

K4
PRESCHOOL
EXPLORING GOD'S LOVE

Stories taken from *Preschool: Exploring God's Love*,
by Champ Thornton with Kristi Houser and Mollie Whitley

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www.positiveaction.org

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Published by



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God Exists Before Creation

Genesis 1:1; John 14:31; 17:24

God doesn't need anything to be happy.

In the beginning, there was nothing—no world, no sky, no flowers, no people. All there was . . . was God.

Do you think God was lonely? Not at all! Before He made anything, He was not alone. God the Father always had the Son and the Holy Spirit with Him.

God is all-powerful, and He always has been. Nothing is too hard for Him. He can make whatever He wants. He can make big, strong elephants or tall, giant mountains.

God is all-wise, and He always has been. He knows exactly how to make anything He can imagine. He knows how to make fat little bumblebees buzz through the air and how to change slow-crawling caterpillars into fast-fluttering butterflies.

However, God is not just powerful and wise. He is also loving and good.

How the Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit! They had so much love that They wanted to share it.



God Creates the World: Days 1–3

Genesis 1:2–13

God made everything out of nothing.

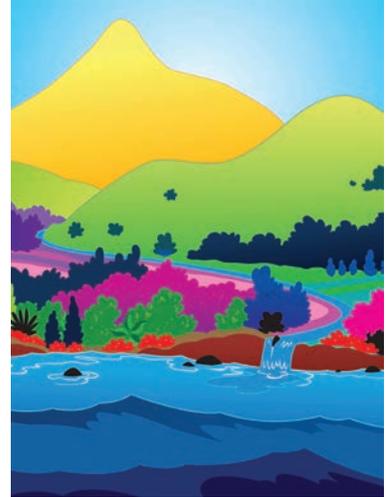
The Father, Son, and Spirit decided to give their love to others. They wanted others to enjoy what They enjoyed, so God began to speak. God is so powerful that every time He said a word, something happened.

On the first day, God said, “Let there be light.” As soon as God spoke, there was light, and it was good. He named the light “day,” and He named the darkness “night.”

On the second day, He said, “Let there be sky. Let there be water.” As soon as He spoke, there was a sky, and there was water.

On the third day, He said, “Let there be land.” What do you think happened when He said this? Out of the water came the land! Then up out of the land popped mountains and trees and flowers too. God named the land “earth” and the waters “seas.”

God looked at what He had created and saw that it was good. He loved the world He had made.



God Creates the World: Days 4–6

Genesis 1:14–25

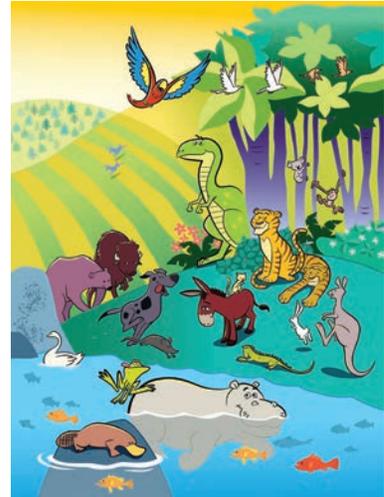
God made everything just right.

After creating the light and darkness, sea and sky, and all the dry ground, God made more. He filled His world with good things.

On the fourth day, God said, “Let there be a sun, a moon, and stars. You belong in the sky.” God gave the sun for light during the day and the moon for light at night. God also put the sun, moon, and stars in space to help us tell time. God saw that this, too, was good.

On the fifth day, He said, “Let there be fish. You belong in the water.” He said, “Let there be birds. You belong in the sky.” Then He said to them, “Fill up the sea with more fish, and fill up the sky with more birds.” All of this was good.

On the sixth day, God said, “Let the earth bring forth all sorts of animals.” All of a sudden there were frogs and dogs, cats and rats, and even parrots and ferrets. God looked at His world and all that was in it and saw that it was good. God was showing His love. Now others could enjoy what He had made.



God Makes Adam and Eve

Genesis 1:26–2:4; 2:15, 18–25;

1 Timothy 6:17

God created people to share in His love.

Everything God made was good. Though God had already created many things, there was still one more thing He wanted to make on the sixth day. He said, “Let’s make people. Let’s make them like Us. I want them to share in Our love. I want them to enjoy all that We have made.”



So, He did just that. First, God took some dust and shaped it. Then He breathed into it and gave it life. That is how God made the first man. God named him Adam.

God put Adam in the Garden of Eden. There he could enjoy God’s creation and enjoy God most of all. Then God said something surprising. He looked at Adam and said, “It is not good for you to be alone.” This was the first time God had said that something was not good.

Man needed a wife, so God put Adam into a deep sleep and, from his side, took out one of his ribs. God shaped the rib into the first woman. Adam named his wife Eve.

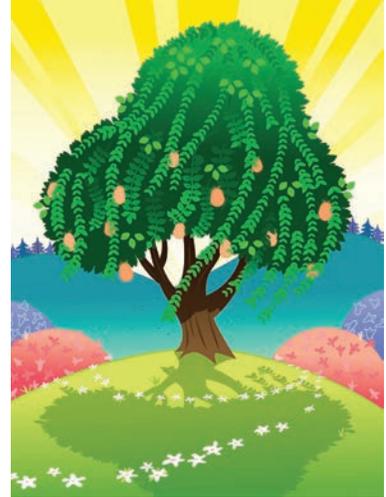
God looked at Adam and Eve. They were made in His image—the way children are like their parents. God blessed His children. He said, “Fill up the earth with your children and grandchildren. All the earth is for you and your family to enjoy and take care of.”

God was pleased with everything He had made. He saw that it was all very good. On the seventh day God rested, not because He was tired, but because His work of creation was done.

God Gives a Good Rule to Adam and Eve

Genesis 2:8–9, 15–17

God wants us to put Him first.



Adam and Eve enjoyed the Garden God had made. He had made it just for them. It was their home, and it was good.

Every corner of the Garden was full of wonderful things—the sweetest fruit you’ve ever tasted, the greenest grass you’ve ever walked on, the brightest flowers you’ve ever seen.

It was a perfect place. No one ever got sick in the Garden. There were no coughs, sniffles, sneezes, or wheezes. No one got hurt there. There were no broken arms or scratched knees.

There was no sin in the Garden either. No one got angry, and there was nothing to make you afraid. Everything Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden came from God.

Every day, Adam and Eve enjoyed God. They loved Him in the games they played. They enjoyed Him in the talks they had. They praised Him for the food they ate.

God also gave them one rule, a very good command. He said, “There is one tree—in the middle of the Garden—that has fruit for you not to enjoy. When you see this fruit, do not eat it. If you do, you will certainly die.”

Adam and Eve obeyed God’s good rule because they loved Him. Everything in the Garden was perfect, until one day when something unexpected happened.

Adam and Eve Disobey God's Good Rule

Genesis 3:1-7

God calls disobedience sin.



There was something moving on the ground. A sneaky snake snuck into the Garden. It was Satan. He came up to Eve and said, “Did God really say that you couldn’t eat from any of the trees in the Garden?”

“No,” said Eve. “God said we could not eat the fruit from one special tree. He said we can’t even touch the fruit,” she added, “or we will die.”

“Will it really hurt you?” hissed the snake. “Look at it. You won’t die. In fact, God told you not to eat it because He knows something special about that fruit. If you eat it, you will become like God Himself.”

Eve looked up into the tree. The fruit was just hanging there, shiny. It didn’t look bad.

She reached up and picked a piece of fruit from the tree. Wouldn’t God want us to be like Him? she thought. Eve looked down at the fruit in her hand. She wasn’t thinking about God or what He had commanded. She was thinking about herself and what she wanted.

“Looks good,” she said to herself. Eve held the fruit to her nose and sniffed. “Smells good too,” she said. Then she opened her mouth and took a big bite. By taking that bite, Eve decided to believe the snake rather than God.

Adam was there with Eve, so she gave the fruit to him. Do you know what he did? He took a big bite too.

Soon Adam and Eve began to feel very bad about eating the fruit. God had given them only one rule, and they had broken it.

God Finds Adam and Eve

Genesis 3:7–13

God seeks His sinful children.

Adam and Eve had sinned. They had disobeyed God. Now they were both hiding in the Garden, and Someone was walking toward them. The footsteps stopped in front of their hiding place.

“Adam, where are you?” Someone asked. It was God. He knew exactly where Adam was. Adam could not hide from God, but God had come to Adam because He loved Adam.

Adam said, “I was trying to hide. I heard You in the Garden, and I was afraid.”

“Why were you afraid, Adam? Did you disobey My rule? Did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat?”

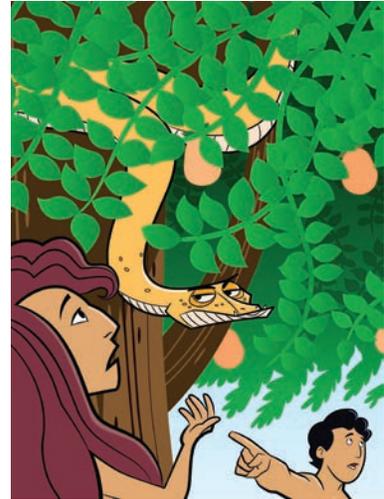
Adam wanted to run far away. He was afraid God would be angry if He found out that he had disobeyed, so he answered God’s question the wrong way. He blamed Eve. “Eve—the woman You made—handed me the fruit to eat. She made me disobey.”

Eve was hiding too, but God knew exactly where she was. He said, “Eve, what did you do?”

Eve knew that she had done wrong and wanted to keep hiding. She fearfully stepped out into the open and said, “The snake lied to me. That is why I ate. The snake made me disobey.” She had answered God’s question, but she had answered it the wrong way. She blamed Satan.

Satan didn’t say anything.

The man and the woman knew they had been caught. They had not loved God and obeyed His rule, and they were afraid. What would the powerful Creator God do now?



God Talks to Eve

Genesis 3:14–16

God disciplines His sinful children.

God turned and spoke to Satan. “One day, you will strike at My own Son’s foot. It will look like you have won, but His foot will crush your head. In the end, He will win.” God loved man and woman so much that one day He would send His Son to take their punishment.



Then God turned to the woman and said. “Eve, I created you to enjoy Me and to enjoy the good world I made. But you disobeyed Me and ate the fruit I commanded you not to eat. You did what you wanted, not what I had commanded. So, I will make it hard for you to enjoy My good world.”

God had made Eve to love and enjoy the family He had given her. The love she would have for them was to remind her of God’s love, but sin messed up this blessing. Now, right beside her love and joy would be pain and trouble.

God said to Eve, “It will be hard to raise a family. The trouble you have will remind you of your sin.”

God punished Eve so she would remember what she had done wrong. God did not want her to sin again. Even though Eve had sinned, God still loved her.

God Lovingly Sends Adam and Eve Away

Genesis 3:17–24

God rescues His sinful children.

When God finished speaking to Eve, He turned to the man and said, “Adam, I made you to enjoy Me and the things I created, but you disobeyed My rule and did what you wanted, not what I had commanded. So, I will make it hard for you to enjoy My good world.”



God had commanded Adam to plant and grow food for his family to eat. The good fruits and vegetables would remind Adam of God’s love. Now, right beside the fruits and vegetables would grow thorns and weeds.

God said to Adam, “It will be hard to grow food. The thorns and weeds will remind you of your sin.”

Then God spoke to both Adam and Eve. “You must leave your home,” He said. “You cannot stay here with Me in the Garden. You used to enjoy walking and talking with Me, but because you have disobeyed Me, you must go.”

God made Adam and Eve go outside the gate of the Garden. He was sending them away—away from the Garden, away from Him!

God sent angels to guard the Garden’s entrance. Adam and Eve could never go back inside. God didn’t want them to eat from the Tree of Life, another special tree in the Garden. If they did, they would live apart from Him forever.

God had sent His children away, but He had a bigger plan. One day, just as He had promised, God would send His Son to defeat Satan and sin. One day, God would walk and talk with His children once again.

God Gives Adam and Eve a Family

Genesis 5:1–32; 6:5–8, 11

God shows love in spite of sin.

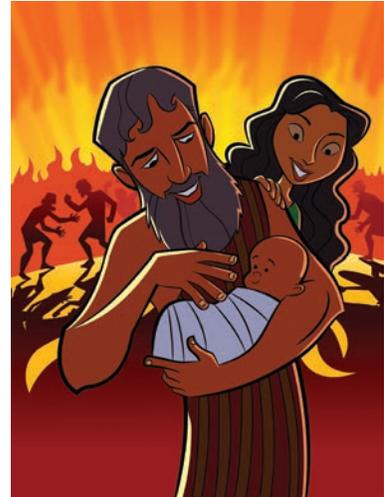
Even though God had sent Adam and Eve away from the Garden, He still loved them. One way He showed His love was that He gave them lots of children. Then He gave them grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. Pretty soon, there were people everywhere.

In those days people lived for a long, long time. One man lived to be almost a thousand years old! It would be nice to say that the longer people lived, the more they loved God, but that wasn't true. Because Adam and Eve had become sinners, all their children were also sinners.

As the world filled with Adam and Eve's family, most of these people were really mean to each other. The world became filled with sin and hatred. All of this sin made God sad because it was destroying what He loved—His good world and the people He had made.

This made God's world into a dangerous place to live, especially for the few men and women who tried to love and obey God. These people weren't perfect, but they believed in God and needed Him to protect them.

As time went by, God did something to keep His people safe. A special baby was born. The baby's father said, "Oh, my little boy, maybe God will use you to bring rest to His world. I'm going to name you, Noah, a name that means 'rest.'"

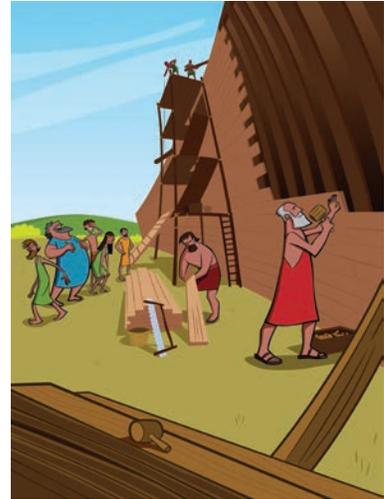


God Protects Noah and His Family

Genesis 6:9–7:16

God shows love by delivering people from sin.

When little Noah grew up, the people in God's good world were even worse than before. They were terribly mean and wicked to each other. No one obeyed God. No one loved God. No one, that is, except Noah and his tiny family.



God said to Noah, “I’ve got a job for you.”

“What is it, Lord?” Noah asked.

“I want you and your three sons to build a boat—a huge boat, called an ark.”

When Noah heard this, he said, “But there’s no water around here. What will we do with this huge boat?”

God replied, “Noah, I am going to flood this whole world with water to punish all the wickedness. I hate how people are sinning and hurting each other so badly. I also want you to prepare homes inside the boat, homes for the animals and for the people who will turn from their sin and trust Me.”

For 120 years, Noah and his three sons obeyed God and worked on the ark. They also showed God’s love to the sinful people who lived around them. Again and again they invited these people to come with them inside the boat, but none of the people wanted to turn back to God. No, it was just the opposite. They wanted to keep sinning and being mean. They thought, *God is not going to do anything! There is no flood coming!* They were not going inside that boat.

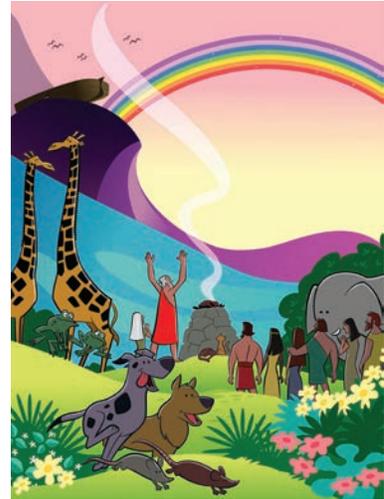
Finally, after lots of work, the ark was ready. God, in His love, tucked Noah’s family and the animals safely inside the boat. Then God Himself shut the door.

God Keeps Noah Safe Through the Flood

Genesis 7:17–9:17

God shows love by keeping His promises.

Once Noah and his family were safely inside the ark, something happened that had never happened before. Lightning flashed against the darkness as clouds filled the sky, and the thunder rumbled. Then the people outside the ark felt something wet on their arms and faces. It was starting to rain.



For forty days, water poured down from the clouds and gushed up from the ground. The water rose higher and higher until the highest mountains were covered. When Noah looked out the window, all he could see was water.

Many days went by, and Noah, his family, and all the animals were safe inside the ark, floating on top of the water. God loved them so much that He took care of them. They didn't get wet; they were safe and dry.

One day, the rain stopped. Slowly the waters got lower. Then the tops of mountains began to appear. Noah, his family, and the animals waited until the day when the earth would be dry and ready for them to enjoy once again.

When it was time, God opened the door of the ark and said, "There you go, animals. You frogs and dogs, you rats and cats, fill up the earth again." And they did just that.

It was a new start. God commanded Noah to fill the earth again with people and to once more enjoy all that God had made, and Noah worshipped the Lord.

God said, "I have brought rest to My world, Noah. I promise never to flood the whole earth with water again. I will hang up my bow in the sky so everyone can see the promise I am making right now."

To this day, God still hangs His bow—a rainbow—in the sky after a rainstorm. God has kept His promise to Noah, and He always will.

The People Begin Building the Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1–5

Sinners don't naturally seek or desire God's help.

As Noah's family grew, people once more filled the earth. Some loved God, but many did not. The flood may have removed all the wicked people from the earth, but, sadly, it didn't remove the wickedness from people's hearts.



One day, a group of people came up with a selfish plan. They said to each other (for they all spoke the same language), “Let’s make an amazing city. Right in the middle, we will build a super-tall tower that reaches all the way to heaven.”

God knew all about their plan and said, “Let Us go down to look at their tower.” The tower might have seemed big and fancy to the people building it, but in God’s eyes their ‘super-tall tower’ was pretty tiny.

More than their tiny tower, God disliked their proud hearts. They didn’t think they needed God. They thought they could use their tower to climb up to heaven on their own. They thought their city would protect them from scary animals and scary people.

With this kind of city, the workers certainly weren’t going to fill the whole earth like God had commanded. No, they wanted to stay together in one place. This city and super-tall tower would be their home. Their own work would keep them safe and make them famous.

In their hearts, these men and women did not love God, and they refused to obey Him. What would God do next?

God Stops the Tower Builders

Genesis 11:5–9

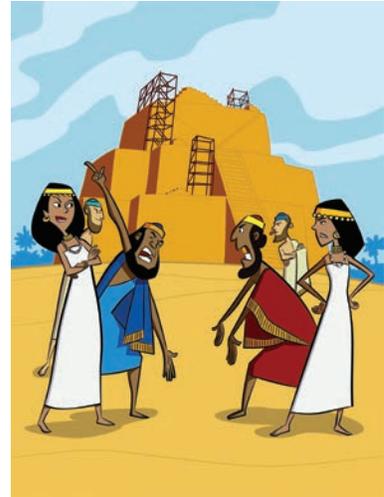
Sinners cannot mess up God's plan.

When God saw the tiny tower and the proud workers, He didn't destroy the workers. Instead, He lovingly guided them to do what He wanted. God powerfully stopped the people's plans by mixing up their languages.

One day, a worker turned to the man beside him and said, "Hand me the brick. I think it's on the scale." But the other worker thought he said, "You look sick, and you stink like a whale."

Well, you can imagine how the rest of that day went. With such silliness and confusion, they couldn't keep building. The people packed up their belongings, leaving the city and the tower behind. The ones who could understand each other joined together to form new nations. God caused the people to obey His command to scatter all across the earth.

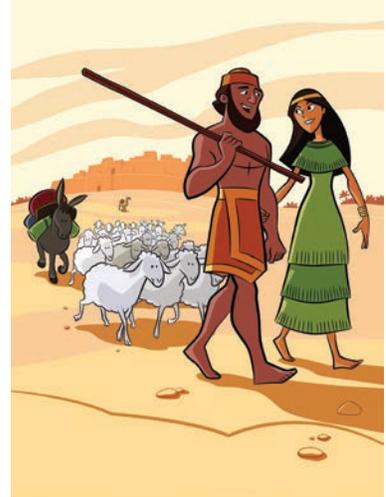
God was not finished dealing with these sinful people. Even though He had scattered them across the earth, He had a plan. God would bless the people of the earth through the family of one person—a man named Abraham.



God Calls Abraham to Follow Him

Genesis 11:27–12:5; 15:1–6

Sinners are objects of God's love.



There was nothing really special about Abraham. He didn't grow up in a good family that loved God. He lived with his wife Sarah in Ur, a wicked city like the one the tower builders had lived in. There they didn't have to worry about scary animals or scary people. They were safe inside the city's strong walls.

One day, God came to Abraham and said, "Abraham, I want you to take Sarah, leave your home, and follow Me to a land I will show you."

God loved Abraham and wanted to teach him a special lesson. God wanted Abraham to know that He, not strong walls, would keep Abraham safe.

Abraham believed and trusted God, so he did as God had commanded and left his home. God led Abraham and his family to the land called Canaan.

God also made Abraham a very special promise, "Look up, Abraham. Do you see all those stars? I will give you more children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren than the stars in the sky."

Abraham said, "But, Lord, Sarah and I don't have any children, and we are too old to have children now. How will we have a huge family?"

What seemed impossible to Abraham was no problem for the Lord. God had made a promise to Abraham, and God always keeps His promises. Abraham would have to be patient. God said, "Abraham, I will make you into a great nation, and through your family, I will bless all the peoples of the earth."

God Blesses Abraham

Genesis 12:7–8; 21:1–6

God gives good gifts to His children.

Years had gone by, and still Abraham and his wife Sarah had no children. In fact, they were now far too old to have children.

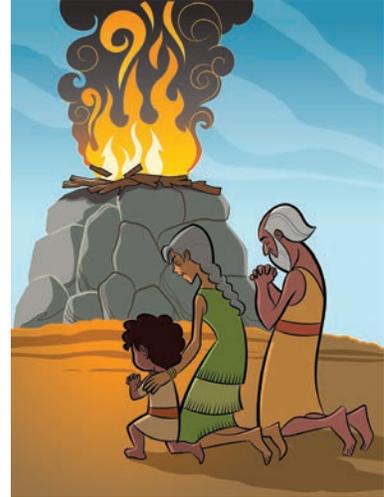
Yet they believed that God would keep His promise to give them a family, and, in His perfect timing, He did. Abraham and Sarah had a son and named him Isaac. Their family had begun, and through them God would bless all the peoples of the earth, just as He had said.

Day after day, Abraham and Sarah watched Isaac grow up. They loved the son God had given them, but more than their son, they loved God.

Abraham showed his love for God by offering sacrifices to Him. In a sacrifice, Abraham gave back to God something that God had given to him. Often it was an animal from his flock.

The old man would pick out a ram or sheep. Using some rope, he would bind it tightly. Then he would lay the animal out on an altar—a large, flat pile of stones. Reaching for his knife and wrapping his fingers around its handle, he would draw the long blade out of its pouch. Then raising his arm high in the air, he would bring the knife down and sacrifice the animal to God.

Abraham showed his love to God by giving back to God part of what he had been given. Abraham knew that everything he had was a gift from God.



Abraham Prepares to Obey the Lord

Genesis 22:1–8

God commands us to love Him more than His good gifts.

Abraham's favorite gift from God was his son Isaac. One day, God came to test Abraham to find out whom Abraham loved more, Isaac or God.

When God called out to Abraham, Abraham replied, "Here I am."

Then God said, "Abraham, I have seen how much you love Isaac. Tomorrow I want you to take him to a place that I will show you. When you get there, I want you to give him back to Me as a sacrifice."

God's words struck Abraham's heart like lightning. How could he sacrifice Isaac? It was a hard command. What would Abraham do? Would he love God or the son God had given him?

For three days, they walked until Abraham saw the place God had chosen. It was high on the side of a mountain, so they began to climb.

"Father," asked Isaac, "What are we going to do?"

Abraham had not told Isaac what God had said. He replied, "We are going to give a sacrifice to the Lord. This shows our love for Him."

"But Father," Isaac said, "We've brought the wood for the fire and a lantern to start it. But where is the lamb?"

"God will provide a lamb," replied Abraham. "God will provide."

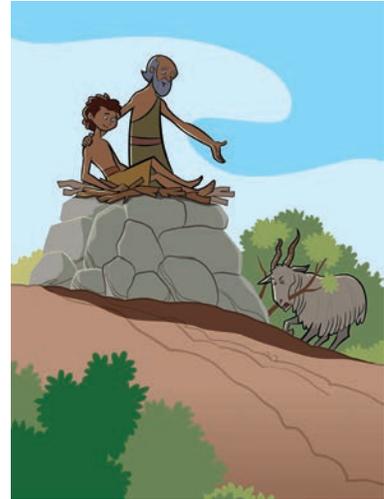


God Provides a Sacrifice

Genesis 22:9–14

God gave Jesus, His Son, as the best gift of all.

When Abraham and Isaac reached the spot for the sacrifice, they gathered stones together. As they finished, the old man turned toward Isaac. Using some rope, he bound it tightly around his son. Then he laid the boy on the large stone altar. Reaching for his knife and wrapping his fingers around its handle, he drew the long blade out of its pouch. Then raising his arm high in the air, he . . .



“Abraham!” God called out, “Abraham, don’t hurt the boy!”

Abraham stopped and dropped his knife safely to the ground.

God said, “Abraham, I saw you. You were willing to give Me the son you love so much. Now I know you love Me more than anyone or anything else.”

Then Abraham looked up and saw something. Behind him, stuck in a bush, was a ram! Together Abraham and Isaac brought the ram to the altar and gave it back to the Lord as a love gift.

Even though He had given Abraham a hard test, God had never stopped loving Abraham. God had provided His own animal for the sacrifice, just as Abraham had said.

One day, on that same mountain, God would lay down His own Son as a sacrifice; and, at that time, no one would stop His hand. In time, God would provide the perfect Lamb to take the death that our sins deserve.

Jacob Tricks Esau

Genesis 25:19–34

You cannot trick God out of His loving plan.

Just as God had shown His love to Abraham, He now showed His love to Isaac. God gave Isaac and his wife Rebekah twin sons. The older son was named Esau; the younger was named Jacob. As they grew up, the boys were very different.



Esau would go far from home and hunt wild animals. He liked to work with his hands, but he didn't work for God, only for himself. Because Esau was the oldest, he would become the leader of the family when he grew up, just like his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac.

Unlike Esau, Jacob stayed close to home. He liked to think, but he didn't think much about God. He thought mostly about himself and how to get what he wanted; Jacob was a trickster.

One day, Jacob was at home cooking a pot of red bean soup when he saw someone in the distance. It was Esau returning home from a long hunt, tired and hungry. When Esau walked up, Jacob asked, "My brother! How are you?"

"Oh, Jacob. Help me," groaned Esau. "I'm starving! If I don't eat right now, I will die right here!"

"Well, I do have this yummy soup," said Jacob, stirring the pot. "You can have some, but it will cost you."

Esau couldn't stop looking at the bubbling soup. It smelled wonderful. He smacked his lips. "How much?" asked Esau.

Jacob lied, "Oh, not much. I just want to become the family leader. Think about it. If you died right here—you wouldn't be the leader anyway. Brother, if you give me your spot, I will give you the pot."

"Fine," blurted Esau, grabbing the spoon from Jacob's hand. "You can have it. Now give me that red stuff!"

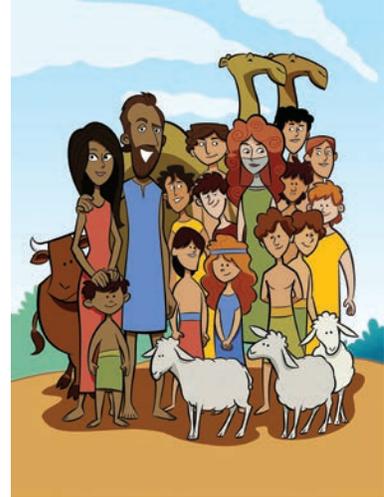
Jacob smiled. His plan had worked perfectly. Now he, Jacob the younger brother, would become Jacob the family leader. Though Jacob had a new title, it wouldn't change him on the inside. In his heart, he was still Jacob the trickster.

Jacob Runs Away from Esau

Genesis 27:1–45; 30:43–31:3; 32:1–26

You cannot run away from God's love.

One day, when Esau was gone, Jacob dressed up like his brother and tricked his father into giving him the family blessing instead of Esau. This made Esau so mad that he wanted to kill Jacob. So Jacob ran away—far from home and far from Esau.



Despite everything that Jacob had done, God still showed love to this trickster. He gave him a family, many children, and huge flocks and herds. Through the years, God never forgot about Jacob, and neither did Esau.

When Jacob was old, God told him to return home to the land of Canaan. As Jacob got closer to home, he thought, *Could Esau still be mad at me for tricking him? What will he do when he sees me?* Then Jacob heard the news—Esau was coming, and he wasn't alone. He was bringing an army of 400 men with swords! Jacob trembled with fear.

For the rest of the day Jacob helped his family escape across the river. He knew there would be no tricking Esau this time. As nighttime came, Jacob helped the last of his family to the other side. Surely they would be safe here.

Then out of nowhere a man tackled Jacob to the ground, and through the long blackness of night, Jacob and the man were locked in fierce struggle. *Who is this man?* Jacob thought. *He has strong hands. Could this be Esau?*

God Wrestles with Jacob

Genesis 32:24–33:4

You cannot do anything to earn God's love.

Through the hours of darkness, Jacob and the man struggled and strained. Finally, the man touched Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint. As the night turned into morning, the man said, "Let Me go because the sun is coming up."

Yet Jacob would not let go. He hung on with every bit of strength he had. He said, "I will not let You go unless You promise to bless me."

The man replied, "I will always take care of you, Jacob. The promises I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I give to you. You will no longer be called Jacob 'the trickster.' Instead, you will be called Israel 'the prince of God.'"

Jacob realized this was no ordinary man. He had not been wrestling with Esau; he had been wrestling God Himself. Because of that, Jacob's leg would always hurt, but now he was a new person. God had changed his heart.

As Jacob limped out to meet Esau and the 400 men with him, Esau was no longer angry with Jacob. God had changed Esau's heart too.

Jacob had not tricked God into blessing him. No, God blessed Jacob freely—because He loved Jacob. Jacob was blessed not because he had been good, but because God is good.



Joseph Is Hated by His Brothers

Genesis 37:1–22

God is in charge even when people do wrong.

For the rest of Jacob's life, God kept His promise to take care of Jacob. The land of Canaan was filled with wicked people, yet Canaan was the place that Jacob and his twelve sons called home. Thankfully, the people around Jacob didn't lead him into sin. God had changed Jacob's heart, but his sons were another story. The wicked people in Canaan were not good friends for them. Only two of Jacob's sons, Joseph and Benjamin, loved God. The other brothers didn't mind Benjamin; he was little. However, they hated Joseph because their father loved him the most.



Though Jacob loved all of his sons, Joseph was his favorite. He even made Joseph a special robe, not the kind like Joseph's brothers wore when working with smelly sheep. This robe was beautiful and had been made just for Joseph.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to take care of the sheep. After they were gone for days, Jacob started to worry, so he sent Joseph to check on them. Joseph was to come back and tell him how they were doing.

After a few days, Joseph found his brothers—but not before they spotted him first.

“Oh no! Here comes the ‘Favorite!’” one said.

“And no one's around to help him! Let's beat him up!” said another.

“Wait, I know,” said a third. “Let's kill him!”

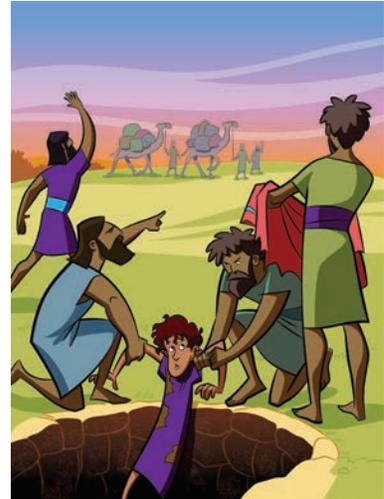
So they waited for their brother.

Joseph Is Sold as a Slave

Genesis 37:23–28; 41:56–57

God is in charge of every detail in the world.

As soon as Joseph walked up, his brothers ran at him, wrestled him to the ground, ripped off his special robe, and threw him into a deep pit. Usually these pits were filled with water, but God had kept this one empty in order to protect Joseph.



From the bottom of the pit, Joseph begged his brothers, “Help! Don’t leave me here. Please, help.” But Joseph’s brothers didn’t help him out; they didn’t even listen to a word he was saying.

As the brothers talked about what to do with Joseph next, Judah said, “Wait. See those men over there? They’re going to the far away land of Egypt. Let’s not kill Joseph. Let’s sell him as a slave.” The brothers nodded their agreement.

Before Joseph knew it, he was out of the pit and on his way to Egypt. The brothers thought he was gone for good.

Years went by, and Joseph’s brothers didn’t change. In fact, they got worse as they followed the ways of their sinful neighbors in Canaan.

One day, Jacob, his sons, and everyone in Canaan started to run out of food because there was a famine in the land. Remember, in those days people couldn’t just go out to a restaurant or grocery store to buy some food. If Jacob’s family didn’t do something soon, they would all starve.

Joseph Meets His Brothers in Egypt

Genesis 42:1–45:11

God is in charge of His salvation plan.

Everyone in Canaan was hungry. There were plenty of growling stomachs but not enough food. Then Jacob heard there was food in Egypt. He said to his sons, “Go to Egypt. Bring back food so our family won’t starve.”



After a long, dusty trip, the brothers reached the land of Egypt. There they saw the one person they had never expected to see again. It was Joseph! He was no longer a slave. God had shown His love to Joseph, and now Joseph was one of the most powerful men in Egypt—second-in-command.

You can imagine how surprised and scared the brothers were. Joseph said, “Don’t be afraid. I forgive you. You wanted to get rid of me, but God sent me here for all our good.”

“We don’t understand,” they said. They knew they had been mean to Joseph and were afraid he might be mean to them in return. They didn’t expect kindness from Joseph or from God.

Joseph explained, “God has done all of this because He loves us. He gave the land of Egypt seven years of rain and lots of food to store up. The famine we’re in now will last for another six years, so get all the family and bring them here. God used you to send me here so I could prepare food for you and for all the nation of Egypt.”

God had a bigger plan than just giving Joseph’s family food. Even though Joseph’s brothers had hated him, God still loved them and would take care of them. God gave Jacob’s family food to eat, and He also took them away from their sinful friends in the land of Canaan.

Jacob’s twelve sons and their families, the Children of Israel, safely lived in the land of Egypt. God never stopped taking care of them. They were His family, and He loved them.

God Sends Moses Back to Egypt

Exodus 1:6–11; 3:1–4:17

God never forgets His people.

Many years had gone by since Joseph's family had moved to Egypt. A new king, who didn't remember Joseph and didn't love God, sat on the throne. In fact, he thought he was a god. Each day he looked out at the people of Israel living in his land and frowned. These twelve tribes, one for each of Jacob's sons, were getting bigger all the time—too big. *Soon they might even take over Egypt*, he thought.



Then the king had an idea. *I could make these people my slaves. I could tell them what to do, and they would belong to me forever.* So the king made God's people his slaves.

The king's plan was evil, but the Lord had a different plan—a plan to rescue His people. He started by speaking from a burning bush to an Israelite named Moses. “Moses, I am the one true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Israelites think I have forgotten them, but I have heard My people crying out for help.”

“What are you going to do, Lord?” asked Moses. “The king of Egypt is strong and thinks Your people are his.”

“Moses, that little king is no problem for Me. I will show him how much I love Abraham's family. They are My people, and I want them to be near Me. I am going to bring them out of Egypt, and you are going to help Me.”

“Me?” sputtered Moses.

“Yes, you, Moses.”

“But I am not very good at speaking to people. I wouldn't know what to say,” said Moses.

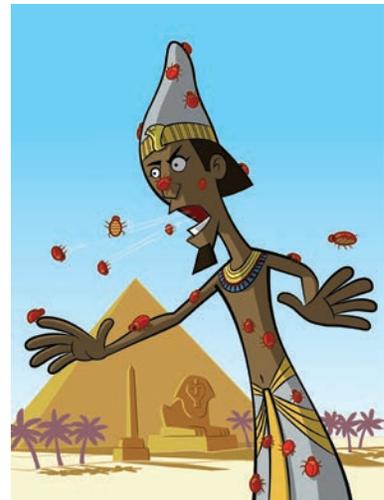
“Don't worry,” the Lord told him. “I will help you and tell you what to say.”

God Sends the Plagues on Egypt

Exodus 5:1–2; 7:1–10:29

God fights to protect His people.

After God told Moses about His plan to rescue the Israelites, Moses went to Egypt and stood before the evil king. Moses said, “King, the real God has a message for you. He says, ‘The Israelite people don’t belong to you. They’re Mine. Let them go free so they can worship Me.’”



The king laughed. “God? Said what? No way! Those people are mine. Let this god—whoever he is—just try to take those people away.”

And with that, the war for God’s people began. The evil king may have been powerful in his own kingdom, but he was no match for God.

God worked ten miracles, called plagues, against the king to show His mighty power. With each plague, Moses always had the same message from God. He said, “The LORD, the God of Abraham, has sent me to you. He says, ‘Let My people go free so they can worship Me.’”

But no matter how bad the plague, the king would always say, “No way.”

First, God turned Egypt’s big river into blood. But the king looked away, held his nose, and said, “No way.”

Then God covered Egypt with yucky frogs. But the king stepped very carefully and said, “No way.”

Next, God sent gazillions of tiny bugs and then bazillions of big bugs. But the king spat out a big bug and coughed and said, “No way.”

So God killed all the king’s cows and covered the king’s people with icky sores. But the king still groaned, “No way.”

Finally, God covered the land of Egypt with ice, even bigger bugs, and then complete darkness. But the king crunched over the frozen bugs, lit a candle, and croaked, “No way!”

The evil king hated God and would not obey, but God loved His people and would not quit until He had rescued them all.

God Brings His People Out of Egypt

Exodus 11:1–12:32; 14:5–30

God's rescue always succeeds.

Even though God had sent blood, frogs, bugs, sores, lice, and darkness, the evil king would still not let God's people go free. God said, "You have lost every battle we have had. You are not going to win against My might. If you do not let My people go free, some of your people will die this very night."

It would be nice to say that the king obeyed God's command, but he didn't—not until it was too late. When the final plague was over, many of the king's people had died, even his oldest son. Crushed with sadness, the evil king finally gave up and said, "You win. Your people may leave."

With great joy, the Children of Israel loaded their carts and hurried out of Egypt.

Before the people had gone far, the evil king changed his mind. He didn't want to lose all of his slaves; they were his. He gathered his army and raced after God's people. Soon the Israelites found themselves trapped—stuck between the king's army and the waters of the Red Sea. There seemed to be no way out, but God worked another great miracle. The winds roared over the Red Sea, and the waters rolled back on both sides. As the waters piled up, a dry path appeared in the middle of the sea. All night long, the people walked through on dry ground.

The next morning, the king saw that the people were escaping. He commanded his mighty army to follow, dashing after the Israelites. As the last of God's people came safely to the other side, God brought the water crashing down on the army of Egypt. God's people were free from that evil king forever.

Now they were on their way to Mount Sinai, where God had first told Moses His rescue plan. There they would meet with God. They were His people, and soon they would meet with Him.



God Comes Down on the Top of Mount Sinai

Exodus 19:1–16

God's holiness makes Him unapproachable by sinners.

When the people arrived at Mount Sinai, God sent Moses an exciting message for them. God said, “Do you remember how I crushed the Egyptians and carried you out of slavery? Now, if you will obey My words, I will make you My precious treasure, a nation who will be Mine forever.”



When the people heard this, they rejoiced and answered, “Everything God has said we will do.”

But God was not finished. God told Moses to have the people get ready for a visit from Him. He wanted them to understand what it means to be the people of a holy God. God said, “I will come down and speak to you from the mountain. Do not come too close. If any person or animal touches the mountain, he will die.”

Three days later, the sky filled with thick, dark clouds. Lightning flashed, and thunder rumbled through the air. The dark clouds settled on the mountain, and the ground began to shake and shudder. As God came down, fire and smoke poured onto the mountain, and the noise of a trumpet grew louder and louder.

The people trembled with fear! How could they ever fellowship with a God like this? He was so mighty and holy, and they were so sinful. How would God ever make them His people?

God Gives the Law and Instructions for the Tabernacle

Exodus 19:20–20:19; 25:8–9; 29:36–46

God forgives sin through a Sacrifice.

With a loud voice God spoke out of the thick, dark cloud on top of the mountain. “I am the God who brought you out of slavery in Egypt. You are My people, so you must live like My people.”



God began to teach the people how they should live. He gave them ten rules called the Ten Commandments. The first and most important rule was, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” God’s people were not to love anyone or anything else more than God.

Then God gave them more rules, lots and lots of rules. The more God gave, the more fearful the people became. How could they keep all these rules? What would happen if they broke one?

God was holy, and He had a plan to deal with the people’s sin. Moses said, “Don’t be afraid. Here is what God has said. He will live among you in a very special tent. It will be called the Tabernacle.”

Moses explained, “The Tabernacle is the place where you should bring sacrifices to God.” These sacrifices were like the gifts Abraham gave to God, gifts of lambs and rams and cows. The animals would be punished and die instead of the people, but the people would live.

God knew that animals could never really take away sin. One day, He would send the perfect Sacrifice who would die to remove the sin of His people. Through His Son Jesus, God would one day live with His people forever.

God Fellowships with His People

Exodus 24:1–11

Forgiven sinners can enjoy fellowship with God.

Moses told the Children of Israel all that God had commanded him on the mountain. The Children of Israel once more shouted in reply, “We will do all that the Lord has said.” God had made them His special people, and they would live like His people. He would love and take care of them, and, in turn, they would love and obey Him.



Moses wrote all that God had said in a book so the people would always remember the promise they had made to God and the promise God had made to them. As a sign of their promise, the young men offered fellowship sacrifices, showing that they would obey God and would be His people.

Then God called Moses and the other leaders up onto the mountain. They were going where the thunder had roared and the lightning had flashed. They were going to that holy place to meet with God. Just a few weeks before, they would have died if they had gone up the mountain. What would happen to them now as they stood in the presence of the holy God?

When the leaders arrived, God had prepared a feast for them. No one can see God and live, but the leaders were allowed to see God’s feet and sit at His table. Then they all ate and drank together—God with the people He loved and the people with their loving God. With this feast, God showed that He would keep His promise to care for His people.

Israel Worships the Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1–35

Only God is to be worshipped, not idols.

One day, God called Moses up the mountain. There God wrote down the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets and gave them to Moses. Then God began telling Moses all the instructions for making the Tabernacle. For many days, Moses was up on Mount Sinai away from the people. The Israelites began to wonder where he was. *What has happened to Moses? What if he has been hurt or killed? He was our only way of talking to God.*



So the people went to Aaron the priest, who offered sacrifices to the Lord, and gave him their gold earrings. They said, “We don’t know what happened to this fellow Moses, so make us a statue of God. We need some way to see God and have Him here with us.”

Aaron should not have listened to the people or made the golden statue of a calf, but he did. He pointed to the calf and said, “This is your god, O Israel, who led you out of Egypt. Tomorrow, you shall celebrate this god.”

On the mountain, however, God was not celebrating. He said to Moses, “Go down to those people. They have broken My rules and turned their backs on Me. They have made an idol and are worshipping it instead of Me!”

Moses took the two tablets and went down to the people. When he got there, Moses saw how badly Aaron and the people had sinned. He threw the stone tablets to the ground with a crash, shattering them into tiny pieces. God’s rules had been broken. Then Moses burned the statue, ground it to powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it. Moses turned to Aaron and said, “Why did you lead the people into such great sin?”

Aaron replied, “Don’t be angry with me, Moses. You know what these people are like. They gave me their gold earrings and asked me to make a god for them. I threw the gold into the fire, and out jumped this calf!”

Aaron’s story was ridiculous. He and the people had both chosen to disobey. The punishment for their sin didn’t stop with having to drink the nasty water. God sent a mighty plague, as He had in Egypt, against His own people, and many people died because of their sin.

God had shown great kindness to His people, but now they had turned away from Him and had begun to worship another god. What would happen to Israel?

God Is Angry with His People

Exodus 32:30–33:16

God's people desperately need His presence.

God was angry with His people. They had bowed to an idol instead of worshipping Him. Normally Aaron could offer sacrifices for the people's sin, but he had sinned too! Moses scolded the people, saying, "You have sinned greatly, but I will go back to the Lord on the mountain. Perhaps I can offer a sacrifice for your sin."



Moses returned to the mountain and said to the Lord, "These people have sinned terribly. Please forgive their sin and take my life instead of theirs."

The Lord said, "I will punish the people who sinned, Moses, not you. Now go down to the people and lead them to the land I have promised them, but I will not go with you. If I went near these wicked people, I would punish all of them!"

When the people heard that God had said He would not go with them, their hearts broke. They knew they couldn't go on without God.

So Moses stood between the Lord and the people and prayed, "I know that You are angry with these people, but if You still love me, please show your love to them again. They are still Your people." The Lord said, "I will go to the land with you, Moses."

"But, Lord, if you do not go up with all of us," said Moses, "then do not lead us there at all. Your presence with us is what makes us Your people. Without You, we are no different from anyone else. You must go with us all."

The Lord answered, "Moses, I'll do what you have asked because I'm pleased with you and know you by name."

God Shows Moses His Glory

Exodus 33:16–34:28

God loves to show mercy.

Because of His love for Moses, God agreed to go with the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, even though they had sinned against Him terribly.

Then Moses asked the Lord for something more. He prayed, “Please show me what You are like. Please show me Your glory.”

In answer to his request, the Lord took Moses and placed him in a small cave on the mountain. Then the Lord walked past in all His glory. As He moved by the cave, God covered the entrance with His hand so Moses could not see His face, for no one can see God’s face and live.

Then God showed Moses what He was really like. He announced that He was “the LORD—a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and overflowing with love and faithfulness. He forgives all kinds of sin, but sin must also be punished.”

After the Lord had passed by, He removed His hand, and Moses saw the back of the Lord Himself.

The Lord said to him, “Although the people have turned away from Me, I will take them as Mine once again.” Then He gave Moses another copy of the Ten Commandments. God had heard Moses’ prayers and would go with His people.

One day, God would send Jesus to stand between Himself and a sinful people. Like Moses, He, too, would pray for God’s people, but this time God would accept His Son’s life as payment for the people’s sin.

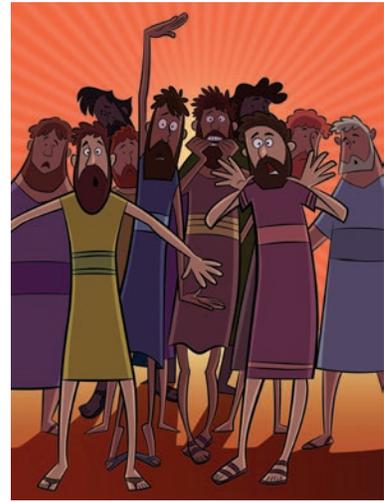


The Twelve Spies Discover Giants in the Promised Land

Exodus 13:21–22; Numbers 13:1–14:31

God is more powerful than anything that may scare us.

As Israel journeyed away from Mount Sinai, God was with them every day in a cloud and every night in a pillar of fire. Whenever the cloud moved, the people followed it across the desert. After many days, they arrived at Canaan, the land God had promised to give them. The people picked twelve men to spy out the land. When the spies returned, they said, “You wouldn’t believe this land! It’s just as amazing as God said it would be!”



“Yes,” said one named Joshua, “Just look at these grapes we found. They’re huge!”

“This is home!” said another spy named Caleb, “God has promised to give it to us. Let’s move in!”

“Now wait just a minute, not so fast,” the other ten spies argued. “Sure, the land is nice, but it’s also full of the biggest people we’ve ever seen! They’re so big—they make us look like little grasshoppers!”

When the rest of the people heard this, they were afraid. How could they fight giants? Did God think they were strong enough? The people complained to Moses, “Why did God lead us here to be killed by giants? We should have stayed in Egypt!”

Then the Israelites said to each other, “Let’s choose a new leader and go back to Egypt.”

Finally, Joshua and Caleb spoke up, “The land that God promised us is very good. If God is with us, we have nothing to fear. He is much bigger than any giant!” What Joshua and Caleb said made the people angry. The people were so angry that they talked about killing Joshua and Caleb.

Just then, God came down in the cloud to speak to Moses and Aaron. He said, “I would have given the people this land I promised them, but they didn’t think I was strong enough to defeat some puny giants. Even though I have done miracles for them, they still do not believe in Me. Now, instead of enjoying the Promised Land, they will wander around the desert for forty years, but their children will get to enjoy My good land. The only grown-ups who will enter Canaan are Joshua and Caleb—because they believed in Me.”

When Moses shared with the people what God had said, they were very sad. They knew that they had sinned, yet no matter how much they wanted to, most of the grown-ups would never enter the Promised Land.

God Gives His People Water from a Rock

Exodus 16:1–18; Numbers 20:1–13

God takes care of His people—even when they sin.

God’s people wandered in the desert with no huge grapes to eat and no place to call home. Yet through all those years, God showed love to His people by taking care of them. Every day He sent food from heaven called manna. When the people looked outside their tents each morning, they saw little white wafers that looked like snow covering the ground. They tasted like fresh cakes made with honey!

Once, the Children of Israel were in a place with no water to drink, and they started to grumble. It wasn’t the first time they had complained. They didn’t like how God was taking care of them.

They said, “Moses, we wish we were still in Egypt. At least there we could get water! Why did you lead us here where all our families and animals are dying of thirst?”

When Moses heard the people, he prayed to the Lord for help. The Lord answered, “Take your staff in your hand, gather the people together, and, in front of them, speak to the rock. I will make water come out for all to drink.”

God’s command was simple, but Moses disobeyed the Lord. He didn’t speak to the rock, as God had told him. Moses became angry and said to the people, “Listen up, you complainers! Watch as we bring water for you out of the rock.” Then he took his staff and hit the rock with it!

Moses had sinned. Because of this sin, God would not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land. Despite Moses’ disobedience and the people’s grumbling, God still gave everyone water out of the rock.



God Gives Poisonous Snakes and the Bronze Serpent

Numbers 21:4–9

God forgives people who trust in His promises.

It wasn't long before the people were complaining again. The desert they were walking through was far away from cool streams and fields of food. As they walked through that dry, hot place, the people grumbled, "Why has God brought us here? There is no food or water, and we are sick of this yucky manna!"



They weren't thankful for the blessings God gave them every day. Deep down they didn't really believe God would take care of them.

Suddenly, someone screamed, "Ouch! Something bit me!" Then more people began to yell. All over the camp snakes slithered. They slid around people's feet and slipped inside their tents. God had heard the Israelites' complaining and sent poisonous snakes into the camp.

The people ran to Moses and cried, "We have sinned because we grumbled against you and God. Please pray that God will take away these snakes." So Moses prayed for the people.

God answered Moses' prayer, but He didn't take the snakes away. Instead, He told Moses, "Make a snake out of metal and put it on top of a pole so everyone can see it." God promised, "Anyone who looks at that snake will be healed and live."

The people didn't have to take medicine, and they didn't have to find a way to heal themselves. If they simply looked at the snake on the pole, they would live. They had only to believe what God had promised.

God healed His sinful people because He loved them. Their sin had brought death, but God's promise gave new life.

God's People Prepare to Attack Jericho

Joshua 1:1–5; 2:1–24; 5:13–6:7

God doesn't need our help to accomplish His work.

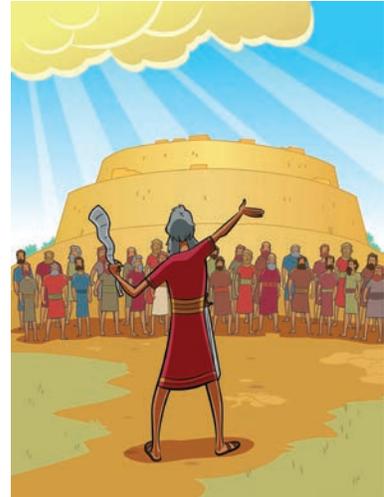
Because the Children of Israel hadn't believed God, they wandered in the desert for forty years. During that time, the grown-ups died, but their children got older and took their place. Now the nation was full of new people who would trust the Lord, and God gave them a new leader, Joshua.

One day, God spoke to Joshua, "It is time for the people to enter the land I promised them. As you go through the land, all the ground you walk on will be yours."

Joshua selected two men for a secret mission. He sent them to sneak into the enemies' land and spy on them. When the spies came back, they said, "God has prepared everything and has given us the whole land. All the people—even the giants—are scared to death of us!"

Then Joshua told the Israelites the plan that God had shown him, "For six days, we will march silently around the city of Jericho once each day. Then, on the seventh day, we will walk around seven times. When we finish, we will blow our trumpets and shout as loud as we can, and God will knock down the walls Himself!"

It seemed like a strange plan to the people. They wouldn't knock down the walls. They wouldn't even attack the walls. All they had to do was obey what God had said, and He would fight for them.



Joshua Leads the Attack on Jericho

Joshua 6:6–20

God wants us to trust and obey Him.

The people of Jericho were confused. Day after day, they watched God’s people march around and around their city. The Israelites didn’t talk or fight; they just walked! The people of Jericho had never seen this kind of battle before. They wondered, *What’s wrong with these people? What kind of war is this? What kind of God is this?*



The Israelites obeyed God’s plan. For six days, they simply walked around the city, one time each day. When the seventh day came, the people walked around the city once, but they didn’t stop there. They went around the city a second time, then a third time, then a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh. Then they stopped.

When the Israelite army finished their last lap around the city, Joshua shouted with all his might, “Now!”

Immediately, horns blew, people shouted, and the ground shook! Then, God tore the walls of Jericho all the way down, down to the ground. The city was theirs.

God had given them the mighty city of Jericho. In His loving plan, He would give them many more cities. Soon, the people would worship God in Canaan, the special land the Lord had promised.

Gideon Fights Against the Midianites

Judges 6:1–7:22

God alone is powerful to save us.

While Joshua was alive, the people obeyed and loved God, but after he died, the people began to worship idols once more. This was a terrible sin against God. To bring the people back to Himself, God sent an enemy nation, Midian, to attack them.



The Midianites would ride their camels into town and steal all the people’s money and food. It got so bad that God’s people were about to starve. Just as God had planned, His people cried out to Him for help. God answered their prayers by sending them a man named Gideon.

One day, Gideon was hiding from the Midianites, preparing some food. Suddenly, the Lord’s messenger appeared and said, “Greetings, you brave and mighty man! The LORD is with you.” When Gideon heard the news that God wanted him to fight Midian, he couldn’t believe it. He was hiding. He wasn’t a brave man.

But to fight the mighty Midianites, Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 men! To Gideon this seemed like a good size for an army, but God said, “Gideon, you have too many soldiers.”

Gideon couldn’t believe his ears. He thought to himself, What? Too many? Even though it seemed crazy to him, Gideon believed God and sent home every soldier who was afraid. More than half of the soldiers went home! Again, God said, “There are still too many soldiers in your army,” so Gideon sent home more soldiers until there were only 300 left. God would rescue His people with just these few men.

God told Gideon exactly what to do. That night with torches covered by clay pots, the 300 men circled around the sleeping Midianite army. Then Gideon put the horn to his lips, and all at once the darkness exploded with sound and light. The rest of the men blew their horns, smashed their pots, and held their flaming torches high. All together they shouted, “For the Lord and for Gideon!”

The Midianite soldiers didn’t know what was happening. They thought a huge army was attacking the camp. In the darkness and confusion, they started fighting each other. God didn’t need a huge army or even a brave leader to rescue His people. God loved His people and wanted to rescue them Himself.

Goliath Challenges Israel's Army

1 Samuel 8:19–22; 10:20–24; 17:1–11

God's people must be rescued by Him.

God's people had lived in Canaan for a long time, but they had not conquered all of God's enemies who also lived there. These enemies fought against God's people, so the Israelites complained, selfishly asking God for a king like the other nations. Though God saw their hearts, He graciously answered by giving them King Saul, who would lead them into battle.



One of their enemies was a giant named Goliath. He was the biggest, meanest, and scariest person you could imagine! Absolutely no one messed with Goliath.

Every day when Goliath stomped onto the battlefield, the army of Israel shook with fear. The giant would shout, “You don’t need to send your army over to fight our army. Just send one man to fight me! If your man wins, we will serve your king. But if I win, you will serve our king!” Then he laughed a terrible, giant laugh.

Not one soldier stepped forward. They were all afraid to fight Goliath. Even King Saul, the tallest man in God’s army, was too scared to fight.

Day after day, the giant came out, and day after day, God’s people trembled. They had forgotten that this giant was no match for the mighty God who had defeated their enemies before. They acted as if God couldn’t handle one tiny, little giant.

David Gets Ready to Fight Goliath

1 Samuel 17:12–37

God prepares rescuers for His people.

Every day, the giant Goliath yelled challenges at God's Army, and God's people hid in their tents. Then one day a young shepherd boy named David came to the battlefield to visit his older brothers who were soldiers.



David found his brothers and started to say, “Dad sent some food for you and some for the commander too! Here is some cheese and ...”

Then he heard the giant shouting, “Are you still too scared to fight me! I defy you and your God!”

David clenched his fists and glared at the giant. He loved the Lord with all his heart, and no one could talk about his God like that! David said to his brothers, “Who is going to go fight this giant? Who's going to teach him a lesson?”

No one answered, so David said, “I will fight him!”

His brothers laughed. “You're only a boy! We're the soldiers! Go home and take care of your little lambs. Let us do the fighting.”

David knew that God alone could defeat this giant. When a lion and a bear had attacked some of his sheep, God had helped David kill them. David knew that if God could use him to defeat dangerous animals, then God could do the same with this dangerous giant.

David went to King Saul and said, “Oh king, don't worry. I will fight this giant.”

Saul replied, “You are too young to fight Goliath. He has been a soldier all his life.”

David told the king his story of the lion and the bear. Then he said, “God saved me from the lion's claws and the bear's paws. This giant is no match for God!”

When King Saul heard David's story, he said, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

David Defeats Goliath

1 Samuel 17:38–52

God fights to rescue His people.

David was going to fight Goliath. He reached into a small stream and carefully picked five smooth stones. Then, with a shepherd's stick in one hand and his sling in the other, David turned and started walking—past the soldiers, past the king, and straight for the giant.

Goliath roared! He couldn't believe his eyes. "Are you joking with me? Am I a dog that you send a boy to beat me with a stick?"

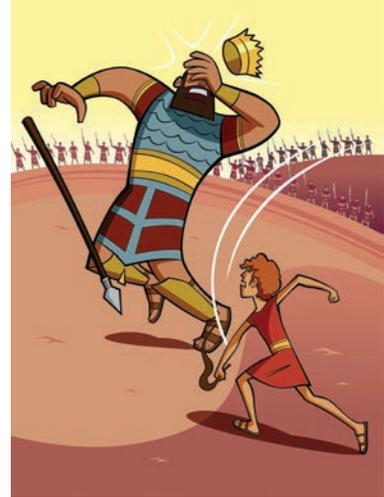
David looked at the giant. He saw Goliath's thick shield, his gigantic spear, and his special armor! This enemy was a mighty warrior.

Still, David knew that His God, the Lord who loved and protected His people, was even mightier. David shouted back, "You fight me with spear and sword, but I come in the name of the LORD Almighty! Today everyone will see that it is the LORD who saves—and not with swords and spears. This battle belongs to Him!"

David began to run. He slid a rock into his sling and slung the rock around his head faster and faster and faster. With a snap, he let the rock fly! Zing! It was a direct hit to the giant's forehead—the only part of his body that wasn't protected. Goliath stopped, staggered, stumbled, and came crashing to the ground.

It was so quiet that you could hear a whisper. The battle was over. The evil giant had lost. The mighty God had won.

He had sent David to rescue His people from their enemy, and one day God would send Jesus to rescue His people from sin, the biggest enemy of all.



God Gives the Kingdom to David's Family

2 Samuel 7:1–29

God's promises are undeserved.

Though King Saul had ruled over God's people, he did not have a heart that loved and obeyed God. God removed this disobedient king and put David, the shepherd boy and singer of songs, in his place.



David was a wonderful king. He obeyed and loved God with all his heart.

One night, God reminded David of all the things He had done for David. God said, “I took you from shepherding sheep to ruling My people. I have been with you and helped you defeat the enemies who still lived in your land.”

Then God promised David something special. “I give you My word that one of your descendants will be king over My people, and I will be a Father to him. When Saul sinned, I took away his kingdom, but I will never take the kingdom from your son because I will always love him.”

When David heard this, he cried out in prayer, “Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, that You have loved me like this—making me, a shepherd, into a king? Lord, You have promised the kingdom to my family forever, and I know that through my family, You will bless all the nations of the world. Let Your name be magnified forever, for You are great and there is no one like You! Now, O Lord, bless Your servant's family forever as You have said.”

God kept His promise to David, just as God always keeps His promises. David had many sons, and one of them, Solomon, became the next king of God's people.

God Gives Solomon Great Wisdom

1 Kings 3:3–15; 4:29–5:6; 10:1–2

God provides the humble with wisdom.

God loved Solomon and made him king after his father David, but being king was a big job for such a young man.

One night, God came to Solomon in a dream. He said, “Ask for whatever you want, Solomon, and I will give it to you.”

Solomon answered, “O LORD my God, you have made me king in place of my father David to rule over Your people. There are too many of them to count now, and I am still young. I don’t know how to be their king, so please give me wisdom in how to lead them and help me to know the difference between right and wrong.”

Solomon’s request pleased the Lord, so God gave Solomon wisdom—lots of it! No one was wiser than Solomon. Not only did God give him wisdom, but God also gave Solomon many gifts that he had not asked for—riches, honor, and peace with his enemies.

God told Solomon to use these gifts to build the Temple, a magnificent building covered in gold, where the people could come to worship their God. Solomon also built a beautiful palace for himself. While Solomon was king, the Children of Israel became very rich and powerful.

Through Solomon, God continued to make Israel into a great nation. The blessings promised by God were coming true for His people, but how would God use this one nation to bless the other nations of the world?

Not long after he finished the Temple, Solomon looked out of his palace and saw a long line of camels marching into the city. They were coming from another nation, the far away land of Sheba.



Solomon Brings Blessing to the Queen of Sheba

1 Kings 10:1–13

God keeps His Word to bless all the nations of the world.

The Queen of Sheba had come to Jerusalem, the city where God had lovingly placed His house and His king. She went to the royal palace and knelt before King Solomon.



“O, King,” the queen began, “I had heard about your great wisdom and your mighty kingdom, but they are more wonderful than I had ever dreamed!”

Then Solomon and the queen talked about all she had on her mind, for she had come to him with many hard questions. No matter what the queen asked, nothing was too hard for Solomon to explain to her.

When the queen saw the wisdom God had given Solomon, his beautiful palace, the food at his table, his officials and servants, and the offerings he gave at the Temple, she was amazed. She said, “Praise be to the LORD your God, who has blessed you and made you king of Israel. Because God loves your nation, He has made you king and helps you lead the people to do right.”

The Queen of Sheba stayed in Jerusalem for many days. While there, she gave Solomon all kinds of gifts—spices and jewels and gold. However, Solomon owned much more than this and gave the queen any treasure she wanted. God had made His people so wealthy that their blessings began to overflow into other nations as God had promised.

God's People Begin to Follow False Gods

**1 Kings 11:4–6; 34–39;
16:29–17:1; 18:17–20**

God is a jealous God.



Not long after the visit from the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon turned away from the Lord and began to worship idols. Yet God still kept His promise to make David's sons kings over His people. After Solomon died, his kingdom split into two smaller kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Few of the kings of the south obeyed and loved God, and none of the kings of the north did.

One of the worst of the northern kings was a man named Ahab. Ahab didn't want the people of Israel to love God. Instead, he wanted them to worship an idol named Baal. Ahab believed Baal could control the rain and storms.

Many of God's people started to think Ahab was right. They began disobeying God's command not to worship idols. So God sent messengers to tell them the truth. These messengers, called prophets, told people not only how much they had sinned but also how much God still loved them.

God sent one prophet straight to Ahab. His name was Elijah. He said, "King Ahab, the real God has spoken. He wants everyone to know that He is the one who controls the rain—not Baal. To prove this to you and everyone else, God has said it will not rain again until He gives the command!"

After Elijah shared God's message with King Ahab, there wasn't even one little drop of rain for three and a half years.

When the three and a half years was over, God sent Elijah to the king again. This time he said, "You have disobeyed God's loving rules and obeyed Baal instead of God, but the Lord will show you that He is the only God to be obeyed."

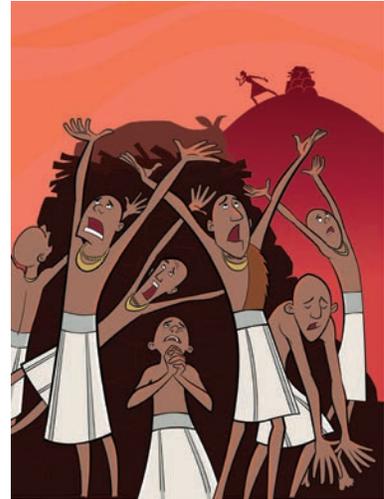
Then Elijah told King Ahab God's plan, "Gather all Baal's wicked prophets and the rest of the people at Mount Carmel. We are going to see whose God is real; we are going to have a contest!"

The Prophets of Baal Call on Their God

1 Kings 18:21–35

False gods have no true power.

The day of the contest arrived, and Elijah told Baal’s prophets, “Place a sacrifice for Baal on an altar and pray to him. When you are done, then I’ll do the same for my God. The god who sends down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice will prove to be the real God.”



You should have seen those prophets of Baal. They got their offering set up and started praying. At first nothing happened, so their prayers became longer and longer and then louder and louder! Still nothing happened.

Elijah mocked them, saying, “Maybe Baal is too busy, or perhaps he has gone on a trip. He might be asleep. Call out more loudly to wake him up.”

They cried out, “O, Baal, hear our prayers! Send fire from heaven! O hear us, Pleaaaase!”

This went on for hours, but still nothing happened.

Finally, it was God’s turn. Elijah set up an altar of twelve stones—one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The stones were a reminder that they were still the people God owned and loved.

Then Elijah dug a trench around the pile of stones and gave instructions, “Get four big jars of water and pour the water on the sacrifice. When you finish, pour four more jars of water onto it. After that, pour four more on it. Cover the sacrifice with water. Get all of it good and wet!”

When they were finished, the water had not only soaked the offering and the wood, but it had also filled the trench around the altar. What was Elijah doing pouring twelve jars of water on the sacrifice?

The Lord Proves He Is the Only True God

1 Kings 18:30–39

Only the real God answers prayer.

Everyone was watching Elijah. He didn't put on a big show; he simply prayed. His prayer wasn't long or loud, but it was to the real God.

“O Lord, You are the true God. Would you show all these people that You are the real God? Please help Your people come back to You and stop worshipping idols. Amen.”

As Elijah finished praying—whoosh—fire fell from heaven. In a flash, it burned up the wet sacrifice, the soggy wood, all the stones, and even the water in the trench! God had answered Elijah's prayer!

When the people saw that God had defeated Baal, they shouted, “The LORD is the real God! The LORD is the real God!”

They knew then that Baal was not real. Baal couldn't love them like God did, nor could he help them. Only God could help them when they prayed.

Through Elijah, God had shown that He was the only real God. Although sinful Ahab was still the king, God had shown how much He still loved Israel.



God Commands Jonah to Go to Nineveh

1 Kings 14:23–26; Jonah 1:1–3

God wants all people to repent.

God continued to send prophets to His sinful people. One of the prophets was named Jonah. God commanded Jonah to tell the Israelites that God would still protect them from their enemies. This was a message Jonah liked to preach.



But one day, God commanded Jonah to do something he did not like one bit. God said, “Jonah, I want you to go preach to the wicked people of Nineveh. If they don’t turn from their sin within forty days, I am going to destroy their city.”

Jonah had heard all about those people—how sinful they were. Everyone knew that Ninevites were the meanest, nastiest people anywhere!

Jonah knew that God loves and forgives sinners, but the Ninevites weren’t even part of God’s people. In fact, they were Israel’s fiercest enemy! Jonah wondered, *How could God love those terrible people?*

Jonah did not want God to forgive the Ninevites, so he decided to disobey the Lord. Jonah didn’t travel toward Nineveh. Instead, he got on a ship going the opposite direction.

Jonah Disobeys and Doesn't Go to Nineveh

Jonah 1:4–16

God pursues His people who disobey.

Jonah was on a ship, running away from God and from His mission. However, God loved Jonah and the enemy Ninevites too much to let Jonah disobey. While Jonah slept in the bottom of the boat, God hurled a wild storm onto the sea.



The sailors had never seen a storm like this. As the ship rocked back and forth and up and down with the waves, water gushed over the sides of the boat. The ship creaked and groaned as the wind and waves almost tore it apart. They were sinking! Sailors rushed to throw everything heavy overboard to make the ship lighter, but it still wasn't enough. The sailors cried out to their idols to rescue them, but no help came.

Meanwhile, Jonah slept peacefully inside the ship. Frantically, the sailors woke Jonah and yelled, "How can you be sleeping? Get up and pray to your god. Perhaps he will hear you, and we won't drown!" They didn't know that Jonah's God was already in control of the storm, but Jonah knew exactly what was happening.

When Jonah told the sailors that God had sent the storm because of him, they were terrified. They said, "What have you done? How can we make this storm stop?"

He answered, "If you pick me up and throw me into the sea, God will quiet the storm."

The sailors didn't want to throw Jonah overboard and tried hard to row the boat to shore. Finally, they realized there was no other choice. Picking up Jonah, they flung him into the sea.

Immediately, God stopped the wind and calmed the waves. The sailors were amazed by God's mighty power. "Let's offer a sacrifice to the LORD," they said. "He is the One we should serve with our lives."

The Ninevites Turn to the Lord

Jonah 1:16–4:11

God wants His people to love their enemies.

With a big splash, Jonah hit the water and began to sink. Deeper and deeper, down he went, but God had prepared a giant fish to swallow Jonah so he would not drown.

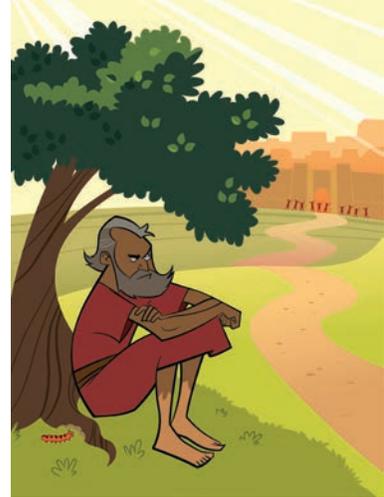
For three days inside the smelly belly of that fish, Jonah thought and prayed. Jonah knew he didn't deserve the mercy God had shown by sending the giant fish. He also knew that he needed to obey God and preach to the Ninevites even though they didn't deserve God's mercy either.

Now that Jonah had learned God's lesson, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spat Jonah onto the beach. Once again, God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, and this time Jonah obeyed. As he preached, something amazing happened. Those wicked enemies listened to God's Word and turned from their sin. They, too, enjoyed God's forgiveness, just like Jonah had.

You would think that this would have made Jonah very happy, but it didn't. He was angry. He didn't want the nasty Ninevites to enjoy God's love. He wanted them to be punished.

Jonah stormed out of the city, sat down on a hill, and sulked. The sun was hot, but God caused a plant to grow and give Jonah shade. He was thankful for the plant, but that night God sent a worm to eat part of the plant, causing the leaves to wither. The next day, Jonah baked in the sun and became angrier than before.

God said, "Jonah, why are you angry? You are upset because I destroyed a single plant, but you would be happy if I destroyed a city full of men, women, and children. Shouldn't people be more important than plants?"

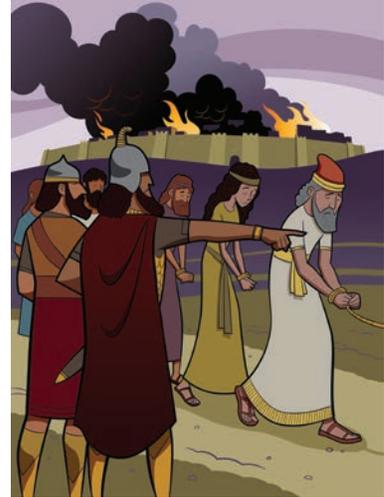


Nebuchadnezzar Decides to Build a Statue

1 Chronicles 9:1; Daniel 3:1–6

God is God wherever you live.

Despite the many ways God had proven Himself to the Israelites, they still loved the idol Baal more than they loved the real God. Because of this, God took His people out of the land He had given them. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the people were led away as slaves to Babylon.



Even though they were being punished because of their sin, most Israelites did not turn back to the Lord. However, there were a few who still loved God with all their hearts. Three of them, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, served in the court of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.

One day, King Nebuchadnezzar had an idea—a terrible, wicked idea. He shared this idea with his messengers, and they announced it to everyone in the land.

“Hear ye, hear ye! The magnificent Nebuchadnezzar gives a new law to all who serve in his kingdom. He commands that when the music plays tomorrow, everyone must bow down and worship the huge golden statue the king has made. Anyone who doesn’t bow down to it will be thrown into a hot, fiery furnace!”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew exactly what they had to do. They might live in Babylon where other people worshipped idols, but these three friends still served the one true God.

Nebuchadnezzar Throws Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the Furnace

Daniel 3:7–23

God gives us courage to do what's right.

The time came for all the people who served King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down to his golden statue. As the music started to play, people began to bow—but not all of them.



Some of Nebuchadnezzar’s servants came to the king and said, “O King, live forever! You’ve commanded everyone to worship your statue, but there are three Israelites who refuse to obey—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!”

When Nebuchadnezzar heard this, he was furious. He shouted, “Bring those men here right now!” When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego got there, the king gave them another chance. He said, “If you bow down now, I will let you live. If you disobey my rule, I will throw you into the hot, fiery furnace, and you will die!”

The three friends stood up straight before the king and looked him right in the eye. Then they said, “We will obey God’s command, not your rule. We love Him, not your huge golden statue. God is able to keep us safe from you and your fiery furnace, but even if He does not save us, we will not bow down to your idol.”

You should have seen the king when he heard this. His lips tightened. His eyes bulged. His face turned red. He was very, very angry! He thought, *How dare these men disobey me? I’ll show them who’s boss!*

He called out to his soldiers, “Make the fire hotter than it’s ever been! Make it seven times hotter. Then tie these enemies up and throw them into the furnace.”

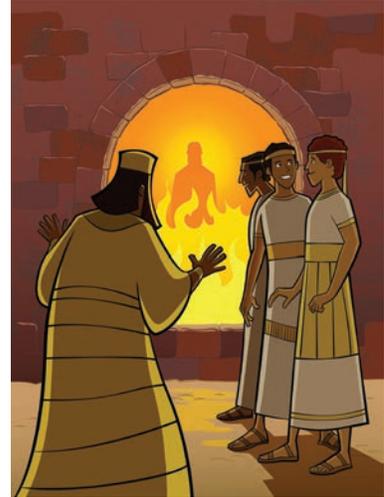
The king’s soldiers grabbed the three friends, tied them tightly with ropes, and marched them off to the furnace. Then with a mighty shove, the soldiers pushed the three friends inside.

God Rescues Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Daniel 3:22–30

God can protect you wherever you are.

As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego tumbled into the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar sat back and laughed to himself, *What fools! This God is no match for me.* Then the king gasped. He couldn't believe his eyes.



He jumped up and shouted to the advisor beside him. “I thought we threw three men into the fire, but I see four! I don't believe it—they are all walking around inside the furnace! They aren't burned up, and this fourth man looks like someone who comes from God. What is going on?”

The king called to the men in the furnace, “Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, servants of the Most High God! Come out of the fire!” As the three came out, a crowd gathered around them. They looked closely—not one burned hair. They sniffed—not a whiff of smoke!

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has rescued them because they served only Him. God has protected them because they did not obey my command to worship the statue. Therefore, I command all the people of my kingdom never to speak against their God, for there is no other god who can rescue like this God.”

God had worked a mighty miracle to reveal His strength and protect His people. Though they had sinned and been sent into a far away land, they were still His. Even as prisoners in Babylon, God continued to show His love for them.

God Promises to Return His People to the Promised Land

Psalm 137; Jeremiah 23:1–8; 30:8–23

God never forgets His people.

The Children of Israel cried as they sat by the rivers of Babylon. They had been prisoners there for a long time. They thought of the wonderful city of Jerusalem and the beautiful Temple that God’s enemies had burned. They had lost the Promised Land and now lived as slaves far away from home.



However, God never left His people. He continued to send prophets to comfort them with His promises and to encourage them to obey His Word. God still loved the Children of Israel, and He wanted them to love Him too.

Through the prophets, God said, “I am your God, and you are still My people. Just as I rescued you from the land of Egypt, one day I will rescue you from the land of Babylon. I will take you back to your land and destroy those who have hurt you.”

God continued, “Not only will I lead you back to the land, but one day I will also build a Temple even more beautiful than the one you remember. I will set another King over My people, one who will be like David, only greater.”

Seventy years went by, but nothing happened. God’s people had built houses and made Babylon their home. Many of them grew tired of waiting for God’s promises to come true. They didn’t even want to go back to Canaan. Yet a few of God’s people remained faithful. Deep in their hearts they trusted that God would keep His promises.

God's People Return to the Promised Land

Ezra 1:1–8; 2:64–4:5; Haggai 2:1–9

God always keeps His promises.

The time had come for God to keep His promise to take Israel home. He came to the evil king, Cyrus, and put an idea into the king's mind—a wonderful, too-good-to-be-true idea.

King Cyrus stood up and announced to God's people, "Hear ye, hear ye! The LORD, the God of heaven, has told me to rebuild His Temple in the land of Canaan. I will give all the supplies that are needed; I just need workers. If you want to go home and rebuild the Temple, you are free to go."

This was the good news they had been waiting for! Many of the people loaded their wagons with gold and silver and building supplies. They saddled their camels, horses, mules, and donkeys, and off they went. They were going home.

After a long journey, they arrived in Jerusalem. It was no longer the beautiful city they remembered. The walls were fallen down, the houses had been burned, and the Temple was in ruins. They would have to rebuild the Temple from bottom to top. Day after day, they worked—brick upon brick, stone upon stone—until finally, the foundation was done.

When the people saw the foundation, they cheered! God had been so good and had never stopped loving them. They sang and shouted for joy, but two groups of people weren't singing.

A group of older men were sad because they remembered Solomon's beautiful Temple. The foundation of this new Temple was smaller and not as fancy.

The people who lived nearby weren't singing either. They were mad! They didn't want to share the land with God's people or God's Temple. One man said to his friends, "What can we do to stop these people from building their Temple?"

Another man replied, "Let's slow down their work and scare them away."



The Temple Is Rebuilt in Jerusalem

Ezra 4:1–6:15; Malachi 1:1–4:6

God is in complete control.

Israel's angry neighbors didn't want to see the Temple finished. They sent a letter to the new king in Babylon, lying about God's people. It read, "O king! God's people have a plan against you. They are building a Temple, and when it's done, they will turn against you. The people of this city like to fight against their kings. If they finish building this Temple, they will stop giving you money."

When the king read this letter, he believed the lies. He commanded God's people, "You must stop building right now!"

But this king, like all kings, was not the one in charge—God was. After a few years, God put yet another king, Darius, on the throne in Babylon. Then God did a mighty miracle in Darius's heart, leading him to change the law. He commanded God's people to finish the Temple and gave them anything they needed.

God had shown Himself faithful, but many of His promises were not yet fulfilled. The Temple was finished, but it still wasn't huge and beautiful. God's people lived in the Promised Land, but they still didn't have their own king. They tried to obey God's rules, but they still sinned against Him.

What would God do to set everything right? When would He fully keep all His promises? He had started, but the best part was yet to come.



Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem

Luke 1:26–36; 2:1–7

Jesus, the Messiah, was sent by God the Father.

The sun had set behind the hills of Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph were staying in the only room they could find—a stable full of animals. The couple had traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem because the Roman king had commanded that everyone visit his hometown to pay taxes. Not only was Bethlehem the hometown of Joseph, but it was also the hometown of King David.



Joseph, a carpenter who usually spent his days making tables and plows, looked over at Mary, who was holding a newborn baby boy in her arms. Mary wrapped her son in long strips of cheap cloth. It wasn't much, but it would keep Him warm. She gently placed the sleeping infant into a crib she had made from a manger that the cows weren't using. She had been waiting for the baby ever since the angel appeared to her with surprising news.

He had said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will have a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of David, and He will rule over His kingdom forever."

Now those words had come true; God had given Mary the baby Jesus. As she held her newborn son, Mary remembered God's great promises to send Someone who would save God's people from their sins. This little one was the promised Messiah.

The Shepherds Tell the Story of the Angels

Luke 1:46–55; 2:8–16

Jesus, the Messiah, brings great rejoicing.

Inside the stable, Joseph and Mary sat up straight. They could hear hurried footsteps down the street, and the footsteps were coming towards them. A group of excited people stopped at the door of the stable and knocked.



As Joseph brought them in, Mary could see their faces, covered with sweat and full of excitement. You could tell by their clothes and their smell that they were shepherds. One of them explained why they had come.

“We were watching over our sheep in the fields outside of town. Suddenly, an angel appeared to us.” Mary glanced at Joseph—this was the same thing that had happened to her. The shepherd continued, “This angel was shining with God’s glory, brighter than the stars, and that light was all around us! We didn’t know what was going to happen. We were afraid!”

“The angel said, ‘Don’t be frightened. I bring good news that will give you—and all people—great joy! For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. You will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’

“Then, the sky blazed with light—like it was daytime. Everywhere we looked, angels filled the night with brightness and singing. They praised God, saying, ‘Glory to God in heaven! And on earth, peace to all of God’s people.’

“And suddenly, they were gone. We left someone to watch the sheep, and the rest of us ran here as fast as we could. We had to find the newborn Messiah. And here He is, just as the angel said, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger. It’s not where we would have thought to find the Savior that God would send, but He is the One.”

The Shepherds and Mary Respond to Jesus' Birth

Luke 1:46–55; 2:17–20

Jesus, the Messiah, came to save sinners.

After the shepherds had told Joseph and Mary everything the angel had said, they went outside and headed back to their sheep. As the shepherds went away along the dark streets, they shouted the good news. “The promised Messiah has been born!” The people who heard these things didn’t know what to think. Could this wonderful news be true?



The shepherds loved telling people what God had done. He had sent Jesus the Messiah into the world, and only He could rescue His people from their sin. This was very good news to hear and to tell!

As the shepherds returned to their flocks, Mary looked around the now quiet stable at the wooden tools, dirt floor, and sleeping animals. The angel had been right. This little baby, wrapped in cloth strips and lying in a manger, really was the Savior. Mary thought to herself, *It is strange to find a wonderful Savior in such a rough place. Why would the Messiah be born in a stable instead of somewhere special? Why would His first visitors be shepherds instead of kings?* But perhaps this is where He needed to be to show that no one was beyond His love.

Mary picked up baby Jesus and rocked Him in her arms. She marveled at how God’s promises, which had been delivered by the angels, had come true. Then she remembered God’s other promises, promises about a Messiah who would save His people. Even these promises were coming true right before her eyes. She thought, *This little baby will one day grow up to be my Savior.*

The Wise Men Arrive in Jerusalem, Seeking the Newborn King

Matthew 2:1–3

Jesus, the Messiah, was born King.



From King Herod’s palace, you could see the long, dusty line of camels coming into Jerusalem. The riders, dressed in beautiful but dirty clothes, had traveled far. They were wise men, people who studied the stars. When they got off their camels, a crowd gathered around them. The wise men began asking, “Do you know where we can find the baby who has been born king?”

But no matter where they turned, it was always the same answer. “What do you mean? Our king is named Herod, and he’s a grown man.”

The wise men tried to explain that in their home far away they had seen a star, a special star. It was the kind of star that only appears when a king has been born. That is why they were there—to find and honor the new king.

At the back of the crowd, one of King Herod’s servants was listening very carefully. When he heard the wise men ask about a new king, he ran off to tell King Herod. He knew the king wouldn’t like this news.

King Herod was as evil as the king of Egypt had been. He hated God’s people, and he hated God. So, when Herod heard there might be a new king—one who might want to take away his crown—he came up with an evil plan. He decided he was going to find this so-called king.

Herod Directs the Wise Men to Bethlehem

Matthew 2:4–10

Jesus' birth perfectly fulfilled God's plan.

King Herod commanded, “Go look in the scrolls to see what they say about where this king will be born.”

Those who heard the command rushed to obey. One of the men brought out an old scroll of God's Word and opened it. There was the answer! They took the scroll to Herod and said, “The King God promised will be born in the same place King David was born, not far away, in Bethlehem.”

Once Herod knew what the Bible had foretold, he pretended to be nice and secretly invited the wise men to his palace. Making sure no one else was listening, Herod quietly asked the wise men, “Why are you here? What are you looking for?”

The wise men replied, “Oh, King Herod, we are looking for a newborn king. We thought he would be in Jerusalem at the royal palace, but we cannot find him.”

Herod lied to the wise men and said, “Please, go find this new king. When you find him, come back and tell me. I want to worship him too!” Of course, Herod wanted to find the new king so he could kill him. He hated the new king, but God's love for His Son and His people was much stronger than Herod's hatred.

The wise men left Herod's palace to search for the new king. As the wise men walked out, they had to pinch themselves. Were they seeing things? It was the special star again! “There it is!” they cried, “It will show us the way to the new king.”



The Wise Men Worship the Newborn King

Matthew 2:11–15

As King, Jesus is worthy of worship.

The wise men left Herod's palace and followed the star as it led them to the new king. Finally it stopped, not over a king's palace but over a small house. The wise men knocked on the door and went inside. There in simple baby clothes was the new king.



The wise men knelt and said, “We have brought special gifts for the little child—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” These were expensive gifts, the kind of gifts given only to a king. By giving these gifts, the wise men were worshipping Jesus as king.

That night when the wise men went to sleep, God spoke to them in a dream. He said, “Do not go back to King Herod. He wants to kill Jesus. Instead, go back to your own home. Don't let Herod find you.” In the morning, they loaded their camels and headed home by a different road.

After they left, an angel appeared to Joseph and also warned him of Herod's evil plan, saying, “Herod wants to kill Jesus. Take Him and Mary and leave Israel. I will tell you when it is safe to return.”

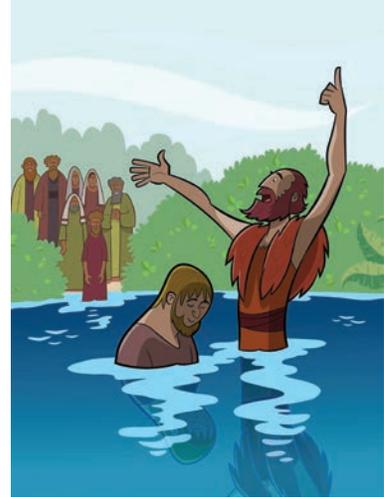
God loved His Son and protected Him from Herod. God also loved His people, which is why He had sent Jesus, who would one day rescue them from their enemy. However, their true enemy wasn't an evil king like Herod. No, instead, Jesus the Messiah would rescue His people from their greatest enemy of all: the sin that kept them apart from God.

John Baptizes Sinners in the Jordan River

Matthew 3:1–12; Luke 3:1–18

Everyone needs to repent.

During the thirty years since the wise men followed the star, Jesus had grown from a baby into a man. God still loved His people and was preparing them for the next part of His plan.



Just as He had sent prophets like Jonah and Elijah to preach to His people, God sent another prophet to them named John. He didn't dress, eat, or speak like most of God's people. He wore scratchy camel hair robes, ate wild honey and grasshoppers, preached strong sermons, and baptized people in water. This was so unusual that many of God's people came out to the desert to hear what he had to say.

People came from rolling hills and deep valleys. They came from big cities and small towns. So many came that people began to wonder, *Could John be the Messiah?*

John told them, "No. I am not the Promised One, but I am preaching and baptizing to prepare the way for Him. Don't think that just because you are an Israelite, you are really one of God's people. Turn away from your sin! Turn back to God! Repent and do what God commands. Share what you have with other people, don't steal from them, and be happy with what the Lord has given you."

Many people believed John's preaching and turned away from their sin. They allowed John to baptize them in the Jordan River. This didn't wash away their sin. Instead, it showed that they were turning from their sin and coming back to God.

However, some of the religious leaders called Pharisees didn't like John's message. They didn't think they needed to repent; they didn't want to admit that they were sinners.

John Baptizes Jesus

Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–23; John 1:29

Jesus didn't need to repent.

One day as John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, he looked up and couldn't believe his eyes. It was Jesus! John was Jesus' cousin, and he knew that Jesus was no ordinary person. Jesus had had a miraculous birth and was living a perfect life, yet here He was in line with everyone who was coming back to God!



“Why are You in line, Jesus?” John asked. “You don’t need to come into the water. You’ve never sinned. You should be baptizing me!”

Jesus replied, “This is the right thing to do, John. This is what God wants.” God had sent His Son to go where sinners were, to love them, and one day even to take their sinfulness on Himself. That’s why He stood in line to be baptized with sinners—to show His love for them.

Just then, the sky opened up, and God the Father proved that although Jesus was being baptized, He was no sinner. The Father said, “This is the Son I love. I am very happy with Him.”

Then the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and rested on Jesus. When John saw this, he knew that Jesus was more than a perfect person. Jesus was the Messiah whom God had promised to send. He was the One who would die as the Sacrifice in the place of sinners.

The next time John saw Jesus, John told everyone around him exactly who Jesus was. Pointing to Jesus, John announced, “Look! It’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Jesus Defeats Satan's Temptations

Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13

Jesus resisted temptation.

After being baptized by John, Jesus went into the desert where there were no friends or food. For forty days, Jesus was alone.

At the end of the forty days, Jesus was so hungry. Just then, Satan tried three times to get Jesus to sin. Long ago in the Garden, Satan had tricked Eve into sinning. Now he was going to try his tricks on Jesus.

First, Satan said, “Are You hungry, Jesus? If You really are the Son of God, why don’t You turn these stones on the ground into some delicious bread?”

Even though He was hungry, Jesus did what was right. He said, “You’re supposed to love and enjoy God most of all—even more than food.”

Satan tried again: “If You are the Son of God, prove it! Jump off this high place, and God will take care of You. Come on—jump!”

Again, Jesus did what was right. He said, “I believe that God will take care of Me, but I will not make God help Me just to prove that He loves Me. That would be putting God to a test—My test—and that would be selfish. God has commanded us not to put Him to the test.”

Then the devil tried one last time. He said, “I’ll make a deal with You. If You will bow down to me, I’ll give You the kingdoms of the world, and You can be king right now. All You have to do is worship me.”

Jesus said, “Satan, I command you to leave this place, for God has said we are to worship only Him and no one else!” With that, Satan immediately obeyed and left Jesus alone.

Of course, Satan would try to defeat Jesus again, but ultimately Jesus would triumph over Satan by dying on the cross. Just as God had promised, Jesus had come to crush Satan and rescue His people. No one else could have ever done what Jesus did. He truly was the perfect Son of God.



Jesus Turns the Water into Wine

John 2:1–11

Jesus works a miracle of real joy.

There was a wedding in the country. Mary, Jesus, and some of His followers were invited. The wedding guests were having a great time—eating and drinking delicious things. All of a sudden, someone realized that they had run out of wine. Mary heard the terrible news and had an idea. She knew Jesus could fix the problem.



Mary found Jesus and said to Him, “They are all out of wine for the wedding party.”

Jesus replied, “My dear mother, now is not the time to show My mighty power to everyone.” He knew that His Heavenly Father had many amazing miracles for Him to do later.

Mary understood, but she hoped that Jesus would still help out in some small way. She said to the wedding helpers, “Do whatever He says.”

Jesus saw six huge pots nearby, so He told the wedding helpers, “Fill the pots with water and serve that water as drink at the wedding party.” This seemed strange, but the wedding helpers did what He had said. When they poured out the water, everyone was in for a huge surprise!

As the guests began to drink, they exclaimed, “This is the best wine ever! Where in the world did you get this amazing wine?”

Only Jesus’ mother and His followers knew where the delicious drink came from. They saw just how amazing and powerful Jesus really was. He was God’s Son. He had brought delight back to the wedding, just as He would bring real joy to all those who trusted Him.

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus About the New Birth

John 3:1–7

Jesus offers the miracle of new life.

After Jesus and His followers left the wedding, they went to the biggest city around—Jerusalem. While there, Jesus did more miracles. Some people saw and believed in Him, but others were scared of what people might think of them if they followed Jesus. However, one man’s curiosity was stronger than his fear. His name was Nicodemus.



He was one of the smartest Bible teachers in the whole land, a very important person, yet Nicodemus couldn’t figure Jesus out. God was using Jesus to give the blind their sight, the deaf their hearing, and the sick their health. Nicodemus could see God at work in Jesus’ miracles. Like the pieces to a puzzle that he could not put together, there were things he just didn’t understand.

Late one night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “It’s clear to see that You come from God. I know this because of the miracles You are doing.”

Jesus corrected him, “You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born again.”

Nicodemus could not believe his ears. Be born again! “How can a man be born after he has grown up?” he asked. Nicodemus knew that a grown-up is too big to be born a second time.

Nicodemus did not understand that Jesus was talking about how a Christian is born, not how a baby is born. He was talking about how God’s Spirit cleans up a sinner so much on the inside that it’s like he has become a new person. Jesus said, “Don’t be surprised that I said, ‘You must be born again.’”

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus About Salvation

John 3:8–18

Jesus brings the miracle of forgiveness.

Nicodemus wanted to figure out what Jesus was saying about being “born again,” but he still didn’t understand. To help Nicodemus understand and believe, Jesus reminded him of a story from the Old Testament.



When the Israelites were wandering around in the desert for forty years, they sinned against God. God punished them by sending poisonous snakes into their camp. God told Moses, their leader, to make a statue of a snake and lift it up on a pole. That way everyone in the camp could see it. God promised the people that if they looked at the snake on the pole when they were bitten, they would not die.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the snake on a pole, I will one day be lifted up, and everyone that believes on Me will be born again to live with Me forever.”

Jesus explained that this was why He had come down from heaven. God was going to lift Jesus up on the cross. There Jesus would take all the poison of evil and sin on Himself so that anyone who looked to Jesus would not die because of sin. Jesus would take it away instead. He said, “It’s because God so loved this sinful world that He gave His Son. Whoever believes in the Son will not die but have life that never ends.”

Nicodemus had been wrong. Jesus was not a puzzle to be solved. Instead, He was the Savior to be trusted. To this day, all people who look to Jesus, who trust in Him, will not die. Instead, they will have new life. They will be born again.

Jesus Provides a Huge Catch of Fish

Luke 5:1–7

Jesus' power changes doubters into believers.

A large crowd of people gathered by the Sea of Galilee to hear Jesus teach. As they pushed each other to get closer and closer to Jesus, He got closer and closer to the water.



Jesus looked around and saw two fishing boats nearby. He climbed into one of them and asked its owner, Peter, to row a short way from the beach. He and his brother, Andrew, worked with two other brothers, James and John. All of them were fishermen.

As Peter rowed the small boat away from the crowds, Jesus began to teach once more. His voice echoed loudly across the water so everyone—even the people standing on tiptoe at the back—could hear Him.

When Jesus finished teaching, He turned to Peter and asked, “How many fish did you catch last night?”

Peter shook his head and answered, “We didn’t catch a single fish. Not one.” This was strange because nighttime was when they caught the most fish, the big ones.

Jesus commanded Peter, “Row out a little further from the shore, put your nets back in the water, and see what you catch.”

Peter knew what would happen. He’d been a fisherman all his life. They wouldn’t catch anything—not in the daytime—but Peter did what Jesus had said.

When he did, the nets sunk beneath the surface then exploded with fish! There were hundreds of them! Peter and Andrew couldn’t believe it. They called James and John to help. Fish filled the boat till it was so full that it started to sink.

Jesus Calls Peter to Become a Fisher of Men

Luke 5:8–11

Jesus' power changes sinners into followers.

The four fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, had never seen so many fish! The flopping fish filled the boat. Standing knee-deep in fish, Peter stopped and bowed before Jesus. Peter knew he was a sinner and that Jesus had done this amazing miracle for him!



He said, “Lord, please leave me. I do not deserve Your kindness. I am a sinner.”

But Jesus was not going to leave Peter and his friends. No, instead, He asked them to join His group of followers. Jesus loved them so much that He wanted them to spend every day with Him.

He said, “All your life you’ve been catching fish, but I will turn you into fishers of men. Come. Be My disciples.”

When they reached the shore, Peter, Andrew, James, and John immediately left their nets and boats. They weren’t just leaving their fishing equipment; they were leaving the whole family business. Jesus had called them to be His disciples. From then on, they would live with Jesus and travel wherever He went. They would learn His teachings and help Him serve others.

These disciples had seen Jesus easily fill their boat with hundreds of fish. Now they knew He could also fill God’s kingdom with many, many people using even simple sinners like them.

Jesus Calls Matthew and Simon to Be His Disciples

Matthew 9:9; Luke 6:13–16

Jesus' power changes enemies into friends.

Not long after Jesus called Peter and his friends to be His disciples, He called two more men. One man was named Simon, the Zealot. Like many people in Israel at that time, Zealots hated the Romans because the Romans had taken over their nation. The Zealots didn't want to be under a Roman ruler; they wanted their own king.

The other man was named Matthew. Although he was an Israelite, Matthew worked for the Romans as a tax collector. Day after day, Matthew would sit at his table and take money from other Israelites, most of whom were already very poor. Matthew gave most of that money to the Romans, but he kept some for himself. As a result, the Romans and Matthew became richer while the Israelites became poorer.

It's easy to see why tax collectors and Zealots didn't get along. Tax collectors worked for the Romans while the Zealots wanted to destroy the Romans. However, Jesus had called both Simon and Matthew to be His followers. Like the other men, these two enemies left everything, followed Jesus, and soon became friends.

Jesus was calling all kinds of people to follow Him, even ordinary, sinful people like fishermen and tax collectors. Jesus didn't call people to follow Him because they were special or because He needed them. He called people because He was special and wanted to include them in His great plan. Who else could change doubters into believers, sinners into followers, or enemies into friends?



Jesus Heals Many People

Mark 1:29–39; Luke 4:38–44

Jesus shows love for God and people.

One day, Jesus and His disciples went over to Peter's house. When they got there, someone told Jesus that Peter's mother-in-law was very sick. She was lying in bed with a high fever.

Jesus went to her, held her hand, and commanded the fever to leave. Immediately Jesus' command was obeyed, and the fever left her! She was healed! Joyfully, she got up and began serving Jesus and His disciples.

As the news of Jesus' miracle spread, people began to gather at Peter's house. They brought friends and family members to receive help from Jesus, and that night the whole city met at Peter's door. Because of His love, Jesus laid His hands on every person who needed help, and they were healed too!

Early the next morning, Jesus woke up and left Peter's house to find a quiet place to pray. Jesus loved to be with people, but most of all He loved to be with His Father.

When Peter and the disciples woke up, they searched for Jesus. When they found Him, the disciples said, "Everyone is looking for You."

Jesus answered, "It's time to go to a new place so that more people can hear the good news. This is the reason God has sent Me."



Jesus Heals a Leper

Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–16

Jesus reveals His power to heal.

Jesus and His disciples left and went to another village. Wherever Jesus taught God's Word, He also did miracles to show that what He said was true. It wasn't long before many people had heard about Jesus' healing power. People walked a long way to hear Jesus' teaching and feel His healing touch.



One day, a terribly sick man walked up to Jesus. He was covered with awful sores called leprosy. If the man didn't get help, he would die. No one knew how to help this man. In fact, if someone touched him, that person would get leprosy too. No one could help him—except Jesus.

The man believed in Jesus and said, “Lord, if You want to, You can heal me.”

Jesus loved this sick man so much that He did something that no one else would have done—He reached out His hand and gently touched the man. Jesus was not going to get sick. Instead, the man was going to get better.

Jesus said, “I want to heal you,” and gave a mighty command: “Be healed!”

As soon as Jesus spoke the words, the man was better. From head to toe, there wasn't a sore left on him.

When the man went back home that night, he told everybody what Jesus had done for him. From that point on, so many people knew about Jesus that He couldn't go into a city without crowds following Him everywhere.

Jesus Heals the Lame Man

Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26

Jesus has the power to forgive sins.

Jesus kept on teaching and doing miracles wherever He went. Among the crowds that followed Him were many people who liked what Jesus was saying. However, there were some men called Pharisees who didn't like Jesus' words.

One day, four men came to Jesus carrying a friend on a mat because he was paralyzed. When the four men got to the house where Jesus was teaching, they couldn't get inside. There were too many people in the way.

The house had a flat roof, so these four friends climbed to the top of the house and removed part of the roof. Then, using ropes, they lowered their friend down through the ceiling to where Jesus stood.

When Jesus saw their trust in Him, He said to the man who could not walk, "Your sins are forgiven."

When the Pharisees heard this, they became angry. *No man can forgive sins—only God can do that*, they thought.

Even though the Pharisees hadn't spoken, Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking. He said to them, "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Rise up and walk'? It would be easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven' because no one can see if it happens. But so you will know that I have the power on earth to forgive sins, I am going to heal this man's legs."

Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk home."

At Jesus' words, the man got up. He could walk! It was a miracle! The man grabbed his mat and headed home, praising God.

The people watching were amazed. They said to one another, "We have never seen anything like this before."

Many of these people had seen Jesus work healing miracles before, but now He was claiming an even greater power. Jesus was teaching that if He could heal someone's legs, He could also heal his heart.



Jesus Calms the Storm

Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25

Jesus helps people who are afraid.

One evening, Jesus and His disciples got into a small boat. Though the sun had already set, they needed to cross the Sea of Galilee before morning. Jesus was tired from a long day of teaching and healing, so He settled down in the back of the boat to sleep.

While Jesus was sleeping, a strong wind swept across the sea. Water poured into the boat as wave after wave crashed against its sides. This storm was so wild that even fishermen like Peter and John were afraid that the boat might sink.

In fear, the disciples woke Jesus up shouting, “Lord, save us! We are about to die!”

Jesus got up and, with a loud voice, said to the wind and waves, “Quiet! Be still.”

Immediately, the wind obeyed and stopped blowing, and the waves obeyed and stopped moving. As soon as Jesus said the words, the night was perfectly still.

Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still not believe in Me?”

The disciples stood in amazement. Looking at each other, they said, “Who is this Man? Even the wind and the sea obey Him.”

In the quietness of the smooth sea, the disciples thought about what they had just seen Jesus do. This miracle was greater than any other that He had done so far. They still had much to learn about Jesus.



Jesus Heals a Sick Woman

Mark 5:21–35; Luke 8:40–48

Jesus is never too busy to help.

As Jesus and the disciples climbed out of their boat, a large crowd surrounded them. The people wanted to hear more of Jesus' teaching, and they especially wanted to see more of His miracles. Then, from the back of the crowd, a man named Jairus began squeezing his way through the people toward Jesus.



When Jairus reached Jesus, he fell at Jesus' feet and begged Him, "My little twelve-year-old daughter is dying! Please come to my house and heal her before it's too late."

Jesus agreed to go with Jairus, so they set off toward his house. The people crowded around them, brushing against one another as they tried to get near Jesus.

As they were walking, a woman in the crowd reached out her hand toward Jesus. She had been sick for twelve years and had gone to one doctor after another, but no one could help her. If she didn't get help soon, she would die.

She thought, *If I can just touch Jesus' clothes, I know I will be healed.* As Jesus walked past, the woman reached out her hand and touched His clothing. Immediately, she was well.

At that moment, Jesus stopped, looked into the crowd, and asked, "Who touched Me?"

One of His disciples joked, "Why would You ask who touched You? Look at all these people crowding in around us!"

The woman knew Jesus was talking about her. Though she was afraid, the woman stepped forward, fell to her knees, and told Jesus what she had done.

Jesus already knew who had touched Him, but He wanted the woman to come talk to Him. He said, "My dear, you believed I could heal you. Go home and enjoy God's blessings. Your suffering is over."

At that very moment, some men came with a message for Jairus. They said, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother Jesus anymore?"

Jesus Raises Jairus's Daughter

Mark 5:36–43; Luke 8:49–56

Jesus gives us hope when we want to give up.

Jairus stood there weeping at the news that his daughter was dead. He hadn't brought Jesus to his house fast enough. Jairus believed that Jesus could heal a sick person, but how could He heal a dead person?

Jesus knew everything Jairus was thinking and how sad he was. He said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Trust Me."

Then Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went with Jairus to his house. When they got there, they saw many people standing in the living room mourning because the little girl had died. Jesus said to them, "Why are you crying so loudly? The child is not dead; she is only sleeping."

When the people heard this, they started laughing at Jesus. They knew the girl was dead. However, the laughter didn't stop Jesus. He sent all the people out of the house except for the three disciples and the little girl's parents.

Once the people were gone, Jesus went to the girl's room. He knelt down beside her bed, holding her hand in His. Then He gently said to her, "Little girl, it's time to get up."

Immediately, the girl got up and started walking around her room. She was alive again! Her parents and the three disciples were amazed!

To Jesus, raising the little girl from the dead was as easy as waking her up from a nap. On that day, Jairus learned that nothing was too hard for the Lord Jesus Christ.



Jesus Does Good on the Sabbath Day

**Matthew 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6;
Luke 6:1–11**

God gave rules to help people.

One sunny afternoon, Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grain field. The disciples were hungry, so they picked a little grain for a snack. Some of the Pharisees saw what the disciples did and became very upset. They were angry because Jesus' disciples had worked by picking grain on a special day—the Sabbath.



Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, “Haven’t you read in the Bible about when King David and his soldiers were starving? They ate the special bread that only priests were allowed to eat.” This was okay because the lives of his soldiers were more important than rules about bread.

Jesus continued, “God doesn’t want your Sabbath rules. God made the Sabbath because He loves His people. People are more important than the Sabbath.”

Not too long after that, on another Sabbath, Jesus went to a service in a synagogue. In the crowd sat a man with a hurt hand. He couldn’t use it to work or provide for his family.

The Pharisees also sat in the service. They were just waiting to catch Jesus working on the Sabbath. They asked Jesus, “Is it right to heal someone on the Sabbath?”

Jesus said, “If one of your sheep gets stuck in a hole on the Sabbath, won’t you pull it out? Now, isn’t a person more important than a sheep? Of course it’s right to help a person on the Sabbath.”

Then Jesus turned to the man with the hurt hand and said, “Stretch out your hand.”

The man stretched out his hand, and immediately it became as good as new. He was healed!

This made the Pharisees even angrier with Jesus. From that time on, they tried to find a way to get rid of Him.

Jesus Gives Sight to a Blind Man

John 9:1–16

God wants us to love people more than rules.

Jesus and His disciples walked down the streets of Jerusalem on another Sabbath day. As they passed a blind man, the disciples asked, “Master, why was this man born blind? Was it because he had sinned or because his parents had sinned?”

Jesus answered, “It’s not because of anyone’s sin. This man is blind so that people will see God do an amazing work in his life.”

Then Jesus spat in the dirt, made a little mud, and covered the blind man’s eyes with the mud. Jesus told him, “Go wash off the mud in the Pool of Siloam.”

The blind man obeyed and went to the Pool of Siloam. When he had washed away the mud, he opened his eyes. For the first time in his life, he saw the golden brown of brick buildings, the bright, clear blue of the sky above him, and the flash of colorful robes as he ran past crowds of people. He could see!

The people who knew him asked, “Is this the man who was blind from birth?”

Some said, “Yes, that’s him!” Others weren’t so sure.

But the man kept saying, “Yes, it is me.”

They asked, “How were you healed?”

The man answered, “Jesus put mud on my eyes and told me to wash in the Pool of Siloam. I did, and now I can see.”

The people took the man to the Pharisees. When he told them what had happened, the Pharisees did not like that Jesus had made mud on the Sabbath. To them, making mud was work, and no one should work on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were thinking about the rule that Jesus had broken instead of being happy that the man could now see.



Jesus Heals the Man's Spiritual Blindness

John 9:13–41

Jesus can heal spiritual blindness.

The Pharisees didn't like that Jesus had healed someone on the Sabbath. *The real Messiah wouldn't do that*, they thought. They shouted at the blind man Jesus had healed, saying, "Don't lie! How did Jesus open your eyes?"



The man smiled and said, "I already told you. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?"

They growled, "We are not His disciples—you are! We don't even know if Jesus was sent by God."

The man replied, "That's strange. I was blind, but now I can see. Since the world was created, no man has ever healed anyone who had been born blind. If Jesus was not from God, He could never do such an amazing miracle."

The Pharisees glared at him and said, "You are trying to teach us about God?" Then they kicked the man out of their synagogue.

When Jesus heard what had happened, He found the man and asked him, "Do you believe in the Messiah?"

The man said, "Who is the Messiah so I can believe in Him?"

Jesus replied, "I am the Messiah."

When he heard this, the man bowed down before Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe."

Just as Jesus had opened the blind man's eyes so that he could see the things around him, Jesus opened the man's heart so that he could see and believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Not only did Jesus heal the blind man's eyes, but He also healed the man's heart. Jesus had performed a double miracle!

Jesus Discusses the Two Greatest Commandments

Luke 10:25–29

Loving God and loving people are God’s most important rules.

Many of the Pharisees did not like Jesus. He had worked on the Sabbath by picking grain, healing a man with a hurt hand, and making mud to heal a blind man. The more they thought about the things Jesus had done, the more they wanted to get rid of Him.

The Pharisees decided that if they could get Jesus to say something the people didn’t like, the crowds would quit following Him. They began asking Jesus questions, trying to trick Him into saying something that would get Him into trouble.

One Pharisee, a teacher, asked, “What do I have to do so God will let me into heaven?”

Jesus knew the man was trying to trick Him, so He asked His own question: “What’s the greatest commandment in the Bible?”

The Pharisee replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. You must also love your neighbor like you want to be loved.”

Jesus said, “You’re right. These are the most important commands in the Bible. If you love God and all people, you will have perfectly obeyed God’s commands.”



Jesus Tells the Story of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:26–33

Obedience without love is sin.

The Pharisee didn't like that Jesus had said he should love all people. He didn't want to love everyone. He just wanted to love his friends, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

To answer, Jesus told a story to teach an important lesson.

As an Israelite was walking along a dangerous road, robbers attacked him. They hurt him, took his money, and left him lying in the road.

A priest, a religious leader, passed the place of the attack. He saw the man but didn't know if he was alive. If the priest touched a dead person, he couldn't work in the Temple, so the priest didn't help the man. Instead, he turned his head, moved to the other side of the road, and continued on his way.

A little later, a Levite came hurrying down the road. He was a priest's helper. Just like the priest, he saw the man bleeding on the ground but walked past without helping.

Finally, a third person was passing by and discovered the hurt man. He was not a priest or a Levite. He was a Samaritan. Though the Samaritans and the Israelites were neighbors, they hated each other. They would never have helped one another; they were enemies.



Jesus Teaches Love for People

Luke 10:33–37

True love loves everyone.

The poor Israelite lay hurt and bleeding on the side of the road. The priest and the Levite should've stopped and helped the man, but they didn't. Instead, they passed by and went about their own business.

When the Samaritan saw the Israelite lying there, his heart was moved with love for him. Getting down on the ground beside the hurt man, the Samaritan bandaged up the wounds. Then the Samaritan lifted the man onto a donkey and took him to an inn. There he could rest and get better. The Samaritan even gave the innkeeper some of his own money to pay for whatever the man might need.

When Jesus finished telling His story, He asked the Pharisee, “Who was a good neighbor to the man that had been hurt? Was it the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan?”

The Pharisee replied, “The man who showed love. The Samaritan acted like a loving neighbor.”

Jesus said, “You're right! That's the kind of neighbor you should be.”

Jesus was teaching that we must love all people—both our friends *and* our enemies. This isn't easy to do, but it's what Jesus did. Even though we were God's enemies because of our sin, Jesus came down to die for us.



Mary Listens to Jesus' Teaching

Luke 10:38-40

Listening to Jesus shows love for God.

As Jesus traveled from town to town, He continued doing amazing miracles and teaching the people about God and the loving plan God was working out. One day, He came to the little village of Bethany.

In this village, Jesus had two very special friends. They were sisters named Martha and Mary. Martha heard that Jesus had come to town and invited Him to dinner.

Jesus accepted the invitation, and while waiting for dinner, He began to teach the people who were in the house.

The people stopped what they were doing, sat at Jesus' feet, and listened to what He had to say. While they listened, Martha rushed about preparing dinner.

Martha's sister, Mary, also wanted to hear what Jesus had to say. Usually girls didn't sit and learn at a teacher's feet, but Mary loved Jesus and wanted to learn how to obey Him.

While most people were surprised that Mary was sitting there, Martha was angry. The more she worked, the angrier she became.

Martha thought to herself, *This is not fair. Here I am in the hot kitchen, working hard, and there sits Mary in the other room, doing nothing! Shouldn't Jesus tell Mary to get up and help me?*



Jesus Teaches Martha About Loving God

Luke 10:40–42

Loving God is more important than loving people.

Martha fumed as she worked busily in the hot kitchen. She had so much to do—eggs to break, food to make, bread to bake. She had to serve these hungry people, and where was that sister of hers? Just sitting there, doing nothing but listening to Jesus.



Martha had had enough. She marched right up to Jesus and interrupted, “Lord, don’t You care about me? Don’t You care that my sister has left me to do all the work? Tell her to get up and help me.”

Jesus listened to what Martha had to say and gently called her by name: “Martha, Martha, I know you are busy and worried about the work that needs to be done. However, there’s only one important thing right now, and that is what your sister Mary is doing. She is listening to Me. I won’t let anyone take that away from her.”

Though Jesus taught that loving people is important, He taught that loving God is more important. Both the Good Samaritan and Martha showed love for others, which is a good thing. However, Mary chose the better thing when she showed love for God by listening to Jesus.

Jesus Teaches His Disciples to Pray

Luke 11:1–4, 9–13; Matthew 7:7–11

We pray in response to God's love for us.

After Jesus left Mary and Martha's house, He stopped to talk to His Heavenly Father. When He finished praying, one of His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."



Jesus gathered His disciples and said,

Our Father, who is in heaven, may Your name be kept holy.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Help us not to sin when we are tempted; keep us away from evil.

Jesus told the disciples always to ask God for help. "I tell you, ask, and God will give it to you. Seek Him in prayer, and you will find what you're looking for. Keep knocking on God's door in prayer, and He'll open His door to you."

Explaining the reason God would answer their prayers, Jesus continued, "If a child asks his father for bread, will the father give him a rock? If he asks for a fish, will his father give him a snake? If he asks for an egg, will his father give him a scorpion? If even fathers here on earth, who aren't perfect, love to give their children good gifts, how much more does your Heavenly Father, who is perfect, love to give you what you pray for?"

Jesus was teaching that God as our Father loves to help us, His children, and He wants us to come to Him often in prayer.

Jesus Eats with Sinners

Luke 5:27–32

Jesus welcomes sinners.

One of Jesus' disciples was a man named Matthew, a former tax collector. After he became a follower of Jesus, Matthew threw a big party at his house. He invited all his friends, many of whom were also tax collectors—a group known for their sinful actions. Matthew wanted them to hear the news that he was going to follow Jesus now.



At Matthew's party, Jesus sat down at the table with all these sinners. When the Pharisees saw Him, they couldn't believe what He was doing.

The Pharisees thought, *Why is Jesus talking to all those sinners? What kind of teacher is He?* A good teacher would never get so close to wicked people.

The Pharisees didn't understand Jesus. They thought the real Messiah would come and punish all the sinners. They thought He would be a friend only to "good" people, but Jesus loved all kinds of people—even tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees didn't like that at all.

The Pharisees grumbled to the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

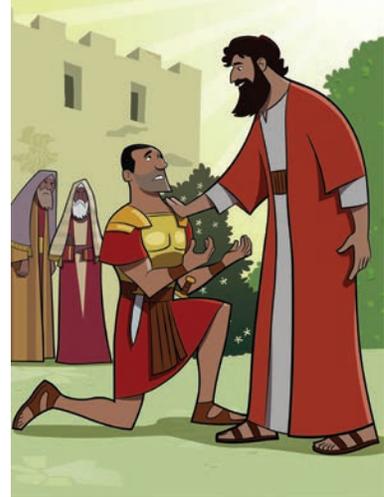
Jesus heard the Pharisees and answered them. He said, "Doctors spend time with sick people because they're the ones who need doctors. Healthy people don't need doctors. In the same way, I came from God to call sinners to repentance."

Jesus Ministers to a Gentile

Matthew 8:5–13

Jesus ministers to all people.

One day, as Jesus was entering a city, a centurion came running up to Him. This man was a leader in Rome’s army and had one hundred soldiers under his command. As the centurion fell at Jesus’ feet, he asked for Jesus’ help, saying, “Master, my servant lies at home terribly sick. The sickness is so bad that he can’t even get out of bed.”



Jesus looked with compassion at the man kneeling before Him. He said, “I will come with you and heal your servant.”

The centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have You come into my house. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. I have soldiers under my command, so I understand how authority works. When I tell one to come or go, he does what I say, and I know that the sickness will obey Your command as well.”

When Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those following Him, “I have not seen any Israelite with this much faith. I say to you that many Gentiles will enter into heaven because of this kind of faith.”

Then Jesus turned to the centurion and said, “You may go home. I have healed your servant as you asked.”

Jesus had come to help sinners of all kinds—even those who were not His people.

Jesus Forgives a Sinful Woman

Luke 7:36–50

Jesus' forgiveness motivates love.

One night, Jesus was eating dinner with a Pharisee named Simon. During the meal, a sinful woman rushed into the room.

She hadn't come in to make trouble. She had come to thank Jesus for forgiving her sins. Kneeling down, she began to cry. With her tears, she washed His feet and then wiped them with her beautiful hair. She even kissed Jesus' feet and poured very expensive perfume on them to show how much she loved Him.

Simon the Pharisee was not happy about this. He thought to himself, *Jesus can't be a good teacher. If He knew how sinful this woman was, He wouldn't let her touch Him.*

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking. He said, "Simon, let me tell you a story. Two men needed to repay some money they owed. One man needed to pay a lot of money; the other man needed to pay just a little bit. However, neither of the men had the money to pay what they owed. One day, these men got some very good news. The man they owed money to said that they no longer needed to pay him anything!"

Jesus asked, "Which of the two, do you think, loved the man more—the one who had owed lots of money or the one who had owed only a little bit?"

Simon said, "I guess the man who had owed a lot would have loved him more."

Jesus said, "You're right. Don't you see how much this woman loves Me? Why do you think she loves Me so much? It is because she has been forgiven for many sins."

Then Jesus turned to the woman and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."



Jesus Feeds Five Thousand People

John 6:1–13

Jesus uses little things to accomplish His great plans.

Many people loved to hear Jesus teach. One day, about 5,000 men took their wives and children, left their homes, and followed Jesus all the way out into the wilderness, far away from stores and good places to eat.



As it got later in the day, there was a problem. It was almost dinnertime, and the people had not brought food.

Jesus looked at the hungry crowd with love. He asked Philip, one of His disciples, “Where are we going to buy bread so all these people can eat?”

Philip answered, “We don’t have that kind of money! We can’t even buy enough to feed each person a crumb.”

Andrew, another of Jesus’ disciples, said, “There is a boy here who has given five little loaves of bread and two tiny fish. But how many people will that feed?”

This wasn’t much food, yet with Jesus it would be more than enough. He took the five loaves and two fish and thanked God for them. Then He started breaking the bread and fish into pieces and giving them to His disciples.

The disciples took the pieces and gave them to the people. Jesus kept on breaking, the disciples kept on giving, and the people kept on eating.

Before long everyone was nice and full, and there were even twelve baskets of leftovers! Jesus had worked another amazing miracle!

Many People Turn Away from Jesus

John 6:14–15; 22–59

Jesus is the Bread of Life.

The crowd enjoyed every bite of the fish and bread Jesus had given them. They were so full and happy that they decided to make Jesus their king.

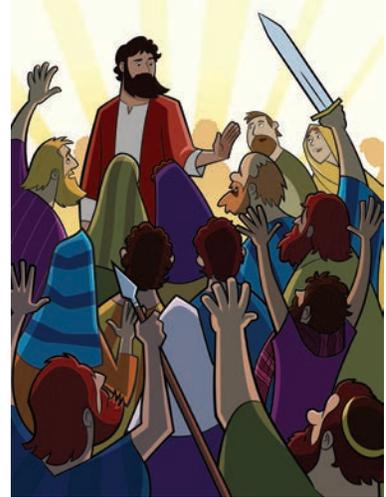
They thought, *If Jesus were king, then He could give us good food to eat all the time.* That was the people's plan, but it wasn't God's plan.

Jesus knew it wasn't the right time to be king, so He secretly left the crowd behind and went across the Sea of Galilee.

However, the people didn't give up that easily. They followed Jesus, and when they found Him, they said, "Why did You leave us?"

Jesus replied, "You don't really want Me to be king. You just want more food to eat. You don't even understand why I am here. I am the Bread of Life. If you come to Me, you will not get hungry. If you believe in Me, you will never be thirsty."

The crowd didn't want Jesus to be that kind of king, so many of the people stopped following Him. Though they wanted Jesus to give them food and heal their sicknesses, they didn't want Him to be their Savior. But Jesus was not sent to fill their stomachs with food; He was sent to fill their hearts with love for God.

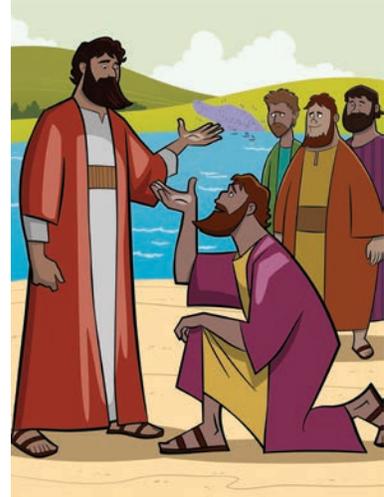


The Twelve Disciples Stay with Jesus

John 6:60–71

Jesus guards His children's hearts.

The people didn't like what Jesus said about being the Bread of Life. It was hard for them to understand, and they didn't think they wanted that kind of king. They wanted a king who would give them more free food. Many of the people shook their heads, turned their backs, and walked away, following Jesus no longer.



Then Jesus turned to His twelve disciples. Pointing to the departing crowds He asked, “Do you want to leave Me like these people have?”

Peter said, “Lord, who else would we follow except You? You teach the only way to get to heaven. We know for sure that You are the Holy One from God.”

When Jesus heard Peter's answer, He replied, “Didn't I choose you to be My twelve disciples, yet one of you doesn't really believe in Me?”

Jesus was reminding the Twelve that they were His disciples because He had chosen them. They had believed, but it was God who had revealed to Peter and the others that Jesus truly was the Holy One from God. This is what made them different from those who turned away.

Jesus was also warning about one of the Twelve named Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew that one day soon Judas would help Jesus' enemies kill Him.

Though Jesus was approaching the time of His death, He was completely in charge, and everything was happening according to God's wonderful plan.

The Disciples See Jesus' Glory

Matthew 17:1–3; Luke 9:28–32

Jesus reveals His glory.

About one week after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Holy One of God, Jesus led Peter and two other disciples, James and John, up a tall mountain. Jesus had chosen these three to see something special.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Jesus began to pray, but the disciples soon fell asleep.

Suddenly, there was a bright light that was so white it hurt to look at it. Peter, James, and John were startled from their sleep. They squinted to see where the light was coming from. It was shining from Jesus.

His face shone like the sun. His clothes gleamed with brightness. This wasn't the Jesus the disciples were used to seeing. This was a mighty, powerful, glorious Jesus.

Jesus was talking with two other men—Moses and Elijah—men who had been in heaven a long time. There, on the mountaintop, these two famous men stood talking with Jesus about how He was soon going to die on the cross.

Moses and Elijah had lived long ago and had accomplished their part of God's plan. Yet they were still alive. Jesus was also going to die, yet He, too, would live again. Jesus' death would not be the end of Him. His death was part of God's plan.



The Disciples Should Listen to Jesus

Matthew 17:4–8; Luke 9:33–36

God's plan focuses on Jesus.

On the mountaintop, Peter, James, and John stared as Jesus revealed His glory. He shone with a blinding light: the mighty and powerful Son of God.

While the three disciples watched in amazement, Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah, two of Israel's most important teachers.

Of course, Jesus' disciples knew the right way to treat important teachers like this. They should listen carefully to them and obey them.

This gave Peter a sudden thought, *What an amazing team of teachers—Moses, Elijah, and Jesus!*

Peter said, "It is good that we are all here. I don't want it to end. Let's build three tents you could teach in. One for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus!"

But Peter wasn't thinking about what he was saying. He had forgotten that Jesus was more than a great teacher like Moses and Elijah. While he was still speaking, a cloud came down and covered the disciples. They heard a voice coming from the cloud. God the Father Himself was talking to the disciples about Jesus.

He said, "This is My Son, whom I dearly love. Listen carefully to Him."

Only Jesus is God's Son. There is no one else like Him; He alone is the Savior!



Jesus Is Kind to His Disciples

Matthew 17:6–9; Luke 9:36

Jesus treats people lovingly.

When Peter, James, and John heard God's voice speaking from the cloud, they were scared and fell to the ground, hiding their faces.

Jesus walked over to where the disciples were lying. He reached out His hand and touched them. Though Peter had shared a bad idea, Jesus spoke to the disciples kindly, saying, "Get up and don't be afraid."

At Jesus' words, the three disciples looked up and found that everything was back to normal. There was no shining light, bright cloud, or booming voice from heaven. Moses and Elijah were gone too. There, alone, stood Jesus as they had always seen Him. His face was no longer shining; He looked just like anyone else.

Even though the disciples had misunderstood what had happened, Jesus still loved them. Soon Jesus would show just how much He loved His people by dying for them. No one—not even Moses or Elijah—could do that job. No one except the real Messiah could die for people's sin.



Jesus Tells the Disciples That He's Going to Die

**Matthew 16:21–23;
Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32; Luke 9:22**

Jesus lived to die.

One day, as Jesus and His disciples were walking down the road, He said to them, “It has always been the Father’s plan that I must go to Jerusalem. While I am there, I will suffer many things and be rejected. The Pharisees and Romans will kill me, but three days later I will be raised to life again.”



What Jesus was trying to teach His disciples was very hard to understand. The disciples couldn’t believe what they were hearing! They thought, *What? Jesus—the Messiah—will be killed? How could dying be God’s plan for His Son?*

Peter was so upset by what he heard that he took Jesus aside and said, “Master, this can not be. This will never happen to You.”

Then Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “You are not thinking the way God thinks. You’re thinking like a man.”

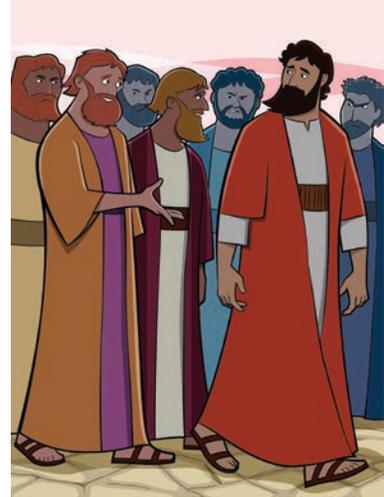
Jesus continued to teach His disciples about His Father’s plan. He told them that He was going to Jerusalem to die as the Sacrifice for sin and be raised again. But no matter how many times Jesus told them, the disciples still didn’t understand.

James and John Want to Be in Charge

Mark 10:32–41; Luke 18:31–34

Jesus came to serve.

Jesus again told His disciples that He knew He was going to Jerusalem to die. He said, “We are going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be handed over to the religious leaders. They will judge Me and give Me over to the Romans. Then the Romans will mock Me, spit on Me, whip Me, and kill Me. But I won’t stay dead. After three days, I will rise again.”



The disciples didn’t think that the Messiah was supposed to die; they wanted Him to be in charge. In fact, that’s what the disciples really wanted—to be in charge.

James and his brother John, two of Jesus’ disciples, said to Jesus, “Teacher, we want You to do us a favor—whatever we ask.”

Jesus replied, “What do you want Me to do?”

They said, “When You sit down on Your glorious throne, we want to be second-in-command, sitting right beside You—one of us on Your right side and one of us on Your left side.”

Jesus said to James and John, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Can you also share in My suffering?”

The brothers answered, “Yes, we can.”

Jesus replied, “You will suffer with Me, but only My Father assigns those seats of honor beside My throne.”

When the other disciples heard what James and John were asking, they were very angry with them and thought, *How dare they ask that question! We don’t want them to be in charge; we want to be in charge!*

However, the disciples had it all wrong. Even Jesus Himself had not come to be in charge but to serve in obedience to the Father.

Jesus Teaches About Serving

Mark 10:41–45; John 12:24–26

Jesus wants us to serve.

Jesus knew His disciples were selfish and wanted to be in charge. So He said, “You know that the Romans act like they are in charge, like they’re the boss. But that’s not the way it should be with you. Whoever wants to be in charge should give everything to serve other people.”

The disciples didn’t like this. They thought, *We’re Jesus’ disciples! Certainly He doesn’t want us to be servants.*

Jesus explained, “God sent Me to earth to serve. Soon, in Jerusalem, I will even let Myself be killed to save God’s people. If God sent Me to be a servant, you should be servants too.”

While walking through a field, Jesus encouraged His disciples by telling a story about planting grain. He said, “Do you know how grain grows? First, a farmer plants a kernel in the ground. That piece of grain dies, but soon it will grow with new life. It will shoot up and make a stalk that grows lots of grain.”

Jesus was talking about His own death. He would die and be buried in the ground, yet soon He would live again and bring new life to many people. This was exactly what the disciples needed to hear. They had wanted other people to serve them, but God had sent Jesus to die and pay for sins, showing His people what being a true servant was all about.



The Younger Son Leaves Home

Luke 15:1–2, 11–13

God sometimes lets us have our own way.

The Pharisees' hatred for Jesus continued to grow because He was so nice to sinners. They thought, *Look at Him! We don't hang around sinners like Jesus does.*

The Pharisees had not learned that God wanted them to love all people, so to help them understand, Jesus told them another story.

Once there was a rich man who lived on his huge farm with his two grown-up sons. The older son seemed like a good son because he always obeyed his father, but the younger son was very selfish. Even though they were very different, their father loved them both.

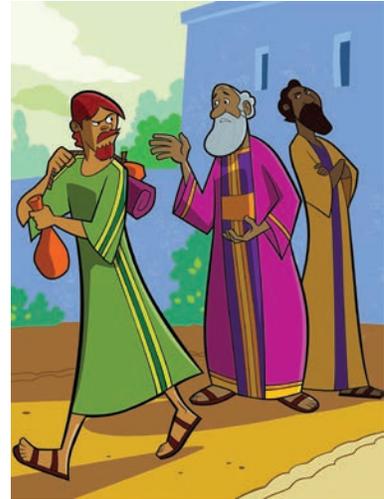
One day, as they were walking through the fields, the father said, "Sons, when I die, you will inherit this farm and all my money."

The younger son replied, "Dad, I don't want to wait until you die. I want my half of the money right now."

Even though the son was being selfish, the father still loved him very much. He said, "Here you go, my son. Here is your part of the money."

The son took the money and said to his father, "I am leaving home so that I can live the way I want."

This son didn't hug his father or even stop to say thank you. He simply turned and walked away.



The Younger Son Returns Home

Luke 15:13–24

God loves a sinner who comes back to Him.

In a far away land, the selfish son spent his money foolishly until one day he had none left. He had to find a job, but the only job he could find was feeding dirty, smelly pigs that rolled around in the mud and snorted as they ate.

Every day the son fed the stinky pigs. They had more food than he did. He was so hungry that even the pig food started to look good.

Then he thought, *Oh, why did I leave my father's house? Why did I spend all of his money? Now, I'm here in the mud with the pigs—and I'm so hungry! What am I going to do?*

Suddenly, he had an idea. *Even the helpers on my father's farm have better food than I do. I will go home, confess my sin, and beg my father to let me serve in the fields with the other helpers.* So the son got up, wiped as much mud off his clothes as he could, and started to walk home.

The road home was long, but at last the son could see his house. As he got closer, he saw someone running towards him. *Who could that be, he thought. It must be a child—no grown-up runs like that.* But wait! It wasn't a child. It was his father! His father was running fast . . . right towards him.

Oh, no! he thought. *Did Dad see me? Is he angry? Is he going to chase me away?*

The father ran right up to his son and hugged him very tightly. The son said, "Father, I've sinned against you and God. I no longer deserve to be your son. I'm so sorry . . ." but his father stopped him before he could say one more word.

"I love you so much!" said his father. "I don't care what you've done. I'm just glad you're home."

The father called one of his farm helpers and said, "Get the best clothes from my closet and the special ring—my own ring. We'll cook a feast big enough for everyone in town. My son is home!"



The Older Son Refuses to Rejoice

Luke 15:25–32

God wants us to be happy when people repent.

While the party was being prepared for the younger son, the older son was working in the fields. He had stayed on the farm working faithfully while his brother had been far away, wasting his money.

Returning to the house that evening, he heard music and laughter coming from inside. He asked one of the farm helpers, “What’s all the noise?”

The man replied, “Your brother has come home, and your father is having a welcome home party for him.”

When the older brother heard this, he got angry. He was so angry that he wouldn’t even go in to his brother’s party. He wanted a party for himself. He thought, *Why should my selfish brother get a party?*

The father left the party and came to where the older son stood glaring at the house. He invited his son to come inside and join the celebration.

The older son growled, “Look, I’ve always obeyed you. Yet you’ve never given me a party. This isn’t fair!”

The father said, “My dear son, this farm and all my money—everything—is yours! You can have a party any time you want. Shouldn’t you be happy that your brother is home safe and sound?”

“He’s made such foolish choices!” the older brother said.

“Yes,” said the father, “but he has turned away from his sin and come home. And that is always a good reason for a celebration!”



Two Men Pray in the Temple

Luke 18:9–14

Being good doesn't get people into heaven.

One day, Jesus met some people who didn't trust Him as their Savior. Instead, these people tried to get to heaven by doing good things. To teach them the true way to heaven, Jesus told them a story.

Two men went up to the Temple to pray—a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee proudly walked into the Temple, nodding to the people as they watched him pass. Nearby, the tax collector sneaked to a quiet corner under the glaring eyes of those who happened to see him.

The Pharisee stood up in front of everyone and loudly prayed, “God, thank You for helping me be so good. I'm not like other sinful people. I'm not a cheater. I'm nice and fair with people. I don't do bad things, not like that tax collector over there. In fact, God, I worship You and give money in the offering every week.”

As the tax collector prayed in his dark corner, he was so sad because of his sin that he couldn't even look up to God. He hung his head and cried, “God, give me mercy. Forgive me. I am a sinner.”

As Jesus finished the story, everyone thought that the Pharisee would be the hero. He did such good things, while the tax collector cheated people out of their money.

Jesus' explanation surprised everyone. He said, “I tell you, when the tax collector went home, God was happy with him. God forgave the tax collector because he was humble and was truly sorry for his sin. However, God was unhappy with the proud Pharisee because he was more interested in what people thought of him than what God thought of him. God honors those who are humble, but He humbles those who honor themselves.”



Jesus Blesses the Little Children

Luke 18:15-17

God saves people who know they need Him.

While Jesus was teaching one day, some parents brought their little children to Him so He could pray for them.

The disciples thought Jesus was too busy for little children. They told the parents, “Stop bothering Jesus. Take your children away.”

Jesus loved these children. He said to His disciples, “Let the children come to Me. Don’t get in their way. You can learn a lot from children. In fact, the only way to get into heaven is by becoming like one of these little children.”

Then Jesus stopped what He was doing, picked up the little children one at a time, and blessed them.

The people wondered what Jesus meant by all this.

Jesus was teaching that only the people who know they need God and ask Jesus to save them will get into heaven. Grown-ups are able to take care of themselves, but little children need help. They need help eating, help dressing, and help walking. Jesus didn’t come to help people who think they can save themselves by the good things they do. Jesus came to save people who know they need Him.



Jesus Talks to the Rich Ruler

Luke 18:18-27

Jesus is the only way into heaven.

One day, an important rich man came to Jesus and knelt in front of Him. He asked, “Good Teacher, what do I have to do to get into heaven?”

Jesus wanted to teach this man that no one could get into heaven on his own, no matter how good or rich he was. Jesus listed some important rules from the Bible.

He said, “Do not kill people. Do not steal. Do not lie. Respect your parents.”

The rich man replied, “I have obeyed all these rules ever since I was a little boy.”

Jesus said, “You still haven’t done enough to get into heaven. Take your gold and silver, fancy clothes, and nice houses, and give them all away. Then come and follow Me.”

When the rich man heard this, he became very sad and walked away. He was sad because he would have to give away so much to follow Jesus.

As the man left, Jesus looked at His followers and said, “It is impossible for people to be saved if they are trusting in what they have or how good they are. Being good and having great wealth can never save a person.”

His followers replied, “Then who can ever get to heaven?”

Jesus answered, “Salvation is possible only with God.” Jesus wanted them to know that only God could provide the way into heaven.



Jesus Hears About Lazarus's Sickness

John 11:1–15

God's plan is sometimes different from our plan.

One day, while Jesus was teaching, a message arrived from His good friends Mary and Martha. They asked Jesus to come quickly and help their brother Lazarus, who was very sick. He was so sick that the sisters were afraid he might die.



Jesus was far away when He got the message. He said, “This sickness will not end in death. All this has happened so people will see the greatness of God through the mighty power of His Son.”

Though Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to come quickly, Jesus waited two whole days. This was all part of God's plan.

After the two days, Jesus said to His disciples, “Let us go where Lazarus is in Bethany near Jerusalem.”

When the disciples heard this, they said, “The Pharisees there are trying to kill You. Why do You want to go back?”

Jesus said, “This is all part of My Father's plan, and now it is time to do His work. Lazarus, our friend, has fallen asleep. I am going to wake him up.”

The disciples complained, “Lord, why do we have to go then? If he is sleeping, that means he will get better on his own.”

But Jesus meant something else. He explained, “I mean that Lazarus has died. Yet I am glad that He needs more than just healing so that your faith in Me can grow stronger. Now let us go to them.”

Jesus Comforts Martha and Mary

John 11:17–37

God's plan is stronger than any obstacle, even death.

After a long journey, Jesus and His disciples arrived in Bethany. Martha and Mary were in their house, along with many of their friends. All of them were crying because Lazarus had died.

When Martha heard that Jesus had finally come, she ran to meet Him. She said, “Lord, if You had come sooner, my brother Lazarus would not have died, yet I know that God will give You anything You ask for.”

Jesus said, “Your brother will live again.”

Martha replied, “Yes, Lord, I know. Lazarus will live in heaven forever.”

Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Any person who believes in Me—even if he dies—will live. Do you believe this about Me, Martha?”

Martha answered, “Yes, Lord. I believe.”

Mary came out to see Jesus too. When she got there, Mary fell down at His feet and said the same thing that Martha had said. “Lord, if You had come sooner, our brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw Mary and all her friends crying, He also wept. Jesus was crying because death had hurt the people He loved. Yet, Jesus would soon fulfill God's plan to destroy death and give people eternal life.



Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

John 11:38–53

God's plan brings joy from sorrow.

Jesus came to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried, a cave with its doorway covered by a huge rock. Jesus commanded, “Remove the rock from the doorway of the cave.”

Martha said, “But Lord, it’s been four days since Lazarus died. His body will smell really bad.”

Jesus said, “Watch and you will see God’s greatness.”

As some men rolled back the rock, Jesus looked up and prayed, “Father, I know You always answer My prayers, but I am praying out loud so the people around Me will see that You answer. Then they will believe that You sent Me.”

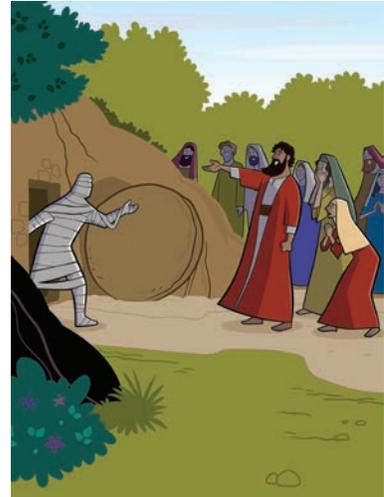
Jesus shouted in a loud voice, “Lazarus! Come out!”

As Mary, Martha, the disciples, and the whole crowd watched, a man came out of the cave. It was Lazarus! He was alive! When the people saw this, many of them believed in Jesus.

However, some people went to tell the Pharisees what had happened. The Pharisees said, “This is terrible. If Jesus keeps on doing these kinds of miracles, then everyone is going to believe in Him.”

The Pharisees began making plans—evil plans—to kill Jesus and Lazarus too.

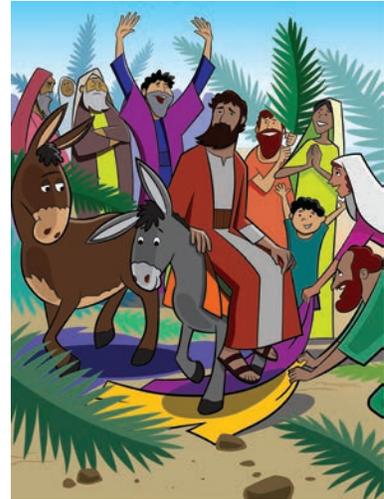
None of this surprised Jesus. He knew that bringing Lazarus back to life would lead to His own death. Yet Jesus also knew that His death would bring eternal life to every person who believes in Him.



Jesus Rides into Jerusalem as King

Matthew 21:1–11; Luke 19:29–40

Jesus, the King, deserves praise.



Jesus continued His trip to Jerusalem, the city where the kings of Israel had ruled over God’s people long ago.

Just outside Jerusalem, Jesus told two of His disciples, “God has a donkey ready for Me that no one has ever ridden on. Go, get it, and bring it to Me. If anyone asks why you are taking it, say, “The Lord needs it.”

The disciples obeyed and found the donkey where Jesus said it would be. As they untied it, its owners asked, “Why are you untying our donkey?”

The disciples replied, “The Lord needs it,” so the owners let the donkey go. Then the disciples brought the donkey to Jesus, placing their coats on its back for Jesus to sit on.

Many people cheered as Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem. They were excited because they knew God had promised to send the real King riding on a donkey. They waved leafy branches in the air and threw their coats down on the dusty road, making a nice, clean path for the King. Everyone, even the children, joined in the praise, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Save us! Rescue us!”

The Pharisees, who didn’t like this at all, wanted the people to stop cheering for Jesus as their King. They said, “Jesus, don’t You hear what the people are saying? Make them stop.”

Jesus replied, “If the people stop cheering, even the rocks on the ground will sing praise to God.”

Jesus Cleans the Temple

**Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–48;
John 12:17–19**

Jesus, the King, restores true worship.

The Pharisees hated Jesus. They said to one another, “Look at this! Our plans to stop Jesus have failed. Everyone loves Him.”

What Jesus did next made them hate Him even more. In the morning, Jesus and His disciples went into the Temple. The Temple was a special holy place for worship, yet there were animals everywhere! Men were selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices. However, the Temple was not the right place to sell animals.

People had come to worship God, but all you could hear were wings fluttering against wooden cages, hooves stamping on stone floors, and tails swishing away buzzing flies. Doves cooed; sheep baaed; cows mooed. Coins clanked and clattered as the people bought these animals. The house of worship sounded and smelled like a barnyard.

When Jesus saw what was happening in His Father’s house, He was angry. Jesus chased out the people who were buying and selling things, turning over their tables and benches. He said, “My Father’s house is for prayer, not for buying and selling animals!”

In just a few days, people wouldn’t need to offer animal sacrifices any longer. In fact, people wouldn’t meet with God at the Temple any longer. Instead, Jesus would Himself become the perfect Sacrifice, and He Himself would be the new way for all people to meet with God.



The Pharisees Try to Trick Jesus

Matthew 22:15–22; 23:18–39;

Luke 20:20–26

Jesus, the King, loves His enemies.



The Pharisees were looking for a way to kill Jesus, but they were too afraid of the crowds who loved Jesus and listened to His teaching. Hoping to stop people from following Jesus, the Pharisees sent spies to ask Him hard questions. They were hoping to make Jesus say something to trap Him with His own words. They thought, *If He says the wrong thing, maybe the crowds won't love Him anymore.*

One man asked Jesus, “Teacher, the Roman king, Caesar, has said that we have to pay him taxes. Should we obey him?”

Jesus answered wisely, “Why are you trying to trick Me? Show Me a coin.”

A person in the crowd handed Him a coin. Jesus held it up and asked, “Whose face is on it?”

They answered, “Caesar’s.”

Jesus replied, “Then give to Caesar what belongs to him, and give to God what belongs to God.”

Even though the Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus, He still loved them. The Pharisees’ sin made Jesus very sad. He said, “You are in trouble with God. You look clean and good on the outside, but in your hearts you are full of sin. If you don’t repent, how will you keep out of hell?”

Jesus didn’t hate the people who hated Him. Looking out over the city, Jesus cried, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! So many times I’ve called you to turn back to God, but you wouldn’t do it. I’ve wanted to bring you close like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you wouldn’t come to Me. Now destruction is coming to you.”

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

John 13:1-11

Jesus washes away our sin.

Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the feast of Passover. They were gathered around the table when Jesus did something the disciples were not expecting. He stood up, got a basin of water, and began washing the disciples' feet. Their feet were covered with dirty dust and smelly sweat. Jesus would have to hold and scrub the grime off twenty-four feet and out from between one hundred twenty toes. This was a job for a servant, not for God's Son.



When it was Peter's turn to have his feet washed, he stopped Jesus and said, "I won't let You wash my feet. It wouldn't be right."

Jesus replied, "I must wash all who follow Me. If I don't wash you, you are not one of My followers."

Peter said to Jesus, "Well, if that's the case, don't wash just my feet. Wash me from head to toe!"

Peter didn't understand that cleaning the dirt from his feet was a picture of cleaning daily sin from his heart. Jesus explained, "As God's child, you are already washed completely clean from sin's penalty. However, when you do sin, you still need to ask for forgiveness in order to enjoy your relationship with God."

By washing the disciples' feet, Jesus showed them that God had sent Him to wash away people's sins. This job was going to be hard, like the work of a servant. Jesus would have to die on the cross in order for sin to be washed away forever.

Jesus Serves at the Last Supper

**John 13:12–17; Matthew 26:26–29;
Luke 22:17–20**

Jesus teaches us to serve one another.

After Jesus finished washing His disciples' feet, He sat back down with them at the table.

He said, "Do you understand what I've just done for you? You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord.' And that's right, because that's who I am. If I, your Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, then you should wash one another's feet."

Jesus had set an example of love by His actions. He loved the disciples, so He wanted His disciples to love each other—even if it meant doing a servant's work like washing each other's dirty feet.

Then Jesus served His disciples in another way. As He sat at the Passover feast, Jesus took some bread and broke it into pieces. Then He blessed it and gave some to each of His disciples.

Jesus explained, "This bread is a picture of My body, which will be sacrificed for you. Eat this meal and remember My sacrifice."

Then Jesus took a cup, thanked God for it, and gave it to each of His disciples to drink. He explained, "This cup is a picture of My blood, which will bring forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink this cup, remember My sacrifice."

This was a new kind of Passover feast called the Lord's Supper. From now on God's people would eat the Lord's Supper to remind them how Jesus' death brings rescue from their sins.

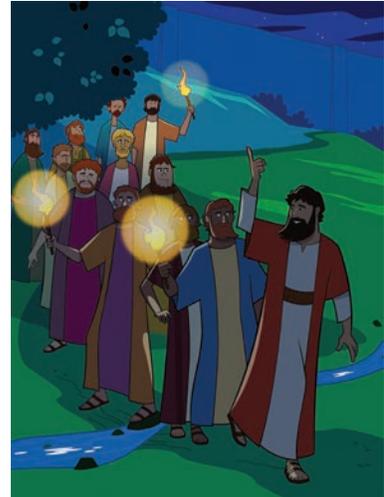


Jesus Comforts His Disciples

John 14:1-27

Jesus promises to bring us to God.

Jesus and His disciples left the room where they had eaten the Lord's Supper. As they walked, Jesus again told His disciples what was about to happen. The Pharisees and the Romans were going to kill Jesus, and very soon He would go back to heaven to be with His Father.



This made the disciples very sad, so Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts fill with worry. You trust God, so trust Me too. I am leaving to do something wonderful. I’m going to heaven to prepare a place where we can live together forever. You know how to follow Me.”

The disciples didn’t understand Jesus. Thomas asked, “Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus explained, “I am the way to heaven, the truth, and the life. No one finds a way to the Father except through Me.”

Jesus wasn’t just going back to heaven for Himself. He was going to make the pathway for other people to get to heaven.

Then Jesus said, “I’m also leaving with you My peace. It is not a fake peace, but a real, deep-down peace. Don’t let your hearts be worried or afraid.”

Although Jesus was going to die, He would not leave His disciples on their own. He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever.

Judas Helps the Pharisees

Matthew 26:14–16; John 18:1–2

Jesus experienced Judas's selfishness.

Though the Pharisees wanted to capture Jesus, they had a problem. During the day, crowds of people surrounded Jesus. Those people loved seeing His miracles and hearing His teaching. The Pharisees feared what would happen if they tried to arrest Jesus while these people were listening to Him teach. At night, Jesus was alone with His disciples, but the Pharisees didn't know where to look for Him.



Now it was night, and Jesus led His disciples from their Passover feast to a quiet garden called Gethsemane. While they walked, Jesus talked to His disciples—to all of them except for one, a man named Judas.

Judas had been a disciple of Jesus for a long time, but he didn't really love Jesus. A few days before, He had made an evil deal with the Pharisees.

He had asked the Pharisees, "What are you willing to give me if I help you catch Jesus?"

The Pharisees were so excited that they promised, "If you help us find Him when He is alone, we will give you thirty pieces of silver."

Now the time had come. Judas rushed to tell the Pharisees that they could find Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. All the crowds were gone, and it would be easy to capture Jesus.

Jesus Is Taken Prisoner

John 18:2–12; Luke 22:47–53; 23:1–12

Jesus selflessly obeyed God's plan.

Judas was leading the Pharisees and their soldiers to the quiet garden where Jesus was praying. Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to Him, and He was asking His Father for strength. He knew that Judas, the Pharisees, and many soldiers would take Him prisoner. Yet this was all part of God's plan to rescue His people.



As Jesus finished praying, the dark, quiet garden filled with the light of fiery torches and the noise of rattling swords.

The soldiers approached with their hands on their weapons, but they didn't realize that they wouldn't need them. Instead, Jesus stepped right out towards them.

He said, "Whom are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

Jesus answered, "I am He."

At this, the soldiers fell backwards to the ground. When they got up, Jesus said to them, "You've come for Me. I will go with you, but let My disciples go free." The soldiers obeyed, and the disciples ran away to safety. Jesus now stood alone with the soldiers, the Pharisees, and Judas.

The Pharisees took Jesus to the Roman governor, named Pilate. The Pharisees wanted Pilate to put Jesus to death. So they told Pilate a lie.

They said, "This man, Jesus, said He is a king. We all know that the Romans already have a king. This man is trying to kick out the Roman king and take over his kingdom. You need to put Him to death."

Jesus Is Condemned to Die

Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25

Jesus selflessly suffered in the place of others.

The Pharisees demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus, but Pilate could find no crime that Jesus had committed. Not wanting to kill a man who hadn't done anything wrong, Pilate put his own plan into action.

Pilate said to the crowds outside his palace, "Every year I let you choose one prisoner for me to set free. Who do you want this year? Do you want me to let Jesus go? Or do you want me to let Barabbas go?"

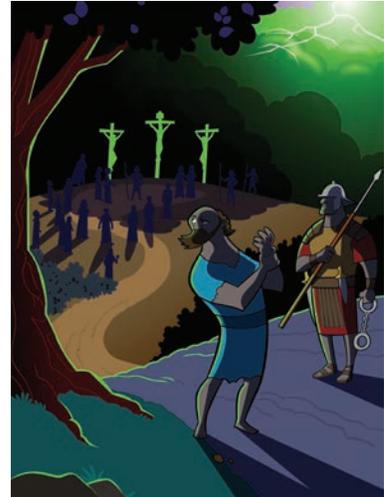
Pilate thought that the people would want Jesus, not the evil Barabbas, who was a terrible robber and murderer. But the Pharisees stirred up the people against Jesus. They began shouting, "We want Barabbas! We want Barabbas!" Soon the whole crowd joined in.

When Pilate heard their shouts and realized that his plan had failed, he gave in, commanding the soldiers to crucify Jesus and let Barabbas go.

Though Barabbas deserved to die for his wickedness, Jesus had never disobeyed. Yet Jesus would take Barabbas's place; He would be crucified on Barabbas's cross.

Since Jesus was God's Son, He could have stopped Pilate. He could have stopped the Pharisees. He could have stopped Judas. Instead, Jesus let Himself be crucified because He loved God's people.

Like Barabbas, all of us deserve to die because all of us have sinned against God. But on the cross Jesus let Himself be crucified in our place. Jesus died so that we might live with Him forever.



Jesus Rises from the Tomb

John 20:1–18

Jesus is alive!

The disciples were so sad. They had believed that Jesus was the true Messiah. Instead, Jesus had been killed. They thought that all hope was gone . . . but they were wrong.

It had been three days since Jesus died. Mary Magdalene, a follower of Jesus, was on her way to Jesus' tomb. It was so early that it was still dark outside. As she arrived, she saw that something was out of place—the huge stone which should have been in front of the tomb had been moved. *Oh no*, she thought. *Someone has taken Jesus' body!*



Quickly she turned and ran as fast as she could to the place where the disciples were hiding. When she saw Peter and John, she exclaimed, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb!”

Peter and John raced to the tomb. When they arrived, John peeked inside carefully, but Peter rushed right in. The strips of cloth that Jesus’ body had been wrapped in were lying there, and the cloth that had been around His head lay folded in a place by itself. Suddenly, they remembered all the things that Jesus had taught them—He would die on the cross, but He would come back to life on the third day. Now, finally, they saw and believed.

Peter and John went back to their homes, but Mary stayed at the tomb. She cried as she bent to look inside. Sitting where Jesus’ body had been were two angels. They asked, “Why are you crying?”

She replied, “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put Him.”

When Mary Magdalene turned around, there was Someone else standing there. He asked, “Why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?”

Thinking He was the gardener, she answered, “Please tell me where they’ve taken Him.”

Then the man called her by name, “Mary.” As soon as the man spoke Mary’s name, she knew it was Jesus.

Mary had seen and spoken to the risen Christ. He was alive!

Jesus Appears to Doubting Thomas

John 20:19–31

Jesus helps people who doubt.



“What do you mean, Jesus is alive?” asked Thomas.

“You should have been there,” said the disciples. “We were hiding because we were afraid that the Pharisees would come looking for us too. We had locked our doors, and, out of nowhere, Jesus appeared right in the middle of the room!”

Thomas wanted to believe that what the others were saying about Jesus was true, but he wanted to see Jesus with his own eyes. He said, “I just won’t believe until I see Jesus’ nail marks for myself.”

Later, Jesus appeared to His disciples again. The situation was exactly the same, but this time Thomas was with them.

Jesus suddenly stood among them in the middle of the room. He said, “God’s peace be with you.”

Jesus looked at Thomas with love and lifted His hands, showing Thomas the nail marks. Then Jesus gently said, “Thomas, see My hands? Put your finger where the nails were. Stop doubting and believe in Me.”

Thomas didn’t need to touch Jesus’ hands. Jesus was alive! Thomas’s heart overflowed with love and joy. He said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus had helped Thomas, who had once been filled with doubt. Now Thomas, too, believed in Jesus with all his heart.

Jesus Commissions His Disciples

Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 24:46–53;

Acts 1:8–11

Jesus commands us to spread the Good News.

Jesus was alive! He spent the next forty days with His followers, but soon it was time for Him to go back to heaven. Before He left, Jesus gave the disciples a job to do while He was gone.

Jesus said, “Go to every part of this earth. Make other people into My disciples. Baptize them and teach them to obey Me. I will send the Holy Spirit to give you power to do all I have commanded.”

As soon as Jesus blessed His disciples, He began to ascend into the air. His disciples watched in amazement as Jesus disappeared high into the clouds. He was going back to the Father in heaven to prepare a place for His followers.

While the disciples stood gazing into the sky, two angels appeared beside them. The angels asked, “Why are you looking for Jesus? He has returned to heaven, but He will one day come to earth again.”

For the rest of their lives, the disciples told other people about God’s great plan of love. The ones who believed in Jesus began telling others too! Before long, the news of God’s forgiveness had spread all over the world!

Jesus’ followers always want other people to hear and believe this message of God’s love. They tell friends, family members, neighbors, and even enemies.

I have told you the good news about God’s love. Now it’s your turn to tell other people about our loving God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

