

THE GOOD STORY



*BEHOLD, THE LION THAT IS FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH,
THE ROOT OF DAVID, HAS OVERCOME. (REV 5:5)*

THE GOOD STORY

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THE WICKED FLEE WHEN NO ONE IS PURSUING, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BOLD AS A LION. (PROV 28:1)

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PART 1: THE PATRIARCHS

THE PROMISE

The God of glory appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you." Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to Canaan. But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. "And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge," said God, "and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place." And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph their brother and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and the patriarchs could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent the patriarchs there the first time. On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and the patriarchs died. From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the Israelites increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. It was he who took shrewd advantage of the Israelites and mistreated them so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

PART 2: THE EXODUS

THE DELIVERER

It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own

son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, "Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?" But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?" At this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. But the Lord said to him, "Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt."

TEN COMMANDMENTS

This Moses whom they disowned, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?" is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, "God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren." This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with the Israelites; and he received living oracles to pass on to them. The Israelites were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, "Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt -- we do not know what happened to him." At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

MIRACULOUS NATION

But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, "It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images

which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.” The Israelites had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. And having received it in their turn, the Israelites brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before them, until the time of David. David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?” says the Lord, “Or what place is there for My repose? Was it not My hand which made all these things?”

The God of this people Israel chose them and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance -- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.”

PART 3: THE MESSIAH

From the descendants of David, according to promise, God has brought to the world a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. You yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, “What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.”

You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. There were many witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

JESUS CHRIST

Listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him, just as you yourselves know -- this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and

foreknowledge of God, was nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put to death.

For those who lived in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which they read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. He is the stone which was rejected by the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to the Apostles who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to those who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered them to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom the Israelites delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But they disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to them, but put to death the Prince of life by hanging Him on a cross, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which there are many witnesses.

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise in that He raised up Jesus. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to the world, and forgiveness of sins. God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless us by turning every one of us from our wicked ways. We are the heirs of the covenant which God made with Abraham saying, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

PROPHET, PRINCE, AND SAVIOR

Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people."

And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. These things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would

suffer, He has thus fulfilled. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." Therefore He also says in another Psalm, "You will not allow Your holy one to undergo decay." For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. This Jesus God raised up again, to which there are many witnesses. Therefore let everyone know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus who was crucified.

Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: "Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you." You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as the Israelites did. Which one of the prophets did the Israelites not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers they have now become; those who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.

Brethren, those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth His Spirit into the hearts of men everywhere who obey Him.

Therefore repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins so that your sins may be wiped away; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you. Be saved from this perverse generation!

PART 4: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. When they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go.

But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.

TRIALS CONTINUE

But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside." Now when the captain of the temple

guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

But someone came and reported to them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned). When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

When they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.” They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

They cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice,

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep. Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

PART 5: THE APOSTLE PAUL

SAUL'S WITNESS:

This I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify.

ROAD TO DAMASCUS

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” And I said, “Who are You,

Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.” But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus. A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, “The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” So, I did not prove disobedient, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

FRUIT OF THE LIGHT

It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, “Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.” And I said, “Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.” And He said to me, “Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly

serve God night and day. And for this hope, I am being accused by Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, for we also are His children. Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Paul was continually discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come; explaining to people by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Someone said to him, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, but I utter words of sober truth. For you know about these matters, and I speak to you also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape your notice; for this has not been done in a corner. Do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.” To which they responded, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”

THE PRECEDING WAS ADAPTED ENTIRELY FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Jesus started a spiritual revolution that continues to spread around the world! He rejected the host of extra-biblical traditions invented and imposed by hypocritical religious hierarchies. This is one of the reasons they rejected and crucified Him. He taught His followers how to overcome the fear and intimidation of men. So in spite of severe persecution, they carried on the fight.

Those who believed the good story told it to everyone. They changed their mind about behaviors that were destructive to their stewardships and their relationships with God and others, and they committed to learning all that Jesus commanded.

They were baptized by faith and their sins were washed away (Acts 22:16); their conscience was cleansed of guilt (1 Pet 3:21); they received a new Holy Spirit which is the blessing of Abraham (Acts 2:38-39; Gal 3:14, 26-27); they were anointed priests (2 Cor 1:21-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10); and they were given a gift to serve others (1 Pet 4:7-11).

Their lives were transformed as they exercised their gifts in continual devotion to God. They helped each other to grow spiritually and stay engaged and involved in meaningful ways. Their lives were lived as a community, and they admonished each other as needed.

Day by day, from house to house, they met for fellowship, prayer, and studying the word of God, and on the first day of the week they gathered to eat the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor 10-14). This was like a family get-together in someone's home to enjoy a love feast, and each man prepared a Scripture reading, a psalm, a teaching, an exhortation, etc. Some generous hosts even remodeled their homes to accommodate more Christians.

They practiced telling the good story to each other and others. Each church was accountable directly to God and responsible for sending out evangelism teams. The lifestyle and financial sacrifices that were made by all enabled the story to spread all over the world. These saints were holy new creatures that had been set free from organized religion to demonstrate their love for God. Christianity was the only religion that didn't have temples or a professional priesthood. In spite of severe persecution by Jews and Gentiles, their numbers multiplied exponentially.

Hundreds of years later, Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, then hijacked the church and transformed it. He gave buildings to the church, mixed in many pagan practices, and paid professional clergy to perform - turning everyone else into spectators and setting the stage for religious tyranny. Power-hungry men claimed to rule the universal church. Through political manipulation they made it illegal for any but themselves to own Bibles, they invented a host of extra-biblical doctrines and traditions, and they persecuted any who didn't submit to their reign of darkness. Catholic means universal; hence the Catholic Church.

Hundreds of years later, the Protestant Reformation was an effort to reform the Catholic Church. But this ended up forming denominations, each protesting various Catholic doctrines while keeping most of the manmade traditions. These denominations each developed their own creeds and hierarchies. In Protestant countries, many who did not submit to their reign were persecuted.

Hundreds of years later, the Restoration Movement quit trying to reform the traditions and creeds of men and attempted a simple and genuine obedience to

the Bible. A wide cross-section of people from different denominations and countries, many unknown to each other, rejected many more false doctrines while keeping numerous other manmade traditions. The main thrust of the Restoration Movement was a plea to return to the word of God as the basis for unity among believers and as the sole authority in everything pertaining to life and godliness.

THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

Today, the good story is spreading fastest in places where the traditions of religious hierarchies are not imposed and believers feel free to learn and apply the word of God to their unique circumstances. Once again there is an emerging movement of people around the world who are trying to imitate the New Testament church. More manmade practices are being rejected, including “sacred” buildings and the clergy/laity format where the masses pack the pews while the professionals tell them what to think, or just tickle their ears with entertainment.

You can still visit just about any denomination’s “sanctuary” and get some variation of the same basic format that goes something like this: Sunday school hour followed by the main assembly hour which usually includes a prayer, a few songs, communion and/or a collection, and a sermon. Where did this format come from? Not the Bible. Why do so many maintain this rigid ritual as if it were a sacred ceremony? Those wanting to differentiate themselves from manmade religions should be asking many such questions.

Jesus said, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:6-8)

Those who unquestioningly follow traditions go through the motions in vain, because their heart ends up far away from God. Those who believe God believe that His ways and thoughts are better than man’s (see Isa 55:6-11).

Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mat 28:18-20)

With primitive means, the first century church reached all the nations in one generation! Why haven’t we? Compared with how they did it, it appears that the task goes unfinished today because the traditions of men still consume the focus, effort, and resources of so many.

Now you know the rest of the story. You know how we got so far from the simple Biblical pattern that was easily duplicated throughout the first century world in one generation. The church today, just like the Judaism of Jesus' day, is burdened with a host of extra-biblical traditions invented and imposed by hypocritical religious hierarchies. Spreading their religion is overwhelmingly more complicated and expensive than simply telling the good story.

Why not join the growing movement of people around the world who are rejecting organized religion in favor of pursuing pristine Christianity? Why not join the spiritual revolution?

SIMPLE FORMAT

Here's what you need to do: have a house party! Seriously. Get your friends and family together for storytelling and small group discussion. Tell *The Good Story* that was told by the first century church and recorded in the book of Acts.

Storytelling is a fun and effective way to learn and share the word of God. People easily grasp stories and are able to tell them to others. Most people (70%) learn best through group discussion; and learning retention is highest (90%) for those sharing with others. And leadership training is part of the process.

The short stories that make up *The Good Story* give an overview of the Bible and build faith in Jesus Christ. You can tell one or more stories per gathering or tell them all during the same gathering. Once you start storytelling you'll be able to edify others with innumerable Bible stories.

The early church learned from Jesus. Scripture records about 40 stories that He told. There's not much you can't teach with a story. *The Good Story* produced a degree of hope and faith that many millions were willing to die for. It was proclaimed in all creation under heaven. This generation needs it, too!

HOW TO GET STARTED

- Gather your family, friends, and neighbors.
- Read or tell a story. You'll improve the experience by reading slowly with occasional eye contact and adding some dramatization.
- Ask the audience to retell the story - taking turns by speaking in sentences, not paragraphs.
- To bring out the truth and increase learning, ask discussion questions:
 - What did we learn about God and man?
 - What questions did this raise, what did you learn new, or what stood out to you?
 - How does it apply to your life, and what specifically should you do or change?

- When do you want to hear the next story?
- Who can you share the story with before we meet again?

Define words anyone is unfamiliar with (keep a dictionary handy; we recommend Webster's 1828, available in hardback, mobile app, or website). Here are some key points and Scriptures to bring out during discussion:

PART 1

- The promise to Abraham.
- I wonder what happens next??? Leave them wanting more.
- Homework: read Genesis to get the whole story.

PART 2

- How many of the Ten Commandments can you name? (See Exodus 20)
- If you were judged by the Ten Commandments, would you be innocent or guilty?
- This is the bad news. The next story is the good news.
- Homework: read Exodus 1-20 to get most of the story (Deuteronomy - 2 Samuel for the rest).

PART 3

- Jesus is Lord and Christ.
- Want to see some prophecies of the Christ written 700 years in advance?
- Isaiah 9:6-7; 7:14 (Matthew 1:23).
- Homework: read Matthew to get the whole story.

PART 4

- Those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)
- Why not follow this simple example today?
- Homework: read Acts 1-8 to get the whole story.

PART 5

- Do you believe the prophets?
- Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. (Acts 22:16)
- By this point you should know who's interested in moving into a deeper study and relationship with God.
- Homework: read Acts 9-28 to get the whole story.

The Rest of the Story is extra-biblical so there's no homework to go along with it, but it's important for new believers to get this overview of church history. It's been said, "Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Christians love, encourage, and pray for one another. They provide all kinds of assistance and accountability for each other. This can be developed by asking the group some questions at the beginning of each gathering:

- What's gone well since our last gathering? What are you thankful for?
- What difficulties have you had? How can this group help?
- Who did you share the last story with? How did it go?
- How have you changed or what have you done differently?

Reviewing some basic guidelines as you begin the first several gatherings can help create a good experience for everyone:

- Everyone shares in sentences, not paragraphs.
- Focus only on what the text is saying, not on outside materials.
- Give people time to think and respond. Silence is okay.

Try facilitating discussion instead of lecturing, but keep it focused. Respond to:

- Questions by asking the group, "What in the text helps us answer that?"
- Distracting comments by asking, "Where is that found in this text?"
- Strange answers by asking, "Help us understand what you're thinking."

You should read the homework (the whole Biblical account of that story) ahead of time so you can help guide an accurate discussion, connect each story with the Bible and encourage each person to read the homework themselves.

DEVELOP HIGHLY RELATIONAL HOME CHURCHES

Jesus said, "Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Mat 18:20)

Always remind your group that the goal is to multiply disciples that make disciples, churches that plant churches, and teachers that train teachers. Exhort them to start new groups and show others how to get started!

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

Additional study guides are available at JesusForKing.com. Study them with your group by following the same simple format described above to create a firmly grounded faith and transformation of character, provide training in spiritual warfare and successful stewardship, or make a rapid paradigm shift from organized religion to New Testament Christianity.



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TEST YOURSELF
to see if you are in the faith;
examine yourself! Or do you not
recognize this about yourself, that
Jesus Christ is in you -- *unless
indeed you fail the test?* (2 Cor 13:5)

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