The God of the Way Study Series

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO
SIX SESSIONS

The GOD of the HOW and WHEN

Kathie Lee Gifford
with Rabbi Jason Sobel

The God of the Way Study Series

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The GOD *of the* HOW *and* WHEN

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

Kathie Lee Gifford
with Rabbi Jason Sobel

HarperChristian Resources

The God of the How and When Bible Study Guide
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A Note from Kathie Lee

Several years ago, I was in early production for a small film that I'd hoped to make here in Tennessee. I wanted a song that would capture the essence of our film. I wrote the lyrics and sent them over to my friend and songwriter Brett James to set it to music. As usual, Brett sent it right back within hours, totally ready to demo in a recording studio.

So, I called one of my favorite performers, Jimmie Allen, to record it for us, and he came right over. He nailed the song. But as it often happens, the film itself fell through, leaving us with a great song with nowhere to go. That is, unless the Lord had a different plan. And he did.

The song Brett and I had written for the ill-fated movie was already titled "The God of the How and When" and was perfectly adaptable for a brand-new oratorio by the same name.

I immediately set out to tell the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. They all had one thing in common: *each story represented a promise from God.* Some of those promises, however, took centuries before they were fulfilled, required a great deal of waiting from the one who had received the promise. Waiting on God is one of the hardest things for any believer. Trusting him in the process is equally as difficult. But it's in the *believing* that we truly please the God who made the promise.

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, God told Abram (his name at the time), "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). Of course, to do this he would need an heir, which seemed impossible at the time, because his wife, Sarai (her name at the time), had been barren for many years. In fact, Sarai laughed when she heard that she would become pregnant and bear a child.

The initial promise God made to the couple took decades to come true—many decades beyond their natural child-bearing years. Their son, Isaac, was born when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety (see Genesis 21:1–7)!

Of course, this was the beginning of the great nation of the Hebrews that took root with Isaac's twelve grandsons. But after six hundred years of growing "as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Genesis 22:17), they were enslaved in Egypt. God made a promise to deliver them from Egypt and take them to a land of their own—the "promised" land.

But someone had to deliver them from the brutal and ruthless tyranny of Pharoah, the powerful king of Egypt. So God called an eighty-year-old shepherd from Midian who had fled Egypt decades before, instructing him to go back to the place of his birth and convince this all-powerful, evil leader to "let my people go" (Exodus 9:1). The fact that this elderly and, by his own admission, incapable man was successful in this mission is nothing short of miraculous.

The story is legendary, of course, but it continued on after Moses died and his faithful follower Joshua was called to lead the Hebrew nation to the Promised Land. Again, God's promise took decades to be fulfilled, but Joshua and the Hebrews eventually entered the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8) more than forty years after leaving Egypt.

Back in the days of Abraham, God had promised the eventual father of Israel that his seed would be a blessing to all nations and that it would bring about the birth of the Eternal Deliverer, one who would be far greater than Moses (see Genesis 22:18). For centuries, the great prophets of Jehovah God prophesied this Messiah would be born of a virgin (see Isaiah 7:14). This would require a miracle even more improbable than when God parted the Red Sea.

Nevertheless, "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman . . . that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Galatians 4:4). An angel visited a young woman named Mary and told her that she would be that virgin who would give birth to the promised Messiah. Nine months later, the Savior of the world came into the physical world that he had already created with his Father in the beginning.

The God of the how and when is still building his Kingdom through the lives of the billions of followers of Jesus (Yeshua), the Savior of all of humankind.

Blessed be his holy name.

How to Use This Guide

The Lord once told an ancient Hebrew prophet, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8–9). The Bible is clear that God executes his own plans in his own timing. But this often trips us up, because we not only want to know *how* he is working on our behalf but also *when* he will deliver on our requests.

In this study, we will draw on the stories of five people in Scripture—Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, and Mary, the mother of Jesus—who also must have wondered *how* and *when* God would come through and deliver on his promises to them. Each of these individuals had to step out in *faith* and *obey* God without knowing all the details of what would eventually happen in their story. As we study their examples, we will discover what it really means to trust that God's ways are higher than our ways—and what it takes to truly trust in him.

Before you begin, keep in mind there are a few ways you can go through this material. You can experience this study with others in a group (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any other small-group gathering), or you may choose to go through the content on your own. Either way, know that the videos for each session are available for you to view at any time by following the instructions provided on the inside cover of this study guide.

Group Study

Each of the sessions are divided into two parts: (1) a group study section, and (2) a personal study section. The group study section is intended to provide a basic framework on how to open your time together, get the most out of the video content, and discuss the key ideas together that were presented in the teaching. Each session includes the following:

- **Welcome:** A short note about the topic of the session for you to read on your own before you meet together as a group.
- **Connect:** A few icebreaker questions to get you and your group members thinking about the topic and interacting with each other.

- **Watch:** An outline of the key points that will be covered in each video teaching to help you follow along, stay engaged, and take notes.
- **Discuss:** Questions to help your group reflect on the material presented and apply it to your lives. In each session, you will be given four "suggested" questions and four "additional" questions to use as time allows.
- **Respond:** A short personal exercise to help reinforce the key ideas.
- **Pray:** A place for you to record prayer requests and praises for the week.

If you are doing this study in a group, make sure you have your own copy of this study guide so you can write down your thoughts, responses, and reflections and have access to the videos via streaming. You will also want to have a copy of the *God of the Way* book, as reading it alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights. (See the notes at the beginning of each group session and personal study section on which chapters of the book you should read before the next group session.) Finally, keep these points in mind:

- **Facilitation:** If you are doing this study in a group, you will want to appoint someone to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. If *you* have been chosen for this role, there are some resources in the back of this guide that can help you lead your group through the study.

- **Faithfulness:** Your small group is a place where tremendous growth can happen as you reflect on the Bible, ask questions, and learn what God is doing in other people's lives. For this reason, be fully committed and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members.

- **Friendship:** The goal of any small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build friendships. So seek to make your group a "safe place." Be honest about your thoughts and feelings . . . but also listen carefully to everyone else's thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Keep anything personal that your group members share in confidence so that you can create a community where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

If you are going through this study on your own, read the opening Welcome section and reflect on the questions in the Connect section. Watch the video and use the prompts

provided to take notes. Finally, personalize the questions and exercises in the Discuss and Respond sections. Close by recording any requests you want to pray about during the week.

Personal Study

The personal study is for you to work through on your own during the week. Each exercise is designed to help you explore the key ideas you uncovered during your group time and delve into passages of Scripture that will help you apply those principles to your life. Go at your own pace, doing a little each day or all at once, and spend a few moments in silence to listen to what God might be saying to you. Each personal study will include:

- **Opening:** A brief introduction to lead you into the personal study for the day.
- **Scripture:** A few passages on the topic of the day for you to read and review.
- **Reflection:** Questions for you to answer related to the passages you just read.
- **Prayer:** A prompt to help you express what you've studied in a prayer to God.

If you are doing this study as part of a group, and you are unable to finish (or even start) these personal studies for the week, you should still attend the group time. Be assured that you are still wanted and welcome even if you don't have your "homework" done. The group studies and personal studies are intended to help you hear what God wants you to hear and how to apply what he is saying to your life. So . . . as you go through this study, be listening for him to speak to you as you learn about what it means to trust in the *God of the How and When*.

Schedule

WEEK 1

BEFORE GROUP MEETING	Read the Introduction and Part 1 in *The God of the Way* Read the Welcome section (page 3)
GROUP MEETING	Discuss the Connect questions Watch the video teaching for session 1 Discuss the questions that follow as a group Do the closing exercise and pray (pages 3–14)
PERSONAL STUDY – DAY 1	Complete the daily study (pages 16–17)
PERSONAL STUDY – DAY 2	Complete the daily study (pages 19–20)
PERSONAL STUDY – DAY 3	Complete the daily study (pages 21–22)
PERSONAL STUDY – DAY 4	Complete the daily study (pages 23–24)
PERSONAL STUDY – DAY 5 (before week 2 group meeting)	Complete the daily study (pages 26–27) Read chapter 1 in *The God of the Way* Complete any unfinished personal studies

SESSION ONE

The Holy Land

GOD'S CHOSEN PLACE FOR HIS PEOPLE

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

GENESIS 28:13–15

World of the Patriarchs

Welcome | Read On Your Own

Welcome to the *God of the How and When*. Over the course of the next few weeks, you and your group will look at the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Jacob, and Mary (the mother of Jesus) in the Bible and examine why they are so important today. But before we start out on that journey, we first need to take a look at *where* these events will place. After all, every story needs a *setting* . . . and in God's story, this setting is Israel, or the "Holy Land."

We first learn of this place when the Lord calls Abraham to leave his hometown of Ur of the Chaldeans and travel to an undisclosed location that will be revealed to him. As the Lord instructs, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Eventually, God leads Abraham to what is known in that time as Canaan. God promises to give this land to Abraham and his descendants and make him into a great nation. God even seals this promise with an agreement, or "covenant."

As the story of the Bible unfolds, we find that the God of the How and When—the one who determines *how* and *when* all things in Scripture will take place—is also concerned about *where* these things will take place. He reveals his plans and purposes in a specific location. But this should immediately raise some questions in our minds. *Why did God choose that particular piece of land? What is the significance of this place that we call Israel?*

In this opening session, you will learn the answer to those questions. You will discover the land of Israel had—and still has—both *geographic* and *spiritual* significance. You will learn about the type of agreement or "covenant" that God established with Abraham as it relates to this land and why it was so different from other covenants of the time. You will also follow the course of the promise that God made with Abraham to see how it played out in Israel's history.

It's going to be an exciting journey, so let's get started!

Connect | 15 minutes

If you or any of your group members don't know each other, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- How would you describe your primary goal or hope for participating in this study? (In other words, why are you here?)

— or —

- How would you rate your ability to wait on God's timing? In what situations are you most tempted to rush ahead of his plans?

Watch | 20 minutes

Now it's time to watch the video for this session, which you can access by playing the DVD or through streaming (see the instructions provided on the inside front cover). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

I. What is unique about Israel in the life of God's people?

A. Spiritual significance

1. The boundaries of the land that God promises to Abraham in the covenant are the same boundaries as the Garden of Eden.

2. God was restoring everything lost in the Fall to the physical descendants of Abraham and also to the spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham.

3. The rabbis say that the land of Israel is most fertile for producing prophets and people who hear God's voice in a unique way.

Geography of Israel

The land of Israel is located at the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It has been described by some as an area about the size of New Jersey with the geographical diversity of California. In a single day, a visitor can experience the heat of the desert in the south and then drive north to see the snow on the slopes of Mount Hermon. While there are many ways to describe the geography of Israel, five distinct regions can be easily identified.

The Coastal Plain. The coastal plain is located in the east of the country between the Mediterranean Sea and a hilly plateau at the center of Israel. It is about 140 miles in length and reaches from the southern edge of Lebanon to Gaza, gradually widening as it moves southward. Near its beginning in the north the coastal plain is interrupted by Mount Carmel.

The Central Hill Country. The entire central area of Israel is comprised of interlocking hills and plateaus, beginning in the north at an elevation of more than 3,000 feet. These hills are broken by the valley of Jezreel, but rise again into small hills in southern Galilee and Samaria. In the east, the Judean hills drop off sharply into the Rift Valley west of the Dead Sea.

The Rift Valley. The Rift Valley is located to the west of the Central Hill Country and slices like a great gash in the earth's crust through Palestine from north to south. This region runs the entire length of the Jordan River, beginning with its sources in the north, running to the Sea of Galilee, and meandering all the way down to the Dead Sea in the south.

The Transjordan Plateau. East of the Jordan River, rising sharply above the Rift Valley, is a high tableland known as the Transjordan Plateau. It can be subdivided into three main plateaus: the Bashan plateau in the north, the Moab and Gilead regions in the center, and the Sier mountain plateau in the south. Four major rivers or streams flow down into the Jordan River or Dead Sea from the plateau: the Yarmuk, the Jabbock, the Arnon, and the Zared.

The Desert. The Desert region (called the Negev) is located in the southern portion of Israel. It forms an inverted triangle shape whose western edge is contiguous with the desert of the Sinai Peninsula and whose eastern border is the Arabah valley. The Negev is a rocky and arid region interrupted by wadis (dry riverbeds that flow briefly after rain) and deep craters.[1]

B. Geographic significance

1. The location of Israel was strategic because it served as a land bridge between the cultures that flourished in Africa and Asia.

2. Significant trade routes such as the Via Maris ran through the land of Israel. There were key cities in Israel that protected these important trade routes.

II. What is the significance of God's covenant with Abraham as it relates to the land of Israel?

A. Covenants in ancient times were more like what we would consider contracts.

1. Both sides had stipulations to fulfill, and not fulfilling those stipulations would render the covenant null and void—and there were consequences for the side that broke it.

2. Abraham was concerned that his descendants would ultimately not be faithful to follow God and would thus forfeit the promise the Lord was making to him.

B. God makes what is known as "the covenant between the parts."

1. God tells Abraham to lay out sacrifices and causes a deep sleep to come over him. The Lord then passes through the parts of the sacrifices like a fiery torch and smoking oven.

2. The sacrifices were symbolic of what would happen if the parties broke the terms. But only God passed through the parts, which meant this was an unconditional covenant.

3. God's relationship with us is never conditional or contractual. His relationship with us is always formed on the basis of his grace and his goodness.

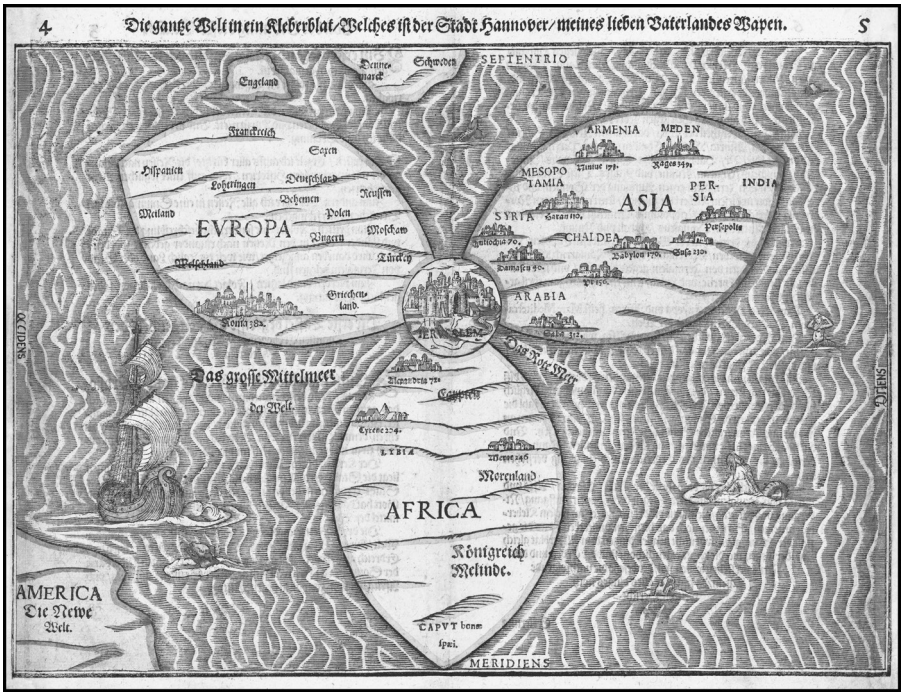
III. How did the covenant that God made with Abraham work out in Israel's history?

A. God promises the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then ultimately raises up Moses to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

1. Moses died in the desert because he lacked faith and disobeyed God. So the Lord raised up Joshua to bring the twelve tribes into the Promised Land.

Jerusalem at the Center of the World

In 1581, a German Protestant pastor published a map of the world that captures the ancient idea of Jerusalem being at the center of the world. The Bünting Clover Leaf Map, also known as The World in a Cloverleaf, depicts the world as a flower. The city of Jerusalem is seen at the center of the flower, with petals coming off that center that represent Europe, Asia, and Africa. Of course, Bünting understood that *geographically,* the world does not look like a flower with Jerusalem at its center. However, he wanted to show that *spiritually*, the city of Jerusalem—and what took place there—is at the center of everything that truly matters in this world. For it was in Jerusalem that Yeshua, the Messiah, "being found in appearance as a man . . . humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8).



2. God ultimately raises up King David as the nation's second king. It is through King David that the people conquer the city of Jerusalem—the spiritual center of the world.

3. The house built for God (the Temple) is located on Mount Moriah, which is where God told Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, on the place that he would show to him.

4. The binding of Isaac ultimately points to the death of Yeshua, who is the greater than Isaac and the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham.

B. Unfortunately, the Temple is destroyed because God's people are disobedient.

1. The rabbis state the First Temple was destroyed because the Israelites broke the First Commandment to "love the Lord your God." They committed *idolatry*.

2. The rabbis state the Second Temple was destroyed because the Israelites broke the Second Commandment to "love your neighbor." They engaged in *senseless hatred*.

3. The destruction of the Second Temple is tied to Israel's rejection of Yeshua. It is this temple, built by King Herod, over which Yeshua weeps.

IV. How does the land of Israel apply to us today?

A. Israel is still at the center of God's plans and purposes for humanity.

B. Just as the land of Israel was strategically located in ancient times, so the Lord is strategic in everything that he does in our lives.

C. Just as the land of Israel was at the center of the world, so we need to make the Lord the center of our lives.

D. Looking to the land of Israel is looking to the Lord, and praying for the land is praying for the second coming. Jerusalem is going to be the eternal home for all believers in Yeshua.

Discuss | 35 minutes

Take some time to discuss what you just watched by answering the following questions. There are some suggested questions below to help you begin your discussion, but feel free to pick any of the additional questions as well as time allows.

Suggested Questions

1. God could have chosen any location on earth as the place to reveal his plans, purpose, and provisions to his people. Yet he chose the land of Israel as the setting for his great story. What was the spiritual significance of God choosing this land for his people?

2. The prophet Ezekiel wrote, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her" (Ezekiel 5:5). What was the geographical significance of God choosing Israel for his people?

3. Read Genesis 15:7–12. God appeared to Abraham and promised that he would give him the land of Canaan. However, Abraham was concerned that he and his descendants would violate the terms of God's covenant and thus forfeit the promise. How did God reassure Abraham in the way he conducted the "covenant between the parts"?

4. The place where God chose to build a house for himself was on Mount Moriah—the same place where God had told Abraham to offer his only son as a sacrifice. How does this location point to the greater sacrifice that would take place centuries later in Jerusalem when God's only Son entered into the world? Why is this significant?

Additional Questions

5. Read aloud 2 Chronicles 28:2–7. King David wanted to build the Temple, but the Lord determined that his son Solomon would be the one to construct it. The First Temple was completed around 950 BC but later destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonians. But what do the rabbis say was the real reason why the First Temple was destroyed?

6. Read Haggai 2:9. God used Herod the Great in the first century AD to fulfill this prophecy. Herod enacted a large-scale renovation of the Second Temple that made it one of the wonders of the ancient world. This Temple was also destroyed, this time in AD 70 by the Romans. What do the rabbis say was the real reason for its destruction?

7. God strategically directed the events that led to Abraham and his descendants claiming the land of Israel, just as he strategically directs the events in your life today. God has a *reason* for everything he does—and he also has a *season* in which it takes place. What are some of the ways you have seen the truth of this statement play out in your life?

8. Just as Israel was the spiritual center of the ancient world, we need to make sure that God is the spiritual center of our world. What are some of the ways that you ensure God is always at the center? How has this had an impact on your life?

Respond | 10 minutes

Review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down your most significant takeaway from this session.

Pray | 10 minutes

Praying for one another is one of the most important things you can do as a community. So use this time wisely and make it more than just a "closing prayer" to end your group experience. Be intentional about sharing your prayers, reviewing how God is answering your prayers, and actually praying for each other as a group. Use the space below to write down any requests so that you and your group members can continue to pray about them in the week ahead.

Name	Request

SESSION ONE

Personal Study

You are on a journey toward a better understanding of the God of the How and When. A key part of that growth, regardless of where you are spiritually, involves studying Scripture. This is the goal of these personal studies—to help you explore what the Bible has to say and how to apply God's Word to your life. As you work through each of these exercises, be sure to write down your responses to the questions, as you will be given a few minutes to share your insights at the start of the next session if you are doing this study with others. If you are reading *The God of the Way* alongside this study, first review the Introduction and Part 1 in the book.

-Day 1-

More Than a Land

The Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, Canaan . . . the location had many names, but it was destined for one group of people. As the Bible unfolds, this land becomes a central character in the story of God and his people.[2] It is more than a strategically located territory. It is more than an agricultural epicenter. The land represents God's relationship with his people.

Land is a theme that runs throughout Scripture.[3] At the beginning of Genesis, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden—God's original gift of land—for their sin. A few chapters later, we learn about a new territory that God wanted to give his people through the patriarch Abraham (known as "Abram" before God changed his name). Abraham would have known Adam and Eve's story. He was all too aware of humankind's ability to sin. So, understandably, he was nervous when God wanted to enter into a covenant with him.

The reason for this is because the covenants of Abraham's day were always conditional (see "Ancient Covenants" on page 18). They were filled with warnings of the consequences that would occur if one of the parties broke the agreement. Abraham naturally assumed God would follow this same pattern in the covenant that he was making with him—and Abraham knew that neither he nor his descendants would be able to live up to the Lord's holy standards. However, God would set a new precedent with Abraham that would change the nature of covenants—and foreshadow the covenant that Jesus would make with all God's people.

In your group time this week, you read how Abraham questioned God about his promise to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants (see Genesis 15:7–12). Today, you will read how this covenant (known as a *b'rit* in Hebrew) would be unique in that God *alone* would be responsible for fulfilling the terms.[4] He knew that Abraham would stray. He knew his ancestors certainly would stray. But his love would remain . . . and the land would be the proof. The people might be exiled, they might be enslaved, they might wander, but no matter what they did, God would bring them back to the land that he promised to Abraham.

Read | Genesis 15:12–21

Reflect

1. The "thick and dreadful darkness" that falls on Abraham after he has prepared the sacrifice (see verse 12) foreshadows the dark events that will occur in the lives of Abraham's future descendants. What does God say will happen to these descendants? How does God assure Abraham that he will see them through these troubles?

2. This prophecy from God, however, does not relate directly to Abraham. The Lord has a different future in mind for him. What does God say will happen to Abraham?

3. As you saw in this week's teaching, the land of Israel that God was giving to Abraham had both geographic and spiritual significance. What spiritual territory has God given you—whether that's an actual place, your family, or a community that you feel God has entrusted to you? How are you "taking possession" of that territory?

4. How have you experienced God's unconditional love in the context of this spiritual territory? How have you responded to God for this act of love to you?

Pray | End your time in prayer. Picture the territory God gave the Israelites, and then picture the territory God has given you. Ask God how you can be a good steward of this "land." Thank him for keeping his covenant with you.

Ancient Covenants

Several texts have survived that demonstrate the way in which sacrifices were used in forming covenants in ancient cultures between two parties. In each case, the destruction of the animal served as a representation of the consequences that would befall the party who violated the terms of the agreement. One example is a covenant from the eighth century BC between the Assyrian King Ashurnirari V and Aramean King Mati'ilu, which reads, in part:

> This spring lamb has been brought from its fold not for sacrifice, not for a banquet, not for a purchase . . . it has been brought to sanction the treaty between Ashurnirari and Mati'ilu. If Mati'ilu sins against (this) treaty made under oath by the gods, then, just as this spring lamb, brought from its fold, will not return to its fold. . . . Mati'ilu, together with his sons, daughters, officials, and the people of his land . . . will not return to his country, and not behold his country again. This head is not the head of a lamb, it is the head of Mati'ilu, it is the head of his sons, his officials, and the people of his land. If Mati'ilu sins against this treaty, so may, just as the head of this spring lamb is torn off . . . the head of Mati'ilu be torn off.[5]

Another example is a covenant from the seventh century BC, in which the Assyrian King Esarhaddon desired to secure the throne for his sons through a treaty with his vassals. The king first called on his Assyrian gods to strike down any parties who did not honor the agreement, saying, "If you sin against this treaty which [your] lord Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, has established with you . . . may Ashur, father of the gods, strike you down with his fierce weapons." The king then outlined the consequences for breaking the treaty, stating, among other curses, "Just as this ewe is cut open and the flesh of its young placed in its mouth, so may he . . . make you eat in your hunger the flesh of your brothers, your sons, and your daughters."[6]

Compare this language to words that God said to Abraham in his covenant—when the Lord himself passed between the two parts of the sacrifice: "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites" (Genesis 15:18–21). No caustic remarks, conditions, or curses—just a commitment from the Lord God that he would fulfill his promise because he is merciful and faithful.

-Day 2-

Slavery

The covenant that God made with Abraham for the land of Israel was unconditional. However, just as the Lord said, Abraham's descendants eventually found themselves strangers in a country that was not their own. During the time of Jacob, they journeyed to Egypt to escape a famine in Canaan. There they settled in Goshen and multiplied greatly (see Genesis 42:1–2; 46:1–7, 28–29; Exodus 1:6–7). But this concerned a king of Egypt, who worried they might join with their enemies if a war broke out. So he put them all into slavery (see Exodus 1:8–11).

You will learn more about the Israelites' deliverance under Moses in a future session, but for now imagine what it would be like to be one of the Hebrews born into slavery. All you've known is captivity. All your *parents* have known is captivity . . . and their parents before them. Your people have been enslaved for *400 years*. You've heard the story of Abraham and the covenant that God made with him. But it is difficult for you to imagine your people ever owning such prized territory when all you and those before you have known is bondage.

All God's people have known this type of captivity and yearning for freedom. When Jesus came, he came to an enslaved people. Perhaps they weren't literally enslaved—though, of course, slavery has continued throughout the generations. But they were slaves to their sin. Stuck, trapped, and unable to imagine freedom. Jesus came to reclaim what was lost. Through his sacrifice and the New Covenant, he freed us from sin. And because of this freedom, we can reclaim our lives, our hearts, and our souls as *our* territory and not the enemy's.

Read | Exodus 1:8–14 and Galatians 4:1–7

Reflect

1. Joseph had risen to a position of second-in-command during his time in Egypt. He had been instrumental in helping the Egyptians navigate a famine that stretched across the entire region (see Genesis 41:41–57). But according to the account from

Exodus, after Joseph's death, a king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing of what Joseph had done. What actions did this new king take against the Israelites?

2. The apostle Paul saw all of humanity in a similar plight. According to his words in Galatians, what status did we hold before the arrival of Christ? What status does God now offer to us because of the sacrifice made by his only Son?

3. What does this passage in Galatians reveal about the way that God views you? Where have you experienced freedom from bondage in your life because of Christ?

4. Where do you need still need to experience this freedom in your life—a place where sin or shame is still holding you back? Explain.

Pray | Focus on the last question during your prayer time. Name the sin or shame that is keeping you in bondage. Ask Jesus for radical freedom. If you're struggling with believing that freedom is possible, speak honestly about that with the Father.

-Day 3-

Wilderness

The 400 years of captivity for the Israelites ended with a great exodus from Egypt. Under the leadership of Moses, the Lord guided the people out of the region of Goshen and instructed them to head toward Canaan—the "promised land" that had been given to Abraham. The Pharaoh soon regretted his decision to allow his slave labor force to go free and sent his chariots to return the people back to Egypt. But God parted the waters of the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to escape on dry land, and then closed the waves down on their pursuers.

After this miraculous escape, the Israelites hoped they would soon be back in the Promised Land. Unfortunately, when they reached the border, a report from ten spies who had been sent to investigate the land caused the people to doubt the faithfulness of God and his power to lead them to victory over the inhabitants. As a result, God decreed the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for not a few days, weeks, or months . . . but *forty years.*

Now, instead of finding themselves in the land of milk and honey, the Israelites found themselves in a land of desolation. Perhaps you found yourself in a similar place in your life—seasons when your work, pursuits, and relationships felt fruitless. The wilderness can feel like a stagnant place . . . an arid and inhospitable desert where nothing can flourish. But in Scripture, we find that the wilderness can actually represent a time of transition or liminal space—"an in-between place where ordinary life is suspended, identity shifts, and new possibilities emerge."[7] In the wilderness, the Israelites were forged together as God's people again.

Jesus likewise found himself in the wilderness during a time of transition. Right before he began his public ministry, he was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where he was tempted by Satan. Jesus was being tested. Who was he? Was he going to be able to deliver God's people to salvation as Moses had delivered the Israelites out of Egypt? It was in the desert that Jesus showed Satan what he was up against: the Son of the one true God.[8]

So don't discount the wilderness times in your life. Lean into the work that God wants to do there. Who you are and who God is making you to be happens in the wilderness.

Read | Numbers 21:4–9 and Matthew 4:1–10

Reflect

1. The Israelites' wilderness wandering takes place after they had rebelled against God at Kadesh and been prohibited from entering the Promised Land. How did the Israelites feel about being in the desert? How did God respond to their grumbling?

2. The story of Jesus' time in the wilderness takes place immediately after he is baptized in the Jordan River and right before he preaches his first recorded sermon in Nazareth (see Matthew 3:13–17; 4:12–17). What did this time in the wilderness represent for Christ?

3. When have you been led into the wilderness—a time of spiritual, relational, or personal drought? How did you feel about being in this place at first?

4. What did you learn about yourself during this wilderness time in your life? What did you learn about the love and faithfulness of God?

Pray | If you find yourself in the wilderness today, ask God why you're here. Listen and see what he has to teach you. If you are out of the wilderness, thank God for delivering you. Reflect on who you became as a result of that season.

-Day 4-

Exile

Under the leadership of Joshua, whom you will learn about in a future session, the Israelites finally entered into the Promised Land. But Israel's relationship with God and, therefore, their relationship with the land that he gave to them, would be tumultuous. Several hundred years after the Israelites took possession of the land, Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah.

The prophets Hosea and Isaiah warned that Judah and Israel, as a result of their disobedience to the Lord, would be conquered by foreign powers (see Hosea 9; Isaiah 39). The fall of Israel was completed in 721 BC, when the Assyrians completed their invasion and forcibly resettled the people in other lands. The fall of Judah was completed by 586 BC, when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it. The people of Judah were also taken as captives to other lands (see "The Return to Jerusalem" on page 25).

The Israelites—as a result of their unfaithfulness to God—had once again been forced to live as captives and foreigners in a strange land. This was devastating to God's people, who had been living in the Promised Land for generations. Being away from home is difficult enough. But not knowing if you will ever return? It was heartbreaking.

Have you ever been in exile—far from home, in a foreign place, unsure of what is expected of you? You don't have to go far to feel this way. You can move to the next town over and feel like a stranger in a strange land. You can feel like a stranger in your own home. The feeling of exile is isolating and lonely. All you want is a place where you can feel at home, seen, and loved. God's people knew this feeling well, and as you'll read in the following psalm, they lamented their exile and kept Jerusalem close to their hearts.

Read | Psalm 137:1–6

Reflect

1. The author of this psalm reflects on the time when the people lived by "the rivers of Babylon" and hung their harps "on the poplars" (verses 1–2). Life had been good for

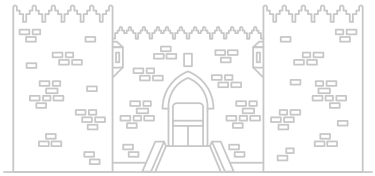
many of the captives when it came to material benefits. Yet while Babylon may have been a pleasant country, the people of Judah recognized they were aliens in a foreign land. Based on the tone of this psalm, how do you think the psalmist was feeling?

2. The author of this psalm writes that the Babylonian captors ("our tormentors") demanded the people of Judah to "sing songs of joy" (verse 3). How does the psalmist respond to this request? Why do you think it was so important for him and the other Jewish people to remember Jerusalem?

3. As noted previously, you don't have to go far to feel like an exile. You can even feel like a stranger in your own home. When is a time in your life that you have been in exile—a time when you have felt like a foreigner in a foreign land?

4. What feelings or sentiments from this psalm particularly resonate with you? What is the value of remembering "where you came from" when you find yourself in exile?

Pray | End your time in prayer. Remember that no matter where you are, God sees you. You are always known and loved by him. Meditate on that truth.



The Return to Jerusalem

The Babylonians occupied Judah beginning in 597 BC. The Bible states that when Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, rebelled against the king, the Babylonians marched on Jerusalem and destroyed the city in 586 BC (see 2 Kings 25). The people of Judah were taken into exile in Babylon and other places in the empire. But in 539 BC, the Persian king Cyrus the Great invaded the Babylon Empire and conquered it. Cyrus instituted a policy that allowed captive peoples to return to their homelands, which encouraged the Jews to start returning to the land of Palestine in three primary waves.

The First Wave. Shortly after Cyrus issued his decree, a man named Zerubbabel led the first group of exiles back to their homeland, sometime between 538–520 BC. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David (see Matthew 1:6, 12) and led 42,360 people back to Judah, accompanied by 7,337 slaves and 200 singers (see Ezra 2:64–65). Zerubbabel also laid the foundation for building the Second Temple in Jerusalem soon after (see 3:8; 5:2).

The Second Wave. The second wave of exiles was led by a priest and scribe named Ezra sometime around 458 BC (see Ezra 7:6). Ezra carried a letter from the Persian king Artaxerxes I that authorized any Jewish person to travel back to Jerusalem with him (see verses 12–26). However, only around 1,754 males responded—and none of the Levites answered the call (see 8:1–15). When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he found that many had violated the law concerning mixed marriages (see 9:1–2). Ezra ultimately led the people to repentance (see 10:1–17).

The Third Wave. The third wave of exiles was led by Nehemiah, a cupbearer to king Artaxerxes I, who was granted permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls (see Nehemiah 2:5–8). Nehemiah faced challenges from enemies, but the wall was nevertheless finished in only fifty-two days (see 6:15). Nehemiah, with the help of Ezra and, later, the prophet Malachi, encouraged various spiritual reforms in Judah (see 13:1–31)

-Day 5-

Our Promised Land

The Israelites were ultimately delivered from exile during the rule of the Persian king Cyrus the Great. However, in 63 BC, Pompey the Great claimed the city of Jerusalem for Rome. The glory days of the Israelites were long gone, and the Jews were now living as an oppressed minority in the land promised to Abraham and their ancestors.

However, over the centuries, the prophets foretold of a coming Messiah. Isaiah had written, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious" (11:10). By the time of Christ, the people were expecting the Messiah to be a great political leader, descended from the line of King David, who would overthrow Rome and return Israel to its former glory.

But Jesus had a bigger kingdom in mind—the kingdom of God that stretched far beyond the borders of ancient Palestine and into the entire world. Instead of seeking empirical glory, "he [chose] to live without a home going around teaching others what relationship with God is all about."[9] A relationship with God *made possible through him*.

In the New Covenant, Jesus reclaimed our hearts for himself, and he asked us to do the same. His final command to his disciples, known as the Great Commission, was to increase God's kingdom by telling the nations about him.[10] In this way, he invited *all* into Abraham's Promised Land, no longer reserved for the Israelites but for all God's people, creating the kingdom of God on earth while we wait to enter the kingdom of God for eternity.

Read | Matthew 28:16–20 and Acts 1:7–11

Reflect

1. Jesus gives the same commission to all of his followers, regardless of whether they worship him or doubt. What does this say about the way that Christ can use you for God's kingdom—even if you have doubts?

2. Jesus reveals that "all authority in heaven and on earth" has been given to him. What instructions does Jesus then give in Matthew 28:19–20? What other promises does Jesus give to his followers before he is taken into heaven (see Acts 1:8)?

3. What does the Great Commission look like in your life? What are some of the ways that you are sharing Jesus' love and message with those around you?

4. The land of Israel is the place where God's people have always placed their hope. It's the place to which Jesus came, it is where he died, it is where he ascended into heaven, and ultimately it is going to be the place where he places his feet at the second coming (see Zechariah 14:3–4). So, looking to the land of Israel—the "Holy Land"—is looking for his return. As you conclude this study, how is that truth impacting your day-to-day life?

Pray | Spend a few minutes reflecting on this week's personal study time. Did God convict you of anything this week? Did you change in any way or learn something new? Talk to God about what you discovered in his Word this week and what he might be showing you today.

For Next Week

Before you meet again with your group next week, read chapter 1 in *The God of the Way*. Also go back and complete any of the study and reflection questions from this personal study that you weren't able to finish.

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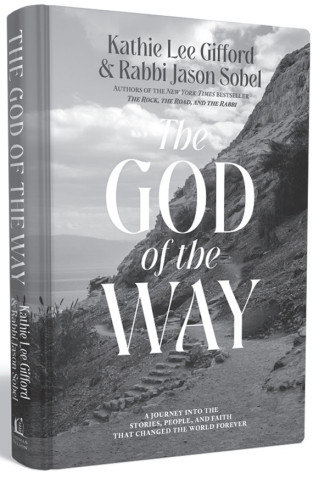

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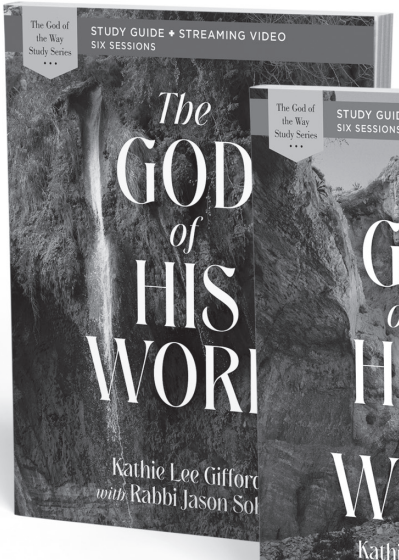

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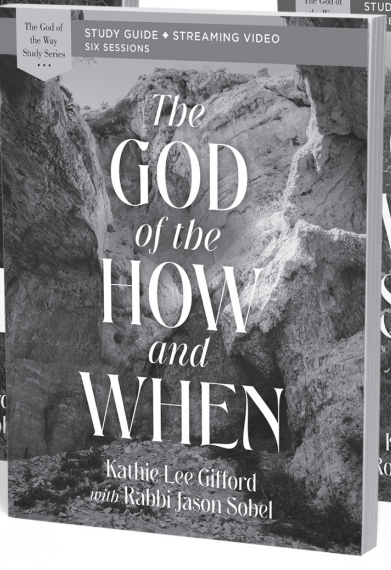

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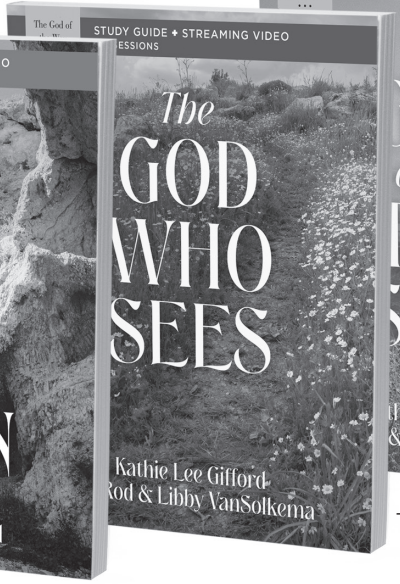

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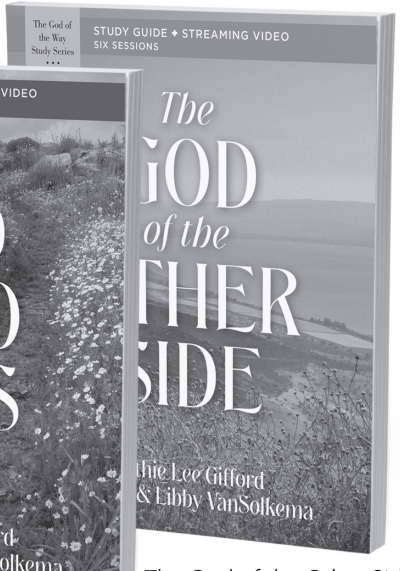

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Trusting God When You Don't Know the Details

The Bible reveals that God's plans are greater than our own and that he executes those plans in his own timing. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways" (Isaiah 55:9). Yet this often trips us up, because we want to know all the details of exactly *how* God is working and *when* he will deliver.

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5. Joshua (19:00)
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Kathie Lee Gifford, four-time Emmy Award winner, is best known for her eleven years cohosting the popular fourth hour of the *Today* show alongside Hoda Kotb. She has authored numerous books, including her most recent book, *The God of the Way*, and five *New York Times* bestselling books, including *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi* and *It's Never Too Late.* She is also an actress, singer, songwriter, playwright, producer, and director.

Rabbi Jason Sobel is the founder of Fusion Global, a ministry that seeks to bring people into the full inheritance of the faith by connecting treasures of "the old and the new." He received his rabbinic ordination from the UMJC (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations) in 2005, his B.A. in Jewish Studies at Moody, and his M.A. in Intercultural Studies from Southeastern Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Messiah* and coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi,* with Kathie Lee Gifford. Find him on Twitter and Instagram at @RabbiJasonSobel.

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