

BIZARRE BIBLE

If you have established the discipline of reading the Bible on a regular basis, surely you have experienced parts of your reading plan where you do an intellectual equivalent of a double take. Every ounce of your being shouts, "Are you KIDDING me!?!"

Yes, the Bible has some really bizarre bits, and the intent of this series is to help you understand what to look for to ensure you are getting a solid understanding of what the Bible is saying. We all interpret the Bible, but we must make sure that we allow it to speak in its own voice, not attempting to dumb-it-down or explain away its raw moments. We are reading this book to understand more about God, not to make excuses for Him.

He does not need our protection, but He calls us to wisdom. Many around us who do not believe in the inspiration of scripture look at these stories as reasons why the Bible is untrustworthy or worse yet, why God Himself shouldn't be trusted. So, this series provides an opportunity to avoid this confusion and to understand what the story is really communicating in the overall structure of the Bible.



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Session I

Bridegroom of Blood

Exodus 4:18-26

GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. Read Genesis 17:1-14. What is circumcision? How is circumcision related to the LORD's covenant with Abraham? How important would you say it is to the story of Israel? Explain.
2. Read Exodus 1:7-22. What is the king of Egypt's fear? How does he try to resolve the problem? Who is he not worried about based upon his actions?
3. In the first four chapters of Exodus including the story of Zipporah in Exodus 4, find all of the references to individual women. How many are there? What different nationalities are they? What did they all have in common?
4. Read Exodus 2:16-22. Where is Moses when he starts his family? What is his firstborn son's name and what does it explain about him?

5. Why did Moses run to Midian in the first place?

6. In today's session, who does the LORD threaten to kill in Pharaoh's household? Which Israelites has Pharaoh killed so far in Exodus? Why might Moses' firstborn be important in this story?


7. Who do you think the "bridegroom of blood" is referring to and why?

8. Read Exodus 11:4-5 and 12:21-29. What is the Passover event? What is the plague that was announced before and brought about after the Passover? How might it be related to the bridegroom of blood?

READING FOR THE POINT

Sons. Circumcision. Blood. The covenant mark of circumcision sets Israelites apart and is a non-negotiable, and in a story where male infants are threatened and Israel is called the LORD's "firstborn son," it is not surprising that Moses' firstborn son might become important.

Exodus begins with a hostile and violent ruler who threatens these male children, but we read how God subverts his evil plans through seven different females who choose to protect the boys with great danger to themselves. At the same time, one such boy who is born Hebrew is raised in an Egyptian royal home. His first act is to seek justice by killing an Egyptian to protect a Hebrew slave. While the violent act seems "Pharaoh-like" his protection of the Hebrew slave seems to be heroically Hebrew. From this behavior and his less-than-positive response to the LORD at the burning bush, the reader wonders is he Hebrew? Is he Egyptian? His firstborn, a child of sojourning, apparently had not been circumcised. So Moses' wife, a foreigner, circumcises her firstborn, thus declaring for Moses and her family that they will trust in the LORD. If she hadn't, her son and Moses would die. But what about the blood? As a sign act, she touches the blood of her son to Moses' "feet" which echoes forward in the book of Exodus, where firstborn sons must be saved by blood as well. In the Passover, Israelites "touch" their doorposts with



the blood of a sacrifice. And we are called to look forward in scripture to Another who will save through His blood.

So, we can consider whether these few verses are simply bizarre, or are they a majestic declaration of the beauty and unified story of God's Word? Are you in it consistently? Do you cherish it?



Session 2

Yahweh and Dagon

1 Samuel 5



GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. Read Joshua 13:1-3 and Judges 3:1-6. Who were the Philistines? Where were they located?
2. Read Exodus 25:10-22, Leviticus 16:2 and Numbers 7:89. What is the ark of the covenant? Where was it located under normal circumstances? What did it signify to Israel?
3. Read 1 Samuel 2:22-36 and 3:10-14. Who was Eli? Where did he serve, meaning what was his job? What was the problem?
4. Context matters, so what happens in 1 Samuel 4:10-22 which is directly before this session's text?

5. As a group, scan through 1 Samuel 5-6 and determine the number of times the text includes the word “hand.” Considering 1 Samuel 5:4 (the first use), what do the other uses of the word tell us?

6. Read 1 Samuel 17:45-47. Relate David’s words and deeds to 1 Samuel 5 between the LORD and Dagon. What are some interesting comparisons? Where was David’s opponent from?

7. Who eventually restores the ark to the center of Israel’s worship? (2 Samuel 6). Note the similarities with the ark being returned by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5.

8. Where is God’s presence today and do you believe it has the same power toward follower and foe?



READING FOR THE POINT

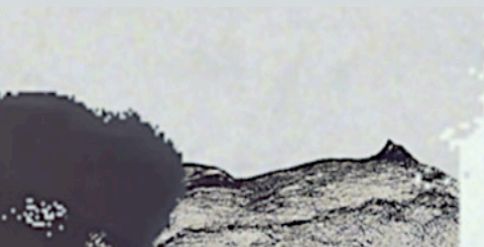
When the Israelites battle the Philistines who were supposed to be removed from the Promised Land, they lose twice in this account. The Israelites thought the ark representing the LORD's presence would save them. But when it didn't, their God seemed defeated. The Philistines believed the same since the ark is put beside or even at the feet of Dagon. But the LORD clarifies what is happening. Dagon falls to his face. Twice! That's a sign of submission, even worship. The heavy hand of Yahweh versus the missing hand of Dagon. The imagery is powerful. One commentator says it can make one think the statue of Dagon was trying to drag his way out from the conquering presence of the LORD.

Consequences follow wherever the ark goes. God's presence is destruction for those who stand against Him whether god or man.



And, his presence is powerful for those who stand with Him. So why was Israel defeated? The priesthood of Eli (and his sons) was a failure. Eli's sons were downright wicked using their priestly role to take advantage of everyone. Eli was indifferent, ineffective or both. Samuel represents the new era, and will usher in the one who would bring God's presence back to the center of Israel's worship, King David. And it is the Son of David who would usher that presence back into the center of our world.

Do we treat our King with contempt or indifference through our actions or failure to take action? How can we work with one another to avoid it? Prayer, fasting and commitment to a fellow Christian is essential.



Session 3

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

Matthew 15:21-28 & Mark 7:24-30



GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. What strikes you as unusual or challenging in these passages? Why?
2. What are the differences between the Matthew and Mark accounts? Why might each writer have chosen to include the details as he did?
3. Jesus is traveling into Gentile territory in the district of Tyre and Sidon. How could the events before this story help us understand why this setting is important? (Matthew 11:21-22; 1 Kings 17:8-24; Isaiah 23)
4. Jesus says He was sent to “the lost sheep of Israel.” What do you think He means and how does that fit with the wider story of Scripture? (Matthew 10:5-6; John 10:16; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6)

5. What do you think Jesus' bread metaphor is communicating? How might the feeding miracles detailed before and after this account help us understand? (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Matthew 15:29-39; Mark 8:1-10; John 6:35; Isaiah 25:6)

6. What is notable to you about the woman's response to Jesus? How do you tend to respond when challenged or offended? (James 1:19-21; Proverbs 19:11; Luke 18:1-8)

7. Compare this woman's posture toward Jesus with others Jesus commends for their faith in the gospels (Matthew 8:5-13; Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 7:36-50) What do these examples have in common?

8. Can you relate to this woman's desperation to bring relief to a loved one's suffering? If so, please share your experience.

READING FOR THE POINT

In this story, we find that Jesus doesn't always respond the way we expect. We find silence, tension, and words that seem difficult coming from the same mouth that commands us to love God and love our neighbors. This Gentile woman was someone many would have assumed had no claim on the Son of David, yet that didn't stop her from continuing to ask, trusting that in His mercy and power, Jesus could do for her daughter what no one else could. And He did.

His response to our requests may not come when or how we expect either, but we can hold fast to the reality that His power is never limited by the barriers men (or demons) impose. In our flesh, we may be tempted to divide people into categories of deserving and undeserving, deciding who seems too far gone, too different, or too unlikely for the Lord's intervention, but praise Him, His grace is available to all who come to Him in faith.

Who in your life have you quietly stopped believing Jesus can reach? Who have you overlooked, dismissed, or placed outside the reach of His grace? Bring them to Jesus again. Keep asking. Keep trusting. Keep coming to the One whose mercy is greater and whose power is perfect. Maybe you feel weary, forgotten, or confused by God's silence. Take heart! The same Jesus who answered this woman still hears those who call on His name with faith today. Keep trusting the One who has victory over Satan, sin and death. Your faith is secure in Him.





Session 4

The Sons of God

Genesis 6:1-4

BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

In the section of Genesis from chapter 1 to chapter 11, we encounter the fall of humanity. Most of the time, Christians focus directly on Adam and Eve, but the bad news doesn't stop there. Today's passage introduces us to the "sons of God". Who they are is a bit tricky, but it doesn't change the fact that God creates lines for our good, yet the stories of scripture like this reveal the human heart cannot stop crossing those boundaries.



GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. How would you describe the “fall of man”? Describe the breadth of the fall.
2. Genesis 3:15 identifies a battle that will continue throughout scripture. Describe the two lines that will be at war.
3. Read Genesis 3:6 and compare with Genesis 6:2. Describe the pattern and explain what it helps us understand about the action of the sons of God.
4. Read Genesis 4:15-5:3. Who are the two surviving sons of Adam and Eve? What would you say differentiates them? How might this relate to Genesis 3:15?

5. Genesis 6:2-4 twice uses the title “sons of God.” Read Deuteronomy 32:8 and Job 1:6. What does the “son of God” seem to mean in these texts?

6. What is the resulting problem of the marriage of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of man”? Read Genesis 6:5-7

7. If the “sons of God” refer to the line of the offspring of the woman in Genesis 3:15 and thus the “daughters of men” could be describing the other rebellious line of humanity (the seed of the serpent), would it change the implications of the story? Explain.

8. Are there other times in scripture where God sets boundaries on marriages commitments for Israelites? (Leviticus 18; 21:7; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 17:17)

9. What is the very next story after Genesis 6? Why is it important to Genesis 6:1-4?



READING FOR THE POINT

Some say that the “sons of God” indicates that faithful line that proceeds from Adam and Eve, the line of Seth, which means the intermarriage of the faithful line of image-bearers of God with those that throw off the image from the line of Cain. Others believe the “sons of God” refer to supernatural beings who have intermarried with and infiltrated humanity thus creating evil hybrids. Either way, we can’t lose sight of one certainty—God creates boundaries and his created beings make decisions about those boundaries. Much like the decision at the infamous tree in the Garden, Genesis 6 proves that rebellion has won the day and never-ending violence and evil persists. God in His Goodness, Truth, and Beauty will not let the evil continue. Noah’s Ark and the Flood. The Tower of Babel. These reveal the ongoing cycle when God’s creation casts off His will and ways. As the Apostle Paul in Romans 3 quotes the Psalms “No one is righteous, no, not one.”

But there is a “son of God” that would undo all of the previous evil. The question is whether we are trusting in Him or following our own desires to define what is good for ourselves. Christian, look to the Cross. See the True Son. Let His righteousness overwhelm you. Now, decide today to live joyfully inside the boundary set by Him to His glory.

An intricate black and white engraving depicting the biblical story of Daniel and the Beast. In the foreground, Daniel, with a long, flowing beard and hair, is shown kneeling on the ground, looking towards the viewer with a somber expression. He is wearing a heavy, draped garment. To his left, a large, multi-headed bull-like creature, the Beast, stands prominently. The Beast has several heads, some with horns, and its body is covered in a dense, textured pattern. In the background, another similar creature is visible, and the landscape is filled with detailed foliage and a large, draped structure, possibly a tent or a building. The overall style is characteristic of 19th-century religious art.

Session 5

Babylon's Beast

Daniel 4

GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. Nebuchadnezzar testifies “to all peoples, nations, and languages.” Why do you think he wants everyone to hear the story of his humiliation and restoration? Are there similar elements in your own testimony of God’s work in your life?
2. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the tree gives shelter, food, and life before being cut down to a stump. What other tree images come to mind from Scripture? How does this symbol align or contrast with others? (Eden, Psalm 1, Revelation 22:2)
3. Scripture contrasts God-given flourishing with self-made human greatness, like the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11:1-9) What are some of the differences between life that grows under God’s provision and what we build for our own glory? Do you have a personal example that highlights a difference?
4. Nebuchadnezzar loses his reason and lives like the beasts. In Genesis 1:26-28, humans are given a unique role over living creatures. What could it mean for a human to live like a beast? What happens when pride rejects God’s rule?

5. Daniel urges Nebuchadnezzar to turn from sin by practicing righteousness and showing mercy to the oppressed. In what ways does biblical repentance involve more than admitting a wrong?

6. Why do you think God restores Nebuchadnezzar? What does his restoration reveal about God's purpose in humbling pride? Daniel records Nebuchadnezzar's testimony here, but we are not told anything more about him. Why might Scripture leave us with that tension?

7. In our culture, self-made success, self-exaltation, independence, and self-glory are frequently met with admiration. Is there an area of your life that feeds pride? What would it look like to surrender that before the Most High?

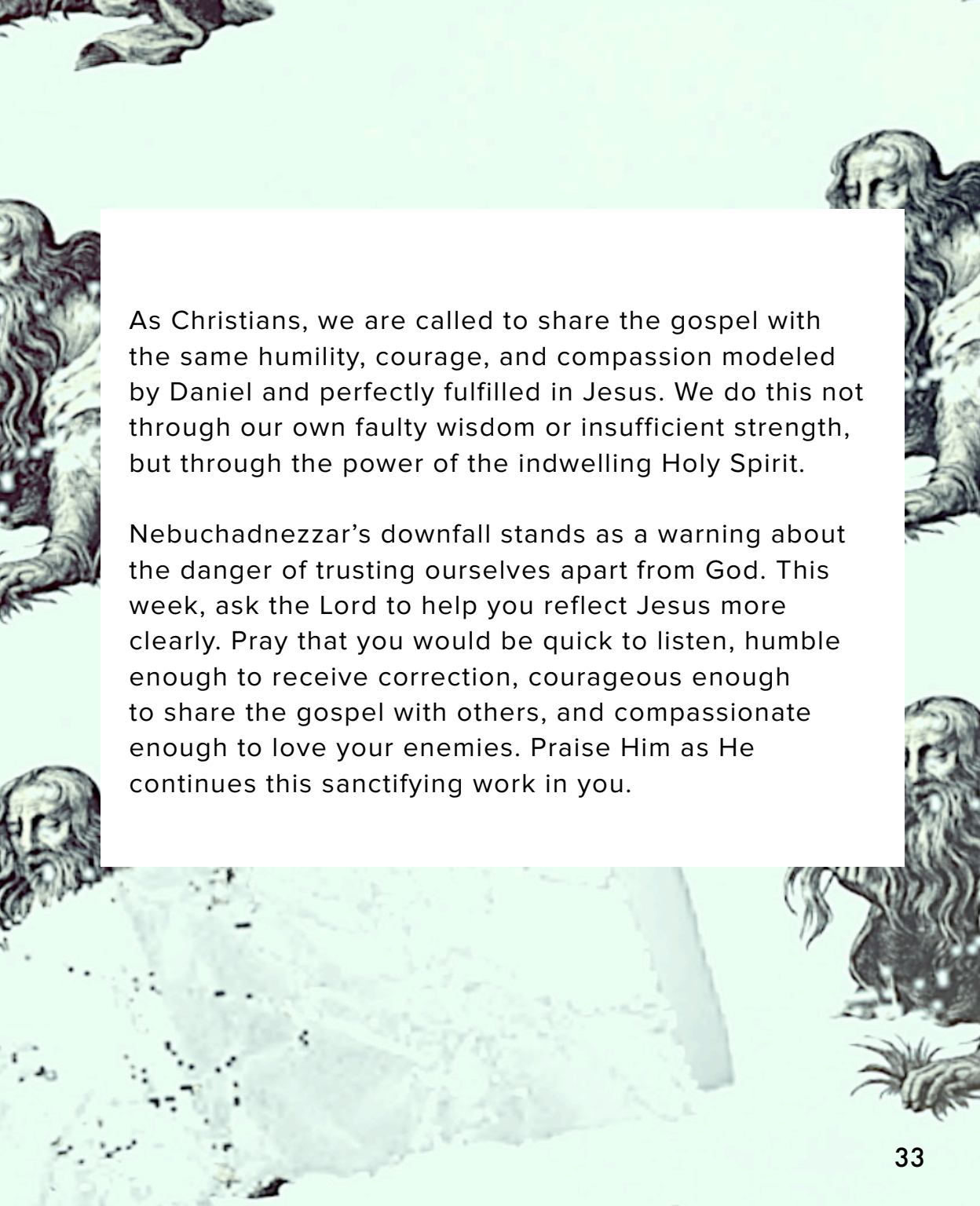
8. One year after his warning, Nebuchadnezzar forgets and glorifies himself. Over time, do you tend to forget God's warnings or His blessings? What practices help you remember that every good gift comes from Him?



READING FOR THE POINT

Daniel delivers this difficult interpretation with courage, humility, and compassion to the very king who carried his people into captivity. He delivers this warning from the LORD to Nebuchadnezzar in the hope that the king might repent and receive God's mercy.

Centuries later, Christ commands His followers to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). On the cross, Jesus fulfilled His teaching by making a way for enemies of God to be reconciled to the King and welcomed by faith into the everlasting kingdom of the Most High.



As Christians, we are called to share the gospel with the same humility, courage, and compassion modeled by Daniel and perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. We do this not through our own faulty wisdom or insufficient strength, but through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Nebuchadnezzar's downfall stands as a warning about the danger of trusting ourselves apart from God. This week, ask the Lord to help you reflect Jesus more clearly. Pray that you would be quick to listen, humble enough to receive correction, courageous enough to share the gospel with others, and compassionate enough to love your enemies. Praise Him as He continues this sanctifying work in you.

Session 6

Abraham's Deep Sleep

Genesis 15



BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

Some ancient biblical accounts, like this one, describe unfamiliar customs and practices that can become an obstacle for modern readers. As we take time to understand what seems unfamiliar in a passage, the strange parts often come into clearer focus. The more we read, the clearer it becomes that ancient people struggle with many of the same challenges in faith as we do. In this encounter of God with Abram, later renamed Abraham, God reveals Himself as Promise Maker and Promise Keeper. As you read, remember that you're reading more than dry, historical facts. You're reading our Christian family's story.



GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. In Genesis 14, Abram defeats foes and refuses the king of Sodom's reward. Why might the timing of the Lord's promise of protection and reward have been important to Abram?
2. Abram speaks openly to God about his childlessness. Which other people in the Bible show similar openness in their communication with the Lord? (Psalm 13; Habakkuk 1:2–4; Job 3; others) How comfortable are you with this kind of honesty in your prayers?
3. The promise of offspring is repeated throughout this passage. How do the New Testament authors help us understand the fullness of God's promise of offspring to Abram? (Galatians 3:16, 29; Romans 4:18)
4. How would you define faith and righteousness? Verse 6 says Abram believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. What might this suggest about the relationship between faith and righteousness? (Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:5-6)

5. Compare God's responses to Abram's questions with His responses to the questions of others in the Bible, like Gideon (Judges 6:36–40), Zechariah (Luke 1:18–20) or Mary (Luke 1:34-35). Why do you think God responds to each petitioner differently? In what ways could this help us better understand how God chooses to communicate with people today?

6. God tells Abram that generations will pass before his descendants inherit the land and that judgment on the Amorites will come (v 13-16). What could this show about God's patience and justice? In what ways have you been challenged by God's timing?

7. Why do you think Scripture includes the detail that Abram drove away the birds of prey before the covenant ceremony? What might this suggest about waiting faithfully for God to fulfill His promises? **Bonus for those who can connect this to the story of Rizpah and her dead sons (2 Samuel 21:1-14) from the first installment of the Bizarre Bible series.

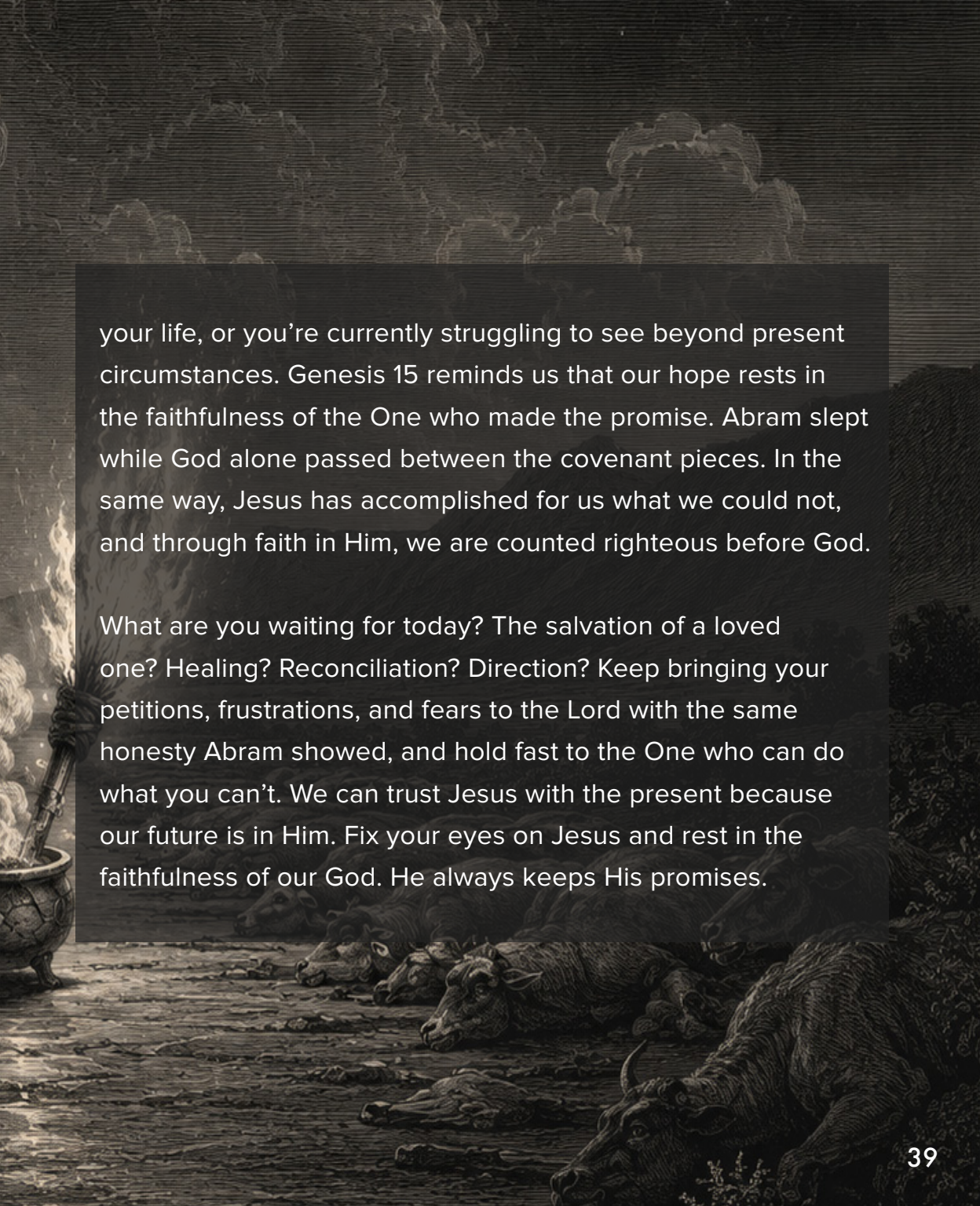
8. God passes between the animal pieces as Abram sleeps. In what ways could this foreshadow what Christ accomplished on the cross? (Galatians 3:10–14; Romans 3:21–26)



READING FOR THE POINT

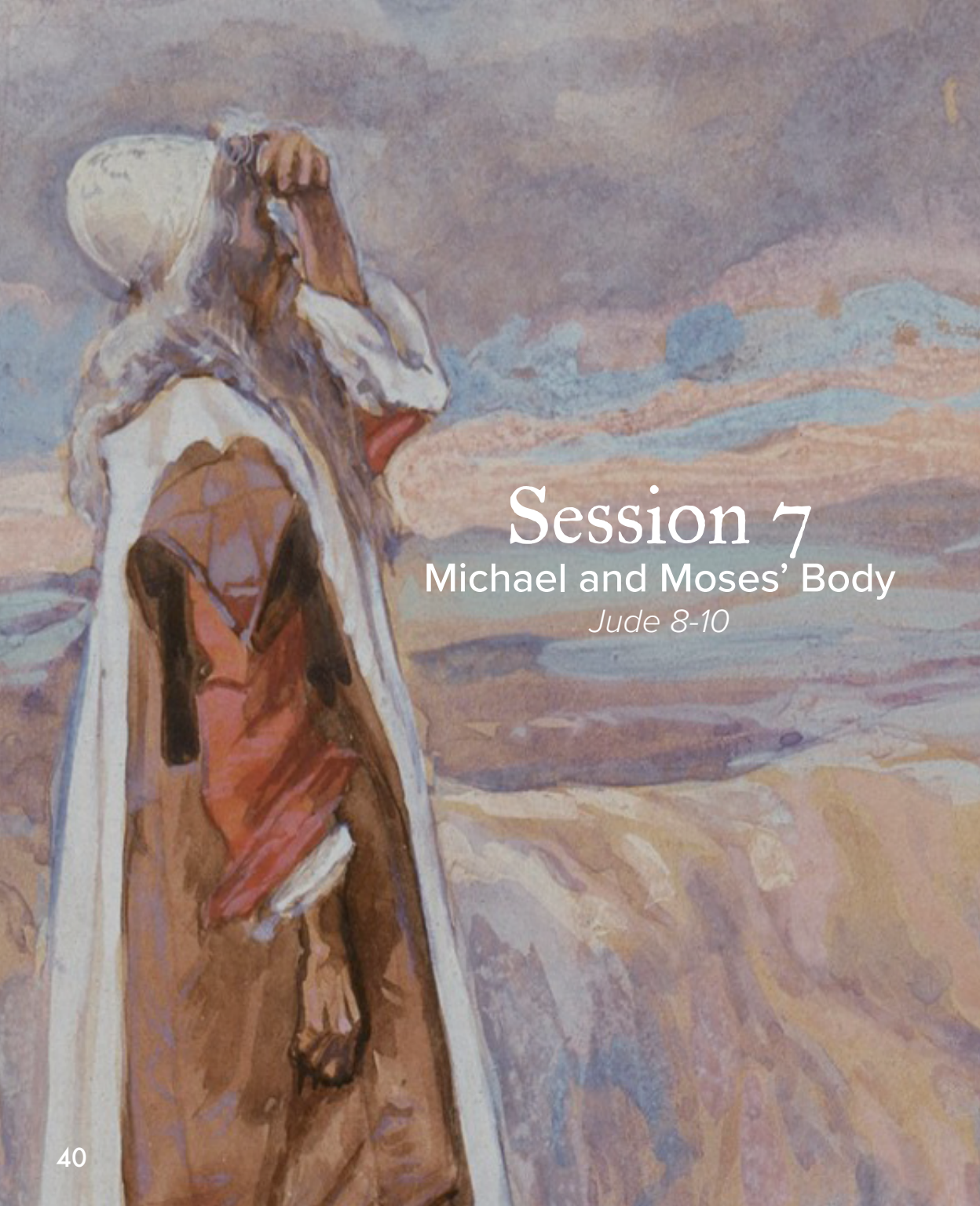
Looking back on God's covenant with Abram, we have the advantage of seeing fulfillments that he had to trust would come by faith. The Lord gave him Isaac, multiplied his descendants, brought them out of captivity, judged their oppressors, and gave them the promised land. Still, these kept promises pointed to something greater. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promise of eternal life with Him is secured. Abram believed God's promise long before he saw its fulfillment. Many of the things God promised would happen long after Abram's death. God proved faithful to every word He spoke.

Perhaps you know what it feels like to stand where Abram stood. Maybe you're unsure of how God's plan will unfold in

A dark, atmospheric illustration. In the foreground, a herd of oxen is resting on the ground. To the left, a hand holds a flaming torch, with a large, ornate cauldron or pot nearby. The background is a dark, cloudy sky. The overall tone is somber and contemplative.

your life, or you're currently struggling to see beyond present circumstances. Genesis 15 reminds us that our hope rests in the faithfulness of the One who made the promise. Abram slept while God alone passed between the covenant pieces. In the same way, Jesus has accomplished for us what we could not, and through faith in Him, we are counted righteous before God.

What are you waiting for today? The salvation of a loved one? Healing? Reconciliation? Direction? Keep bringing your petitions, frustrations, and fears to the Lord with the same honesty Abram showed, and hold fast to the One who can do what you can't. We can trust Jesus with the present because our future is in Him. Fix your eyes on Jesus and rest in the faithfulness of our God. He always keeps His promises.



Session 7

Michael and Moses' Body
Jude 8-10

BREAKING THROUGH THE *BIZARRE*

Here we go again. Angels. Glorious Ones. Michael. The Bible is not shy when it talks about the spiritual realm, and this should make us pause and consider how much our culture of materialism influences us. That said, there is caution the other way as well. Rulers and authorities in the heavenly and the earthly realms should not be taken lightly.



GETTING TO THE *REALITY*

1. Have you ever seen an unhealthy Christian approach to spiritual realities? Explain.
2. Read Zechariah 3:1-5. How do these passages compare?
3. What are some ways the Bible pulls back the curtain on the spiritual realm? Read and discuss these passages: Genesis 3:24; Isaiah 6:1-6; Psalm 82; Luke 1:19; Jude 6.
4. Read Daniel 10. Here we see another picture of Michael, seemingly a supernatural being. What is he doing? What seems to be his role? How does this compare with the other passages we have reviewed this session?

5. Read Revelation 12:7-12. This is apocalyptic literature so it includes dramatic visions and borrows a lot from the Old Testament stories. What does this passage say about Michael? Does it seem complementary to the Daniel 10 passage and the other passages above?

6. Based upon these passages, is spiritual warfare real? If so, would you say you are a part of the battle? How so?

7. Do you know passages that tell you about the human role in that battle? (Ephesians 6:10-20; James 4:1-10; 1 Peter 5:6-9)

8. Who has already defeated the the accuser and his minions? (Romans 8:37-39; Colossians 2:9-15; Hebrews 2:14)

READING FOR THE POINT

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” — C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters.

Lewis is right and Jude’s note about the behavior of Michael, the archangel, adds another layer. In his contention with the devil, a fallen angel, he refuses to blaspheme a fellow spiritual being. Michael won’t slander the slanderer, but only say “the Lord rebuke you.” Do you see the humility? Do you also see the direction of Michael’s submission? This makes sense of so many passages about how humans should treat other humans no matter how evil they can be. We are to pray for our enemies. We forgive as we are forgiven. The grace and goodness of Christ tells us that “in Him” we have victory already. No need to posture. No need to speak more than the truth— Christ is victorious over Satan, sin and death, so He stands as ultimate judge.

Do you deny or demote the existence of the spiritual realm that the Word of God delineates? Are you someone who is looking for a ghost around every corner or spirits-needing-to-be-exorcised from the car next to you on the freeway? Humility before God’s Word brings humility before God’s creation, whether spirit or flesh.





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