



Following the

Genealogy of Jesus Christ

25 stories - 25 days

Abraham to Christ

by *Jessica Morris*

Following the Genealogy of Jesus Christ:

25 Days of Christmas Readings

By Jessica Morris

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Introduction to the Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The greatest love story ever recorded is that of the Lord Jesus Christ giving His life for us – all while we were in a sinful, ugly condition.

His birth was planned from the beginning of time and when Adam and Eve sinned He was promised as the coming Savior. All throughout the Old Testament there are people, pictures and prophecy that point to the coming King.

But when He does finally come it isn't to a royal palace or with great fanfare as the Jews were expecting. Rather, as a fulfillment of prophecy, He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem and His humble beginning was in a manger. Not where one would expect to find a highly anticipated king!

His family tree is recorded for us in two of the gospels – Matthew and Luke. One traces Mary's lineage and the other Joseph's. Both assert that His earthly parents were of royal descent.

In Matthew Joseph's lineage is traced, starting with Abraham. For this countdown to Christmas twenty five of these characters have been chosen from this list of names and a little bit of their story has been shared. This is the tiniest glimpse into the lives of some of these men and women in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, it is my desire to give a little life to the verses in Matthew 1 that otherwise seem dry. What we see in Matthew 1 is a long list of names – but they aren't just names. They are people with stories; adventures they have been through, and the goodness and mercy of God seen throughout the lives of these people.

My idea in writing this series with 25 characters from Abraham to the Lord Jesus is that from December 1 – December 25 a story would be read each day, counting down to Christmas day, the day we celebrate the birth of Christ. Our family has painted wooden clothes pins to represent each of the 25 characters – a similar, tangible illustration for the genealogy might be helpful for your family too. A few questions have been included at the end of each days reading. Please adapt this to meet the needs of your own family.

God bless and may He be glorified,

-Jessica

Day 1 :: Abram :: God is our Great Reward

Abraham is called the friend of God – isn't that amazing?! God considered him a friend. Do you want to know something even more amazing? God calls us His friend when we follow Him.

Abraham didn't always follow God. He once lived a life without any thought of the one true God. He worshiped false gods, which are called idols. But God called him and asked Abraham to follow Him, and Abraham obeyed God.

Abraham followed God because he knew that this God was different than all of the false gods he had spent his life worshiping. He followed God because he knew that this God was the true God.

God told Abraham to leave his city of Ur, so Abraham headed out with his wife and his nephew Lot, servants, tents, and camels. He walked and he walked- not knowing where he was going, just trusting God. God had promised him a land and descendants and he was looking forward to both. His beloved wife, Sarah, had been unable to have a baby and they were looking forward to seeing God fulfill His promise.

One night while Abraham lay sleeping in his tent God came to talk to him again.

"Do not be afraid Abraham," a loud, rich voice flooded Abraham's dream. "I am your shield, your very great reward."

Abraham pulled his rough goat skin cloak a little closer as he thought on these words that had just stirred his nights slumber.

He knew this voice – he knew it well. This voice had called to him years before to leave everything.

That voice – that call – had been mysterious and yet comforting and assuring. This voice had once called him to leave it all and go somewhere. Somewhere unknown. Somewhere strange.

The part of a man that beats for something more; he knew he had found that when this voice called to him. How a clay pot, still damp and pliable, moves for its potter, this created being moved for his creator.

He had packed up his belongings and had set off across a vast, unsettled land. He had traveled far, and that land the voice had spoken of had not yet come to be. He collected riches and reputation, but waited with longing for that which had moved him.

And then these words; "I am your shield, your very great reward."

God wanted Abraham to know of the spiritual wealth to be found in a personal relationship with God.

Abraham is told to stand outside his tent and the voice that spoke each star into existence lovingly tells this childless man to look up.

Look up, to the inky black night bejeweled in distant, sparkling white.

“Count the stars,” God urges.

Abraham stares, awestruck at the volume of stars. He had never quite noticed how many stars there were until his God told him to. As the weight of this responsibility starts to bear down on his shoulders God finishes His message; “Your offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.”

That weight of responsibility dissolves into awe as he considers the magnitude of what his God had just promised him.

Then began a time of waiting – he had been promised thousands upon thousands of descendants and yet he still lacked one child. He knew an heir was coming, but he didn’t know when.

Day 2 :: Isaac :: God will provide the Lamb

Isaac was born as the promised child to Abraham when his father was one hundred years old and his mother ninety years old. God had remained faithful and true in His promise to bless Abraham with a son.

Years pass by without record, and then a great story is told – one so profound it is hard to wrap our minds around it. The father that loved his son so dearly was asked to sacrifice him. Does that sound like another story you know?

Back in Isaac's day - and all the way up until the time of Christ – blood sacrifices were needed to cover the sins of the people.

God started this way back in the Garden of Eden when the first two humans, Adam and Eve, sinned and covered themselves with leaves. Their covering was not enough and so God killed an animal, blood was shed, and He covered their nakedness. It continues as a theme woven through scriptures that blood is needed for the forgiveness of sin and it ends when the Son of God, our Lord Jesus, shed His own blood once and forever for us.

God gave Abraham the promised son, and then God asked Abraham to give his son up as an offering. With a heart full of grief and faith anchored firmly in the confidence that Isaac was the promised son from whom future nations would come, Abraham set off with Isaac.

Isaac traveled these long, tiring miles with his father to make this special burnt offering, the two of them traveling through dust and rocks with their needed supplies and two servants.

They started up a mountainside and as they climbed higher Abraham asked the servants to stay put and father and son carry on, alone.

Isaac, being youthful and strong, carried the wood. His father the fire and knife.

“Father,” Isaac inquired in a thoughtful tone, “we have everything we need to make a sacrifice except for the animal for the burnt offering itself. Where is the lamb?” He knew what was required for a burnt offering. He had seen many offerings and knew his parents always did it the way God required.

With an assurance that came from intimacy with his God Abraham responded; “God Himself will provide the lamb.”

Higher and higher they climbed, carefully maneuvering over rough rocks as the sun beat down on them. Isaac's arms grew heavy under the weight of the wood.

Isaac knew his father was going where God had called him to go, and at last they reached that place. Carefully Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on top. The time had come.

The aged father tied together the wrists of the youthful son. Scratchy rope pulled tight around the wrists of Isaac, who was certainly capable of overthrowing his father and yet obediently submitted to his father's obedience to his God.

Isaac lay on the altar, innocent but also powerful enough to remove himself, and yet bound by a love for his father. He watched as his father's arm rose high, the sharp knife reflecting the evening glow of the sun.

In that moment the voice of the Lord called out;

"Abraham! Abraham! Do not hurt the boy! Don't do anything to him! Now I know that you fear God because you haven't tried to keep your only son from me."

How do you think this father and son felt in that moment?

Isaac's life was spared and Abraham sacrificed a ram whose horns had gotten tangled in the thicket.

Abraham had known God would provide the lamb, and He had.

Day 3 :: Jacob :: God's familiar work is to bless

Jacob and his brother Esau were twins and even while they grew inside their mama's tummy they fought with each other. If they fought with each other before they'd even entered the world, do you think they fought when they got out?

Sadly, they did still fight. They didn't grow up as close buddies that enjoyed doing the same things and just being together. Jacob actually did something very terrible to his brother. See, Esau had been born first and because he was the firstborn he was given a special blessing by his father, Isaac. Jacob wanted that special birth right that was for the oldest and one day Esau came home tired and hungry from a long day of work. Jacob had made a delicious smelling stew that made Esau's belly rumble in hunger. When Esau asked for some of Jacob's stew Jacob said he would trade a bowl of stew for the special birth right. Esau was so hungry all he could think of was eating so he agreed to the trade!

Then Jacob did something even more terrible. When his father Isaac was dying Jacob pretended to be Esau so that Jacob could have his brother's blessing. It was not easy – Jacob was smooth skinned and Esau was hairy! Jacob disguised his skin and his voice and Jacob was given Esau's blessing by the dying Isaac.

Can you imagine how angry Esau must have been? His very own brother had cheated him. Esau was furious, and Jacob got scared! He did not want to wait and see what Esau would do so he ran away – he ran, and he ran, and he ran; all the way to his Uncle Laban.

Now, Uncle Laban had a beautiful daughter named Rachel and Jacob wanted to marry her. Uncle Laban agreed, but only if Jacob would work for him for seven years. So for seven years Jacob worked hard for his bride – and at last! The special day arrived. This might sound silly to us, but the brides would cover their faces during their wedding and the groom would not see his bride's face until their wedding night. Guess what tricky Uncle Laban did? He married his oldest daughter, Leah, to Jacob – not beloved Rachel that Jacob had dreamed about as he worked under the hot sun. Jacob was so upset, but he quickly agreed to work seven more years for his love. And this time he was able to marry his Rachel. Jacob continued working for Uncle Laban and he collected cattle, servants and wealth.

One day God spoke to Jacob and told him to go back home. Jacob packed up everything he owned, and with his large family and many servants, headed out for the long, dusty journey home. Each step brought him closer to the brother he had treated so badly.

Jacob sent a messenger to Esau, letting Esau know that he was coming home but would cause him no problems. The messenger came back and told Jacob that Esau was coming – and with four hundred men!

Jacob had always been creative, and when faced with this fearful news he split his large family and servants into two groups, thinking that if Esau attacked at least one group would be spared. And then in his moment of fear and despair Jacob cried out to God.

“God You asked me to leave Uncle Laban, You said You would make me prosper. I am so unworthy of Your kindness and faithfulness, but please save me and my wives and children from my brother Esau. You promised that I would have descendants that were like the sand of the sea!”

This Jacob, he knows people. Maybe it is because he has cheated and been cheated through his whole life, but he knows how to work people. He decides to send a magnificent gift to his brother – something remarkable that will show Esau how much Jacob thinks of him. Jacob decides to send Esau some animals. But not just one animal, or two, or three ... or even ten, or twenty or one hundred. Jacob sends Esau five hundred and fifty animals! He sent him goats and sheep and camels and cows and donkeys – what a noisy, funny present to receive!

Jacob sent the servants ahead with the gift and then he spends the night by himself. Only, he wasn't by himself. God met Jacob there and wrestled with him. Jacob held on and would not let go – he wanted to be blessed. It is the character of God to bless and Jacob clung to that. God did bless him, and He also changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob continues on his journey homeward – and at the moment the brothers came into view of one another Esau ran towards Jacob and threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. They wept together as brothers reunited, no longer enemies.

And so Jacob settled his family into their new home, back in the land he had grown up in.

Day 4 :: Judah :: God is working

Judah was the fourth son born to Jacob and Rachel, he had 11 brothers and one of them made all the other brothers very jealous. His name was Joseph and the brothers all hated him, mainly because their father favored Joseph more than the rest of his sons. He protected Joseph when there was danger and gave him a brightly colored coat. Joseph also had dreams about his brothers bowing down to him, which he told to his brothers.

These brothers were terribly jealous of Joseph – and they were ready to kill him. But Judah stepped in with a different idea – he thought it would be much better to sell Joseph as a slave. So, off Joseph goes with a group of travelers headed for Egypt.

Years passed by and Judah married and had three sons; Er, Onan and Shelah. Er grew up and married a lady named Tamar. Er died before she has a son, and following the custom of their culture, Tamar married his brother Onan. But then Onan died before she had a son! Shelah was too young to get married, so Judah told Tamar to go back to her father's house and promised Tamar that when Shelah was old enough Shelah and Tamar would be married. Judah does not keep his promise and Shelah and Tamar are never married to each other.

Years more passed by and Judah's wife died. Judah grieved for her, and when his time of mourning ended he decided to take a trip to see where his sheep were getting sheared. This just happened to be right near Tamar's father's house and Tamar just happened to hear that Judah was coming.

Now, Tamar knew something. She knew the culture and traditions and that she was meant to have a child and that Judah had stolen that from her. And so she did something very brave. Tamar covered her face so that Judah would not know it was her, and then she sat by the road he would be journeying on. Judah saw her and did not recognize her, and he spent the night with her.

Three months passed by and Judah was told that his daughter in law, Tamar, was pregnant. Back then death was the punishment for unmarried women that were found to be pregnant, so Judah said that she should be brought out and burned to death.

Tamar stood before Judah and laid before him his staff, his seal, and his cord; three things he had given her when he had spent the night with the woman he had thought was a stranger. And then he knew. He knew the belly that bumped before him held his child. He knew he had not honored his word. He knew she had acted more rightly than he had. And he knew he could not burn her.

When Tamar was all ready to have her baby they discovered a great surprise – there was not just one baby in her tummy, but two!

Judah's two new sons were named Perez, the first born, and Zerah.

More years pass by and famine strikes the land. A famine is when there is no rain for food to grow, and people starve for lack of food. Judah, his brothers, and all of their families grew very hungry.

Hunger led Judah and his band of brothers to head to Egypt to buy some food. When they arrived in Egypt they were amazed at the abundance and were happy that there was food for them to buy.

Only, for them, that food came with a condition.

They were perplexed when they were told by the second in command of Egypt that they had to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, with them before they could buy any food. It was a strange request, but they needed food.

The brothers traveled back to their land and told their father the news. Poor old Jacob was heartbroken. He was still grieved, all these years later, over the loss of his precious Joseph. He could not lose his Benjamin. Judah reasoned with his father, food from Egypt was needed and he would take all the responsibility for his brother and make sure that Benjamin came home safely.

Back to Egypt the brothers go, confused about why Benjamin is with them, weary from all the travel, and hungrier than ever. They soon find out why Benjamin was asked to come with them. The man who was second in command in Egypt was Joseph, the very brother they had sold into slavery. He had wanted to see his youngest brother.

While they had meant to hurt Joseph and what they had done was evil, God had used it for good.

Joseph forgave them all and invited his father and brothers to live near him, and so the family settled down in Egypt. They had children, and their children had children and hundreds of years pass by as this family grew into a nation, the nation of Israel. Terrible things happened to the Israelites – the Egyptians began to fear them and turned them into slaves until God said it was enough – He was going to free His people.

The nation of Israel was never meant to live in Egypt forever – remember the land God had promised to Abraham? They were supposed to be living there. And God had a plan to get them there.

Day 5 :: Rahab :: God draws us out & draws us in

God used a man called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. Millions of Israelites started on a long walk through the wilderness. They defeated cities of enemies that stood in their way. One of the cities that stood before them was Jericho. And in Jericho lived a woman named Rahab.

Rahab was worldly wise and weary of it all – day in and day out were all the same to her and she was tired of it all. Her city was strong and safe, but she never felt strong or safe inside the walls of Jericho.

There were stories going around the city of Jericho that the Israelites were coming their way. Everyone in the city was told to report anyone that looked like they might be an Israelite – they didn't want any spies in their city! But one day Rahab found two Israelite spies and she quickly ushered them into her house. She hid them on her rooftop and when soldiers came to her door asking if she had seen the spies she turned them away – something about these strangers was stirring something inside her and she wanted to know more.

“I know God has given you this land,” she said to the spies. Destruction of Jericho was coming. Of this she was convinced. “Please save me and my household,” she asks of the men.

“You and all those who are in your house will be saved and we will treat you fairly and kindly as you have treated us. You must tie a scarlet cord in your window and all who are in this home will live.” The spies slipped out of her home and back to their camp.

Rahab knew nothing of the plans of the Israelites for defeating her city, but her heart beat with excitement as hope grew deep in her heart. Change was coming. She had heard stories of the Israelites God – everyone had heard stories. This misfit group of Israelites had defeated military powers that defied reason because their God fought for them.

Rahab had known the strength of men and seen how even the most powerful of them were weak. But this God she knew He was powerful, she knew was more than any man could be.

Rahab watched out her window as the Israelite army marched close. The city of Jericho was a bustle of activity as their military prepared itself for war, they were preparing for a bloody battle. The Israelites made the first move – they started to walk. And every day they walked all the way around the city wall.

For seven days Rahab watched the Israelite army walk around the city. It thrilled her heart to hear and see these soldiers march around her city each day and her anticipation grew, would this be the day that defeat came to the city of Jericho? Would this be the day that she would be saved? And then, she heard it. A strong shout came from the soldiers and the city walls began to crumble as they folded in all around the city. The noise was deafening, but Rahab knew she was safe in her home with her cord hanging in the

window. In time, she was rescued from her home and the Israelite soldiers came and rescued her.

She was brought out of the destruction of Jericho and brought into the privileges of God's chosen people.

Rahab married Salmon, a descendant of Perez, a man in the direct genealogy to Christ Jesus, which brought Rahab into that line too. A woman who was from a city that was going to be destroyed but was saved because of her faith in the living God.

Day 6 :: Ruth (& Boaz) :: Redeemer and Refuge

Ruth was a Moabite, which means she came from the land of Moab. Do you remember Abraham's nephew, Lot? One of Lot's sons was named Moab and Ruth was a descendant from him. The Moabites were a pagan people – they had rejected God and worshiped idols.

Ruth had married an Israelite man. He and his family had come to her town because there was a famine in their town of Bethlehem. Ruth had loved him, and was broken hearted when he died. She was even more broken hearted when her father in law died and her mother in law, Naomi, decided to go back to her home land.

Ruth made up her mind, she would go with Naomi. Even though Naomi tried to convince Ruth to stay, Ruth would have none of it.

“Where you go, I go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die.”

With a surge of love and faithfulness Ruth committed herself to Naomi and to the God of Israel. The two widowed women journeyed back to the land of Bethlehem and arrived at the beginning of barley harvest.

The women needed to eat and Ruth took on the responsibility to collect food for the two of them. With tummy grumbling with hunger she settled on a bountiful barley field. Oh how easy it would have been to have reached out and picked from the ample grains that grew across the vast field. But no, Ruth knew that would not be right. It was not hers. Ruth swallowed all pride for the practical need of belly filling, and fell in line with the other poor, displaced people. The leftovers. The forgotten pieces. That was all she had claim to. Slowly her collection of barley grew in her apron as she picked up the pieces of barley that the field pickers dropped.

As only God can orchestrate, Rahab had chosen to pick in a barley field that belonged to Boaz. Boaz, the strong, wealthy son of Rahab and Salmon.

When Boaz walked out to his field to check on things he noticed this foreign woman, Ruth, picking up the leftovers in his field. He asked some of his workers who she was and why she was there and his heart was moved for this foreign woman. Boaz was very kind to Ruth and told her to only come and pick grain from his field and to drink water from his well when she was thirsty.

Overcome with gratitude Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him for his kindness, “But why me?” she asked him, looking around at the other poor people that were also picking up the leftovers. “Why are you showing this kindness to me?”

“I have heard your story. I know you left your family and the land that you know. I know you came here to a people you do not know with traditions that you do not understand. The Lord will repay you, and a full reward will be given to you by Him under whose wings

you came for refuge.” Boaz’s voice broke as he finished this line and he left Ruth to go back to her picking.

Refuge. His bedtime stories had been filled with stories from his mother about God being the God of refuge. She had told him often the story of God saving her from Jericho – how she waited in her room while the city around her crumbled, and he had often imagined it to be like a baby bird nestled safely under its mother’s wings while all around was danger. A safe refuge. Boaz admired Ruth for making the choice to leave all she knew to follow this God of Israel, he knew the challenges that came with such a decision.

When Ruth went home at the end of the day Naomi was thrilled with the day’s report. “Oh Ruth, do go back to his field to pick!” And throughout all of barley season Ruth continued to pick from Boaz’s field.

When barley season came to a close Naomi told Ruth that she must see what Boaz’s intentions were. “Ruth, you must go uncover his feet and lay down by them. Then wait and see what he says.”

Under the cover of darkness Ruth slipped out to where Boaz was sleeping. She pulled his blanket away from his feet and laid her own body up close. “Wha...? Oh, Ruth, is that you?” Boaz whispered in a sleepy confusion. “Why are you here?”

With quiet confidence Ruth simply replies, “Take your maidservant under your wing.”

Boaz’s heart leaped – this was a declaration of love and dependence.

Boaz provided refuge, strength and help for Ruth.

Boaz and Ruth were married and they had a baby named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse.

Day 7 :: Jesse :: God is King of Kings

Jesse was a shepherd who lived in the city of Bethlehem. He was alive during a very unique time for the people of Israel; they had seen that all the nations they had conquered

and all the nations surrounding them had a king – but they did not. And Israel wanted what everyone else had. Israel wanted a king. And God allowed it.

Israel wanting their own king was their rejection of God as their king. They wanted a man they could see as a symbol of power and authority. But as we go through the stories of the kings of Israel we will see that these men who reigned over the people were all sinful men and they all needed their own King.

The very first king of Israel was a strong and handsome man named Saul, a regal looking man that made the people of Israel proud. But Saul did not obey God – when he went to war he saved lives that God had said to kill and he saved treasures that God had said to destroy.

Obedience is a precious thing to God, and this disobedient king was no good. God would use men to talk to His people; they were called prophets and were messengers, delivering God's word to whom God wanted to hear it. After Saul's disobedience God talked to his messenger Samuel and told him that there was going to be a new king and that Samuel was going to anoint this king from one of Jesse's sons in Bethlehem.

Samuel traveled to Bethlehem, an unusual and unexpected visit for the prophet to make. Then he asked Jesse and his sons to join him in making a sacrifice to God, just as God had asked. The seven sons were strong and handsome, surely any of them would be an excellent fit to be king over the nation. We do that sometimes, don't we? We see things that look good on the outside and think that means it is right on the inside.

The first son walked in front of Samuel and God said no, not this one. Then the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth sons walked in front of him, and each time God said no, not this man. When the seventh son walked before Samuel he was certain that this would be the king, but again God said no.

Samuel turned to Jesse; "Do you have any more sons that I have not seen today?" "Oh yes, just David. He is my youngest and he takes care of the sheep. Would you like me to send for him?" Samuel did, and so David was sent for.

When Samuel saw David God told him that this man would be the future king of Israel. The greatest king of Israel had his beginnings in his father's sheep field.

There isn't much else that we are told of this man Jesse. He fathered the greatest king that Israel ever had, and yet his own story is a rather quiet one. He witnessed the rise of the first king in his nation, and the fall of that king before the King of kings. He saw firsthand his own son, one he didn't even think worthy of calling in from the field, be called by the King of kings to be the king of this nation.

Day 8 :: David & Bathsheba:: God forgives

David is a man we know well; he was a shepherd turned king. He killed a giant with just a sling and a stone. He was best friends with Jonathan, King Saul's son. King Saul tried many times to kill David. David wrote many of the psalms and he was called a man after God's own heart.

David loved the Lord, but he was still a sinful man. Something very special about David was that he was quick to repent of his sin. When David would realize that he had done wrong he would confess it to God and ask for forgiveness. It is a wonderful example to us.

One night when the country was at war David was home at his palace. A king's place is with his soldiers, but this night David was in the comforts of home. He found himself pacing back and forth on his roof, unable to sleep. Back and forth he walked, his eyes wandering the buildings around him. Suddenly, he stopped. There, on another rooftop, was a beautiful woman. 'I must have her!' he thought to himself. "Who is she?" he asked his servant. "That is Bathsheba, she is the wife of Uriah who is away fighting in your battle."

"Go get her for me," David ordered.

And just like that, this king chosen by God chose to sin. He took another man's wife for himself and she became pregnant with his child.

David was desperate to hide his sin – he had Bathsheba's husband put in the very front of the battle so that he would be sure to die, and then he married Bathsheba.

But we can't hide our sin. God always knows. And he knew what David had done.

God sent his messenger Nathan to David to confront him about his great sin, and David broke down in grief and confessed his sin.

"I have sinned against the Lord!" This great king and warrior recognized and confessed his own sin. And God forgave him – He always does forgive when confession and repentance is made.

A very sad consequence to David's sin was that the baby he fathered with Bathsheba died. Shortly after Bathsheba became pregnant with another son, and this one was born healthy and strong. They named the baby Solomon.

One of David's desires was to build a temple to the Lord, a permanent place of worship to the One true God, but because he had been a warrior and fought so many battles and killed so many people God said no, the temple building would be done by Solomon, who would become the king of Israel when David died.

Since David couldn't do the actual building he collected provisions for the beginning of the temple. David collected gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, stone, and skilled craftsmen, and they were all left for Solomon to use in the building of the temple.

Day 9 :: Solomon :: God is the Giver of all good things

When David died Solomon was anointed king. One night as Solomon was sleeping God appeared to him in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted. What would you ask for, if you were Solomon?

Solomon asked God to give him discernment so that he would rule the people well and God was pleased to answer this request.

God told Solomon that not only would He answer that request and make him wise, but He would make Solomon the wisest man that there ever was or that there ever would be! God also told Solomon that He would give him wealth and honor.

Solomon became well known for his wisdom and people would travel great distances just to hear him speak on various subjects.

Solomon never forgot his father's desire for the temple and he worked hard for it to be completed so that there could be a permanent place of worship to God. When the work was finally completed Solomon turned to the people and with a loud voice declared;

"May God turn our hearts to Him so that we will walk in obedience to Him and keep all of the laws He has given us. And may our hearts be fully committed to the Lord, to live by and obey His commands."

But Solomon's own heart wasn't fully committed to God. He married many women and he allowed their false gods to enter his home. This eventually drew his heart away from the One true God. It took time for Solomon's allegiance to shift, but by befriending and being closely connected with those who worshiped false gods Solomon too began to worship them, isn't that sad?

Up until this time there had been peace in Solomon's kingdom, but once he turned his devotion to false gods the time of peace ends.

Solomon had a son named Rehoboam who would become the next crowned king of Israel when his father died. But there was another man, whose name rhymes with Rehoboam, and his story is an important one. His story starts during the reign of Solomon and continues into the reign of Rehoboam.

His name was Jeroboam. This kingdom of Israel that Solomon was king over was going to split in two – with Rehoboam being king over some and Jeroboam being king over the rest. The story of those two kings we will talk about tomorrow.

Right now Jeroboam was still a young man and a hard worker – and King Solomon noticed him. "I want that hard worker to work for me!" he said. And so King Solomon made Jeroboam in charge of all the labor force from the tribe of Joseph.

Remember what happened to Solomon as he grew older? He started to worship idols. It was because of that disobedience God that was going to split Israel into two kingdoms.

Israel was made up of twelve tribes, and most of those tribes were to be taken away from Solomon's family's rule.

When Solomon understood that Jeroboam was going to eventually become king Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam ran for his life, he ran to Egypt and stayed there until he received news that King Solomon had died.

Day 10 :: Rehoboam :: God is whom we should seek

Upon Solomon's death Rehoboam was crowned king. All of the people gathered together and pleaded with him; "Please, lighten the load that your father put on us! If you do this we will serve you."

Rehoboam told the people to give him three days to think about their request.

Rehoboam had had the wisest man in all the world for his father, but he was a very foolish man.

He asked the elders in his counsel what they thought he should do, and they thought it sounded very wise to lighten the load and secure the service of the people. He dismissed the sage advice of these men and turned instead to the younger men. His peers urged him to rule the people even more harshly than his father had, and when Rehoboam stood before the people with his answer he boldly proclaimed;

"My father made you work hard, but I will make it harder. He beat you with whips, but I will use whips with pieces of sharp metal."

The people were not happy. This was not a good king that they had to rule over them. They wanted a good king. Word started going around that Jeroboam had returned from his trip to Egypt. "We want him for our king!" the people announced, and so they crowned him king. Ten of the tribes wanted him as their king.

The other two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, were gathered by Rehoboam and were told to prepare for war. He was going to fight against the ten tribes that had followed Jeroboam.

But God sent a message to Rehoboam and told him to stop. "Stop – don't go into battle. Don't fight against your brothers. This splitting of the tribes is my doing."

So now Israel has been split into two kingdoms, never to reunite as one – the Northern kingdom with its ten tribes and the Southern Kingdom with its two tribes. Each with its own king ruling. Through the rest of our stories we will be following the kings from the Southern Kingdom, for that is the line that the Lord Jesus came through.

King Jeroboam quickly realized that he might lose the allegiance of his people if they journeyed to Jerusalem to make their sacrifices to the Lord, so he built golden calves in his territory for the people to worship instead. He also built shrines and made men priests that were not from the tribe of Levi, the only tribe that priests were to come from.

A messenger of God came to Jeroboam as he was standing near the altar to make an offering and the messenger called out to the altar;

"Altar! Altar! This is what the Lord has said; 'Out of the line of David will be a son called Josiah. And on this altar he will sacrifice the priests who make offerings here and human bones will burn here. And this is a sign so you will know it is true, the altar will be split in two and the ashes will spill out.'"

King Jeroboam was furious and he raised his arm to command for this messenger to be seized, but his hand shriveled and he could not pull it back. As he gazed at his hand in horror he saw the altar split in two and the ashes pour out just as the messenger had said. "Please," King Jeroboam begged of the messenger, "pray that my hand will be restored." The messenger prayed and the hand was restored but Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. Years and years will pass before we see the fulfillment of the prophet's words about Josiah.

King Rehoboam did not do any better in his kingdom. He led his kingdom into idolatrous worship. King Rehoboam did evil because he did not set his heart on seeking the Lord.

Day 11 :: Abijah:: God is our leader

Abijah was Rehoboam's son and the next crowned king. Abijah was not like his father – under his leadership his kingdom had submitted themselves to God, observing God's requirements and asserting Him as their leader.

Abijah wanted to reunite the two kingdoms of Israel and he made a plea to Jeroboam and his troops; "Don't fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors! You will not succeed!"

Jeroboam had a large army – a much, much larger army than Abijah had. For every strong and skilled soldier that Abijah had, Jeroboam had two! Jeroboam had 800,000 men in his army and Abijah had 400,000 – but that didn't stop Abijah from pleading with Jeroboam's army to repent and turn back to the One true God.

Jeroboam had a sneaky plan. He decided that since he had so many soldiers he could surround Abijah's army and they could ambush the smaller army. Some of Jeroboam's soldiers stood in front of Abijah's soldiers and others snuck around the back – Abijah's smaller army was surrounded! When they saw this, what do you think they did? What would you do if you were surrounded by a big, scary army?

Abijah and his men cried out to the Lord. They asked God to help them. And God did! God helped them and Abijah's army did some serious fighting that day. Remember how many men were in Abijah's army? 400,000. Well those 400,000 men caused 500,000 casualties in Jeroboam's army. They caused more injuries than there were men in their own army!

Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took several of his cities from him. Then God struck Jeroboam down and he died.

While the Northern kingdom of Israel was not a threat throughout the rest of King Abijah's reign, he did not succeed in reuniting the two kingdoms.

Day 12 :: Asa :: God is the one we rely on

Asa, son of Abijah, became the next king. He was passionate about keeping the worship of the One true God. He even went so far as demoting his grandmother from her position as queen mother because of her worship of idols.

Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord.

One time Asa was faced with a large military threat from Ethiopia and he turned to the Lord in prayer;

“Lord there is none like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us for we rely on You and in Your name we have come against this huge army. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You.”

The Ethiopian army was crushed.

In Asa's third year as king in the Southern kingdom, Baasha became king over the Northern kingdom of Israel.

Now, Baasha was a bad king. He was not supposed to be the king. Baasha had been serving as a captain of the army and had killed the king and his family so that he could be king. Baasha continued leading the people in idol worship.

King Baasha made a peace treaty with King Ben-Hadad, the king of Damascus. A treaty was like a promise to be friends and not go to war against each other. King Asa didn't like their little peace treaty, especially when King Baasha started attacking his kingdom, and so King Asa took silver and gold from God's temple and he offered it to King Ben-Hadad and said “Please take this and break your peace treaty with King Baasha. I want you to go to war against him rather than going to war against me!”

King Ben-Hadad broke his peace treaty with King Baasha and he sent his armies to go fight against King Baasha. King Asa was able to get two cities worth of building material from the plunder they took from King Baasha!

But King Asa had made a big mistake. Rather than relying on the Lord to deliver him from his enemies King Asa had taken money that belonged to God and he had made an alliance – like a friendship between two armies – with an enemy in order to fight another enemy. He'd made a mess trying to handle things by himself.

God sent one of his messengers to talk to King Asa. The messenger's name was Hanani and he reminded King Asa that God had helped him conquer much bigger and scarier armies in the past and that he should have looked to God rather than man to help him. Hanani told King Asa that the Lord looks throughout the earth to strengthen the hearts of those that are fully committed to him. And then Hanani rebuked King Asa;

“You have done a foolish thing! From now on you will be at war.”

King Asa was furious. He didn't like Hanani speaking the truth to him and so he threw Hanani in prison.

A few years later King Asa became sick with a very serious foot disease. He asked lots of doctors for advice, but he did not ask God to help him. He was never healed and two years later he died.

Day 13 :: King Jehoshaphat :: God is the One who saves us

Jehoshaphat was the son of Asa and became king when his father died. He was the fourth king to rule over the southern kingdom of Israel.

Jehoshaphat did four important things during his reign as king;

1. He strengthened his kingdom against the northern kingdom of Israel.
2. He sought God and followed His commands with a devoted heart.
3. He removed idols from the land.
4. He sent out men to teach the laws of the Lord.

Because of these four things the fear of the Lord fell on the surrounding nations and they did not go to war against him. What's more, the Philistines and the Arabs brought him gifts – gold, silver, rams and goats. People could see that Jehoshaphat was different. He became stronger and wealthier by the day – it was a very prosperous time for Jehoshaphat!

But even though his kingdom was very wealthy and strong, Jehoshaphat wanted to strengthen his alliance with the king of the northern tribes of Israel, wicked king Ahab. So Jehoshaphat married his son, Jehoram, to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah.

Some years later King Ahab had a feast with lots and lots of food. He invited King Jehoshaphat to the feast. It wasn't just a fancy dinner; King Ahab wanted something from King Jehoshaphat. He wanted help in attacking Ramoth Gilead. King Ahab finally asked; "Will you help me?"

"Yes! You can count on me and my troops in war" King Jehoshaphat answered. "But you should ask God for guidance."

King Ahab called all of his own prophets together and asked them; "What do you think? Should I go to war?" They were all in favor of it. "Go for it!" they cried as one, loud voice.

King Jehoshaphat wasn't so sure. "Is there a prophet of God that we can ask?"

King Ahab started to fuss; "There is one – but he always speaks bad things about me. I hate him. He never says good things about me. His name is Micaiah."

Micaiah was called for and the two kings sat on their throne. The messenger that summoned Micaiah whispered to him as they were walking back to the kings – "Listen Micaiah, all of the other prophets have said this is a sure victory for the king. Just say yes like all the others." But Micaiah answered; "What God says I will say."

"So Micaiah, do we attack or not?" King Ahab asked.

"Go ahead," said Micaiah, "it will be an easy victory."

"No, no – tell me the whole truth," answered King Ahab.

And so Micaiah told the whole of the word of the Lord to King Ahab. He told him that yes, the battle would be won, but at the cost of King Ahab's life.

Enraged King Ahab had Michaiah thrown in prison and given a small ration of food to eat.

The kings went to war – Ahab feared the word of the prophet and so he disguised himself as a common soldier. He looked as unkingly as he could. But the word of the Lord is always true and a randomly shot arrow pierced the wicked king and he died, just as Michaiah had prophesied.

When King Jehoshaphat returned from battle he was confronted by a man named Jehu; “Why are you helping the wicked and loving those that hate the Lord? Because of this God’s anger is on you.”

Do you remember what Jehoshaphat’s father, king Asa, did to the man who confronted him? He had that man thrown in prison. That man was Jehu’s father, so Jehu was probably a little nervous wondering how this great and powerful king would treat him now that he was the bearer of bad news.

But Jehoshaphat’s response stands in stark contrast to his father – Jehoshaphat went out to the people and encouraged them to turn back to the Lord.

He appointed judges and told them to live in the fear of the Lord and to judge carefully.

He appointed Levites to teach the law and told them to be faithful and wholehearted in their service.

After some time a vast army came to wage war against Jehoshaphat – a collection of nations, some Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites came together to fight.

This time Jehoshaphat remembered to seek the Lord. He turned to God and encouraged the people to fast. Jehoshaphat prayed and remembered the victories the Lord had given his ancestors in the past and he asked for help with the current enemy as he had no power in himself to fight against the enemy.

“We don’t know what to do, God, but we are looking to You.”

As Jehoshaphat led his army in to battle he appointed men to sing praises to the Lord and give thanks for His everlasting love. They marched and they sang praises and while they knew the truth in the words that they sang they must have wondered too – how would this singing help them win the war?

But God had a fabulous plan all worked out. When the men came to a place that overlooked the desert where the huge enemy army was all they saw were dead bodies! While they had sung praises of love and worship to God, God had confused the enemy and they had all killed each other. There were so many dead bodies it took King Jehoshaphat’s army three days to collect all the plunder. They returned praising God.

Despite the incredible ways that God worked for King Jehoshaphat, and the terrible mess he saw his allegiance with Ahab had been, he made yet another foolish allegiance. King Ahaziah became the next king of the northern kingdom and he too was an evil king. King Ahaziah had an idea to create a fleet of trading ships and asked Jehoshaphat to help him,

which Jehoshaphat did. Once they were completed God sent a messenger to tell King Jehoshaphat that God was going to destroy what he had made because of his alliance with the wicked king Ahaziah. The ships were wrecked and they never sailed.

Day 14 :: Jehoram :: God is just

Jehoram was given the kingdom by his father Jehoshaphat as he was the first born son. However, when Jehoshaphat died Jehoram killed all of his brothers and some of the officials of Israel. Jehoram followed in the wicked ways of the northern kingdom under the rule of King Ahab , for his wife was Ahab's daughter.

While Jehoram was king there were people within his kingdom rebelling against him because of his rejection of God.

Jehoram set up places of worship for idols and led his kingdom away from God.

Elijah, the prophet, sent a letter to Jehoram. In the letter Elijah chastised him for his evil ways and warned him that God was about to strike his people, sons and wives and everything that was his with a heavy blow.

Elijah also told Jehoram that he would be afflicted with a stomach disease that would eventually cause his bowels to come out.

The Philistines and the Arabs attacked Jehoram's kingdom and carried off all of the goods found in the kings palace, including Jehoram's sons and his wives. Only his youngest son, Ahaziah, remained.

After all this the Lord fulfilled his word and Jehoram became sick with an incurable disease of the bowels.

At the end of the second year of this affliction his bowels came out and he died a painful death. We're told that he passed away to no one's regret.

There was no funeral fire in his honor, as had been given to his predecessors, and while he was buried in the City of David, he was not buried in the tombs of the kings.

Day 15 :: Uzziah :: God is to be worshiped in His way

Uzziah was only sixteen years old when he became king. He was a very accomplished and well known king, his fame spread around the land.

King Uzziah was very powerful and God helped him win many victories against his enemies.

King Uzziah was involved in a lot of interesting things during his reign as king. He had men build tall towers and dig many deep wells. He encouraged agricultural developments around his kingdoms, fields and vineyards. King Uzziah built up a strong military presence that was well trained, well organized and well equipped with the weapons they needed.

Perhaps the most interesting of all though is that King Uzziah invented devices to be used on the towers so his soldiers could shoot arrows and hurl large stones to the enemy below. This is the first mention of a warlike device of this nature and it is a long time before history records Greeks or Romans using anything similar!

So long as Uzziah sought the Lord, God gave him success in what he did. It sounds like a very logical thing for King Uzziah to keep seeking to honor God, doesn't it? Sadly, as his power and accomplishments grow so does his pride.

God had a rule about his temple. It had been a rule from the very beginning and it was that only priests could do the offerings to God in the temple. And only Levites were to be priests.

King Uzziah had an idea – he thought he should go burn incense to the Lord in the temple. He knew that he wasn't supposed to, but he wanted to do so anyway. After all, he was the king.

Azariah the priest and eighty other priests confronted Uzziah.

“This isn't right King Uzziah! You know you aren't a priest from the tribe of Levi. Don't do this sinful thing!”

That angered King Uzziah and he threw a fit. He didn't want to be told what he could do. He raged and he roared at those priests.

And as he threw the ugliest of temper tantrums his forehead broke out in leprosy.

Leprosy was a terrible disease that ate at the flesh.

The priests hurried King Uzziah out of the temple and he had to live the rest of his life separate from others in his own house.

When he died he was buried near to, but not with, his ancestors, because of his leprosy.

Jotham took over the role of king rather suddenly when his father, Uzziah, became ill with leprosy.

Day 16:: Jotham :: God is to be considered in all we do

King Jotham wanted to do what was right in the sight of the Lord, but the people continued in their corrupt practices.

King Jotham never did enter the temple, the place where his father had sinned by trying to make his own offering to God. While we know that King Jotham walked faithfully before God, perhaps it was a stumbling block to his people that he did not tear down the false idols and he avoided entering the temple, where God was to be worshiped.

As King Jotham walked faithfully before the Lord he became more powerful. Have you noticed the connection between obedience and the king doing well? Obedience is so important to God!

Through his reign he did a lot of repairs on the temple. King Jotham also declared war on the Ammonites. He conquered them and for three years they paid him a tribute of silver, wheat and barley.

Have you heard of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah or Amos? They were all prophets that were alive at the same time as King Jotham.

Jotham was a good king and his strength lay in the fact that He considered God in all that he did.

Day 17 :: Ahaz :: God is angered

Ahaz was not interested in obeying God as his father had done – he made idols to use in worship of Baal. He also did something horrible, something other nations that didn't love God did; he killed his own children in fire as an offering to the idols.

Because of that great evil God let another king conquer King Ahaz. The king of Aram took many of King Ahaz's people off to Damascus.

Remember how the nation of Israel split and there are now two kings ruling, one in the north and one in the south? That Northern King came and he attacked King Ahaz's army too. In just one day he killed 120,000 of King Ahaz's soldiers and took 200,000 women and children as prisoners.

However, a messenger from God went to the northern kingdom and told them that God said they were to give all of the prisoners back, and so they sent all of the prisoners and all the goods that they had stolen back.

King Ahaz was in a really bad place. The Edomites came in and attacked. And then the Philistines raided some of his towns. Things were looking really bad!

King Ahaz decided that he was going to ask for help. Who do you think King Ahaz asked for help from? It would make sense that he would ask God, the One who had worked for generations and had helped all those who obeyed Him. But no, King Ahaz went to the king of Assyria and asked him for help.

Ahaz went into the temple of God and took out some treasures. Then he walked around his palace and selected some more treasures. And when he thought he had an impressive looking pile of treasures he brought them to the King of Assyria and pleaded with the king for help.

The King of Assyria agreed to help and attacked Damascus, capturing the city for himself. King Ahaz was thrilled that his enemy had been taken care of and he went to the city of Damascus to meet the king and thank him.

On his journey he saw an impressive looking altar used for worshiping false gods. He wanted one just like it back in Jerusalem; so he sent a sketch of this altar back to Uriah, the priest in Jerusalem. Uriah went to work on this altar right away and had it completed before King Ahaz returned from Damascus.

When King Ahaz returned he offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, reasoning that since Damascus had defeated him their gods must be powerful and might help him.

What a mess. In his times of trouble Ahaz just became more disobedient and more unfaithful to God.

That wasn't the worst of King Ahaz's evil. King Ahaz decided to destroy the temple of God. He had all of the furnishings in the temple collected together and then had it cut into

pieces. He had the doors of the temple shut – which meant the lamps weren't burning, the incense wasn't burning, and the offerings weren't being made to God.

Then King Ahaz had altars set up at every street corner in Jerusalem and in every town in his kingdom he built places so that people could make offerings to idols.

Day 18 :: King Hezekiah :: God is our confidence

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king and he had a heart that wanted to honor God.

In the first month of being king he opened up the temple doors. He ordered it to be repaired and told the priests to prepare themselves for service.

He knew the previous generation had been unfaithful and had turned their faces from God, and so he challenged the Levites not to be negligent. "The Lord has chosen you to stand before Him and serve Him!" He encouraged them.

The extreme difference between the father, who shut the temple and his son, who had it opened and repaired, shows us so well what we can see through the entire genealogy of the Lord Jesus; it doesn't matter who your parents are each person has a personal responsibility before God to live in obedience to Him. Hezekiah had such wisdom in starting out his reign as king by setting right the dwelling place of God.

Under King Hezekiah's command the Levites gathered themselves together and consecrated themselves, then set about purifying the temple of the Lord, following the instructions He had given. They made a blood offering and sang and played instruments and when the priests were finished King Hezekiah and all who were with him knelt down to worship.

All those gathered were invited to bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the Lord. The crowd of people with their animals for offerings kept growing; the priests couldn't keep up with the skinning of all of the animals and they had to ask their relatives to help!

King Hezekiah was looking forward to returning to the ceremonies God had ordained. He wanted everything to be the way God had meant things to be. It was close to Passover time, which had not been observed properly for a very long time. King Hezekiah sent letters out to all of the people inviting them to come and celebrate Passover the right way, the way God had instructed. There wasn't quite enough time to prepare for the large Passover celebration, so they postponed it by one month so they could be all ready for it. Hezekiah didn't want to have to wait an entire year to celebrate Passover.

The letters that were sent out were received with mixed responses; some scorned the letter and ridiculed the messengers, while others humbled themselves and returned to Jerusalem. A great crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the 7 day feast, and there was much rejoicing. At the end of the 7 days they all agreed to keep it going for another 7 days! Those that gathered were unified in their desire to carry out what King Hezekiah said to do. They smashed the idols and places of worship to the false gods. The people were turning their hearts back to God.

King Hezekiah encouraged the people to return to sincere and proper worship of God. He gave from his own possessions for burnt offerings, and he sought God in all of the work he did in the temple.

After all of their glorious restoring and worshiping, the enemy attacked. The King of Assyria came with armies to invade the land. Hezekiah reminded the people of the power of God and encouraged them to trust in Him and not fear the size of the enemy army.

The King of Assyria laughed at the people. What fools he thought they were! He wrote a letter ridiculing the people and he asked them what they were basing their confidence in that they would remain in the city while it was under siege. His army was big and strong and he thought he could conquer them without a problem.

Hezekiah took the letter from the King of Assyria into the temple of God. He spread it out before the Lord and poured out his heart to God, pleading for His help so that all would know that He is the one true God.

Hezekiah was basing his confidence in the one true God. God delivered Hezekiah and his people; He sent an angel to destroy the Assyrian army, and in disgrace the King of Assyria fled. God had taken care of Hezekiah, His loving care and provision was so thorough.

Hezekiah's lived out his life with confidence in God and a life desiring to honor Him. He fought with pride, but humbled himself before God when he was made aware of his pride. When Hezekiah died he was honored by all.

Day 19 :: King Manasseh:: God is compassionate

Manasseh was Hezekiah's son and he became king when he was only twelve years old. He was the very first king to have no experience with the northern kingdom of Israel as they had just been wiped out and scattered by the Assyrians.

Manasseh chose to not honor God with his life, and chose instead to rebuild all of the places of worship to false gods that his father had destroyed. Manasseh wanted to do things his way, not God's way.

Manasseh worshipped the stars and built altars in God's temple to the stars. He would look up at the same inky black night bejeweled in distant, sparkling white that Abraham had looked at. But rather than marvel at the Maker of those stars, rather than stand in awe of God's power and His promises King Manasseh would worship them.

Manasseh also offered his own children to be sacrificed on altars and he practiced witchcraft and led his people into many evils. He was the king of God's chosen people and yet the evils that Manasseh led the people into were far greater than the evils of the nation's God had wiped out before bringing the Israelites into the land.

God spoke to Manasseh and the people, but they didn't care. They liked their evil ways and wanted to continue in them. So God allowed King Manasseh to be taken prisoner by the Assyrians. They came and captured him. They put bronze shackles around him and a hook through his nose and led him back to Babylon.

King Manasseh was in great distress and he called out to the Lord in humbleness. God was moved by his brokenness and brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and his kingdom.

Manasseh then knew that the Lord was God and he changed the very course of his life. Instead of building idols and altars, he tore them down and threw them out. He restored the altar of the Lord and encouraged the people to worship Him.

He had been a man intent on evil, but the compassion of God changed him and made him a completely different man. He had been the most evil king in the land, and yet he came to realize the greatness of God and submitted himself to God's authority – isn't that amazing that one so evil could be changed so drastically?

When King Manasseh died he was buried in his palace garden.

Day 20 :: Josiah :: God is righteous

Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. He was the grandson of Manasseh and his father, Amon, had been assassinated. The people made Josiah king after his father's death. Do you remember that Josiah had been talked about 300 years earlier when the prophet talked to Jeroboam?

When Josiah was sixteen years old he began to seek the Lord, and in the years to follow he began to rid his kingdom of idol worship. He thoroughly destroyed everything related to idolatry throughout Israel. Then he turned his focus to repairing the temple. He had men work hard to fix up the worn and damaged parts of the building.

While work was being done in the temple an old copy of God's laws was found. The king had it read and he was grieved; he ripped his robes as he realized how far they had wandered from God. King Josiah had Huldah, a prophetess sent for.

"I know generations of us have forsaken the law, and that God's wrath is coming because of that. Tell me Huldah, is there any chance of mercy?"

Huldah told the king that God's wrath was coming, but that Josiah would be spared because his heart was responsive and he had humbled himself before God.

Knowing God's wrath was coming, Josiah gathered the people around and read them the book of the Law. He renewed the covenant, promising to follow the Lord and keep His commands, statutes and decrees with all of his heart and soul, and he had all of his people do the same. Josiah led all of his people to serve the Lord because of his strong leadership and because of his own resolve to follow the Lord.

As his great grandfather Hezekiah had done, Josiah encouraged the Levites and Priests in their service in the Lord's temple, and he instructed them to prepare for the celebration of the Passover.

When it came time for the Passover Josiah provided 30,000 lambs and goats for the poor, as well as 3,000 cattle, all from his own supply. This Passover celebration was unlike any that had been observed since the time of Samuel, the prophet who declared David to be king. This Passover was unique in its absolute devotion to God and His written law.

Time passed and Necho, king of Egypt, went to fight against the Assyrians. Josiah pursued Necho, trying to oppose him but King Necho sent a message back telling King Josiah to stop opposing him, God had told him to make haste. Josiah did not stop his pursuit, but rather he disguised himself to fight Necho in battle. An archer's arrow hit Josiah, seriously wounding him and he was taken back to Jerusalem in a chariot. There he died, mourned by all of his people. Jeremiah the prophet wrote laments about Josiah that all of the people sang.

Day 21 :: Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah) :: God is the one true king

After Josiah's death the people crowned his son, Jehoahaz, king. He reigned for three months and then the king of Egypt dethroned him and made his brother, Eliakim, king. Eliakim's name was then changed to Jehoiakim and he reigned for eleven years and was a very bad king. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked him and bound his wrists with bronze shackles and took him and items from the Lord's temple back to Babylon. (This was the first of the exiles and is believed to be when Daniel was taken captive.)

Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah, was Jehoiakim's son and was the next crowned king. That was a lot of names to get to this king that appears in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, Jehoiachin was a bad king just as his father had been. He didn't care about the ways of God and did what he wanted to do.

In the spring time King Nebuchadnezzar and his army returned. They had come to capture Jerusalem, and the kingdom surrendered. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin as his prisoner, as well as even more gold from the Lord's temple, all of the men of age to be in the army, the officers, and the skilled workers and artisans. A total of ten thousand people were taken, leaving only the poorest behind in Jerusalem. (This is the second exile, and amongst those taken was Mordecai, the future Queen Esther's cousin.)

Nebuchadnezzar crowned Jehoiachin's Uncle Zedekiah (Josiah's third born son) as the next king. Uncle Zedekiah was nothing more than a puppet king for Nebuchadnezzar – he held no power and no freedoms. But Uncle Zedekiah wasn't cowardly; he tried to rebel from King Nebuchadnezzar.

That didn't end well – Nebuchadnezzar marched his army right back to Jerusalem. Uncle Zedekiah's eyes were hit until he went blind. Then his hands were shackled and he was taken to Babylon. As for the city of Jerusalem, it was destroyed. The temple of the Lord was burned, as were the homes and every other important building. Then the walls of the city were torn down. (This was the third of the Babylonian attacks.)

King Jehoiachin was eventually released from his prison cell in Babylon. When King Nebuchadnezzar died and his son took the throne the new king treated King Jehoiachin well and ate with him and gave him a daily allowance for the rest of his life.

The era of the kings of Israel had ended. Kings had failed to deliver the people of Israel from their enemies. The people failed to turn their hearts to God under the direction of the kings they had so badly wanted.

God's chosen people, the Israelites, remained in captivity for many years – Daniel and Esther are two stories that occur during the Babylonian captivity that you might be familiar with.

Day 22 :: Zerubbabel :: God is worthy of praise

Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiachin and was a governor under the rule of King Cyrus of Persia. He was given permission to lead the first group of Jews from the Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem. About 50,000 Jews returned with Zerubbabel, as well as some of the stolen possessions and contributions donated by the surrounding nations that King Cyrus had persuaded them to donate.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the high priest, built an offering to the Lord because they desired to honor Him. Under their direction plans were made for the rebuilding of the temple of God. When the foundation of the new temple was built a service was held to dedicate it to the Lord. The old and the young were gathered together, and out of the collected company a mix of sounds rose up. The old wept because they remembered the old temple and all of its splendor; this was so plain compared to the one Solomon had built with its fine craftsmanship and precious materials. The young, however, rejoiced as they had never known anything else.

Zerubbabel was approached by a group of people wanting to help with the rebuilding of the temple. These people were descendants of colonists from other countries and they had married with the Jews that had remained in Jerusalem during the Babylonian captivity. These people became known as the Samaritans.

Zerubbabel turned down their offer of help, for the Samaritans did not worship God alone. The Samaritans were upset that their help was unwanted and decided to start discouraging the Jews as they worked. Soon the discouragement turned threats, trying to scare the Jews, and finally they started meddling with the building process so much that the building had to stop.

God's messengers, Haggai and Zechariah, told the Jews that they were to continue with their building. More opposition arose and the Jews were challenged about whose authority they were under. They boldly responded that they were under God's authority, but added that King Cyrus had authorized all of this under his reign as king.

King Cyrus was no longer king, King Darius was and he received a letter with all of these details about the happenings in Jerusalem. King Darius had his records searched and found that King Cyrus had supported the rebuilding of the temple, so he made an official order that the building of the temple must continue. His order stated that the Jews were not to be hindered and that if anyone tried it would be considered a crime. Basically, it was against the law to try to stop the rebuilding of the temple of God! King Darius also made more provisions to help them with them with the building.

The building of the temple continued and was completed four years later – twenty years after the foundation was first laid. The people were joyful and worshiped the Lord.

The temple they constructed was not even close to the spectacular one Solomon had built. The sacrifices they made in worship were not as many as in previous times. But the

God of the good and plentiful times is still the God through the hard and poor times and He is always worthy of honor and praise, for He is good.

We are not told how Zerubbabel died. According to Matthew 1 we know that he is the father of Abihud, who is the father of Eliakim, who is the father of Azor, who is the father of Zadok, the father of Akim, who is the father of Elihud, who is the father of Eleazar, who is the father of Matthan, the father of Jacob, who is the father of the man we will read about tomorrow.

Day 23 :: Joseph :: God is our Father

Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, but it was through Joseph's lineage that the inheritance of David's throne was passed on to Jesus.

Joseph was betrothed to Mary. Do you know the word *betrothed*? It is a funny word that we don't use anymore. It is very similar to being engaged. Joseph was going to marry Mary! He was so excited to marry this beautiful woman that loved the Lord, just as he did.

When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant he was very troubled. By law she could be stoned for having a baby and not being married. He decided the best thing he could do would be to deal with it all very quietly. We can see the character of this man through his gentle manner and not wanting to publicly disgrace Mary. While he was still thinking through exactly what he should do an angel appeared to him in a dream.

"Joseph, son of David, don't be scared to take Mary as your wife!"

The angel addressed Joseph as "Son of David" – a vivid reminder of his royal line.

The angel went on to tell Joseph that this baby was placed in Mary's belly by the Holy Spirit, a miracle from God, and that His name was to be Jesus for He would save His people from their sins.

A Savior. Joseph obeyed the angel and did not have Mary put away.

Shortly after Caesar Augustus issued a decree for everyone to go to their hometown to be counted and pay money. Joseph was from the line of David, so had the return to Bethlehem, the town of David.

They traveled to Bethlehem and found it to be packed full of people – no room in the inn. The couple were placed in a barn, and there the Lord Jesus was born.

It is said that an orthodox Jew, which Joseph was, would never journey without taking their own burial linens with them, just in case they died. The Law required them to be buried right away, and in taking their own burial linens with them a stranger would be able to bury them and fulfill this law, should the traveler die. These burial linens were narrow, fine linen strips, wrapped around the torso and were called swaddling bands. Perhaps it was the swaddling bands of Mary or Joseph that first swaddled the baby Jesus. The One who was born to die to pay for our sins.

After the birth of Jesus, Joseph had a second visit from an angel; this time a warning that Herod was about to embark on a mad slaughter to kill all the baby boys under the age of two.

Herod had heard from the visiting wise men that the King of the Jews had been born and Herod wanted to do away with any threat to his ruling. Joseph took his family and fled to Egypt.

When Herod died Joseph had a third visit from an angel, where he was told it was safe to return to Israel. The Lord leads him to settle in Nazareth.

Joseph taught his sons his own trade of carpentry. The Lord Jesus worked as a carpenter; side by side with his earthly father handling and crafting wood that His Heavenly Father had spoken into existence.

Joseph is last mentioned when the Lord Jesus is twelve years old. The family had traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and on the journey home Mary and Joseph notice that Jesus is not with them. They retrace their steps and are amazed to find Him at the temple, talking with the religious leaders. Mary asked why He had not traveled home with them and the first recorded words of Jesus are recorded here;

“Why were you searching for Me? Didn’t you know I had to be in My Father’s house?”

How often do we travel on in our everyday life, unaware that we are not traveling with Jesus?

Day 24 :: Mary :: God is preeminent

Mary was a young woman when she was visited by an angel with news that would change her life – she was going to be the mother of God’s Son. Mary wondered how it would happen, seeing as she did not have a husband and there was no possible way for her to have a baby by herself.

It was going to be a miracle – a work of God to put the baby Jesus in her.

The angel also told Mary of the pregnancy of her older cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her husband were old and hadn’t been able to have any children, and this news assured Mary that nothing was impossible with God.

Mary traveled to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was pregnant with a boy that would grow up to be John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus.

When Elizabeth saw Mary, John leaped inside her. Elizabeth greeted Mary and Mary sang a beautiful song, the Magnificat. In her song Mary praised God for what He had done, and for His mercies throughout all the generations – these very generations we have been reading about each day and where we have seen God working.

She praised God for His faithfulness in keeping the promise He had made to Abraham all of those many, many years ago. And she spoke of God as her Savior, recognizing her own need for forgiveness of sin.

After some time Mary traveled back to Joseph, where he was told by the angel that her pregnancy was from God and that she was carrying the Son of God. Together they travel to Bethlehem for the census, and for the birth of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus was born in a stable, as there was no room for the little family anywhere else. The first visitors were shepherds, who had been told of the birth by the angels. Mary watched as these shepherds worshiped this new born baby and she held it dear in her heart.

Forty days after the birth Mary was required to have a purification ceremony, a law set out for the Jewish people. Ordinarily a lamb was required as an offering at this ceremony but allowances were made for those who could not afford a lamb. Mary’s offering was two young pigeon doves. The family God chose for His Son to be born into were not wealthy, but they were obedient.

Mary and Joseph had Jesus dedicated at the temple, as all first born sons were. There was an old man at the temple named Simeon who had waited his whole life to see the Lord Jesus. Simeon was one of the godly Jews that was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, and God had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.

Simeon held the baby in his arms – this was the One he had waited for. This was the One who would save the people. Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and then spoke directly to

Mary; “Yes, a sword will pierce your own side.” A strange thing to say to a new mother, but it was a prophecy, speaking of something that was to come, and we will see where this comes out later in Mary’s story.

Mary observed the ways of Jesus as He grew and pondered these things in her heart. How full her heart must have been!

Mary went with Jesus to a wedding, the wedding where He performed His first miracle. The wine ran out and Mary brought the problem to Jesus. He gently reminded her that His divine mission was to His Heavenly Father, but He does His first recorded miracle; He turned water into wine.

Here, and in other places, Mary is referred to as “the mother of Jesus.” He was not known as being the son of the virgin woman, but rather she was known as being the mother of the Lord Jesus – the preeminent, or most important, place is given to Christ.

Later, we see Mary at the cross of Jesus where He had been crucified. A fulfillment to Simeon’s words that she would have a sword pierce her side – a sword of agony and pain in watching her Son die a brutal, undeserved death in order to redeem her and all else who would accept Him as their Lord and Savior.

Mary observed so many intimate details about her Son, the Savior of the world. The last recorded words of hers are worth considering today. Back at that wedding ceremony where Jesus turned the water into wine Mary spoke to the servants and said;

“Do whatever He tells you.”

These words from the heart of the one who brought Him into the world and pondered in her heart the worship of Christ Jesus and the ways that He lived are words worth challenging ourselves with today – do we do whatever He tells us?

Day 25 :: Jesus Christ :: God incarnate

Each one of the characters we have read about this month in the genealogy of Christ Jesus did one of two things; they either had burnt offerings and sacrifices being made for their sin through the shedding of animal blood, or they rejected the Laws of God and did not deal with their sin.

But even through the shedding of animal blood, the sin itself was not dealt with. It was covered, but animal blood cannot remove sin.

Now the long awaited Savior has come to earth.

God became flesh – the One who was there before time, who spoke the world into existence and created man in His own image – now comes to earth in the form of a baby; born to poor parents, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

Worshiped by humbled shepherds, He was later rejected and despised by men and eventually brutally treated and hung on a cross – all this because He was the only one who could remove our sins.

Like all of the lambs that were sacrificed through the Old Testament, Jesus Christ was the perfect spotless Lamb that was sacrificed for us.

His death on the cross was the punishment for our sins. Sin demands a payment, and because He loves us so much He came to earth as a baby so that He could pay that payment.

But He did not stay dead! Three days later He rose from the grave – a conqueror over death because He was perfect – sinless – and death had no power over Him.

Through the birth, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus the need for people to bring their burnt offerings and sacrifices ended with the obedience of Him going to the cross as our sacrifice.

The punishment for the things that we do wrong – our sin – is death, but the gift that God offers us is eternal life through His son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because God loved us so much He sent His one and only son to die in our place and He offers us this choice to believe in Him and have eternal life in a home He is preparing for us.

This gift is a free gift - just like you receive a Christmas present and the gift becomes yours; this gift of eternal life is yours if you receive it.

“... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

As we celebrate this Christmas day with our loved ones, let us not forget the greatest gift; that of our precious Lord Jesus coming to earth as a baby so that He could go to the cross to save us.