

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

KATHIE LEE GIFFORD

WITH RABBI JASON SOBEL

the ROCK, *the* ROAD,
and the RABBI



Come *to the* Land Where It All Began

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STUDY GUIDE BY KAREN LEE-THORP



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The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi Study Guide

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants is a dry, rocky piece of dirt roughly the size of New Hampshire. It has been quarreled over for millennia because it lies on a land bridge linking Asia and Africa, and is thus a key part of the trade route between those two continents. Every time an empire from the Middle East wanted to expand into North Africa (or vice versa), its army had to march through what we call the Holy Land.

Some of the events of the Bible took place outside the Holy Land, but the whole of Jesus' earthly life was spent there. So, if we want to understand what His life was about, we are well served to know about the places where He lived and taught and died and rose again. This study aims to bring those places alive in ways that will illuminate the message of the Gospels, the message of Jesus. You will also be discovering the very Jewish background of the Gospels in ways that shed fresh light on the Scriptures. If you think you already know what happened in Bethlehem or Jerusalem, get ready to be amazed!

This guide contains six sessions that accompany the six video teachings. You can meet weekly for six weeks, or proceed at a slower pace if you prefer. Each session contains these sections:

- *Today's Tour Stop*: An introduction to the places you will be exploring in the session.
- *First Thoughts*: An icebreaker that will help you get to know others in your group as you start discussing the session's theme. After session one, you will also have a chance to share insights you gained from doing the Digging Deeper work between sessions.
- *Watch the Video*: Includes an outline of key thoughts from the video segment, along with space to write your own notes of what stands out to you.
- *Debriefing the Tour (Group Discussion)*: Questions for your group to discuss. You'll interact with the Bible, the video, and your own stories.
- *Trying It Out*: A fun and enlightening exercise that lets you do something with what you're learning other than just talking about it.
- *That's a Wrap*: A summary of the session teachings.
- *Closing Prayer*: An idea for how to guide your group prayer time as you finish your meeting.
- *Recommended Reading*: The chapters in *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi* book that correspond to this week's study.
- *Digging Deeper*: Questions for you to investigate on your own before the next session. Ideally, you'll want to do these exercises over several sittings rather than trying to do all of them at one time. The exercises are divided into three days, but you can spread them over more days if you prefer.

For group meetings, you will need a copy of this study guide, a Bible, a pen, and an open heart. For the solo work between meetings, you will need:

- A copy of Kathie Lee Gifford's and Rabbi Jason Sobel's book, *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi: My Journey into the Heart of the Scriptural Faith and the Land Where It All Began*
- A Bible
- A pen
- Extra paper or a journal, in case you need more room to express your thoughts

If you're going to do the "Trying It Out" sections of each session, your group leader will need to plan ahead and bring some materials. The materials for each session are:

Session 1: Cardboard, felt tip pens, white ribbon, tape

Session 2: Paper and pens

Session 3: Paper and felt tip pens or pencils

Session 4: No materials

Session 5: Palm branches or stones the size of paper weights, magic markers

Session 6: Laptop, tablet, or smartphone for internet search

FOR GROUP LEADERS

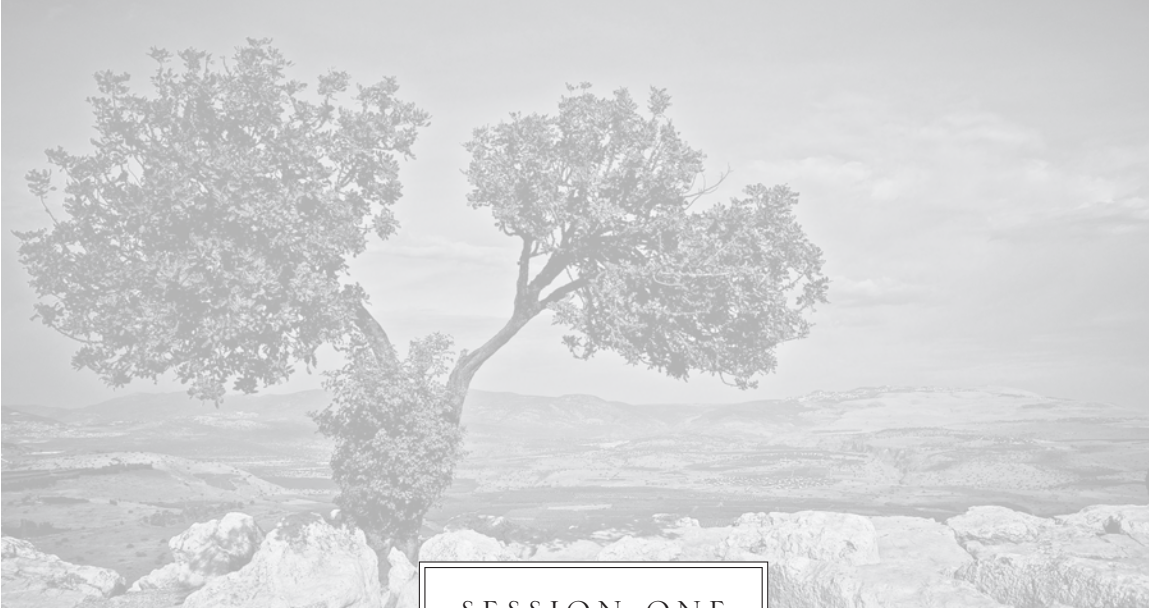
Everything you need to lead your group is right here in this study guide. In each session, watch for the instructions in italics immediately under each section heading. If your group is newly formed, you may find it helpful to go over a few simple ground rules in your first meeting. These can help everyone get the most out of the group experience. For example, most groups are most effective with ground rules like these:

- *Confidentiality*: What someone shares in the group stays in the group and is not repeated to outsiders for any reason.
- *Active Listening*: One of the best gifts you can give each other is your full attention. Listen closely to what others say in your group. Don't be focused on what you can say as soon as someone pauses. Think about what the other person is saying. Don't dominate the discussion.
- *No Distractions*: Silence and put away your phone.
- *Honesty*: Be honest about what you think.
- *Timeliness*: Arrive on time.
- *Commitment*: Try to commit to attending all six sessions of the group. If you can't attend, let the leader know.

As the leader, your primary job is to keep discussions on track with an eye on the clock to be sure you get through the whole session in ninety minutes. You may also need to keep the conversation shared fairly by drawing out quieter members and helping more talkative members to remember that others' insights are valued in your group.

It will be helpful if you preview the session's video teaching segment and then scan the discussion questions that pertain to it, highlighting various questions that you want to be sure to cover during your group's meeting. Ask God in advance of your time together to guide your group's discussion, and then be sensitive to the direction He wishes to lead.

Ask group members to bring their study guide and pen to every meeting. Urge them to consider buying a copy of *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi* book by Kathie Lee Gifford to read along with this study.



SESSION ONE

BETHLEHEM
Where It All Began

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

LUKE 2:4-7



TODAY'S TOUR STOP

Ask someone in the group to read aloud this introduction to today's main setting: Bethlehem.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town about six miles south-southwest of Jerusalem. Today its population is about 25,000, mainly Palestinian Arabs, most of whom are Muslim, though there is a sizeable Palestinian Christian community. It is surrounded by major Jewish settlements of some 170,000 people. But in Jesus' day, Bethlehem was a Jewish town with a population of fewer than a thousand people, and maybe as few as one hundred.¹

Bethlehem was important as the birthplace of King David, a thousand years before Jesus. There was a prophecy that the Messiah, a descendant of David, would be born in Bethlehem. The Messiah was expected to be a godly military leader like David, who would drive out the foreign oppressors who controlled the Holy Land. At the time of Jesus' birth, His homeland was ruled by a nominal Jew, Herod the Great, who ignored God's law and collaborated with the hated Romans.

In this session, we will go to Bethlehem to see what happened there in the time of Herod the Great. We will explore the drama behind the Christmas carols about the little town of Bethlehem.

FIRST THOUGHTS

If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then have each person in the group share an answer to these questions:



What images, feelings, and thoughts come to mind when you hear the word Bethlehem?



What do you hope to get out of a study of the Gospels and the Holy Land?

WATCH THE VIDEO

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the outline below to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

NOTES

We tend to picture Jesus as being born in a stable, but the evidence suggests He was born in a cave—the birthing place of lambs.

Jewish tradition tells us the animals born around the fields in Bethlehem were used as sacrifices in the temple for the worship of the Lord.

The caves were kept in a state of ritual purity, and the lambs were wrapped in swaddling cloth to keep them without spot or blemish.

Jesus was wrapped like one of these baby lambs to show that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Priestly garments too worn for use were made into the wicks of the menorah in the temple, which points to Jesus as the light of the world.

Every event in Jesus' life revolves around a Jewish holiday—He died as the Passover Lamb; His resurrection was on the Feast of Firstfruits; and He poured out His spirit on Pentecost.

DEBRIEFING THE TOUR

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What caught your attention most as you viewed the video?

2. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:1–18. (Because it is long, you could change readers every few paragraphs.) Jesus was born in the humblest of places: a cave for animals. In what ways did His humility reveal His greatness?



Bethlehem is about eighty miles from Nazareth. It would have taken about four days on foot or with a donkey to cover that distance. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph traveled the eighty miles to Bethlehem to enroll in a census for tax purposes.

A manger is a feeding trough for animals (see verses 7, 12). Swaddling cloths were strips of fabric in which the baby was wrapped to immobilize his arms and legs to give him more restful sleep.

Levitical shepherds were shepherds from the priestly tribe of Levi. They had the job of raising animals that were pure enough to be used for sacrifice in the temple.

3. What explanations did Rabbi Sobel give in the video for why Jesus was:

- Placed in a manger in a cave?

- Wrapped in swaddling cloths?

4. Why is it significant that Jesus may have been born in the same place as the lambs used for sacrifice in the temple?

5. What is the significance of the infant Jesus being wrapped in cloth that came from used priestly garments?

6. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the information about the Feast of Tabernacles below. What do you think about the idea that Jesus may have been born in September on the Feast of Tabernacles, rather than on December 25?



The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the wandering of the Israelites in the desert after God liberated them from slavery in Egypt. Each September, Jews build temporary structures much like those the Israelites lived in during their wandering, and live in them during the holiday. This holiday commemorates how God provided manna from heaven to feed the Israelites, water from the stones to quench them, and a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night to guide them. Ultimately, it reflects God's presence, provision, and protection. And for Christians, it reminds us of the time when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us [literally, tabernacled among us]" (John 1:14).

TRYING IT OUT

This is a hands-on activity to help you fix in your mind something you've learned in this session. For this activity, you will need cardboard, felt tip pens, white ribbon, and tape.

A crèche is a scene of the nativity, the birth of Jesus. Many Christians set up crèches at Christmastime to help them imagine the wonderful event in Bethlehem. Crèches can be made of wood,

pottery, or many other materials. As a way of making the events more real to the members of your group, you can make a simple crèche together.

On sheets of cardboard, draw pictures of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, a manger, shepherds, sheep, and a lamb. Make the adult figures at least six inches tall and the other figures in proportion to them. Cut out the figures. You may color or laminate them if you like. Tape additional wedges of cardboard onto the backs of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the sheep so the figures can stand up. Use white ribbon to swaddle the baby Jesus and the lambs. Arrange your figures the way you imagine them in the cave at Bethlehem.

Another idea to try: buy or borrow a crèche, a nativity scene, to display in your home at Christmastime. Be sure to get some sheep with your crèche. When you display it, wrap the baby Jesus in strips of old cloth (linen would have been used in His day, but cotton will serve just as well). Also, wrap one of the sheep in strips of cloth to represent the young lambs that would have been swaddled there. Let this be a visual reminder of what you've learned about Jesus' birth.

THAT'S A WRAP

This week, you and your group members learned some insights about Jesus' birth from Jewish tradition. You learned what Luke may have meant when he wrote in his Gospel about Jesus being wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. As you prepare for personal study time this week, reflect on the truth that even from His birth, Jesus was destined to be our Passover Lamb without blemish, born to die to free us from sin and death.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father of grace, we thank You for sending Your Son into the world to be our Passover Lamb. Thank You that through His coming in the flesh, He has dealt with sin and death for all who trust in Him. We offer ourselves completely to You and ask You to be active and real in our lives this week. Please fill us with courage to face whatever comes to us during the coming week as we keep our eyes fixed on the Lamb. In Jesus' name, Amen.

RECOMMENDED READING

Read chapters 5 and 6 of *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi*.

SESSION ONE
Personal Study

DIGGING DEEPER

This section offers additional Bible passages for you to dig into on your own to enrich your study of this session's themes. Explore them all or select those that appeal to you.

DAY ONE



Read Matthew 2:1–18. Why would Herod have been disturbed by the birth of someone whom the Magi called king of the Jews?



The “Magi” (verse 1) were probably followers of the Persian religion called Zoroastrianism. They were astronomer/astrologers who saw signs in the heavens about many things. We don’t know how many of them went to worship the king of the Jews. Western tradition sets their number at three because of the three gifts they brought. Their importance is that they were non-Jews who recognized that the king of the Jews was going to be a significant figure for non-Jews as well.



How did Herod try to deal with the problem?




How did God outwit Herod?



How does the slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem affect your view of the Christmas story?





Consider that the non-Jewish magi went to worship the king of the Jews. Why might this be important to you?

 King Herod was a rich and powerful man during his lifetime. How does our culture urge us to admire and envy people like him?

 List some concrete steps we can take to resist this influence.

DAY TWO

 To deepen your understanding of Jesus as the Passover lamb, read Exodus 12:1–13. This passage takes place while Moses is attempting to free the descendants of Jacob/Israel from slavery in Egypt. The passage contains the Old Testament law's instructions for the Passover lamb. What do you learn from this passage that sheds light on what Jesus accomplished for us as our Passover lamb?

 Why do you think it was so important that the sacrificed lamb was unblemished? How does this correlate to Jesus?



What do you think was the point of putting blood on the door frame of the family's house? How does this correlate to Jesus?

The most central element of the Seder [Passover meal] in the first century was the Passover lamb. The command to eat the Passover lamb is first found in Exodus 12:8, which states: "They are to eat the meat that night, roasted over a fire. With *matzot* and bitter herbs they are to eat it" (TLV). The offering of the Passover lamb was meant to be a reminder of blood placed on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes in Egypt.

But not just any lamb would be acceptable to be eaten in fulfillment of the commandment of Passover. The Passover lamb had to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to the Lord (*korban*, in Hebrew), in the designated location that had been chosen for offerings. Deuteronomy 16:5–6 states: "You may not sacrifice the Passover offering within any of your gates that ADONAI your God is giving you. Rather, at the place ADONAI your God chooses to make His Name dwell, there you will sacrifice the Passover offering in the evening at sunset—the time of your coming out from Egypt" (TLV).

Since the destruction of the second Jerusalem temple by the Romans in AD 70, there has been no Passover sacrifice offered in the fulfillment of this prophecy. For this reason, Jews of European descent don't eat lamb today and will not do so until the temple in Jerusalem is restored.

Jesus taught that He was the true Passover lamb and the promised Messiah who came to bring about a greater Exodus. Moses came to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt, but Messiah Jesus came to bring deliverance from sin and death. From the perspective of the New Testament, true freedom is found in God's Son, Jesus, of whom it is written, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!" (John 8:36 TLV).

God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, so that everyone who receives and believes in Him might find freedom and everlasting life in the world to come! Just like Israel had to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts of their homes so that death would pass over their firstborn sons, so everyone of us must apply the blood of Jesus, the greater Passover Lamb of God, so that death and judgment will pass over us!

—From *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi*



What additional insights into Jesus as our Passover lamb do you glean from Rabbi Sobel's teaching in the preceding book excerpt?



List some differences these insights will make in the way you live:



How have you experienced the freedom that Rabbi Sobel speaks of?





Who can you tell about Jesus, your Passover lamb?





The Gospel writers intentionally used terms that were in current use in the Roman Empire when they were writing. For example, Augustus Caesar—the reigning emperor at the time of Jesus' birth—was proclaimed on coins and monuments to be “the son of God” because his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, had been declared to be divine. The “gospel” was the good news that Augustus had brought peace on earth through his reign (by the power of the Roman army enforcing the peace). Augustus was called “Savior” and “Lord.” There was a cult of Augustus by which people offered a pinch of incense in homage to him. They were encouraged to have “faith” in his promise to bring security and prosperity. The Gospel writers applied these words to Jesus to show that He was the true Lord who should be worshiped and that no Christian should place allegiance in a worldly empire.²

DAY THREE

 Why do you think the Gospel writers incorporated politically charged language into their writings?

 What does this tell you about their view of the Roman Empire and its claim that its emperors were divine?

 How do you think we are meant to relate to our own government's leaders in light of what the Bible claims about Jesus?

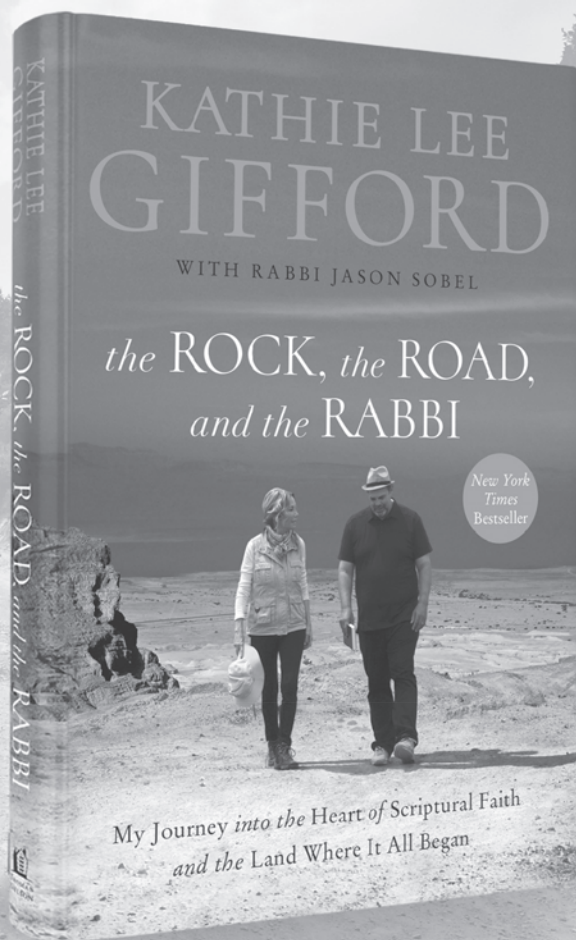
 Do you tend to appreciate the role of the government (national, state, and local) in your life or to be suspicious of it? Why?

Offer to Jesus your praise as the one and only rightful ruler of heaven and earth.

REFLECT

- Jesus was born in a stable or a cave where animals were kept. He was wrapped in strips of cloth. It was not a glorious entrance into this world. Reflect on the significance of Jesus' birth and the circumstances surrounding his arrival as it relates to your understanding of who Jesus is.
- Consider the explanation of the Passover, the Passover lamb, and the Jewish tradition of Passover. Reflect on what these mean in your life today.
- Reflect on the kingdom that God established and what role you play in it. Think about how your role in the kingdom of God intersects with your role in earthly "kingdoms."

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