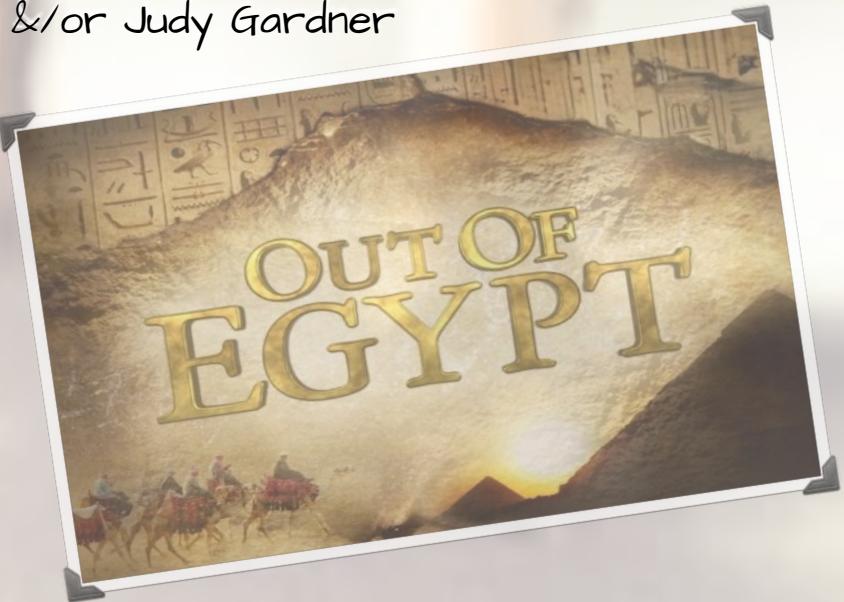


January 12-16, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year_(s) Of Jesus Part 210
Out Of Egypt

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



January 10/11, 2026

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If they help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday:

We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps. Proverbs 16:9 (NLT)

Then the Lord said to his people, "Keep watching... and you will be astonished at what you see. I am going to do something that you will not believe when you hear about it. Habakuk 1:5 (GNT)

Reflection: Judy and I sat down last week to discuss our spiritual, social, physical and mental goals. Some years when we do this I have some firm direction in mind. Others (like this year) I kind of struggle with what I should aim for. I mean, sure the physical goal was easy- don't get so sick that you have to miss 2 solid months of church. But beyond that it wasn't quite so clear. They always say that a goal should be "juicy", but some years I have difficulty trying to figure out what my goals should be. But I do it anyways. Why? Because there's something energizing about clarifying my plans for the future. If I don't take time to identify what I'm aiming for I often hit very little. And that's why I set goals.

Once I'm clear on a direction I find it more compelling to move forward. I think this aspect of goal planning is one of it's greatest advantages. Goals fuel action. It is easier to redirect someone in motion than to convince someone that they should get off the sofa. But it's important to realize that God is in the business of transforming our plans. Plans are not promises so make your plans in pencil instead of permanent marker (you know... so God can tweak or completely change our plans).

Without plans we get stuck and discouraged. God want's us to take aim in life and take action. But we set ourselves up for devastation if we expect to achieve every detail of our plans. This is a good thing. God always has something better than we planned in mind for us. The problem is that God values the growth of our character so stinking much. He is constantly in the process of cultivating our maturity which often involves personal discomfort and uncertainty.

Life just never seems to go the way it's supposed to. But we are not alone in our frustration and discomfort with life's unplanned twists and turns. If I was writing the story of God coming to Earth here is a list of things I would eliminate as plot lines – things that just shouldn't happen: The Son of God should not be born in a stable. That seems a most unsuitable, even unsavory introduction to Earth. There should have been a sense of nobility not strong animal smells. Jesus should have been able to be raised in Israel. Surely God could have just taken Herod out, am I right? Why let him think he succeeded in killing the king of kings. Frankly, I could go on and on. My point is that very little of Jesus' childhood looks like something I would plan.

It's almost as if God was saying, "Bring it on. Do your worst. Make His life as difficult as you can. He's still gonna save the world." Maybe God just wanted us to be sure that there is no place to lowly, too uncertain, so smelly that He wouldn't go there for us. There's nothing that love won't endure. Poverty, danger and upheaval are just no match for the hope and determination that come from knowing that God is with you.

Prayer: Lord, I don't always understand your ways. Even when I read in the Bible I am stumped so often trying to figure out You and Your plans. Teach me to trust You. Today I pledge to trust you more in 2019. Show me the way. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? Luke 16:11 (NLT)

Reflection: We know relatively little about Jesus' childhood. His ministry didn't begin until He was in His thirties. Then He was sort of like an overnight sensation - three decades in the making. What does one do while one is waiting to become the Messiah?

The Bible tells us that Jesus grew. That means that, like the rest of us, Jesus started small. Not a lot was up to Him. He had a very limited sphere of influence. But He grew. Growth involves filling up your current place in the world. In fact... I like that sentence I'm going to write it again:

Growth involves filling up your current place in the world.

I have to confess... Judy wrote that line. She doesn't really like me to highlight her presence in these devotionals but I knew those of you who know me well would be thinking... "Ed didn't come up with that on his own";o) Ok... so back to growth.

Growth involves accepting your role and putting your best effort in right where you are. He had to build His muscles (physically and spiritually). There was the mundane and often tiresome process of putting one foot in front of the other. Life requires effort, the accumulation of skill, and an inordinate amount of learning the hard way.

God didn't make exceptions for His Son. Jesus didn't get easy or automatic. He didn't have a sheltered childhood. He had to learn hard lessons. He didn't get a pass from sweat or frustration. The reality is that God gives all of us the opportunity to grow.

This fallen world gives us near constant challenges to overcome, and the never ending pull of gravity to test our resolve against. We set ourselves up to be promoted to the roles that seem most impressive to us by being faithful in the roles that don't impress us at all (in other words... instead of waiting for your ship to come in row the boat God has already given you). We "get" to build our muscles (physical and spiritual) in our response to life's resistance.

Reality has no limits to its supply of resistance, but growth requires some cooperation. Jesus spent those years waiting to change the world taking the steps that God put in front of Him. No one was compelled enough to write most of the things He did as young boy/man down. His life showed little of the extraordinary role He would play in the future. But Jesus prepared for the future God had in store for Him by outgrowing each stage that God gave Him. He wasn't above the smaller tasks of life.

Prayer: Father, teach me to bloom where I'm planted, trusting that as I prove myself faithful with what I know have, where I now am, that You are preparing me for even more. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." Matthew 9:12-13 (TLB)

Peter fairly exploded with his good news: "It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. Acts 10:35-36 (MES)

Reflection: Jesus' treatment of outsiders was nothing short of revolutionary. Prostitutes, tax collectors, Roman soldiers – Jesus had a way of paying attention to those that His culture gave Him a free pass to overlook. Jesus had a special place in His heart for the outcast and the foreigner. Although part of this may have come from sharing the character of God(ya think?), part of it may have had much more human origins.

When Jesus was a toddler, King Herod made it his mission to wipe out anyone who could grow up to change the balance of political power. Using the description of the wise men, and even searching the scriptures about the origins of the Messiah (Bible study for the wrong reason ;o), Herod sought to nip God's kingdom in the bud by eliminating it's king before he had a chance to grow into power. Since Herod couldn't narrow down the threat, he gave the order to kill all male children two years old and under in the region where Jesus lived, just to be sure.

An angel told Joseph to take the child to Egypt where they would be beyond Herod's reach. I guess it was a good thing that the wise men had given them gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh— all valuable commodities they could sell to fund an immediate escape to a foreign land. Poor Joseph and Mary. Jesus is still itty bitty and there goes His college fund! Instead of growing up surrounded by family and community and tradition, Jesus spends His childhood as a foreigner.

It's a whole different world growing up in a culture that doesn't speak your language and doesn't recognize your traditions. Jesus would have been the odd boy out when it came to holidays, values, and behavior. He was an outsider. I don't know if they even let Him join in any reindeer games! Very early on Jesus knew what it felt like to live in a world that wasn't home.

God often instructed the Israelites (in the Old Testament) to deal graciously the foreigners living in their lands. He reminded them that they were once foreigners in Egypt. I guess once we've experienced the hardships of being an outsider we can no longer claim ignorance to the plight (and sheer inconvenience) of being strangers in a strange land. Jesus dealt with outcasts almost as though He knew exactly how they felt. Maybe His childhood prepared Him for that.

Prayer: Father, teach me how to treat the people in my life the way Jesus did. Especially the people I have a tough time understanding. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

Thursday:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. John 1:1-5 (NLT)

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. Colossians 1:16-20 (NLT)

Reflection: When John begins his gospel he doesn't list Jesus' genealogy or say anything about His birth or childhood. Instead John goes much further back than that – back to the very beginning. In poetic style he describes Jesus as the force that brought all matter into existence. Similar to the ancient hymn quoted from the book of Colossians above, John speaks of Jesus' original nature – the creator and sustainer of all things.

When a scientist looks at the building blocks of matter, he sees atoms. Each atom has a proton/neutron nucleus; but it is the frenetic orbit of electrons around the nucleus that gives dimension to the atom. If we were able to still electrons, and collapse the atom down to its few components, it would take up only a fraction of the space that each atom fills. Matter is not made up of solid matter. Matter is the energy field produced by each vigilant electron. Matter needs energy to exist.

Jesus is the energy (power) that keeps all those little electrons spinning. Without His care, His attention, all matter would collapse in on itself and the planets would cease their faithful orbit of our sun.

If Jesus is the force sustaining all matter, then there is no place we can go, nothing we can touch, that is devoid of His love and power. We have access to Jesus everywhere and in all things. Unlike God (the Father) who cannot touch or inhabit evil, Jesus' energy invades and infuses every atom in this fallen world.

But Colossians tells us that Jesus did more than that. Because of His sacrifice on the cross, the healing power of Jesus' blood is in the process of redeeming all things. He made us, and despite our failings, He sustained us. And then He entered our world and took on our mess so that He could redeem us. No place is beyond His reach. He entered death itself and infected it with life.

He does not invade our world by force, however. His process of redeeming the world is limited only by our invitation (or its absence). He's done all the hard work. All He asks of us is to cooperate in His redemption. To the extent that we invite Jesus to heal our lives, His redemption spreads across the globe.

Prayer: Father, show me what it means to invite your healing, frenetic power into my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Friday:

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. Ephesians 1:11-12 (NLT)

Reflection: Timothy Keller wrote today's devotional thought. It is his attempt to show that the Bible is not a collection of moralistic stories intended to make us better people. If that were true, according to Keller, the Bible would be nothing more than Aesop's fables. And if that were true the Bible would be a crushing burden to live under. Adam messed up so don't be like Adam. Abraham was a man of great faith so go wherever God asks even if He doesn't tell you where you're going. But don't be like Abraham when he lied (twice in the exact same type situation) because that leads to consequences.

All of those statements are true. But they're not primarily what the Bible is about. So what is the Bible about then you ask?

The Bible is about Jesus. It is the story of God's salvation. It is a broken record of God showing us that it's not really about us. Grace and salvation don't come to us because of our own record... but because of Jesus' record. He came to this earth and passed every test that we had failed in the past. And because He was able to live the life we should have lived we now get to share in His reward through no achievement of our own but only because He wants to share with us.

So read through Tim Keller's explanation. If you see a reference you aren't completely familiar with google it and read the story and see how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Enjoy...

Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us.

Jesus is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.

Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void not knowing whither he went to create a new people of God.

Jesus is the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, "Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me," now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, "Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us."

Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.

Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better Rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us water in the desert.

Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.

Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.

Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.

Jesus is the real Rock of Moses, the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us. He's the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread.

The Bible's really not about you – it's about him. And thank God for that!

Prayer: Father, I humbly accept the reward that Jesus wants to share with me. Give me the grace to live my life in a way that says, "thank You" for sharing with me. In Jesus' Name, amen.