

The Authority of Scripture

Foundational Bible Stories



© 2026 Africa Baptist Theological Education Network

All rights reserved worldwide. The Bible stories may be reproduced for educational purposes. No other part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a review or a scholarly journal.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2025. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Introduction	iv
Creation of the World	1
The Law and the Prophets.....	5
Instructions for the King	11
Joshua Succeeds Moses.....	15
The Book of the Law: Josiah	19
The Book of the Law: The Exiles and Nehemiah	25
Jesus, the Word.....	31
The Temptation of Jesus.....	35
They Consulted the Scriptures: Thessalonica and Berea	41
God-Breathed Authority.....	47

Introduction

People of the Book, or *People of the Bible*, has been an informal nickname for Baptists globally for centuries. This identity has shaped generations of Baptists who valued the authority of Scripture and sought to follow Jesus faithfully. Baptist theological education, literacy programs, reading rooms, and small community libraries have encouraged engagement with God's Word and reinforced this reputation.

Their identity as People of the Book reflects Baptists' strong commitment to knowing, teaching, and living by the whole counsel of Scripture. Their view of the authority of Scripture has protected Baptist congregations from preachers who often misuse isolated Scripture passages—especially for profit. Rather than only memorizing scattered power verses, Baptists have emphasized reading and understanding the entire biblical narrative.

Historically, the People of the Book have faced other significant challenges. Scripture translation into various languages was slow to develop. For centuries, Scripture access was limited to those who had formal education in European languages. However, much of the global population had not received formal education, or they preferred to learn through oral means, so they had no access to Scripture. Even those who had been educated often still learned best through oral communication. These linguistic and educational realities created an urgent need for Scripture engagement methods that honored oral cultures and made God's Word accessible to everyone.

Additionally, Baptists have faced teachings that do not align with God's Word. Across the majority world, traditional religions have flourished for millennia. Though diverse in expression, they are deeply rooted in local worldviews and cultural practices. These long-standing belief systems continue to shape how communities interpret spiritual power, blessing, suffering, and success.

In this generation, one of the most significant challenges comes from false teachers known as prosperity preachers. Beginning in the early 1970s, a developing threat emerged that slowly eroded the long-held reputation of Baptists as the People of the Book. As Dr. Matthews A. Ojo notes in *The Abandoned Gospel*, “a new form of Christianity emerged with the rise of Pentecostal and charismatic movements.”¹ Over time, this movement developed into what is now referred to as neo-Pentecostalism—

1 Matthews A. Ojo, et al., eds., *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Africa: AB316, 2021).

an expression of Christianity that is often syncretistic, incorporating animistic assumptions about power and spiritual causation and heavily shaped by the prosperity gospel and the word of faith movement.

Scripture consistently warns that false teachers will arise and that believers must remain vigilant (2 Pet 2:1–2; 2 Tim 4:3–4). In this critical time, an urgent question arises: How will this generation of Baptists choose to define itself? At such a crucial moment, it is essential to examine Scripture carefully and reaffirm the Baptist conviction that the Bible—fully inspired, inerrant, and authoritative—is the foundation for faith and practice.

The purpose of this set of Bible stories is to equip church leaders and the congregation to evaluate what Scripture testifies about itself. Will Baptist churches retain their identity as the People of the Book? Or will autonomous congregations drift toward the trends, culture, money, and glamor of neo-Pentecostal expressions and slowly abandon biblical foundations?

Dr. Randy Arnett has issued a sobering warning: “Unfortunately, many churches will embrace—consciously or unconsciously—the faith and practice of neo-Pentecostals. Unless biblically grounded, they will pentecostalize.”² His words emphasize the need for discernment, conviction, and renewed commitment to the authority of Scripture.

2 Randy Arnett, *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (Eldon, MO: CreateSpace, 2017), 2.

Creation of the World

Genesis 1:1–31; 2:2–3, 7–9, 15–25

In the beginning, there was God. He spoke, and when he did, he created the universe, the whole world, and everything in it. God spoke and made light and water. He spoke and made the dry ground and all kinds of plants and trees. God spoke and made the sun, the moon, and the stars. He spoke and made all kinds of fish, birds, and animals. God looked at all he had created and said, “It is good.”

And then, God made a special creation, man and woman. He patterned them after himself.

God formed a man’s body from the soil of the ground and breathed into him, and he began to live. Then God placed the man in a garden of fruit trees. In this garden were trees that produced delicious fruit. At the center of the garden were two trees—the tree that gave life and the tree that gave the understanding of good and evil. But God told the man, Adam, “You may eat any fruit in the garden except the fruit from the tree that gives the understanding of good and evil. If you eat this tree’s fruit, you will die.”

And God said, “It is not good for Man to be alone.” So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He took one of Adam’s ribs and made a woman from the rib and brought her to Adam. “At last!” Adam exclaimed. “She has flesh and bones like me!” Adam and his wife, Eve, were naked, but they were not ashamed.

God blessed them and told them, “Multiply and be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals.” Then God looked over all he had made, and said, “It is very good.” God had created the world and everything in it in six days.

The next day, the seventh day, God stopped working. God set apart one day of the week for himself because he had finished creating the world.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, Creation of the World. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: God spoke!

Group: And it happened!

Leader: God spoke!

Group: Light appeared!

Leader: God spoke!

Group: The world was formed!

Leader: God spoke!

Group: Plants and living creatures appeared!

Leader: God spoke!

Group: Man and woman were created!

Leader: And God saw all he had made.

Group: It was very good!

The Authority of Scripture

God created everything by the power of his voice, speaking the world into existence. From the very beginning, he demonstrated his authority through his word. The psalmist echoes this truth: “He spoke, and it happened. He commanded, and it appeared” (Ps 33:9 NCV).

Application

Today, some people teach that we can speak things into existence the same way God did. They claim that because we are made in God’s image, we can speak our hopes and desires into reality. This belief in the power of people’s words stands in stark contrast to the biblical story of creation. Only God has the authority to create and command reality.

Some people say things like, “We declare that no sickness will dominate our lives this new year,” or, “I declare and bind the spirit of poverty, and I declare financial favor over my family this year.” Others affirm, “I manifest that no weapon, no witchcraft, no spell formed against me will succeed.” But the common declaration, “I manifest,” is, at best, wishful thinking. Despite popular teaching, people cannot speak things into existence or manipulate events by the power of their minds.

Instead of approaching God in dependence and humility, these declarations are spoken in a commanding tone. Such prayers tell God what he must do rather than asking him in faith and submission. This shift in posture highlights a deeper problem: the practice of “decreeing and declaring” rests on an assumption of personal authority that Scripture does not grant.

As we look more deeply into the authority of Scripture, we observe a consistent theme: all authority is by God and from God alone, as revealed in his Word. Recognizing this distinction restores an attitude of humility and dependence, reminding us that our role is to pray in submission to God’s will, not to command outcomes as though they originated in our own authority.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

In many languages, “in the beginning” denotes a specific opening to a specific type of story. Be sure your introduction to this story indicates the beginning of a true, historical story. “In the beginning” suggests that there is an end. Therefore, the New Testament writers spoke of the end in terms of the beginning (i.e., “new heaven and new earth”).

Many previous attempts to reconstruct and retell the day-by-day creation structure of Genesis 1 in a natural, well-told story form have failed. We have chosen instead to highlight the fact that God spoke to create. The order of creation is maintained in this story without chronology words so that it is not necessary to retell the order of creation as it happened. For the purposes of this story, it is probably not necessary to communicate the chronology perfectly. However, look at the indigenous creation accounts from your culture before making a final decision.

God spoke, “and when he did, he created.” This is the way we have rendered the traditional translation, “And God said, ‘Let there be....’” The translation “let there be” seems to imply that God permitted something to happen rather than commanded it. However, when God spoke, he was not asking an agent to carry out his commands. Rather, he commanded the thing to come into being. Some translations have communicated this idea as something like (1) “God (spoke and) commanded light to appear,” or (2) “Light! Appear!”

Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that humans are created both male and female and that they are created in God’s image. Be sure that in your story, whether by the words or by the storytelling devices you use (pauses, emphasis, etc.), your audience recognizes this.¹

Bibliography

- Akande, Oyewole. “A Caution to Those Who Decree and Declare.” The Gospel Coalition Africa. <https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-caution-to-those-who-decree-and-declare/>.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Jamieson, Robert, Andrew Robert Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Faithlife Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997. Electronic edition.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1–11:26*. New American Commentary 1A. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996.
- Reyburn, William David, and Euan McGregor Fry. *A Handbook on Genesis*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1998.
- Stringer, Stephen. *Storying Training 4 Trainers*. Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2010.

1 Notes derived from Scripture Resource Team StoryCrafter’s Handbook, Tricia Stringer, general editor.

Story Two

The Law and the Prophets

Exodus 19–20; 24:3; 31:8; Deuteronomy 5; 18:17–22

Some time later after God created the people, the man and the woman chose to disobey God. This broke their perfect relationship with him. Many years later, God decided to establish a special people of his own through a man God called Abraham. Abraham's descendants became known as the Israelites.

God spoke directly to the Israelites through their forefathers and later through his prophets. After 400 years of slavery in Egypt, God brought the Israelites out of bondage through the leadership of his servant Moses. God led Moses and the people of Israel to a mountain called Sinai. Moses instructed the people to prepare to hear from God.

God came down to the people in a thick cloud with thunder, lightning, fire, and smoke. God spoke and gave them a summary of the laws they were to live by. We call these the Ten Commandments. The people were afraid of God's voice and trembled. They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, or we will die!" So the people kept their distance while Moses drew near to God in the thick darkness. Later, Moses returned to the people and read out loud this sacred agreement, a covenant with God that was based on all God's words and laws for living. The people responded together with one voice, saying, "We will do all that the Lord has commanded us."

Forty years later, the Israelites were preparing to enter the land the Lord had promised Abraham and their ancestors. But God would not allow Moses to enter the promised land because of his disobedience years earlier. Instead, God took Moses to a high place so he could see the land. When Moses returned to the people, he repeated all the laws of the sacred agreement they had made with God.

Moses told the Israelites about their next leader. Moses said, “God said to me, ‘I will send them a prophet like you, Moses. The prophet will be an Israelite too. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him.’”

Moses also warned the people, “God said to me, ‘If a prophet says something I did not tell him to say as though he were speaking for me, that prophet must be killed. If what a prophet says in my name does not happen, it is not my message. That prophet was speaking his own ideas.’” These were some of the warnings Moses gave the people.

God chose Joshua to lead his people into the land that God promised Abraham and his descendants.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person’s name?

Call-and-Response

Here’s an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, The Law and the Prophets. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: God speaks!

Group: We listen!

Leader: God commands!

Group: We obey!

Leader: God's Word is

Group: Our authority!

The Authority of Scripture

In this story, God's word and his authority are revealed through his covenant with his people. When God spoke at Mount Sinai, the Israelites recognized the overwhelming holiness of his presence. In fear, the people asked Moses to stand as their mediator. God's commands were then written down as a lasting covenant—a sacred agreement between God and his people. This covenant formed the basis and beginning of what is recognized as Scripture. It is the permanent, sacred document that defines God's will for all generations.

Because the written words of Scripture come from God, they carry his full authority. That is why God required every prophet to align his prophetic speech perfectly with God's words. A true prophet speaks God's word. A false prophet speaks from himself.

God warned that any prophet whose message failed or contradicted God's word was false. False prophecy is never a harmless mistake. It is a misrepresentation of God, who cannot lie and does not change. Under the covenant, such deception warranted the death penalty (Deut 18:20).

Application

Many modern prophecies are not aligned with Scripture. Today, many self-described prophets offer predictions that fail, claim new revelations that contradict the Bible, or elevate personal "words" above God's written truth. Some even glean information from social media rather than from God's Word. When someone speaks in God's name without accuracy or fidelity to Scripture, they stand outside the authority God himself established.

Often a "prophetic word" is shared along with a request for a monetary donation to the prophet, supposedly to help bring the prediction to pass more quickly or to reward

the man of God. In many cases, the host church or platform also receives a percentage of that contribution. This has become a secondary revenue stream for churches or conference hosts.

When a prophecy fails, the so-called prophet sometimes compares his prophecy to Isaiah's in 2 Kings 20, claiming that Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah also did not come to pass. But the false prophet takes this verse out of context. His proof-texting overlooks the clear biblical explanation: God responded with mercy to Hezekiah's prayer. God's merciful response did not mean Isaiah's prophecy of Hezekiah's imminent death was false or mistaken.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The introduction to this story is intentionally designed to quickly summarize the events of Genesis 1–3 and help the audience retell those events with accuracy. The entire narrative of the fall of man is condensed to the essential: God warned the man not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Both the man and the woman made a conscious decision to disobey God by ignoring his command not to eat this specific fruit.

Although God had not yet changed Abram's name to Abraham at the beginning of this story (Gen 12), we use the name Abraham here for simplicity. God later changed the name of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, to Israel. Israel remains the collective proper noun for Abraham's descendants today. Jacob is not named in this story in order to reduce the number of proper nouns. However, the storyteller may include Jacob's name if doing so would be helpful for the audience.

The storyteller should clearly convey that God—not the strength or leadership of Moses—was the one who delivered the Israelites out of slavery.

God came down in the form of a cloud, not hidden in the cloud.¹ It was an ominous display of the natural elements. This powerful display brought about awe and fear among the people. The storyteller should word this in a way that the audience understands God's face was not visible. At this meeting, the presence of the Lord was so fearsome and overwhelming that the people begged Moses to serve as their intermediary.

The Israelites unanimously agreed to enter a covenant relationship, a sacred agreement, with Yahweh God. To emphasize the definition of covenant, which may not be understood by the ultimate audience, we have rendered it “sacred agreement,” with

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 429.

“covenant” as a parenthetical element. This is intentional to reinforce the meaning of this important biblical key term.

God revealed his sacred, private name, YHWH, to Moses when he spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai (Exod 3:14–15). Scholars think this name refers either to his eternal and self-sufficient nature or to his presence.² YHWH is usually translated as LORD. This story set uses the more general reference, God.

Bibliography

- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Kroneman, Dick, Peter Schmidt, and Paul McLarren, eds., *Key Terms of the Old Testament*. Dallas: SIL Global, 2025.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus*. New American Commentary 2. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006.

2 *Key Terms of the Old Testament*, s.v. “YHWH.”

Story Three

Instructions for the King

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

Before Joshua led the people of Israel into the promised land, Moses prepared them with many instructions from God.

Moses said, “When you enter the land that God is giving you and settle in it, and you say, ‘Let us have a king over us like all the nations around us,’ the king must be the man God chooses. He must be a fellow Israelite.”

Moses gave the Israelites God’s special instructions about what the king should not do: “The king should not buy many horses for himself to make himself strong in battle. Nor should he make his people go to Egypt to buy horses. Never return to Egypt. The king must not marry many wives because they will turn his heart away from God. The king should not make himself rich with silver and gold.”

Moses then told the people what the king should do: “When the man becomes king, he must write for himself a copy of this book of the law. It must be approved by the official priests. The king must always keep that copy with him and read it every day as long as he lives. That way he will learn to respect and obey God and carefully follow all the words of this law and these regulations. This will keep him from thinking he is better than the other Israelites. When the king does this, he and his descendants will rule Israel for many years.”

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?

- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call and Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, *Instructions for the King*. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: Who is above the king?

Group: God is above the king!

Leader: What is the king's law?

Group: The Word of God!

Leader: How often should he read it?

Group: Every day!

Leader: How long must he obey it?

Group: All his life!

Leader: What kind of king should he be?

Group: A humble king who reveres God!

The Authority of Scripture

As Moses prepared the Israelites to enter the promised land, he reminded them of the covenant God had made with them at Mount Sinai. Although God was their true king,

God knew that one day the people would ask for a human king, just like the nations around them. Anticipating this request, God provided clear instructions that any king of Israel was to rule under the authority of Scripture. God's laws and regulations were designed to guide the king in leading Israel and in maintaining a faithful, honorable relationship with God.

Sadly, many of Israel's kings failed to live and lead under the authority of Scripture. They rejected Moses's instruction and the covenant with God. Israel suffered the bitter consequences of their sin.

Application

Just as Israel's ideal king was to read the Scripture daily and submit to its authority, believers today must devote themselves to listening, reading, and obeying Scripture daily. The authority of Scripture provides guidance and boundaries designed by God for our good and for his glory. However, today's self-help theology proclaimed by prosperity-focused preachers around the world encourages greed rather than obedience. These preachers teach Scripture verses out of context to manipulate God and his people and increase their own wealth. They are not the kind of leaders God desires for his people. God wants leaders who are transformed by his Word and do not think they are better than other people.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

Centuries would pass before Saul was chosen as the king of Israel, but the request for a king was not a surprise to God. God mentioned in Gen 17:6 that his people would have kings.

In biblical times, horses were used to pull chariots for warfare purposes. If a king had many horses, it would suggest he reigned over a self-reliant people ready for battle or ready to brag about their wealth. Egypt had the reputation for raising excellent war horses. God did not want Israel to grow dependent on Egypt in any way.¹ Israel was to rely on God alone, not on military strength.

Marriages were often arranged to strengthen political ties between nations and kingdoms. But Israel was not to rely on alliances with other nations for strength or security. Instead, the nation was to depend completely on God.

Scholars have varying opinions on the meaning of the phrase "this law." Some think it could be the complete Torah, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and

¹ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 17:16.

Deuteronomy. Others think it could refer only to the book of Deuteronomy or even to only a part of Deuteronomy that includes a renewal of the covenant made on Mt. Sinai.²

The king's copy of the law would remind him every day that he was only a man and that he was under God's authority. The Hebrew word for "respect and obey" is sometimes translated as "fear." This should not be confused with being afraid of God. It is rather an awe, reverence, or respect of God.

Bibliography

Bratcher, Robert G., and Howard A. Hatton. *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2000.

Matthews, Victor Harold, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

² Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 308–309.

Story Four

Joshua Succeeds Moses

Joshua 1:1–11; 8:33–35

After Moses died, God spoke to Joshua, Moses's assistant. God said, "My servant Moses is dead. Now you and all these people go across the Jordan River into the land I am giving to the Israelites. I promised Moses I would give you this land, so I will give you every place you go in the land. From the south to the north, the east to the west. No one will be able to defeat you all your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forget you.

"Joshua, be strong and courageous! You must lead these people so they can take the land that I promised their fathers I would give them. Be strong and courageous. Be sure to obey all the teachings, the Book of the Law, my servant Moses gave you. Think about what it says all day and all night. If you follow the teachings exactly, you will be successful in everything you do. Always remember what is written in the Book of the Law, the teachings. Study it day and night to be sure to obey everything that is written there. If you do this, you will be wise and successful in everything. Remember that I commanded you to be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid, because the Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go."

Joshua gave orders to the leaders, "Go through the camp and tell the people to get their food supplies ready! Three days from now, you will cross the Jordan River and take the land the Lord your God is giving you." Joshua led the people into the land God promised their fathers.

Later, after conquering the enemies just across the Jordan River, Joshua built an altar to worship God. Joshua read aloud to the people the entire Book of the Law.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, Joshua Succeeds Moses. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: Day and night!

Group: We think about God's Word!

Leader: Day and night!

Group: We obey God's Word!

Leader: What guides our lives?

Group: God's Word!

The Authority of Scripture

After Moses died, the Israelites faced a moment of uncertainty. The transition in leadership could have posed a significant challenge for Joshua. However, God pointed him back to what had been written—the Book of the Law. Joshua’s success was rooted in the authority of Scripture. The Israelites’ success was tied to their obedience to God’s revealed word.

The people showed reverence by listening to the entire Book of the Law and following its instructions for worshiping God. They placed themselves under the authority of God’s word.

The reverence shown for the Book of the Law, along with its reading to the entire community, highlights for modern audiences the importance and authority of Scripture.

Application

Many modern prophets often claim to bring a “new” word from God. But in Joshua’s time, God commanded the Israelites to obey what was already written in the Book of the Law. God’s revealed word was sufficient for Moses’s generation, and it remained sufficient for Joshua’s generation. “The law of Moses is mentioned eight times in the book of Joshua, and in each case the context concerns obedience to this law.”¹ This repeated emphasis underscores the unchanging authority of Scripture: God’s Word does not adapt to fit new circumstances. Rather, God calls his people to conform to his Word. Joshua understood this truth, and his life challenges us to recognize and submit to that same authority today.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

God revealed his sacred, private name, YHWH, to Moses when he spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai (Exod 3:14–15). Scholars think this name refers either to his eternal and self-sufficient nature or to his presence.² YHWH is usually translated as LORD. This story set uses the more general reference, God.

The Hebrew word that describes Moses as a “servant” can also be translated “slave.” This type of person must obey and carry out the orders of a master.

In some languages, the phrase “strong and courageous” may be expressed as a single word or may sound unnatural when both terms are used together in the same sentence. In such cases, the storyteller may add a word like very or another appropriate word that emphasizes the command.

1 David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, New American Commentary 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 59.

2 *Key Terms of the Old Testament*, s.v. “YHWH.”

“Fathers” refers to the forefathers of the Israelites: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

“Obey all the teachings, the Book of the Law,” refers to the laws and commandments God gave to Moses in the covenant agreement on Mt. Sinai.

The original text uses the rhetorical question, “Have I not commanded you?” For clarity, we have chosen to render this as a direct statement.

The conclusion of the story is based on Joshua 8:30–34. Under Joshua’s leadership and God’s direction, an altar of uncut stones was built. Altars were used in the worship of God and involved the offering of sacrifices.³ This act of worship honored God’s fulfillment of his promise to Abraham to give his descendants the land.

Bibliography

- Howard, David M., Jr. *Joshua*. New American Commentary 5. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.
- Kroneman, Dick, Peter Schmidt, and Paul McLarren, eds. *Key Terms of the Old Testament*. Dallas: SIL Global, 2025.
- Douglas, J. D., and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Revised by Moisés Silva. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

3 *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Altar.”

The Book of the Law: Josiah

2 Kings 22–23

Many years later, after the people of Israel entered the promised land, they did not follow God with their whole hearts. They worshiped the pagan idols of the land. Although the kingdom was once united, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

After the death of the king of Judah, his eight-year-old son, Josiah, was crowned king. He did things that pleased God. Years later, King Josiah gave orders to repair the temple, the house of God. During the repair process, the chief priest of God found the Book of the Law. It was read to King Josiah. When he heard it read, he tore the clothes he was wearing to show his great sadness.

King Josiah ordered the chief priest and court officials, “Ask God about the words in the Book of the Law on behalf of all of us. He is very angry with us because our ancestors did not obey the laws written in this book.” The king was told that God was angry because his people worshiped the pagan gods of the land and failed to honor the Book of the Law. Because King Josiah humbly repented on behalf of Judah, the people would not suffer the consequences of their idolatry and rebellion until after his death.

The king called for all the people of Judah, from the youngest to the oldest, to come to the house of the Lord. There, the Book of the Law was read out loud to everyone. King Josiah and all the people renewed the sacred agreement with God. They committed to follow God and to keep all the commands that were written in the Book of the Law.

The house of God was cleaned up. All the pagan religious objects were destroyed. All over Judah, pagan altars of sacrifice were crushed into dust and the idols destroyed.

King Josiah ordered the pagan priests to be executed and their bones burned on their gods' altars. Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to God with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, *The Book of the Law: Josiah*. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: God's Word speaks to us!

Group: We listen!

Leader: God's Word shows us our sin!

Group: We repent!

Leader: God's Word shows us how to live!

Group: We obey!

Leader: God's Word is

Group: Our authority!

The Authority of Scripture

God repeatedly warned the Israelites to worship only him. He first established this expectation in the terms of the covenant he made with the people through Moses at Mount Sinai. Later, Joshua renewed the covenant after they entered the promised land. For a time, the people of Israel honored the covenant and followed God. However, they were surrounded by a pagan, idol-worshipping culture. Some Israelites married local pagan women and eventually began worshiping their gods. Soon, the Israelites' devotion to God eroded. Their pattern of disobedience eventually led to a divided kingdom, ruled by kings who were not faithful to God. This division marked the last major reform among the Israelites before the Babylonian exile.

Because the people no longer revered the authority of Scripture, both their worship and their allegiance to Yahweh declined. However, when the Book of the Law was read to King Josiah, he recognized the truth. This moment marked a turning point. The authority of Scripture became central to the restoration of Israel's relationship with God. Josiah's example of reverence for the authority of Scripture in the Book of the Law changed the course of Judah for an entire generation.

Application

Josiah chose to be countercultural, seeking to please God rather than people. How is today's church being counter-cultural? How is the church submitting to the authority of Scripture rather than culture?

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The introduction to this story connects to the earlier stories in the series through its focus on the Word of God and the covenant as the Book of the Law.¹ This story and the previous accounts are woven into a unified narrative, revealing that the Scriptures tell one overarching story. Centuries after the time of Joshua, the Israelites neglected their covenant with God.

The word temple, in a general sense, refers to a building for worship of a divine being. The temple in the Scriptures refers to the large and ornate building in Jerusalem. King

¹ See Stephen Wellum's article "The Law of God" for a discussion on the covenantal aspects of the Law of God: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god/>.

Solomon built the first temple. We used an appositive to unpack a familiar word like temple, “the house of God.” The storyteller should not assume the audience knows the true definition of key biblical terms.

Instead of the title “high priest,” which is seen in many international translations, we used the title “chief priest,” which may be more easily understood by an oral audience with a more concrete learning style.

The phrase the Book of the Law refers to the laws and commandments God gave to Moses in the covenant agreement on Mt. Sinai. This text is first called the Book of the Law in Deut 31:24–26.

The tearing of clothes was a Hebrew display of grief, strong emotions, and even repentance and mourning.² This cultural tip is important to explain with this story because most audiences would think it was odd to destroy nice clothing.

God revealed his sacred, private name, YHWH, to Moses when he spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai (Exod 3:14–15). Scholars think this name refers either to his eternal and self-sufficient nature or to his presence.³ YHWH is usually translated as LORD. This story set uses the more general reference, God.

For a detailed list of the consequences that Judah would face, see the consequences outlined in Deut 28:15–68.⁴

A covenant is “a solemn (sacred) agreement between two parties who promise to help one another and be loyal to one another.”⁵ Covenant was defined in The Law and the Prophets story earlier in this series. The storyteller should be careful not to assume the audience understands the correct definition of a key biblical term such as covenant.

Burning bones on pagan altars symbolized a deliberate act of desecration against the pagan deity that had been worshiped there.

Bibliography

House, Paul R. *1, 2 Kings*. New American Commentary 8. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.

Kelley, Helen Saint, ed. *Translator’s Notes on 2 Kings: Display*. Dallas: SIL International, 2020.

Kroneman, Dick, Peter Schmidt, and Paul McLarren, eds. *Key Terms of the Old Testament*. Dallas: SIL Global, 2025.

2 Helen Saint Kelley, ed., *Translator’s Notes on 2 Kings: Display* (Dallas: SIL International, 2020), 2 Ki 22:11.

3 *Key Terms of the Old Testament*, s.v. “YHWH.”

4 Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 385.

5 *Key Terms of the Old Testament*, s.v. “Covenant.”

Selman, Martin J. *2 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 11 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Wellum, Stephen. "The Law of God." The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god/>.

The Book of the Law: The Exiles and Nehemiah

Nehemiah 8–9; Daniel 9:2

Years after the death of King Josiah in Judah, the people of Israel once again abandoned God and worshiped idols. God allowed a foreign nation to attack Jerusalem three times. Eventually, the security walls of the city were torn down, and the temple was destroyed. The people who survived the attacks—the nobles—were taken away to live in the land of their enemies.

After seventy years in exile, God allowed his people to return home to Jerusalem. The temple was rebuilt. A leader named Nehemiah led a group of people to rebuild the security walls of the city. Once the walls were completed, all the people came together as one. A podium was built for the occasion. Ezra, a priest and teacher of the law, came forward. He opened the Book of the Law for everyone to see. Ezra praised God, and all the people raised their hands and shouted, “Amen!” Ezra read out loud the Book of the Law. The people began to weep as they heard the words of the law and understood them.

Nehemiah told the people, “This is a sacred day before our God. Don’t be gloomy and sad! The joy of the LORD is your strength. Celebrate this day!” It was a day to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words and understood them.

Days later, there was a seven-day religious festival. Ezra read the law to the people each day. On the final day—the eighth day—all the people of Israel came together. They dressed in special clothes to show their sorrow for their disobedience to God. Ezra once again read the law for hours. The people confessed their sin and disobedience and worshiped God. They even confessed the disobedience of their ancestors. All

the people who returned from exile made a solemn promise to God to obey the Book of the Law.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, *The Book of the Law: The Exiles and Nehemiah*. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: What do we have in our hands?

Group: The Word of God!

Leader: What do we do with it?

Group: We listen to God!

Leader: What else do we do with it?

Group: We understand it!

Leader: What if it shows us our sin?

Group: We repent!

Leader: What do we do next?

Group: We worship and obey God!

The Authority of Scripture

The people of Israel suffered the consequences of failing to obey God. When they had first accepted the covenant, the Israelites made a unanimous vow to follow God. He then gave them the Book of the Law, which outlined the commands and teachings that defined the covenant. However, the Israelites fell into a recurring cycle—faithfully keeping the law for a time, only to drift back into worshiping the gods of the surrounding nations. As a result, God allowed foreign nations to conquer the Israelites and ultimately take them into captivity.

Years later, King Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah as governor of Judah. Nehemiah led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls. Once the wall was completed, the hearts of the people turned toward God. They called upon Ezra, the expert in the Law, to read the Book of the Law before the assembled community. The Book of the Law served as the standard by which the people were to live and as the sacred covenant that bound Israel to God. As they listened, the people submitted to the authority of the Scripture. They humbled themselves, confessed their sins, and renewed their commitment to worship only God and obey the Book of the Law.

Application

Ever since God established his covenant with his people, Scripture has been the authoritative standard for obedience. The Book of the Law provided the Israelites with clear direction on how to live in a right relationship with God. In the same way today, the authority of Scripture plays a pivotal role in guiding God's people. However, modern prophets are declaring "new words" from God that do not conform to Scripture. Declarations from pulpits are violating the authority of Scripture, promising riches and perfect health to their congregations. Nevertheless, the Scripture's authority remains the basis of obedience in a loving relationship with God.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The brief introduction links this story to events from previous stories in this series. It is no longer a common practice to construct walls around towns to secure them from invaders. This is why we made it explicit that the security walls were torn down. This is an important detail in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

Although there were three waves of captivity in the Babylonian exile, this narrative refers to Judah's exile as a general term. To read about the three waves, see Daniel 1:1–3, 2 Kings 24:10–16, and 2 Kings 25:1–11.

The exile was a period of seventy years under Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11). Only the poorest of people remained in Judah to live off the land.

There were also three returns from captivity. See Ezra 1–6, Ezra 7–10, and Nehemiah 1–7.

We simplified Nehemiah's title of governor to "leader." However, we explained Ezra's title of priest and scribe to emphasize his knowledge and authority to read the law. From this time onward, scribes were scholars who studied and taught the law of Moses.¹

We use the phrase the Book of the Law in this series to refer to the Law of Moses. The consistent term will help the audience understand it. In this context, the Book of the Law refers to the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy and means "instruction."²

The public reading of documents was a familiar activity in this era. There was little access to written materials and few people who could read them. It was a common occurrence for a scribe such as Ezra to read the document to groups of people.³

God revealed his name YHWH to Moses during the episode of the burning bush on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 3:14–15). Scholars think this name references either his eternal and self-sufficient nature or his presence.⁴ YHWH is usually translated as LORD. This story set uses the more general reference, God.

The seven-day religious festival refers to the Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths), a celebration that commemorates the use of temporary shelters during the forty years the Israelites lived in the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt. This post-harvest festival served as a reminder to the Israelites of how their ancestors lived before they entered the promised land. During the festival, the people were instructed to construct temporary dwellings, typically made from palm fronds.⁵

1 John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, "Neh. 8:1" in *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), electronic edition.

2 Steve Christensen, ed., *Translator's Notes on Nehemiah: Notes* (Dallas: SIL International, 2021), Ne 8.

3 Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, "Neh 8:3" in *IVP Bible Background Commentary: OT*, electronic edition.

4 *Key Terms of the Old Testament*, s.v. "YHWH."

5 G. H. Twelftree, "Feasts," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 274.

The Israelites wore burlap, or sackcloth, to demonstrate the seriousness of their sorrow for their sin. Some translations may use clothing that represents mourning. This dark colored material was also appropriate for times of loss, grief, or general sadness.⁶

Bibliography

- Christensen, Steve, Ed., *Translator's Notes on Nehemiah: Notes*, Translator's Notes. Dallas: SIL International, 2021.
- Douglas, J. D., and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Revised by Moisés Silva. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Kroneman, Dick, Peter Schmidt, and Paul McLarren, eds. *Key Terms of the Old Testament*. Dallas: SIL Global, 2025.
- Twelftree, G. H. "Feasts." Page 274 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.
- Walton, John H., Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. Electronic edition.

6 *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Sackcloth."

Story Seven

Jesus, the Word

John 1:1–4, 12; Matthew 5:17–19

God demonstrated his power by speaking the world into existence. God then spoke through the prophets to remind his people to remain faithful to him and worship only him. Through the prophets, God promised a Savior who would be the perfect sacrifice to restore the relationship between God and people. The Savior, Jesus Christ, came to earth.

One of his closest followers, a man named John, wrote an account about the life of Jesus. John called Jesus the Word. John wrote, “At the beginning of all things, the one called the Word already existed. The Word was together with God, and the Word was God. The Word, Jesus, became a human being and lived among people.”

When Jesus lived on earth, he taught how important the Law and the prophets’ writings were. One day as he was teaching a large crowd, Jesus talked about the Book of the Law and the writings of the prophets. Today we call these the Old Testament. Jesus said, “You should not think that I have come to do away with the Book of the Law or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, nothing, not one small part of the Law will go away until all the Law is completed.

“Every person who disobeys one of the less important commands and teaches others to disobey it will be considered as the least important person in the kingdom of God. But if you keep these laws and teach others to obey them, you will be considered great in the kingdom of God.”

Jesus, who is called the Word, continued to preach, teach, and quote Scripture during his time on earth.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, Jesus, the Word. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: Who is Jesus?

Group: The Word of God!

Leader: What does Jesus do?

Group: Jesus fulfills the Scriptures!

Leader: What must we do?

Group: We believe Jesus, obey him, and teach his commands!

The Authority of Scripture

The introduction of John 1 reveals Jesus as the eternal Word. Jesus coexisted with God as he spoke the world into existence. John captured this profound truth by giving Jesus the title “the Word.” Commentator Edwin Klink explains, “Rooted in the Old Testament’s use of the term, the Word is God’s self-expression in creation, revelation, and salvation.”¹

Jesus, as the Word, demonstrated that Scripture is the authority and judge of truth. He taught and modeled that Scripture is the ultimate standard. This story highlights Jesus’s teaching at the Sermon on the Mount. His central teaching there was not only that people should keep the Law, but that they should live according to the true intent or the spirit of the Law. He challenged people to examine their hearts according to this true intent.

Ultimately, Jesus confirmed he was the fulfillment of the Law, the Promised Savior God had spoken about through the prophets in the Scriptures.

Application

The Law is not simply a checklist, but God’s standard for living. Is it the standard in our churches today? While grace is abundant, it does not contradict the Law. The church should be vigilant to reject teachers or so-called prophets who attempt to teach that the spirit of the Law departs from the authority of Scripture. Believers should ask, “Is the message more culturally acceptable than under the authority of Scripture?”

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The introduction to this story connects the audience to the creation narrative and the foretelling of the Messiah, who is called the “Promised Savior” in this set of stories.

Traditionally, John 1:1–18 is referred to as the prologue or introduction to the Gospel according to John.² The language in the first few verses of this prologue echoes the opening lines of the book of Genesis.

In the original language, the phrase the Word would have resonated deeply with both Jewish and Gentile people. Jewish listeners were already familiar with writings that associated the concept of word with divine wisdom—something they regarded as the highest truth to be sought.³ For Gentiles, the word was understood as how God revealed

1 Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 88–89.

2 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 116.

3 Craig S. Keener, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, vol. 2A of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 7.

himself to people. Others thought it was the principle that held the world together.⁴

When the Law and the prophets appear together, the phrase refers to the entire Old Testament.⁵

The Word, Jesus, became a human being and lived among people. Lived or dwelled means “to tabernacle” or “tent.” When Jesus became a man, God once again lived among his people as he did in the garden and above the mobile tent in the desert after the Exodus.

The narrative transitions to the Sermon on the Mount, specifically Matthew 5:17–19. In this passage, Jesus declares that he has come to fulfill the Law and the writings of the prophets. As the promised Savior, his fulfillment brought certain aspects of the Law—such as the sacrificial system—to their intended completion.⁶

Jesus insisted that the smallest detail of the Law would be fulfilled. He used a clever phrase that referenced his audience’s alphabet. It has a small vertical line that his audience immediately understood as very small.

Jewish religious teachers would debate over which commandments were more important than others, but Jesus taught that all the commandments must be followed. Teachers who followed Jesus’s instruction would be honored by God.

Bibliography

- Blomberg, Craig. *Matthew*. New American Commentary 22. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel according to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Groff, Randy, ed. *Translator’s Notes on Matthew: Notes*. Dallas: SIL International, 2016.
- Keener, Craig S. *John*. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Vol. 2A of Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.
- Klink, Edward W., III. *John*. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Newman, Barclay Moon, and Eugene Albert Nida. *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1993.

4 Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 7.

5 Randy Groff, ed., *Translator’s Notes on Matthew: Notes* (Dallas: SIL International, 2016), Mt 5:17; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 107.

6 Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 104.

Story Eight

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus grew up healthy, strong, and full of wisdom. When he began his ministry, God's Spirit led him out to the wilderness to fast and pray. There God allowed the enemy, Satan, to tempt Jesus to disobey God.

Jesus had not eaten food for forty days and nights. He was hungry. Satan said to Jesus, "If you are really the Son of God, prove it by commanding these stones to become loaves of bread for food." But Jesus said, "The Scriptures say, 'People do not live on bread or food alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then Satan took Jesus to the temple, the house of God, in Jerusalem. As Jesus stood at the highest point of the temple, Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! The Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you.'" But Jesus refused and said, "The Scriptures say, 'Do not test God. Don't try to force him to prove himself.'"

After that, Satan took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the nations of the world and all their riches and greatness. Satan said, "I will give you all that you can see, if you will kneel down and worship me." Jesus said, "Get away from me, Satan. The Scriptures say, 'People must worship the Lord their God and serve only him.'"

Immediately, Satan left. Angels came and took care of Jesus.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, The Temptation of Jesus. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: What do we say when temptation comes?

Group: It is written!

Leader: When lies come?

Group: It is written!

Leader: When doubts come?

Group: It is written!

Leader: What is our authority?

Group: The Word of God!

The Authority of Scripture

After the baptism of Jesus and before his public ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray. He modeled the necessity to be in communion with the Father. To know the Father is to know his revealed Word.

When Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus did not argue with Satan. He simply quoted Scripture. Satan quoted Scripture in their exchange as well. Jesus modeled that Scripture is the authority and ultimate truth. Scripture is the decisive tool to address spiritual deception.

Application

Jesus could have used his divine nature to display power over Satan, but instead he relied on the authority of Scripture. Today, when discerning followers of Christ are confronted with popular teachings or social media trends that elevate personal feelings or experiences, they look to Scripture as their ultimate authority. They are also aware that Satan will manipulate Scripture for his purposes. For instance, Satan quoted a Psalm about accidentally falling and stumbling, but he applied it out of context to tempt Jesus to deliberately jump.¹ Discerning disciples know that any fresh word from a modern prophet must be vigilantly tested against Scripture, which alone stands as the final authority for faith and practice.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

We use “wilderness” as a generic term in this story. This would have been a dry, arid region. Bush may be appropriate for some contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. Alternatives include empty land or an area where no one lives.²

We have opted to use “fast and pray” in this story, but some audiences may not be familiar with the Christian discipline of fasting. To fast is to voluntarily go without food to concentrate on religious activities such as prayer. Neither the Gospel of Matthew nor the Gospel of Luke say whether Jesus drank water. Words or phrases that suggest he did not drink water should be avoided.

Matthew uses the term devil or tempter throughout chapter 4. Jesus calls him “Satan” (v. 10). Devil in Greek means “accuser.” In Hebrew, satan means “accuser” or “enemy.” Devil and Satan are interchangeable throughout the New Testament.³

Satan was allowed to tempt Jesus only as far as God allowed. The audience should not be led to think that Satan and God are on an equal level.

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 85.

² Randy Groff, ed., *Translator’s Notes on Matthew: Notes* (Dallas: SIL International, 2016), Matt 4:1.

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 130.

The example story consistently uses the phrase “the Scriptures say” to reference the Hebrew Scriptures, which modern audiences call the Old Testament.

Jesus quotes Deut 8:3 when he says man cannot live by bread alone. “Man” is not gender specific but speaks about humankind in general. Thus, the example story says “people.”

Bread was a main food source for the people of Jesus’s day. If bread is not commonly eaten in the area, then a storyteller can say “food.”

Some Bible translations state, “the devil took Jesus to the holy city.” Many audiences may not understand that “the holy city” is Jerusalem, or they may think it is a reference to Mecca. We have made the name of the city explicit in the story. Future stories in this set will also feature Jerusalem.

In Matt 4:6, Satan quotes Ps 91:11,12 about the angels protecting Jesus so he does not strike his foot against a stone.

In Matt 4:7, Jesus quotes Deut 6:16: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah” (ESV). Massah, or the place of testing, was where the Israelites complained to Moses about the lack of water (Exod 17:1–7). When they tested God, they revealed their dissatisfaction with what God had provided.

To tempt means to “put to the test,” to sin or disobey God. Jesus’s response to not tempt God is unpacked in the example story as “do not test,” then further explained concretely to an oral-preference audience as “Don’t try to force [God] to prove himself.”⁴

Satan then took Jesus to a high mountain to look at the kingdoms of the world. The crafted story uses the word “nations” for kingdoms. Nations is a more modern term than kingdoms ruled by kings.

All their glory is a Hebrew idiom that means “their greatness.” The verb “kneel down” in this segment is a form of submission. This can look different across people groups where some people literally lie prostrate, kneel, or sit at someone’s feet. This verb is often translated as “fall down,” but not in the sense of stumbling and falling. A storyteller should use the best word picture for their audience.

Jesus gave Satan a sharp command to leave him alone. We opted not to use “Be gone” as it brings up the image of today’s “combat prayers” where congregants yell their commands at Satan and God. In the local language, this command should be a natural expression that means “to leave.”

4 Groff, ed., *Translator’s Notes on Matthew*, Matt. 4:5.

“You must worship” uses the plural you and refers to Deut 6:13. This command is for both men and women. The verbs “worship” and “serve” mean the same thing.⁵

The word ministered is unpacked as “took care of” to give the audience a mental image of the angels serving Jesus. Matthew does not specifically say how the angels served Jesus.

Bibliography

Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992.

France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Groff, Randy, ed. *Translator's Notes on Matthew: Notes*. Dallas: SIL International, 2020.

5 Groff, ed., *Translator's Notes on Matthew*, Matt. 4:9.

They Consulted the Scriptures: Thessalonica and Berea

Acts 17:1–15

Jesus demonstrated he was the Promised Savior. Even though he did nothing wrong, he was arrested and executed on a cross. Three days later, Jesus came back to life! On the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserved. God's justice was satisfied, and now there is forgiveness of sins for those who choose to follow God through Jesus only. Jesus commanded his followers to go and tell everyone this good news. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were some of his followers who traveled on mission to tell people this good news.

Paul and Silas traveled to a town called Thessalonica. They entered a synagogue, the local Jewish house of worship and study. There Paul explained the Scriptures on three consecutive worship days. Paul said, "The Promised Savior had to suffer. The Promised Savior was to rise again, and that Savior is Jesus!" Some of the Jewish people believed Paul's message. Many non-Jewish men and even important women believed as well.

Other Jewish people were jealous. They gathered troublemakers from the market area and started a riot in the city. Then, the jealous Jews and the mob attacked the house where Paul was staying. They found only the owner of the house inside. They took him and some of the new believers to the city officials. They said, "These men are turning the world upside down! They say there is another king, Jesus!" As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas to the town of Berea.

In Berea, Paul and Silas went to the synagogue and began to teach again. The Bereans were more noble and open-minded than the people in Thessalonica. They were eager to learn but carefully examined what Paul was teaching from the

Scriptures. Every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. When they saw that the Scriptures confirmed everything Paul said, many believed. Non-Jewish men and women believed too and chose to follow God through Jesus, the promised Savior.

When the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul was teaching in Berea, they went and stirred up a crowd there as well. The believers sent Paul away for his safety. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea for a while.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, They Consulted the Scriptures: Thessalonica and Berea. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: Who tests every teaching?

Group: The people of God!

Leader: What do we compare it to?

Group: The Scriptures!

Leader: Why do we test it?

Group: To know the truth!

Leader: And what do we do with the truth?

Group: We believe it and live it!

The Authority of Scripture

Paul and Silas taught exclusively from the Scriptures, demonstrating that the Scriptures are the ultimate standard. By reasoning from God's Word, Paul modeled the truth that genuine faith rests not on popular human opinion, but on the authority of Scripture itself.

The people of Berea, though eager to hear, did not blindly accept the teaching of Paul and Silas. They searched the Scriptures to verify for themselves if this teaching was consistent with what the Scriptures taught. They held Scripture as the ultimate authority even over the authority of their teachers.

Application

Followers of Jesus today must have the same understanding of Scripture's authority as the Thessalonian and Berean believers did. The new Thessalonian believers understood the authority of Scripture and faced immediate persecution because of their belief. The Bereans studied the Scriptures daily because Scripture alone was their ultimate authority.

Commentator David G. Peterson notes, "Luke contrasts the jealousy and emotive defiance of the Thessalonians with the rational and reflective approach of the Berean Jews. By implication, he commends the latter as the way to respond to the challenge of the gospel and its approach to the Scriptures. Initial expressions of belief, however

enthusiastic, need to be reinforced and strengthened by examining the scriptural basis for the gospel more holistically.”¹

Today’s charismatic preachers are certainly engaging, but only the Scriptures are sufficient to equip believers for life and ministry. No so-called divine revelation outside of Scripture should be more important. The standard for evaluating any teaching or preaching should be ensuring it aligns with the Scriptures.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The introduction links to the previous story in this set, The Temptation of Jesus. The gospel is unpacked briefly here. This prepares the listener for the direction of the story from Acts 17.

Timothy’s appearance in the introduction may seem unrelated to this story, but in the next story, Paul will send Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the new believers there (1 Thess 3:2–3). He is introduced in Acts 16:1–3. Commentators acknowledge that Timothy most likely traveled with Paul throughout the region. This is documented in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians.

The word synagogue is defined in the story. Scholars speculate synagogues began forming during the exile in Babylon so Jewish people could maintain their culture and religious identity in a foreign land.

The Scriptures during Paul’s time were what we now consider the Old Testament.

In this story, we are avoiding traditional words like sabbath, Gentiles, and Greeks that are often adapted in local languages but are foreign.

The mob or angry crowd was made up of troublemakers or lazy men of the market. Scholars agree that this expression is used in a negative sense.²

The accusation leveled at the host of Paul and Silas was serious. This complaint carried the understanding that the host would be responsible if Paul and Silas did not return to Thessalonica.³

Berea is about 72 kilometers away from Thessalonica in modern-day Greece.

1 David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 484.

2 Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), 330.

3 I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 5 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 296.

We used both “noble” and “open-minded” to describe the Bereans. While using both “noble” and “open-minded” may sound unnecessary, it is to clarify that the Bereans were not born into nobility or the upper class but were open to deeper study of the Scriptures.

Bibliography

Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 5. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980.

Newman, Barclay Moon, and Eugene Albert Nida. *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1972.

Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

God-Breathed Authority

2 Timothy 1:2–3; 2:2; 3:12, 15–17; 4:3–4

Paul and his partners continued sharing the gospel from town to town. Many people heard the gospel and chose to follow God through Jesus. Persecution increased too. Paul was arrested multiple times. After his final arrest, Paul knew his death was near. He wrote one final letter from a Roman prison to his faithful co-worker, Timothy. Paul warned Timothy to expect suffering. He wrote that every believer who wants to live as a godly person will be persecuted.

Paul also encouraged and instructed Timothy, “My dear son Timothy, I thank God for you! I pray for you constantly. Timothy, you heard me proclaim the teachings about Jesus Christ to many people. You must take those same teachings to other faithful and trustworthy people who will then also be able to teach others.”

Paul reminded Timothy, “Since you were a child, you have known the Scriptures. Through the Scriptures, we gain wisdom that helps us understand that God saves us when we believe in Christ Jesus.” “All Scripture,” Paul continued, “is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. Using the Scriptures, the person who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work.”¹

Paul warned, “In the future, people will no longer listen to sound teaching. They will follow their own desires and look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject truth and chase myths.”

¹ The last two sentences of this paragraph are directly quoted from 2 Tim 3:16–17 (NCV).

Paul sent greetings to the brothers and sisters working with Timothy. He encouraged Timothy to come see him in Rome before the cold season.

Meditating on the Story

Tell the story 2–3 times and ask the group or an individual to retell it.

Ask discussion questions:

- What do you like about this story?
- What part of the story do you not like or do you find difficult to accept?
- What does this story show us about God?
- What does this story show us about people?
- If this story is true, how does it change your life, behavior, or attitudes? Or what is the lesson for you in this story?
- What is the best way to learn this story? (Answer: Tell it to someone else!) Who will you tell this story? Who else besides your family members? What is the person's name?

Call-and-Response

Here's an example of a call-and-response script you can use with every story in this set.

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: The truth!

Leader: The Word of God!

Group: Our authority!

Leader: What will we do with it?

Group: We will listen and obey!

All: The Word of God is our authority!

Here's an example of a call-and-response you can use with this specific story, God-Breathed Authority. Or you may want to develop your own.

Leader: All Scripture!

Group: Is inspired by God!

Leader: All Scripture!

Group: Is useful for our lives!

Leader: All Scripture!

Group: We believe it, live it, and share it!

The Authority of Scripture

Facing the end of his earthly ministry and his coming death, Paul used his final recorded letter to reaffirm the authority, sufficiency, and importance of Scripture. He urged Timothy to teach God's Word faithfully and train others to uphold its truth. The Scriptures stand as God's authoritative standard, providing instruction for righteous living, correcting error, and guarding believers against false teaching.

Application

Paul's warning to Timothy is especially relevant today. Many people prefer messages that affirm their desires rather than God's truth as defined by Scripture. As followers of Christ, we must carefully measure every teaching, belief, self-help theology, prophecy, and trend to see if it aligns with Scripture. Scripture remains the authority. Rather than following the standards set by popular opinions or cultural trends, followers of Jesus should seek wisdom and submit to the authority found in Scripture. Believers must remain committed to sound doctrine.

Story Crafting and Vocabulary Notes

The apostle Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy from a much different setting than the first. Instead of being under house arrest, he was imprisoned in Rome and bound with chains. Although not detailed in the book of Acts, Paul's last arrest most likely occurred in Troas in Asia Minor, which is now Turkey. He left his coat, books, and important parchments there (2 Tim 4:13). Paul wrote this second letter while Timothy was most likely in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3), which was also in Asia Minor.

In the phrase "faithful and trustworthy people," we used "people" for the Greek word *anthropoi*, which can refer to both men and women, humankind, people, or persons, depending on the context.²

We used "inspired" for the Greek word that means "God-breathed." Henrietta Andrews explains, "The term God-breathed is a literal translation of the Greek word that older English versions translated as 'inspired.' This is the only place in the New Testament that this word is used. This word indicates that the people who wrote the books of the Bible did not merely write what they themselves were thinking. It means that they wrote the thoughts that God put into their minds. God was the source or origin of what they wrote."³

² *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, s.v. "anthropoi."

³ Henrietta Andrews, *Translator's Notes on 2 Timothy: Notes* (Dallas: SIL International, 2003), 2 Ti 3:16.

The example story says “in the future” rather than “a time is coming,” which is an idiom and may not make sense in local languages.

We chose not to use the idiom “itchy ears.” It means to hear what one wants to hear.

Paul encouraged Timothy, “Do your best to come before winter.” “Do your best” is an idiom that means to try hard. Paul needed Timothy to come before the weather would make the Mediterranean Sea too rough to cross by boat. In warm tropical and desert climates, winter is better described as the cold season.

Bibliography

Andrews, Henrietta. *Translator’s Notes on 2 Timothy: Notes*. Dallas: SIL International, 2003.

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.