and I want us to become more familiar with the scripture as a whole. And then once we kind of do this somewhat of a survey, then I want to address the ten verses in the Bible that are the most misinterpreted and the reason they're misinterpreted is because we take them out of their context, okay?

And so that kind of gives you a lay of the land for what we know as Sunday evenings this year but tonight, even though we're studying what we know as the Torah, the law, the first five books of the Old Testament, I wanna begin in Matthew chapter 8. As I mentioned, this is a very discussed, divisive, debated portion of the Bible, particularly Genesis 1 through 11, we'll address that in just a moment. However, in Matthew chapter 8, there is a leper that Jesus touches and heals and I want you to hear, I'm gonna put it in context, I'm gonna begin in verse 1, I want you to hear what Jesus says.

Now, just in case you need a little clarification, verse 4, you'll notice that it's in red letters. These are the words of Jesus, okay? So begin verse 1,

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony

Now, you may not understand the gravity or the weight of verse 4, but when it comes to the first five books of the Bible, Jesus didn't discuss it, Jesus didn't debate it, and he wasn't divided about it. He never questioned whom the instrument was that God used to give us what we know as these first five books of the Bible, and the reason that's important is if you do any type of study regarding this section of scripture, there's an entire study, there's an entire genre just questioning can we trust the scripture? Is it really from Moses? Did God really? And there's all that discussion.

So tonight, obviously, it's going to be on the screen, somewhat of a small print. We've given you an outline here in person. I want to walk through some pretty important issues regarding the first five books of the Old Testament. Then I want to look at each one of them in just a snapshot of not just the stories they contain, but the teachings that are there within. And then I want to conclude with kind of a theological framework. What's the connection? What's the bridge between what we know as the first five books of the Bible and a tomb empty, believing in Jesus faith of today.

Again, I've somewhat addressed what we know as the authorship. The book 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 21 says that those individuals whom the Lord used, particularly in the Old Testament, but for the totality of scripture, that the Holy Spirit spoke unto them. Now, I know and you know, we all know, that when you read Genesis chapter 1, Moses was not there to observe it. It's kind of hard to observe something when humanity hadn't even been created yet, right? And that's one of the struggles that people have. He wasn't there when Noah built the boat. He wasn't there at the Tower of Babel. He wasn't there for any of those things, but the Holy Spirit was and the Holy Spirit spoke unto him what had occurred and had him record it for humanity. And so again, when we talk about the authorship and we could really get into the academic weeds tonight, there's theories out there that there were four different authors of the book of Genesis and we could get into all that mess, but the reason we're not going to is because Jesus didn't. If Jesus didn't waste his time with it, then why would we waste ours? Jesus simply just said, "Guess what, guys? Moses wrote it. Deal with it." I can work with that.

That's the authorship. Now modern-day relevance The first five books of the Old Testament are referred to as, quote, the law by Jesus, by Paul, as well as other Testament writers. The reason this is important is because this is the term that Moses uses to describe those first five books, and it's the term that the New Testament authors, whom the Holy Spirit inspired, also used for this. So we have a consistency here and one of the things I want to remind you is in the New Testament, when it says that he got up and he, quote, preached from or he read from the Scriptures, it was referring to the Old Testament. Understand, when Jesus was in the synagogue, he opened up the Old Testament. When Paul went in and preached the scriptures, they were speaking of the Old Testament. And what we know as the first five books of the Bible are known as, quote, the Law, the Torah, the Pentateuch, etc.

What's the historical framework? This is a scope beyond none other. If you think about Genesis through Deuteronomy, it takes us from the beginning, and by the way, Genesis begins, the Bible begins, unlike any other religious book. You know that every other book that claims religious favor and/or spiritual fervor, every one of them begins in the middle of the story. Only the Bible has the audacity to say, "In the beginning. In the beginning God." And so it begins in the beginning and it ends in Deuteronomy 34 with what we know as the death of Moses, okay? Now the reason this is critical on so many different levels is if we're just going to take a literal chronological approach to these first five books of the Bible, I know there's a whole other study in all that, but just dealing with humanity and genealogies, if you go back in the Old Testament a strict genealogical

study of the characters mentioned in the Bible and take you back to Adam and Eve in the garden about 6,000 years ago, 4000 BC. Just using strict chronology of the biblical record. So roughly 4000 BC, let's just work with genealogy. Well, what we know as the death of Moses was anywhere from 1500 to 1200 BC. In other words, these first five books of the Bible, they encompass 2,500 years. Now let's put that in perspective. Did you know that the gospel of Luke, half of Luke, contains the story of one week of the life of Jesus, the Passion Week. And so when you get to the New Testament, the book of Acts, that's 30 years but these first five books contain 2,500 years.

So let's look to the purpose and I think this is critical for our study tonight. When you read this portion of the Bible, when you study it, when you memorize it, it points us to Jesus. It is not encouraging us to quote, look back for a proper process. Now let me explain what that means. There is, and by the way, I'm not trying to be disparaging tonight. I'm not trying to proverbially run the bus over, but there is a vibrant movement that is happening in our culture today, particularly in the Western world, we collectively call it the Hebrew Roots Movement. What that basically says is you're a New Testament Christian, but we express our faith as if we were living in Old Testament times. All the Hebrew Roots movement is, is just a new version of Seventh Day Adventism. That's all it is. And one of the things they will say is, well, you can't truly understand Christianity unless you celebrate the feasts. You can't truly understand Christianity unless you understand what the Passover is and all that. Now, I'm all for learning, I'm all for studying, I'm all for applying, but allow me tonight to read you some of the scriptures that are contrary to.

In the book Leviticus chapter 21 verse 17 through 20, it gives us the qualifications for what a priest is supposed to be. You know what's interesting about that? Jesus Christ is the only one who ever met the qualifications. So if we're going to go back and we're going to live our life according to the Levitical law, the problem is none of us can actually do it. That's why we need Jesus. And so what we know is Leviticus is pointing us to the true priest, not a substandard human version of it.

Leviticus 17 is the famous dietary laws. By the way, I do not find it coincidental at all that nobody has reserved that chapter yet. But nonetheless, in Leviticus chapter 17, it's all the animals that we're supposed to consume, not consume, all the different ways and manners of preparing food. Again, in today's context, you understand if you're going to live by a strict Levitical law when it comes to the cleanliness of food, you're never going to eat out again. It's not going to happen. But what was happening here? It was pointing us to the cleanliness that it can only come through Christ. And so whether it's the priesthood of Christ, whether it's the cleanliness of Christ, the purpose of these first five books is not to get us back in them, but to take us past them in Christ.

In conclusion, Romans 8 says that Jesus has made me free from sin and death. He's made me free from this. And then in Hebrews 1, it says that the law is a foreshadowing of things to come. In other words, when we look at these first five books of your Bible, they are not a guide to the way that we should revisit living life, they are ultimately fulfilled in

the person of Christ, and they serve for us as an instruction manual of who Christ desires himself to be in our lives, okay? So again not a return to but a pointing for.

So let's walk through the respective five books We could spend an hour plus on each and every one of them. Genesis. Well, I took an entire seminary course on the book of Genesis chapter 1 through 11. We spent 32 hours studying those 11 chapters. We're about to do it in 3.2 minutes. Hang on. Here we go. The book of Genesis is the story of origins and you think about it, everything that you are aware of, everything that exists, everything that can be seen, heard, touched, felt, experienced, does not or is not if it were not for the book of Genesis. In fact, even though there is great debate in Genesis chapter 1 about the chronology, the timeframe, the process by which God brought everything to existence, one of the things that you will notice is in every position of creation theology, whether one believes in creation evolution or one believes in a strict 6,000 year time period or somewhere in between, all of them combined, guess what they all agree on? That God initiated it. Nothing exists apart from him. Nothing. Nothing in the human realm, nothing in the animal kingdom, nothing in the agricultural world. There is nothing that is apart from him. In fact, in the book of Job chapter 38 verse 7, it says the angelic beings, the sons of God, they celebrated when the Lord did this. They celebrated. So nothing exists apart from God.

Secondly, not only does everything exist by God, but it contains the fact that everything is tainted by our sin. God may have created and originated it, but we're the ones that messed it up. We're the ones that tainted it. In fact, you go back into Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3, it makes it very clear that God gave us instructions of how to live life, how to walk in the Garden of Eden, how to relate to him, and then in chapter 3, the serpent shows up and says, "Yea hath God said?" Did God really mean what he's saying and did he really say what he meant? And as you study Genesis chapter 3, you'll discover that humanity fell into the classic satanic trap, surely we know how to do things better than God does.

Now that's a very rough Southern estimation of Genesis 3, but it's very accurate as well and we fall into the same trap today. In fact, I would say there's not a single temptation or sinful mannerism that anybody falls into that you cannot go to Genesis 3 and discover how you got into it and how you talked yourself into it. Every single time. In fact, I would claim, now, please hear me, I believe that all 66 books of the Bible are inspired by God. I believe they're preserved by God. But if we only had Genesis chapter 1 through 11, we'd be good because we've got everything we need to know. We've got how it all started, how it all messed up, and how God's going to fix it. Right? We've got it all. That being said, once you get past chapter 11, and most of the discussion, the debate about Genesis is in the first 11 chapters for obvious reasons, here's what we discover, the root of the Israelite lineage and the nation that's formed when Abraham was called by God. If you begin to study kind of the taintedness of sin in the book of Genesis, obviously it begins in the Garden of Eden in chapter 3. By the time you get to chapter 4, you have a brother whack another brother. When you have three sons in your house, that's the word you use for killing. They whacked him, okay? By the time you get to chapter 6, humanity, every deed and every thought is wicked. By the time you get off the boat,

Noah, who found grace in the eyes of God, one of the first things he does is plants a vineyard and he gets drunk, he gets naked. By the time you get to chapter 11, I told you it was kind of seedy, did I not? By the time you get to chapter 11, God says, "All right, enough's enough. Go your separate ways." So what do we do? "Nah, we're not gonna go our separate ways. We're gonna come together." You realize that there is a pattern and it's not working. We're not getting the hint. God floods the earth, we still don't understand it. God dismisses us, we don't understand it.

So it is in chapter 12 where a man by the name of Abram, who would later become Abraham, was called by God by faith to go to a place he had never seen before, and he and his wife, who were well beyond the natural childbearing years, would give birth to a miracle, a son by the name of Isaac. His name does and always means laughter. Why does it mean laughter? Because they laughed at the thought that somehow, some way a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman could have birth. By the way, just for the sake of humor, that means some of y'all still got a chance. God's still God, is he not? Y'all give me an ugly look tonight. But nonetheless, it is in the book of Genesis that the ancestors and the lineage of Jesus Christ is originated. Again, do you see how critical Genesis is to us? Everything that we know, everything that we are familiar with and the lineage and what we know is the chronologicalness of Jesus Christ is established.

By the time we get to the book of Exodus, it's the story of redemption. It is the story of God redeeming us. Now that word redemption is one of those words that oftentimes in our culture we somewhat skew so to speak, but to redeem is to buy back. It is to purchase on behalf of, and it is to place in a position that one is not worthy of. You know the story of Exodus I'm sure very well. The Israelites found themselves enslaved. For what we typically say 400 years, approximately, the Israelites were under the tutelage of whom we know as the Pharaohs. Their work was not compensated, their lives were made miserable, until the day where Moses found himself on the backside of nowhere, chapter 3, and God comes to him in a bush that is burning, but it is not consumed and he basically tells him to go unto Pharaoh and proclaim, "Let my people go." It's a story we know well. It's the story of the famous plagues. It's the story of God's redemption. It's the story of God releasing them, not only out of Egypt, but miraculously through the Red Sea.

Now, as they make their way through the Red Sea, they will find themselves on the other side of what we know as the wilderness. We'll get to that in just a moment. But if you think about it, the whole story of Exodus is a story of God's grace and redemption. Moses, even though he grew up in Pharaoh's house, he was not, quote, from our perspective, qualified to be used by God. Remember, he killed the Egyptian and then ran away. For 40 years he avoided incarceration. And then when God tells him, "Hey, I want you to be used by me," he says, "Not only have you not looked at my past, you haven't heard me preach. I got a really bad stammer and stutter here. This isn't going to work real well." And basically, in Exodus, what we discover is this, God uses people that people give up on. Moses from a human perspective would not have made it past the first round of interviews and God said, "That's my only choice. That's the one I'm gonna use." By the way, I picked on you because of Abram and Sarah. Let me remind you that when Moses fled to the wilderness, he was 40 years of age. When God called him to deliver the

Israelites, he was 80 years of age and he was faithful until he was 119. I'm telling you, that 120th year, it'll get you every single time.

But nonetheless, It portrays the people of God being led by Moses out of captivity. It also contains the giving and the explanation of what we know as the famous Ten Commandments. Now I mentioned the book of Genesis is a book of origins, but what's fascinating is historically speaking all of man-made laws and regulations can be traced historically back to these famous two tablets. So how humanity decides to govern themselves is in some way of a construct of these famous Ten Commandments. You walk your way through the rest of Exodus and one of the reasons among many that so many people have said, you know, that's just not the chapter I'm interested in memorizing is because it gives us a very, very detailed account of the building of the tabernacle. How many cubits? What kinds of skins? And I know you're thinking to yourself, how is this profitable? You know what you discover about the book of Exodus? God did not have them build these structures. He did not have them construct the tabernacle just because he wanted them to go on a rabbit's chase to find these different things. Everything was strategic. Everything was purposeful. And essentially, here's what God said, "It may not make sense to you, but if you'll just do it the way I tell you to, it's all gonna work out." Does it make sense to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go"? Does it half in the water and see it part? Does it make sense to say, "Well, you know what? We gotta have badger skins and gopher skins, and they gotta be blue and purple"? Doesn't make any sense but it made sense to God. And so in the story and what we know as the book of Exodus, it's a story for redemption, but it's also a picture for us of what happens when we do live life according to how God has commanded us.

Now we get Leviticus, our Baptist favorite book of the Bible. By the way, the book of Leviticus is a fascinating read and here's why, you find out every conceivable way that humanity can rebel against God. Now think about the Ten Commandments. Now, by the way, I'm not just singling out because, but there's a reason for this. Of those ten commandments, one of those commandments, it says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." One, right? Did you know that Leviticus chapters 18 and 19 tells you every way you can do that? You know why it does it? Because we always have this way of saying, "God, is that really the way? Is that really the person? Is that really the means?" If you want to get flush in the face and get embarrassed, read Leviticus 18 out loud. God tells it all as they say. The book of Leviticus is a book that contains the proper manner of worship in the Old Testament. Chapter 11 verse 44, you know what it says? "God is holy therefore be ye holy." The whole reason for all these quote rules, regulations and you read this thing going, seriously why? Because at the end of the day all God desires is that we be holy, that we be distinct, that we be set apart.

Secondly, it's a guidebook of how to live under the covenant established by God at Sinai. Amazing thing about the Book of Leviticus, yes, from our perspective, is it somewhat confounding, yes. But historically speaking, when the Israelites lived their life according to the Book of Leviticus, God blessed them. When they didn't, he didn't. It's real simple. It's a simple matter of deed and consequence. And so there was a reason. In fact, one of the things he said, it's picked up in the book of Deuteronomy as well, one of the things he

said was, "The reason I'm doing this is so that sin will not take over the land." I realize Jesus has been raised from the grave. I realize it. I realize that we are born again Christians, but I also would tell you that generally speaking, if we would live our lives according to the book of Leviticus, you might be shocked how much God will bless your life because it basically generally tells you the decisions you should make, the manner you should do so, and the way you should live life, again, under God's direction.

Now the Book of Numbers, Baptist's second favorite book. You'll notice on the outline, I put in quotes, the wilderness. The Book of Numbers has its respective title because of a bunch of pig-eating Gentiles, okay? We named it the Book of Numbers because if you've read the Book of Numbers, it's got a lot of numbers in it, a lot of genealogies, a lot of respective counts. But it begins, this is the first two words hyphenated in Hebrew, *de midbar*. The book actually begins with this statement, "In the wilderness." Can I tell you why the Book of Numbers should be on your top reading and memorization list? It is the story of how God provided for his people for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness. I don't know about you, but I've had some wilderness experiences in life. Anytime I tend to go through one personally, I go to the Book of Numbers because we discover that God is always faithful in spite of our circumstances, environment, consequences, etc.

The Book of Numbers, whether you believe it or not, has some of the most exciting stories in all of the Bible. The Book of Numbers contains the story of a donkey who can talk. Remember that famous story? That's in the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers has a story where the people of Korah were rebelling against God through the person of Moses, and so just like "Raiders of the Lost Ark," the ground opens up and 14,000 people fall to their death. I mean, it's good stuff. You read the Book of Numbers, you will discover it is an action-packed, quote, biblical Indiana Jones story. But most of us never read it because it's just a bunch of names and numbers. Once you get past the genealogies, there is some exciting, and I say this in a healthy, there's some crazy stuff in Numbers. It's a lot of fun when you discover how God moved in the wilderness for 40 years. They never went without a meal. They always had food to eat. Their shoes and their clothes did not wear out, nor did they grow old. God provided every step of the way.

The Book of Deuteronomy, *deutero* meaning second, it's the second telling of what we know is the story of the Exodus. It looks back on the past and it looks ahead. Deuteronomy chapter 1 verse 39, the very first chapter of Deuteronomy it says this, that those who knew the difference between good and evil would perish in the wilderness. Now by the way, you understand that that journey from the Red Sea to the Promised Land was designed to be eleven days. Eleven days. An eleven day journey that ended up taking forty years. Why? Because they began to grumble, mumble, whine, gripe and moan. Not only did they whine and moan, but they also lied about it as well. When Moses confronted them and said, "Why do you have such a bad attitude?" They said, "Do you not remember in Egypt, we had three meals a day to eat?" No, they didn't. Isn't it funny that when you start looking back on your past, you tend to accentuate the good and diminish the bad? And that's exactly what happened. And so as they began to gripe and question what God was doing, "Did you bring us here just so we would die in the

wilderness?" God said, "Fine. Those who are griping, whining, moaning and complaining, you're gonna die here and those who do not yet know the difference between good and evil, those that were young of age, stature and understanding, they will be the ones that enter what we know as the Promised Land."

And so the Book of Deuteronomy isn't just the second telling of the Exodus experience, it goes into more detail of the ultimate walking into what we know as the Promised Land. It contains instructions on how the Redeemer lived in a new Promised Land. And this is where we could have a lot of fun tonight if we wanted to, it possibly, now for those of you who know me well, allow me to use a Meyersism, could it be? Is it possible? Could it be that it describes a future Exodus? Now I mentioned at the beginning of tonight's study that one of the problems that people have in the first five books of the Bible is there's so much discussion and debate and division because they struggle with the content they're in. I placed on your outline here and I know it's on the screen, in Revelation chapter 12, you know any good Bible study is going to get us to Revelation, in Revelation chapter 12, there is an event that is described in a future sense of the people of God running from whom we know as the Antichrist for three and a half years and God supernaturally feeds them. Does that sound like an event in the first five books of the Bible to you? Absolutely it does. For three and a half years, the Bible says supernatural food, just like the manna that's described in the Book of Numbers throughout what we know as the Torah. There are some that say, is it possible? Why would God give us the story of Exodus and the story of Deuteronomy about the same event, yet they're written a little bit different? Is it possible that the Exodus account is the historical account of going to the Promised Land and the Deuteronomy account is the prophetic account of what it's going to look like in days ahead. If that is the case, if that is the case, did you know that the first five books of the Bible are all you need to know not just about days past but also days future? It's a prophetic context as well as just a historical one.

So at the end of the day, what is our, quote, theological takeaway? As a New Testament born-again believer in Jesus Christ, we look at all these constructs, we look at all the content here, what's our takeaway? First thing is this, that throughout all five of these books, the idea and the action of sin is treated in the light of the grace of God. Let me define for you, for those who do not know what the word grace means, grace is receiving what you do not deserve. Adam and Eve did not deserve a coat of skins to be safe on the backside of the garden. Noah did not deserve to get instructions on how to build that boat. Abram did not deserve to get the opportunity to go to a land that he knew not of. You do know if you study that historically Abram was a part of all that mess in Babel too, but somebody had to be willing and somebody had to be used. So the grace of God is all throughout. How many times have you heard people say, well, the Old Testament is law and the New Testament is grace? No, there's grace in the Old Testament. There's grace in the third chapter. When God took Adam and Eve and didn't squash them like a bug and gave them skins, that was grace in the Old Testament.

Secondly, because of the fall of man and other sinful encounters, God establishes a covenant with his people. Now when I make that statement, we typically go to Genesis chapter 12 in the call of Abram. I want to go back to Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis

chapter 3 verse 15, when giving the consequences to the serpent, here's what God says, "The seed of the woman will crush your head." Oftentimes we call it the very first gospel. Now the reason this is critical tonight is because most of us spend most of our time in the New Testament, but yet it is this part of the Bible that lays the foundation for why we need the New Testament and how God established a pattern for bringing the message to us.

Thirdly, this covenant contains an if-then clause. For those of you who have a history in computer programming, we might call it recursion. That being said, what do you mean an if-then, causal? Leviticus chapter 26, here's what God says, "If you do it, then I'll be your God and you'll be my people." Is that not what we find in the New Testament, if you believe, then you'll be saved? We see it all throughout the Bible. There's an if-then. We begin with this. What did God tell Adam when it comes to the trees of the garden? Basically, if you eat the wrong one, then death will occur. This has been God's pattern all throughout time and all throughout history. It began in the first five books. It works its way today. In essence, if the people of God do as God desires, then God will bless them. If they do not, he will not. This covenant was not established to be a curse or a hindrance, but rather an aid to holy living because God is a holy God. In addition, the need for a Redeemer is demonstrated by humanity's inability to uphold the law.

I want to conclude tonight's study with a story that is very near and dear to my heart. Some of you may have heard this in days past. Forgive me for repeating it. I promise the names and the context will be as they have been spoken earlier. When I was 18 years of age, I found myself on the campus of what is historically the largest Baptist college slash university in the world. In those days, boy, it sounds weird when I use the phrase in those days, I just sound antiquated. But in those days, if you were going to graduate from this institution, there were two classes that you had to take. I mean, even if you wanted to major in atheism, they don't offer it, you had to take Old Testament and you had to take New Testament. Now, as I understand it today, they've consolidated those courses into what they call the Christian scriptures. But nonetheless, even to today, you still have to take some form of, quote, Bible study to get a degree from there. So go back to when I was there, Old Testament, New Testament. Almost every single professor in every course did as I'm about to instruct you. It's obviously a study of the scriptures, but one of the things they did and I'm sure every student, please note my gift of sarcasm, was honest, is they would give you sections of the scriptures to read before the test. And I remember it. You had to indicate by checking off the box that you had read the text. Now again, it's kind of like our Project 1180. Now we're not gonna test you, we're just gonna trust you that you're telling us the truth.

Well, I had a young man that lived across the hall from me. He originated from the metropolis of El Paso, Texas. If you don't know where El Paso is, that's the Northern Providence of Western Mexico. But nonetheless, he was from El Paso. He was not from a Christian family. He did not spend any time upbringing in church. He came to a, quote, Baptist institution and did not even have a Bible. That was a problem because his first semester, he took Old Testament. And on a Friday afternoon, he came to me and said, "Jeff, I need a favor." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I need to borrow a Bible." I said,

"Great, friend, what would you need it for?" He said, "Well," he said, "I've got a test Monday in Old Testament, and I have to check the box that I've read the prescribed reading." I said, "Well, what's the prescribed reading?" He says, "I have to read Genesis through Judges." I said, "Brother, I hate to tell you, but that's all you're doing this weekend." And he said, "Is it that much?" I showed him, he's like, "Oh, that's gonna be a long weekend." Here was a young man who never went to church, had no concepts of faith, did not even have a Bible at a, quote, Baptist institution, borrowed one from a guy across the hall in the dorm.

Sunday night came, knocked on my door. He said, "Jeff, here's your Bible back." I said, "Friend, don't you have a test on the next...? Oh, okay," I said, "just keep it for the semester." And then I asked the question, "What'd you think?" Now, I had no idea what a loaded question that was. You know what he told me? He said, "Man, this is the best book I've ever read in my life." I said, "The best book you've ever read in your life?" He said, "Man," he said, "you got brothers killing people, you got people sleeping with people they're not supposed to sleep with." He said, "there's wars everywhere." He said, "This is better than any action movie I've ever seen." If you think about it, and you look at that last statement I put, humanity's inability to keep the law, you read those first five books of the Bible and it doesn't matter what your name is, it doesn't matter where you're from, nobody can get it right.

I Know what you're thinking. What's the rest of that story? That young man several years later came to an understanding of his sin problem and he asked Jesus to save him and last time I checked he was a youth pastor in a Baptist church. You know, I know it's not in the Bible, this statement, it's not how you start, it's how you finish, and that young man finished well. And the whole story of Jesus in his life started with what we study tonight. He read those first five books of the Bible and he saw humanity's inability to fix the sin problem. If he can get it, certainly we should as well.

Let's pray. Tonight with our heads about our eyes closed, as we come to our time of decision, I know it's Sunday evening. I know that tonight, as most Sunday nights, we call it the faithful few but maybe tonight, like my friend in college, there's never been a time where you've confessed Jesus as your Savior and asked him to save you. Tonight would be a great night to do so. The Bible says that today is the day of salvation. Or maybe tonight you say, you know what, I'm already a believer. In fact, I've been walking with the Lord for not just years, but for decades. Maybe tonight's one of those nights where we look back and we truly remember the foundation of the faith, our inability to get it right. I know one of the things that I've learned through time is the more we walk with Jesus, unfortunately, the more we think we got it figured out. Maybe tonight's one of those nights may not require a formal decision, but maybe it's one of those nights where we say, you know what, tonight was one of those watershed nights in my life where I recaptured my need for the Lord, for his grace. There's no amount of church attendance, there's no amount of giving, there's no amount of serving that's ever gonna fix it. If it were not for him, I'd be in a mess.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you, thank you, thank you that you didn't sugarcoat the story. Thank you that you just didn't tell us the highlights of the obedience but you allowed us to see, Lord, for a lack of better terms, the underbelly, the Garden of Eden, the flood, the Tower of Babel, Abraham, Moses, and all these individuals and stories that show that if it is not for your mercy and your grace, there is no hope. So tonight may we learn from and may we go forward. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.