

A close-up photograph of green palm fronds, likely from a date palm, is positioned in the upper right corner of the page. The fronds are long and slender, with a central rachis and several leaflets extending outwards. The lighting is soft, creating a gentle shadow of the fronds on the light-colored background.

5-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY

Easter

BEHOLD YOUR KING

LIFEWAY WOMEN

Easter

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LIFEWAY WOMEN

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How to Use This Study

Welcome! This Easter study may vary from others you've done. We know many Bible study groups don't always meet during the Easter season, so we wanted to provide a study you can do alone, with family, or with your friends! Along with daily personal study, we've provided activities each week you may choose to do by yourself, with your kids, or with friends. Each week you'll find:

- an introduction;
- group discussion questions in the Group Guide;
- five days of personal study;
- activities to do individually, with kids and teens, or with your friends and family.

Use the five days of personal study to reflect, allowing God's Word to nourish your soul. This study is designed to help you see the true meaning of Easter—that our hope is found only in Jesus Christ, the risen Savior.

GROUP DISCUSSION

If you decide to do this study with others, use the Group Guide discussion questions and the personal study each week to guide your conversation. In addition to answering the questions in the Group Guide, invite women to share specific things they learned from each day of study and to share Scripture that made an impact on them during the week. During the group meeting you may want to invite women to share how they've incorporated the kids, teens, and adult activities into this Easter season. As an option, your group may want to bring the supplies needed to complete one of the activities in a group setting as you discuss the Group Guide questions and personal study.

Because Easter can be a busy season, we hope the activities in the study provide a time of rest and reflection. We hope you'll enjoy sharing the love of Jesus with your family, friends, and neighbors during this time of the year.

A GROUP TIME MIGHT LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

- Welcome everyone to the group.
- Discuss the questions on the Group Guide page for that week.
- Review the five days of personal study.
- Ask women to share any special activities they added to their week as they focused on Easter.
- Close in prayer.

SHARE WITH OTHERS

There may be those in your neighborhood or community who don't understand the meaning of Easter. Invite them to join you. Build authentic relationships with them. Use the Group Guide questions and host a group in your home to share what the Bible says about Jesus' death and resurrection and how your celebration of Easter is different because of Christ.

Introduction

Easter has become a part of the fabric of our culture, especially in the United States. Almost immediately after Valentine's Day, the life-size cupids succumb to aisles littered with bunnies, chicks, and pastels. Folks who wouldn't claim to be "religious" even celebrate Easter, popping a pack of PEEPS® into their carts on the way out of the store.

One of the reasons we love Easter is because, in many ways, it signals the long-awaited arrival of spring, bursting with new life and new hope, just when we think we can't handle the doldrums of winter one moment longer.

Many of us get wrapped up in the joys of the celebration and the extravagance of Easter services without understanding what it's actually all about. I think we'd all agree, Easter was a significant event—otherwise, why are we still marking the occasion thousands of years later? But do we really understand the deeper meaning?

That's the heart behind the study you hold in your hands. We want to take five weeks together to intentionally and prayerfully pull back the curtain, asking God to help us understand the big picture of Easter—surely everything we've learned in these Passion plays wasn't wrong—while also exploring some of the deeper meanings of what God was doing in Jesus' death and resurrection and the days leading up to these events.

WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Our main focus in this study will be on Passion Week—the last few days of Jesus' thirty-three years here on earth. We'll move chronologically through these days, watching Him purposefully and lovingly walk toward the cross. Then, we'll see Him resurrected, modeling new life, defeating fear of death and sin forever.

I think you'd agree, peoples' last actions and last words carry great weight. In the final moments of our lives, we only want to communicate the important things, the most true and pure things to the people we love most.

In exploring Passion Week, we are watching Jesus finish well. Being fully God as well as fully man, He knew His time was short. We will witness Him making

sure He said what He needed to say to His family and followers whom He loved so dearly. We will see Jesus walk through the hardest assignment God the Father has ever handed out. We will watch Him suffer with unrelenting perseverance, integrity, and purpose.

We're going to unpack several of the Old Testament prophecies and how they were fulfilled in the last days of Jesus' life. We're going to examine some of the meaning and intention behind Jesus' activity during Passion Week. And we're going to see how Jesus' actions thousands of years ago speak directly to our everyday lives now and our eternal lives forever.

As we'll explore together, the first century world was languishing in pain and suffering and injustice, with no hope in sight. Jesus burst on the scene offering an "unorthodox" (pun intended) way to new life and joy—just when He knew we couldn't handle this world of darkness and hopelessness a moment longer. He sacrificed Himself on the cross, died, and rose again the third day to bring us inexhaustible purpose and unspeakable joy now and forever.

Jesus' suffering was meant to bring you new life. If you ask me, that's the best news there ever was.

Augustine is famously quoted as saying, "We are Easter people and alleluia is our song."¹ As followers of Jesus, understanding the beauty and importance of His sacrifice allows us each to add our voices to the alleluia chorus of worship that's been sung by believers throughout the ages—one that will be sung for all of eternity. A sacrifice of praise that's more than deserved for Jesus' spotless sacrifice for us. And while we're on this side of heaven, we are uniquely positioned to point others to Him as our glorious Savior and our mighty Lord.

We pray this study will fuel your joy and hope in being loved by Jesus. We pray it will spur you to intimate worship of Him. We pray it will lead you to tell others how Jesus came to save them too.

The chorus needs your alleluia. Let's start warming up our voices.



JESUS'

LAST WEEK

SUNDAY



- Royal entry into Jerusalem
(Mark 11:1-10)
- Weeps over Jerusalem
(Luke 19:41-44)
- Spends night at Bethany
(Mark 11:11)

MONDAY



- Curses the fig tree
(Matt. 21:18-22)
- Cleanses the temple
(Mark 11:15-19)

TUESDAY



- Teaches in parables
(Matt. 21:28-22:14)
- Debates the rulers in the temple
(Matt. 22:15-46)
- Mount of Olives discourse
(Matt. 24-25)

WEDNESDAY



- Anointed at Bethany
(Mark 14:3-9)
- Betrayal plot is formed
(Luke 22:1-6)

THURSDAY



- The Passover meal
(*Luke 22:7-20*)
- Washes disciples' feet
(*John 13:1-17*)
- Intercessory prayer
(*John 17*)
- Agony in Gethsemane
(*Matt. 26:36-46*)
- Betrayal and arrest
(*Matt. 26:47-56*)

FRIDAY



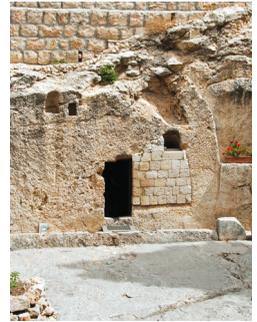
- Trials in Jerusalem
(*Luke 22:66–23:25*)
- Crucifixion and burial
(*John 19:16-42*)

SATURDAY



- In the tomb
(*Matt. 27:62-66*)

SUNDAY



- Resurrection
(*Luke 24:1-15*)





Hope for Redemption

WEEK 1



The Promised Messiah

by Sarah Doss

If you're familiar with Easter, you may have heard about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the sins of humankind and how He rose from the dead three days later. If you had to pick and choose, I'd say those are the most important "big headline" pieces of the Easter story—the crucial elements and, better still, key linchpins of the Christian faith. If you know those facts, you've got a leg up. **Congrats.**

But, in this introductory week, we want to look a little deeper, past the "highlights" and the chronology of the events of the week Jesus died on the cross. We want to journey back to the Old Testament to understand some of the history and prophecy that laid the groundwork for Jesus' appearance as Messiah. As we'll come to see, God spoke many beautiful Old Testament words of love that found their echo and fulfillment in Jesus—His life, death, and resurrection.

Though it sounds strange to our earthly ears, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to save us from our sin wasn't a contingency plan that God was forced to put in place when Adam and Eve let us all down in the garden of Eden. In fact, that dark day on Golgotha was the plan all along.

Early in Scripture, we witness God masterfully sowing seeds of hope and redemption, casting shadows of the Messiah who would come. Admittedly, we

have the benefit of reading the Old Testament from this side of the cross. Since we know who Jesus is and was—how He loved, how He acted, how He spoke to His followers and led with a servant’s heart—it’s much easier for us to see the Jesus-shaped holes in the Messianic references throughout the Old Testament.

But our brothers and sisters who lived in the Old Testament world didn’t have such a luxury. They received these prophecies with great hope, but were only able to see them in part, unsure of what they were really being shown.

I imagine it almost as if they were looking through a kaleidoscope; they saw the beautiful shapes God might be placing together, but the edges were never quite clear and the image constantly shifting. Mesmerizing yet baffling. Who could imagine how it would all come together? Only God knew how all the pieces would lock into place to reveal the Savior whom we desperately needed.

And God, in His kindness, started giving us glimpses of who He was.

Almost immediately after Adam and Eve chose to do what was right in their own eyes, we hear God promise a Redeemer to come, One who would crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). God points to the coming of Jesus in the Exodus story—the deliverance with the Passover and the sacrifice of a lamb. And He tells us of a coming Messiah who will appear as a servant, humbly suffering to help us.

As we look backward from the cross, I can’t help but be struck by the care and intentionality of God in crafting a rescue for us, His wayward and helpless people, from the beginning. He illuminated each step of the way, gradually giving us shadows of Jesus along with grace and understanding bit by bit, pulling our hearts out of despair and buoying them with hope time and again. And He’s still doing it.

We pray this week will fuel your worship of God as you see how intricately and beautifully Jesus fulfilled and fulfills all the promises God made to us all along.

Let’s put ourselves in the sandals of our Old Testament brothers and sisters and marvel at the hope and light the coming Messiah brought with Him.



EASTER WAS THE PLAN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

by Michelle R. Hicks

Read Genesis 3.

Have you ever put a plan in place to diet or exercise in order to lose weight? What were the results?

Women will try all kinds of things to lose weight. Sometimes we choose specific diets or exercise regimens. Other times we turn to certain vitamins or powders mixed with water before meals. We create meal plans and reorganize schedules to build in time for exercise. Millions (or billions) of dollars are spent each year on marketing products and services to dieters. The advertisers use before and after photos, claims of rapid weight loss, and sometimes the promise that no dieting or exercise is required at all. Believe me, I've been drawn in by many. How about you?

Sadly, I've discovered that some of these advertisements for weight-loss products and services are exaggerated claims or just false information mixed with a little truth. Giving into the temptation to hope and believe that the product will deliver the desired results often ends with disappointment and hopelessness. And that is where we begin our focus of Easter—temptation and the fall. It's a moment where dazzling promises were marketed using false information mixed with a little truth, but the result was devastating. Sin entered the world and with it came hopelessness. However, we also discover that God was not caught off guard. He had a plan crafted before the foundation of the world—the ultimate hope, a Savior. Jesus.

In the beginning God (Gen. 1:1). I love how the Bible starts with the focus and foundation on God. But it isn't long until Genesis 3 reveals the account of Eve being tempted and deceived by the serpent. Most of us are familiar with this beautiful beginning that turned into tragedy. Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the one and only tree God had forbidden. Genesis 3 reveals the curses and repercussions of sin that we describe as the fall.

Reread Genesis 3 and write a short summary of each passage.

Committing the sin (Gen. 3:1-8)

Confronting the sinners (Gen. 3:9-13)

Consequences of the sin (Gen. 3:14-24)

Ultimately, the consequence for sin is death, both physically and spiritually (Rom. 6:23). Eternal separation from God is the result. But God, in His goodness, had a plan from the beginning.

When the Lord was walking in the garden after Adam and Eve sinned, He came seeking those who were now lost. This loving act demonstrates how God loved us and had a plan in place for salvation. God came to seek and save humanity right from the start. His plan culminated in Jesus Christ—His death, burial, and resurrection.

How do we see a foreshadowing of that plan in Genesis 3:15?

Genesis 3:15 is often called the *protoevangelium*—the first gospel proclamation.¹ The hostility between Eve and her enemy, the serpent (later identified in Rev. 12:9 as Satan) is representative of the spiritual battle that continues to this day. Because of Adam's sin, we are all enslaved to sin and dead in our sins. We carry out the "inclinations of our flesh" and are "by nature children under wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3). In other words, we have no hope. But in Genesis 3:15, God told the serpent there was One coming from the woman's "offspring," who would "strike (his) head." To strike or crush the head of the snake is a picture of fatal and final

destruction. That's what happened through Christ's coming to be our perfect sacrifice. Jesus has defeated death and Satan. Even in physical death we can have spiritual victory and eternal life because of the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Because of Easter.

Let's look at some additional verses that confirm God's plan for Easter—a plan for us to know the Savior.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES AND TAKE NOTES:	
ACTS 2:23	
ROMANS 5:12-21	
COLOSSIANS 1:19-22	
1 PETER 1:18-20	

How do these verses confirm God had a plan for our redemption before the foundation of the world?

Which ones are most meaningful to you? Why?

What do you need to be reminded of most this Easter?

Since all of humanity came from Adam, we are all subject to physical and spiritual death, which is the punishment for sin. As Paul said in Romans 3:23, all of us are sinners. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. If salvation and forgiveness for our sin depends on our goodness or our effort, we are not going to be saved. We might wish to be different but we do not have the power to change on our own. The separation that started in the garden of Eden was only able to be closed by the offspring of the woman, Jesus, the God-man, born of a virgin. What was a shadow in Genesis 3:15 became the Light of the world in Christ. Because of His death on the cross we can be made alive again (John 5:24) and experience eternal life (John 3:16-17).

Why do you celebrate Easter?

What traditions or activities do you take part in that remind you of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection?

Read Romans 5:6-8 and write down what these verses mean to you.

We know there is a great, sovereign God and that we answer to Him, but we still rebel intentionally or mess up unintentionally. We understand what we should do, but we keep coming up short. It sounds hopeless. We are lost. But we are not hopeless because we have been found. What we could not do, God has done.

Just as God walked in the garden seeking Adam and Eve after they sinned, God seeks after us. Instead of expecting us to rise up to Him, He came down to us. He came to seek and save those who had been lost (Luke 19:10). If Genesis 3 did not happen, we wouldn't need Easter. But Easter was not God's plan B. It was God's sovereign plan all along.

ADULTS



Photo by Lauren Ekin

make a

Confessional Wreath

by Larissa Arnault Roach

Set the tone for the Easter season by embracing the practice of confession. Confession of sin to God brings forgiveness and restores our fellowship with Him (Ps. 32; 51; 1 John 1:9). Confessing to each other is a vulnerable activity that provides support, accountability, and restoration within the body of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2; Jas. 5:16).

You may have participated in a stations of the cross service prior to Easter Sunday where you physically drove nails into a wooden cross. Then on Easter, the holes left from the nails were filled with flowers as a celebrative display. The following activity is a simple way to personalize that celebration at home.

GATHER

- Styrofoam wreath or grapevine
- Toothpicks
- Fresh flowers (for Easter Sunday)

DIRECTIONS

Place a styrofoam wreath and cup of toothpicks on the center of your table a month before Easter. (If you are feeling extra festive, you can spray paint the

wreath or wrap it with thin ribbon.) Whether yours is a table for one or if it seats many, each evening when you sit down to dinner, practice confessing your sin out loud and insert a toothpick into the wreath with each admission. While this practice might be uncomfortable at first (indeed, it is difficult to examine our hearts), the physical and verbal act is profound. Hopefully over time you will become more aware of your sin and see patterns that need to change. The most wonderful news is that this activity does not end with confession! On Easter morning before others in your home wake up, replace the toothpick indentions with beautiful spring flowers. This reminds us that His mercies are new every morning, and Christ came to forgive our sin.

TEENS



share your story of
Redemption

by Amanda Mejias

How tragic would it have been for the redemption story to have ended with Genesis 3? Can you imagine if God said to Adam and Eve, “Well, good luck figuring your way out of this one!” But we know their story wasn’t over. God’s plan was just beginning and redemption was coming.

You have probably heard the words “My life is over” come out of your teen’s mouth at some point. Those words seem dramatic, but don’t you remember life in middle and high school? A failing grade or broken relationship truly felt like the end of the world. Even the smallest things felt so big. And you know what feels really big as a teenager? Sin.

It’s common for teens to get caught up with sins like lying, cheating, viewing pornography, and so on. But most teens aren’t ignorant to the seriousness of these sins and why they shouldn’t be engaging in those behaviors. However, if they are never given hope for redemption and restoration, they will feel hopeless to move forward and locked into that sinful struggle.

We may understand there is no sin too great for God to forgive and no past too dirty for Him to make clean, but does your teen know this? Does he truly know what redemption could look like for him? One of the best ways your teen is going to learn about redemption is through your example.

Set aside some time this week to talk to your teen about your redemption story. Share your story of coming to Christ. Be honest about your need for Jesus and how He has freed you from past struggles with sin. If you don’t feel comfortable sharing everything in a face-to-face conversation, you could write it out in a letter to him. After he reads it, you could discuss it together. Either way, encourage your teen to always come to you if he has questions about salvation or about how to find freedom from sins. As one final activity for this week, memorize this verse with your teen:

Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him.

COLOSSIANS 1:21-22