

AFRICA STUDY BIBLE

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AFRICA STUDY BIBLE™

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UNCORRECTED PROOF



New Living
Translation



OASIS INTERNATIONAL LTD



Africa Study Bible

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the <i>Africa Study Bible</i>	5
Articles and Learn Notes Index	13
Partners, Contributors, and Editors	16
You Can Trust the Notes in this Bible	25
Using the <i>Africa Study Bible</i>	27
History and Vision of the <i>Africa Study Bible</i>	30
Introduction to the New Living Translation.....	33
A Note of Thanks	43
The Story of the Bible	44
Understanding and Applying the Old Testament Today.....	47
Hosea.....	51
Marriage	68
James	73
Children at Risk	84
Leadership in Africa	87
A History of Christianity in Africa	90
A Narrative Timeline of God's Work in Africa	93

INTRODUCTION TO
THE
AFRICA
STUDY
B I B L E TM





GOD'S WORD THROUGH AFRICAN EYES

The *Africa Study Bible* is a pacesetter in using the African experience for understanding the Bible. I recommend it highly to those who have sought to understand life and the world from an African perspective.

Dr. Mvume Dandala, *former presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and former head of the All Africa Conference of Churches*

The *Africa Study Bible* is a welcome blessing to the body of Christ in Africa, which is becoming a center piece for divine visitation. The most difficult concepts, names, periods, and situations that African readers grapple with, have been greatly simplified by making them relevant to our understanding and context. These were further made easier by including various explanatory notes, relevant articles, African proverbs, idioms, and pithy sayings. All of these make both the reading and study of the Bible much easier and friendly to Africans.

This study Bible demonstrates two important things about our church in Africa. First, we are coming of age. We no longer have to get most of our Bible study resources from outside Africa. The Spirit of Jesus anointed well over 300 African writers, who contributed to this highly useful study Bible, the first of its kind on the African continent. Second, we are coming together. We Christians have far more that unites us than divides us. Therefore, the traditional missionary churches, the Pentecostals, the indigenous African churches, and others laid aside our minor differences to write the notes for this study Bible that can teach and bless all of us. This is the Holy Spirit in action. Jesus' prayer on his last night on this earth—that "we may be one" is being answered in this study Bible. I offer my most sincere congratulations and thanks to all our brothers and sisters who have contributed to this study Bible through coordinating, writing, editing, and funding. I, therefore, endorse and recommend it very highly to all Christians, churches, and students of the Bible.

Pastor E. A. Adeboye, *General Overseer, Redeemed Christian Church of God*

The *Africa Study Bible* is a clear indication that the African Church has come of age. In this publication, different African Christian Leaders interact with scripture using African lenses yet remain faithful to the evangelical doctrine. I commend it to all readers, African or otherwise.

Rev. Canon Peter Karanja, *General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Kenya*

Here is a fresh study Bible of significant value written by African scholars from an African perspective. This is indeed a much-awaited contribution to our appreciation and deeper understanding of the biblical narratives in a context, which is very much closer to the African culture and worldview. It is hoped that not only Africans but also people from other cultures would find this study most beneficial for personal devotion and spiritual development.

Dr. Opoku Onyinah, *Chairman, The Church of Pentecost*

The emergence of the *Africa Study Bible* is, no doubt, divinely providential as the church in Africa. is clearly fast becoming the global missionary hub of the twenty-first century and the center of world Christianity. Oasis International is being used by God to bring us this gift that is an amazing tool to grow the church in Africa in understanding doctrine, values, and the Bible. It is contextual, culturally relevant, and truly indigenous as God's Word through African eyes. The ASB is highly recommended for every professing Christian in Africa.

Dr. Dachollom C. Datiri, *President, Church of Christ in Nations*

I welcome this collaboration and fruits of the *Africa Study Bible* and commend it to readers throughout the world. Of course the Bible is universal, but it is always given life by the lived experiences of the people of God.

Dr. Thabo Makgoba, *Archbishop, Church of South Africa, Anglican Community*



YOU CAN TRUST THE NOTES IN THIS BIBLE

You can trust the text (see “Introduction to the New Living Translation”) and notes of the *Africa Study Bible* (ASB). The ASB has undergone one of the most thorough and rigorous quality reviews of any study Bible or Bible reference book in the world. The message, theology, and format have been checked and double checked to assure that the ASB speaks with a unified voice; adheres to the highest editorial standard; and is clear, readable, and biblically accurate.

The editorial leaders, following the mandate of the Founding Committee of the *Africa Study Bible*, were deeply aware that there is a blessed and full diversity within the body of Christ. In fact, the editorial team itself was carefully chosen to accurately reflect the diversity of the church in Africa. Great effort was made to assure that correct and accepted Christian beliefs are reflected and encouraged, while allowing for differences in opinion on non-essential issues.

It is best to let the editorial process speak for itself:

1. Denominational or ministry leaders who are scholars, pastors, or elders recommended potential writers. Writers were given assignments based on specifications established by the Founding Committee of the *Africa Study Bible*, including language, gender, and geographic diversity. Writing coordinators worked to match each contributor’s expertise with a topic or passage to encourage quality submissions.

The contributors represented people whose heart languages range from Yoruba in western Africa to Swahili in the east, and from Zulu in the south to Amharic in the north. Besides English, many wrote in French and some in Portuguese, Arabic, or Swahili. A team translated their contributions into the English that you will read here.

We are thrilled that the ASB met these goals for country, language and gender diversity:

- writers from fifty countries
- one hundred ninety-four writers from Anglophone countries
- one hundred writers from Francophone countries
- eleven from Portuguese-speaking countries
- eleven from Arabic-speaking countries
- sixty-nine female writers

2. Supervising editor Dr. John Jusu reviewed, commented on, and approved every submission—often sending material back to a writer for revision when needed.

3. A team of editors worked to standardize submissions so the *Africa Study Bible* speaks with a unified voice.

4. Edited articles and notes by book batches were sent to a group of ten African theological scholars to review and make suggestions for improvement.

5. An experienced Bible editorial team revised the material according to the African scholars’ suggestions and edited the articles and notes for clarity.

6. Two senior Ph.D.-level theological editors reviewed the revised articles and notes book by book.

7. Finally, the articles and notes were copy-edited and checked for reading level and accessibility by the target audience.

8. Once typeset into the current format, the entire biblical text, articles, notes, and supplemental study materials were proofread to assure accuracy and editorial excellence.

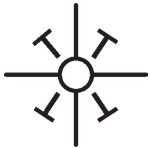
Fourteen to twenty individuals reviewed, edited, and proofread each note and article. This rigorous and exhaustive process assures us that the *Africa Study Bible* speaks with the highest quality as a trusted resource for the church.



SYMBOLS OF THE AFRICA STUDY BIBLE



This **Ornate Cross** serves as the primary symbol of the *Africa Study Bible*. The four points of the cross represent the four corners of Africa: North, South, East, and West. The points are comprised of spears, as the holy Word of God serves as our primary weapon in the battle for his kingdom. The concentric rings represent the unity the Gospel can bring to people of every country, race, and denomination. Finally, the four shields represent God's all-encompassing protection of those he has called to faith, such that they need fear only him.



The **Coptic Cross** highlights “Learn” features in the *Africa Study Bible*, which provide key historical doctrinal understandings of God's Word and the Church. It represents the North African region, reminding readers of Africa as ancient seat of Christianity, home of Augustine and Athanasius.



The “**Mate Masie**” highlights the “Proverbs and Stories” features, revealing the connection between uniquely African sayings and the wisdom of Scripture. It is an Adinkra symbol, representing West Africa, and stands for wisdom and for God's omniscience.



The Nguni symbol for “**Made Peace**” serves to highlight the “African Touch Points” features, where Scripture and the African way of life are considered and reconciled. Representing Southern Africa, this symbol serves to represent our peace with God and one another.



The **Masai Shield and Spear** highlight “Application Notes,” which equip the reader with the tools they need to act righteously and fight for God's glory. Representing East Africa, these symbols remind readers of the safeguard of faith and of the great power of God's Word to defeat Satan.



USING THE AFRICA STUDY BIBLE

Each feature of the *Africa Study Bible* was planned by African leaders who teach and lead God's people. Their goal was to help us grow strong in Jesus Christ and to give insight about God's Word to the continent and to the world as *God's Word Through African Eyes*.

Each note is written to inform us about an important topic or to help us understand a verse or passage. This is not information to memorize but instruction on how to live a good and righteous life. Each is based on God's wisdom and truth. What are the special concerns and issues that we face in Africa? How does God want us to live as we face each challenge? Even as we ask those questions, the *Africa Study Bible* is much more. It will teach us how to apply the Word of God to our lives. Each day, we must open the Bible and let it be God's bread for us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The notes in the *Africa Study Bible* can show us, by example, how to apply God's truth. Sometimes our thinking or our culture really fits the truth in God's Word, and this Bible shows us how to celebrate and encourage that. Sometimes we need correction from God's Word, and we need to learn to think and live differently. Perhaps we need to find a new path or even repentance. The *Africa Study Bible* shows us how to do that, too. And sometimes, the *Africa Study Bible* will help us grow deep and mature in our faith or encourage us in the tough times.

It is our prayer that we will not only be reading and learning what others have to say about the Bible, but we will be learning by example to take what we are reading and apply it in a way that honours God and builds his Kingdom for ourselves. The *Africa Study Bible* is written by leaders across our continent who have worked their entire lives to learn how to apply the truth found in the Bible. They wish to be faithful in applying God's Word to our lives in Africa and the world. As we read and listen to their wisdom, we can learn this skill as well. The Bible has many more applications than we will find in this Bible, but by observing how to apply the Bible correctly, we can learn to apply the Bible to our own situation. If you would like to learn more, we have developed tools that teach how to apply the Bible. Visit africanstudybible.com for more information.

As Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth."

African Touch Points draw attention to Scripture passages with a special connection to Africa. There are three kinds of Touch Points. In some Touch Points, we explore a passage where the Bible talks about Africa or a person from Africa. Other Touch Points have an important quotation from one of the greatest early African Christian leaders, whose writings and teachings helped shape all of Christianity. Listen carefully to the voices of thinkers such as Augustine, Athanasius, Cyril, and Origen. Finally, many of the Touch Points feature an example of how African culture sheds light on the meaning of a passage. Often, African cultures are much closer to the culture of the Bible than the cultures of North America and Europe. This is a key area where the African church can speak about the significance and impact of Scripture to the worldwide church.

Introductions to each book of the Bible help us understand its history and biblical cultures. They have a special focus on issues close to the African heart. Sometimes a book of the Bible does not tell us who wrote it, but most often we have evidence that may point to a particular person. Sometimes scholars who study the Bible disagree about who wrote a book of the Bible. Some stories were passed on orally for a long time before they were written down, just as is common in our culture. A priest or a prophet may have written stories down or edited a book years after it was first written to help it speak correctly to his own time. But we have historical evidence showing us that there was a very accurate transmission of the stories written in the Bible. We can trust that God inspired this process, and Jesus affirms the Old Testament as the Word of God. In the *Africa Study Bible*, when we do not know who was the original author, we may say something like "According to Jewish tradition, Moses wrote Genesis." We affirm with our whole hearts the words of 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by

God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.”

Beyond listing general facts, the introductions will connect you to the original purpose and audience. Many books of the Bible were originally read aloud to a group of people or even sung. They are written records of stories, poems, and instructions that people often heard rather than read. Like musicians, often the authors used repeating patterns to communicate their message. They also focused on characters and plot to make a point, like great storytellers. They had a message for the listener to learn. The book introduction highlights the story and the rhythm of each Bible book and what the book can teach us, just like the traditional African storyteller.

Application Notes are used to inspire readers to apply what the Bible teaches to our lives. They will help us reflect on issues in light of the truths in Scripture. These notes can show us how the Bible’s message should change the way we live. They also help us understand how to apply truth from Scripture to our daily lives. The goal of our writers is to teach us to think about all issues in light of what the Bible says. We can use these notes to learn how to apply the Bible to our lives. First we work to understand the meaning of the text in the Bible, *then* we apply that truth to our current situation.

Proverbs and Stories illuminate and complement the biblical text. The African peoples have a wealth of wise sayings, fables, and stories that the *Africa Study Bible* explores. These have been referred to as the treasures of Africa or the wisdom of the elders. This feature will help the Bible come alive by highlighting passages that have parallels with a specific African proverb or story. The proverb or story is used as a starting place to illuminate the original meaning of the Bible. Proverbs may either be in agreement or in conflict with the text. We can follow this example to learn how the Bible relates to our cultures either positively or negatively. In all things, the truth of the Bible is to be our authority even when it does not agree with traditional wisdom. Often specific regions or tribes are identified, with the proverb quoted in the original language. These sayings are the work of the original author and no attempt has been made to check for accuracy.

Articles are about living the Christian life and critical concerns that face the African church and its people. The committee chose article topics and gave writers main points and issues to address. Each Article was written with the following three questions: (1) What is the biblical basis for the perspective being presented? (2) What are the specific African issues for this topic? (3) How may the truth be applied to everyday life? The Articles appear between books of the Bible so they do not interrupt the flow of the text. Read through the index to find a topic of interest to you. Articles will help us understand how to apply the Bible to a specific area of life where God’s wisdom is needed.

Learn Notes expand our thinking in theology, doctrine, and biblical values. The committee chose important topics to be explored, things that “every Christian should know.” Each Learn Note explains the topic, giving a basic understanding that the majority of Christians agree on. At least one special point of interest or application for Africa is considered for every topic. Learn Notes are placed near scripture about the topic. Learn Notes show us how to discern the great doctrines of our faith by listening to the whole Bible speak with a unified voice.

Learning and Teaching Helps are included throughout and at the back of the Bible. The **Topical Index and Concordance** lists all the Articles, Application Notes, Stories and Proverbs, African Touch Points, and Bible references that give insight into a particular topic. This Topical Index and Concordance also includes two other special features. Words that have special meaning for the church are explained—like *propitiation* or *sanctification*. Also, this feature defines English words from the text of the Bible that may be unclear or are seldom used in Africa. A brief biography of each Early African Church Father who is quoted in African Touch Points is included. This one feature, will equip us to learn or teach about almost any topic found in the Bible.

You will also find a special feature presenting the history of God’s people in Africa—**A Narrative Timeline of God’s Work in Africa**. This unique graphical timeline will help you understand God’s work in Africa from Abraham through the year 2010—it is an insightful overview of all God has done in our continent over almost 4,000 years.

In addition, **maps and other graphical timelines and features** are spread throughout the Bible to help us understand the locations, people, time, and structure of the Bible. One of the features, **Harmony of the Gospels**, located at the end of the Gospel of John, gives us a wonderful overview of how the four Gospels tell a unified story and also how they tell the Life of Jesus from different viewpoints.

Bible Overview Reading Plan was created specifically for the *Africa Study Bible*. Here is a plan to give you an overview of the whole Bible in one year by reading the length of a chapter six days a week. If you commit to this, you will receive a wonderful understanding of the story of God reaching out to us.

All of these features help us understand the wonder and diversity of the Bible, the rich Christian heritage of Africa, and the part that Africa played in the events of the Bible.

Colorful original art in the front of the *Africa Study Bible* was created to show the beauty and power of God's Word. Verses were chosen that highlight the project's goals and beloved verses give encouragement and power as they are memorized, shared, and hidden in our hearts. The art is built from many of the scripts, symbols, colors, and patterns of Africa. Here is a brief explanation of each piece:

Mark 12:29-31—The two greatest commandments are illustrated. The spiraling circle at the top represents the eternal God and the row of people at the bottom represents our neighbors. The two tablets, also in the background, remind us of the Ten Commandments which can be summarized in these two commands given to us by Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-10—A special robe celebrates the great honour God has given us to be a part of his family when we trust Christ. The lettering for "God's Masterpiece" is designed to express the uniqueness of each one of us working together to bless the world.

Galatians 5:22-23—In these verses, we can imagine various fruits on the same tree. This illustrates the supernatural nature of these

character traits. The roots of the tree are included at the bottom to remind us that God's Spirit makes us strong and enables us to live abundantly.

Psalms 67—A compass pattern was chosen to represent God's rule and guidance over all the world's peoples. The words follow the arc of the globe, stretching from one end of the earth to the other. The gold dots radiate from God's name to illustrate that he is the source of all blessing.

Psalms 91—The large background symbol represents the confidence that we should fear no one except God. The psalmist expresses that trust in the Most High through the gentle metaphor of a bird's wings. This reminds us that God's Spirit also revealed himself in the form of a dove when Jesus was baptized.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26—Jesus uses two pictures of the great sacrifice he made for us to be forgiven and accepted by a holy God. The first, his body broken for us, is illustrated here in a cross made from stalks of grain which sprout new life. The second diagonal image is of Christ's blood poured out freely as represented in the wine shared with his disciples.

Philippians 4:12-13—A symbol for strength and humility is shown very large in the background to illustrate the power of Christ to help us do what we can't accomplish in our own strength. The cross, centrally located in the design, reminds us of the great cost by which we have access to His strength.

Romans 8:38—In lettering art, the artist attempts to make words look like what they mean. So these words are designed to show great confidence strong and close together. In contrast, "God's Love" is written in a gentle, comforting style. The background shield represents the assurance that this eternal love protects us.

2 Timothy 4:2—God's Word, the Holy Bible, represented here by a sword and fiery flames, has the power to change us as we listen and obey. The different styles of lettering help to express the meaning of each word or phrase.



HISTORY AND VISION OF THE AFRICA STUDY BIBLE

History

The concept of a study Bible specifically created for the needs of African Christians was birthed in talks among African leaders, Oasis International, and Tyndale House Publishers. A survey and statistical analysis to evaluate the understanding of the Bible by Christians in Jos, Nigeria, was undertaken to evaluate the potential impact of having the Bible in clear, modern language using African vocabulary and expressions. The research clearly showed that meanings of words and expressions in modern English from the United States or the United Kingdom were not always clear for English-speaking Africans.

Over the following years, the project moved forward through conversations with leaders throughout Africa, Bible experts at Tyndale, and the Oasis International Board. These conversations included Dr. Tite Tiénou from Burkina Faso, a member of the team that formed the vision for the *Africa Bible Commentary*. He would soon be joined by several other contributors to the *Africa Bible Commentary*.

It was decided that the project, if attempted, would focus on discipleship and life transformation by providing tools and helps to grow Christians deep in their faith.

During an extensive period of evaluating the need for the project, leaders from the continent were asked to give input. Seminary presidents, denominational leaders, and academics spoke with unity: It was essential that we create a study Bible to reflect the knowledge, culture, and wisdom of Africa, with the purpose of growing African Christians and bringing insight to global Christianity.

Brought together by Oasis International, the project soon had a number of strong development partners, each bringing their unique skills to the project. Special honour is due Tyndale House Publishers and Tyndale House Foundation, who provided expertise and seed funding. In addition, Livingstone, the creators of the best selling *Life Application Study Bible*, began their role as consultant and editorial manager. After extensive preparation, the Founding Committee of the *Africa Study Bible* met in Accra, Ghana. Leaders from every region of Africa, representing

English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic speaking areas and eleven countries formed the final mandate for the project, making all major editorial decisions. Special thanks goes to Mark Taylor, Bruce Barton, Jeff Wright, and Matthew Elliott—publishing experts who joined the meetings in Accra to advise the committee in study Bible creation.

The committee came together in a spirit of unity; the cornerstone of the meetings was a belief in the power and authority of God's Word and a pastor's heart for growing the African church. In simplest terms, the committee had one mind in making each decision, shared one heart in their desire to foster spiritual growth, and spoke with one voice. The *Africa Study Bible* will for ever reflect the work of the Spirit in the Accra meetings and is for ever indebted to this special group of people—each bringing a unique set of qualifications and knowledge.

Vision

Formed by the committee, the vision for the *Africa Study Bible* reads:

The *Africa Study Bible* is a Bible with study tools written by African pastors and scholars. Our goal is to increase the understanding of the Bible using African insights and experiences to meet the needs of the church in Africa and around the world.

The expression of the governing committee is that the *Africa Study Bible* is to feed God's people as we all need constant feeding from the source of life—God and his holy Word. We Africans should see ourselves and our cultural context in the study notes. Our goal is that the notes will challenge and encourage the readers to live as God's people in Africa. The *Africa Study Bible* is to concentrate on knowledge and application, teaching people how to apply truth to their specific situation. It should empower Jesus' mandate to make disciples. The *Africa Study Bible* will help people make a link between biblical truth and life transformation. "African" writers are defined as those who are African in

knowledge, heart, and voice. “Pastors and scholars” will include ministry and lay-leaders who function as pastors and church leaders.

Following from this mandate, the committee decided that the notes would, whenever possible, be paired with modern, easily understood translations. The English edition is being launched using the clear, accurate, and accessible language of the New Living Translation, with other languages added over time. First among these languages will be French, Portuguese, and Arabic.

Following through on the diverse make-up of the committee, targets were set for diversity of the writers by language groups, geographic location, denomination, age, and gender.

Key points and goals for the project include:

- To treat the Bible text as the final authority
- To give practical and wise teaching in a non-confrontational approach
- To focus on prescriptive advice, application, and life-transformation
- To attempt to answer questions that are likely to be in the reader’s mind
- To create a valuable resource for pastors and teachers as they apply the Word of God for their listeners
- To create a study Bible that is culturally relevant and readable for the average reader
- To bring African insights and experiences to the text in a way that makes the Bible come alive for all readers
- To avoid rehashing specifically Western theological issues and application

Today, with the prayers and support of partners and donors across the world, the *Africa Study Bible* is bringing the promise of a readable and affordable Bible to Africans and the world.



A NOTE TO READERS OF THE AFRICA STUDY BIBLE

Oasis International and Tyndale House have partnered in creating the *Africa Study Bible*. One of the things we are most excited about is to see readers understand the Bible in a new and fresh way with the text of the New Living Translation (NLT). You might wonder why this Bible does not use the traditional and beautiful King James Version or another modern translation. We have crafted this introduction to help people understand how the NLT can help us know God and his Holy Word. To answer our questions, it is good to understand how we have a Bible in English from the original words written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today's readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision with-

out sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007, 2013, and 2015. The *Africa Study Bible* uses the Anglicized version, with British spelling.

We understand that many readers are familiar with the King James Version and may have questions about how the NLT differs from this older version. Some of the differences can be explained easily by differences in translation philosophy and methodology, which are explored below in the first section of the "Introduction to the New Living Translation." Other differences are related to the NLT's more contemporary English style. The NLT uses the English spoken today, whereas the King James Version was translated into the English of the 1600s. However, readers familiar with the KJV may notice still other variations related to differences between the texts behind the translations. For more on this, see the discussion in the "Introduction to the New Living Translation" under the section header "Textual Differences between the NLT and the King James Version."

A special feature of the *Africa Study Bible* is that you can look up some well-loved terms from the KJV, such as "propitiation" in the concordance to find their meaning and how the NLT translates these important ideas.

Each of the translators of the NLT believes in the power and ultimate authority of God's Word. We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

—The Publishers

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

The story of the Bible is the story of God, his people, and his world.

God spoke. The world sprang into life. Everything there is—the huge and the tiny, mountains and oceans, little ants and bugs so small you can only see them with a microscope—God made it all.

Then he made us. He made the very first people and gave us a job: “You be in charge here, for me. You are to take care of everything. I’ve made you to be like me; show the world what I’m like.”

He gave our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, a garden to live in, with flowing rivers and flourishing trees. “Start here,” he said. “I’ll meet with you here.”

When Adam first saw his wife Eve, he said, “Eyaa! This is the one!” Adam and Eve had everything—God, each other, and good work to do.

But There Was an Enemy

But there was an enemy. He was jealous. He wanted to wreck what he couldn’t have. He was also clever. He asked Eve, “Why can’t you be the boss? Why not run things your own way? Why not do what you feel like doing? Why let God keep you back?”

Soon, our ancestors disobeyed. They did exactly what God said they should not do and set the pattern that lasts to this day. Everything began to fall apart. The world is still full of wonderful things, of beauty that makes you tremble. We are still smart and still able to do amazing things. But our thinking and our feelings are twisted and often broken. When we are all trying to be the boss, we cut ourselves off from God. We hurt one another. And the whole world feels the effect. In fact, the brokenness is inside us and we hurt ourselves, too. Our brokenness even damages creation.

God saw the messed-up world and the messed-up people he had put in charge of it. God could have gone away. Many of the old African stories say that is what he did. The stories say that we made God angry, and he went a long way off. But that is not the story of the Bible. Yes, God can seem far away. Yes, we can choose to build a wall between us and God. But God is not going to be defeated. He is going to get rid of the bad. He is going to take broken people and make them over again. And he is going to take the broken world and make it over again. He is going to do this through his own Son, who came to live in this broken world.

God Starts with Abraham

He started small, with Abraham. “Leave your family. Leave your people. Follow me. I will be family for you. And I will make you into a nation with your very own land to rule. Through you, my blessing will reach the whole world.”

Abraham followed God. Abraham stumbled, but he still trusted God, and God kept his promise. Abraham and Sarah were given a son, Isaac. From Isaac came a son named Jacob, also given the name Israel. From that son came a nation, also called Israel.

In time, there were thousands of Israelites, but they were not that impressive. They lived as forced laborers in Egypt and the government was trying to destroy them. God called Moses to lead them and told the people, “I will rescue you. Come to me. Meet with me in the desert. Walk with me. Be my people. Live my way. I will give you your own rich land, your own garden. And through you, my blessing will reach the whole world.”

God rescued them by opening up the sea. The towering cloud and fire of his presence marched with them. But the people still had Adam’s sinful nature. Before long, they forgot the blessings. They complained. They disobeyed. They said, “Let’s go back to Egypt.” They said, “Let us make our own gods and worship them our own way.”

So God punished them, but he did not leave them. In spite of what they did wrong, he took them through the desert and gave them their own land. They marched in, led by Joshua. They watched city walls fall down and conquered the communities. They renewed their promises: “We will live as God’s people. We will show what he is like to the world.”

But it didn’t last long. “Let’s be like everybody else” was the easier way to live. But they belonged to God, and he did not leave them. They were his. He punished them, and he sent leaders to rescue them. Then they would turn from God and things would get worse again. This pattern repeated for many years.

Next Come David and the Kings

God gave King David to the people of Israel. David made no room for false gods. Enemies all around were defeated. The people lived in peace. In the time of David’s son Solomon, Jerusalem, the capital, was made God’s city. God’s presence was focused in his Temple—a beautiful building that Solomon built to worship and sacrifice to God. The people gathered there to worship God

in glorious praise. Wisdom for godly living flowed out from there, touching other peoples in other lands with blessing.

But David and Solomon and Israel were like Adam. They all failed. The hints and tastes of goodness faded. Other kings came and went, some better, most worse, none good enough.

God sent his prophets, his messengers, to tell the nation, "You are God's chosen people, sworn to him with marriage vows! Turn to him from disobedience. Turn to him from the false prophets, the idols, the substitutes, the liars, and the cheats. Care for the needy among you. Find blessing. Watch him rescue you. Watch God's blessing reach the end of the earth. Or don't, and lose what you have, even the land you have been given."

In the end, they lost the land. They were hauled off to Babylon. But God did not leave them. His messengers promised that they would come back. And beyond that came richer promises. The people and the world would be made new with God's blessing and with Adam's mess undone.

Some did return to Jerusalem. A small Temple was built again in God's city. Prophets encouraged the people. But failure and compromise were everywhere.

Questions remained unanswered: "Has God failed? His people have failed again and again! The glory of his blessing for the whole world has not gone anywhere. From Adam to Israel, the ones who belong to God mess up. Rescuers come, rescuers go. The gap between promise and reality is huge. What is God doing? Will there ever be an Adam who does what Adam should have done? Will there ever be an Israel that lives according to God's good law? Will there ever be a David who rules in true peace? Will God's Temple presence ever come close to stay?"

For four hundred years, things went very quiet.

Finally, Jesus

But then a surprise. God did exactly what he said he would do. And he did it in a way that no one expected.

There was a harsh colonial government and a baby was born in a poor family. He was called Jesus, which means Joshua—Saviour. Born in David's village from David's family, he would be called God's Christ, Messiah, Lord, Immanuel (which means God with us), King. He would call himself Son of Man, son of Adam, Son of God. He would talk to God as his Father. He would command wind and waves, rebuke disease, and

banish cringing demons. He would forgive sins, putting people right with God. He would give wisdom greater than Solomon's. He would command more than Moses. He was God with his people when the Temple could not be. He would be the one faithful Israelite when all Israel had failed. He would bless the nations.

He marched to Jerusalem and then rode into the city as King of peace, surrounded by followers praising God. But the rulers did not see it that way. The government did not see it that way. The enemy from back in Eden did not see it that way. Jesus was a threat. His Kingdom would break the kingdoms of the earth. The rulers determined to break him. Arrested and falsely accused, Jesus was executed on a cross in cruelty and shame, then sealed in a rock tomb.

Little did they know. Jesus did not run or hide. At that moment, and every moment, he gave himself over to God's will and purpose. He knew God had a plan. He did the opposite of Adam. Having nothing and losing his life, he gave himself to God, to stand in the place of all those who followed Adam. He stood in our place, took on our failure, our brokenness, our rebellion. He said to God, "Father, I am utterly alone. Yet I give myself to you. You will put things right. You will bring victory from total defeat."

And God did.

On the third day, God reversed death. He launched the age of new creation. He started to make all the brokenness fresh and new. He raised Jesus from that tomb. He declared him for ever innocent, for ever right. He confirmed every title—Saviour, Messiah, King, Lord. And he lifted Jesus to glory.

He also did something else. He gave Jesus a people, a Kingdom. The faithful people of God were few. Now God said, "Repent. Trust Jesus. Give yourself to him. Abandon your old self. In Jesus, you share in his blessings. You, too, will be right with God. In him, your wrecked life will be remade. God's very own Spirit will be present within you. You were nobodies, but now, you are his dear family."

He Is Alive

Jesus' followers spread out. They could not stop telling people what they had seen: "He is alive!" The first time they said this, people from many nations heard them. And three thousand believed. Soon his followers were beaten, they were imprisoned, they were killed. But they declared, "He has won!" They were despised and they were mocked,

but they declared, "Every honour belongs to him, for he is God!"

Those who believed the good news, those who turned to Jesus, lived as his family, his people, his Kingdom, showing and telling what he is like to the world. Eagerly they waited for the completion of God's victory in Jesus. They wanted everyone to know him.

The good things started were a long way from complete. God's people in Jesus failed. They did not understand who they really were. And they did not live like who they really were. Lots of times, they would get confused.

But Jesus had sent his apostles, empowered by his Spirit, to declare his message and teach his people. Jesus' people belong to him so tightly; they are his body. They are hands and feet for him in this world. Just like Adam, they are here to show his world what he is like, show every people what he is like. They are also here to suffer as Jesus suffered. Time and again, they would be attacked and hurt, just because they were his.

The apostles said, "Look back. Look at Jesus

and all he has done for you. Look ahead. Look to Jesus and all he will do. You are his people, being formed from every language, tribe, and nation. That same enemy from the beginning, those same rulers and powers who raged at Jesus, they want to hurt us all that they can. But their time is short. Jesus will defeat them once and for all. Soon, in God's time, they will be stripped of all strength and doomed to the punishment they deserve. Even the evil that still lurks inside us will be rooted out. Jesus is coming back with all God's power and authority in full view."

The story began in a garden. It ends in a beautiful city. A city full of people but still rich in flowing water and flourishing trees. A city of beauty, praise, and joy. A city without tears or hurt or wrong. A city with God and Jesus right there, for ever, with us.

The story of the Bible is the story of God, his people, and his world. It is the story of Jesus, who is God, of his new people, of his Kingdom, and his new world.

And it is our story. We are still living it.



THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Author: The prophet Hosea. The son of Beeri, Hosea's name means "salvation." His three children, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi, later played an important part in Hosea's message to Israel.

Date: Hosea recorded events between about 760 and 722 BC, before the fall of Israel to Assyria.

Purpose: To illustrate God's covenant love for his people even when they are unfaithful and to call them to repentance. The illustration of marriage and intimate language portray our relational and loving God in a way that prepares us for the teachings of Jesus.

Overview and Story: The book of Hosea illustrates the intimate relationship between God and his people. Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel for forty years before its fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Other prophets during this time who preached the same messages of unfaithfulness to God were Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. God asked Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute, saying that children born during the marriage might not be his. The first three chapters tell the story of the unfaithfulness and then the redemption of Gomer. "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel" (Hosea 3:1). Hosea's experience with Gomer illustrates God's experience with Israel. This dramatic story shows that the Lord (the husband) still loves Israel (his wife) even though she has loved other gods. This is a unique situation that serves as an object lesson, not as a model for our families.

The second part of the book (Hosea 4-14) uses this story to warn of severe judgement because of Israel's worshipping of other gods. The book ends with the hopeful message that Israel would receive forgiveness and restoration if the people returned to God (Hosea 14).

God is faithful to his people. He pursues us, even when we have been unfaithful to him and rejected his love. This is true, eternal, and unconditional love.

What Hosea Teaches Us

- Faith in God requires total dedication to him, just as we should be fully dedicated to our husband or wife (see Ephesians 5:25-33). We cannot trust God and also trust in our traditions, good behaviour, wealth, status, or position. If we trust God completely, he promises to answer our prayers and take care of us (Hosea 14:8).
 - True repentance requires a turning away from sin to God himself and choosing to love him and to know him (Hosea 6:6). In some churches in Africa, people are called to repent again and again. The danger is that repetitive repentance can become an empty ritual. The people of Israel were convinced that God would be impressed by their sacrifices (Hosea 6:1-3), but their hearts and their lifestyles showed they were not truly repentant.
 - The abuse of wealth leads to idolatry. The idolatry of Israel in the time of Hosea was strongly connected with wealth and prosperity (Hosea 2:5, 12; 10:1). People were ly-
-

ing and cheating in order to get rich (Hosea 12:7-8). There is much controversy about wealth in the church in Africa today. Some Christians view wealth as positive, part of the blessing of God in life, while other Christians see it is negative. Hosea focussed on the abuse of wealth with four warnings: (1) wealth must not be acquired fraudulently (Hosea 12:7-8); (2) wealth must not be used for wrong purposes (Hosea 2:8; 8:4; 13:2), including turning away from God (Hosea 2:13; 12:8); (3) the pursuit of wealth must not become our major goal in life (Hosea 10:12; 12:1); and (4) the abuse of wealth will bring judgement from God (Hosea 2:8-13; 9:9).

- God has strong warnings for leaders in church (Hosea 4:4-9) and society (Hosea 5:1-10). God hates corruption, deceit, and indifference (see Micah 3:9-11). Leaders are called to show people the right path of love, unity, and justice (Hosea 12:6).
- We serve a personal and passionate God. God desires love over sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). He desires sincere repentance and worship (Hosea 7:19; 9:1). He also desires a loving relationship with his people, a relationship that is broken by our rebellion (Hosea 11:8-9).

OUTLINE AND RHYTHM

Hosea and God as the loving but rejected husbands (1:1-3:5)

Hosea and God marry unfaithful mates (1:1-2:1)
Gomer and Israel continue to be unfaithful (2:2-23)
Hosea and God offer redemption (3:1-5)

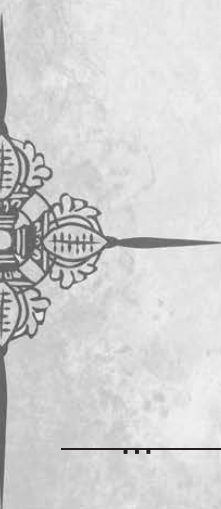
God as the loving but rejected husband (4:1-10:16)

The people are unfaithful (4:1-19)
The leaders are unfaithful (5:1-15)
The call to repentance (6:1-11)
The rejection of that call (7:1-16)
The results of that rejection (8:1-10:16)

God as the loving but rejected Father (11:1-13:16)

God as the loving Father (11:1-12)
Example of Jacob (12:1-14)
Example of Ephraim (13:1-16)

God as the forgiving and loving Lord (14:1-9)



I The LORD gave this message to Hosea son of Beeri during the years when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash* was king of Israel.

Hosea's Wife and Children

²When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute,* so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the LORD and worshipping other gods."

³So Hosea married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she became pregnant and gave Hosea a son. ⁴And the LORD said, "Name the child Jezreel, for I am about to punish King Jehu's dynasty to avenge the murders he committed at Jezreel. In fact, I will bring an end to Israel's independence. ⁵I will break its military power in the Jezreel Valley."

⁶Soon Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to Hosea, "Name your daughter Lo-ruhamah—'Not loved'—for I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them. ⁷But I will show love to the people of Judah. I will free them from their enemies—not with weapons and armies or horses and charioteers, but by my power as the LORD their God."

⁸After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she again became pregnant and gave birth to a second son. ⁹And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi—'Not my people'—for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God.

¹⁰"Yet the time will come when Israel's people will be like the sands of the seashore—too many to count! Then, at the place where they were told, 'You are not my people,' it will be said, 'You are children of the living God.' ¹¹Then the people of Judah and Israel will unite together. They will choose one leader for themselves, and they will return from exile together. What a day that

1:1 Hebrew *Joash*, a variant spelling of Jehoash. **1:2** Or a *promiscuous woman*. **1:10** Verses 1:10-11 are numbered 2:1-2 in Hebrew text. **1:11** Jezreel means "God plants." **2:1** Verses 2:1-23 are numbered 2:3-25 in Hebrew text.

1:1
2 Kgs 15:32-38;
16:2-20; 18:1-8
2 Chr 26:1-23;
27:1-9; 28:1-
27; 29:1-32
Mic 1:1

1:2
Jer 3:1
Hos 2:5; 3:1

1:4
2 Kgs 10:1-36

1:7
Ps 44:3-7
Isa 30:18

1:9
*1 Pet 2:10

1:10
Gen 22:17;
32:12
Isa 63:16; 64:8
Jer 33:22
*Rom 9:26

1:11
Isa 11:12
Jer 30:21
Ezek 37:21-24
Hos 3:5

2:2
Isa 50:1
Hos 4:5

2:3
Isa 20:2-3;
32:13-14
Jer 14:3
Ezek 16:7, 22
Hos 13:15



NAMING

In the Krou tribe in Côte d'Ivoire, when a woman has lost several children in childbirth, the elders recommend that the next child be named "Koukougnon." Paradoxically, this name, which roughly translates to "a being fit for death," was supposed to protect the child from premature death. It was as if acknowledging death's power would cause death to have mercy on the child. People who were called "fit for death" were actually those destined to live.

This reversed identity is in complete contrast with the names that God gave to Hosea's children. By God's command, the prophet's sons' names literally reflected their identity. The third child born of this unusual couple had a significant name, Lo-ammi, which means, "not my people" (Hosea 1:9). This terrible name signified a broken relationship. The child was the symbol of God's rejection. His name indicated how God felt abandoned by his people.

The pagan gods of the ancient world would not show this kind of great marriage-like attachment to their subjects. Our God, in contrast, passionately longs for his wandering children. If you have wandered from God, he is waiting with longing for your return. He wants to be your loving Father again.

will be—the day of Jezreel*—when God will again plant his people in his land.

²¹"In that day you will call your brothers Ammi—'My people.' And you will call your sisters Ruhamah—'The ones I love.'

Charges against an Unfaithful Wife

2 ²But now bring charges against Israel—your mother—for she is no longer my wife, and I am no longer her husband. Tell her to remove the prostitute's makeup from her face and the clothing that exposes her breasts.

³ Otherwise, I will strip her as naked as she was on the day she was born.

APPLICATION

PERFECT LOVE FORGIVES • Hosea 1-3

God asked the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children with her. He warned Hosea that this woman, Gomer, would continue in her prostitution and not be a faithful wife. The prophet obeyed and married her. Gomer bore three children—probably not all fathered by Hosea. God gave the children names that reflected Israel's spiritual state and how he felt about Israel's idolatry. Then, despite all the pain Hosea felt over Gomer's unfaithfulness, God asked him to go and take her back as a demonstration of God's love for his people (Hosea 3:1).

God used the prophet's family to illustrate what was happening in Israel and how he felt about their rebellion. The people had abandoned God to serve idols, just as Gomer abandoned

Hosea for other men. God was very pained by Israel's unfaithfulness, but he still loved them. Therefore, although God punished them and rejected their children (Hosea 2:1-13), he promised to restore them once again (Hosea 2:14).

God loved us while we were still sinners and sent Jesus to die for us (Romans 5:6-8). Yet we are often attracted by what the world offers, and we abandon God's way. But he still continues to show us his love and pursue us. Like the prodigal son's father, when we return to him, he will abundantly pardon (Luke 15:11-24). In the same way as God pardons us, he wants us to love, forgive, and accept others in our daily relationships (Colossians 3:13).



I will leave her to die of thirst,
as in a dry and barren wilderness.

4 And I will not love her children,
for they were conceived in prostitution.

5 Their mother is a shameless prostitute
and became pregnant in a shameful
way.
She said, 'I'll run after other lovers
and sell myself to them for food and
water,
for clothing of wool and linen,
and for olive oil and drinks.'

6 "For this reason I will fence her in with
thorn bushes.
I will block her path with a wall
to make her lose her way.

7 When she runs after her lovers,
she won't be able to catch them.
She will search for them
but not find them.
Then she will think,
'I might as well return to my husband,
for I was better off with him than I am
now.'

8 She doesn't realise it was I who gave her
everything she has—
the grain, the new wine, the olive oil;
I even gave her silver and gold.
But she gave all my gifts to Baal.

9 "But now I will take back the ripened
grain and new wine
I generously provided each harvest
season.
I will take away the wool and linen
clothing
I gave her to cover her nakedness.

2:15 Hebrew *valley of Achor*. 2:16 Hebrew *'my baal'*.

2:5
Jer 2:25; 3:1-2
Ezek 23:16-17,
40-45

2:6
Job 19:8

2:7
Jer 2:2; 3:1
Ezek 23:4
Hos 5:13

2:8
Ezek 16:18
Hos 8:4

2:9
Hos 8:7

2:10
Ezek 16:37

2:11
Isa 1:13-14
Jer 7:34; 16:9

2:12
Jer 5:17; 8:13

2:13
Jer 7:9

Ezek 23:40-42
Hos 4:13; 11:2

2:14
Ezek 20:33-38

2:15
Josh 7:26
Jer 2:1-3

Ezek 16:8, 22

2:16
Isa 54:5
Hos 2:7

10 I will strip her naked in public,
while all her lovers look on.
No one will be able
to rescue her from my hands.

11 I will put an end to her annual festivals,
her new moon celebrations, and her
Sabbath days—
all her appointed festivals.

12 I will destroy her grapevines and fig
trees,
things she claims her lovers gave her.
I will let them grow into tangled thickets,
where only wild animals will eat the
fruit.

13 I will punish her for all those times
when she burned incense to her
images of Baal,
when she put on her earrings and jewels
and went out to look for her lovers
but forgot all about me,"
says the LORD.

The LORD's Love for Unfaithful Israel

14 "But then I will win her back once again.
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her there.

15 I will return her vineyards to her
and transform the Valley of Trouble*
into a gateway of hope.
She will give herself to me there,
as she did long ago when she was
young,
when I freed her from her captivity in
Egypt.

16 When that day comes," says the LORD,
"you will call me 'my husband'
instead of 'my master.'"



PROVERBS & STORIES

DESIRING GOD ABOVE ALL OTHERS

Hosea and his unfaithful wife illustrated the state of the relationship between God and people who had left him to follow other gods. A Kinyarwanda proverb translates to say, "Any chick that spends a night in the bush becomes wild. For you to receive it back, you must pick out what [the chick] was [going] after in the bush, and in its disappointment, it will remember home."

The Israelites abandoned God to follow foreign gods known

as Baals because of the blessing the people of Israel thought the gods would give. Like the wild chick, God snatched out of the Israelites' hands what they were after so that they could hear him and return to him.

We are chosen for fellowship with God, which means that we must not go into the bushes to find any other treasures. We already have what we seek—a relationship with a loving Father.



APPLICATION

THE GOD WHO LONGS FOR US • Hosea 2:14-15; 3:1

After all Israel's rejection of God, their neglect of the law, their idolatry, and their immorality, God still longed for a relationship with them. He instructed Hosea to illustrate this by actually paying the price of a prostitute to be with his wayward wife again. Can you imagine having the rights of marriage, and instead of demanding loyalty, buying back that loyalty? The love that would motivate this laying down of marriage rights is difficult to understand, yet that is how God feels towards his wayward children of Israel.

As we read through the prophets in this part of the Bible, we find incredible details of God's angry judgement. But here we see the other side: God's anger is motivated by a great love. We are not usually so angry when a distant relative's wife leaves him, but we are very angry when our wife leaves us. We are angry at the unfaithfulness of the one we love greatly. That is the way it is with God. His great love motivates both his anger over unfaithfulness and his great longing to see the relationship restored.

- 17 O Israel, I will wipe the many names of
Baal from your lips,
and you will never mention them again.
- 18 On that day I will make a covenant
with all the wild animals and the birds
of the sky
and the animals that move along the
ground
so they will not harm you.
I will remove all weapons of war from
the land,
all swords and bows,
so you can live unafraid
in peace and safety.

2:18
Lev 26:5-6
Job 5:23
Isa 2:4
Ezek 34:25;
39:1-10

2:20
Jer 31:34
Hos 6:6; 13:4

2:21
Zech 8:12

- 19 I will make you my wife for ever,
showing you righteousness and justice,
unfailing love and compassion.
- 20 I will be faithful to you and make you
mine,
and you will finally know me as the
LORD.
- 21 "In that day, I will answer,"
says the LORD.
"I will answer the sky as it pleads for
clouds.
And the sky will answer the earth with
rain.



LEARN

LOVE

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). Genuine love is our greatest tool for evangelism and impacting society.

Here in Hosea 3:1, we see the depth of God's love. The Lord sent Hosea to love his wife again, even though she committed adultery. "This will illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them."

God's love for us challenges us to love him and love others. Christ said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others. If we love rightly, we will have kept God's standards and morals (Matthew 22:36-40). To live out and demonstrate God's love, though, we must overcome incorrect understandings of what love is. We must truly understand God's love for this world and for us.

There are elements in our cultures that make it difficult for us to understand biblical love. Traditional African religion offered sacrifices to appease ancestors or spirits in order to receive a blessing or maintain peace. This system can distort our view of love. God's love is given freely. Although God is pleased with our worship and good works, we cannot appease him or earn his love by our actions (Romans 5:5-10; 8:35-39; James 1:17).

Tribal deities also distort our understanding of love. Each tribe claims its own deity. It was believed that a tribe's gods fight for, provide for, and bless only that tribe. In fact, these gods may try to curse people from a different tribe. The idea that the God of the Bible loves us seems normal. However, to those who have been reared with tribal gods, it may seem strange to think that God's love also crosses tribal borders. Can God love me and love the tribe of my enemy? The answer is that God loves all tribes and nations. "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). His love does not discriminate. He loves "us," and he loves "them."

We also easily misunderstand God's love because of the difficulties that arise in our relationships with authorities—government officials, chiefs, pastors, teachers, and our fathers. We sometimes see leaders who manipulate, lie, steal, cheat, abuse, and require bribes in exchange for helping others. Fathers are often absent or take family resources to gratify their own desires instead of helping the family. It has been said that Chief Rumanyika of western Tanzania would spear the foot of a villager whenever he addressed his people. People who see examples such as these find it difficult to believe in the love of

God our Father. Yet God does love us. And his love compels him to serve rather than mistreat, abuse, or manipulate us (Mark 10:46). God has the power and authority to take, but instead he gives and serves. This is amazing!

Living out God's love in our own lives means that we love unconditionally. We must love other people no matter what they do. People made in God's image are his special creations and should not need to earn our love. We must freely give love without an ulterior motive or expecting anything in return, as God does.

Love must cross boundaries. We need to love those people who are difficult for us to love. Jesus told Jews that they should love Samaritans—their enemies (Luke 6:27-29, 32-35). We must love the tribe next door that always fights against us. This requires a commitment to choose to love. Our love will grow if we make a daily decision to focus on the Bible's teaching about love and to live it out. God the Father loved us so much that he chose to send his Son, and the Son chose to love us and live among us in order to save us from our rebellion against God. This is how God loved the world: "He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul shares this concept of love that even the greatest acts of sacrifice are empty without love. This chapter also describes the true characteristics and nature of love. We are commanded to have love in our hearts for God and others. If we do not have this heartfelt love, we can encourage our love to grow by understanding and caring for the needs, hurts, and struggles of another person made in God's image. We can also pray that God will help us see the other person as God does.

We may think the church's job is to defend and prove our faith through our words, but the Bible is clear that we prove our faith by how we love others. As 1 John clearly teaches us, this is especially true for those inside God's family. People are drawn to the people of God when they see how well we love one another. One of the greatest ways to evangelize our community is for people to be able to look at Christians and think to themselves, "They treat one another as family. They must really know the love of God. I want to be a part of that."

Note that Christian love is sacrificial. God's love for us has always been self-giving (Galatians 1:4). Let us love people so much that we give of our time, our resources, and our skills to help them.

- 22 Then the earth will answer the thirsty
cries
of the grain, the grapevines, and the
olive trees.
And they in turn will answer,
'Jezreel'—'God plants!'
- 23 At that time I will plant a crop of Israelites
and raise them for myself.
I will show love
to those I called 'Not loved.'^{*}
And to those I called 'Not my people,'^{*}
I will say, 'Now you are my people.'
And they will reply, 'You are our God!''^{*}

Hosea's Wife Is Redeemed

3 Then the LORD said to me, "Go and love
your wife again, even though she^{*} commits
adultery with another lover. This will
illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even
though the people have turned to other gods
and love to worship them."^{*}

²So I bought her back for fifteen pieces of
silver^{*} and 220 litres of barley and a measure of
wine.^{*} ³Then I said to her, "You must live in my
house for many days and stop your prostitu-
tion. During this time, you will not have sexual
relations with anyone, not even with me."^{*}

⁴This shows that Israel will go a long time
without a king or prince, and without sacri-
fices, sacred pillars, priests,^{*} or even idols!
⁵But afterwards the people will return and
devote themselves to the LORD their God and

2:22
Jer 31:27-28
Joel 2:19

2:23
Hos 1:6, 9
*Rom 9:25
*1 Pet 2:10

3:2
Ruth 4:10

3:4
Judg 17:6

3:5
Jer 50:4-5
Ezek 34:24

4:1
Isa 59:4
Jer 7:28
Hos 1:2-2
Mic 6:2

4:2
Hos 6:8-9; 7:1-
4; 10:4

4:3
Isa 24:4; 33:9
Zeph 1:3

4:4
Deut 17:12
Ezek 3:26
Amos 5:10, 13

4:5
Ezek 14:3, 7
Hos 5:5

4:6
Hos 4:14
Zech 11:8-9,
15-17
Mal 2:7-8

to David's descendant, their king.^{*} In the last
days, they will tremble in awe of the LORD
and of his goodness.

The LORD's Case against Israel

- 4** ¹Hear the word of the LORD, O people
of Israel!
The LORD has brought charges against
you, saying:
"There is no faithfulness, no kindness,
no knowledge of God in your land.
- 2** You make vows and break them;
you kill and steal and commit
adultery.
There is violence everywhere—
one murder after another.
- 3** That is why your land is in mourning,
and everyone is wasting away.
Even the wild animals, the birds of the
sky,
and the fish of the sea are
disappearing.
- 4** "Don't point your finger at someone else
and try to pass the blame!
My complaint, you priests,
is with you.^{*}
- 5** So you will stumble in broad daylight,
and your false prophets will fall with
you in the night.
And I will destroy Israel, your mother.
- 6** My people are being destroyed
because they don't know me.

2:23a Hebrew *Lo-ruhamah*; see 1:6. 2:23b Hebrew *Lo-ammi*; see 1:9. 3:1a *Or Go and love a woman who.* 3:1b Hebrew *love their raisin cakes.* 3:2a Hebrew *15 [shekels] of silver*, about 171 grams or 6 ounces in weight. 3:2b As in Greek version, which reads *a homer of barley and a wineskin full of wine*; Hebrew reads *a homer [220 litres or 5 bushels] of barley and a lethek [110 litres or 2.5 bushels] of barley.* 3:3 *Or and I will live with you.* 3:4 Hebrew *ephod*, the vest worn by the priest. 3:5 Hebrew *to David their king.* 4:4 Hebrew *Your people are like those with a complaint against the priests.*



APPLICATION

DISOBEDIENCE CALLS FOR JUDGEMENT • Hosea 4

When the leaders of God's people lack the knowledge of God, when they fail to advise the people to obey God's law, or when they themselves disobey God's law, God's people fall into sin. The people lack knowledge and an example to follow, and they disobey him.

Like the priests in Hosea's time, some pastors and leaders of God's people reject the truth and teach what is popular. Because of this, God will reject them. If sin continues to be

evident in a church, it is because pastors have failed in their responsibilities. God promises even greater judgement and punishment for leaders who cause people to sin than on those who are led astray.

Leaders should preach and teach the authentic Word of God. They should show the people how to obey, and they should set a good example through their own actions. Then the people will live holier lives!



PROVERBS & STORIES

"THEY DO NOT KNOW ME"

Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are being destroyed because they don't know me. Since you priests refuse to know me, I refuse to recognise you as my priests." God scolded his people for living in error, ignorance, and without love. He told them they no longer knew him, and that they, in fact, refused to know him. People need to know and to be enlightened by God to have direction and be able to make good choices.

During family gatherings, when two Mossi people from Burkina Faso realise they are related, they may say, *Naaf tabda a biig liké n ka mi t, yaa a biig ye*, meaning, "The cow crushes her calf in the darkness without knowing that it is hers." They use

this to show their regret for an unfortunate event that may have happened between them when they did not know they were related. We must ask God to shed light on all of life's circumstances so we can understand them correctly.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life" (John 8:12). There must be light for the cow to avoid "crushing her little one." The world is complex and problems can be difficult to solve. We need to know God and his wisdom to follow the truth correctly in each situation. Ask God for this spiritual insight and wisdom. (Ephesians 1:17-18).

Since you priests refuse to know me,
I refuse to recognise you as my priests.
Since you have forgotten the laws of
your God,

I will forget to bless your children.

7 The more priests there are,
the more they sin against me.

They have exchanged the glory of God
for the shame of idols.*

8 "When the people bring their sin
offerings, the priests get fed.
So the priests are glad when the
people sin!

9 'And what the priests do, the people also
do.'

So now I will punish both priests and
people
for their wicked deeds.

10 They will eat and still be hungry.
They will play the prostitute and gain
nothing from it,

for they have deserted the LORD

11 to worship other gods.

"Wine has robbed my people
of their understanding.

12 They ask a piece of wood for advice!
They think a stick can tell them the
future!

Longing after idols
has made them foolish.

They have played the prostitute,
serving other gods and deserting their
God.

13 They offer sacrifices to idols on the
mountain tops.

They go up into the hills to burn
incense
in the pleasant shade of oaks, poplars,
and terebinth trees.

"That is why your daughters turn to
prostitution,
and your daughters-in-law commit
adultery.

14 But why should I punish them
for their prostitution and adultery?
For your men are doing the same thing,
sinning with whores and shrine
prostitutes.

O foolish people! You refuse to
understand,
so you will be destroyed.

15 "Though you, Israel, are a prostitute,
may Judah not be guilty of such
things.

Do not join the false worship at Gilgal or
Beth-aven,*
and do not take oaths there in the
LORD's name.

4:7
Hos 10:1; 13:6
Hab 2:16
Rom 1:23

4:9
Isa 24:2
Jer 5:31

4:11
Isa 5:12; 28:7

4:12
Isa 44:19
Jer 2:27

4:13
Jer 2:20; 3:6
Ezek 6:13
Hos 2:13; 11:2

4:14
Deut 23:17
Rom 1:31

4:16
Isa 5:17; 7:25

4:17
Ps 81:12

4:19
Hos 12:1; 13:15



IDOLATRY IS SPIRITUAL PROSTITUTION

In southwestern Côte d'Ivoire, there is a small mountain named Guékouzalié. A village of hunters and farmers stretches out from its hillsides. Its inhabitants used to worship this mountain unashamedly because they believed the mountain was the sanctuary of their guardian spirit.

Like these people, many other traditional African communities worshipped material things like lakes, rivers, woods, or forests. In Hosea's day the people of Israel also worshipped such things. God condemned them for worshipping idols, saying that they asked a piece of wood for advice and thought that a stick could tell the future (Hosea 4:12).

God looks upon idolatry as a form of spiritual prostitution. The children of Israel worshipped natural elements, but idolatry is not limited to these things. Today we can have attitudes and behaviours that creep in and are forms of idolatry. Perhaps a good football match causes some of us to forget about our time of prayer and meditation on God's Word. Sometimes business opportunities lead people to give up their Christian principles. For other people, their affection for titles or money competes with their affection for God.

We must stop to consider: Have some of our activities taken precedence over God? The children of Israel gave up the worship of God for a piece of wood. We are not immune. It is important to ask ourselves if our favourite paper is found in the pages of our Bibles or the bills in our wallets.

We should not give anyone or anything priority over God. He is the only one worthy of worship (Exodus 20:3).

16 Israel is stubborn,
like a stubborn heifer.
So should the LORD feed her
like a lamb in a lush pasture?

17 Leave Israel* alone,
because she is married to idolatry.

18 When the rulers of Israel finish their
drinking,
off they go to find some prostitutes.
They love shame more than honour.*

19 So a mighty wind will sweep them
away.

Their sacrifices to idols will bring
them shame.

The Failure of Israel's Leaders

5¹ "Hear this, you priests.
Pay attention, you leaders of Israel.
Listen, you members of the royal family.
Judgement has been handed down
against you.

4:7 As in Syriac version and an ancient Hebrew tradition; Masoretic Text reads *I will turn their glory into shame*. 4:15 Beth-aven means "house of wickedness"; it is being used as another name for Bethel, which means "house of God." 4:17 Hebrew *Ephraim*, referring to the northern kingdom of Israel. 4:18 As in Greek version; the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

- For you have led the people into a snare by worshipping the idols at Mizpah and Tabor.
- 2 You have dug a deep pit to trap them at Acacia Grove.*
But I will settle with you for what you have done.
- 3 I know what you are like, O Ephraim. You cannot hide yourself from me, O Israel.
You have left me as a prostitute leaves her husband;
you are utterly defiled.
- 4 Your deeds won't let you return to your God.
You are a prostitute through and through,
and you do not know the LORD.
- 5 "The arrogance of Israel testifies against her;
Israel and Ephraim will stumble under their load of guilt.
Judah, too, will fall with them.
- 6 When they come with their flocks and herds
to offer sacrifices to the LORD,
they will not find him,
because he has withdrawn from them.
- 7 They have betrayed the honour of the LORD,
bearing children that are not his.
Now their false religion will devour them
along with their wealth.*
- 8 "Sound the alarm in Gibeah!
Blow the trumpet in Ramah!
Raise the battle cry in Beth-aven*!
Lead on into battle, O warriors of Benjamin!
- 9 One thing is certain, Israel*:
On your day of punishment,
you will become a heap of rubble.
- 10 "The leaders of Judah have become like thieves.*

5:3 Amos 5:12
5:4 Hos 4:6, 14
5:5 2 Kgs 17:19-20; Ezek 23:31-35
5:6 Isa 1:15; Ezek 8:6; Mic 6:6-7
5:7 Hos 2:4
5:9 Isa 28:1-4; 37:3; Hos 9:11-17
5:10 Deut 27:17; Pss 32:6; 93:3-4; Ezek 7:8
5:12 Ps 39:11; Isa 51:8
5:13 Jer 30:12
5:14 Pss 7:2; 50:22; Hos 13:7
5:15 Isa 64:7-9; Jer 2:27
6:1 2 Chr 7:14; Isa 30:26; Jer 50:4; Hos 14:4; Zeph 2:1-3
6:2 Ps 30:5
6:3 Isa 2:3; Joel 2:23; Mic 4:2
6:4 Ps 78:34-37; Hos 13:3

- So I will pour my anger on them like a waterfall.
- 11 The people of Israel will be crushed and broken by my judgement
because they are determined to worship idols.*
- 12 I will destroy Israel as a moth consumes wool.
I will make Judah as weak as rotten wood.
- 13 "When Israel and Judah saw how sick they were,
Israel turned to Assyria—
to the great king there—
but he could neither help nor cure them.
- 14 I will be like a lion to Israel,
like a strong young lion to Judah.
I will tear them to pieces!
I will carry them off,
and no one will be left to rescue them.
- 15 Then I will return to my place
until they admit their guilt and turn to me.
For as soon as trouble comes,
they will earnestly search for me."

A Call to Repentance

- 6¹ "Come, let us return to the LORD.
He has torn us to pieces;
now he will heal us.
He has injured us;
now he will bandage our wounds.
- 2 In just a short time he will restore us,
so that we may live in his presence.
- 3 Oh, that we might know the LORD!
Let us press on to know him.
He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn
or the coming of rains in early spring."
- 4 "O Israel* and Judah,
what should I do with you?" asks the LORD.

5:2 Hebrew at *Shittim*. The meaning of the Hebrew for this sentence is uncertain. 5:7 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. 5:8 *Beth-aven* means "house of wickedness"; it is being used as another name for Bethel, which means "house of God." 5:9 Hebrew *Ephraim*, referring to the northern kingdom of Israel; also in 5:11, 12, 13, 14. 5:10 Hebrew *like those who move a boundary marker*. 5:11 *Or determined to follow human commands*. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. 6:4 Hebrew *Ephraim*, referring to the northern kingdom of Israel.



APPLICATION

A NATION IS THE REFLECTION OF ITS LEADERS • Hosea 5

The priests and the leaders of Israel strayed from God into idolatry and led the people into a snare by their folly (Hosea 5:1). God was angry at the attitudes of the priests, leaders, and people. The entire nation betrayed him. God felt like a husband who had been left by his wife. He complained, "You have left me as a prostitute leaves her husband" (Hosea 5:3).

Hosea prophesied that God would judge Israel and Judah so harshly that they would turn to the king of Assyria for help. But he would not be of any help to them until they recognised how sick they were and returned to God.

The situation in Hosea's time can be compared to many of our nations. Social, political, and military crises are so devastating that the nations turn to the United Nations for help. Extremism is developing, and diseases like Ebola are killing many. Although the United Nations and World Health Organisation send international military forces and medical help, they cannot solve the deeper problem.

The leaders in areas of crisis need to be take action by turning to God for guidance. Is God not strong enough to help us fix our own problems? Leaders of Africa, turn to God, not outsiders, for help. This can begin a process of healing.



THE BOOK OF JAMES

Author: James, a half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:6-29). He wrote the letter to the Jewish Christians in the *diaspora*—those living in other countries.

Date: Probably in the mid or late AD 40s, prior to the Jerusalem council of AD 49 or 50. James may have been the first book in the New Testament to be written.

Purpose: To show, through many practical examples, that the faith of a Christian should result in a change of behaviour. True faith, guided by godly wisdom, is evidenced in godly living.

Overview and Story: The church in Africa, like the church in other parts of the world, is torn between emphasizing evangelism and social action. It tries to balance faith declared in words with faith declared in action. James says, however, that there should not be a choice between the two. Instead, genuine faith will be demonstrated in action. The real contrast is between just saying “I believe” and not letting it make a difference in how one lives compared with a genuine saving faith that results in doing good works.

James is not like other New Testament letters that follow a logical train of thought from the beginning to the end. Instead, it is more like Proverbs or other wisdom literature that uses one short idea after another to make a point. This is a more Semitic form of writing. For instance, James is concerned about the way believers speak. He tells us to be slow to anger (James 1:19), control our tongues (James 1:26), avoid speaking evil against one another (James 4:11), and not be boastful (James 4:13-17). Other themes in James are wisdom, the relationship between faith and deeds, the trials of faith, favouritism, and the dangers of wealth.

In chapter 1, James urged his readers to put their faith into action through their words and activities. In chapters 2 and 3, he established the relationship between faith and works. He asserted that one may claim to have faith but that failing to “love your neighbour as yourself” makes one a transgressor of all the other laws. The evidence of faith is seen in action and speech. In chapters 4 and 5, James answered the question of who is a wise person and told the readers to be humble before God and resist the devil (James 4:7). He warned his readers against the evils of pride, discrimination, greed, lust, hypocrisy, worldliness, and slander. He explained the value of winning a “wandering believer.”

What James Teaches Us

- Believers are to take care of one another instead of following the world’s principle of “every man for himself and God for us all.” As Christians, our faith must bear fruit by causing us to take care of those in trouble—the oppressed and those who are disregarded (James 1:27). This message is of particular importance to the African church in the *diaspora* and the African church in persecution.
 - Believers must understand that integrity and uprightness in all aspects of life should be the natural result of a living faith. This living faith results in a godly life guided by godly
-

wisdom.

- Like the readers of the letter of James, African Christians need to re-evaluate our societies' structures and work to bring them in line with biblical values. Traditional African societies made provision for care of the underprivileged and disenfranchised through the strength of the community. Today, however, our societies are being more influenced by the individualism that is often found in the Western world, which means we have less motivation to care for the underprivileged and those without power. James calls us to return to our roots and be more concerned about the needy.
- Running like a thread though this letter is the need for wisdom from God. The key verse is James 2:26, "Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works." James is concerned that believers live out the Christian faith within the community of believers in a way that is consistent with true faith in Christ. The book of James urges the many African Christians in the *diaspora* not to put away their faith or allow it to conform to the Christianity of a host country, as the *diaspora* Jews were doing. Rather, even in *diaspora*, the Christianity of Africans must remain authentic and faithful to the Bible.

OUTLINE AND RHYTHM

The true life of faith (1:1-18)

Enduring trials and overcoming temptations (1:1-11)

God blesses those who patiently endure trials and overcome temptation (1:12-18)

Faith informed by godly wisdom is faith in action (1:19-3:12)

Faith helps us control anger (1:19-26)

Faith helps us control prejudice (2:1-13)

Faith helps us control inaction (2:14-26)

Faith helps us control our tongues (3:1-12)

Faith informed by godly wisdom shapes our worldview (4:1-5:20)

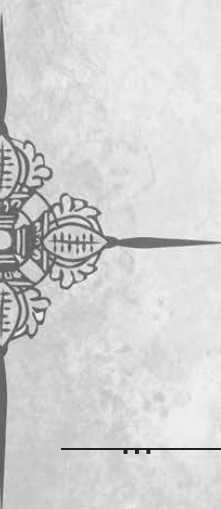
Peaceful and humble living (4:1-17)

Use of wealth and riches (5:1-6)

Patience and endurance (5:7-12)

Prayer (5:13-18)

Accountability (5:19-20)



Greetings from James

I This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to the “twelve tribes”—Jewish believers scattered abroad.
Greetings!

Faith and Endurance

2 Dear brothers and sisters,* when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.⁶ But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.⁷ Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.⁸ Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

9 Believers who are* poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.¹⁰ And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field.¹¹ The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.

12 God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterwards they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.¹³ And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong,* and he never tempts anyone else.¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

1:2 Greek *brothers*; also in 1:16, 19. **1:9** Greek *The brother who is*. **1:13** Or *God should not be put to a test by evil people*.
1:17a Greek *from above, from the Father of lights*. **1:17b** Some manuscripts read *He never changes, as a shifting shadow does*.
1:18 Greek *we became a kind of first-fruit of his creatures*. **1:20a** Greek *A man's anger*. **1:20b** Or *the justice*.



APPLICATION

WISDOM IS FROM GOD • James 1:5

Education is very expensive and not available to some people. However, wisdom, which is more valuable than education, is free and accessible to everyone. One cannot buy wisdom; it comes by asking God for it (James 1:5) and pursuing it through study of the Scriptures. James assures us that wisdom is available for those who are willing to ask for it. This wisdom is different than formal education. It requires knowing the mind of God and walking in his will. Also, it results in living an honorable life and making good decisions.

Many people spend years going to school and earning degrees but fail to ask God for wisdom. They become highly educated but foolish. They are incapable of making wise decisions in life choices and relationships. Wisdom is from God, and God is ready to give it to those who seek it.

What confuses you in your life, work, family, or career? Ask for wisdom to make the right decision that will give your life meaning. God is not stingy.



AFRICAN TOUCH POINTS

ABLE TO HANDLE ANYTHING

Didymus the Blind (AD 313–398) was a theologian who led an important school for nearly fifty years in Alexandria, Egypt. He wrote:

James does all he can to encourage his readers to bear their trials with joy and as a burden that is bearable. He says that perfect patience consists in bearing testing for its own sake, not for the hope of a better reward later.

Nevertheless, he tries to persuade his readers to rely on the promise that their present condition will be put right. The person who has fought hard battles will be able to handle anything. The person who comes through his troubles with joy will be prepared to receive his reward. This reward is “the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.¹⁷ Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.* He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.*¹⁸ He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.*

Listening and Doing

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.²⁰ Human anger* does not produce the righteousness* God desires.²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.²⁵ But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

²⁶If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. ²⁷Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means looking after orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.


A Warning against Prejudice

2 My dear brothers and sisters,* how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favour some people over others?

²For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting* dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewellery, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. ³If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one. "You can stand over there.

2:1 Greek *brothers*; also in 2:5, 14. **2:2** Greek *your synagogue*.

1:26
Ps 34:13
1:27
Deut 14:29
Jas 4:4
1 Jn 2:15-17
2:1
Prov 24:23
Acts 10:34
1 Cor 2:8
2:4
John 7:23-24
2:5
Luke 6:20; 21:1-4
1 Cor 1:26-28

 **AFRICAN TOUCH POINTS**

GOD CHOOSES THE WEAK

Augustine (c. 354–430), a well-known leader of the early church whose writings are often still read today, was born in what is today Algeria. He wrote:

I find it strange, Lord, that in many of your churches the rich are more highly regarded than the poor and that the noble are better thought of than the less well born. But you have chosen the powerless in this world to put to shame those who are powerful and you have chosen things the world considers foolish, despised, and as nothing at all to shame those who think they are wise and bring to nothing what the world considers important.

or else sit on the floor”—well, ⁴doesn't this discrimination show that your judgements are guided by evil motives?

⁵Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters.



PROVERBS & STORIES

WHO AM I?

The Hausa people of northern Nigeria have a story about a cattle dealer who went down south to sell some cattle. He made a lot of money. On his way home, however, he got into the company of some robbers who tricked him into drinking a drugged beverage when they stopped for lunch. He fell asleep, and the robbers took all his money, shaved his head clean, and left. When the dealer woke up, he was all alone. His mind went immediately to his money, so he touched his pockets to see if the money was there. When he realised his pockets were empty, he put his hands on his head, preparing to cry out in distress. He discovered that there was no hair on his head, so he paused, nodded, and said, "Aha! I certainly know I am not the one who was robbed!"

Of course, trying to assure himself that he was not the one was a form of denial due to his distress at his great loss of money. James tells us that the one who hears the Word of God and does not do it is like the person who looks into a mirror but forgets who he is as soon as he turns away (James 1:23-24).

The Bible—God's mirror—reveals our true person, our origin, our past, our present, and our future. When we look into the Word, we must not go away without allowing the Word to change us. There is nothing that is as powerful to transform our lives as the Bible. We must put into practise the principles of God's Word. Merely repeating the Bible or even memorizing it gets us only halfway there. Obeying God's Word brings true change. When you read a passage, ask what God would have you do in response.



APPLICATION

CARING FOR OTHERS • James 1:27

Many activities and practices we perform in the name of religion are not acceptable to God. The Bible, being the manual for living, provides us with a guide on what is acceptable or not. James declared that any form of religion that fails to provide for orphans and widows in their affliction is not pure and not acceptable to God. You must also keep yourself away from those thoughts and actions that can defile you or drag you in the dirt.

Many widows and orphans are often innocent victims of war in Africa. Your church, fellowship group, and family should constantly be on the lookout for ways to help them. In addition to living a holy life, without which no one shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14), we must practise the Word of God. We do this by caring for the less privileged in our communities. Jesus did it. The early church did it. You, too, must do it if you desire your worship to be acceptable.

NO PREJUDICE IN THE CHURCH • James 2:1-9

In the Roman world, a small elite controlled most of the wealth. Most free persons were peasants working on the estates of rich landlords. The urban poor lived in cramped apartments owned by the wealthy. Synagogues honoured wealthy donors with special titles and seats, while most people apparently sat on mats on the floor. In most of the empire, members of the wealthy elite could drag those of lower status into court. However, a poor person taking a wealthy person to court was rare because judges themselves belonged to the elite and favoured people like themselves. James denounces such prejudice in the church.

In some churches, we seat people according to rank. The church often favours those with wealth. All of us are the same before God, and Christians need to treat one another accordingly. Sometimes even church members or leaders have oppressed the poor in the name of tradition; for example, displacing widows in order to take their homes. At other times, however, churches stand for justice. Churches should challenge customs that abuse others. For example, some people who promise to provide education for an orphan or a child from a poor village family simply use them as servants. Instead, we should defend the needy.

Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? ⁶But you dishonour the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? ⁷Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name* you bear?

⁸Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbour as yourself."⁸ ⁹But if you favour some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

¹⁰For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. ¹¹For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder."¹¹ So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

¹²So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. ¹³There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

Faith without Good Deeds Is Dead

¹⁴What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶and you say, "Goodbye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that

2:7 Greek slander the noble name. **2:8** Lev 19:18. **2:11** Exod 20:13-14; Deut 5:17-18.

2:7
Acts 11:26
1 Pet 4:16

2:8
*Lev 19:18
Matt 7:12
Rom 13:8

2:10
Matt 5:19
Gal 5:3

2:11
*Exod 20:13-14
*Deut 5:17-18
Matt 19:18

2:12
Jas 1:25

2:13
Matt 18:32-35
Luke 6:36

2:15
Matt 25:35-36
2:16
1 Jn 3:17-18

2:17
Gal 5:6
Jas 2:20, 26

2:18
Matt 7:16-17
Rom 3:28



THE POOR

Have you ever been denied fair treatment because you are poor? Many in Africa have this experience. Some have dropped out of school because they could not pay their fees. Others have died because they could not afford the cost of simple medication. Many poor people are not given the rights, privileges, dignity, and honour due to them. They often receive harsh mistreatment, injustice, and discrimination. At special functions, those who dress well are given seats among the dignitaries and receive special attention, while those who dress poorly are kept away from the head table.

We can learn how to treat the poor by seeing the way Jesus and the early church treated them. James 2:1-11 tells Christians to treat poor people in the same way they would treat the rich. What matters is a person's relationship with God. Jesus spoke of reaching out to the poor as part of his anointing (Luke 4:18-19). Giving special treatment to people on the basis of their social and economic status is against the teachings of Jesus. James tells us not show favouritism. The Kingdom of God does not discriminate. Neither should we. Jesus blessed the poor and promised them the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3). The Bible clearly states that the Kingdom of God is for them.

person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

¹⁷So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

¹⁸Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I



SINGING LULLABIES TO A HUNGRY CHILD

Some say, *Ni utheri kwinqira uri na mpara*, meaning, "It is pointless to sing lullabies to a hungry child." This saying was used in many parts of Africa to express the uselessness of ignoring the physical needs of a person while at the same time trying to get cooperation from them. Most Africans agree with James 2:15-17, "Suppose you see a brother or

sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, 'Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well'—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?' Thus faith by itself if it does not have works is dead. Churches will only grow healthy through engaging the whole person: mind, heart, and body.



DEAD OR LIVING FAITH? • James 2:14-19

Both Africans and Jews have strong rules about dead people and animals. When a living thing dies, it must be removed immediately. It must be properly disposed of so that it will not smell or contaminate the environment. When James says the type of faith without works is dead faith, he was using a very strong picture of how useless and unwanted such faith is.

Many people think there is a contradiction between James's teaching on the importance of works and Paul's teaching in Ephesians and Galatians on the importance of faith. They are actually complementary and not contradictory. Paul's teaching

says we are saved by faith and not by works, while James says that saving faith must produce works. Such works do not earn salvation, but they are the result and evidence of faith. We are not saved by good deeds but are saved to *produce* good deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Faith without works is dead! Your life as a Christian must impact others around you positively as evidence of what Christ has done in you. Is your faith dead or alive? Let your faith display the good works that will glorify God and bless the people who are in need. Put your faith into action and many will believe your message.



AFRICAN TOUCH POINTS

ABRAHAM'S ACTIVE FAITH

Cyril of Alexandria (ad 378–444) was the patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt, when the city was at the height of its influence and power. He wrote:

How are we to understand the relationship between faith and good deeds in our salvation?

On the one hand, James says that Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions, his good deeds, when he bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on a mountain in Moriah. On the other hand, Paul says that Abraham was made right with God not by his good deeds but by his faith (Romans 4:1–4). These two statements appear to be contradictory.

However, the Scriptures are to be understood as meaning that Abraham believed God before he was the father of Isaac. Isaac was given to him as reward for his faith. Likewise, when he bound Isaac and placed him on the altar, he did not merely do the work that was required of him, but he did it with the faith that in Isaac his seed would be as numberless as the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5–6). Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham's faith was an active one that resulted in obedience to God.

say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

¹⁹You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God.* Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

2:19 Some manuscripts read that God is one; see Deut 6:4. **3:1** Greek *brothers*; also in 3:10.

- 2:19**
Deut 6:4
Matt 8:29
- 2:20**
Gal 5:6
Jas 2:14, 17, 26
- 2:21**
Gen 22:9, 12
- 2:22**
Heb 11:17
- 2:23**
*Gen 15:6
Isa 41:8
Rom 4:3–5
- 2:25**
Josh 2:4, 6, 15
Heb 11:31
- 2:26**
Gal 5:6
Jas 2:14, 17, 20
- 3:1**
Luke 12:48
Rom 2:21
- 3:2**
Jas 1:4, 26
- 3:3**
Ps 32:9
- 3:5**
Prov 26:20

2:23a Gen 15:6. **2:23b** See Isa 41:8. **2:26** Or *without spirit*.

²¹Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."* He was even called the friend of God.* ²⁴So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

²⁵Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. ²⁶Just as the body is dead without breath,* so also faith is dead without good works.

Controlling the Tongue

3 Dear brothers and sisters,* not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

³We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. ⁴And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. ⁵In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.



PROVERBS & STORIES

WORDS ARE LIKE EGGS

The Tchabè people from Benin say, "Words are like eggs; if you let go of them, you cannot get them back." A dropped egg will crack, spill, and be permanently lost. Words are the same. Once you say them, they cannot be taken back, and their effects are beyond your control.

James says the tongue is like a flame of fire. Even though it is small, a spark from words it speaks can destroy a whole forest. Just as it is foolish to play with eggs or fire, "fools

are destroyed by their own words" (Ecclesiastes 10:12). It is important to learn to "tame the tongue." The tongue is a double-edged sword that we must learn how to use for good.

Only divine wisdom can help us guard our tongue, handling it carefully like an egg so our words will edify and encourage those who listen to us, rather than do harm. "Those who control their tongue will have a long life; opening your mouth can ruin everything" (Proverbs 13:3).

TONGUE MEAT

Two married women were friends in the same village. One of them had a hard life in her marriage, and the other had a good marriage. When the unhappy wife asked her friend what she did to make her marriage thrive, the happy wife explained that she gave her husband tongue meat. So the unhappy wife bought a cow tongue to prepare for her husband. But many days later her husband still had not changed. Then the happy wife explained her secret: Marriages are preserved with sweet words.

James 3:1–12 teaches us to control our words. That is the critical element. Ask before we speak, "Will this be helpful or hurtful?"

Jesus Christ warned us about the words that we carelessly let out of our mouths (Matthew 12:36). James wants us to speak only helpful words because we are saved by God. Sweet, good words are those that build up others' souls so they can see God and see how we see God. Our words can either be "tongue meat" or poison. To speak words that offend your fellow person who has been filled with the Holy Spirit is to blaspheme the One who is within them. To do this is to wrong God and the Holy Spirit who lives within that person. Let us follow the book of James: Good and bad speech cannot come from one mouth.



AFRICAN TOUCH POINTS

TAMING THE TONGUE

Augustine (AD 354–430), a well-known leader of the early church whose writings are often still read today, was born in what is today Algeria. He wrote:

Does your own human nature prevent you from taming your tongue? Let us understand, my dearly beloved, that no human being can tame the tongue, and so we must take refuge in God, who will tame it.

Consider this analogy from the animals that we tame. A horse does not tame itself. A camel does not tame itself. An elephant does not tame itself. A snake does not tame itself. A lion does not tame itself. In the same way, a person does not tame himself or herself. In order to tame a horse, a camel, an elephant, a lion, or a snake, a human being is required. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that God should be required in order for our human tongue to be tamed.

6And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.*

7People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, **8**but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. **9**Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses

3:6 Or for it will burn in hell (Greek Gehenna). **3:12** Greek from salt. **3:18** Or of good things, or of justice.

3:6
Prov 16:27
Matt 12:36-37;
15:11, 18-19

3:8
Ps 140:3
Rom 3:13

3:9
Gen 1:26-27;
5:1
1 Cor 11:7

3:12
Matt 7:16

3:13
Jas 2:18

3:14
2 Cor 12:20

3:15
Jas 1:5, 17

3:16
1 Cor 3:3
Gal 5:20-21

3:17
Luke 6:36
Rom 12:9
Heb 12:11

3:18
Prov 11:18
Isa 32:17
Matt 5:9
Phil 1:11

those who have been made in the image of God. **10**And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! **11**Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? **12**Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.*

True Wisdom Comes from God

13If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. **14**But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. **15**For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. **16**For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

17But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favouritism and is always sincere. **18**And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*



APPLICATION

GODLY WISDOM VS. EARTHLY WISDOM • James 3:13-18

It is easy to confuse being smart with true wisdom. Many use their academic credentials to brag. They may create bitterness, envy, strife, or confusion. They act self-important and offend many. Can we say such credentialed people are wise? It is easy to confuse being smart with true wisdom.

Also, many people confuse knowledge and wisdom. When knowledge is properly applied to how we live, it can bring wisdom. James talked about two kinds of wisdom—God's kind of wisdom and earthly wisdom. Earthly wisdom can be destructive, promote jealousy, and be selfish. God's kind of wisdom is pure, peace-loving, gentle, submissive, full

of mercy, impartial, and sincere. We need to ask for God's wisdom (James 1:5).

We know the value of wisdom and also the dangers of acting foolishly, especially as leaders. Our political leaders in Africa need wisdom to make important decisions that affect our lives. But when the source of the wisdom is not from God, the results can be bitterness, selfish ambition, and disorder. Africa has suffered a lot from this kind of bad wisdom.

We must seek wisdom from God for our nations, communities, and families so we can enjoy true peace. Peacemakers who sow in wisdom will enjoy a harvest of righteousness (James 3:18).



PROVERBS & STORIES

HEALTHY CLEVERNESS

Wisdom to the Nuer of South Sudan means "healthy cleverness." Healthy cleverness promotes right living and gives good understanding.

Healthy cleverness is not cunning or a type of smartness that harms people. Nuer believe that the jackal is a cunning animal. While people fill their baskets with fruit and seeds from the trees, the jackal sleeps as though it is dead. It then awakens and quickly steals the food. This is the wisdom of the world—cunningly stealing things from people and nations and making them suffer.

The opposite is true wisdom—a healthy cleverness that builds up. It comes from God, and it is his gift to us from creation.

No one is born wise, but we can learn to acquire healthy cleverness that glorifies God. Wisdom is not only for the elderly; even young people can be wise when they search for the wisdom that comes from above. God can give wisdom to someone to create, advise, or teach. Old people may have experience, but age does not always guarantee wisdom. Seek both experience and wisdom.

CHILDREN AT RISK

God has blessed Africa with many children, a great blessing indeed (Psalm 127:3). Roughly half of Africa's population is children below age eighteen. They are our hope for the future. But what kind of a future can Africa's children hope for? It is sad that many of our children are "at risk" because of violence, war, abuse, disease, and many obstacles that challenge children in Africa.

A child at risk is any child whose God-given potential for normal growth and a bright future are hampered because of difficult circumstances. Children at risk lack basic necessities needed for them to develop into healthy adults. These might include lack of food, clothing, shelter, safety, parental support, healthcare, and education.

Unique Problems of Children in Africa

In Africa, children at risk include orphans, abused children, street children, trafficked children, unwanted children, disabled children, child prostitutes, children of war, children in forced labour, children living in extreme poverty, children affected by HIV/AIDS, child brides, girls forced to endure female genital mutilation, and child-headed households. The United Nations estimates that there are ten million street children in Africa. Some children are killing and dying in wars. These children do not receive the necessary care and support to enjoy childhood and normal growth.

Neglected children may engage in substance abuse, stealing, begging, deceiving, or sexual activities. It may lead some to selling their bodies as sex workers. Some drop out of school, become emotionally and psychologically unstable, or even commit suicide. Disabled children can be a mark of disgrace to the family and are either shunned or pitied.

The spirit of communal compassion that used to reign in Africa seems to be dying as globalization, individualism, and changes in lifestyle take over. In the past, for example, a child would never be truly an orphan because there was always someone in the extended family, like an uncle or grandparent or even a neighbour, to take responsibility for them. Nowadays, "family" is more and more being redefined to mean the immediate family, the ones with just parents and their biological children. When a parent or parents are missing, the child may be in trouble. Street children were never a reality in the past, but now our streets are filled

with them.

A Call to the Church

God is not silent about our children. His care, compassion, and protection for them are seen throughout Scripture. In Psalm 68:5, God is called a "Father to the fatherless, defender of widows." Because God is concerned for the rights of children, we must also be. The Bible is clear that those who exploit the poor and the orphans and rob the fatherless children will incur God's judgement (Isaiah 10:1-2). In addition, "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means looking after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children" (Matthew 19:14). Christ is the ultimate comfort for all children. The church must point children at risk to Christ, both by word and deed.

Individual Christians

The Shona people of Zimbabwe say, *Chakafukidza dzimba matenga*, meaning, "What covers houses are the roofs." They say this to show that only those who are inside know what is going on there. Christians need to see whether any children around them are at risk. It is easy to point fingers at the government or the wider church and say they should take care of the children. However, looking at ourselves helps us to see "the log in [our] own" eye (Matthew 7:3) and to act on it.

If every Christian home truly cared for all its children, the number of children at risk would drastically decrease. More children would be safer, secure, and well cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Christians should learn to treat all children as a blessing and to provide an environment that allows children to grow and prosper in the home.

- *Physically*, children must be provided with enough good food, clothing, and a safe environment.
- *Emotionally*, children need to have a healthy connection with trusted adults. They need to be supported and encouraged to express their feelings in a healthy, God-fearing way. Trusted Christian adults should make themselves available for children, especially those at risk.
- *Socially*, children must be encouraged to associate with other children and with adults of both genders. Children should

be taught to be responsible both for themselves and to care for others. Children should not live isolated lives. They need to have a sense of belonging.

- *Spiritually*, children should be pointed to their Saviour Jesus Christ through caring adults modelling faith, prayer, regular Bible study, and church attendance.
- *Educationally*, children should be provided with an education that gives them a foundation for life and allows them to advance as far as possible. Jesus said that truth sets us free; education trains our children how to discover truth. The African church must insist that girls as well as boys be provided with every opportunity to get a good education.

We also need to look beyond our own families. The Shona saying, *Ndezvemeso muromo zvinyarare*, meaning, "It is for the eyes; mouth, keep quiet," does not apply when it comes to children at risk, especially for Christians. Isaiah 1:17 tells us to learn to do good, seek justice, help the oppressed, and defend the cause of the fatherless and the children at risk. What is it like in our neighbourhoods? Christians should learn to be their brothers' children's keepers.

This includes concern and provision for the children in the village or neighbourhood. Christians need to respectfully address issues with the adults responsible for the children, reporting crime against children, and speaking up and taking action for the welfare of children at risk. "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me," said Jesus (Mark 9:37).

Churches

LORD you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so people can no longer terrify them. (Psalm 10:17-18)

Part of genuine religion is to care for children at risk in their distress (James 1:27). Churches in Africa are well placed as the conscience of society. Churches should actively protect children from evil and encourage God's way of parenting. Preachers should encourage family unity and discourage family breakup. Churches should develop programmes to help children at risk. They should provide homes for orphans, and food, school fees, and medical care for children living in poverty. Churches should help rescue children being trafficked or prostituted. They should assist disabled children and teach them God's Word.

The church needs also to address the underlying social problems that result in so many children at risk. Typical problems are alcoholism, drug addiction, adultery, and sexual promiscuity, incest, war, exploitation of children, and poverty.

As Jesus said, "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:5-6).

Points to Remember

- *Christ is our ultimate model.* Jesus Christ is our ultimate model in giving all children a sense of belonging. He is the ultimate comfort for children at risk. We should therefore point children at risk to him. In every interaction with a child, we should ask, "What would Jesus do?"
- *The Kingdom of God belongs to children.* Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children" (Mark 10:14). Children show us the way in their total dependence, their unworldliness, their openness, and the completeness of their trust. Therefore, the church should regularly remind itself of the simplicity and faith of children (Luke 18:16-17).
- *Children are a blessing.* Viewing children, even those at risk, as a blessing should prompt us to love and care for them. Christians should reject the attitude that children cause too much trouble and commit themselves to making children's ministries a priority.

- *Children at risk are an African reality.* Many children in Africa are at risk. The Bible is clear that we have a responsibility to care for orphans and children in need. The church must develop and implement solutions to the problems of our vulnerable children.
- *A complete approach is the solution.* Christians need to develop a complete approach to the needs of children at risk: physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- *The church is uniquely placed to help.* African people generally listen to the church. Churches must support children by encouraging family unity and godly parenting. God has called and equipped the church to minister to children at risk by bringing the hope of transformed lives. Thus, churches need to develop programmes for all children in the village or neighbourhood, making sure all are properly cared for, introduced to Christ, and trained in the Christian faith.

LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Our society today cries for inspiring and God-honouring leadership. Families, businesses, churches, ministries, civic organisations, and other institutions need leaders. These groups search for people who have the ability to guide them, the character they can trust, and the worthy ideas they can pursue and share with others. Such leaders have a compelling vision that motivates their followers. They have clearly defined goals and plans that help the group move towards making the vision a reality. They also have an ability to communicate that will help their followers focus on the vision and avoid confusion. Africa needs this kind of leader in order to stimulate the continent's growing population and inspire hope that will set it on a path to achieve such a vision.

Most leaders in Africa today pattern their leadership style after the precolonial ruler or "king." In that era, the leader (king) was both a social and spiritual figure. He represented his people and insured their unity, stability, and security. He was a link to his people's ancestry and guided them in their pursuit of keeping their own tradition.

Because people saw the king as the representative of their group, they took pride in making sure the king was cared for, so as a result he became rich. This was a mutually beneficial relationship in which the people provided for the king and he, in turn, saw that the needs of all were met, especially those of any hungry people coming to the palace. Though apparently autocratic, the traditional leader was well organised with good ways for him to listen to his people's thoughts and concerns. Ministers or territorial administrators surrounded the king and formed his leadership council.

As in other parts of the world, such "divine rights of kings," in which the king saw himself as the voice of God and being above the law could lead to the oppression of the king's subjects. He might lead for his own benefit rather than the good of his subjects. He might treat them brutally and seize whatever he wanted. This is how injustices developed, and anyone who did not obey was treated harshly.

The traditional society that a king led was more homogenous, or similar, to societies today. They were held together by blood relationships and a common ancestry. People shared assumptions about the roles of leaders and followers. They shared common cultural values.

As in the Old Testament, leadership positions were held for life. Leaders chose their successors, usually from among their sons.

Leadership Relationships Have Changed

However, leaders in modern Africa guide a varied society, one in which cultural values and ways of acting are not shared. We find a separation of traditional and civil administrations, of spiritual and political systems, and of public and private sectors. A democracy in which each individual has a vote does not allow for the autocratic power of a king to continue ruling. When modern leaders govern with the assumptions of precolonial leaders, the results are likely to be a problem because the societies are not the same.

For example, in a precolonial society, the people were proud to make their king wealthy. Today, the motivation for a leader's wealth is the leader's greed and a quest to achieve symbols of status as a "big man." This has led to abuses, corruption, and the exploitation of those being served. By so doing, many leaders have failed to show compassion and love for their followers. They act as wolves rather than caregivers.

Also, the desire for many to hold leadership positions for life in an age of constant change has led churches, civic organisations, and states into major crises and even wars. Many leaders have turned out to be insensitive, distant, self-centred, and self-seeking. Too often leaders today have not seen their role as blessing and caring for their followers. Too often the so-called leaders attempt to appear like traditional leaders (kings) without having the support or relationships on which such a form of leadership was based.

This crisis of leadership points to the need for new patterns of leadership in Africa. The Bible has two pictures of what a leader should be: a shepherd and a servant. Such leadership is exemplified by Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-10; Psalm 23) and the one who "took the humble position of a slave" (Philippians 2:7). This is leadership that is inspiring, God-honouring, and encouraging to those being led. Let us explore this kind of leadership.

The Leader as Shepherd

Shepherding is one of the metaphors used in

Scripture to describe God's guidance of his people (Psalm 23:1; 78:52-53). The life and service of shepherd leaders such as David, Moses, and Amos can provide helpful insights into effective leadership for Africa. A shepherd's primary aim is to guide the flock to the green pasture and streams of fresh water. This requires selflessness on the shepherd's part and a motivation of deep compassion (Mark 6:34; John 11:33-35). Real shepherds commit to the protection of their people and agree to risk their lives for them. David fought against the lion and the bear to protect his flock (1 Samuel 17:37), just as Jesus Christ gave his own life for his followers. Likewise, leaders in Africa must protect their people through just laws, fair economic practices, and transparent administrative systems.

Thus, though the people may not be able to provide for their leaders (and the leaders may not be rich enough to meet the needs of the people out of their own wealth) as in the old days in Africa, people can still follow them. The people will follow because of the vision, the care, and the commitment to guide them to the place of their fulfilment.

Moreover, shepherds have a deep relationship with their flocks. Sometimes, shepherds lead from the front to set the direction. In this case, it takes trust for the flock to follow, just as it requires trust for the leaders to keep going, assured that the followers are behind them.

At other times, shepherds lead from the side, where the flock can feel closeness and intimacy. But shepherds also lead from the back when they compel the flock to move, especially at the end of the day.

Whether shepherds lead the flock from the front, the side, or the back, shepherds are an example of a deep relationship between leaders and their followers based on the compassion and the vision for the good of the ones being led. The fulfilment leaders receive does not derive from the applause and rewards of the people but from the difference that their service makes in terms of the growth and development of their people.

The Leader as Servant

Servanthood is another helpful metaphor of

leadership as modelled by Jesus Christ. When Jesus lived in Palestine, his perspective was contrary to social norms. In fact, it was revolutionary. Responding to the disciples who were debating about greatness (Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27), Jesus pointed to the servant as the greatest. He later washed his disciples' feet, demonstrating servanthood as real greatness (John 13:12-17).

In a world where leadership has most often been valued for the benefits it may secure for the leader, servant leadership provides a new basis for leaders who desire to make a difference for God's Kingdom. Servant leaders demonstrate their genuine and selfless motivation. Jesus himself models true servant leadership that is grounded in a clear sense of identity and purpose (John 13:3-4). Servant leaders spend time with their people. They get to know them (Mark 3:13-14) and empower them through teaching, mentoring, and coaching (Matthew 5-6; Luke 10:19-20). They admonish them as needed (Matthew 16:21-24; Luke 9:54-56). They offer guidance by responding to their people's deepest needs and questions (Matthew 28:18-20; John 11:25-26; 14:6; 16:33). They encourage and console them (John 14:1-3; 15:18-21), and they constantly point to Kingdom values and perspectives.

True Authenticity Is a Source of Power

Leadership is often perceived today in terms of the position and privileges of one who considers himself "a big man." But the values of shepherding and servanthood can lead to true authenticity that becomes a real source of power for leaders.

In Africa today, we need leaders who can lead by the consistent example of ethical values and principles that shape their lives, both in public and in private. We need leaders with a genuine care and compassion for their followers. We need leaders who will in word and deed constantly point to the model of Jesus Christ as the vision that consumes them.

Points to Remember

- Organisations in Africa—from local groups to national governments—are searching for leaders who have the ability to guide, the character to trust, and worthy ideas to pursue.
- Most leaders in Africa today pattern their leadership style after that of precolonial kings, but without the context that made a king effective. The result has been abuses, corruption, and exploitation of those being led.
- The Bible says godly leaders should be like shepherds. The fulfilment such leaders receive does not come from the applause of their followers but from the difference that their service makes in the growth and development of their followers.
- The Bible says godly leaders should be like servants. Such leaders demonstrate genuine and selfless motivation. They spend time with their people, get to know them, empower them, and admonish them as needed. And they constantly point to Kingdom values and perspectives.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

Africa is one of the most dynamic centres of Christianity in the world. Africa has a significant share of the world's 2.2 billion Christians. It has about 30 percent of the world's evangelicals, 20 percent of the world's Pentecostals and charismatics, and about 15 percent of the world's Roman Catholics. In addition, Africa has significant Orthodox groups such as the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches and the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

Christianity was well established in North Africa in the first few centuries after Christ. From a solid foundation in North Africa, Christianity moved deeper into the heart of the continent. The challenge by Islam and African traditional religions deepened the faith of believers. The fifteenth century was a turning point when Catholicism from Portugal circled the continent.

The modern missionary movement and indigenous African Christian movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries built upon these earlier foundations. Contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has brought a renewal to the church in Africa. And now the churches of Africa in the twenty-first century are missionary-sending churches that are spreading the gospel around the world. This story can be told in four overlapping waves.

Wave One: Early Christianity in North Africa and Ethiopia

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem . . . and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). One of the first places that the story of Jesus went was to Sudan when "the treasurer of Ethiopia" (probably Meroe in modern Sudan) believed the good news that Philip told him, was baptized, and took the message to Africa.

The Coptic church of Egypt has long claimed that the apostle Thomas and the evangelist Mark played important roles in the formation of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt. But the key moment in early Christianity in North Africa was in the late third century when there was rapid growth, in part due to the conversion of many people in large Jewish communities. But perhaps the most surprising thing that helped Christianity grow was persecution. Persecution deepened the commitment of African believers and gave them courage to witness to an increasingly sympathetic African audience.

Christian growth was also encouraged by Pantaenus, Origen, and Clement, all teachers at the catechetical school in Alexandria. They attempted to define Christianity in terms of Greek philosophy that well-educated people in North Africa could understand. However, this created a backlash, and sometimes violent debates erupted over the nature of Christ and the Trinity.

Constantine, emperor of Rome in the fourth century, had a dramatic conversion to Christianity, and that had a direct impact on the early Coptic (Egyptian) church, especially in urban Africa. At the council of Nicaea in 325, Constantine attempted to have church leaders agree on how to understand the deity of Christ. But his efforts were only partly successful. Theological orthodoxy became identified with political loyalty and caused splits that would mark the church for centuries.

Egyptian Christianity grew and spread. The Bible was translated into several variations of the Coptic language, and monasticism, which originated in Egypt, spread to the Latin-speaking church of western North Africa. Monasticism is a religious way of life in which priests renounce living in the world and instead live in monasteries—and sometimes by themselves as hermits. By the fourth century, monasticism became a powerful force in evangelism and discipleship, although at times it was disruptive. A part of the church around Carthage (in modern Tunisia) protested against the strong ties other parts of the church had with Rome. Movements such as Donatism in the fourth century considered imperial Christianity, which owed its allegiance to Rome, as exploitative and compromising. Such movements developed their own clergy and churches. However, great Africans who helped shape Roman Christianity included Bishop Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine, bishop of Hippo, both of whom were inspired by the second-century firebrand and theologian, Tertullian from Carthage.

While Christianity in North Africa and Egypt flourished and North African Christians strongly influenced the church in Rome, Christianity was also growing in the powerful kingdoms of Nubia (ancient Sudan) and Ethiopia. Nubia is one of the two countries that claims to be the world's oldest Christian nation (the other is Armenia). In both Nubia and Ethiopia, the king or emperor determined the religion of his people. Frumentius, a fourth-century Syrian missionary, tutored Ezana, the young prince of the kingdom of Axum, which

is in present-day Ethiopia, in the Christian faith. Ezana became one of the great Christian kings of Africa. Important popular Christian movements also flourished, motivated in Ethiopia by Syrian monastic missionaries, known to tradition as “the nine saints,” and in Nubia by Jewish converts.

Over the next thousand years, Christianity in Ethiopia grew stronger while in Nubia it declined. Between 1200–1500, the Zagwe dynasty in Ethiopia, a family of Christian kings, revived Christian art, literature, and church expansion. Lalibela, the greatest emperor of the Zagwe dynasty, built eleven famous stone churches carved out of solid rock to create a “new Jerusalem.” But not everyone was happy with the Zagwe kings, and by 1225 the *History of the Kings* appeared as a protest. This book purported to tell the story of Solomon and the queen of Sheba and their son Menelik, first king of Ethiopia. In 1270, a new “Solomonic” dynasty replaced the Zagwe dynasty. This new dynasty reached its peak in the fifteenth century during the reign of Zara Yaqob, who saw himself as an African Constantine. He convened church councils to address debates about Christ and Sabbath worship. Zara Yaqob also purged Ethiopia of African traditional religion. While Ethiopia reached its height as a Christian kingdom under Yaqob, Christianity was eliminated in Nubia. Nubian forces were defeated in battle by a sultan from Cairo, Babyars I, and came under the control of the Muslim Egyptians. By 1500, Christianity in Nubia all but disappeared.

Wave Two: Portuguese Catholicism

From 1420 until 1800, Portuguese politics and Christian missionaries from Portugal and Spain dominated much of coastal Africa. A controversial decree by the pope, called the *Padroado*, granted to the king of Portugal all rights to economic, military, and evangelistic activities in the areas he controlled. Slave traders and missionaries wrestled with one another for the souls of Africans. Portuguese missionary efforts were spread too thin, however, to make a significant, lasting impact. The result was only a thin veneer of Christianity in most places they influenced. Kongo and Soyo (kingdoms of Angola) and the Republic of the Congo were exceptions. There, Catholicism, indigenous popular Catholicism, and traditional religion clashed for centuries.

Wave Three: The Evangelical Era

As the glories of Catholicism faded in the late eighteenth century, a new force arose. Evangelical

Christianity was both a movement of spiritual revival as well as a force for justice. It combined a passion for personal religion with a crusade against slavery and changed the face of Africa forever. Evangelical Christianity has been described as a fourfold commitment to the Bible, the cross, conversion, and mission.

In the late eighteenth century, evangelical and other British leaders formed a movement that sought to abolish slavery. Great nineteenth-century British leaders such as William Wilberforce (member of the British parliament and champion of anti-slavery legislation), Thomas Clarkson (leader of the anti-slavery society in England), and Granville Sharp (English abolitionist) did much good. Evangelicals in Africa such as Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano were just as crucial to the anti-slavery cause. They were two Nigerian former slaves who lived in England and published stories of their liberation and conversion to Christianity. Many African slaves who were freed during the American Revolution found their way to the Canadian maritime provinces where their faith was deepened by the fiery preaching of Henry Alline of Nova Scotia. Sierra Leone, a West African colony for freed slaves, was founded in 1787. From Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, the evangelization of West Africa began through liberated slaves such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Anglican bishop in Africa. Liberia, founded for free-born American blacks in 1822, played a similar role.

The evangelical revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States and England produced the modern missionary movement. Denominational missions and faith missions such as the Africa Inland Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, Sudan United Mission, and the South Africa General Mission (later the Africa Evangelical Fellowship) influenced African societies. Schools, hospitals, churches, and many social agencies in Africa were the result of missionary efforts in partnership with African Christians. The same partnerships translated the Bible or a portion into more than 640 African languages, an effort which has helped promote literacy as well as the knowledge of God. The commitment of the missionaries to Africa is illustrated by the many who took their coffins with them when they travelled from their homelands, knowing that their lifespan would probably be short. Many were martyred for their faith, including the American medical missionary Paul Carlson, who was killed by rebel insurgents in

1964 in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Wave Four: Indigenous Movements, Pentecostalism, and Post-Independence

The shape of missions changed in 1884–1885 with the Berlin Conference in Germany. At this meeting, European powers partitioned Africa for colonization and trade. France was given certain countries, and King Leopold II of Belgium was given the Congo, for instance. Europeans justified their imperialism as being a part of a civilizing mission to an Africa that they perceived as still in bondage to the dark past. Africa answered the challenge of colonialism through the voice of new prophets like William Wadé Harris of Liberia and members of the Organization of African Instituted Churches (African initiated churches—AICs) throughout the continent. These AICs took the names of Zionist in Southern Africa, Aladura in West Africa, and Roho movements in Kenya. When independence dawned in 1960, Christianity below the Sahara was no longer merely a European import. Christianity in Africa now included many churches with an African understanding of Christianity and African ways of worship.

Many of the newly elected presidents of independent African nations had graduated from missionary schools and were affiliated with specific Christian denominations. But in spite of these connections, many ruled in a way that promoted themselves as saviours of their countries. Many new nations took control of missionary schools, hospitals, and social agencies in the 1960s. Then in the 1970s and 1980s, they staggered under the weight of the obligations they had taken on. In many cases, African governments that were once critical of the church asked churches for help in education, medicine, and nation building. For instance, Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, a product of missionary

education, described his movement of political independence as an alternative to Christianity. He summarized his thinking by saying, "Seek first the political kingdom and all things will be added unto you." But his regime disintegrated in a coup in 1966. Similar upheavals happened to a number of other African nations. Coup leaders eventually gave way to multiparty politics. By the early 1990s, new nations had a new desire to work with the church.

By the 1990s, charismatic Christianity had transformed the face of many Christian traditions in Africa. Some new Pentecostal churches began preaching a message of healing and power. This message captured not only the poor and disenchanting but also the young, upwardly mobile urban professional class in Africa's growing cities. Today, most Christians in Africa have been touched in some way by Pentecostal methods and teaching.

Two significant trends in Christianity in African since independence are first, the emergence of a large African theological fraternity composed of both Catholics and Protestants and, second, a new missionary zeal on the part of the African church. This second trend has seen African Christians move around the world in migration and mission. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the largest church in England was led by a Nigerian missionary pastor. Similarly, in Kiev, Ukraine, Europe's largest church was shepherded by a Nigerian. Churches like Ghana's Church of Pentecost and Nigeria's Redeemed Christian Church of God have established centres all over the world in a trend sometimes described as reverse mission. This new era of African missions is still in its infancy, but it promises that the story of Christianity in Africa, begun in a quiet corner of Alexandria, Egypt in the first century, is now a global movement changing the world.

Points to Remember

- Christianity in Africa dates to the first generation of the church. Any attempt to label Christianity as a "white man's" or European religion should be rejected.
- Africans played a crucial role in establishing the doctrines and theology of the early church. We should stand on their shoulders in the way we seriously study the Bible.
- Praise God for his work across Africa. His Spirit has moved in many different ways: through African leaders, through foreign missionaries, and through various political movements. We should rejoice in our diversity and unite around the core doctrines of our shared faith.
- The powerful African church is coming to maturity in the twenty-first century. We should claim our Christian identity and mission with both boldness and humility—boldness in proclaiming our vibrant faith to the world, and humility in learning from others and working to build churches on biblical teaching and excellence and integrity in organization and leadership.



A NARRATIVE TIMELINE OF GOD'S WORK IN AFRICA

God's Work in Africa

God has been at work in Africa since the moment he created the continent. Records of God's work in Africa date back to some of the earliest recorded history. Biblical history focuses on God's people in Israel. Yet, Africa is mentioned often in the Bible because Israel's land connected Africa, Asia, and Europe. Some of the very first churches outside Jerusalem were established in Africa. And many of the most prominent voices that defended the faith as the church matured in organization and doctrine were African. Even when Africa's Christian history has been ignored or overlooked, God's eyes have always been on Africa. He watched as empires rose and fell, churches prospered and declined, and people struggled for freedom and justice. In the last two hundred years, God's Spirit has been moving powerfully in Africa to make it one of the global centres of Christianity.

There is not enough space here to describe all the important events in God's work in African history. We can only highlight some of the major events from Abram to the twenty-first century. This narrative will inspire you as you understand that God has always been at work in Africa and he will not stop! We are grateful for the expert church historians, biblical scholars, and *The Center for Early African Christianity* (CEAC) who contributed to this timeline.

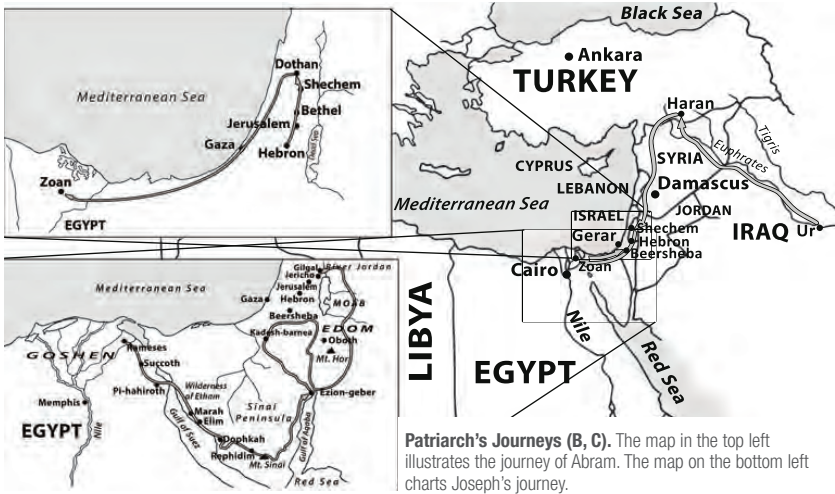
A Comment about Dates

Every effort has been made to ensure the dates in this timeline are accurate, but some events are very difficult to know with certainty. For instance, we know Solomon reigned from 970–931 BC, but we do not know when the Queen of Sheba visited him. Another problem is information for very old dates is incomplete. Because of this, we provide a range of dates in some cases.

One of the most difficult Old Testament dates to determine is the Exodus. Many scholars believe the Exodus occurred in 1446 BC based on 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26. However, based on archaeology and Egyptian records, other scholars believe the Exodus occurred around 1280 BC. This is important because the date of the Exodus affects other dates. For instance, the "History in Africa from the Patriarchs to the Promised Land" extends to when the Israel entered the Promised Land, which was 40 years after the Exodus. That date would be either 1406 BC or 1240 BC, depending on whether the Exodus was 1446 BC or 1280 BC. Because of this, we provide both dates. Additionally, some dates are approximated due to lack of clear records and are noted with an asterisk (*).

History in Africa from the Patriarchs to the Promised Land

3100 BC—1406 or 1240 BC



Patriarch's Journeys (B, C). The map in the top left illustrates the journey of Abram. The map on the bottom left charts Joseph's journey.

? Date unknown.

Genesis 10:13-14 mentions some of Noah's descendants who are considered to be African peoples including Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, and Casluhites. These people groups settled in portions of Egypt and Libya.

A 3100 BC. First Egyptian Dynasty

B 2000 BC plus or minus 100 years.

Abram and his family are forced to go to Egypt to survive the famine in Canaan. Because of the Nile River, Egypt was fertile and the crops were not as dependent on rain.

C 1825 BC plus or minus 100 years.

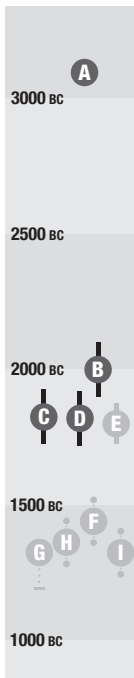
Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and taken to Egypt. He rises from slavery to become an unnamed pharaoh's advisor. Some scholars think this pharaoh may have been Senusret II, fourth ruler

of Egypt's Twelfth Dynasty who reigned from 1897–1878 BC. Other scholars think the pharaoh could have been one of the five Hyksos rulers in the Fifteenth Dynasty.



Joseph, Advisor to Pharaoh (C).

D 1820 BC plus or minus 100 years. Joseph marries Asenath, an Egyptian and the daughter of a priest from the city On. Their two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, eventually become tribes of Israel, making the founders of these two tribes half African.



E 1800 BC plus or minus 75 years.

Joseph's brothers go to Egypt during a famine in Canaan. The pharaoh lets them settle in part of a fertile land in northeastern Egypt called Goshen, referred to as "the region of Rameses" in Egyptian texts.



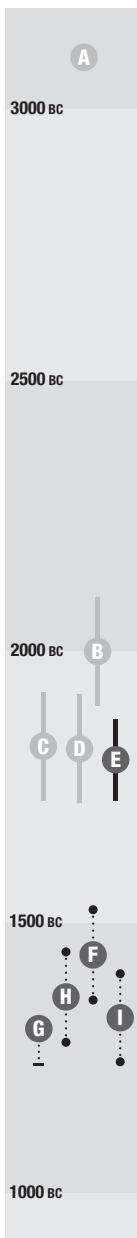
Moses, in the Reeds of the Nile (F).

F 1526–1525 or 1360–1350 BC.

By this time, the Israelites—descendants of Joseph and his brothers—become numerous. The reigning pharaoh fears their growing strength and orders all newborn boys killed. Pharaoh's daughter finds the infant Moses in the reeds by the Nile and raises him in the palace as her son. Moses spends 40 years in Egypt before he flees to Midian on the Sinai Peninsula where he lives for 40 years.

G 1304–1236 BC. The reign of Ramses II, often considered the greatest ruler in Egyptian history.

H 1446 or 1280 BC. God uses Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery. They cross the Red Sea and enter the Sinai Peninsula. While in the wilderness, Moses marries a Cushite woman, who was likely from the region known today as Sudan (Numbers 12:1).



Baal, a Phoenician Idol (I). Israel was punished for following after this false and foreign god.

I 1407 or 1241 BC. The priest Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, stops a plague in Israel. God makes a covenant of peace with him and his descendants to honour his action (Numbers 25:10-13). Phineas' name means "the Cushite" or "the Nubian," suggesting he had dark skin. He may have had African blood from his mother's father, Putiel, whose name means either the "Libyan of God" or the "Somali of God."



Phinehas in Priestly Garments (I).

