

What Role Did Joseph Have in Jesus' Life?

Joseph was God's Son's earthly father. He was Jesus' teacher, coach and mentor during Jesus' youth. Joseph was the God-chosen leader of the family that helped prepare Jesus for the most important ministry in history.

Fatherhood Principles of Joseph the Carpenter sheds light on effective Godly fatherhood strategies through the story of this great man of faith. It shows how he facilitated for Jesus' development, and how he protected his family.

Joseph's role in Jesus' life was so stunning that he is the 21st century role-model that fathers need today. See how Joseph was so successful and why God chose him to be His Son's father.

About the Author

Akili Kumasi is a devoted husband and the father of two young men and two girls. He is president of the Reconciled Fathers Network, an organization dedicated to helping separated fathers and to raising the standard of fatherhood.



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FATHERHOOD PRINCIPLES OF JOSEPH THE CARPENTER



Examples of Godly Fatherhood

Akili Kumasi

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Fatherhood Principles of Joseph the Carpenter: Examples of Godly Fatherhood

by Akili Kumasi

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or his siblings. From scripture there is no evidence that he was previously married or had children before his marriage to Mary. Nor is there any indication in the Bible that he was a much older man as is popularly believed.

We are simply told that Joseph² was a **just man** (Matthew 1:19 KJV) or a **righteous man** (Matthew 1:19 NIV). Any historical background about Joseph other than that does not come from the Bible.

II. JOSEPH AND MARY'S ENGAGEMENT

Joseph and Mary were already engaged to be married when God sent the angel Gabriel to visit Mary (Luke 1:26-27).

Their engagement, however, was not like what we call an engagement today. It was much more binding. In ancient Jewish tradition, once the man and woman became officially engaged, they entered *kiddushin* and were in fact legally married, but not yet living together.

Kiddushin means the consecration of the bride for her husband³ and is the first of two distinct stages in the marriage process. *Kiddushin* could begin up to a year or two before the final stage of *nissuin*. Since *kiddushin* began the legal marriage, at that point it could only end through death or divorce.⁴

² The genealogy of Jesus as presented in Matthew 1:16 establishes that Joseph was a descendant of the House of David. It says Joseph father's name was Jacob. However, Luke 3:23 says Joseph's father's name was Heli.

³ William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1999), p. 100. This was also a period of preparation for the husband.

⁴ "Process of Marriage: Kiddushin and Nisuin," *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/marriage.html> (accessed February 15, 2008); Tracey Rich, "Marriage: The Process of

THE STORY OF JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

Joseph of Nazareth, or Joseph the Carpenter, as he has come to be known, was the foster-father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Biblical accounts of Joseph seem to present him as having a sole purpose – to be the head of the family that the Messiah was born into and reared on earth. Thus, he was the husband to Mary, the earthly father to Jesus Christ and the father to Jesus' half-brothers and half-sisters.

This chapter presents the historical story of Joseph the Carpenter as background to the discussion of the seven Godly fatherhood principles.

Part of the responsibility of presenting the story of Joseph the Carpenter is to counter some popularly believed myths about Joseph. Thus, this account of Joseph is taken strictly from the Bible – which is our authoritative source for documenting the Godly life of this great man.¹

I. JOSEPH'S BACKGROUND AND LINAGE

Joseph was a descendant of the house of David. He was the son of Jacob. The Bible records no other information about his family background, his mother

¹ This story of Joseph the Carpenter is derived from the Protestant Bible. Throughout this book, other sources are used only to document historical facts of history, especially that of Jewish customs and traditions. See the copyright page of this book for a list of Bible versions (translations) used.

At the second stage, *nissuin*, the couple would complete the marriage process and begin their life together in the same house.

It was after Mary and Joseph had entered the *kiddushin* stage that God sent the angel Gabriel to visit Mary and to tell her of God's plan for her life. She became pregnant with the Messiah through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31-35).

When Joseph became aware that Mary was pregnant he assumed that she had committed adultery and he sought to deal with the situation accordingly.

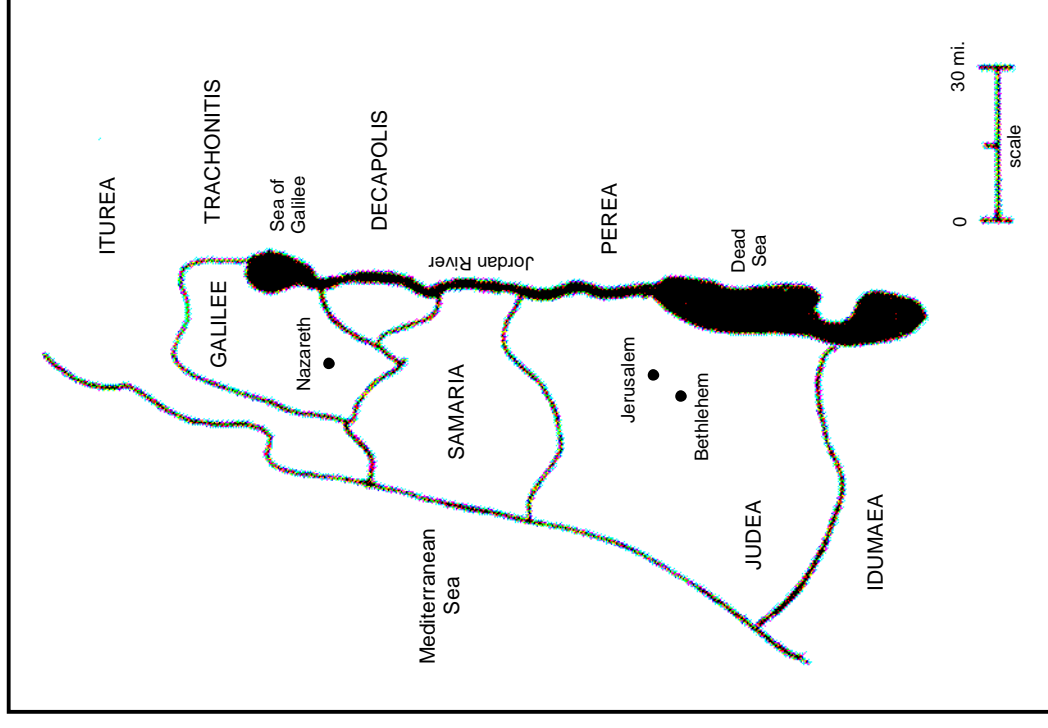
Adultery during the *kiddushin* stage was the same as with any fully married couple. As explained in the Mosaic Law of God, adultery could be punishable by stoning to death (Deuteronomy 22:20-24; Leviticus 20:10).

But, nonetheless, Joseph chose not to give Mary the harshest penalty of death by stoning. Instead, Joseph decided to **divorce her quietly** (Matthew 1:19 NIV), which was also permissible under the Law (Deuteronomy 24:1, Matthew 5:31-32).

However, God had another plan for Joseph and Mary. He sent an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream. He commanded Joseph to take Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:19-21).

Joseph *immediately* complied and brought Mary to his house to be his wife. Also, according to scripture, Joseph and Mary did not have intimate relations with each other until some time after Jesus was born (Matthew 1:18, 25).

Marriage: Kiddushin and Nissuin," *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/marriage.htm> (accessed February 15, 2008).



Herod the Great's Kingdom, 4 BC

I. JOSEPH AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was foretold in prophecy (Micah 5:2) and was facilitated by Caesar

Augustus' decree to have everyone in the Roman Empire be counted in a census and pay taxes (Luke 2:1-4). This meant that Joseph, a descendant of the House of David, had to take his *entire* family with him to David's birthplace (Bethlehem) to be counted and taxed.

Thus, Joseph and the very pregnant Mary made the 70 to 80 mile trip on foot (Mary may have ridden a donkey.) from Nazareth to Bethlehem.⁵ They most likely traveled in a caravan as was typical for long-distance travel during that time because a caravan offered safety from bandits and other threats. See the map on the next page for reference points.

Jesus' birth in the manger in Bethlehem appears to have been fairly quiet and without a lot of fanfare. Scripture says He was visited only by neighboring shepherds who were told of His birth by a host of angels. Scripture does not indicate that there were any other visitors (Luke 2:6-18).

According to Jewish Law, Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old (Leviticus 12:3, Luke 2:21) and He was given the name Jesus just as God had commanded through the angels that visited Joseph and Mary (Luke 1:31, Matthew 1:21).

Later, when Jesus was forty days old, Joseph and Mary followed Jewish Law⁶ and tradition and

⁵ Normal travel would be 20 miles a day. However, with Mary's advanced pregnancy, it would have taken a week or more. Rev. Phil Greetham, "Joseph and Bethlehem" *The Nativity Pages* (1996, 2002), http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/p_greetham/wisemen/ana2.html (accessed September 18, 2008).

⁶ The Law of Moses cited in Luke 2:21-24, 39 refers to Leviticus 12:2-8: Circumcision of the male child would happen on the child's eighth day of life. After a son's birth there was a seven day period (14 days for girls) of the mother being ceremonially unclean, followed by a 33 day wait (66 days

presented Him in the temple in Jerusalem. A sacrifice was offered to God on Mary's behalf to atone for her and to cleanse her from the issue of blood associated with giving birth (Luke 2:21-39).

After Jesus was born, circumcised and dedicated, Joseph re-settled his family back in Nazareth (in Galilee in the north, see map). They had left Bethlehem and Jerusalem (in Judea in the south) (Luke 2:39).

III. JESUS AT TWO YEARS OF AGE

Some time later, the Magi (the so-called wise men) visited Joseph, Mary and Jesus and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:10-11).

The Magi had seen **his star in the east and came to worship him**. First, they presented themselves to King Herod to inquire about where **the one who has been born king of the Jews** was born (Matthew 2:1-3).

King Herod was alarmed at the possibility of **the king of the Jews** which the Magi sought becoming a rival to himself for the throne. Herod quizzed the Magi about their quest to find the **king of the Jews**. Next, he inquired of the chief priest and scribes to learn about the prophecy (Micah 5:2) of the Messiah's birth (Matthew 2:3-6). :

Herod therefore sent the Magi to Bethlehem to find the **king of the Jews**. Herod told them to come back with details of where He could be found **so that I too may go and worship him** (Matthew 2:7-8).

for girls) for the women to be purified from her bleeding. Afterward, a burnt offering was to be made by the priest in the temple for her atonement and for her cleansing.

The chronology of events indicates that the Magi could have been looking for Jesus for up to two years before they found him. The Bible shows that when the Magi actually found and visited Jesus, He was a **young child**.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him ...

Matthew 2:11 KJV

Notice that the scripture says “**the house**” and “**the young child**.” Jesus was no longer a baby and they were in a **house** not a manger.

Contrary to popular beliefs and to Nativity scenes that have become a standard part of Christmas decorations, this visit by the Magi obviously did not take place in the manger in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ birth. It was probably in Joseph’s home in Nazareth since that is where they returned after the baby Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:39).

After the Magi visited the Messiah and his family, they were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, but to return by a different way (Matthew 2:12).

When it became apparent to Herod that the Magi were not going to report back to him, he became enraged. He ***gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under*** (Matthew 2:16 NIV).

Herod’s command was ***in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi*** indicating that Jesus’ birth was up to two years earlier.

IV. THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT

After the Magi left, Joseph had his second recorded dream where an angel visited him with a message from God. Joseph was warned that Herod wanted to kill the **young child**. Joseph was instructed to take his family to safety in Egypt.

Immediately, Joseph awoke from his sleep, prepared Mary and Jesus and then left for Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14). Given the traveling routes of the time, this trip was about 350 miles one-way (on foot) from Nazareth to Egypt.⁷

After some time in Egypt, God spoke to Joseph a third time in a dream, telling him that Herod was dead and that they could return home.

The fourth dream occurred when Joseph became apprehensive about the new king in Judea, Herod’s son Archelaus.⁸ God told Joseph to return to Galilee and to settle again in Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23).

V. JESUS WAS OBEDIENT TO JOSEPH AND MARY

Further details about Joseph and about Jesus’ childhood were not recorded in scripture after they returned from Egypt. The story picks up again when Jesus was 12 years old.

Joseph’s family would annually travel 65 miles to

⁷ Arthur Blessitt, “Miles Jesus and Mary Walked,” *Official Website of Arthur Blessitt*, http://www.blessitt.com/?q=miles_jesus_and_mary_walked (accessed June 30, 2008).

⁸ Upon Herod the Great’s death, the kingdom was divided between his three sons, Phillip, Antipas and Archelaus. Archelaus was over the regions of Judea and Samaria which Joseph, Mary and Jesus had to pass through to get back to the town (village) of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. Dennis Bratcher, “Palestine Under the Herods – New Testament Era,” *The Voice: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*, <http://cresourcei.org/herodrule.html> (accessed June 26, 2008).

Jerusalem to observe the Jewish feast of Passover then return to Nazareth. But, on this occasion Jesus did not immediately return with Joseph and Mary (and we can assume other children) after the festivities were over.

After a day's journey from Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was not in their traveling company of relatives and friends. They had to return to Jerusalem to search for Him. It was three days before they found Him in the temple listening to and questioning the religious leaders who were amazed at His **understanding and answers** (Luke 2:46-47 KJV).

Scripture shows that Mary admonished Jesus for separating from the family. That is when He told His earthly parents the now famous quote "**I must be about my father's business.**" (Luke 2:49 KJV).

Afterward, Jesus returned with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth where he was **[habitually] obedient to them** (Luke 2:51 AMP) or **subject to them** (KJV) as is the proper relationship between parents and their children (Exodus 20:12).

VI. JESUS WAS JOSEPH'S SON

Jesus had come down from heaven to live amongst us and to lead a human life (John 1:1, 14) and as such, a normal and healthy human family life was appropriate. He would have led a seemingly common life until He embarked on His ministry.

It was not the type of situation where Jesus' deity was known, except to a very few (Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth, Zachariah, the Magi, Anna the Prophetess, Simeon and the shepherds).

From the time Jesus was born until Joseph's death, Jesus was a son in Joseph's family. Since God made Him human in form, He would have developed physically and intellectually as a human would. He

ate, slept and cried as a human. He took part in all those family-life activities that were normal for a son in a Jewish family during that historical period.

They had a typical family life with father, mother and children. Joseph would have led his family in all things including prayers and devotions, in blessing the food at mealtime, in religious rituals as well as insuring that everyone studied and knew the Law of God according to prevailing standards at the time. (For more on this topic see the chapter on *Godly Fatherhood Principle #5: Be a Teacher.*)

Thus, as best anyone knew, Joseph was Jesus' father (John 1:45). This is also evidenced in scripture when Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah during a service in the synagogue in Nazareth and then proclaimed His divinity. In disbelief that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the people questioned, "**Is not this Joseph's son?**" (Luke 4:22 KJV).⁹

VII. JOSEPH'S LIFESPAN AND FAMILY LEGACY

After the events in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old, there is no further direct mention of Joseph in scripture. However, there are reasons to

⁹ In John 8 there is a long and intense argument where the Pharisees were questioning Jesus about His origin and Jesus exposed them as not being sons of Abraham, but sons of the devil, the father of lies. One of the Pharisees said, "**We are not illegitimate children ... The only Father we have is God himself.**" (John 8:41 NIV). The King James Bible reads, "**We be not born of fornication.**" Some people believe this to be a reference to alleged rumors that supposedly occurred when Mary conceived Jesus prior to her completing the marriage vows with Joseph. However, renowned scholars see this as a reference to the Pharisees' claim to be spiritual sons of Abraham. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1991. If the assertion that this statement by the Pharisees was an allegation about Jesus' virgin birth then we would have heard more about it in the scriptures.

believe that Joseph lived for quite some time after Jesus' 12th year. We can extrapolate many facts from scripture about Joseph's lifespan and his role in Jesus' upbringing including the following.

First, when Jesus was twelve years old and he returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary the scripture tells us that:

He ... was ... [habitually] obedient to them ... Jesus increased in wisdom (in broad and full understanding) and in stature and years ...

Luke 2:51-52 AMP

This scripture indicates that Joseph was there for some period of time (for **years**) after Jesus' 12th year because Jesus was **habitually obedient to them** as he increased in **stature and years**.

Second, another interesting fact is that Joseph and Mary had at least eight children, including Jesus (which would have taken some number of years to procreate). How do we calculate the number of children born to Joseph and Mary?

Jesus' siblings (brothers) are named in Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55-56:

**Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?
And his sisters, are they not all with us?**

Matthew 13:55-56 KJV

That is four brothers and possibly three or more sisters. The reference to the sisters is **all**, which generally means three or more. Had the Bible said "both" we could assume two sisters. But, since it used

the term **all** we can deduce that it is three or more sisters (See footnote for a more detailed explanation).¹⁰ So with four brothers and at least three sisters, then the total number of siblings, including Jesus would be eight or more.

Scriptures confirms that all of these children belonged to Joseph and Mary because there is no mention of Joseph having been married prior to his marriage to Mary or of him having any children prior to Jesus' birth. If he had other children prior to Jesus' birth, they would have been accounted for when Joseph and Mary had to travel to their **own ancestral town** (of Bethlehem) to be counted and taxed in Caesar Augustus' census (Luke 2:1, 3 NLT).

Additionally, since Mary was a virgin, she could not have had children prior to Jesus and there is no indication that Mary married a second time. So she had no children after Joseph died.

Therefore, all of the children mentioned in the Bible as Jesus' siblings are attributed to Joseph and Mary jointly.

With eight total children, if each of the remaining

¹⁰ Reference to Jesus sisters in Matthew 13:55-56. The Greek word for **all** is **pas**. This is #G3956 in the Strong's Concordance, which means *individually, each, every, any, all, the whole, everyone, all things, everything*. This is quiet different from the Greek word for **two** (#G1417) which is **duo**. It means a *primary numeral; two, both, twain* and was used to refer to **the two** Zebedee brothers James and John in Matthew 4:21 KJV. The word **both** is used in John 20:4 to refer to Peter and John. This word **both** is translated from the same Greek word **duo** (#G1417). James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publications, 1990). Therefore, we interpret **all** as three or more and **two** and **both** as two. Thus, the speaker in Mathew 13:56 with the usage of the word **all** had to be referring to three or more sisters. If they meant less than three, they would have used the word **duo** for **both** or **two**.

seven births after Jesus occurred every two years then Jesus would have been 14 when the last sibling was born.¹¹ If the births were three years apart then Jesus would have been 21 when His last sibling was born which indicates that Joseph possibly lived at least until Jesus reached adulthood.

Third, Jesus was trained to be a carpenter. This we know because Jesus was referred to as a **carpenter** in Mark 6:3. It is also most likely true since during that time period fathers usually trained their sons to follow in the same trade or profession. For Jesus to be fully trained as a carpenter He would have been an apprentice under Joseph well beyond his 12th year.

In fact, Jesus' training as an apprentice may not have started until he was around 15 years of age.¹² As we will see later in the chapter on *Godly Fatherhood Principle #5: Be a Teacher*, Jesus was in school until he was at least 12 or 13. A full time apprenticeship to be carpenter could not have begun until some time after Jesus' 12th year, further indicating that Joseph was present far beyond that point because it would have taken several years for Jesus to learn the trade.

Joseph died¹³ somewhere before Jesus' 30th year as he was not mentioned in scripture when Jesus began His ministry (Luke 3:23). This is marked by

¹¹ This also confirms that when Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph and Mary had other children with them when they were returning from Jerusalem.

¹² Raymond T. Exum, "Jesus Christ, the Carpenter," (October 22, 1995), *Crystal Lake Church of Christ, Crystal Lake, Illinois*, <http://www.clcoc.org/inetserm/carpentr.htm>, (accessed May 27, 2008).

¹³ The reasonable assumption is that Joseph died as there was no mention of his exit through other means and as a righteous man, his exit through any other means is inconceivable. See the *Epilogue: Purpose Driven Father* for further discussion on Joseph's exit.

Joseph not being present at the wedding feast where Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:1-11).

Nevertheless, whatever Joseph's age when he died, it is reasonable to conclude that he raised a full family with Mary, facilitated for Jesus' upbringing, and trained Him for manhood in the Jewish tradition.

II. JOSEPH FOLLOWED GOD'S AGENDA

We want to state conclusively that the discussion of Joseph's fatherhood role in this book is in no way intended to downplay or diminish the relationship between Jesus, the Messiah, and His own Father, the Almighty God. The Bible even tells us that God was with Jesus as He **grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him** (Luke 2:40 NIV).

This discussion of Joseph's fatherhood role is only to highlight the necessary role of an earthly father for Jesus who was both God and man. And - we use the example of Joseph to expound on Godly fatherhood principles for men to learn from today.

We conclude that God emphatically led Joseph in his fatherhood role of Jesus as with all of his estimated eight children. The impact of Joseph's Godly life could also be seen in his children, one of which was a James, Jesus' half-brother. He was a great warrior for the early church and was also one of the writers of the New Testament.¹⁴

In sum, Joseph's contribution worked according to God the Father's plan and the execution of the Holy Spirit. This is the way it should be for all fathers. We need to be on God's program for each of our children.

¹⁴ James the Righteous was the Bishop at Jerusalem. Prior to being martyred in 70 AD, God used him to write the Book of James in the New Testament.

Do You Have a Relationship With God?

The Bible tells us that:

*... if you confess with your mouth,
"Jesus is Lord," and believe in your
heart that God raised him from the
dead, you will be saved.*

Romans 10:9 KJV

HAVE YOU ACCEPTED JESUS AS YOUR LORD?

If you do not have a relationship with God – through accepting Jesus as Lord – then I invite you to pray the following prayer:

Lord, I come before you today to confess that I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior and that I believe you raised Him from the dead. I believe that He died for my sins and that only through Him can I be saved.

Lord, please forgive me of all my sins and accept me into your kingdom. Lord, I welcome the Holy Spirit into my heart today.

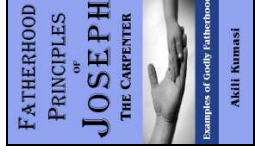
I thank you Lord. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Congratulations! Now, as a born-again Christian you can best maintain your walk with God by attending a Bible teaching church, studying and reading God's Word (the Bible) daily, praying continuously and fellowshiping with other serious Christians. A good place to start your Bible reading is with the book/gospel of John. If you have questions or need help please write to me at:

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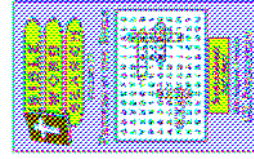
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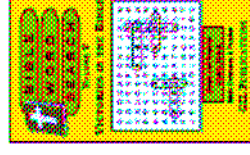
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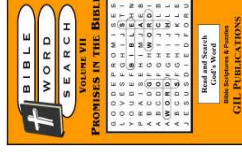


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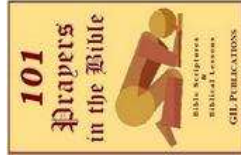


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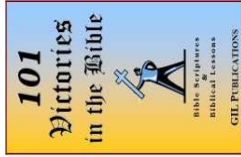


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