



THE PROPHETS

THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

LISTEN TO GOD'S MESSENGERS PROCLAIMING HOPE & TRUTH

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THE DRAMA OF THE BIBLE IN SIX ACTS

The Bible is a collection of letters, poems, stories, visions, prophetic oracles, wisdom and other kinds of writing. The first step to good Bible reading and understanding is to engage these collected works as the different kinds of writing that they are, and to read them as whole books. We encourage you to read big, to not merely take in little fragments of the Bible. The introductions at the start of each book will help you to do this.

But it is also important not to view the Bible as a gathering of unrelated writings. Overall, the Bible is a narrative. These books come together to tell God's true story and his plan to set the world right again. This story of the Bible falls naturally into six key major acts, which are briefly summarized below.

"I had always
felt life first as a story:
and if there is a story,
there is a story-teller."

G. K. Chesterton

But even more precisely, we can say the story of the Bible is a drama. The key to a drama is that it has to be acted out, performed, lived. It can't remain as only words on a page. A drama is an activated story. The Bible was written so we could enter into its story. It is meant to be lived.

All of us, without exception, live our lives as a drama. We are on stage every single day. What will we say? What will we do? According to which story will we live? If we are not answering these

questions with the biblical script, we will follow another. We can't avoid living by someone's stage instructions, even if merely our own.

This is why another key to engaging the Bible well is to recognize that its story has not ended. God's saving action continues. We are all invited to take up our own roles in this ongoing story of redemption and new creation. So, welcome to the drama of the Bible. Welcome to the story of how God intends to renew your life, and the life of the world. God himself is calling you to engage with his word.

ACT 1: GOD'S INTENTION



The drama begins (in the first pages of the book of Genesis) with God already on the stage creating a world. He makes a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, and places them in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. The earth is created to be their home. God's intention is for humanity to

be in close, trusting relationship with him and in harmony with the rest of creation that surrounds them.

In a startling passage, the Bible tells us that human beings are God's image-bearers, created to share in the task of bringing God's wise and beneficial rule to the rest of the world. Male and female together, we are significant, decision-making, world-shaping beings. This is our vocation, our purpose as defined in the biblical story.

An equally remarkable part of Act 1 is the description of God as coming into the garden to be with the first human beings. Not only is the earth the God-intended place for humanity, God himself comes to make the beautiful new creation his home as well.

God then gives his own assessment of the whole creation: *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good*. Act 1 reveals God's original desire for the world. It shows us that life itself is a gift from the Creator. It tells us what we were made for and provides the setting for all the action that follows.

ACT 2: EXILE



Tension and conflict are introduced to the story when Adam and Eve decide to go their own way and seek their own wisdom. They listen to the deceptive voice of God's enemy, Satan, and doubt God's trustworthiness. They decide to live apart from the word that God himself has given them. They decide to be a law to themselves.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve—the introduction of sin into our world—is presented in the Bible as having devastating consequences. Humans were created for healthy, life-giving relationship: with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. But now humanity must live with the fracturing of all these relations and with the resulting shame, brokenness, pain, loneliness—and death.

Heaven and earth—God's realm and our realm—were intended to be united. God's desire from the beginning was clearly to live with us in the world he made. But now God is hidden. Now it is possible to be in our world and not know him, not experience his presence, not follow his ways, not live in gratitude.

As a result of this rebellion, the first exile in the story takes place. The humans are driven away from God's presence. Their offspring throughout history will seek to find their way back to the source of life. They will devise any number of philosophies and religions, trying to make sense of a fallen, yet haunting world. But death now stalks them, and they will find that they cannot escape it. Having attempted to live apart from God and his good word, humans will find they have neither God nor life.

New questions arise in the drama: Can the curse on creation be overcome and the relationship between God and humanity restored? Can heaven and earth be reunited? Or did God's enemy effectively end the plan and subvert the story?

ACT 3: CALLING ISRAEL TO A MISSION



We see the direction of God's redemptive plan when he calls Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation. God narrows his focus and concentrates on one group of people. But the ultimate goal remains the same: to bless all the peoples on earth and remove the curse from creation.

When Abraham's descendants are enslaved in Egypt, a central pattern in the story is set: God hears their cries for help and comes to set them free. God makes a covenant with this new nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Israel is called by God to be a light to the nations, showing the world what it means to follow God's ways for living. If they will do this, he will bless them in their new land and will come to live with them.

However, God also warns them that if they are not faithful to the covenant, he will send them away, just as he did with Adam and Eve. In spite of God's repeated warnings through his prophets, Israel seems determined to break the covenant. So God abandons the holy temple—the sign of his presence with his people—and it is smashed by pagan invaders. Israel's capital city Jerusalem is sacked and burned.

Abraham's descendants, chosen to reverse the failure of Adam, have now apparently also failed. The problem this poses in the biblical story is profound. Israel, sent as the divine answer to Adam's fall, cannot escape Adam's sin. God, however, remains committed to his people and his plan, so he sows the seed of a different outcome. He promises to send a new king, a descendant of Israel's great King David, who will lead the nation back to its destiny. The very prophets who warned Israel of the dire consequences of its wrongdoing also pledge that the good news of God's victory will be heard in Israel once again.

Act 3 ends tragically, with God apparently absent and the pagan nations ruling over Israel. But the hope of a promise remains. There is one true God. He has chosen Israel. He will return to his people to live with them again. He will bring justice, peace and healing to Israel, and then to the world. He will do this in a final and climactic way. God will send his anointed one—the Messiah. He has given his word on this.

ACT 4: THE SURPRISING VICTORY OF JESUS



"He is the god made manifest . . . the universal savior of human life." These words, referring to Caesar Augustus (found in a Roman inscription from 4 BC in Ephesus), proclaim the gospel of the Roman Empire. This version of the good news announces that Caesar is the lord who brings peace and prosperity to the world.

Into this empire a son of David is born, and he announces the gospel of God's kingdom. Jesus of Nazareth brings the good news of the coming of God's reign. He begins to show what God's new creation looks like. He announces the end of Israel's exile and the forgiveness of sins. He heals the sick and raises the dead. He overcomes the dark spiritual powers. He

welcomes sinners and those considered unclean. Jesus renews the nation, rebuilding the twelve tribes of Israel around himself in a symbolic way.

But the established religious leaders are threatened by Jesus and his kingdom, so they have him brought before the Roman governor. During the very week that the Jews were remembering and celebrating Passover—God’s ancient rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt—the Romans nail Jesus to a cross and kill him as a false king.

But the Bible claims that this defeat is actually God’s greatest victory. How? Jesus willingly gives up his life as a sacrifice on behalf of the nation, on behalf of the world. Jesus takes onto himself the full force of evil and empties it of its power. In this surprising way, Jesus fights and wins Israel’s ultimate battle. The real enemy was never Rome, but the spiritual powers that lie behind Rome and every other kingdom whose weapon is death. Through his blood Jesus pays the price and reconciles everything in heaven and on earth to God.

God then publicly declares this victory by reversing Jesus’ death sentence and raising him back to life. The resurrection of Israel’s king shows that the great enemies of God’s creation—sin and death—really have been defeated. The resurrection is the great sign that the new creation has begun.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s story and a new start for the entire human race. Death came through the first man, Adam. The resurrection of the dead comes through the new man, Jesus. God’s original intention is being reclaimed.

ACT 5: THE RENEWED PEOPLE OF GOD



If the key victory has already been secured, why is there an Act 5? The answer is that God wants the victory of Jesus to spread to all the nations of the world. The risen Jesus says to his disciples, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* So this new act in the drama tells the story of how the earliest followers of Jesus began to spread the good news of God’s reign.

According to the New Testament, all those who belong to Israel’s Messiah are children of Abraham, heirs of both the ancient promises and the ancient mission. The task of bringing blessing to the peoples of the world has been given again to Abraham’s family. Their mission is to live out the liberating message of the good news of God’s kingdom.

God is gathering people from all around the world and forming them into assemblies of Jesus-followers—his church. Together they are God’s new temple, the place where his Spirit lives. They are the community of those who have pledged their allegiance to Jesus as the true Lord of the world. They have crossed from death into new life, through the power of God’s Spirit. They demonstrate God’s love across the usual boundaries of race, class, tribe and nation.

Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God can now be announced to all. Following in the steps of Jesus, his followers proclaim this gospel in both word and deed. The power of this new, God-given life breaking into the world is meant to be shown by the real-world actions of the Christian community. But the message also has a warning. When the Messiah returns, he will come as the rightful judge of the world.

The Bible is the story of the central struggle weaving its way through the history of the world. And now the story arrives at our own time, enveloping us in its drama.

So the challenge of a decision confronts us. What will we do? How will we

fit into this story? What role will we play? God is inviting us to be a part of his mission of re-creation—of bringing restoration, justice and forgiveness. We are to join in the task of making things new, to be a living sign of what is to come when the drama is complete.

ACT 6: GOD COMES HOME



God's future has come into our world through the work of Jesus the Messiah. But for now, the present evil age also continues. Brokenness, wrongdoing, sickness and even death remain. We live in the time of the overlap of the ages, the time of in-between. The final Act is coming, but it has not yet arrived.

We live in the time of invitation, when the call of the gospel goes out to every creature. Of course, many still live as though God doesn't exist. They do not acknowledge the rule of the Messiah. But the day is coming when Jesus will return to earth and the reign of God will become an uncontested reality throughout the world.

God's presence will be fully and openly with us once again, as it was at the beginning of the drama. God's plan of redemption will reach its goal. The creation will experience its own Exodus, finding freedom from its bondage to decay. Pain and tears, regret and shame, suffering and death will be no more.

When the day of resurrection arrives God's people will find that their hope has been realized. The dynamic force of an indestructible life will course through their bodies. Empowered by the Spirit, and unhindered by sin and death, we will pursue our original vocation as a renewed humanity. We will be culture makers, under God but over the world. Having been remade in the image of Christ, we will share in bringing his wise, caring rule to the earth.

At the center of it all will be God himself. He will return and make his home with us, this time in a new heaven and a new earth. We, along with the rest of creation, will worship him perfectly and fulfill our true calling. God will be all in all, and the whole world will be full of his glory.

WHAT NOW?

The preceding overview of the drama of the Bible is meant to give you a framework so you can begin to read the books that make up the story. The summary we've provided is merely an invitation for you to engage the sacred books themselves.

Many people today follow the practice of reading only small, fragmentary snippets of the Bible—verses—and often in isolation from the books of which they are a part. This does not lead to good Bible understanding. We encourage you instead to take in whole books, the way their authors wrote them. This is really the only way to gain deep insight to the Scriptures.

The more you immerse yourself in the script of this drama, the better you will be able to find your own place in the story. The following page, called *Living the Script*, will help you with practical next steps for taking up your role in the Bible's drama of renewal.

Go deep
and read big.

LIVING THE SCRIPT

From the beginning God made it clear that he intends for us to be significant players in his drama. No doubt, it is first and foremost God's story. But we can't passively sit back and just watch what happens. At every stage he invites humans to participate with him.

Here are three key steps to finding your place in the drama:

1. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE BIBLE

If we are unfamiliar with the text of the drama itself, there's no chance of living our parts well. Only when we read both deeply and widely in the Bible, marinating in it and letting it soak into our lives, will we be prepared to effectively take up our roles. The more we read the Bible, the better readers we will become. Rather than skimming the surface, we will become skilled at interpreting and practicing what we read.

2. COMMIT TO FOLLOW JESUS

We've all taken part in the brokenness and wrongdoing that came into the story in Act 2. The victory of Jesus in Act 4 now offers us the opportunity to have our lives turned around. Our sins can be forgiven. We can become part of God's story of new creation.

Turn away from your wrongdoing. God has acted through the death and resurrection of the Messiah to deal decisively with evil—in your life and in the life of the world. His death was a sacrifice, and his resurrection a new beginning. Acknowledge that Jesus is the rightful ruler of the world, and commit to follow him and join with God's people.

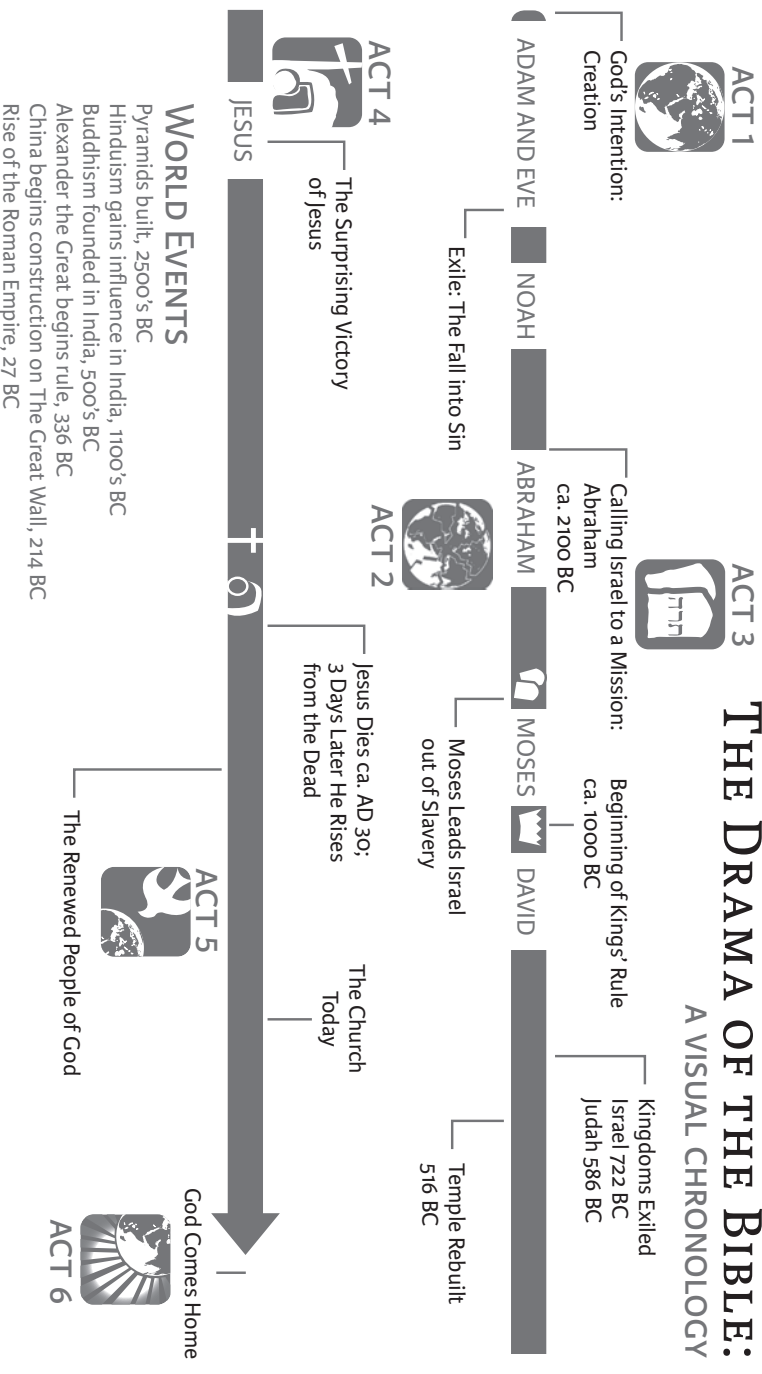
3. LIVE YOUR PART

Followers of Jesus are gospel players in local communities living out the biblical drama together. But we do not have an exact script for our lines and actions in the drama today. Our history has not yet been written. And we can't just repeat lines from earlier acts in the drama. So what do we do?

We read the Bible to understand what God has already done, especially through Jesus the Messiah, and to know how we carry this story forward. The Bible helps us answer the key question about everything we say and do: Is this an appropriate and fitting way to live out the story of Jesus today? This is how we put the Scriptures into action. Life's choices can be messy, but God has given us his word and promised us his Spirit to guide us on the way. You are God's artwork, created to do good works. May your life be a gift of beauty back to him.

THE DRAMA OF THE BIBLE:

A VISUAL CHRONOLOGY



A GUIDE TO THE BOOKS OF OF THE PROPHETS

The Books of the Bible edition closely follows the ancient structure of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Here we present the second major division of the First Testament books, the words of the Prophets. These covenant spokesmen presented their messages from the 8th to the 5th centuries BC. Their writings are presented here in a generally chronological order, and are grouped together by historical period.

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PREFACE TO

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible isn't a single book. It's a collection of many books that were written, preserved and gathered together so that they could be shared with new generations of readers. Reading, of course, is not an end in itself. Especially in the case of the Bible, reading is a means of entering into the story. Overall, the Bible is an invitation to the reader first to view the world in a new way, and then to become an agent of the world's renewal. Reading is a step in this journey. *The Books of the Bible* is intended to help readers have a more meaningful encounter with the sacred writings and to read with more understanding, so they can take their places more readily within this story of new creation.

Just as the Bible is not a single book, the Bible is more than bare words. Those who wrote its books chose to put them in particular forms, using the literary conventions appropriate to those forms. Many different kinds of writing are found in the Bible: poetry, narrative, wisdom collections, letters, law codes, apocalyptic visions and more. All of these forms must be read as the literature they really are, or else misunderstanding and distortion of meaning are bound to follow. In order to engage the text on its own terms, good readers will honor the agreement between themselves and the biblical writers implied by the choices of particular forms. Good readers will respect the conventions of these forms. In other words, they'll read poetry as poetry, songs as songs, stories as stories, and so forth.

Unfortunately, for some time now the Bible has been printed in a format that hides its literary forms under a mask of numbers. These break the text into bits and sections that the authors never intended. And so *The Books of the Bible* seeks instead to present the books in their distinctive literary forms and structures. It draws on the key insight that visual presentation can be a crucial aid to right reading, good understanding and a better engagement with the Bible.

Specifically, this edition of the Bible differs from the most common current format in several significant ways:

- : chapter and verse numbers have been removed from the text;
- : the books are presented instead according to the internal divisions that we believe their authors have indicated;
- : a single-column setting is used to present the text more clearly and naturally, and to avoid disrupting the intended line breaks in poetry;
- : footnotes, section headings and any other additional materials have been removed from the pages of the sacred text;

- : individual books that later tradition divided into two or more parts are put back together again; and
- : the books have been placed in an order that we hope will help readers understand them better.

Why have we made these changes? First of all, the chapters and verses in the Bible weren't put there by the original authors. The present system of chapter divisions was devised in the thirteenth century, and our present verse divisions weren't added until the sixteenth. Chapters and verses have imposed a foreign structure on the Bible and made it more difficult to read with understanding. Chapter divisions typically don't correspond with the actual divisions of thought. They require readers to make sense of only part of a longer discussion as if it were complete in itself, or else to try to combine two separate discussions into one coherent whole. Moreover, because the Bible's chapters are all roughly the same length, they can at best only indicate sections of a certain size. This hides the existence of both larger and smaller units of thought within biblical books.

When verses are treated as intentional units (as their numbering suggests they should be), they encourage the Bible to be read as a giant reference book, perhaps as a collection of rules or as a series of propositions. Also, when "Bible verses" are treated as independent and free-standing statements, they can be taken selectively out of context and arranged in such a way as to suggest that the Bible supports beliefs and positions that it really doesn't.

It is true that chapter and verse numbers allow ease of reference. But finding passages at this speed may be a dubious benefit since this can encourage ignoring the text *around* the sought out citation. In order to encourage greater understanding and more responsible use of the Bible, we've removed chapter and verse numberings from the text entirely. (A chapter-and-verse range is included at the bottom of each page.)

Because the biblical books were handwritten, read out loud and then hand-copied long before standardized printing, their authors and compilers needed a way to indicate divisions within the text itself. They often did this by repeating a phrase or expression each time they made a transition from one section to another. We can confirm that particular phrases are significant in this way by observing how their placement reinforces a structure that can already be recognized implicitly from other characteristics of a book, such as changes in topic, movement in place or time, or shifts from one kind of writing to another. Through line spacing, we've marked off sections of varying sizes. The smallest are indicated by one blank line, the next largest by two lines, and so on, up to four-line breaks in the largest books. We've also indicated key divisions with a large initial capital letter of new sections. Our goal is to encourage meaningful units to be read in their entirety and so with greater appreciation and understanding.

Footnotes, section headings and other supplemental materials have been removed from the page in order to give readers a more direct and immediate experience of the word of God. At the beginning of each biblical book we've included an invitation to that particular writing with background information on why it was written and how we understand it to be put together. Beyond this, we encourage readers to study the Bible in community. We believe that

if they do, they and their teachers, leaders and peers will provide one another with much more information and many more insights than could ever be included in notes added by publishers.

The books of the Bible were written or recorded individually. When they were gathered together, they were placed into a variety of orders. Unfortunately, the order in which today's readers typically encounter these books is yet another factor that hinders their understanding. Paul's letters, for example, have been put in order of length. They are badly out of historical order, and this makes it difficult to read them with an appreciation for where they fit in the course of his life or how they express the development of his thought. The traditional order of the biblical books can also encourage misunderstandings of what kind of writing a particular work is. For example, the book of James has strong affinities with other biblical books in the wisdom tradition. But it's typically placed within a group of letters, suggesting that it, too, should be read as a letter. To help readers overcome such difficulties, we've sought to order the books so that their literary types, their circumstances of composition and the theological traditions they reflect will be evident. Our introductions to each of the different parts of the Bible will explain how we have ordered the books in these sections, and why.

Just as the work of Bible translation is never finished, the work of formatting the Bible on the principles described here will never be completed. Advances in the literary interpretation of the biblical books will undoubtedly enable the work we've begun here to be extended and improved in the years ahead. Yet the need to help readers overcome the many obstacles inherent in the Bible's current format is urgent, so we humbly offer the results of our work to those seeking an improved visual presentation of its sacred books.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of many lay people, clergy, scholars and people engaged in active Scripture outreach who've reviewed our work. They've shared their considerable knowledge and expertise with us and continue to provide valuable insights and guidance. However, final responsibility for all of the decisions in this format rests with us. We trust that readers will gain a deeper appreciation for, and a greater understanding of, these sacred texts. Our hope and prayer is that their engagement with *The Books of the Bible* will enable them to take up their own roles in God's great drama of redemption.

The Bible Design Group
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INVITATION TO THE THE PROPHETS

The books of the prophets make up the second major division of the First Testament. These books account for about a third of the First Testament, and one quarter of the whole Bible. The prophets were people chosen by God to bring the word of the Lord to Israel at urgent times in the life of that nation. Though they came from many different walks of life and lived under different historical conditions, the prophets nevertheless speak with a single voice. Indeed, they understand themselves to be speaking within a living tradition. Many of them refer self-consciously to the words of the prophets who came before them.

The prophets typically delivered their messages by composing poetic oracles and reciting them in public settings. Many of these oracles may actually have been sung: the prophets sometimes refer to their oracles as “songs” or “laments,” and the closing oracle of Habakkuk actually bears musical notations. But the prophets also used a wide variety of other means of communication, such as writing letters, giving sermons, explaining the meaning of signs that they observed or created, challenging the people with questions and then engaging them in dialogue, and sharing the content of visions that God gave them. While most of their communication was initially oral, it was preserved in writing and safeguarded by their followers. Their message was finally embraced by a repentant nation and included in the Scriptures, where it still speaks to us today.

The prophets whose words have been collected for us in the Bible were active from around 750 BC to about 450 BC. Their activity is clustered around a few key periods. (We learn elsewhere in the scriptures that other prophets, both men and women, spoke to the people both before and after these times.)

: Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah prophesied as the empire of Assyria was growing so strong that it threatened and ultimately conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah narrowly escaped being conquered itself at this time.

: Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk spoke to a later situation, when the Assyrian empire was crumbling and the Babylonians and Egyptians were jockeying to become rulers of the region.

: Jeremiah, Obadiah and Ezekiel lived at the time when the Babylonians conquered Judah and deported much of its population. : And Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi brought their messages to the community that had returned from Babylon to Judea under Persian rule. The prophecies in the second part of the book of Isaiah also speak to this situation of return and restoration.

: It's difficult to determine precisely when the prophet Joel lived. Scholars place him anywhere from the 800s to the 400s BC. Therefore, while we've presented the other prophets in what we feel is plausibly their historical order, we've put the book of Joel near the end of the group, where it can be understood in light of the prophetic tradition as a whole.

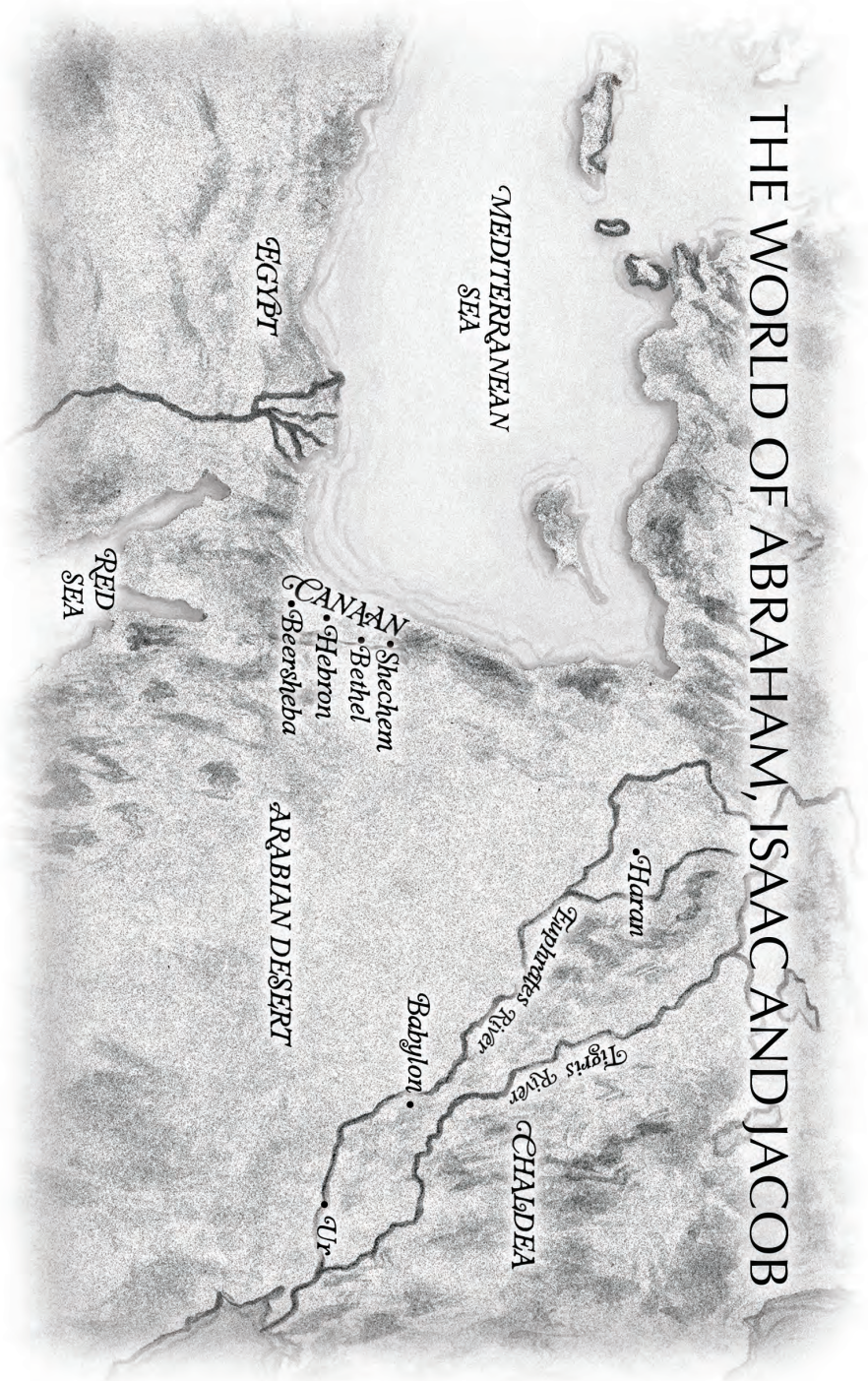
The foundation of everything the prophets said was the covenant bond between Israel and the Lord. They urged the people of Israel to be faithful to this covenant by not turning away from him to worship false gods, by living lives of moral purity, and by maintaining social and economic justice, especially in their care for the poor and the needy. The essential theme of their message, which can be seen in the actual sequence of oracles built into many of the prophetic books, is first judgment on the house of Israel for the failure to follow God's ways, then judgment on the other nations, and finally a promise of future restoration and hope. Many of the prophets use the technique of a "covenant lawsuit," gathering witnesses and marshaling evidence to demonstrate clearly that Israel has disobeyed the requirements of the bond between God and his people. Yet the Lord's promises will prove to be resilient, overcoming even the nation's stubborn wrongdoing.

These promises had a partial fulfillment in the return of Israel from exile in Babylon. But the prophets themselves speak of a hope that is both deeper and wider, a grand and universal salvation that extends beyond Israel, to the nations of the world and finally even to the creation itself. All things will be made new. The realization of this hope lies beyond these prophetic books, beyond the First Testament itself. The prophets looked to later events concerning one who will take Israel's suffering and exile onto himself, facing the crisis of judgment to find vindication for a renewed Israel in the surprising ways of their faithful God.

God's covenant spokesmen,
HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS,
bring the word of the Lord
TO HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL,
announcing a message
OF CLEANSING JUDGMENT
AS WELL AS HOPE AND RENEWAL
for all of God's good creation,

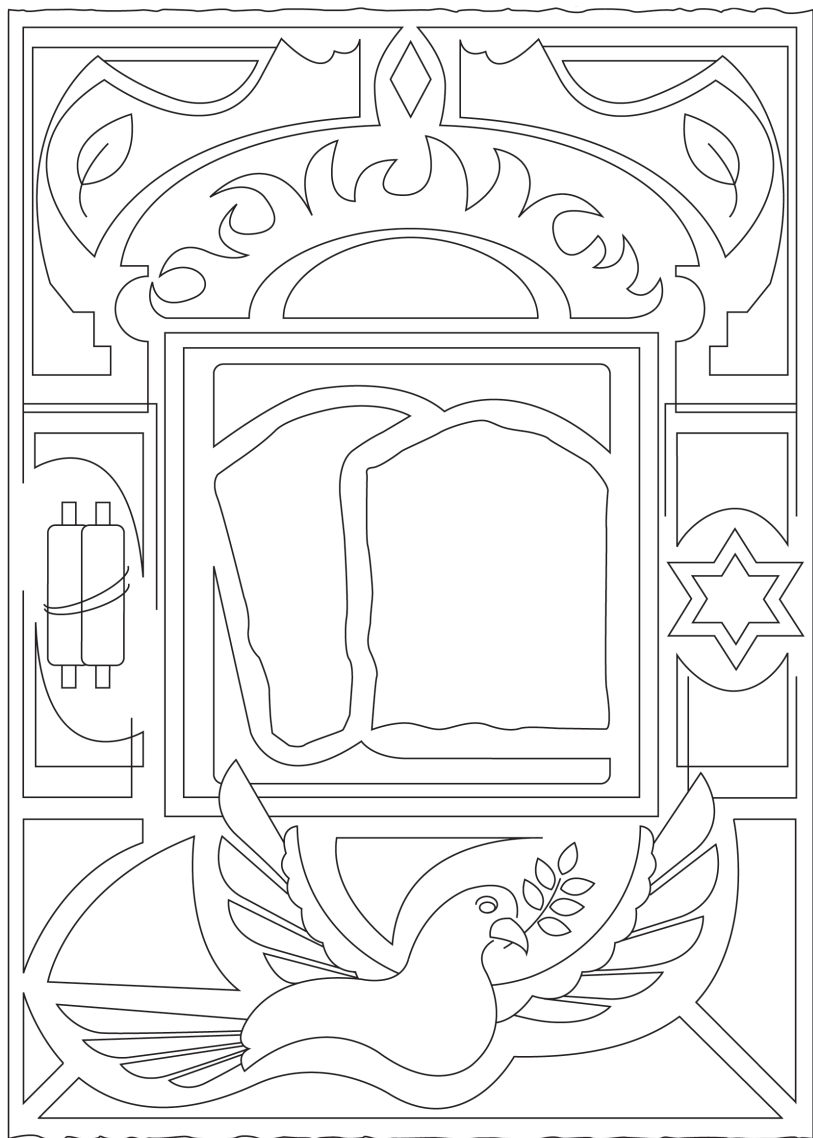
THE PROPHETS

THE WORLD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB



THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL and Surrounding Nations





David Thomson 2010

INVITATION TO JONAH

This book relates how God sent the prophet Jonah, who lived during the reign of Jeroboam II (783–743 or 793–753 BC), to warn the people of Nineveh that their city was about to be destroyed. This book's form is unique among all the prophetic books. It presents a narrative about a prophet, rather than a collection of his oracles. In this whole book there's only one sentence of prophecy: *Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown*.

The book of Jonah is written with a great deal of literary care. It's structured into two main acts, with two scenes each. The repetition of God's command to Jonah, *Go to the great city of Nineveh*, marks the beginning of each act. Act one, scene one is set on a ship at sea as Jonah tries to avoid the mission God has sent him on. The second scene takes place in the belly of a huge fish that has swallowed Jonah. Both scenes of the next act are associated with the city of Nineveh. Act two, scene one takes place within the city itself as Jonah preaches and Nineveh repents. Scene two takes place just outside the city as Jonah struggles to accept God's grace and mercy for others.

Biblical scholars offer varying estimates of when the book of Jonah was written. Because it relates several significant episodes from the life of a prophet who lived in the eighth century BC, in this edition it's placed with the books that record the words of other prophets who lived at that time. But these episodes from Jonah's life may actually be recounted in order to speak to the situation of a later generation. In the book, Jonah seems to represent the attitude that many people in Israel took at various times toward other nations. This is not a minor matter but concerns Israel's original calling to be God's agent for bringing blessing to the world. Instead of recognizing their mission to help these nations come to know the true God, they considered them their enemies and expected God to destroy them. And so God's question to Jonah at the end of the book—*should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?*—is also being posed to any readers who share Jonah's hostile attitude to foreigners.

This suggests that Jonah may represent Israel more generally in the book. God did tell some of the other prophets to act out signs in which they represented their nation. For example, Ezekiel lived on rationed food to show that Jerusalem would come under siege (pp. 368–369).

If Jonah's role in the story is to represent Israel, then his experience of being swallowed by the great fish may have an additional symbolic meaning that can help us get a general idea of the book's date. Even when he is still inside the fish, Jonah sings a song of thanksgiving, which is the centerpiece of the book. While he isn't yet safe on dry land, he has already been delivered from the engulfing waters. This may indicate that the book's author and audience are in exile: they're not yet back in their own land, but they have been spared from destruction. On the other hand, Jonah's argument with God, in which the book's message is heard most clearly, takes place after he is back on dry land. Once again, if Jonah is playing a symbolic role, this may suggest that the book was written after the return from exile.

But we don't need to know exactly when the book was written in order to appreciate its message. The people of God are always called to the mission of helping others come into the light and truth of the world's Creator. Those of us living in a later act of the biblical drama should also avoid viewing those outside the believing community as enemies, hoping only for God to trample them down. Instead, we should rejoice in—and certainly not resent—the fact that we serve a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. This mercy and love extends beyond the borders of Israel to include all nations, indeed, to the whole creation.

JONAH

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for

you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:

“In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called
for help,
and you listened to my cry.

You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;

all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;

yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.’

The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, LORD my God,
brought my life up from the pit.

“When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

“Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.

But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’”

And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a leafy

plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

INVITATION TO

AMOS

The northern kingdom of Israel reached its greatest height during the forty-year reign of Jeroboam II (783–743 or 793–753 BC). He took back much of the territory that Israel had lost to surrounding nations, conquering additional lands in the process. These victories led the people of his kingdom to anticipate what they called *the day of the LORD*. This was how they described the time when they expected God to strike down all the enemies that still surrounded them and establish their nation as the undisputed ruler of the region.

In addition to their military victories, the Israelites drew confidence from their own dedication to worship. They believed that God would surely favor a nation that lavished such attention on him. They went frequently to shrines at places like Gilgal, and traveled to the great royal temple at Bethel for festivals three times a year. They were careful not to do any business on the sabbath or during new moon festivals, and they regularly brought sacrifices and offerings to the temple. They also knew that God had delivered their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and had driven out mighty nations before them, and they were sure that this same God would still want to help them. Confident in their former victories, their worship, and their heritage, they adopted the motto, “God is with us!”

Into this atmosphere of overconfident nationalism stepped a man from the southern kingdom of Judah. His name was Amos. By his own admission, he wasn’t a prophet, but a shepherd. Nevertheless, he claimed that God had shown him a series of visions revealing that Israel’s confidence was misplaced. Amos stood in the royal temple at Bethel and announced that the nation would not prevail against its enemies. Instead, it would soon be conquered by a nation that God would stir up against it, and its people would be uprooted from their land. *The day of the LORD*, he insisted, *will be darkness, not light*.

Amos argued that God wasn’t impressed that Israel had a strong army, or that the Israelites were descended from the people he had brought out of Egypt, or even that they were so devout in their religious observances. What God cared about, Amos insisted, was justice. And there was no justice in Israel under Jeroboam II. Even those who had legitimate cases didn’t win in court, because judges could be bribed. In the end, people stopped speaking up for the innocent

entirely, knowing they'd only get in trouble themselves. The wealthy and powerful took advantage of the poor and landless through every means they could think of. They used the money they extorted from the poor to fund their self-indulgent lives. So long as this continued, Amos insisted, God would not bless the nation. He called the nation to repentance as the only way to avoid destruction. *Seek good, not evil, he cried, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy.*

Amos' message caused an uproar. Amaziah, the high priest at Bethel, accused him of treason and conspiracy. He banished him from the kingdom, likely with the personal approval of King Jeroboam II. But it is probably because Amos was expelled from Israel that he wrote his oracles down, thus creating one of the earliest collections we have from any Hebrew prophet. In this time when only a few people could read, anyone with an urgent message to communicate would not write a book, but rather go to an influential location to speak, as Amos did. However, when his message was rejected, it appears that he (or perhaps his followers) recorded his words to show that he'd faithfully carried out his assignment from God. His words were also recorded so that when the events he foretold came to pass, their meaning would be understood in light of what he'd said.

The book of Amos consists of about three dozen separate oracles and vision reports, plus the story of his expulsion from the northern kingdom. It opens with eight oracles against the nations, first addressing those which circle around the northern kingdom, but then unexpectedly turning its sights on Israel as well. However, in general the book's oracles aren't necessarily presented in the same order that Amos delivered them. They don't seem to be grouped thematically, either. And three stanzas of a hymn that praises God as creator have been inserted into the book at different places—one of them apparently right in the middle of an oracle. So the book as a whole is loosely assembled. In many places oracles seem to have been put together because they have some significant word or phrase in common.

Nevertheless, the book of Amos does possess an essential unity. This unity is created first on the poetic level, as the prophet uses similar images from oracle to oracle, and repeats devices such as plays on the meanings of words. But even more importantly, the book conveys one strong and consistent message: *Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!* The essential word about justice that God conveyed through Amos in the days of Jeroboam II has thus been preserved, and it continues to speak to those of us living in the later acts of the biblical drama.

AMOS

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

He said:

“The LORD roars from Zion
and thunders from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds dry up,
and the top of Carmel withers.”

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Damascus,
even for four, I will not relent.
Because she threshed Gilead
with sledges having iron teeth,
I will send fire on the house of Hazael
that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad.
I will break down the gate of Damascus;
I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven
and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden.
The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir,”
says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Gaza,
even for four, I will not relent.
Because she took captive whole communities
and sold them to Edom,

I will send fire on the walls of Gaza
 that will consume her fortresses.
 I will destroy the king of Ashdod
 and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon.
 I will turn my hand against Ekron,
 till the last of the Philistines are dead,”
 says the Sovereign LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Tyre,
 even for four, I will not relent.
 Because she sold whole communities of captives to
 Edom,
 disregarding a treaty of brotherhood,
 I will send fire on the walls of Tyre
 that will consume her fortresses.”

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Edom,
 even for four, I will not relent.
 Because he pursued his brother with a sword
 and slaughtered the women of the land,
 because his anger raged continually
 and his fury flamed unchecked,
 I will send fire on Teman
 that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.”

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Ammon,
 even for four, I will not relent.
 Because he ripped open the pregnant women
 of Gilead
 in order to extend his borders,
 I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah
 that will consume her fortresses
 amid war cries on the day of battle,
 amid violent winds on a stormy day.
 Her king will go into exile,
 he and his officials together,”
 says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Moab,
even for four, I will not relent.
Because he burned to ashes
the bones of Edom’s king,
I will send fire on Moab
that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth.
Moab will go down in great tumult
amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet.
I will destroy her ruler
and kill all her officials with him,”
says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Judah,
even for four, I will not relent.
Because they have rejected the law
of the LORD
and have not kept his decrees,
because they have been led astray
by false gods,
the gods their ancestors followed,
I will send fire on Judah
that will consume the fortresses of
Jerusalem.”

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Israel,
even for four, I will not relent.
They sell the innocent for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the poor
as on the dust of the ground
and deny justice to the oppressed.
Father and son use the same girl
and so profane my holy name.
They lie down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge.
In the house of their god
they drink wine taken as fines.

“Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them,
though they were tall as the cedars
and strong as the oaks.

I destroyed their fruit above
and their roots below.

I brought you up out of Egypt
and led you forty years in the wilderness
to give you the land of the Amorites.

“I also raised up prophets from among your children
and Nazirites from among your youths.

Is this not true, people of Israel?”

declares the LORD.

“But you made the Nazirites drink wine
and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

“Now then, I will crush you
as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.

The swift will not escape,
the strong will not muster their strength,
and the warrior will not save his life.

The archer will not stand his ground,
the fleet-footed soldier will not get away,
and the horseman will not save his life.

Even the bravest warriors
will flee naked on that day,”

declares the LORD.

Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the LORD has spoken
against you — against the whole family I brought up out of
Egypt:

“You only have I chosen
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your sins.”

Do two walk together
unless they have agreed to do so?
Does a lion roar in the thicket
when it has no prey?

Does it growl in its den
when it has caught nothing?
Does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground
when no bait is there?
Does a trap spring up from the ground
if it has not caught anything?
When a trumpet sounds in a city,
do not the people tremble?
When disaster comes to a city,
has not the LORD caused it?

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing
without revealing his plan
to his servants the prophets.

The lion has roared —
who will not fear?
The Sovereign LORD has spoken —
who can but prophesy?

Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod
and to the fortresses of Egypt:
“Assemble yourselves on the mountains
of Samaria;
see the great unrest within her
and the oppression among her people.”

“They do not know how to do right,” declares
the LORD,
“who store up in their fortresses
what they have plundered and looted.”

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“An enemy will overrun your land,
pull down your strongholds
and plunder your fortresses.”

This is what the LORD says:

“As a shepherd rescues from the lion’s mouth
only two leg bones or a piece of an ear,

so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued,
with only the head of a bed
and a piece of fabric from a couch.”

“Hear this and testify against the descendants of Jacob,” declares
the Lord, the LORD God Almighty.

“On the day I punish Israel for her sins,
I will destroy the altars of Bethel;
the horns of the altar will be cut off
and fall to the ground.
I will tear down the winter house
along with the summer house;
the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed
and the mansions will be demolished,”
declares the LORD.

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria,
you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy
and say to your husbands, “Bring us some drinks!”
The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness:
“The time will surely come
when you will be taken away with hooks,
the last of you with fishhooks.
You will each go straight out
through breaches in the wall,
and you will be cast out toward Harmon,”
declares the LORD.

“Go to Bethel and sin;
go to Gilgal and sin yet more.
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three years.
Burn leavened bread as a thank offering
and brag about your freewill offerings—
boast about them, you Israelites,
for this is what you love to do,”
declares the Sovereign LORD.

“I gave you empty stomachs in every city
and lack of bread in every town,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“I also withheld rain from you
when the harvest was still three months away.
I sent rain on one town,
but withheld it from another.
One field had rain;
another had none and dried up.
People staggered from town to town for water
but did not get enough to drink,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“Many times I struck your gardens and
vineyards,
destroying them with blight and mildew.
Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“I sent plagues among you
as I did to Egypt.
I killed your young men with the sword,
along with your captured horses.
I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“I overthrew some of you
as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
You were like a burning stick snatched from
the fire,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel,
and because I will do this to you, Israel,
prepare to meet your God.”

He who forms the mountains,
who creates the wind,
and who reveals his thoughts to mankind,
who turns dawn to darkness,
and treads on the heights of the earth —
the LORD God Almighty is his name.

Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you:

“Fallen is Virgin Israel,
never to rise again,
deserted in her own land,
with no one to lift her up.”

This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Israel:

“Your city that marches out a thousand strong
will have only a hundred left;
your town that marches out a hundred strong
will have only ten left.”

This is what the LORD says to Israel:

“Seek me and live;
do not seek Bethel,
do not go to Gilgal,
do not journey to Beersheba.
For Gilgal will surely go into exile,
and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.”
Seek the LORD and live,
or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire;
it will devour them,
and Bethel will have no one to quench it.

There are those who turn justice into bitterness
and cast righteousness to the ground.

He who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns midnight into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land—
the LORD is his name.

With a blinding flash he destroys the
stronghold
and brings the fortified city to ruin.

There are those who hate the one who upholds
justice in court
and detest the one who tells the truth.

You levy a straw tax on the poor
and impose a tax on their grain.

Therefore, though you have built stone mansions,
you will not live in them;
though you have planted lush vineyards,
you will not drink their wine.

For I know how many are your offenses
and how great your sins.

There are those who oppress the innocent
and take bribes
and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times,
for the times are evil.

Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.

Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is.

Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.

Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy
on the remnant of Joseph.

Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says:

“There will be wailing in all the streets
and cries of anguish in every public square.

The farmers will be summoned to weep
and the mourners to wail.

There will be wailing in all the vineyards,
for I will pass through your midst,”

says the LORD.

Woe to you who long
for the day of the LORD!

Why do you long for the day of the LORD?
That day will be darkness, not light.

It will be as though a man fled from a lion
only to meet a bear,

as though he entered his house
and rested his hand on the wall
only to have a snake bite him.

Will not the day of the LORD be darkness,
not light —
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.

Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain
offerings,

I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

You have lifted up the shrine of your king,
the pedestal of your idols,
the star of your god —
which you made for yourselves.

Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,”
says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion,
and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
you notable men of the foremost nation,
to whom the people of Israel come!

Go to Kalneh and look at it;
go from there to great Hamath,
and then go down to Gath in Philistia.

Are they better off than your two kingdoms?
Is their land larger than yours?

You put off the day of disaster
and bring near a reign of terror.

You lie on beds adorned with ivory
and lounge on your couches.

You dine on choice lambs
and fattened calves.

You strum away on your harps like David
and improvise on musical instruments.

You drink wine by the bowlful
and use the finest lotions,
but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile;
your feasting and lounging will end.

The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself — the LORD God Almighty declares:

“I abhor the pride of Jacob
and detest his fortresses;
I will deliver up the city
and everything in it.”

If ten people are left in one house, they too will die. And if the relative who comes to carry the bodies out of the house to burn

them asks anyone who might be hiding there, “Is anyone else with you?” and he says, “No,” then he will go on to say, “Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD.”

For the LORD has given the command,
and he will smash the great house into pieces
and the small house into bits.

Do horses run on the rocky crags?
Does one plow the sea with oxen?
But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness—
you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar
and say, “Did we not take Karnaïm by our own
strength?”

For the LORD God Almighty declares,
“I will stir up a nation against you, Israel,
that will oppress you all the way
from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.”

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king’s share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!”

So the LORD relented.

“This will not happen,” the LORD said.

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. Then I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!”

So the LORD relented.

“This will not happen either,” the Sovereign LORD said.

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD asked me, “What do you see, Amos?”

“A plumb line,” I replied.

Then the Lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

“The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.”

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying:

“‘Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and Israel will surely go into exile,
away from their native land.’”

Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say,

“‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and stop preaching against the descendants of Isaac.’

“Therefore this is what the LORD says:

“‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.
Your land will be measured and divided up,
and you yourself will die in a pagan country.
And Israel will surely go into exile,
away from their native land.’”

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. “What do you see, Amos?” he asked.

“A basket of ripe fruit,” I answered.

Then the LORD said to me, “The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

“In that day,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!”

Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,
saying,

“When will the New Moon be over
that we may sell grain,
and the Sabbath be ended
that we may market wheat?” —
skimping on the measure,
boosting the price
and cheating with dishonest scales,
buying the poor with silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

The LORD has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done.

“Will not the land tremble for this,
and all who live in it mourn?
The whole land will rise like the Nile;
it will be stirred up and then sink
like the river of Egypt.

“In that day,” declares the Sovereign LORD,

“I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
I will turn your religious festivals into mourning
and all your singing into weeping.
I will make all of you wear sackcloth
and shave your heads.
I will make that time like mourning for
an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day.

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD,
 “when I will send a famine through the land —
 not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
 but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.
 People will stagger from sea to sea
 and wander from north to east,
 searching for the word of the LORD,
 but they will not find it.

“In that day

“the lovely young women and strong young men
 will faint because of thirst.
 Those who swear by the sin of Samaria —
 who say, ‘As surely as your god lives, Dan,’
 or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’ —
 they will fall, never to rise again.”

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said:

“Strike the tops of the pillars
 so that the thresholds shake.
 Bring them down on the heads of all
 the people;
 those who are left I will kill with the sword.
 Not one will get away,
 none will escape.
 Though they dig down to the depths below,
 from there my hand will take them.
 Though they climb up to the heavens above,
 from there I will bring them down.
 Though they hide themselves on the top
 of Carmel,
 there I will hunt them down and seize them.
 Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom
 of the sea,
 there I will command the serpent to bite them.

Though they are driven into exile by their
enemies,
there I will command the sword to slay them.

“I will keep my eye on them
for harm and not for good.”

The Lord, the LORD Almighty —
he touches the earth and it melts,
and all who live in it mourn;
the whole land rises like the Nile,
then sinks like the river of Egypt;
he builds his lofty palace in the heavens
and sets its foundation on the earth;
he calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land —
the LORD is his name.

“Are not you Israelites
the same to me as the Cushites?”
declares the LORD.

“Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt,
the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?

“Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD
are on the sinful kingdom.

I will destroy it
from the face of the earth.

Yet I will not totally destroy
the descendants of Jacob,”

declares the LORD.

“For I will give the command,
and I will shake the people of Israel
among all the nations
as grain is shaken in a sieve,
and not a pebble will reach the ground.
All the sinners among my people
will die by the sword,

all those who say,
 ‘Disaster will not overtake or meet us.’

“**I**n that day

“I will restore David’s fallen shelter —
 I will repair its broken walls
 and restore its ruins —
 and will rebuild it as it used to be,
 so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
 and all the nations that bear my name,”
 declares the LORD, who will do these things.

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,

“when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman
 and the planter by the one treading grapes.

New wine will drip from the mountains
 and flow from all the hills,
 and I will bring my people Israel back from exile.

“They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
 They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
 they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

I will plant Israel in their own land,
 never again to be uprooted
 from the land I have given them,”

says the LORD your God.

A WORD ABOUT THE NIV

The goal of the New International Version (NIV) is to enable English-speaking people from around the world to read and hear God's eternal Word in their own language. Our work as translators is motivated by our conviction that the Bible is God's Word in written form. We believe that the Bible contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity, sheds unique light on our path in a dark world and sets forth the way to our eternal well-being. Out of these deep convictions, we have sought to recreate as far as possible the experience of the original audience—blending transparency to the original text with accessibility for the millions of English speakers around the world. We have prioritized accuracy, clarity and literary quality with the goal of creating a translation suitable for public and private reading, evangelism, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use. We have also sought to preserve a measure of continuity with the long tradition of translating the Scriptures into English.

The complete NIV Bible was first published in 1978. It was a completely new translation made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. The translators came from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, giving the translation an international scope. They were from many denominations and churches—including Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and others. This breadth of denominational and theological perspective helped to safeguard the translation from sectarian bias. For these reasons, and by the grace of God, the NIV has gained a wide readership in all parts of the English-speaking world.

The work of translating the Bible is never finished. As good as they are, English translations must be regularly updated so that they will continue to communicate accurately the meaning of God's Word. Updates are needed in order to reflect the latest developments in our understanding of the biblical world and its languages and to keep pace with changes in English usage. Recognizing, then, that the NIV would retain its ability to communicate God's Word accurately only if it were regularly updated, the original translators established the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT). The Committee is a self-perpetuating group of biblical scholars charged with keeping abreast of advances in biblical scholarship and changes in English and issuing periodic updates to the NIV. The CBT is an independent, self-governing body and has sole responsibility for the NIV text. The Committee mirrors the original group of translators in its diverse international and denominational makeup and in its unifying commitment to the Bible as God's inspired Word.

In obedience to its mandate, the Committee has issued periodic updates to the NIV. An initial revision was released in 1984. A more thorough revision process was completed in 2005, resulting in the separately published TNIV. The updated NIV you now have in your hands builds on both the original NIV and the TNIV and represents the latest effort of the Committee to articulate God's unchanging Word in the way the original authors might have said it had they been speaking in English to the global English-speaking audience today.

Translation Philosophy

The Committee's translating work has been governed by three widely accepted principles about the way people use words and about the way we understand them.

First, the meaning of words is determined by the way that users of the language actually use them at any given time. For the biblical languages, therefore, the Committee utilizes the best and most recent scholarship on the way Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words were being used in biblical times. At the same time, the Committee carefully studies the state of modern English. Good translation is like good communication: one must know the target audience so that the appropriate choices can be made about which English words to use to represent the original words of Scripture. From its inception, the NIV has had as its target the general English-speaking population all over the world, the "International" in its title reflecting this concern. The aim of the Committee is to put the Scriptures into natural English that will communicate effectively with the broadest possible audience of English speakers.

Modern technology has enhanced the Committee's ability to choose the right English words to convey the meaning of the original text. The field of computational linguistics harnesses the power of computers to provide broadly applicable and current data about the state of the language. Translators can now access huge databases of modern English to better understand the current meaning and usage of key words. The Committee utilized this resource in preparing the 2011 edition of the NIV. An area of especially rapid and significant change in English is the way certain nouns and pronouns are used to refer to human beings. The Committee therefore requested experts in computational linguistics at Collins Dictionaries to pose some key questions about this usage to its database of English—the largest in the world, with over 4.4 billion words, gathered from several English-speaking countries and including both spoken and written English. (The Collins Study, called "The Development and Use of Gender Language in Contemporary English," can be accessed at <http://www.thenivbible.com/about-the-niv/about-the-2011-edition/>.) The study revealed that the most popular words to describe the human race in modern U.S. English were "humanity," "man" and "mankind." The Committee then used this data in the updated NIV, choosing from among these three words (and occasionally others also) depending on the context.

A related issue creates a larger problem for modern translations: the move away from using the third-person masculine singular pronouns—"he/him/his"—to refer to men and women equally. This usage does persist in some forms of English, and this revision therefore occasionally uses these pronouns in a generic sense. But the tendency, recognized in day-to-day usage and

confirmed by the Collins study, is away from the generic use of “he,” “him” and “his.” In recognition of this shift in language and in an effort to translate into the natural English that people are actually using, this revision of the NIV generally uses other constructions when the biblical text is plainly addressed to men and women equally. The reader will encounter especially frequently a “they,” “their” or “them” to express a generic singular idea. Thus, for instance, Mark 8:36 reads: “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” This generic use of the “distributive” or “singular” “they/them/their” has been used for many centuries by respected writers of English and has now become established as standard English, spoken and written, all over the world.

A second linguistic principle that feeds into the Committee’s translation work is that meaning is found not in individual words, as vital as they are, but in larger clusters: phrases, clauses, sentences, discourses. Translation is not, as many people think, a matter of word substitution: English word *x* in place of Hebrew word *y*. Translators must first determine the meaning of the words of the biblical languages in the context of the passage and then select English words that accurately communicate that meaning to modern listeners and readers. This means that accurate translation will not always reflect the exact structure of the original language. To be sure, there is debate over the degree to which translators should try to preserve the “form” of the original text in English. From the beginning, the NIV has taken a mediating position on this issue. The manual produced when the translation that became the NIV was first being planned states: “If the Greek or Hebrew syntax has a good parallel in modern English, it should be used. But if there is no good parallel, the English syntax appropriate to the meaning of the original is to be chosen.” It is fine, in other words, to carry over the form of the biblical languages into English—but not at the expense of natural expression. The principle that meaning resides in larger clusters of words means that the Committee has not insisted on a “word-for-word” approach to translation. We certainly believe that every word of Scripture is inspired by God and therefore to be carefully studied to determine what God is saying to us. It is for this reason that the Committee labors over every single word of the original texts, working hard to determine how each of those words contributes to what the text is saying. Ultimately, however, it is how these individual words function in combination with other words that determines meaning.

A third linguistic principle guiding the Committee in its translation work is the recognition that words have a spectrum of meaning. It is popular to define a word by using another word, or “gloss,” to substitute for it. This substitute word is then sometimes called the “literal” meaning of a word. In fact, however, words have a range of possible meanings. Those meanings will vary depending on the context, and words in one language will usually not occupy the same semantic range as words in another language. The Committee therefore studies each original word of Scripture in its context to identify its meaning in a particular verse and then chooses an appropriate English word (or phrase) to represent it. It is impossible, then, to translate any given Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word with the same English word all the time. The Committee does try to translate related occurrences of a word in the original languages with the same English word in order to preserve the

connection for the English reader. But the Committee generally privileges clear natural meaning over a concern with consistency in rendering particular words.

Textual Basis

For the Old Testament the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text as published in the latest edition of *Biblia Hebraica*, has been used throughout. The Masoretic Text tradition contains marginal notations that offer variant readings. These have sometimes been followed instead of the text itself. Because such instances involve variants within the Masoretic tradition, they have not been indicated in the textual notes. In a few cases, words in the basic consonantal text have been divided differently than in the Masoretic Text. Such cases are usually indicated in the textual footnotes. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain biblical texts that represent an earlier stage of the transmission of the Hebrew text. They have been consulted, as have been the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient scribal traditions concerning deliberate textual changes. The translators also consulted the more important early versions. Readings from these versions, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the scribal traditions were occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading. In rare cases, the translators have emended the Hebrew text where it appears to have become corrupted at an even earlier stage of its transmission. These departures from the Masoretic Text are also indicated in the textual footnotes. Sometimes the vowel indicators (which are later additions to the basic consonantal text) found in the Masoretic Text did not, in the judgment of the translators, represent the correct vowels for the original text. Accordingly, some words have been read with a different set of vowels. These instances are usually not indicated in the footnotes.

The Greek text used in translating the New Testament has been an eclectic one, based on the latest editions of the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament. The translators have made their choices among the variant readings in accordance with widely accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism. Footnotes call attention to places where uncertainty remains.

The New Testament authors, writing in Greek, often quote the Old Testament from its ancient Greek version, the Septuagint. This is one reason why some of the Old Testament quotations in the NIV New Testament are not identical to the corresponding passages in the NIV Old Testament. Such quotations in the New Testament are indicated with the footnote "(see Septuagint)."

Footnotes and Formatting

Footnotes in this version are of several kinds, most of which need no explanation. Those giving alternative translations begin with "Or" and generally introduce the alternative with the last word preceding it in the text, except when it is a single-word alternative. When poetry is quoted in a footnote a slash mark indicates a line division.

It should be noted that references to diseases, minerals, flora and fauna,

architectural details, clothing, jewelry, musical instruments and other articles cannot always be identified with precision. Also, linear measurements and measures of capacity can only be approximated (see the Table of Weights and Measures). Although *Selah*, used mainly in the Psalms, is probably a musical term, its meaning is uncertain. Since it may interrupt reading and distract the reader, this word has not been kept in the English text, but every occurrence has been signaled by a footnote.

As an aid to the reader, sectional headings have been inserted. They are not to be regarded as part of the biblical text and are not intended for oral reading. It is the Committee's hope that these headings may prove more helpful to the reader than the traditional chapter divisions, which were introduced long after the Bible was written.

Sometimes the chapter and/or verse numbering in English translations of the Old Testament differs from that found in published Hebrew texts. This is particularly the case in the Psalms, where the traditional titles are included in the Hebrew verse numbering. Such differences are indicated in the footnotes at the bottom of the page. In the New Testament, verse numbers that marked off portions of the traditional English text not supported by the best Greek manuscripts now appear in brackets, with a footnote indicating the text that has been omitted (see, for example, Matthew 17:[21]).

Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53—8:11, although long accorded virtually equal status with the rest of the Gospels in which they stand, have a questionable standing in the textual history of the New Testament, as noted in the bracketed annotations with which they are set off. A different typeface has been chosen for these passages to indicate their uncertain status.

Basic formatting of the text, such as lining the poetry, paragraphing (both prose and poetry), setting up of (administrative-like) lists, indenting letters and lengthy prayers within narratives and the insertion of sectional headings, has been the work of the Committee. However, the choice between single-column and double-column formats has been left to the publishers. Also the issuing of “red-letter” editions is a publisher's choice—one that the Committee does not endorse.

The Committee has again been reminded that every human effort is flawed—including this revision of the NIV. We trust, however, that many will find in it an improved representation of the Word of God, through which they hear his call to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and to service in his kingdom. We offer this version of the Bible to him in whose name and for whose glory it has been made.

The Committee on Bible Translation



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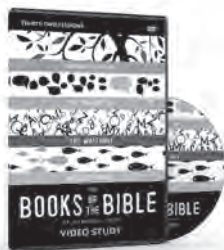
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