

Exploring the Bible

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Welcome!

The Bible is the unique collection of sacred writings that the church honors above all others. It is God's self-revelation. God first sought a relationship, or covenant, with us and has continuously acted on our behalf. The Bible records the long, wonderful story of this covenant.

Perhaps you already know something about the Bible. But maybe you've only learned as much about the Bible as the blindfolded people in this tale learned about the elephant:

Three young people were blindfolded and led into the presence of an elephant. Their task was to identify the animal. One blindfolded boy reached out and grasped the elephant's trunk and described the elephant as a snakelike animal. A blindfolded girl felt the elephant's tail and said she thought the animal must be a hairy, bristly animal. The third young person ran her hand along the animal's wide, rough side and decided this was a trick. It wasn't an animal at all, but a sun-warmed mud-and-wattle wall.

Then the three removed their blindfolds, and before them stood the elephant, large and whole and real. And they were amazed and pleased.

If you know only bits and pieces about the Bible, you are like these young people when they were blindfolded. How much better to see the Bible whole and real.

This course, *Exploring the Bible*, can help you do just that. It can also help you see yourself in these ways:

- as a person invited by God to a covenant relationship
- as a person asked to carry out a mission as one of God's own
- as a person who can choose to deepen your relationship as God's beloved son or daughter
- as a person who remembers and celebrates God's presence

You are one of God's people today. You are called as truly as the people in the Bible were called. Like them, you are asked to respond to God's belief in you and to remember great stories. You are called to choose life. That is what it means to be called by God and to live as one of God's chosen people.



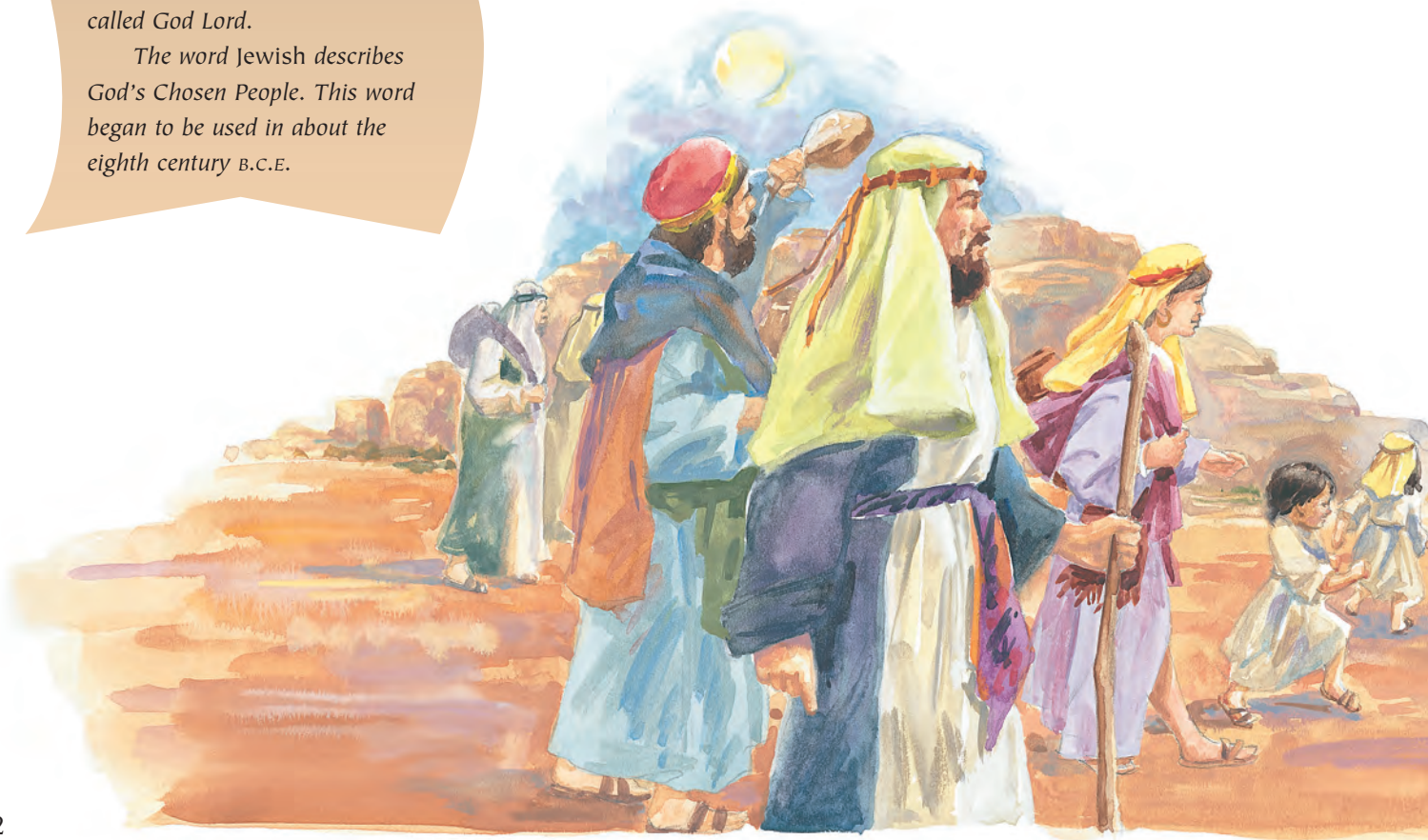
From the Heart

In the Bible two events are so vital and so earthshaking that without them there would be no Bible at all. Both events reveal these two truths, which we could not have guessed on our own: God acts on our behalf, and God offers us a new kind of life we could not have dreamed of for ourselves.

BIBLE FACTS

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, God used the name Yahweh. This name for God was greatly respected by the Hebrew people. They wanted to guard against casually overusing this special name, so instead they called God Lord.

The word Jewish describes God's Chosen People. This word began to be used in about the eighth century B.C.E.



The *Exodus Covenant*

Once, in the land of Egypt, a people lived in slavery. They remembered no other homeland and knew no other life. The Egyptians called them by the name Hapiru, or Hebrews, which means “foreigners” or “the people who don’t belong here.”

One day, while tending sheep near Mount Horeb, a Hebrew named Moses saw a vision of a bush that burned but did not burn up. He heard a voice calling him. Moses drew near. From this mysterious vision, God addressed Moses: “I am who am. I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. I have seen the suffering of my people. With a strong arm, I will deliver them.”

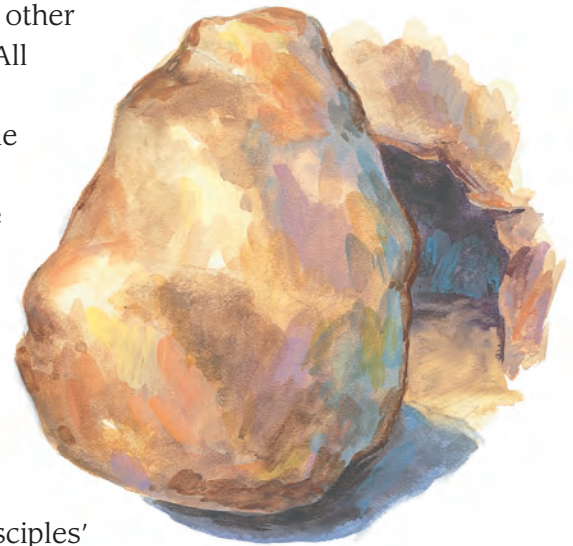
Moses understood that the Lord God of the Hebrew people would release them from slavery. The Hebrew’s God would establish a loving relationship with them.

The story of the Hebrews’ Exodus (exit) from Egypt and Covenant with God formed on Mount Sinai is their most important story. It is the story of the core event that changed their life forever. Because of the Lord’s deliverance, the onetime slaves became somebody. They had a name and a place. They were God’s Chosen People. Their God was the Lord who acted on their behalf.

The *New Covenant*

One dark Friday in the springtime in Palestine, a rabbi, Jesus from Nazareth, was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. He died, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

At sunrise on the day after the Sabbath, Jesus, the one who had been crucified, appeared to women who came to his burial place. On that Sunday he also appeared to Peter and to the other disciples. All witnessed Jesus as the one raised to new life by the Father.



The disciples’ experience of the Risen Christ changed their life once and for all. The day of the Resurrection was the first day of the rest of their life. From that Easter day forward, all was new. They proclaimed Jesus who was living and present among them. These witnesses named Jesus, Lord and Christ, the anointed one, and Son of the living God.

Jesus’ death and Resurrection is the core event of a new people who assembled around their Risen Lord. All the writings that are called the New Testament relate to the story of this event.

GOD'S WORD IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Deuteronomy 6:20-24

Deuteronomy 6:20-24 tells the story of the core event of the Exodus and Covenant. Look up this citation in your Bible. Read the passage, and use your own words below to tell the ending of this core event of the Hebrew people.

Deuteronomy 6

²⁰In the future, when your children ask, "What is the meaning of the Commandments and the Covenant God made with us?" ²¹you must say to them: "We were once slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. The Lord brought us out of that place of slavery with an outstretched hand. ²²Before our very eyes, the Lord worked great signs and wonders against Pharaoh and his land and household. ²³The Lord _____

²⁴ _____

(Adapted from Deuteronomy 6:20-24)

The writings called the Old Testament all relate to the core event of God's deliverance of and Covenant with the Chosen People.

BIBLE FACTS

Jewish scholars put the Old Testament in this order:

The Law (Torah)

The Prophets (Nebi'im)

The Writings (Ketheubim)

The Hebrew word Tanaka is an acronym for these three divisions of the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5,11

Find 1 Corinthians 15:1-5,11 in your Bible. Read the passage, and use your own words below to tell the ending of the core event of the followers of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15

¹I want to remind you of the Good News I preached to you, which you received and in which you now stand firm and strong. ²You are being saved by this news at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. . . . ³For I hand on to you what I myself received: _____

4 _____

5 _____

. . . ¹¹ . . . This is what we preach, and this is what you believed. (Adapted from 1 Corinthians 15:1-5,11)

The writings called the New Testament all relate to the core event of Jesus' death and Resurrection.

BIBLE FACTS

The first sacred words of the Bible were written on papyrus, leather, or parchment scrolls. These scrolls were stored on shelves or in clay jars.

By the second century C.E., books were being created. These were made when scribes wrote on separate pages that were put in order and sown together.