

2-Jan	Mon	GENESIS 1	<p>This year we are going to be reading from the books of the Bible that tell of the historical events. Although the Bible contains many stories, it is one story of God’s interactions with humanity from the beginning of time into eternity. Along the way, we will provide some comments that will help with understanding or explain why these events are important. We will be skipping some chapters so the plan fits within a year. Feel free to read the skipped chapters if your schedule allows.</p> <p>The author of Genesis is not given, but for those who believe the Bible to be God’s Word, it is generally thought to be written by Moses around 1400 BC. This conclusion is based on various written and verbal sources and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Moses was the leader of the nation of Israel when the people were being released after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Moses was reintroducing the people to God by telling them about what God had done from the beginning of time up until the people entered into Egypt.</p> <p>Today we read about creation. Often this chapter is a source of controversy. Did God create everything in six literal days? How was there light before the sun existed? It’s important to realize that the Bible was written to tell people about God. It isn’t a science or history textbook. So regardless of your view of the literal nature of this chapter, it’s important to see what we are being taught about God. For sure, he was the One who brought it about, so the Israelites shouldn’t believe all those stories about Egyptian gods, and we shouldn’t believe the theories of things coming into existence all by themselves. Paul said in Romans 1:20, “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” We also see that God created humanity to be of special value within his creation; only humanity is in his image and given responsibility to rule over creation.</p> <p>Characteristics that come to mind about God from the creation story are: powerful, orderly, creative, seeking satisfaction, provision, and wanting his creation to succeed. What descriptions of God come to your mind as you read about creation?</p>
3-Jan	Tues	GENESIS 2	<p>This chapter zeros in on a specific aspect of creation: the creation of humanity. We also see an emphasis on the abundant way God supplied for the needs of the man he put in the garden. The abundant care is further emphasized by first identifying the problem of Adam being alone and then solving it for Adam’s benefit. Only one restriction is given, and that one doesn’t seem to be much of a hardship.</p> <p>So we can add to the things we know about God as a result of creation. He supplies abundantly, is a problem solver and really doesn’t expect much in return.</p>

4-Jan	Wed	GENESIS 3	<p>Today we see humanity's response to God. Though only one simple rule was given, Adam and Eve could not obey. No matter how completely God supplied for their every need, they wanted the one thing they couldn't have. The result of their sin is that they messed things up for everyone. Conflict arose between humanity and God, between each other, and between them and creation. All of these issues we still struggle with today. God's response recognizes the danger of what humanity has done and he therefore must subject humanity to frustration and death so evil cannot grow unchecked. Even in the midst of humanity's failure, God gives a ray of hope. In verse 15 we are told, "He will strike your head." In Revelation 20:2, we are told that the serpent was Satan, and this is a promise that Satan will one day be defeated by someone who will be born of a woman - that's Jesus! Paul makes reference to this in Galatians 4:4-5 when he says, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." Today's chapter demonstrates God's generosity. He is rejected by humanity but responds with more generosity, a common theme throughout the Bible.</p> <p>We can still create conflict between ourselves and God and between ourselves and others when we reject God's generosity. I'm thankful that God loves me despite my failings!</p>
5-Jan	Thurs	GENESIS 4	<p>There are a couple of firsts in this chapter. The first children are born, but there is also the first murder. We haven't been told of any rules God has put in place since the Garden of Eden, so it's not clear why Cain's offering was rejected. Many find it significant that Cain brought some fruit, while Abel brought the firstborn or best of his flock. Maybe Cain was bringing produce that wasn't good enough to eat. Whatever was wrong with Cain's offering, God gave him the chance to make it right. Like Adam and Eve, he had a choice. Doing the right thing would have resulted in happiness; doing the wrong thing resulted in him coming under the control of evil.</p> <p>A question that often comes out of reading this chapter is where Cain got his wife. The answer is found in the next chapter, which we will not be reading. In verse 4, Adam is said to have had other sons and daughters. Cain must have married a sister or niece. That would be unacceptable today, but apparently acceptable in that time.</p> <p>We are shown we always have a choice: to do the right thing or the wrong thing. Doing the right thing allows us to experience happiness and a closer relationship with God. Doing the wrong thing leads to doing things that are even worse, yielding damaged relationships with God and other people.</p>

6-Jan	Fri	GENESIS 6	<p>The chapter begins by telling us about sons of God marrying daughters of men. It's not clear who these sons of God are. Many think they are angels who followed Satan, whom we now call demons. Others think they are just godly men marrying ungodly women. The point is to let us know people are doing whatever they want, and this is leading to more evil than has ever been experienced before or since. Jesus makes reference to this time in Matthew 24:37-39. He says the world will become that evil again just before he returns to the earth. All this leads to God making the decision to destroy everything in creation. God's instructions to Noah allow him and his family to be saved and to preserve enough animals to repopulate the earth. Only six chapters into the book and God has intervened against the evils of humanity three times. The evils are increasing from one simple act of disobedience to murder to every desire of people's hearts being evil.</p> <p>In many generations, people have wondered if now is the time things have gotten as bad as the time of Noah. They are wondering if Christ is about to return. We never know, but we should always be ready. God's rescue plan today isn't a boat, it's trusting Jesus.</p>
7-Jan	Sat	GENESIS 7	<p>With the building project completed, the boat is filled and God closes the door. Until the rain begins to fall, Noah is doing everything by faith. Noah is listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:7 when it says, "It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith."</p> <p>How would you react if God told you to do something this crazy? Generally, what God asks us to do is much simpler, but still we find it hard. It seems everybody else is ignoring God and doing fine, why should I do the hard things? It's because it is God who is asking, and he will do everything he says he will.</p>
8-Jan	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
9-Jan	Mon	GENESIS 8	<p>The rain stops and the underground water stops overflowing, but it takes time for the water to drop to a level at which people and animals can live. Apparently Noah can't see the condition of the surrounding land from the window, so he uses birds to determine when it is safe to leave the boat. God repeats his instructions from chapter one telling people and animals to be fruitful and multiply. Noah builds an altar to worship God and thanks God for saving him and his family. Despite the fact that God has wiped out all the evil people, he still says that the heart of man is intent on evil. However, God now promises not to destroy the earth again.</p> <p>The earth has been given a clean start, but God knows humanity still tends toward evil. It's true for us too. God gives us a clean start when we trust Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, "<i>This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!</i>" Still, we are drawn toward evil and need God's help in the form of God's Holy Spirit living within us.</p>

10-Jan	Tues	GENESIS 9	<p>God changes the relationship between humanity and animals. The animals will now be afraid of people, and people are given permission to use animals as food, but they are restricted from drinking blood and from killing fellow humans. We are given an important insight that murder is wrong because humanity was created in God's image. The story of Noah getting drunk is strange for us. In that culture, dishonoring one's father was very offensive. Some argue that Ham seeing his father's nakedness is a figure of speech for some type of sexual act or abuse. Since the brothers were blessed for not seeing Noah's nakedness, it seems more likely Ham is criticized for dishonoring his father by using the opportunity to make fun of him. We will see the cursing of Canaan become a reality in later books in this reading plan. Almost everyone recognizes murder as wrong, but on what basis? The Bible tells us it's because humanity is created in God's image. When a person kills another person, the murderer fails to honor the image of God in his or her victim. Jesus said that even being angry with someone is subject to judgment (Matthew 5:22). It's easy to forget about the image of God in others, especially those who have done something to harm us or have done something we find especially evil. People aren't in the image of God because of what they do, but because of how God made them. Who do you need to honor by acknowledging the image of God in them today?</p>
11-Jan	Wed	GENESIS 11	<p>The story of the tower of Babel tells us why we have so many languages today. It is also another example of how humanity rebels against God. The time, energy and building materials they put into building the tower could have been put to so much better use, but they use them to make themselves like God, just as Adam and Eve had desired. The genealogy at the end of the chapter introduces us to Abram's family, setting things up for the story of Abram in the chapters that follow.</p> <p>Many people try to get to God using their own methods like doing good things or participating in religious rituals. Titus 3:4-5 says, <i>"When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."</i> When we try to get to God our way, it's more than just prideful self-sufficiency; it's a rejection of God's mercy. We need to trust in God's mercy to take care of the sin that closes the door between us and God.</p>
12-Jan	Thurs	GENESIS 12	<p>Today's chapter is a major turning point. God chooses a particular person named Abram with whom he wants to have a special relationship. That relationship will also extend to his descendants, the nation of Israel. God says he will bless Abram and his descendants with greatness so they can in turn be a blessing to others. That's a pretty big promise considering Abram is seventy-five, Sarai, his wife, is sixty-five, and they have no children. This chapter makes it clear that Abram was not chosen because he was a tremendously good person. He actually has some pretty major faults. He is not only a liar, Joshua 24:2 implies Abram wasn't even worshiping God before God talked to him. Essentially, the rest of the Bible will show how God blesses Abram, his descendants and all of humanity through them. The people we call Jews today are Abram's descendants. The Bible you are reading was written almost entirely by Jews, and Jesus was a Jew. God took someone who didn't deserve to be blessed and blessed him so people like you and me, who also don't deserve to be blessed, could be blessed too! Could God's blessing of me be one of the ways God blesses others? Maybe I limit God's blessings of others by not always listening to what he asks me to do.</p>

13-Jan	Fri	GENESIS 15	<p>In this chapter, Abram seems to be having a bit of a faith crisis. After many years of struggling with infertility, he is questioning how God is planning to give him many descendants. God reassures Abram that he will keep his promise. We are told that Abram believed God, so God considered Abram righteous. This verse is referenced in Roman 4:3, 22 and 23 and Galatians 3:6 to show us that it is faith which makes us right with God, and James 2:23 tells us faith also leads to righteous living. The ceremony of God passing between the halves of the dead animals is saying God would have to die like these animals before it would be possible for God not to keep his promise. That's a pretty strong promise! It shouldn't have been necessary for God to confirm his promise this strongly, but God meets Abram in his weakness.</p> <p>Here and in chapter 12, we see Abram struggling with his faith while at other times being strong. My faith is sometimes weak and sometimes strong too, but God always remains faithful. Faith is the first step in entering into a relationship with God, but that doesn't mean our faith never wavers. If I want to stay close to God, I need more faith.</p>
14-Jan	Sat	GENESIS 16	<p>Despite God's assurances, Abram's faith is still wavering. He and his wife, Sarai, decide Abram should have a child with Sarai's attendant. It was acceptable at that time for a man to have a child with a female slave, especially if his wife was unable to have children. It was acceptable in the culture, but not God's plan. An angel tells Hagar her son will live in constant conflict with his relatives; a prediction that is fulfilled in the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors today.</p> <p>It's reasonable to look for alternative ways to get things do; so long as the alternatives don't involve sin and are done while still trusting in God. Using the resources God has provided in a way that pleases God is a great thing! However, pursuing a path that is wrong is never God's way. Getting something we are sure God wants us to have, or a relationship we know is right, or wealth we are sure we will use to accomplish things for God cannot be gained in ways God says are wrong. The end does not justify the means.</p>
15-Jan	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
16-Jan	Mon	GENESIS 17	<p>God changes Abram's name to Abraham. Abram means 'exalted father' and Abraham means 'father of a great number.' As God changes Abraham's name, he lets Abraham know in very certain terms he will have a son with his wife and even tells Abraham what to name his son. God also sets up a ceremony to mark those of Abraham's household as belonging to God. God's promises to Abraham don't come as a result of a time when Abraham did something great for God, but after Abraham's faith failed.</p> <p>It's odd how we get the idea that doing good things causes God to give us good things. It is generally true that when we live life God's way, things go better, but Abraham is an example of how God keeps his promises even when we lack faith. I'm thankful for God's faithfulness, love and mercy, even when I deserve the opposite. Can you rest in God's promises today?</p>

17-Jan	Tues	GENESIS 20	<p>We skipped over a few chapters that talk about Abraham and his nephew, Lot. Feel free to go back and read them, but in today's reading, we continue to focus on Abraham's faith and God keeping his promises. Just like he had done in chapter 12, Abraham lies and tells people Sarah is his sister. If Abraham truly believed God's promises, he would have known God was going to protect him. How could he become the father of Isaac otherwise? All Abraham has experienced in his interactions with God have not made his faith very strong.</p> <p>Sometimes I hear people say, "He doesn't go to church or anything, but he is very spiritual." I think they mean his faith is just an internal thing between him and God. If we have faith, it should show in what we do. Abraham couldn't truly trust God and then act in ways that showed he wasn't really sure God would take care of him. Are there ways you think your faith is strong, but your actions tell a different story? Do you say you trust God to forgive yet live with guilt? Do you say you trust God to provide yet refuse to be generous? Do you say you know God loves you yet walk through life feeling unloved?</p>
18-Jan	Wed	GENESIS 21	<p>The son God had promised has finally arrived! It's been twenty-five years since God originally made his promises to Abraham, but God did exactly what he said he would do. God also provided for Ishmael. Abraham is becoming rich, well-known and the father of multiple nations.</p> <p>Faith often requires patience. In 2 Peter 3:9 we are told, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent." The people Peter is writing to are impatient because it is taking a long time for Jesus to return to the earth. We would have even more reason to wonder almost 2000 years later. Jesus is waiting to return because he wants more people to have time to trust him. Maybe God delayed the birth of Isaac to give Abraham the chance to become the man he should be before becoming a father. God's timing is perfect, and he considers things we don't even know about.</p>
19-Jan	Thurs	GENESIS 22	<p>In today's chapter, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. It's normal for Abraham to sacrifice animals to God, but God had never asked for a human sacrifice before. This is Abraham's ultimate test of faith. How could God ask for so much? In the case of Adam and Eve, God gave them everything they needed and only withheld one thing, yet they could not obey. In this case Abraham had the son God had promised and he asked for that one, but Abraham obeyed. That's quite a difference in faith between Adam and Eve and Abraham. It's not the level of sacrifice that makes the difference, but the level of faith. Though Abraham struggled with his faith over the years, he has ended up with exceptionally strong faith!</p> <p>With faith, we can do the little or the big things God asks us to do. Without faith, we can't accomplish anything for God.</p>

20-Jan	Fri	GENESIS 24	<p>In chapter 23, Sarah dies at age 127. It is interesting that Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is listed. After her death, Abraham sends his most trusted servant to find a wife for his son Isaac who worships the same God as Abraham. The servant uses an interesting combination of direction from God and wisdom to find a wife for Isaac. The servant travelled with ten camels. After a journey like this, a camel would probably drink 25 gallons of water. He wanted a hard-working and considerate woman who would offer to draw 250 gallons of water from a well even before she was asked! Rebekah also demonstrated faith in God's leading to leave immediately to marry Isaac.</p> <p>Marriage customs looked very different back then, but share two things in common with today: a public commitment before family and friends followed by a sexual union. The story shows us some great qualifications for a husband or wife; faith in the same God, hard work, generosity and a willingness to follow God's leading. These are so much more important than the shallow things that often attract our attention such as appearance or money.</p>
21-Jan	Sat	GENESIS 25	<p>Abraham marries Keturah and has six more sons. We don't know if that was before or after the death of Sarah. Abraham's death is listed, but this event isn't written down in order that it happened. According to Genesis 21:5, Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. According to verse 26, Isaac was 60, when his sons were born, so Abraham was 160 when his grandsons were born and 175 when he died. Moses tells the story in a way that closes out the life of Abraham before moving on to the life of Isaac's sons. Ishmael's offspring are also listed in this chapter, showing God keeping his promise to Abraham from Genesis 17:20; which is another way of closing out the life of Abraham. Since Isaac was 40 when he married and 60 when his sons were born, Rebekah and Isaac had to wait 20 years for her to become pregnant. What is clear from this chapter is that God keeps his promises. His promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of many nations. This happened through Isaac, Ismael, and his other sons. He promised that Isaac would be the father of a nation. Although it took a while, Abraham saw his grandsons live to age 15. We have many promises from God as well: our sins are forgiven, we have the Holy Spirit inside us and we have the power to overcome sin in our lives. Like Abraham, we can depend on God's promises, even when it doesn't look or feel like it.</p>
22-Jan	Sun		<p>Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.</p>
23-Jan	Mon	GENESIS 26	<p>There is a drought, but God promises he will provide for Isaac. Isaac has enough faith to stay where he is, but not enough to believe God will protect him from those who would want Isaac's wife. It's interesting that Isaac repeats the same lie his father Abraham did. God does provide for Isaac's protection and water needs, and people can tell Isaac is being taken care of by God.</p> <p>Just like Abraham and Isaac, you probably have faith in God sometimes but sometimes take things into your own hands. When we have faith in God, it allows those around us to recognize that God is at work.</p>

24-Jan	Tue	GENESIS 27	<p>This is a fascinating story of conflict and trickery. Jacob receives the promise that, through him, God would fulfill his promises to Abraham. Isaac wanted that blessing to go to Esau, but it had been predicted at Jacob and Esau's birth in chapter 25 that Jacob was the chosen one.</p> <p>I'm sure God didn't approve of the method, but what he said would happen is exactly what happened. It's odd that God would have chosen Jacob. He is a liar and, back in chapter 25, stole his brother's rights as a firstborn. Paul writes about this in Romans 9:10-13, wondering why God would make a choice like this. We should be thankful God chooses to bless people who don't always do the right thing, otherwise we would all be in trouble.</p>
25-Jan	Wed	GENESIS 28	<p>Like Isaac, Jacob is to find a wife from among his godly relatives. On his way to finding a wife, God confirms that Jacob is to be the one to receive the promises given to Abraham. Jacob sets up a memorial stone to remind him of God's promises.</p> <p>You've probably noticed that lots of Genesis talks about God's promises and the ways he keeps them. His promises to Jacob won't be kept until many generations later, but they will be kept. God has made promises to us as well. We have reminders too. When we take communion, we remind ourselves that Jesus died for us and our sins are forgiven. Maybe you have a Bible verse hanging on a wall in your home that reminds you of a special promise God has made to you. It is important to remember God's promises and rely on them.</p>
26-Jan	Thurs	GENESIS 29	<p>If you remember from chapter 24, Laban is Jacob's uncle. That makes Rachel his cousin. Jacob is in love and agrees to work seven years for the right to marry Rachel. It's hard for us to imagine Laban getting away with the substitution of Leah for Rachel. A bride would have been veiled during the ceremony, and by the time Jacob took her to bed, he might have been drunk. In the darkness, with no electric lights, Jacob was unaware of how he had been tricked. Obviously we are not reading about a time when daughters are treated with much respect.</p> <p>We can't help but feel sorry for Leah. God was concerned for Leah as well and allowed her to have children. This was a major source of honor in that culture. Even when we may feel ignored or unloved by others, God loves and watches over us. It took four sons for Leah to stop trying to earn her husband's love and rest in God's love for her. If only we too could rest in God's love.</p>
27-Jan	Fri	GENESIS 30	<p>This is one messed up family. They are more interested in getting one-up on each other than loving each other; sister against sister, wives manipulating their husband and son-in-law against father-in-law. How are these God's chosen people?</p> <p>God still uses messed up people and messed up families to accomplish what he wants to do. I would have picked a family with one man, married to one woman, who remained faithful to each other throughout life and dealt with others in honesty and integrity. God decided he wanted to demonstrate his ability to use broken people. Of course, God chose the better way! He lets us know he can use any of us.</p>

28-Jan	Sat	GENESIS 31	<p>The conflict between Jacob and Laban becomes so great that putting distance between them is the only answer. We can see both of them being unreasonable in how they treat each other. They decide to take vows to not harm each other in the future. They ask God to watch over their agreement, because they clearly can't trust each other.</p> <p>In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus describes a process for how we should deal with those who have wronged us. We are to work hard to try and resolve the problem, but sometimes a resolution can't be reached. People who are not connected in the conflict are part of the process, so reasonable voices can be included in the conversation. Is there conflict between you and another person that should be handled as Jesus has described?</p>
29-Jan	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
30-Jan	Mon	GENESIS 32	<p>Because of Jacob's habit of taking advantage of others, he flees from Laban only to become concerned that Esau will take his revenge. In order to protect his family, Jacob sends them away. While he is alone, God wrestles with him. Jacob is so stubborn and self-reliant that God needs to physically wrestle with him to get him to submit.</p> <p>It's possible to get ahead through underhanded dealings, but then we have to go through life wondering if we are going to get caught. It's like driving around with a policeman constantly in our rearview mirror. Living a life that trusts in God is not only more pleasing to God, it is guilt-free for us. If you are living life worrying about your past catching up to you, a change of lifestyle may be in order. Apologizing to God and those you have hurt would be a good start.</p>
31-Jan	Tues	GENESIS 33	Though Jacob and Esau try to make amends, Jacob still does not trust Esau and moves to an area away from him. The consequences of our actions can still haunt us even after we try to change our ways. Just because we have turned to Jesus doesn't mean our police records get wiped clean, the damage we have caused to our bodies goes away or the mistrust people feel towards us is healed. But we can stop causing more damage and trust God will restore what we have broken.
1-Feb	Wed	GENESIS 35	The focus of the story is about to shift from Jacob to one of his sons, Joseph. Jacob seems to be re-orienting his life more toward God. When Rachel dies while giving birth to a son, Jacob does not react in bitterness, but names him Benjamin, which means "son of the right hand." We can change, just like Jacob did. We need to rely on God rather than our own schemes.
2-Feb	Thurs	GENESIS 37	<p>The remainder of the book of Genesis tells of the life of one of Jacob's youngest sons. Joseph is a young man who lives a life pleasing to his father and to God. He makes an unwise choice in this chapter by telling his brothers of his dream, but otherwise he consistently tries to do the right thing in every situation.</p> <p>We can understand the anger Joseph's brothers would have had toward him but can't justify them selling him into slavery. Life doesn't always seem to be fair. As we continue reading his story in the coming days, we will see these events as key to God's plan for Joseph's life.</p>

3-Feb	Fri	GENESIS 39	<p>If the last chapter felt unfair, this one is even worse. Joseph works hard as a slave and is rewarded by being put in charge of the entire household. But his good fortune doesn't last. His master's wife lies about him, and he is put in prison. He remains true to God and is punished for it.</p> <p>Doing the right thing and being rewarded for it makes sense. Doing the right thing and suffering for it takes faith. In Luke 6:35 Jesus said, "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High." Our reward might not come in this life, but God will make everything right.</p>
4-Feb	Sat	GENESIS 40	<p>Joseph continues to do his best, and, in what probably seemed like an ordinary day, an extraordinary opportunity comes along. Joseph is just being kind, but God is at work.</p> <p>We never know how God is going to step into our lives. He can put a person in our path who needs help. If we ignore that need, we could miss the opportunity for God to use us in an amazing way. In Galatians 6:10 it says, "Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith." We should always be looking for these opportunities and take advantage of them whenever we can.</p>
5-Feb	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
6-Feb	Mon	GENESIS 41	<p>Joseph now gets the opportunity to meet Pharaoh. In verse 16, Joseph decides to say that only God can interpret Pharaoh's dream. Despite all his setbacks, Joseph is still relying on God. The result is Joseph becoming second in command in all of Egypt.</p> <p>Joseph was extraordinarily obedient to God and received extraordinary recognition as a result. What could God do through us if we were as obedient as Joseph?</p>
7-Feb	Tues	GENESIS 42	<p>Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt looking for food. This is Joseph's chance for revenge. It looks like he is going to do that when he puts them in prison, but he lets all of them go except for Simeon. Will they abandon Simeon as they did Joseph, or will they return?</p> <p>It would have been tempting for Joseph to lash out in anger at his brothers, but he doesn't. Anger can be difficult to control when we look only at how we have been hurt. We don't look to see how God may be at work. The next time you are hurt, ask yourself what God might be doing in this situation. Maybe it will help to reduce your anger.</p>
8-Feb	Wed	GENESIS 43	Joseph's brothers return and bring Benjamin with them. Joseph gets to know his brothers better by having them eat at his home. He continues to test his brothers to see if they have changed their ways since mistreating him.
9-Feb	Thurs	GENESIS 44	<p>The change of character in Joseph's brothers is now seen. The brothers Joseph knew as a young man would have abandoned Benjamin. Years later, his brothers are ready to do the right thing.</p> <p>People can change. God can work in those who have hurt us in the past. Do we give them the opportunity to show they have changed? Jesus often taught on forgiveness, but it is hard to do. Who do you need to forgive?</p>
10-Feb	Fri	GENESIS 45	Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and sends them home to get the rest of their families. Imagine Jacob's shock at hearing his sons had lied to him all these years, and Joseph is still alive.
11-Feb	Sat	GENESIS 46	God makes a promise to Jacob that his descendants will become a great nation in Egypt and one day leave Egypt. We will see this come true in Exodus.

12-Feb	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
13-Feb	Mon	GENESIS 47	Joseph is able to provide for his entire family. What a joy it must have been for Joseph to see everything that was taken from him by his brothers restored. God was certainly faithful to Joseph.
14-Feb	Tues	GENESIS 48	Joseph receives the blessing of the firstborn. Reuben was the actual firstborn, but he had committed adultery with one of Jacob's wives back in chapter 35, so the rights were passed to Joseph.
15-Feb	Wed	GENESIS 49	Jacob now blesses the rest of his sons. This is done in faith because he will not see his family leave Egypt and receive what God had promised. His faith is mentioned in Hebrews 11:21. A man who lived most of his life manipulating things to his advantage is, at the end of his life, a man of faith. Would you like to be remembered as self-sufficient or a person of faith?
16-Feb	Thurs	GENESIS 50	When Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers are concerned Joseph will now get his revenge. In verses 19 and 20, Joseph lets them know he sees everything that has happened to him as part of God's plan. In Ephesians 2:10 it says, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." We have been created for a purpose we can't always see. We don't know which way our lives will go, but God does. We need to wait for his plan to come about.
17-Feb	Fri	EXODUS 1	Exodus is also believed to have been written by Moses, except Exodus would have been written based on what he experienced firsthand. The chapter today doesn't give the details of the shift from privileged guests in Egypt to slavery, but by this time, Israel is a large and growing population. They have been in Egypt for 430 years and are being oppressed to the point of being killed, simply due to their race. It seems strange that Israel would be treated like this, but had they not been oppressed, they probably would have been absorbed into the Egyptian population and never would have had a separate national identity. Even in oppression God had a plan. Our story also raises an interesting question. It appears God is pleased that the midwives lied. One way of resolving this is to assume God was pleased that the midwives saved innocent lives, but not with their lying. Another is to see that lies are almost always connected to injustice. The Ten Commandments forbid false testimony, which would cause the wrong person to be punished. Lies usually cause injustice, either allowing a guilty person to avoid punishment or causing an innocent person to be blamed. In this case, the midwives lied, or at least misled Pharaoh, in order to prevent an injustice. Perhaps God finds this type of deception acceptable. We're only capable of having a short-term view in life. God has a plan which transcends today, beyond our lifetime and beyond the lifetime of the nation of which we are a part. Difficulties today could be setting things up for God's eventual solutions. We need the faith to trust he knows what he is doing.
18-Feb	Sat	EXODUS 2	Moses is also supposed to be a victim of Egypt's oppression of Israel. Through a series of events, Moses' life is spared by a member of the ruling family that wants him and all his people killed. Even Moses' crying was used by God to accomplish his plan. Even though Moses was raised in an Egyptian household, he still felt connected to his own people. The end of the chapter hints that God has something in mind, and in the next few chapters we are going to discover that Moses will deliver Israel from slavery. Often in the Bible we see God working in ways that show he is the One really in charge. Even the most powerful of people can have their plans changed when God steps in. We need that reminder when we are facing the seemingly impossible.
19-Feb	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.

20-Feb	Mon	EXODUS 3	<p>God takes action to resolve an injustice and chooses a person to make it happen. As with Abraham, Moses is not a likely choice. He has killed someone and decides it's easier to run away from his problems than face them. Moses doesn't want the responsibility either.</p> <p>God identifies himself in verses 14 and 15. He calls Himself "I Am Who I Am." This is the meaning of the proper name for God in Hebrew, which is "Yahweh." Yahweh is translated as LORD in all capitals in our English Bibles. One of Jesus' clearest statements that he is God is found in John 8:58 when he says, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!"</p> <p>Throughout all that happens to the people in Egypt, God was aware of the injustice. His solution wasn't thunderbolts and striking people dead, it was calling forth a leader. God pretty much always works through people, even significantly flawed ones. There might be a problem somewhere out there that God has chosen you to solve. You might feel inadequate, but Philippians 4:13 tells us, "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."</p>
21-Feb	Tues	EXODUS 4	<p>Moses continues to give God reasons why he's the wrong choice. He does so five times in chapters 3 and 4, and God gets tired of it in verse 14. There is a strange story about circumcision in chapter 4 which also shows Moses' lack of obvious qualification. He is about to enter Egypt to lead the nation but has not circumcised his own son. Circumcision was required by God as a sign that Israel belongs to him (Genesis 17:10). Moses couldn't be an effective spiritual leader in the nation if he was unwilling to lead his family in obeying a simple command.</p> <p>Have you ever had one of these arguments with God? It seems more than a bit stupid to be telling God his plan is no good. We also see that we should not expect to accomplish great things for God when we are refusing to obey him.</p>
22-Feb	Wed	EXODUS 5	<p>Today sets up one of the greatest showdowns of all time. Moses does what God has told him to do, but unfortunately Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, decides he really doesn't need to obey God. He increases his unjust treatment of the people of Israel and openly opposes God. Opposition to God is a dangerous thing.</p> <p>Although I haven't always done everything God would want me to do, I don't think I have ever defied God as directly as Pharaoh does here. However, I know people who do. I have also heard stories in which God has taken pretty drastic action to get people's attention. I hope I'm never stubborn enough to need the kind of reminder of God's power that Pharaoh is about to receive.</p>
23-Feb	Thurs	EXODUS 6	<p>With the situation getting worse for the people of Israel, they now turn against Moses and God. God repeats the promises he had made to Abraham that we read back in Genesis and lets the people know he still plans to keep those promises.</p> <p>When things don't go our way, it is easy to become discouraged. We may question if God is really going to take care of us. It's interesting that in spite of their questioning, God still commits to keep his promises. We can rely on God, even when times are tough. God can be trusted even when we fail.</p>

24-Feb	Fri	EXODUS 7	<p>In chapter 5, God asked Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt to worship him. In this chapter, the request comes with two demonstrations of God's power; the second one is the first of ten plagues on Egypt. Notice that Pharaoh's magicians are able to copy the displays of Moses and Aaron that are from God. We aren't told if they do so by using illusion or satanic power, but this copying of God's power probably helps Pharaoh to continue to ignore God's direction.</p> <p>Pharaoh is described as stubborn or hard-hearted because he resists God's direction. There are probably times in your life when you have resisted God's direction as well. It can seem like it would be in your best interest to do something God says is wrong. If you are resisting God today, it would be a good day to change direction.</p>
25-Feb	Sat	EXODUS 8	<p>Three more plagues are described in this chapter: frogs, gnats and flies. During the plagues of frogs and flies, Pharaoh says he is willing to let the people go, but he does not keep his promise once the plague is over. With the flies, only the Egyptians are infested; the people of Israel are safe. In the midst of a difficult time, Pharaoh says he is willing to obey God, but quickly returns to being stubborn afterwards. Jesus describes this kind of behavior in the parable of the sower in Luke 8. Some people hear what God says, but it doesn't really take root in their lives, so it doesn't have a lasting impact. We can all be that way sometimes. We hear a message in church or read a passage in the Bible and realize there is something we need to do or stop doing, but for some reason the change doesn't happen. Today, follow through on a commitment you have made to God.</p>
26-Feb	Sun		<p>Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.</p>
27-Feb	Mon	EXODUS 9	<p>Plagues five, six and seven are in this chapter. One question that comes out of this chapter is, if all the livestock died in one plague, where did the livestock come from that were killed by the hail? We don't know for sure. We don't know the timing between the plagues, so they could have had time to replenish their livestock, perhaps even taking them from the people of Israel. The plagues are clearly increasing in intensity. Those in chapter 8 seem to be inconvenient. Those in chapter 9 are threatening the livelihood of the Egyptians.</p> <p>In Hebrews 12, we are told God disciplines us like a loving father. When we go in directions that are dangerous to us, he is going to try to get our attention. Like a loving father, he will probably begin with gentle discipline, but it could become harsher if we continue to ignore him. We don't need to view every bad thing that happens to us as discipline from God, but if you know you are ignoring God on some issue, don't be surprised by God's loving discipline in your life. It may not feel loving, but it is for your best.</p>
28-Feb	Tues	EXODUS 10	<p>At the end of chapter 9, there is still some hope for Egypt. Their livestock is dead along with their flax and barley, but they still have some wheat growing. Now the locusts eat the wheat too. Egypt will be without food until the next harvest. Darkness falls when Pharaoh says he never wants to see Moses again.</p> <p>It's hard to imagine Pharaoh being this stubborn. Hopefully you have not experienced it yourself, but you may have someone in your life who, no matter how bad things get, never changes his or her ways. Don't give up. God isn't done with them and you can keep encouraging and praying for that person to turn to God.</p>

1-Mar	Wed	EXODUS 11	<p>God knows his next plague is going to work, so he prepares the people of Israel for what he is about to do. It is a combination of God caring for Israel while showing his wrath against those who continue to reject him.</p> <p>The summary at the end of the chapter is also a summary of how God has always dealt with humanity. God tells humanity his desires for them, and they don't listen. God responds with demonstrations of power designed to convince people to follow him, but many continue to disobey. We should be thankful for his patience.</p>
2-Mar	Thurs	EXODUS 12	<p>Now God sends his final disaster by killing all of the firstborn of Egypt. The people of Israel are spared this disaster, so long as they put blood around their doors. It is an act of faith to do what God tells them to do even though there is no rational reason to think blood around a door would actually protect anyone. This time, God's persuasion works, and the people of Israel are released. Jews celebrate Passover in remembrance of their freedom to this day. In a sense, Christians do too. 1 Corinthians 5:7 refers to Jesus as our "Passover Lamb," and Jesus was crucified during the Passover season. The Passover lamb that died to save the lives of people is like Jesus who died at Passover to save all humanity from sin and punishment.</p> <p>It takes faith for people today to believe Jesus' death could have any meaning for us. There is no rational reason to think someone's death 2000 years ago would save me from my sinful actions. We can be like Pharaoh and wait for God to prove his power, or we can step out in faith and save ourselves from destruction.</p>
3-Mar	Fri	EXODUS 13	<p>God gives some further instruction regarding the celebration of Passover. Verse 9 has some interesting imagery. The Israelites are told that God's law, or Word, should be bound to their foreheads and hands and in their mouths. So God's Word should be closely connected to what they think, do, take in and speak. God then begins to guide the people using a cloud in daytime and fire by night.</p> <p>Being led by God in such a direct way with a cloud sounds like a good situation. I don't have a cloud to visibly guide me, but I can still make God's Word an integral part of my thinking, actions and speech.</p>
4-Mar	Sat	EXODUS 14	<p>After demonstrating his destructive power over Egypt, God also demonstrates his protective power over Israel. It must have been terrifying to have the Egyptian army bearing down on them, but they went from slavery to victory over the greatest army on earth without using a single weapon except obedience.</p> <p>The safest place to be is doing what God says. It doesn't always feel that way in the moment, but it is true.</p>
5-Mar	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
6-Mar	Mon	EXODUS 15	<p>We read the song that was written to remember how God delivered the people of Israel from the Egyptians. The songs we read in the book of Psalms are similar; they were written by people in the midst of something significant going on in their lives. They are songs of deliverance, despair, trust and doubt. It doesn't take long for the story to go from praise to complaining. You may not be a songwriter, but hopefully you have a story of how God has delivered you. Do you tell it to others? Do you use it to remind yourself of God's faithfulness when you are in times of doubt?</p>

7-Mar	Tues	EXODUS 16	It was reasonable for the people to wonder how they were going to eat and drink in the middle of a desert. However, it did not need to come in the form of complaining. After everything they had seen God do in Egypt, you would think they would trust him. Anytime we complain, we are just as guilty. Philippians 2:14 says, "Do everything without complaining and arguing." God is just as powerful and loving today as he was for them. Do we trust him?
8-Mar	Wed	EXODUS 17	The people also experience opposition from enemies. God not only allows them to defeat their enemy, but he does it in a way that shows it was done in God's power, not their own fighting skill. Sometimes we experience difficult things in life so God can deliver us and demonstrate his power. We don't enjoy the trouble, but watching what God does builds our faith.
9-Mar	Thurs	EXODUS 18	Moses is so busy doing things, he can't step back and see there is a better way. Fortunately he has a father-in-law who can give him good advice. We probably all have times in our lives when we need someone to point out something we don't see. We should never do life alone. We need people who have our best interests at heart and can give us godly advice.
10-Mar	Fri	EXODUS 19	God is about to define a contract between him and the people, but it's important to see that God delivered the people before he defined the requirements. They were his people, and he loved them before they had done or even agreed to do anything. God has done the same for us. In Romans 5:8 it says, "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Though our relationship with God may call for sacrifice on our part, he made the first move. We will never out-love, out-sacrifice or out-give God!
11-Mar	Sat	EXODUS 20	Our chapter today gives the Ten Commandments which serve as the basis for the relationship between God and the people of Israel. Israel responds to God's presence with fear. It's easy to fall into the same trap as Israel. God asked them to obey him because of how he had cared for them, but instead they become afraid. It's wise to realize that when we disobey God, we could face dire consequences, but we need to also see his loving care for us. God much prefers obedience based on gratitude.
12-Mar	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
13-Mar	Mon	EXODUS 24	We skipped over a few chapters that give detailed requirements for how the people are to live their lives. The people commit to obeying God's laws, and God reveals himself to the leaders of the nation. This is probably the closest relationship God will ever have with the people of Israel. We are never closer to God than when we obey him. Jesus said in John 14:21, "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them." We communicate our love for God through obedience.
14-Mar	Tues	EXODUS 25	God begins giving instructions for the building of a house of worship. Since the people are still travelling, it is going to be a tent, not a permanent building. The details will continue for the next several chapters. God has a definite plan for how he expects to be worshipped. God could have miraculously provided the materials for the tent and even constructed it himself, but he wanted the people to be involved. Today we do the same. Churches rely on the offerings and efforts of people. God doesn't need our limited resources and imperfect efforts, but he does desire that we give the best of what we have.

15-Mar	Wed	EXODUS 32	It doesn't take long for the people to turn their backs on the commitments they made to God. They do so in the worst possible way by worshipping a god they create for themselves. Worshipping actual idols isn't very common in our culture, but worshipping things other than God is. Anytime we value anything above God we are doing what these people did. We see God as distant or absent and pursue something seemingly more accessible that brings immediate pleasure or security.
16-Mar	Thurs	EXODUS 33	God is so angry with the people that he tells Moses he needs to keep his distance from them or he will destroy them. Moses pleads with God to continue to be near his people and even asks that he be allowed to see God's glory. Moses longing for God's presence is a great example for us. He is not satisfied to have God provide for them and protect them; he wants God nearby. Would you have been satisfied to have God provide for you and protect you, or would you have insisted on God's presence as well?
17-Mar	Fri	EXODUS 34	God renews his relationship with the people. God says he is forgiving but also cannot leave the guilty unpunished. Moses' relationship with God is so close his face shines and the people cannot look at him. Do you want to be so close to God people can see it on your face?
18-Mar	Sat	EXODUS 40	In the previous chapters, the parts of God's tent of worship are built. In this chapter it is all put together, and the people can finally worship God in the way he has said. God's glory then settles into the tent. Today, God doesn't dwell in a tent, he dwells in the people who have trusted Jesus. I Corinthians 3:16 says, "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?" That's both a huge blessing and a huge responsibility.
19-Mar	Sun		Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.
20-Mar	Mon	NUMBERS 1	Unless you are into counting things, this may not be your favorite chapter of the Bible. However, it does let us know how Numbers got its name. Since only those eligible to fight are counted, this represents a nation of two to three million. That gives us insight into why it was necessary for God to supply water and food in miraculous ways and why Pharaoh felt threatened at the beginning of Exodus. It's important to note that Israel grew to nation-size when they lived in slavery. Oppression didn't stop God from keeping his promises to Abraham to have his descendants become a great nation. Jesus made a promise to his followers in Matthew 16:18 saying, "I will build my church and the powers of hell will not conquer it." We may feel oppressed at times, but we should never feel defeated. God will do exactly what he has promised. We may not know the timing or what the fulfillment of God's promise will look like for us personally, but he will accomplish it regardless of opposition.

21-Mar	Tues	NUMBERS 6	<p>We skipped over a few chapters you can feel free to read if you want. One tells the people how the various tribes are supposed to position themselves while travelling. Others emphasize how the tribe of Levi is to be set apart as the priests for the nation. Today's chapter defines a special vow a person can take if they want to enter into a special relationship with God. It's not required, but there are always those who wish to take their relationship with God to a higher level. Later this year, we will read about Samson. He was a Nazirite, though not a very successful one. John the Baptist has similar qualities as well.</p> <p>Although there are Christians who want to take their commitment to God to higher levels, no parallel in the New Testament is this extensive. There are many who have done amazing things for God and those who have made incredible sacrifices, but they have done so without ceremonies or restrictions that go beyond public prayer, similar to what happens in Acts 13:3.</p>
22-Mar	Wed	NUMBERS 7	<p>This chapter is repetitive as the leader from each tribe of Israel brings a similar gift for the dedication of their new place of worship, which happens to be an elaborate tent. It's a tent so it can move with the people as they are travelling.</p> <p>Why would so much detail be provided in such an unvarying way? Perhaps it's because God was pleased with each and every gift. If you give regularly to your church, it may not feel like God notices. This week's offering looks like last week's and next week will be the same, but God is worshipped and appreciates them all.</p>
23-Mar	Thurs	NUMBERS 9	<p>It has been a year since the Israelites left Egypt. If you remember back to Exodus 11 and 12, the people of Israel had been spared the death of their firstborns by putting blood on the frames of their doors. That was how death passed over their household. We are also told of how God led the people using a cloud representing God's glory.</p> <p>You might be envious of Israel being led by God in such a clear way. To know exactly when to move forward and when to stop would be a privilege for anyone who desires to do what God's wants. It's easy to get the idea that what God wants us to do is a big mystery only the smartest can figure out. However, Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that if we trust God, he will direct us. It probably won't be with a cloud, but we can be sure he will keep us on the right path if we trust him enough to follow.</p>
24-Mar	Fri	NUMBERS 10	<p>The cloud moves on, and Israel follows. They are moving closer to their destination, but the entire plan is not known. Sometimes following God is just putting one foot in front of the other.</p>
25-Mar	Sat	NUMBERS 11	<p>Their faith wears thin when the people get tired of monotonous food. Even though God is miraculously providing for them, it is not good enough. Like any leader, Moses gets tired of hearing them complain.</p> <p>It's hard to avoid complaining, even in abundance. It seems what we have is never good enough. A little more, or something a little different, seems to always be the pathway to happiness. Maybe what is needed is a little more faith and a lot better attitude.</p>
26-Mar	Sun		<p>Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.</p>

27-Mar	Mon	NUMBERS 12	<p>The complaining includes the members of Moses' family, and it is Moses they are complaining about. God makes it clear that he was the One who appointed Moses as leader, and his choice is to be respected.</p> <p>Spiritual leaders today are supposed to be people of character. In 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1, we are given qualifications for those who are to lead churches. Since these are people who are to be followed, it is a huge responsibility, and these qualifications should be carefully considered.</p> <p>According to Hebrews 13:17, these leaders should be obeyed so they can consider leading the church a joy. Unfortunately, Moses and many leaders today experience the opposite.</p>
28-Mar	Tues	NUMBERS 13	<p>God gives the people a glimpse of what he is about to give them in the classic good news and bad news scenario. The good news is the land is rich with abundant produce. The bad news is the people who will need to be defeated are strong. Caleb trusted God, so he was able to see God's provision. The other spies didn't trust God, so they could only see defeat.</p> <p>Almost any challenge in life could be looked at through these lenses. Are we headed for defeat, or is God giving us an opportunity for him to do something great? We're probably more likely to run away from a challenge if it appears huge, but God is always bigger than the challenge.</p>
29-Mar	Wed	NUMBERS 14	<p>Hadn't these people seen the disasters in Egypt and the entire army destroyed in the Red Sea? Hadn't these people been provided with food and water throughout their journey? Why couldn't they see God was going to continue to give them victory and protection? The result is that they must wait longer for what God is going to provide and lose their opportunity to enjoy it.</p> <p>Philippians 4:6 tells us not to worry about anything, but to ask God for what we need. Unfortunately people don't always do that very well. We forget the things God has done for us in the past and only look at the things in front of us that have us worried. How much enjoyment of God's provision has been missed due to lack of trusting God?</p>
30-Mar	Thurs	NUMBERS 15	<p>Sacrificing grain and animals was the way to ask God for forgiveness for unintentionally failing to obey his laws. For those who intentionally disobeyed God, there was only death.</p> <p>This probably sounds harsh to you. After all, most of us have probably disobeyed God in a defiant way at least once. Thankfully, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was greater than the sacrifices of grain and animals. Jesus can forgive even the worst of sins. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I am the worst of them all."</p>
31-Mar	Fri	NUMBERS 16	<p>The question of leadership arises again. This time the question is about why Aaron is their priest. Why couldn't anyone approach God as Aaron did? God answers that question in no uncertain terms.</p> <p>This question has a very different answer today. Because of Jesus' death, we no longer need to approach God through priests. 1 Peter 2:9 refers to all of us as priests and holy. Korah was looking forward to what we now experience. Do you see yourself as holy? God does.</p>

1-Apr	Sat	NUMBERS 17	<p>Growing almonds on a dead stick was a less frightening way for God to demonstrate his choice of Aaron, but the people still got the message. They understood it was not their place to approach God. They recognized the distance between themselves and God that only Aaron could bridge.</p> <p>We live in a similar situation today, but no longer rely on Aaron to give us access to God. In 1 Timothy 2:5 it says, "For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus."</p> <p>Aaron made sacrifices on behalf of the people so God would overlook their sin. Jesus sacrificed himself on a cross so God would forever forgive our sins. We don't have access to God, except through Jesus. Korah tried to bypass Aaron and demanded direct access to God. He died as a result. We can't bypass Jesus; we need him!</p>
2-Apr	Sun		<p>Today can be used to reflect or catch-up if you missed a day.</p>