

The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi

My Journey into the Heart of
Scriptural Faith and the Land
Where It All Began



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7-Day Devotional Reading Plan

This reading plan includes seven daily devotions based on *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi*, by Kathie Lee Gifford and Rabbi Jason Sobel (copyright, 2018 Kathie Lee Gifford). These devotions will help prepare your heart for the start of *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi* Video Online Bible Study, beginning August 6 at www.StudyGateway.com/OBS. This study will help you develop a deeper passion for understanding God’s Word in its original setting as you tour the land of the Bible with Kathie Lee and Rabbi Jason. It will also build your heart’s desire to know Jesus—the core focus of the Bible and the One who gave everything for us.

DAY 1

Beginning the Journey

Bible Verses:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–23 ESV).

Devotion

Before I (Kathie Lee) began my new job as co-host of the fourth hour of *The Today Show* in 2008, I felt the Lord tugging at my spirit with the words of Matthew 6:33: *Kathie, seek first My kingdom and My righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

I remember responding, “Lord, You know that’s what I am trying to do—put You and Your kingdom first in my life.”

Then I felt Him gently rebuke me: *You're not listening. I said to seek Me first!*

"Lord," I questioned, "do You mean first thing in the morning before anything else?" In my heart, I sensed His clear answer: *Yes.*

Wow. I already got up earlier than most—usually right before dawn. "Really, Lord?" I said. "Before I go into work?"

Yes. I felt Him tenderly remind me, *As you begin your day, so goes your day.*

So I began to wake up before 4:00 AM and pray for an hour for my family members, friends, colleagues, world situations, and personal concerns. Then I would open the Bible and study God's Word for an hour more, with my puppies and the birds outside my window as my only company.

This new discipline soon became the best part—and my favorite part—of the day. Changing my morning routine has changed my life. I began not only to study the Word but also to memorize as much as I could so that Scripture would become a living, breathing part of me. No textbook needed, no study guide necessary—just the pure, life-giving, sustaining Word of God settled deep in my soul.

One of my favorite verses is Psalm 18:30: "As for God, his way is perfect: The LORD's word is flawless." Friends, this is either a fact or a lie. There is no middle ground. This is why I have grown so passionate about learning what the Bible really says. If I am going to base my life on something, it has to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God! But how can we live the truth if we don't even know it?

The word *truth* occurs in the Bible over 200 times. God places immeasurable value in it, and He longs for each of us to seek it, find it, and apply it to our lives. All too often we are so overwhelmed by technology, our personal dramas, and our endless ambition that we neglect to study God's Word. Imagine how it breaks the heart of our heavenly Father, who loves us, when He sees us putting our energy into everything but the one thing that can bring us life.

You have the exciting opportunity to discover the *truth* of the Bible and learn what many passages in the Bible really mean. You can experience the Rock (Jesus), the Road (the Holy Land), and the Rabbi (the Word of God) in a way you might not have done before. So come deeper as we explore the land of Israel and mine the treasures of God's Word!

Respond

How has your perspective on the value and relevance of God's Word changed over the course of your life? What do you think brought about that change in perspective?

How does time with God and His Word currently fit into your day? What attitude do you *want* to have in regard to spending time in prayer and studying the Bible?

How is understanding the truth of God's Word an important part of growing in your relationship with God? What needs to change in your life to make time with God more of a priority?

DAY 2

Valuing Our Friendship with Christ (Bethlehem)

Bible Verse:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2).

Devotion

My love affair with the land of Israel began the moment I took my very first step onto the Promised Land in June 1971. I was seventeen years old. All the stories I had heard, all the scriptures I had studied since I was a young girl—*everything* I believed from the Word of God had taken place thousands of years before in this land I was experiencing for the first time! That thought took my breath away all those years ago. It still does today.

I have returned to Israel many times during the last forty-five years, and each time I have come back a totally transformed person. But on one recent trip, I was deeply disturbed when our tour group visited modern-day Bethlehem. Scripture tells us Bethlehem was the birthplace of Jesus, the Messiah prophesied in Micah 5:2 about 700 years before Jesus' birth. Yet today, the city of Bethlehem is controlled by the Palestinian Authority, and it feels—as my daughter, Cassidy, described it—"darkly oppressive." There are military checkpoints as you enter and exit. It hardly

feels joyful or anything like how the shepherds experienced it two millennia ago, as a place of great rejoicing at the Savior's birth.

Yet this is where the story of Jesus' life on earth began, and it has great significance for believers in Christ—even in the small details, like the shepherds who visited the baby Jesus. As Rabbi Jason Sobel, my co-author on the book (a colorful, funny, delightful, brilliant, and given-to-rapping Messianic Jew) describes it, the shepherds who visited were no ordinary sheep herders. Rather, they were Levitical shepherds, trained and tasked with the responsibility of tending and guarding the flocks used for sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem.

Not only that, but Jesus was likely born in a cave reserved for the birth of Passover lambs. Since there was no room in the local inn, Mary and Joseph would have chosen one of these caves for the birth of Jesus. Just think about this: *Jesus was born in a cave used for birthing sacrificial lambs, because He Himself would be the ultimate sacrificial lamb.*

Rabbi Jason also note that Jesus was not only born in Bethlehem, which is the city of David, but that He was also the promised *Son of David*. He was the Messiah and King who came to fulfill the Davidic Covenant—God's promise that one of David's descendants would live on the throne forever. He would also establish the New Covenant that would last forever, as described in Jeremiah 31:31: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah" (see also Isaiah 9:7 and Hebrews 8).

Jesus came to make a covenant with us, and He was so committed to us that He chose to die in order establish it, demonstrating how seriously He takes His friendship with us! This is what John 15:13 alludes to: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Now, that's a true friend. Isn't it amazing? But we must make sure we are valuing His friendship and taking full advantage of it.

Respond

Think of a place that you feel connected to by virtue of your birth or ancestry. Why is that place meaningful? How does visiting that place impact you?

How has God used a place to show His love and care for you? What did you experience? With whom did you share that experience?

Why is it significant that Jesus was born in a cave reserved for birthing Passover lambs? How does this help you see that God was always providing clues as to His Son's purpose on earth?

DAY 3

Reflecting God to the World (Nazareth)

Bible Verse:

“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:15–16).

Devotion

When my husband, Frank, and I visited Israel for the first time, we quickly discovered that our tour guide, Ray Vander Laan, was a memorable individual. He not only looked like Harrison Ford from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but he even dressed like him and wore an Indiana Jones-style hat straight out of the Paramount Studios wardrobe!

But Ray’s message was completely his own. During one stop on our trip, Ray asked us, “How many of you know what Jesus and Joseph, his earthly father, did for a living before He began His ministry as a rabbi when He turned thirty?” Every one of us answered, “He was a carpenter.” We were a smug bunch. But Ray quickly rocked our world with his answer.

“Actually, no,” he said. “Jesus wasn’t a carpenter, although there is no doubt that he did work with wood at times, along with other items.” Now, at this point, I have to confess I was wondering what I was doing on a mountaintop 5,710 miles away from home with a guy who obviously didn’t even know the basics of the Bible! But that was the moment my life changed.

Ray explained, “The word translated *carpenter* in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 for how Joseph and Jesus made a living is the Greek word *tektōn*. It means *builder*.” He paused to make his next point sink in. “You see . . . there were only rocks in Israel. This is an example of one of the many poor translations in the Bible.”

And then Ray gave us a stunning insight. “Jesus was *not* a carpenter. Jesus was a stone mason.” I was shaken to the depths of my soul. Suddenly, everything made sense! I remembered several Bible verses that referred to building with stones—passages such as John 8:7, Matthew 16:18, and Psalm 118:22. I was seeing Jesus in a new way, based on the truth of Scripture, touching the land (and the stones) where He walked.

As Rabbi Jason explains, *tektōn* can actually be translated as either *stone mason* or *architect*. Both concepts are significant in reference to Jesus, since they connect back to Him as the architect of creation. Genesis 1:1 can be translated, “Through the Firstborn, God created the heavens and the earth.” And who is God’s Firstborn? It is Jesus. He was the “firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15) and “The firstborn from the dead” (Revelation 1:5).

Jesus is the master craftsman and architect of creation who brings order out of chaos and *shalom* to our lives in this world and in the world to come. Bringing light out of darkness and order was one of God’s first actions as Creator. We are called to do the same. When we imitate our Creator, we allow God’s light to shine in the midst of the darkness, thereby displaying our good works to others so they might glorify our Father in heaven. Living as image-bearers infuses our lives with meaning and reflects God’s image to those around us.

God longs to show the world His goodness through the way we live. But unfortunately, His goodness and peace can’t flourish in the midst of chaos. The Lord always brings order before He fully manifests His blessing of peace. For this reason, when we care for His creation by working with Him to bring order out of chaos, we show His goodness to the world.

Respond

What assumptions have you had about God that were not based on Scripture? How has your study of God’s Word helped you correct misconceptions about Him and know Him better?

Why is it significant that the word used to describe Jesus in the Gospels (*tektōn*) refers to him both as being an architect and stone mason?

Who in your life needs to see who Jesus really is? What part can you play in illuminating the light of Christ to them and bringing peace to their situation?

DAY 4

Learning from the Master Teacher (Capernaum)

Bible Verses:

“With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything” (Mark 4:33–34).

Devotion

Although Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth, the Bible tells us He moved to Capernaum to establish a sort of headquarters for His earthly ministry. This was strategic. Capernaum sits on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee, and it was an important commercial stop along an ancient trade route.

It was there in Capernaum that our guide, Ray Vander Laan, first explained the role of the rabbis in first-century Jewish life. Apparently, Jewish men were not allowed to become rabbis, or teachers, until they were thirty years old. At that time, they would gather disciples and travel through the countryside, speaking to the local people along the way and in the various synagogues on the Sabbath. Historically, the synagogue was central to the Jewish people and the Jewish faith. It was there the rabbis explained the fundamentals of the faith to the often-confused individuals who followed them on their travels through the countryside.

Rabbis were trained to be “good shepherds” to the common people who, like sheep, were in desperate need of leadership. The rabbis were aware that the people who listened to them were, for the most part, uneducated peasant folk, so they spoke of things the average person could understand through their senses—what they could see, smell, hear, touch, or taste. Given this, it’s little wonder we read of Jesus telling parables that involve everyday items such as lilies (see Matthew 6:28), or millstones (see Matthew 18:6), or seed scattered along the side of a path (see Matthew 13:3). Teaching in parables was an art form of communication at the most primal level—and nobody did it better than Jesus.

During our tour, Ray would begin each day with us circled around him. Then we would recite the ancient Hebrew *Shema*, recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” The Jewish people have been reciting this verse every morning and evening since before the birth of Jesus. The purpose of reciting it is to declare love and allegiance to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is also meant to testify to the world that God is One, that there are no other gods, and that we must therefore serve and worship Him alone—even if this means laying down our lives.

Jesus declared the *Shema* as foundational to faith when He answered the teacher of the law about what was the greatest commandment (see Mark 12:28–34). He also used parables as He taught what it meant to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (verses

30–31). Jesus knew the longing in the people’s hearts to understand the truths He was teaching. He loved the purity of their desire to know their heavenly Father more intimately.

I’m sure the people loved the beauty and simplicity of Jesus’ teachings, just as we do today. And I’m sure they appreciated that He never spoke down to them or belittled them, like the religious leaders of the day often did. They needed hope, and Jesus provided it to them.

Respond

Think about the best teacher you had in school. What made his or her teaching so effective? How did that person impact your love of learning?

Jesus spoke in parables so the people of His day would understand His message. What does this tell you about God’s desire for you to understand Him and His Word? How are you responding to God’s offer and seeking His wisdom?

Which of Jesus’ parables has helped you to understand more about God and how He operates? How can you use stories of faith from your own life to help someone else know Jesus?

DAY 5

Being on Equal Footing with Others (Galilee)

Bible Verses:

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26–28).

Devotion

Daily living for every Jew was an act of faith. They spent each waking moment trying to keep not only the Torah—the Mosaic Law—but also the extra 600-hundred-plus man-made laws imposed on them by the religious leaders of the time. We can’t imagine the weight of such a legalistic burden on everyday life. No one could be pure enough, or holy enough, or without blemish before God under such self-righteous leaders.

Jesus came to ease the burdens on the Jewish people. In Matthew 11:28–30, He said: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you

and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” No wonder the peoples’ hearts soared when they heard Him teach! No one in their world ever spoke such words of life or hope or compassion to them. Such love!

But perhaps no one in the ancient world longed for Jesus’ message of grace more than women. In first-century Israel, their freedoms were severely limited by Jewish law and traditions. They were basically confined to their father’s or their husband’s homes and had no authority of their own. They were considered inferior to men and little more status than slaves. But Jesus consistently demonstrated that He had a high value and respect for women.

One of my favorite stories of Jesus’ love for women is in Mark 5, when He heals a woman whose menstrual cycle has caused her to suffer for twelve years. She touched the hem of His garment (a major violation of the law), and He broke the law as well by talking to her in public. Rabbi Jason has some beautiful insights about this story of Jesus’ love.

As he notes, this woman was desperate—she had not been touched by family or friends for twelve years! She had lived for over a decade in a perpetual state of shame as an outcast who was excluded from the social and spiritual life of her community. She was afraid, but when she heard Jesus was coming to her town, she felt she had nothing to lose and took a big risk. Jesus’ gentle response underscores how radically different He dealt with women than did other men of His day. Rather than being upset—which would have been the normal reaction from a rabbi or priest—He commended the woman’s faith (see Mark 5:34).

Rabbi Jason also notes that just as the woman with the issue of blood was viewed as unclean, many religious leaders in Jesus’ day viewed the Gentile nations as unclean and unworthy. This perspective was due to the fact that nations of the world were pagan at this time, and their cultures were dominated by idolatry, bloodshed, and sexual immorality. Despite this, Jesus did not focus on their sin but on God’s promise of redemption for all people.

Just like the woman who grabbed hold of Jesus and found personal redemption, one day all the nations of the world will do the same (see Zechariah 8:22–23). Jesus sees all people as having equal value in Christ (see Galatians 3:28). This does not mean there is no longer any differences or distinctions between men and women or Gentiles and Jews; rather, it implies a spiritual equality. There are no second-class citizens in God’s kingdom!

Respond

What are some of the rules you live by? How have some of these proven to be helpful? How have some proven to be a burden?

What are some fears that keep you from approaching God? What does this story of the woman with the issue of blood tell you about how He receives you into His presence?

Who do you know that needs to experience God's grace and acceptance? How can you be an example of faith and freedom to that person?

DAY 6

Longing for Jesus' Return (Mount of Olives)

Bible Verse:

"But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Luke 12:39–40).

Devotion

The Mount of Olives is a mountain ridge east of and adjacent to the Old City of Jerusalem. Olive groves once covered its slopes, and a small grove—the Garden of Gethsemane—remains there to this day. What surprises some first-time visitors is that this place has been used as a Jewish cemetery for over 3,000 years. Many Jews believe the Messiah will someday arrive in Jerusalem through the Mount of Olives—and when He does, the dead will rise from their graves and walk to the Temple Mount. Therefore, many Jewish believers wish to be buried at this site.

The Mount of Olives is one of my favorite places in all of Israel, for it features prominently in the Gospels and in the life of Jesus. Yet according to the Bible, the Mount of Olives will also play an important role in the second coming of Jesus during the end times. As Zechariah prophesied, "Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:3–4).

There is an ancient road that descends from the top of the mountain to the bottom at the foot of the Kidron Valley. This is the road on which Jesus rode on the foal of a donkey on Palm Sunday, during the last week of His life. As Rabbi Jason describes it, Jesus made this first entry

into Jerusalem as the Lamb of God riding on a donkey—a symbol of humility and peace (see Zechariah 9:9). During His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He wept over the city. He saw that it would be destroyed because the people did not recognize or receive Him as the promised Messiah, the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets (see Luke 19:28–44).

But it was also from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after His resurrection (see Acts 1:9–12). Jesus likely chose this location because of its prophetic significance. His ascent to heaven as the Messiah was meant as a precursor and sneak preview of His ultimate return as described in Zechariah 14:4. This was soon confirmed by the angels who appeared to the disciples and said, “Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

At Rabbi Jason notes, at Jesus’ second coming, He will descend from the heavens riding a white war horse ready to vanquish all evil from the world (see Revelation 19:1–16). But in the meantime, it is our role as His followers to actively look for, long for, and pray for His coming—just like the disciples who watched Him ascend. Think how your life would be changed if you passionately longed for and lived every day as if this would be the moment Jesus would return!

Respond

What does it mean to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah? What are the consequences of denying Him as God’s promised Savior and King?

What do you see in our world that causes you to weep for the future of its people? How can you “watch and pray” to keep your faith strong during trying times? Who would you like to see accept Jesus as God’s promised Messiah? How is the hope we have in Christ good news to share?

What would you say to the unbelievers in your life if you knew Jesus was returning today? We don’t know when Jesus will return (see Mark 13:32-37); it could be today. How does the urgency that Jesus may return at any time affect how you share your faith? How can this possibility impact how you live your daily life?

DAY 7

Following the Path to Redemption (Jerusalem)

Bible Verse:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Devotion

I have read the biblical account of Jesus’ arrest, “trial,” scourging, and crucifixion hundreds of times. Interestingly, the biblical narrative of Jesus’ last day on earth parallels what was known as the Roman Triumph. This ceremony began with Roman soldiers assembled at the Praetorium, where the guards were stationed. They would place a purple robe (the color of royalty) on the emperor and a wreath on his head. Then they would shout, “Hail Caesar!”

The emperor and the guards would wind their way along the Via Sacra in Rome to arrive at the Capitoline, or “head hill.” Once there, a bull would be sacrificed by someone who had been carrying an instrument of death. The emperor would be offered a bowl of wine, which he would refuse or sometimes pour on the head of the sacrificial bull. Finally, he would ascend the steps of the Capitoline. The population would declare him as their “savior”—their divine Caesar—and look for signs in the heavens to confirm their leader’s coronation.

After Jesus had been sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the Roman guards took Him to the Praetorium in Jerusalem. There they stripped Him, threw a purple robe over Him, and placed a crown of thorns on His head. They mockingly worshiped Him, shouting, “Hail, the King of the Jews” and bowed down to Him, striking Him and spitting on Him. Once they tired of this sport, they led Him away along the Via Dolorosa to be crucified. Jesus carried His own cross (instrument of death) until He collapsed beneath it.

A passerby was forced to carry Jesus’ cross for Him to Golgotha (“the Place of the Skull”). There, the soldiers laid Jesus on the cross and crucified Him along with two revolutionaries. They offered Him sour wine, which He refused. Pontius Pilate had insisted that a sign reading “THE KING OF JEWS” be nailed to Jesus’ cross. As He suffered, the crowd around Him taunted Him, “Hail, the King of the Jews.” They hurled blasphemies and insults on Him. Once Jesus gave up His spirit, there was an earthquake and the curtain at the entrance to the Holy of Holies in the temple was split in two from the top to the bottom. Signs, indeed.

Rabbi Jason notes the significance of many of the items we find at the crucifixion. First, there is the cross. Just as sin entered the world by means of a tree, so God put His Son on a tree, in the form of a cross, to redeem us from sin. God put Jesus, the second Adam, on the tree to make restitution for what had been stolen from the tree in the Garden. The first Adam brought death by means of a tree, but the second Adam brought life by means of His death on one!

And there is more. The crown the Romans placed on Jesus' head also points back to the Garden of Eden. The sign of God's curse was that the ground would "produce thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18). By wearing a crown of thorns at His crucifixion, Jesus took upon Himself the curse of creation—to undo it for the purpose of restoring the blessing!

Jesus' body was pierced so that He might overcome sin, Satan, and death for our sake. He loved us so much that He was willing to identify with our pain and suffering. He tasted death so that we might experience life!

Respond

How would you describe your understanding of what Jesus did on the cross? Where do you stand on accepting or rejecting what Jesus has done for you?

How does knowing all of Scripture points toward God's plan to redeem you through the death and resurrection of Jesus impact how you value His Word?

What does it mean to you to know you are safe in the hands of Jesus when you accept Him as your savior? Why do you think some people struggle with this assurance?

Thank you for reading this 7-day devotional!

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