

The scepter, shepherd, and the stone

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You know, as we've celebrated together this morning, we have declared the power of the resurrected tomb but do you know what we just sang, the most pertinent part of those lyrics may be that one little personal pronoun, me. Today we can debate, we can discuss and we can even dialog the facts of the matter, as a matter of fact, we're about to read a Scripture that talks about the infallible proofs of Jesus' resurrection and you can discuss all those infallible proofs all you want and you can have some type of academic dialog but until it becomes personal, you'll never experience the power of an empty tomb. It's one thing to recognize it just as a page out of the history books, it's another thing to say it is the title of my life's book. The resurrected King is resurrecting me.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time where we transition from declaring your greatness and your grandeur and your glory to the time of which you're going to speak to us very particularly through your word, Lord, I pray that it wouldn't just be an academic exercise, Lord, I pray it wouldn't just be an opportunity to discuss the facts and debate the issues, but this would be a time where we allow ourselves to do what you encourage us over and over in Scripture to be the clay that you mold, to be the item that you shape, and God, may we be able to declare in just a few moments that you're not only the resurrected King but that you are resurrecting me. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places: the book of Acts 1 in your New Testament and the book of Genesis 49 in your Old Testament. On the surface and it may appear that these passages of Scripture have very little in common but we're going to see much to the contrary today. In fact, if you're a guest or visitor with us, one of the things that we're doing as a family of faith over the course of an elongated period of time is that we're going to walk through the entire Scriptures just chapter by chapter, day by day. Sometimes there may be one chapter a day, sometimes there may be two, but as we're walking through the Scriptures over a period of almost three years as a family of faith, we began in the book of Genesis and this week we transitioned into the book of Acts. Now some of you may ask the question, "Well, why didn't we just go Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers?" Well, if we had

gone directly in that pattern, number 1, we would have spent the whole first two years in the Old Testament and I promise you, we would have lost somebody in the book of Numbers. I'm convinced of that.

So we started in Genesis and this week we've rolled over into the book of Acts and I want you to see today that these story lines, these contexts may seem like they have very little in common but we're about to see there's an incredible synthesis here in Scripture that vies for our attention. We'll begin in Acts 1, just the first three verses, and then in a few moments we're going to go back to the book of Genesis 49. It says,

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: 3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Here we have the introduction, we have the beginning of the first 30 years of what we know as the history of the church of Jesus Christ and notice what it says in verse 3, "by many infallible proofs." In other words, the life he lived, the words he spoke, the actions that he partook in, they were not only infallible but they were also declared in advance.

That being said, I want you to work back to the book of Genesis 49. In Genesis 49, we have a man by the name of Jacob. Jacob is the same individual who would be renamed Israel and so when we talk about the patriarchs, you have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or Israel, and we know that he possessed what we know as the 12 tribes and here in chapter 49 of the book of Genesis, Jacob is laying out, for lack of better terms, his last will and testament. This is his blessing to his children and his descendants. Notice what it says in verse 1,

1 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

Now I want you to go ahead and keep a piece of paper or a hand or finger in Genesis 49 as we roll back to Acts 1:1-3. I want to kind of connect the dots in these two passages with just several thoughts and the first one is this, what I want to call a prudent perspective, and the reason I call it prudent is I think it's important to call our attention to the perspective we need to have with these passages, not one that is man-led but God-directed. Here's what I mean by that, I want to talk about the chronology for just a moment. When you go back to Genesis 49 and you do a chronology up to the book of Acts 1, you find yourselves in a period of time of almost 2,000 years that has passed, but yet saying that, look at verse 1 of Acts 1, it says, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up through the Holy Ghost," and the reason that's critical, in 1 ½ verses it describes the entire life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ which would have been roughly somewhere between 33 and 34 years in length. This is critical for our

understanding because I think sometimes we look at it from a human perspective and see all these years and decades and centuries and even millennia of time but from the Lord's perspective it may not be as lengthy.

Notice what it said back in Genesis 49:1, "I must show you the things which will befall in the last days." You know, in the book of Hebrews 1:1, it says, "God who in sundry times and in diverse manners spoke unto us in times past by the prophets," listen to this statement, "has now spoken unto us in these last days by Jesus Christ." The reason that is important is you and I are continuing to live in this time period known as the last days and you and I are almost 4,000 years removed from the time of Jacob, and yet the word that is used in Jacob's time is the same word that's used in the book of Hebrews to describe those of us who are living until the time in which we know the Savior Jesus Christ will one day, hopefully soon, return.

You say, "Why is that significant?" Because when we look at Genesis and we look at the book of Acts, it's so easy to see 2,000 years of time, it's so easy to see things so far removed but let's look at it from the Lord's perspective. In 2 Peter 3, it says, "A day with the Lord is if a thousand years and a thousand years is if a day." Some 2,000 years to him is just a weekend of time and so what I want us to see today as we allow ourselves to see it from the view of the Lord rather than the view of us, it's not an elongated millennia-based time period as much as it is a very – and allow me to quote the secular book – brief history of time from the Lord's perspective.

But not only does it deal with chronology, it also deals with a contrast. The book of Genesis and the book of Acts, though they'll have a continuous theme that we'll discuss in just a moment, there is something that's also of a great contrast. Allow me to illustrate. The book of Genesis begins with life, does it not? It begins with God breathing life into vegetation. The Lord breathes life to the land. He breathes life to the animals. Most importantly for us, he breathes life into us, humanity, where it says he forms us, he fashions us, he creates us. The Genesis account begins with life being given, but by the time you find yourself in the third chapter, death is in the realm of humanity. The Lord made it very clear that, "In the day that you eat thereof, in the day that you rebel against me, in the day that you, humanity, think you're smarter than I am, death will take place." By the time you get to chapter 3, death has taken a hold of humanity. Chapter 4, one brother kills the other brother. Death takes place. Chapter 5, we have a genealogy of Genesis. It says, "So-and-so lived and they died. Another person lived and they died. Another person lived and they died." Genesis 6, everybody but eight people die. Do you see the theme taking place here in Scripture? That which began with life is ending with death. Do you know the last statement, the last sentence in the book of Genesis makes this statement, "And his bones were in a coffin in Egypt." Think about how we started: the garden of Eden, walking in the cool of the day, life abounding. By the time we get to the end of the book of Genesis, death is the only option that we see.

You know, the book of Acts is very much a contrast to that. It actually begins with death. You say, "Well, we've read the first three verses, I don't see how it begins with death." You do understand that if Jesus Christ had not gone to the cross, the book of Acts would

have never been written. There would be no book of the acts of the apostles if Jesus Christ had not died and eventually risen from the dead, and yet Acts begins with death and what do we see come forth out of his death? Nothing but life. That's all we see. In fact, in chapter 1 we have a new purpose, a new direction for these apostles and those that are gathered. By the time you get to chapter 2 of the book of Acts, 3,000 people receive new life through Jesus Christ. Chapter 3, there is a man who's impotent and he needs physical healing and he comes and Peter and John make this statement, "Silver and gold have we none but in the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk." So no longer is there infirmity, no longer is there death. We've gone from a grave to new life being instilled. In fact, the book of Acts is the entire story in history of the first 30 years of the church of Jesus Christ. Life was breathed unto the Jews. Life was breathed unto the Samaritans. Life was breathed unto the Gentiles and it was breathed into the uttermost parts of the earth.

So what you see from Genesis to Acts is the proverbial flipping of the script. We started with life and ended up with death, now we're starting with death and we're going to end up with life. That being said, there's one principle "character" throughout the whole story and I know this won't surprise you, his name is Jesus Christ. In fact, in Genesis 3 when death takes a realm of the humanity, it says there that the Lord pronounces to the serpent that the seed of the woman will one day crush the head of the serpent. By the time that Abram is called out, father Abraham who will have Isaac and eventually Jacob whom we read about his descendants, it says that there will come from his loins, there will come the child of promise who will bear our sins, be our Savior, be our Messiah, be our Redeemer and our reconciler to a holy God, and the whole story of the book of what we know as the Old Testament is letting us see the history, the pattern and the trail of the coming Messiah Jesus Christ.

When we get to the book of Acts 1, notice what it says, "I have come to tell you all that Jesus began to both do and to teach." Now this book of the Bible is entitled the Acts of the Apostles because it shares with us not only the missionary journeys of Paul but other actions and such, but all of their mannerisms, all of their behavior, all of their words are based on the fact that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all they'd hoped for, all the Scriptures pointed us to, and he is the only character that counts at the end of the day. So as we roll from Genesis to the book of Acts, we see that our perspective needs to be one from the Lord. We understand that it's not, yes, it may be technically millennia of history but from God's perspective it's such a sliver of time, and we discover that rather than going from life to death, we're now going from death to life, and that Jesus Christ is at the center of it all.

That being said, I want us to go back to Genesis 49 and I want to see the prophetic picture that is given. This character, this person known as Jesus Christ, he'll be the fulfillment of all these things, what was said about him? Now in Genesis 49, we have the descendants of Jacob, the famous 12 tribes, and even though we know it says that Jesus would be from the tribe of Judah, we're going to read two passages in Genesis 49 regarding Judah and Joseph and the prophetic message that is given regarding who Jesus Christ will be and the life that he will live. Beginning in verse 8 of Genesis 49, it says,

8 Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? [Listen to verse 10] 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,

The scepter is a symbol, it's an item of the law and when it says there that the coming Messiah Jesus Christ, that the scepter shall never pass from him, there are two aspects there. The first one is this: that he will be one who will completely and absolutely be the fulfillment and the keeper of the law. You do realize this distinguishes Jesus from everybody else. He was sinless, without sin; though tempted, he never fell into temptation. In fact, the Bible says in the book of Hebrews that he withstood every temptation known to man yet he didn't go there.

It says that that scepter, that that law, he would be the fulfiller thereof. Jesus Christ showed us what does it actually look like to live according to God's standards in life, and yet for those of us who think it is somewhat prudish to live by the standards of God, last time I checked, every time Jesus turned the corner, thousands of people wanted to hear what he had to say and everybody wanted him to touch them with the touch of healing and forgiveness. So not only did he fulfill what the law should look like, he was also the fulfillment of the law. You see, the law required that because we have sinned and this was practiced recently in our contemporary culture, that we must come and experience a day of atonement; that we must bring our sacrifice, we must bring our lambs, we must bring our turtledoves and we must hope that somehow what we give to the Lord is somehow good enough. And yet, what did the John the Baptist say? "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Not only would he live a perfect sinless life, but he would be the only qualified candidate – hear me clearly – the only qualified one to stand in our stead. He's the only one. He's the only one who was qualified. He's the only one who could bear our iniquities. That's why 2 Corinthians 5 makes it very clear, "He who knew no sin became sin for us."

It says he is the scepter not only in the living of but the fulfillment of what we know as the law. Fast forward to verse 24, speaking particularly of the lineage of Joseph, it says,

24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; [listen to this last statement] (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)

Not only is Jesus prophetically spoken of as one who will be the scepter, but he also will be the shepherd. Now when you think about a shepherd and Jesus said in John 10 that he was the Good Shepherd, a shepherd really has two main functions: to protect and to provide. One who is over a flock of sheep, their job is to make sure that the predators have no place among their sheep.

You realize that whom we later know as King David is probably the best example in Scripture that we have of this. Here's a young man whose father says, "Go, take some cheese to your brothers to fight Goliath." Now can I get personal for just a moment? If I'm out fighting a giant, I don't know if cheese is what I would order on the menu. But nonetheless, his dad says, "Take them some cheese," so he does, and while he's there, he questions. He says, "Why have you not whipped this guy? I know he's big. I know he looks like Shaquille O'Neill on steroids. I got that, but nonetheless, come on!" And they get all fearful and they say, "Oh, none of us are worthy." David makes this famous statement, "Is there not a cause?" and he begins to dialog and King Saul says, "I can't send you out to battle. You're just a young man. You're about half his size. You're inexperienced. You've never fought a war." Do you know what David says to him? "I'm just a shepherd boy but I have fought off a lion and a bear with my own bare hands."

Now you read that and say, "Oh yeah," but I want you to think about that for just a moment. He fought a bear with his own hands? Now, yesterday there was a certain football team that came from the state of Texas to play a game just north of here. I hope you all understand who I'm speaking of. And about 50 years ago, they were in the city known as Waco, Texas playing a game against my alma mater and as college students do, these individuals who oftentimes brag on their wisdom, decided that they would do something, um, you know there's a fine line between courage and stupidity, right? They thought that it would be somewhat intelligent to steal my alma mater's mascot. Now, I went to Baylor University and our mascot is a North American brown bear, alright? Now we used to joke because Baylor was not known as a football powerhouse; we used to joke, "Hey, the game's not going good, let's let the mascots fight. We got this one, alright?" Well, there's about three of these individuals, this would have been about 50 years ago, they decided that they would pull up to the habitat where they held the bear and they would "steal" him. Later that night, they found an abandoned car with three dead human bodies and a bear missing. Three college students could not handle a bear and yet what does David say? "My own bare hands, I took him."

You see, when we speak of Jesus Christ being our shepherd, that means he can protect us against that which nobody else can. There is a woman who is caught in adultery, the whole town comes and says, "Kill her!" What does Jesus say? "He who is without sin cast the first stone." Then he looks at her and says, "Woman, where are your accusers?" She says, "I have none." He said, "Neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more." If that's not a protector, I don't know what is. He protected her.

But a shepherd also provides. The sheep have no clue where to find food unless the shepherd tells him. The sheep have no idea where to find water unless the shepherd tells them. But what did Jesus do? What does he do? Every time when we turn around whether they are educated or lacking thereof, he's always pointing people to the spiritual food and truth and water that they need.

He's not just the scepter, he's the shepherd, but notice this last statement in verse 24 of chapter 49 of Genesis, he is the stone of Israel. You know, it's interesting how many times in your Bible Jesus Christ is referenced to as a stone or a rock. Psalm 118, he's

called the rock or the stone of offense. In Matthew 7 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says there are two houses built by two families that look just alike, one is on the rock and one is on the shifting sand. They experience the same storm but the house built on the rock, and then he spoke of himself, was the one that could withstand it. Later in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 it says when the Israelites were in the Old Testament in the wilderness and they were wandering around and Moses struck the rock with his staff, it says that rock was Christ Jesus. All throughout the Scriptures we discover that Jesus is pictured as or used as a synonym with a rock or with a stone, but yet we discover he's either what Psalms 118 says, he's the rock of offense, or what Matthew 7 says, he's the rock by which our salvation and our security is built thereon.

When it says that Jesus would be a stone, what it tells us very clearly is not only would he be the fulfillment of the law, not only will he protect and provide for us, but he is the one that we will either stumble upon or we will place our whole life and security not just in this life but in the life to come. It's a prophetic picture of who Jesus would and should be.

So let's go back to the ministry, but even reaching back all the way back in the book of Genesis, to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs. In other words, when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ, you really don't have a leg to stand on to argue against what he said he would be and what the prophets said he would be and who his life was fulfilled to be.

I want to share with you something this morning, it's called, someone in the academic circles, it's called the trilemma. Let me describe what that means. It's just a threefold argument or discussion about Jesus Christ. This was actually popularized in the mid-1800s by a Scottish theologian by the name of John Duncan, later R. A. Torrey and Billy Sunday and guys used this, in fact, G. K. Chesterton, but probably the one who brought this to, I guess, common popularity was a man by the name of C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis, probably his greatest literary work as far as popularity is concerned is known as "Mere Christianity." Many people are surprised to find out he didn't actually write "Mere Christianity," he spoke "Mere Christianity" and then it was put in book form. He was summonsed by what we know as the British during World War II by the BBC to encourage the people of the land in the midst of World War II and he actually spoke out loud or read what we know as "Mere Christianity" and then it was put in popular book form. That being said, in the midst of this great literary work originally spoken by C. S. Lewis, he says that when it comes to Jesus Christ, you really only have three options. Now notice it said infallible proofs. He's either a liar, he's a lunatic, or he's the Lord. Those are C. S. Lewis' descriptions.

He's either a liar. Well, did his life in any way, was it contrary to what we just read in Genesis 49? Absolutely not. In fact, everything the Scripture said he would do, he fulfilled it exactly as they were written. Here's what's amazing to me: what we know as the religion of Islam says that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet and their same holy books say a prophet cannot lie. Even that religion says that Jesus wasn't a liar. He's exactly who he said he was and did what the Bible said he would do. So you and I, when we look at the life of Jesus, we can't claim he was a liar.

What about the second one, that he is a, shall we say, a lunatic? Was his message crazy? Was there what he said, was it somehow out of kilter? Allow me to summarize the message of Jesus Christ which, by the way, is the message of all Scripture, that everything started out really good with you, then things went really bad. You are so desperate you needed someone to come and help you and they showed up and you either follow them and suffer the blessings thereof or don't and suffer the consequences thereof. Is that not a quick summary of the message of Jesus? You know that's not only the message of the Bible, that's the message of almost every movie you ever watched and every book you'll ever read. Everybody was doing good, then there's a problem that arose, a "savior" shows up and you either get on board with him or you suffer the consequences thereof. It wasn't a message of lunacy, in fact, it makes such perfect sense that almost every story we tell follows the same pattern.

So none of us with a rational mind would ever say Jesus was a liar, none of us would ever say that he was a lunatic, which leaves that last word, Lord. You see, it says there in verse 3, by many infallible proofs. Can I share with you, there's a difference between recognizing he is the Lord and recognizing he is your Lord and so tonight, today as we kind of close up this message, I want you to understand as we roll from Genesis to the book of Acts, as we see the initiation of what we know as the church of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ isn't the one who is in question, it's us. Jesus Christ isn't the one who's on trial, that's already taken place, it's us. And it's not a matter of saying is he, the question is will I. Will I believe? Will I trust? Will I confess? Will I repent? Will I turn my life over to him? You see, what we read in Acts 1 and when it comes to Jesus, Jesus really isn't the issue, it's how we respond to him.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe today you're that individual, maybe you're that person, you may be seated in this room, in fact, you may be on the other side of one of our cameras, but maybe today the proverbial light bulb came on and you realized that with all that you've experienced and all that you've learned and all that you've done in life, that there was this missing piece, there is this critical piece not just for this life but the next and that's the person of Jesus Christ, and maybe today you realize the absolute need you have for him. You know, the Bible makes it very clear in the book of Romans 10, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I want to encourage you to do that this morning. Now you don't have to call on him out loud, in fact, you don't even have to call on him with the same words that I might use, but let me just encourage you to have a conversation, just what we might call a prayer time with the Lord, and allow me just to guide you and maybe this would be your conversation. "God, today I just want to admit what you already know about me, I'm the problem, and God, I've been the problem my whole life, but today for the first time I realize that Jesus Christ is the answer I've been seeking. Jesus Christ is the only one who can take care of my sin problem so, God, today, I just want to admit, I just want you to know I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on Calvary and three days later he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be

saved. And God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of this life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to save me. I'm asking you to forgive me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life completely over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, it's our hope, it's our prayer that that's already your story, but maybe today it became your story. We'd love to have a conversation with you and we'd love to know how the Lord is working in your life not just in days past but this day in particular. Or maybe you had that conversation with the Lord years ago or decades ago and there are other things that are happening that you need to follow up on, we just want to facilitate that; we just want to have a conversation with you at this hour.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, the evidence, the infallible proofs truly do demand a response, a personal response, not just an academic yes or no, but a personal, "I believe," or, "I don't." So help us, O God, today, not just to acknowledge the truths of Jesus Christ but to believe them. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.