

HEROES OF THE FAITH

ESL WORKBOOK

Teacher's edition

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Advice to Teachers/Facilitators

How to Prepare for Class

Make sure to spend time praying before beginning your preparations. Pray for wisdom in how to conduct the class, sensitivity towards the students, grace and favour. Pray that the students would learn about God.

Read over the materials a day or two before the lesson. Give yourself plenty of time to think about the content. Ask God to reveal truth to you.

Work through all the questions and answers. Select the questions you feel led to use. If you can't answer it, either research it (be careful to use reliable sources) or don't ask it. The answer guide is provided to help you.

Write up a brief lesson plan, including how many minutes each section might take. This will help you move the lesson along.

How to Use Materials

The Student Workbook

The materials are essentially in six parts: the background, the pre-reading question (s), the scripture passage, the What do you Think? discussion, the English exercise questions, and the discussion questions.

The illustrations used in lesson questions are designed to show the key events in the story. These can be used as a post reading exercise, where the students can summarize the story in their own words.

Each chapter begins with useful background information about the text: i.e. purpose, author, place in history, etc. This is followed by one or two questions in Before You Read. These are meant to get students thinking about the topic and help them access their prior knowledge.

The 'What Do You Think' reaction questions were developed by OMF for their method of telling the gospel through Bible stories. They are meant to encourage student interaction with God's Word and get them thinking. ***There are no wrong answers to these questions.*** However, if someone seems way off base, you might ask how they got that answer, or ask for other ideas from the class. There likely won't be time for every student to answer every question, but hopefully you will get some responses.

The exercise questions (True/False, Matching, Circle the Answer, Fill in the Blanks, etc.) are designed to help the students comprehend the story through repetition of key ideas and familiarity with the vocabulary. It has been shown that ESL students learn best when they have these kinds of exercise questions to do. The exercise questions are most useful for the Easier or Intermediate levels.

The discussion questions are divided into three sections: Easier, Intermediate, and Challenging. These levels are decided by the amount of fluency in English the student may have. The Easier questions are more fact based and the Challenging questions are more opinion/discussion in their orientation. The Intermediate questions are a mixture of both. Feel free to mix and match to suit your group.

The Teacher's Guide Answer Key

The answer keys to the questions are guidelines only. Be careful to give scriptural answers not just your own ideas or things you have been taught. Let Scripture explain Scripture. Sometimes you might have to explain the culture of the times. We have added notes to help, but for some things you might need more research. In that case ask the assistance of your pastor or use a well-known and accepted authority such as Matthew Henry's commentary.

How to Manage the Class

Organizing Groups

Allow students to join the group they feel most comfortable in. Sometimes a student will choose an easier group. If someone answers all the questions and seems to understand everything, suggest they join a more challenging group or ask them to be your assistant in translating or explaining. If a student is very quiet or looks totally lost suggest an easier group. Don't refer to it as a "lower" group.

Leading a Group

Make sure everyone knows your name and you know the name of all the students. (Name tags help). Be sure to welcome newcomers to the group. Take a few minutes to greet everyone and ask them how their week is going. Open the lesson with a prayer. Ask God for guidance and wisdom and that the students will understand.

Participation Issues

Allow the students to speak as much as possible. Guide them gently if they are mistaken. Never make anyone feel embarrassed for giving the wrong answer. Acknowledge the part of the answer is correct or say something like: "Yeah, a lot of people would agree with you but actually...".

It's a good idea to have everyone participate even just a little. This can be achieved by having everyone read a section of the story out loud. When people are reading, and mispronounce a word, correct them but don't over-correct. Don't correct more than three times. If they mispronounce a Bible name, tell them the usual way we say that name but remind them that these names are not English.

Don't force someone to answer a question. If no one volunteers to answer, don't answer them yourself. For factual questions ask the students to look at the story to see if they can find the answer there. For opinions, remind them that their opinions should be supported by facts from the story.

First time visitors

If there are new people joining the group allow them to listen and join in when they feel comfortable. Ask simpler questions of the newcomers to build their confidence in speaking out. Never put a visitor on the spot.

Managing the outspoken

Some people are very enthusiastic and love to jump in right away with their answers; others may love attention or are very competitive. Whatever the motivation, it can be very destructive to the learning to have one person dominating the discussion. Make sure you control how much any one person contributes- make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Be kind and polite but redirect the question to another person. For example: "That's a great thought, Sam! Let's hear what Peter thinks about that."

Also, sometimes there are volunteers or helpers assisting the group. Be sure to discuss prior to class what their role should be - assisting, not answering the questions or discussing side issues.

Managing the too quiet

Some people think it's rude to be too forward or are shy by nature. Encourage these people to speak. Ask them easy questions at first and follow it by a "what- do- you- think- about- that" sort of question.

Managing a larger group

In a larger group, some people don't get heard so it is valuable to break into smaller groups for discussions. This works better at the Intermediate or Advanced Levels. For Beginner Levels this can be done if there is an assistant to lead a smaller group.

Concluding and Following Up

It is very important to conclude the class on a positive note. If people have fun and enjoy being with each other, they will learn a lot and they will want to come back.

Make sure to refer to the lesson completed this week in the next class and ask the students whether it was helpful to them and what did they learn.

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Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-16

Background:

The Promised Seed

One of the thoughts Eve may have had at the birth of her first son was that perhaps he was the Seed mentioned in Genesis 3:15:

" And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel."

In this passage from Genesis God is addressing Satan. He says that He (God) will put enmity between "you" (Satan) and the "woman" (Eve).

In one sense, the seed of Eve represents all her children, and so of all mankind. So then, Satan will be the enemy of all mankind.

In another sense, the seed of the woman represents The Seed, the Messiah. The Messiah will also be a descendant of Eve (and Adam). Luke 3:23-38 gives the genealogy of Jesus, and verse 38 says that Jesus descended from "Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." Jesus is the "He who shall bruise your (Satan's) head. And Satan is the "you" that shall bruise "His" (Jesus') heel.

Matthew Henry points out that:

1. God honoured Eve by calling the Messiah, Jesus, her seed - and He does this even though she was the one who chose to trust the serpent in the Garden and disobey God. Henry says that this was an example of God magnifying His grace by telling Eve that even though she was the first to sin against Him, yet she would be saved by the promised seed that would come from her.

1 Timothy 2:14 says, "Adam was made first, then Eve; woman was deceived first - our pioneer in sin! - with Adam right on her heels. On the other hand, her childbearing (her seed) brought about salvation, reversing (restoring) Eve." (The Message)

2. Although sin came to mankind because they were Eve's descendants, yet her descendant, The Seed (the Messiah), saved mankind from sin and

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God's sentence on sin. This happened when Jesus was made sin for us and took its sentence on the cross.

Colossians 2 says, "He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:13b, 14)." (NIV)

3. Although Satan had trampled Eve and insulted her when he beguiled her into sinning, in the fulness of time her Seed would come to avenge her, and triumph over Satan.

In Genesis 3 Satan appeared as the serpent in the Garden of Eden that tempted Eve. The Hebrew word used for "serpent" in Genesis 3 is the same word used for the name of the stellar constellation, "Draco the dragon" (Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon).

Revelation 12 says, "The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down' (Rev. 12: 9,10)."



Before you read:

What are some things that are difficult to do, even though they are the right things to do?

The purpose of this question is to consider our own sinful natures. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get side-tracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets side-tracked.

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Passage Questions

True or False

1. Abel farmed in the fields. F
2. Both Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord. T
3. Abel was angry with his brother. F
4. God warned Cain about sin. T
5. God killed Cain for his brother's murder. F
6. Adam and Eve had a third son. T
7. Abel was forgotten by God. F

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. <u>d</u> crops | a. going place to place having no permanent home |
| 2. <u>f</u> offering | b. hold by force |
| 3. <u>b</u> grab | c. the opposite of a blessing |
| 4. <u>g</u> punish | d. food plants that farmers grow |
| 5. <u>h</u> godly | e. look for (someone) |
| 6. <u>c</u> curse | f. to give something in worship |
| 7. <u>a</u> wander | g. make someone pay for a crime |
| 8. <u>e</u> call on | h. pleasing to God |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. A lot of farmers in Asia grow rice as their crop .
2. God put a curse on Cain because he killed his brother.
3. God punished Cain, by making him wander on the earth without rest.
4. God warned Cain that sin was waiting to grab him.
5. Cain was very angry because God didn't accept his offering.

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6. Abel had faith and he was praised as a ___ godly ___ man.
7. When Seth had children, people began to ___ call on ___ the name of the LORD, because they wanted to find Him.

Re-tell the Story

- A. Adam and Eve named their first son Cain, and their second son Abel.
- B. Cain worked in the fields; Abel tended the flocks.
- C. Cain brought some of the produce of the field to God as an offering; Abel brought the fat from the firstborn of his flock.
- D. God was pleased with Abel's offering, but not with Cain's. Cain became angry and sad because of this. God told Abel that if he did what was right then he would be accepted by Him. But if he did what was wrong, sin was waiting to control him - but he must rule over sin.
- E. Cain asked Abel to go to the field with him; there Cain killed Abel.
- F. God asked Cain where Abel was. Cain said he wasn't his brother's keeper. God told Cain that he knew that he had killed Abel. God told Cain that he was putting a curse on him; driving him away, telling him that he would no longer be able to grow crops, and making him a wanderer.
Cain said this was too hard of a punishment and that someone might kill him. God put a mark on Cain so that no one would kill him. Cain left for the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Discussion

- *Easier*
 1. What was life like for Adam and Eve once they had been forced out of the Garden of Eden?
Life was difficult: they had to work hard to get food. Giving birth was difficult and painful.
 2. Describe Eve's reaction to the birth of her first son, Cain.
She is surprised and happy.
 3. What did Cain and Abel offer to the Lord?
Abel offered the fat of a first-born sacrificed animal; Cain offered some crops.
 4. Why, do you think, did God accept Abel's offering? Why didn't he accept Cain's?

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Genesis does not specify the reason, but Hebrews 11 suggests Abel's offering was better because of his faith. Abel's was perhaps a sin offering with a blood requirement. (Leviticus 4:27-28). Maybe he recognized his own sinfulness whereas Cain did not. Adam and Eve would probably have told their sons about their sin and their loss of Eden because of it.

5. **What did God say to Cain after his offering was not accepted?**

The LORD asked Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If he did the right thing he would be accepted. If not, Cain is warned that" sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

6. **What did Cain do?**

Cain murdered his brother.

7. **Do you think Cain was sorry for what he had done? Why?**

He tried to pretend he didn't know where Abel was. He did not show remorse.

8. **What was his punishment?** He could no longer be a farmer. He had a broken relationship with both nature and with his fellow human beings. For that reason he had to wander with no real home among people.

9. **What was Cain afraid of after God cursed him?**

He was afraid that people would kill him (just as he had already killed).

10. **What is Abel remembered for in the Bible?**

His faith in God.

11. **What good thing happened after the birth of Seth?**

Men began to call on the name of the Lord.

• ***Intermediate***

1. **What was life like for Adam and Eve once they had been forced out of the Garden of Eden?**

Before, their days were spent naming animals and eating fruit and talking with God. After, they had to struggle to get their own food. With the presence of sin, their family life was not easy.

2. **Describe Eve's reaction to the first birth. Why were her words significant enough to be recorded?**

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She seems almost surprised. Perhaps she thought she would have only female children. Perhaps she thought she'd given birth to the Messiah (the "seed") promised by God after she and Adam had sinned. Perhaps she was surprised that God could create new life, formed in her womb.

3. What did their two sons offer to the Lord?

Abel offered a lamb and Cain offered produce.

4. Why, do you think, did God accept Abel's offering? Why didn't he accept Cain's?

Abel's was perhaps a sin offering (Leviticus 4:27-28). Maybe he recognized his own sinfulness whereas Cain did not. Adam and Eve would probably have told their sons about their sin and their loss of Eden because of it. We do not know why God accepted one and not the other. Was it the type of offering, or how it was offered or the attitude of the one doing the offering? Hebrews 11 suggests Abel's faith made the offering better.

5. What did God say to Cain?

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

God was willing to talk to Cain about his feelings and warn him about sin.

6. What does God's warning to Cain teach us about sin?

Sin is an ever-present enemy that we must be on guard against.

7. What did Cain do after he received this warning?

He murdered Abel.

8. Did Cain show any remorse (sadness) for what he had done?

No, he pretended that he didn't know where Abel was.

9. Why do you think God didn't strike him down on the spot after He had confronted him?

Maybe God wanted him to repent or at least be an example of what sin can make someone do.

10. What hope does the birth of Seth give us for humanity?

After Seth was born, men began to call on the name of the Lord.

11. What is Abel remembered for in the Bible? Why is this important?

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Abel is remembered for his faith. Without faith, we have no relationship with God, and we cannot please Him.

- *Challenging*

1. What was life like for Adam and Eve once they had been forced out of the Garden of Eden? Compare their lives before and after.

Before, their days were spent naming animals and eating fruit and talking with God. After, they had to struggle to get their own food. With the presence of sin, their family life was not easy.

2. Describe Eve's reaction to the first birth. Why were her words significant enough to be recorded? What is the significance of them?

She seems almost surprised. Perhaps she thought she would have only female children. Perhaps she thought she'd given birth to the Messiah (the "seed") that God promised after she and Adam had sinned. Perhaps she was surprised that God would create a new life in her body. This was the first step in obeying God to go forth and multiply.

3. What did their two sons offer to the Lord? Compare the offerings.

Cain offered some fruits of the soil to the Lord; Abel offered the fat portions of some of the firstborn of his flock. The offerings were different in type. They were also different in when they were offered- in time Cain offered some of the fruit; Abel offered some of the first born. God did not favor Cain's offering although He liked Abel's. Cain did not seem to know what God would like.

4. Why, do you think, did God accept Abel's offering? Why didn't he accept Cain's?

Genesis does not specify the reason, but Hebrews 11 suggests his offering was better because of his faith. Abel's was perhaps a sin offering with a blood requirement. (Leviticus 4:27-28). Maybe he recognized his own sinfulness whereas Cain did not. We do not know why God accepted one and not the other. Was it the type of offering, or how it was offered or the attitude of the one doing the offering?

5. What did God say to Cain? What impressed you about God's conversation with Cain?

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you,

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but you must rule over it." God really wanted Cain to do the right thing. He shows His love for Cain by warning him.

6. What does God's warning to Cain teach us about sin? Can this be applied to all of us?

Sin is an ever-present enemy that we must be on guard against. It is sneaky. We, like Cain, are always being tempted to do the wrong thing or do something for the wrong reasons.

7. What did Cain do after he received this warning? Did Cain show any remorse (sadness) for what he had done? What does this show us about the nature of sin?

He murdered Abel. No, he pretended that he didn't know where Abel was. Sin deceives us into believing we are right. We don't feel like we have sinned.

8. Why do you think God didn't strike him down on the spot after He had confronted him? What bothered Cain more than the death of his brother? Maybe God wanted him to repent or at least be an example of what sin can make someone do. Cain was more disturbed by the curse God gave him and the fact that he would be infamous and at risk rather than any concern for Abel or his parents.

9. What hope does the birth of Seth give us for humanity? What did men begin to do at this time? Why is this important?

After Seth was born, men began to call on the name of the Lord. This is a beginning of mankind reaching out to God.

10. What is Abel's legacy? He never had the chance to have children, so what did he leave behind?

He left a legacy of faith. He did the right thing and God was pleased. He showed it was possible to please God.

Jesus refers to Abel as "righteous Abel". (Matthew 23:35)

Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:21-34; 27:1-36

Background:

Birthrights

The birthright is emphasized in the Bible because it honored the rights or privileges of the family's firstborn son. After the father died, or in the father's absence, the firstborn son assumed the father's authority and responsibilities. However, the Bible also shows that the father could rescind the birthright and pass it on to a younger son. (Genesis 49; Jacob gives the position of ruler to his fourth son, Judah.)

In addition to assuming the leadership role in the family, the recipient of the birthright inherited twice that received by the other sons. In cases where a husband might have more than one wife, the birthright always went to the firstborn son of the father and could not be awarded to the son of a favorite wife without proper justification (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) or if the firstborn son's mother was a concubine or a slave (Genesis 21:9-13; Judges 11:1-2).

As New Testament Christians, we have an inherited "birthright" status through Jesus Christ as the firstborn Son of God (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15; Revelation 1:5).

<https://www.gotquestions.org/birthright-Bible.html>

Blessings

A blessing, according to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, is "the act or words of one that blesses," or "a thing conducive to happiness or welfare." When Isaac was ready to die, he pronounced this blessing on his son, Jacob: "May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed" (Genesis 27:28-29).

A blessing is a statement of good will and happiness that is said about another, as well as the condition that fulfills those good words. God's original design in creation was for His creatures, including mankind, to experience prosperity, peace, and fulfillment, but that design was ruined when sin entered the world. Statements of blessing are a wish for God to restore His favor on others or a declaration of

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His inherent goodness. The ultimate blessing that God has given is the new life and forgiveness that comes through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

"Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God" (Psalm 146:5).

<https://www.gotquestions.org/blessing-Bible.html>

Before you read:

The purpose of this question is to understand the value of birthright/inheritance. You might want to lead students to consider more than material inheritance, such as values. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

What is the most valuable thing you have ever received from your parents?

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Match the Questions to the right Answers

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <u>E</u> What did Isaac do when his wife Rebekah was not able to have children? | A. He traded some stew. |
| 2. <u>F</u> What did God tell Rebekah about her twins. | B. Rebekah dressed her son Jacob to feel like Esau, so Isaac thought the youngest was the oldest. |
| 3. <u>G</u> Who did Isaac like best and why? | C. She liked Jacob best. |
| 4. <u>C</u> Who did Rebekah like best? | D. He yelled loudly and bitterly. |
| 5. <u>A</u> What did Jacob offer to trade for Esau's rights as an eldest son? | E. He prayed to the LORD for her. |
| 6. <u>B</u> Why did Isaac bless Jacob and not his oldest son, Esau? | F. He said the older brother would serve the younger brother. |

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7. D What did Esau do when he learned that Jacob had gotten his blessing?

G. He liked Esau, because he brought his favourite meat.

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

1. <u>f</u> take advantage of	a. delicious
2. <u>g</u> serve	b. With great sadness; without hope
3. <u>j</u> hunter	c. To cause someone to believe a lie
4. <u>h</u> rights	d. Move back and forth; tremble
5. <u>c</u> trick	e. Food made with small beans
6. <u>e</u> lentil stew	f. Treat unfairly for one's own good
7. <u>d</u> shake	g. Work for or obey someone
8. <u>a</u> tasty	h. Special freedoms
9. <u>b</u> bitterly	i. Someone who catches animals for food

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

- Isaac began to shake when he heard Esau ask for his blessing.
- Rebekah helped Jacob trick Isaac to get his blessing.
- Esau yelled bitterly when he heard Jacob had taken his blessing.
- Esau really wanted to eat Jacob's lentil stew.
- Isaac liked to eat the tasty food that Esau brought him.
- Esau was a hunter, and he loved the open country.
- Esau gave away his rights as an oldest son to his brother Jacob.
- God told Rebekah that the older brother would serve the younger.
- Esau said that Jacob had taken advantage of him.

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Re-tell the Story

Esau sells his Birthright

- A. Rebecca became pregnant with twins. The twins struggled with each other when they were still inside her. When she asked God about this, He told her that the babies were two sons and that each son would become a nation. He said that one nation would be stronger than the other. He said that the older son would serve the younger son.
- B. When Rebecca gave birth, the first son born with a lot of hair on his body and he was red. They named him Esau. He was Isaac's favourite son.
- C. The second son came out grasping Esau's heel. This second son was not hairy. They named him Jacob. Jacob was Rebecca's favourite son.
- D. Esau grew up and became a skilled hunter. He liked to spend his time in the country hunting for wild game.
- E. Jacob grew up and liked to stay at home. He liked to cook.
- F. One day Jacob made a red lentil stew. When Esau came home from hunting, he was very hungry and asked Jacob for some of the stew. Jacob told Esau that he would give him some stew in exchange for Esau's birthright. Esau agreed to this, so Jacob gave Esau some stew and some bread.

Jacob deceives Isaac

- A. Isaac became old and had trouble seeing. He called for Esau and told him to go into the country and hunt some wild game, then cook it the way he liked it and bring it to him. Isaac said that then he would give Esau the blessings of the firstborn.
- B. Rebecca overheard Isaac telling Esau about wanting the meal of wild game before giving him the blessings of the firstborn.
- C. Rebecca called Jacob and told him that she wanted him to pretend he was Esau and fool Isaac into giving the blessings of the firstborn to him instead. Rebecca sent Isaac to get two young goats, and she cooked them the way Isaac liked. She dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes, and put goat skins on his hands and neck to make them feel hairy.
- D. Jacob brought Rebecca's meal to Isaac. Jacob told Isaac that he was Esau. Isaac was suspicious of Jacob but was fooled by the goat skins and by Esau's clothes.
- E. Isaac gave Jacob the blessings of the firstborn.
- F. Just after Jacob left Isaac, Esau arrived with the meal he had made from the wild game. Isaac realized that Jacob had tricked him and began to

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shake. He told Esau what had happened. Esau yelled loudly and bitterly. He told Isaac that this was the second time that Jacob had taken something from him; first Jacob had taken Esau's birthright, and now Jacob had taken Esau's blessing.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. What did God tell Rebekah about her sons?
God told Rebekah that the older would serve the younger.
2. Were Jacob and Esau similar or very different? Explain.
They were different. Esau was born red and hairy, but Jacob was not. Esau liked hunting, but Jacob stayed near the tent and learned from his mother.
3. Did Esau care about his rights as an eldest son? What did he want in exchange?
No, it seemed unimportant to him. He wanted the stew Jacob had prepared because he was very hungry.
4. What did Isaac want to do for Esau? What did he ask Esau to do first?
Isaac wanted to give his blessing to his eldest son before he died. He wanted some wild game to eat because he enjoyed the food Esau prepared.
5. Whose idea was it to steal Esau's blessing?
Rebekah overheard the conversation between Isaac and Esau. It was her idea for Jacob to steal Esau's blessing.
6. How did Jacob trick Isaac? What happened when he did this?
Jacob prepared food and put on Esau's clothes, so he would smell and feel like Esau. Isaac gave his blessing to the man he thought was Esau.
7. How did Esau feel about Jacob when he learned the truth? Would you feel the same if your brother tricked you like that?
Esau was shocked, hurt, angry and bitter. This is a normal reaction to betrayal.
8. What was the prophecy that God gave to Rebekah before Jacob and Esau were born? Did this prophecy become true?
God said that the older son would serve the younger. Jacob took the place of Esau as the older son, even though he was born last. He had his brothers'

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rights, and he had the blessing of his father. Jacob inherited God's original promises to his grandfather, Abraham.

- *Intermediate*

1. What did God tell Rebekah about her sons? How important is this information for the rest of the story?
God told Rebekah that the older would serve the younger. From the beginning she knew her sons would be in conflict.
2. Compare Jacob and Esau, how are they similar and different?
Esau was born red and hairy, but Jacob was not. Esau liked hunting, but Jacob stayed near the tent and learned from his mother. Their characters were different, too. Esau was a man of appetite, but Jacob valued spiritual things.
3. What did Esau say about his birthright? What did he want in exchange? Do you think this was a good deal for Jacob?
"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?". He wanted the stew Jacob had prepared because he was very hungry. It was an excellent deal for Jacob who used his cunning to get his brother to give up his birthright and swear an oath about it.
4. What did Isaac want to do for Esau? What did he ask Esau to do first? What was the significance of the blessing?
Isaac wanted to give his blessing to his eldest son before he died. He wanted some wild game to eat because he enjoyed the food Esau prepared. The blessing was special words spoken over a loved one, much like a prayer.
5. Whose idea was it to steal Esau's blessing? What does this reveal about Rebekah and the relationships within the family?
Rebekah overheard the conversation between Isaac and Esau. It was her idea for Jacob to steal Esau's blessing. There doesn't seem to be very open relationships between family members. Instead there is rivalry. (In later Biblical accounts of Rebekah's family, we see the same sorts of issues.)
6. How did Jacob deceive Isaac? What happened when he did this? What effects on the family do you think this action had?
Jacob prepared food and put on Esau's clothes so he would smell and feel like Esau. Isaac gave his blessing to the man he thought was Esau. (Answers will vary.)

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7. How did Esau feel about Jacob when he learned the truth? Would you feel the same if your brother tricked you like that?

Esau was shocked, hurt, angry and bitter. This is a normal reaction to betrayal. What you do next is important. (Answers will vary.)

8. How was the prophecy that God gave to Rebekah fulfilled through Jacob and Esau's actions?

God said that the older son would serve the younger. Jacob took the place of Esau as the older son, even though he was born last. He had his brothers' rights, and he had the blessing of his father. Jacob may have had a desire for God's original promises to his grandfather, Abraham

9. Why did God still choose Jacob to be the father of his people after he had lied and cheated?

Later Jacob is reconciled to God and God would already know this would happen. Esau was not a spiritual man as far as we know.

• *Challenging*

1. Gen 25: 23 gives God's full answer to Rebekah during her difficult pregnancy: "Two nations are in your body. Two tribes that are now inside you will be separated. One nation will be stronger than the other. The older son will serve the younger one." How important is this information for the rest of the story? Do you think it affected how their sons were treated? What does this information reveal about God?

God told Rebekah that there were two nations inside her womb, and that the older would serve the younger. From the beginning she knew her sons would be in conflict. It would affect how Jacob was treated. God knows all about us before we are even born.

2. Compare Jacob and Esau. In what ways are they similar and different? Which do you identify with the most and why?

Esau was born red and hairy, but Jacob was not. Esau liked hunting, but Jacob stayed near the tent. Their characters were different, too. Esau was a man of appetite, but Jacob valued spiritual things. (Answers will vary.)

3. What did Esau say about his birthright? What did he want in exchange? Do you think this was a good deal for Jacob? How do you think Jacob should have responded to Esau's request?

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"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?". He wanted the stew Jacob had prepared because he was very hungry. It was an excellent deal for Jacob who used his cunning to get his brother to give up his birthright and swear an oath about it. Perhaps he should have tried to get Esau to understand the importance of the birthright and not let his brother make a hasty decision.

4. **What did Isaac want to do for Esau? What did he ask Esau to do first? What was the significance of the blessing? How is the blessing different from the birthright? Do you think Esau valued this blessing?**
Isaac wanted to give his blessing to his eldest son before he died. He wanted some wild game to eat because he enjoyed the food Esau prepared. The blessing was special words spoken over a loved one, much like a prayer. The birthright was something automatically given to the eldest son, a kind of inheritance. Esau seemed to want this blessing and went out to prepare food for his father in order to receive it.
5. **Whose idea was it to steal Esau's blessing? What does this reveal about Rebekah and the relationships within the family? Do you think Rebekah thought about how this would affect her family?**
Rebekah overheard the conversation between Isaac and Esau. It was her idea for Jacob to steal Esau's blessing. There doesn't seem to be very open relationships between family members. Instead there is rivalry. (In later Biblical accounts of Rebekah's family, we see the same sorts of issues.) I don't think Rebekah had thought about how Isaac or Esau would react to this trickery.
6. **How did Jacob deceive Isaac? What happened when he did this? What effects on the family do you think this action had? Although God did say that the older would serve the younger, do the ends justify the means? Jacob prepared food and put on Esau's clothes, so he would smell and feel like Esau. Isaac gave his blessing to the man he thought was Esau. (Answers will vary.)**
7. **How did Esau feel about Jacob when he learned the truth? Would you feel the same if your brother tricked you like that? What can we understand about the Bible when it reveals some of the bad things that people who are chosen by God do?**

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Esau was shocked, hurt, angry and bitter. This is a normal reaction to betrayal. What you do next is important. The Bible is not trying to sugar-coat the truth. These are real people who behave just like we do.

8. Esau doesn't only disrespect his birthright by giving it away so casually, he also chose to marry women whom his parents didn't like. (Genesis 26:34,35) What does this show about Esau's character and perhaps why God preferred Jacob? Read Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:10-13.

Esau was not respectful of his parents. He seemed to be a man of the world, caring about his material but not spiritual life.

God's word reveals how God felt about Esau: Malachi 1:2-3: "I have loved you," says the Lord. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Roman 9:10-13: ¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Martha and Mary: Two Visits

Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-8

Background:

Note: Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet. At that time to sit at a rabbi's feet meant that a person was a disciple of that rabbi - and only a man could be a rabbi's disciple. At that time women were separated from men in the synagogues and were restricted to an outer court of the Temple; only men could go to an inner court. But here, Jesus welcomed Mary and commended her choice.

What Martha may have Served for Dinner:

According to ancient records, most people ate:

- Grain
 - Bread made of barley or wheat; served with cheese and/or grilled fish, or dipped in broth or stew - or wine
 - Spelt, millet, flax, rice
 - Roasted grain (similar to puffed rice and popcorn)
 - Pancakes with filling
- Vegetables
 - Olives, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic, radishes, lettuce, lentils, chickpeas, beans, peas, sesame
 - Herbs such as chicory, endives, radishes, mustard, mandrake, thyme
 - Most people could afford a field had their own vegetable garden
- Fruit
 - Grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates, quince, mulberry, melons, apples, pears, strawberries, citron
 - Most people could afford a field had their own orchard
- Water and Wine
 - Usually they mixed a little wine into their water. The wine helped kill off bacteria or parasites that might be in the water.
 - If they were drinking wine itself, they would mix a little water into the wine, so the wine wasn't too strong to be used as a beverage.
 - Most people could afford a field had their own vineyard
- Dairy
 - Yogurt, cheese, sheep and goat milk, butter
- Eggs
 - Geese, chicken, quail

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- Insects
 - Locusts: the head, wings, and legs were removed, and the body fried in butter.
- Fish
 - From the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River; roasted on coals
 - Salted fish
- Poultry
 - Geese, chicken, quail, partridge, pigeon; roasted or stewed
 - Most people kept some poultry
- Meat
 - Goat meat; marinated and roasted or stewed.
 - A lamb on a special occasion (the fleece of a sheep was valuable, so lambs were not usually killed for meat)
 - A fattened calf for a very special occasion
 - Game: deer, gazelles, roebucks
 - Most people kept a couple of sheep, and a cow.
- Honey, imported sugar cane
- Nuts: pine nuts, almonds, peanuts, pistachio nuts
- Spices such as coriander, cumin, oregano, mint, rue, salt from the Dead Sea

When living in tents, the people would cook their food in the open, outside of the tent. They would use an open fire and roast their food over the fire, fry it in olive oil in a pan over the fire, or stew their food in a pot over the fire. They used cooking vessels made of iron, baked clay, or copper.

When they lived in homes, they cooked their food over a hearth in a closed courtyard of the house; sometimes they had an earthenware oven.

Sources:

- What food did Bible people eat? <http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-extras/food/>
- Bible Dictionary: Agriculture, <https://www.bible.gen.nz/amos/culture/agriculture.htm>
- Jewish Virtual Library, Jewish Food: Eating in Historical Jerusalem, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/eating-in-historical-jerusalem>

Before You Read:

What is the most valuable thing you have ever received from your parents?

The importance of this question is to bring out the ways we value people, whether it is through gifts, serving or spending time. We can show that we value God in many of

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the same ways. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Change these False statements to be True: *Answers*

1. Mary and Martha were *sisters*.
2. Jesus did *not* tell Mary to go and help her sister.
3. Jesus told Mary that she had chosen what was better.
4. Jesus said that it is more important to learn about God than to serve people.
5. A pint of nard cost the same as a worker's pay for a whole year.
6. Mary poured the nard on Jesus feet and wiped it with her hair.
7. Judas really wanted to have the money for himself/ did not care about the poor.
8. Judas was upset with Mary for pouring the perfume on Jesus' feet.
9. Jesus thought Mary's action was a good one. (Jesus told Judas to not criticize Mary.)

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. <u>c</u> celebrate | a. take for oneself without asking |
| 2. <u>f</u> nard | b. bring back to life after death |
| 3. <u>e</u> Passover | c. show happiness for a special occasion |
| 4. <u>b</u> raise from death | d. a unit for measuring liquids (about 500 ml) |
| 5. <u>a</u> help (oneself) to | e. religious holiday to remember God's rescue of Israel from slavery |

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6. g defend f. expensive plant with a sweet-smelling root that grows in India & Afghanistan
7. d pint g. protect

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. Jesus had raised Lazarus from death.
2. Mary poured a pint of nard on Jesus' feet.
3. Judah liked to help himself to the money from the poor.
4. Passover is a holiday that celebrates God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery.

Re-tell the Story

Luke 10

- A. Jesus and his disciples came down from Galilee to the village of Bethany, near Jerusalem.
- B. At Bethany, they all stayed at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They were brothers and sisters.
- C. Martha was busy getting the preparations done for the guests.
- D. Mary joined the disciples and sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him teach.
- E. Martha complained to Jesus about Mary in front of everyone. Martha thought that Mary should be helping her get things ready.
- F. Jesus told Martha that Mary was right in sitting at His feet; Mary had chosen better.

John 12

This picture shows Mary anointing Jesus' feet with the nard and drying his feet with her hair. It illustrates the custom of dining while reclining. It also shows that anointing the feet was an easy thing to do in this position.

To recap the story, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were hosting a dinner at their home in Bethany to honour Jesus. This dinner occurred six days before the Passover Feast in which Jesus would be arrested, tried and crucified in Jerusalem. Mary poured about a pint (about 470 mL) of an expensive nard on Jesus' feet and then wiped His feet with her hair. Judas Iscariot rebuked Mary for this saying that she should have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor. But the Scripture

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says that Judas' interest was not the poor, but the money bag that he would help himself to. Jesus rebuked Judas saying that the perfume was meant for his burial, and that they would always have (opportunity to give to) the poor, but they would not always have Him among them.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. **Where did Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live?**

They lived in the village of Bethany that was about 3 km from Jerusalem.

2. **Why was Mary sitting at Jesus' feet?**

She was sitting in Jesus' 'class' with his other disciple-students. She wanted to learn from Jesus.

3. **Why was Martha upset with Mary?**

Martha was preparing a dinner that had to feed Jesus and his disciples - so 13 men, and there may have been others with them. Mary wasn't helping her with the preparations but had instead joined the disciples to listen to Jesus.

4. **What did Jesus say about Mary?**

Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen what was needed and what was better, and He wouldn't let Martha take Mary away from that.

5. **What was the reason that Mary and Martha were giving a dinner in the second story?**

They were honouring Jesus, and they were probably celebrating what he had done for their brother, Lazarus.

6. **How did Mary honour Jesus at that dinner? What did it cost her?**

Mary poured out about 500 mL of pure nard perfume on Jesus' feet, and then she wiped his feet with her own hair. Washing feet was a servant's job, and women of that time did not usually uncover their hair except with family. Mary was showing her great love and devotion to her teacher. The nard came from the northern mountains of India, and it cost almost a year's pay. (That would be like someone giving a new car as a gift today.)

7. **Why did Judas Iscariot complain about Mary?**

The perfume that Mary had poured on Jesus' feet was very expensive. Judas said that this use of money was too extravagant; he said it should

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have been used to help the poor. But Judas was a thief, and he didn't care about the poor. He probably wanted the use of such a large sum of money for himself.

8. What did Jesus say about Mary's "misuse" of the perfume?

Jesus told Judas to leave Mary alone. He said that it was intended (God's plan) for Mary to use this perfume for the "day" of his burial (that is, in preparation for His burial.) (Note that Mary, then, had been moved by God's Spirit to do this whereas Judas who was plotting to betray Jesus did not appreciate Mary's act of love for Jesus.)

- *Intermediate*

1. How do you know that Jesus had a close relationship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus?

Answers will vary. The Gospels record three accounts of Jesus staying at their home. Both Mary and Martha felt free to express their honest thoughts to Jesus - "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." And their note to Jesus said of Lazarus, "the one you love is sick".

2. The Bible teaches that good works come from faith and are evidence of faith. But Jesus often rebuked the Pharisees for teaching that what you do is more important than spending time with God and reading what He had to say in the Scriptures.

a. What was Martha busy doing? Was it good that Martha was doing this?

Martha was busy preparing supper for Jesus and his disciples. Yes, this was a good work for her to do that Jesus and the disciples would benefit from.

b. What was Mary busy doing? Was it good that Mary was doing this?

Mary was busy sitting at Jesus' feet listening to what he was saying to his disciples. Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was better than Martha's good work.

c. How did Martha ask for help from Mary? Was it okay for her to ask for this help? Why was this not a good way to ask for help?

Martha asked Jesus if he would tell Mary to help her get dinner ready. It was okay for Martha to ask for help. But Martha missed the importance of what Mary was doing. And Martha should have asked

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Mary directly for help, rather than embarrass Mary by asking Jesus to do this, and to criticize Mary in front of the disciples.

- d. Are you surprised that Jesus rebuked Martha, not Mary?

Answers will vary. But most people would sympathize with Martha for having been left to prepare dinner on her own. And many might assume that a woman should be serving, not presuming to join the disciples.

- e. How do we find a balance between good works and spending time with God, listening to His heart and mind?

Answers will vary. But a balance is needed. Jesus spent time alone with God. Jesus said He valued Mary's desire to learn from Him more than Martha's desire to serve Him. At the same time, James said that faith without works is dead. John MacArthur said, "Works are crucial expressions of faith but can become poisonous if we focus on those works to the point of magnifying ourselves and denigrating sound doctrine and worship."

- f. Can a man or a woman, in a marriage, do the good works of a husband or wife, yet at the same time fail to love their spouse?

Yes, there are many Hollywood movies based on the theme of a husband or wife that fulfill their outward roles but lose interest in their spouse.

3. How do you think Martha's family felt after Jesus raised Lazarus from death? (How have you shown those kinds of feelings to someone?)

They were probably filled with as much joy and gratitude as they had been filled with deep grief. Lazarus may have been the only male member of their family, and his death may have meant loss of income for them as well as loss of a loved one. (Answers will vary.)

4. Why do you think Jesus spoke about his burial at the dinner?

Before his death, Jesus spoke to his disciples about his coming sacrifice, and he did not avoid the topic. This may have been one more word to his disciples about what was coming. (It may also have been a signal to Judas, that Jesus knew about the plot with the chief priests.)

5. Do you think Mary knew that Jesus' burial would be soon?

We don't know how much she understood, but we can surmise that she was sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit to be moved to show such an extravagant gesture of love.

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6. Jesus defended Mary twice in these stories.

- a. Why do you think Jesus defended Mary when she joined the disciples when He was teaching them?

Jesus was defending the right of a woman to learn from Him as an equal to the disciples, and not just have to take the role of serving in the background.

- b. Why do you think Jesus defended Mary when she poured a pint of expensive perfume on his feet?

Jesus understood the worth of her act of faith and worship in doing this - and her sensitivity to the approaching time of His burial.

• *Challenging*

1. Why would Jesus and his disciples stay at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? How do you know that they had a close relationship?

Their home was close to Jerusalem, and Jesus was heading to Jerusalem and his last days of ministry there. We know they were close because the gospels recount three stories of Jesus staying at their home. Both Mary and Martha felt free to express their honest thoughts to Jesus - "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." And their note to Jesus said of Lazarus, "the one you love is sick".

2. The Bible teaches that good works come from faith and are evidence of faith. But Jesus often rebuked the Pharisees for teaching that what you do is more important than spending time with God and reading what He had to say in the Scriptures. As a result of their theology, the Pharisees didn't recognize who Jesus was when He was right in front of them.

- a. What was Martha busy doing? Was it good that Martha was doing this? Was it necessary for Martha to do this?

Martha was preparing supper for Jesus and the disciples. This was good because they needed supper; and so it was also necessary. But maybe Martha was preparing a more elaborate supper than was necessary - and so distracted with that preparation that she lost sight of the importance of the opportunity to sit at the feet of the Messiah in person.

- b. What was Mary busy doing? Was it good that Mary was doing this? Was it necessary for Mary to do this?

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Mary had joined the disciples to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his teaching. It was good of course to listen to his teaching in person. Many would wonder at her apparent willingness to leave her sister to do all the preparations for dinner. But Jesus commended Mary for choosing the better. Many people think that the family must have been wealthy in order to have a home large enough to accommodate Jesus and the disciples; if so, then there would have been servants who could have prepared the dinner without her supervision. But bottom line, Jesus said that it was the listening that was necessary.

- c. **How did Martha ask for help from Mary? Was it okay for her to ask for this help? Why was this not a good way to ask for help?**
Martha asked Jesus if he would tell Mary to help her get dinner ready. It was okay for Martha to ask for help. But Martha missed the importance of what Mary was doing. And Martha should have asked Mary directly for help, rather than embarrass Mary by asking Jesus to do this, and to criticize Mary in front of the disciples.
- d. **Are you surprised that Jesus rebuked Martha, not Mary?**
Answers will vary. But most people would sympathize with Martha for having been left to prepare dinner on her own. And many might assume that a woman should be serving, not presuming to join the disciples.
- e. **How do we find a balance between good works and spending time with God, listening to His heart and mind? Why, although both are important and necessary, does Jesus put the listening higher than the works?**
Answers will vary. But a balance is needed. Jesus spent time alone with God. Jesus said He valued Mary's desire to learn from Him more than Martha's desire to serve Him. At the same time, James said that faith without works is dead. The Pharisees had put faith in works above faith in God's word and failed to recognize who Jesus was. John MacArthur said, "Works are crucial expressions of faith but can become poisonous if we focus on those works to the point of magnifying ourselves and denigrating sound doctrine and worship."
- f. **Why are both good works and good doctrine important to God?**
Works come from faith, and these works can be the hands of Jesus in meeting the needs of the needy. But the Pharisees had failed to see

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the importance of good doctrine - in the end, this led to failing to maintain the works that were important to God.

- g. Can a man or a woman, in a marriage, do the good works of a husband or wife, yet at the same time fail to love their spouse?

Yes, there are many Hollywood movies based on the theme of a husband or wife that fulfill their outward roles but lose interest in his or her spouse.

3. How do you think Martha's family felt after Jesus raised Lazarus from death?

They were probably filled with as much joy and gratitude as they had been filled with deep grief. Lazarus may have been the only male member of their family, and his death may have meant loss of income for them as well as loss of a loved one.

- a. How did Mary show her feelings?

Mary poured out 500 mL of pure nard on Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. She lavished on Jesus what may have been the most expensive thing she owned. The nard came from the northern mountains of India, and it cost almost a year's pay. (That would be like someone giving a new car as a gift today.) By using her hair to wipe Jesus' feet, she showed her great love and devotion to her teacher. Washing feet was a servant's job, and women of that time did not usually uncover their hair except with family.

- b. How have you shown those kinds of feelings to someone?
(Answers will vary.)

- c. How do people show those feelings to God?

People still show gratitude and love by giving money and other material gifts to God through his Church and through helping others. They also serve God with their time and efforts. They show love for God by spending time in worshipping Him and learning about Him from the Bible, His Word.

4. Why do you think Jesus spoke about his burial at the dinner?

Before his death, Jesus spoke to his disciples about his coming sacrifice, and he did not avoid the topic. This may have been one more word to his disciples about what was coming. (It may also have been a signal to Judas, that Jesus knew about the plot with the chief priests.)

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5. Do you think Mary realized that it was the "day" (i.e. the period of time) when Jesus' burial was imminent, or do you think it was just a spontaneous act of love?

We don't know how much she understood, but we can surmise that she was sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit to be moved to show such an extravagant gesture of love.

6. Jesus defended Mary twice in these stories; both defences were written in the Bible for everyone to read for all generations to come.

- a. What was the importance of Jesus' defence of Mary when she joined the disciples when He was teaching them?

Jesus was defending the right of a woman to learn from Him as an equal to the disciples, and not just have to take the role of serving in the background.

- b. What was the importance of Jesus' defence of Mary when she poured an entire pint of expensive perfume on his feet?

Jesus understood the worth of her act of faith and worship in doing this - and her sensitivity to the approaching time of His burial.

Gideon Part One

Judges 6:1-40

Background:

Who Were the Midianites?

Abraham had more sons than just Isaac (by Sarah) and Ishmael (by Hagar). He also had six sons by Keturah, his wife after the death of Sarah: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (*Genesis 25:2*). The Midianites were the descendants of Midian and therefore children of Abraham. They settled in "the land of the east" (*Genesis 25:6*). Most scholars believe the land of Midian was officially on both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba, although the Midianites showed nomadic tendencies later in their history (see *Habakkuk 3:7, ESV*).

When Moses fled the wrath of Pharaoh, he traveled to Midian (*Exodus 2:15*). There, Moses met and married his wife, Zipporah, and served his father-in-law, Jethro, as a shepherd for forty years. The fact that Jethro was "a priest of Midian" (*Exodus 2:16*) indicates that the Midianites, at least during Moses' time, still retained the knowledge of the God of their father Abraham (cf. Jethro's words and actions in *Exodus 18*). At the end of Moses' time in Midian, God appeared to Moses—still in Midian—and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of slavery (*Exodus 3–4*).

As the children of Israel traveled through the wilderness, they employed the services of a guide familiar with the desert—Moses' Midianite brother-in-law, Hobab (*Numbers 10:29*). However, the relations between the Israelites and the Midianites began to sour when the Midianites joined forces with the Moabites in order to hire Balaam to curse Israel (*Numbers 22*). Later, when Israel fell into idolatry and sexual sin with the Moabite women (*Numbers 25*), we find that a prominent Midianite woman was also involved (*Numbers 25:6*). The Lord then told Moses to wage war against the Midianites: "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them. They treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the Peor incident involving their sister Kozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader" (*Numbers 25:17–19*). The Israelites did eventually attack the Midianites, meting out divine retribution against their enemies (*Numbers 31*). Five kings of the Midianites were killed, as was Balaam (*Numbers 31:8*). This battle was one of the last things Moses accomplished as leader of the Israelites.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Midianites.html>

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely
2.1 Gideon Part One

Before you read: Have you ever experienced something that most people would say is impossible?

This question is meant to encourage faith. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Put the story in the right order. The first one is done for you.

- a) The angel caused fire to burn up Gideon's offering of wet food. 5
- b) The angel of the LORD told Gideon he was to save Israel. 3
- c) Joash told people that Baal could stand up for himself. 8
- d) The Israelites began to worship other gods. 1
- e) The Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he gathered an army. 9
- f) Gideon asked the angel for a special sign. 4
- g) God allowed the Midianites to attack Israel. 2
- h) Gideon obeyed the angel and destroyed his father's altars at night. 6
- i) Gideon used a wool fleece (the wooly coat of a sheep) twice to test whether what God promised was true. 10
- j) The people of the village wanted to kill Gideon when he destroyed his father's altars to false gods. 7

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. <u>h</u> covenant | a. water that appears on the ground in the morning |
| 2. <u>e</u> spare | b. a courageous fighter |
| 3. <u>b</u> warrior | c. very angry |

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.1 Gideon Part One

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 4. <u>g</u> sign | d. the soft, thick hair of sheep |
| 5. <u>f</u> thresh | e. to not destroy or harm |
| 6. <u>c</u> furious | f. to hit wheat so the grain falls out |
| 7. <u>d</u> wool | g. an event like a miracle to prove something is true |
| 8. <u>a</u> dew | h. a promise between people and God |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. In those days, people had to thresh the wheat by hand.
2. Gideon asked the angel for a sign to prove he was from God.
3. God made a covenant with the Israelites, but they broke it.
4. Gideon squeezed out the dew that was in the wool.
5. The Midianites did not spare any living thing for the Israelites.
6. The angel called Gideon a warrior who would save his people.
7. The village was furious with Gideon because he had destroyed their god's altar.

Re-tell the Story

- A. The angel of the Lord came to Israel and sat down under an oak tree in Ophrah. Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress there; he was doing this to hide the wheat from the Midianites. The angel said to Gideon, "Mighty warrior, the Lord is with you." Gideon said that if the Lord was with the Israelites then why had He deserted them. The Lord told Gideon that he should save Israel. Gideon said his family was the weakest of the Israelite families, and he was the weakest of his family. The Lord said He would be with Gideon. Gideon then asked for a sign that this really was the Lord. He asked the Lord to wait until he returned with an offering for Him.
- B. Gideon prepared a young goat and made bread without yeast. He put the goat meat in a basket. He put soup made from the meat in a pot. He brought back the meat, soup, and bread to the Lord. The angel of God told Gideon to place the meat and bread on a rock, then pour the soup over it. The angel of the Lord had a walking stick. He touched the tip of this stick to the meat and bread. Fire blazed out of the rock and burned up the meat

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.1 Gideon Part One

and bread. Then the angel disappeared. Gideon cried out that he had seen the angel of the Lord face to face. The Lord told Gideon to not be afraid, that he was not going to die.

- C. That night the Lord told Gideon to get his father's second bull, one that was seven years old, and tear down the altar that his father had made to Baal. And to cut down the pole beside it that his father had used to worship Asherah. Then Gideon was to make an altar to God and sacrifice the bull on it as a burnt offering to God. Gideon did all this, but he did it at night because he was afraid of his family and the people in the town.
- D. The next day an angry crowd of people from the town came to Gideon's father and demanded that Gideon must die for tearing down Baal's altar and the Asherah pole. But Gideon's father told the crowd that if Baal really was a god, he could stand up for himself. And that anyone who wanted to stand up for Baal would be put to death by morning.
- E. Gideon gathered the Israelites to go to war against them.
- F. Before going into battle, Gideon asked God for another sign that He was with the Israelites. Gideon put a piece of wool (a fleece) on the threshing floor. He told God that if in the morning the ground was dry, but the wool was wet, then this was a sign that God's promise would come true. The next morning the ground was dry, but the wool was full of water. Gideon then asked God to not be angry with him, but to give him one more sign. He put the wool out again that night and told God that if in the morning the ground was wet, but the wool was dry, then this was the final sign that God's promise would come true. The next morning the ground was wet, but the wool was dry.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. Did the people stay faithful to God after they entered the land He had promised?

No, they forgot about God.

2. Why did God allow the Midianites to invade?

The Israelites had broken the covenant. God was waiting for them to call for help.

3. What good thing did the Israelites do when the Midianites attacked?

They turned back to God and called out to Him

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.1 Gideon Part One

4. What was Gideon doing when the angel appeared to him?
He was secretly threshing his wheat in a winepress.
5. At first did Gideon believe the angel was from God? What changed his mind?
He didn't know who the angel was. When the offering was burned up, it proved who the angel was.
6. Why do you think was Gideon so afraid?
It was a time of fear for Israel. God was asking a lot of him.
7. What did Gideon do to his father's altars?
He destroyed them at night.
8. Why, do you think, were the people so angry with Gideon?
Maybe they thought Baal would rescue them, so when Gideon destroyed their gods' altars they felt they had no chance.
9. What did Gideon do after the Spirit of the LORD came on him? Do you think this showed faith?
Gideon sent word out to form an army and fight the Midianites. God had strengthened his faith.
10. Why did Gideon lay out the wool twice?
After he called the army together, he still wanted to be sure he was doing what God wanted. If he went with his army against God's will, they would all die.

• *Intermediate*

1. Why do you think the people of Israel didn't stay faithful to God after they entered the Promised Land?
I think they began to forget or didn't teach their children well or were influenced by other people around them.
2. Describe the situation with the Midianite invasion? Why did God allow this?
The Midianites not only invaded but they were very destructive. The Israelites had broken their covenant, so God would not protect them.
3. Why do you think Gideon was so surprised by the angel of the Lord?
He didn't know much about God and probably just thought the teachings of Moses were stories.
4. What challenges did Gideon face concerning his father's gods?

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2.1 Gideon Part One

Once he knew the real God he had to destroy the altars to the false gods, but these false gods made up a big part of village life.

5. What was interesting about his father's response to the furious townspeople?
He didn't condemn his son. He said let Baal defend himself. He was challenging Baal to be real.
6. Why did Gideon lay out the wool fleece (the wooly hair of a sheep)?
He was unsure about God's promise, so he wanted a sign.
7. What does the second fleece show about Gideon's faith?
He wanted a second sign just in case the first was a fluke. He was not a man full of confidence.
8. Christians sometimes talk about laying out a fleece. Do you think this shows faith or a lack of faith?
(Answers will vary.)
9. What is more important: that our faith be strong or that we trust in the character of God? Are these the same thing? Why or why not?
If we trust ourselves, we have to look at our own character- we will never have enough faith. Strong faith is still not enough faith. If we trust or have faith in God's character then we will, by grace, be given enough faith.

• *Challenging*

1. Why do you think the people of Israel didn't stay faithful to God after they entered the Promised Land? What would cause them to act this way?
I think they began to forget about God or didn't teach their children well or were influenced by other people around them.
2. What were the results of their breaking their covenant with God?
God allowed the Midianites to invade. He had warned that's what would happen if they broke the covenant.
Exodus 23:31-32: "I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. ³² Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. ³³ Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."
3. What good thing did they do when they felt the oppression of the Midianites? As Christians, do we experience similar things?

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.1 Gideon Part One

They turned back to God and called out to Him. Yes!

4. Why do you think Gideon was so surprised by the angel of the Lord? What kind of spiritual environment was Gideon living in?
He lived among idol worshippers, but he would be shocked to encounter the Living God. (Idols don't really do anything.)
5. What challenges did Gideon face concerning his father's idols?
Once he knew the real God he had to destroy the idols, but the idols made up a big part of the town's life. He knew the people would be furious.
6. What was interesting about his father's response to the enraged townspeople? What do you think his father believed in?
He didn't condemn his son. He said let Baal defend himself. He was challenging Baal to be real.
7. Why did Gideon lay out a wool fleece (the wooly hair of a sheep)? What does the second fleece show about Gideon's faith?
He wanted to be sure- he wanted a physical sign of the truth God had spoken. The second faith shows that Gideon is not confident. He has doubts.
8. Christians sometimes talk about laying out a fleece. Do you think this shows faith or a lack of faith?
(Answer will vary.)
9. What is more important: that our faith be strong or that we trust in the character of God? Are these the same thing? Why or why not?
If we trust ourselves, we have to look at our own character - we will never have enough faith. Strong faith is still not enough faith. If we trust or have faith in God's character then we will, by grace, be given enough faith.

Gideon Part Two

Judges 7:1-22

Background:

What Became of the Midianites?

During the time of the judges, "the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country" and plundered the land (Judges 6:3). For seven years, "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help" (verse 6). God answered their cries and raised up Gideon as a deliverer. With just 300 men, Gideon defeated the armies of the Midianites, although the foe was "thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore" (Judges 7:12). Of course, God was involved, and He was the One who granted the victory over the Midianites (verse 22).

Later references to the Midianites include allusions to God's victory over them (Psalm 83:9; Isaiah 10:26). And, in a prophecy of Israel's future glory in the Messianic kingdom, Isaiah writes, "Herds of camels will cover your land, / young camels of Midian and Ephah. / And all from Sheba will come, / bearing gold and incense / and proclaiming the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6).

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Midianites.html>

Before you read:

Have you ever been asked to do something that you thought was impossible?

The purpose of this question is to give students some empathy for Gideon. Feel free to share your own experiences of trusting God and stepping out in faith. Encourage a few students to speak. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

True or False

1. God thought Gideon's army was too big. ___T___

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2.2 Gideon Part Two

2. God used the way the men drank water to make the army even smaller. T
3. Gideon now had 500 men in his army. F
4. God knew Gideon wasn't afraid to attack the Midianites right away. F
5. Gideon overheard a man talking about a dream he had. T
6. Gideon tricked the Midianites into believing he had a big army. T
7. The Midianites remained in the land of Israel. F

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <u> e </u> boast | a. fall down flat |
| 2. <u> h </u> thin out | b. containers for liquids |
| 3. <u> a </u> collapse | c. loud musical instruments |
| 4. <u> g </u> interpretation | d. to defeat an enemy |
| 5. <u> f </u> torch | e. to speak proudly |
| 6. <u> c </u> trumpets | f. burning stick |
| 7. <u> b </u> jars | g. meaning |
| 8. <u> d </u> subdue | h. to make smaller |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. Long ago people used torches to light the outside at night.
2. They used jars to carry water.
3. Gideon's men used the trumpets to frighten their enemy.
4. The Israelites were able to subdue the Midianites.
5. God wanted to thin out the army by using a water test.
6. A Midianite dreamt that a loaf of bread would collapse their tent.
7. The dream's interpretation was that Gideon would defeat Midian.
8. God did not want the Israelites to boast so he made Gideon take a very small army.

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2.2 Gideon Part Two

Re-tell the Story

- A. Gideon gathered thirty-two thousand men on Mount Gilead. They overlooked the camp of the Midianites. Early in the morning, God spoke to Gideon.
- B. God told Gideon that because he had too many men, the Israelites would think they had defeated the Midianites on their own strength. So God told Gideon to tell the men that anyone who was afraid of going in to battle could go home. Twenty-two thousand men left; ten thousand remained.
- C. God told Gideon that he still had too many men. He told them to bring them to the water for a drink. God said that those who drank with their face in the water were to go home. But those who cupped the water with their hands to drink were to stay.
- D. God spoke to Gideon in the night. He told Gideon that if he was afraid to attack, he was to sneak down into the Midianite with his servant Purah and listen to what the Midianites were saying. Gideon went down to the camp and hear a Midianite telling his friend about a dream in which his tent collapsed. His friend told him that this dream meant that God was going to give Gideon victory over the Midianties.
- E. Gideon went back to his camp. He divided his three hundred men into three companies. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch inside it.
- F. The men went to the edge of the camp, surrounding it on the hills. Then they all broke the jars that were hiding their torches and blew their trumpets together. They all shouted, "For the Lord and for Gideon". The Midianites fled. In their fear the Midianites attacked each other and fled far away. Israel had peace for forty years.

Discussion

- *Easier*
 1. What was the first thing God said to Gideon in this story?
He told Gideon the army was too big.
 2. Why didn't God want Gideon to take a big army?
He didn't want the Israelites to boast in their own strength. They had called to God for help. He wanted them to see His help.
 3. How did God help Gideon choose the men for his army?

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2.2 Gideon Part Two

God told Gideon to watch how the men drank water from the stream. The ones that cupped their hands and lapped up the water were chosen.

4. What did God tell Gideon to do if he were afraid to attack the camp?
He told Gideon to go secretly into the Midianite camp at night to hear what they were saying.
5. What did Gideon and his servant overhear?
Gideon heard a man telling a friend his dream. The men believed it meant that God had given the Midianites and the whole camp into Gideon's hands.
6. What did Gideon tell his army to do? Why?
He told them to surround the camp and blow their trumpets and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon'. This would make it seem that his army was bigger. Since the Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, they would be terrified.
7. What happened when the Midianites heard the trumpets? Why do you think they were so frightened?
When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled. The Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, so they probably thought they were doomed.
8. What was the result of this attack?
The Midianites were defeated and did not trouble Israel again.

- *Intermediate*

1. What was the first thing God said to Gideon in this story? Why didn't God want Gideon to raise a large army?
He said Gideon's army was too big. He didn't want the Israelites to boast in their own strength. They had called to God for help. He wanted them to see His help.
2. What kind of test did Gideon use to choose the men who would remain in his army? Why didn't God just tell him to choose 300?
God told Gideon to watch how the men drank water from the stream. The ones that cupped their hands and lapped up the water were chosen. This way the selection was random, not just the strongest men or the best fighters.

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2.2 Gideon Part Two

3. Why wasn't God angry with Gideon because he didn't attack the Midianites right away?

Perhaps because he understood Gideon well and knew he needed extra reassurance. Gideon did obey God in faith when he was reassured.

4. What did Gideon learn when he overheard the Midianite's dream?

Gideon heard a man telling a friend his dream. The men believed it meant that God had given the Midianites and the whole camp into Gideon's hands. He learned that God had already made the Midianites fearful.

5. What did Gideon tell his army to do? Why?

He told them to surround the camp and blow their trumpets and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon'. This would make it seem that his army was bigger. Since the Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, they would be terrified.

6. What happened when the Midianites heard the trumpets? Why do you think they were so frightened?

When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled. The Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, so they probably thought they were doomed.

7. What was the result of this attack?

The Midianites were defeated and never troubled Israel again.

- *Challenging*

1. What was the first thing God said to Gideon in this story? Why didn't God want Gideon to raise a large army?

He said Gideon's army was too big. He didn't want the Israelites to boast in their own strength. They had called to God for help. He wanted them to see His help.

2. What kind of test did Gideon use to choose the men who would remain in his army? Why didn't God just tell him to choose 300?

God told Gideon to watch how the men drank water from the stream. The ones that cupped their hands and lapped up the water were chosen. This way the selection was random, not just the strongest men or the best fighters.

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.2 Gideon Part Two

3. Why wasn't God angry with Gideon because he didn't attack the Midianites right away? What does this show about God's understanding of us?
Perhaps because he understood Gideon well and knew he needed extra reassurance. Gideon did obey God in faith when he was reassured. (Answers vary.)
4. What did Gideon learn when he overheard the Midianite's dream? How important are dreams? What does this dream reveal about the state of mind of the Midianites?
Gideon heard a man was telling a friend his dream. The men believed it meant that God had given the Midianites and the whole camp into Gideon's hands. He learned that God had already made the Midianites fearful. Dreams were a way God spoke to people throughout the Bible. The Midianites were dreaming of their own defeat.
5. What did Gideon tell his army to do? Why?
He told them to surround the camp and blow their trumpets and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon'. This would make it seem that his army was bigger. Since the Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, they would be terrified.
6. What happened when the Midianites heard the trumpets? Why do you think they were so frightened?
When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled. The Midianites already believed that God was on Gideon's side, so they probably thought they were doomed.
7. In Judges 7: 23-24 we read: "²³ Israelites from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher and all of Manasseh were called out. They chased the Midianites. ²⁴ Gideon sent messengers through the entire hill country of Ephraim. They said, 'Come on down against the Midianites. Take control of the waters of the Jordan River before they get there. Do it all the way to Beth Barah.'
So all the men of Ephraim were called out. They took control of the waters of the Jordan all the way to Beth Barah."
What impact did Gideon's attack have on the whole tribe of Israel?
The Midianites did not dare to attack the Israelites again. Apparently other nations heard of the Midianite defeat and were also afraid to attack the Israelites. There was peace in Israel for forty years.

Zechariah: Breaking the Silence Luke 1:5-25; 39-45; 56-80

Background:

John the Baptist as Elijah

In Matthew 11 Jesus said of John the Baptist, " This is the one about whom it is written, "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you ... and if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." Jesus was quoting Malachi 3:1, "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple."

John fulfilled the role of Elijah; he was not literally Elijah. We know this because:

1. John said he was not Elijah. John 1:21 says, "They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.'"
2. Gabriel told Zechariah that John would live in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).
3. Elijah appeared as himself to Jesus during the transfiguration: "Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus" (Matthew 17:3). (John the Baptist had been beheaded by this point (Matthew 14).)

Further, since Elijah had been taken alive up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11), he can come bodily as himself. Elijah might be one of the two witnesses during the Tribulation (Revelation 11); this because the two witnesses will have the power to:

- turn water into blood and strike the earth with plagues- as Moses did prior to the Exodus
- keep rain from falling during the time they are preaching - as Elijah did when he was confronting King Ahab
- destroy their enemies with fire - as Elijah did twice when Ahaziah sent an army captain with men to arrest him (2 Kings 1:10) and when Elijah called down fire from heaven when confronting the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:38).

- Adapted from Got Questions:

- "Was John the Baptist really Elijah reincarnated?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/John-Baptist-Elijah.html>
- "Who are the two witnesses in the book of Revelation?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/two-witnesses.html>

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

The Priestly Line of Aaron

Aaron was a descendant of Levi, one of the 12 sons of Jacob. God chose Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests (Exodus 28:1).

Because Aaron was a descendant of Levi, the priests were called Levitical priests. Hebrews 7:7 speaks of the Levitical priesthood in the order of Aaron.

So all priests were Levites, but not all Levites could be priests - only the descendants of Aaron (who was a Levite) could be a priest. However, Numbers 8:19 tells of how the entire tribe of Levites were set aside to assist the priests and take care of the Tabernacle. Nehemiah 12:47 says that Israel gave portions to the Levites and the Levites gave portions to the descendants of Aaron.

Before you read:

Can you think of a time when someone did not believe you? How did you feel?

The purpose of this question is to give students a sense of how serious it is not to trust God's message. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Match the sentence beginning with the right ending.

- | | | |
|---------|---|---|
| ___d___ | 1. Hundreds of years before Zechariah, the prophet Isaiah | a. ...that he would have a son. |
| ___e___ | 2. The prophet Malachi told people | b. ...and they could not have children. |
| ___b___ | 3. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, | c. ...John is the Elijah who was supposed to come". |
| ___a___ | 4. God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah | d. ...told people that God would send a Saviour, the Messiah. |
| ___g___ | 5. Zechariah could not speak because | e. ...that God would send Elijah to prepare them for the Messiah. |

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

- ___f___ 6. Gabriel said that f. ... John would have the same spirit and power that Elijah had.
- ___c___ 7. Jesus said, "if you are willing to accept it, g. ...he had not believed what Gabriel told him.

Match the following words with their meanings.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| ___c___ 1. saviour | a. a messenger from God |
| ___g___ 2. court | b. a strong feeling of wonder |
| ___e___ 3. incense | c. someone who saves or rescues |
| ___h___ 4. by lot | d. to be very frightened |
| ___a___ 5. prophet | e. a gum or spice that gives off a sweet smell when burned |
| ___d___ 6. terrified | f. tell a message from God, often about the future |
| ___f___ 7. prophesy | g. an open space surrounded by walls |
| ___b___ 8. amazed | h. when each person from a group takes a small object from a container, and the person who gets a marked object is chosen for a task. |

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above

1. When Zechariah saw Gabriel, he was ___terrified___ and ___amazed___.
2. The family of Aaron would choose a priest ___by lot___ to go and burn ___incense___ in the temple.
3. Only the priests of Aaron could go into the temple, so other people had to stay in the ___court___ .
4. Daniel was a ___prophet___ who had ___prophesied___ that God's ___Saviour___ would come during Roman rule.

Re-tell the Story

- A. Zechariah was a priest. His wife was Elizabeth. They both honored God. But they had no children and they were very old.

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2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

- B. Zechariah had been chosen to enter the Temple and burn incense on an incense altar to God (and pray for the people). (The people would gather and pray outside the temple.)
- C. While Zechariah was praying an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel told him that Elizabeth would have a baby boy and that he must name him John. The angel said that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born; that he would bring many of the people of Israel back to the Lord; would prepare the way for the Lord; have the spirit and power of Elijah.
- D. When Zechariah asked the angel how he could be sure of this since he and Elizabeth were old, the angel said he was Gabriel, and that because Zechariah didn't believe him, now Zechariah would be unable to speak until John was born.
- E. Elizabeth became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and friends thought the boy would naturally be named Zechariah, after his father. Elizabeth said no, the baby was to be named John.
- F. The neighbours and friends were surprised by Elizabeth wanting to name the baby John. But Zechariah (who still couldn't speak) asked for a slate and wrote on it, "His name is John." Everyone wondered about this.
- G. Zechariah was filled with the Spirit and prophesied that John would be a prophet of God and go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way; tell the people how they can be saved and have their sins forgiven.

Discussion

- *Easier*
 1. Before Zechariah, when was the last time that a prophet spoke to God's people? Who was the prophet?
It was 400 years before Zechariah's time; that prophet was Malachi.
 2. How often would a priest have the chance to go into the Temple and burn incense? How was the priest chosen to do this?
A man of that priesthood might have the chance once in a lifetime. There were 24 divisions of priests, and each division served for 2 weeks in the temple. Each division would have thousands of priests - so the priest was chosen by lot to represent his division.
 3. What sorrow did Zechariah and Elizabeth have in their lives?

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2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

They were childless. (In that society having children was considered a blessing from God.)

4. When did the prophet Daniel say that the Messiah would come to save the people?

Daniel said He would come in the time of the fourth kingdom. (In Daniel 2 his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream - the 4-part statue - Daniel said the Messiah (the Stone not cut by human hands) would come during the rule of the 4th empire (Rome). Also, Daniel had specified the time when the Messiah would come (Daniel 12: 11 - 12 - the prophecy of the 70 weeks specified the time)).

5. Do you think people in Zechariah's time were expecting this Saviour? Why or why not?

People who had faith and believed the prophecies were expecting the Messiah, but others may have lost faith after 400 years of hearing nothing from God.

6. What did Gabriel tell Zechariah to name his son?

Gabriel told Zechariah to name his son John. (In Hebrew the name John is Yochanan (Johanan) and means *God is gracious* or *God has shown favour*. It was a common name at the time, but it was unusual to not name a son after a relative.)

7. Why was Zechariah unable to speak? When was he able to speak again?

He was unable to speak because he asked Gabriel how it could be possible that he and Elizabeth would have a baby in their old age. Gabriel told him that he would be unable to speak again until the baby was born.

8. What did Zechariah say in his prophecy about his son?

He said that John would be a prophet of God, and that he would be a messenger that went before the Messiah, tell the people how they could be saved, and that their sins would be forgiven.

- *Intermediate*

1. Before Zechariah, how long had it been since God had spoken to his people by a prophet? Who was that prophet and what did he say?

It had been over 400 years; the prophet was Malachi; Malachi said that God would send a messenger ahead of the Messiah. (You may wish to have your students read Malachi 4, where he both warned the Jews that God would

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

judge them and told them that when they, the Jews, would repent the Messiah would come. He also told them that the messenger would bring a message of repentance to the Jews. (John the Baptist, the messenger, brought a message of repentance to the Jews, baptizing them in the Jordan as an outward sign of their repentance.)

2. **How often did Zechariah serve in the Temple? How did he happen to be the priest who served that day?**

Zechariah would serve only once in his lifetime. He was chosen by lot. (This was because there were so many priests eligible to serve in the Temple, that each would only have a chance to serve once in the Temple.)

3. **Do you think Zechariah would have been praying for a son?**

Zechariah and his wife were both very old. It was no longer possible for them to have a child, so Zechariah would probably have stopped praying for one. (But with God all things are possible.)

4. **Do you think people in Zechariah's time were expecting the Messiah? Why or why not?**

People who had faith and believed the prophecies were expecting the Messiah, but others may have lost faith after 400 years of hearing nothing from God.

5. **Zechariah would have prayed for the people when he was burning the incense. Why would Zechariah have probably prayed for the Messiah to come?**

The priests at that time were known to be praying for the Messiah to come. This may be because they knew from Daniel that the Messiah would come during the time of the 4th kingdom, and that kingdom was Rome. (They probably also wanted the real King of the Jews to come and release them from Herod whom Rome had given that title. (Judah had been fairly independent prior to Roman rule, so the Jews longed for independence from Rome.))

6. **How did Zechariah respond to Gabriel's message that he and Elizabeth would have a son? Why do you think he responded this way?**

Zechariah did not readily believe God; he questioned Gabriel, asking how he could be sure of this, and pointing out his and Elizabeth's old age. Answers will vary, but this shows that even godly people such as Zechariah can have doubts about God fulfilling His Word.

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

7. **Why might Gabriel have silenced Zechariah until his son was born?**
Answers will vary here. But God gave the Jews 400 years of silence after Malachi (this was for their disbelief following their return to Judah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem). So now He disciplines Zechariah with another form of silence for his disbelief.
8. **What did Zechariah prophesy about John? How did his words match the meaning of what Gabriel had spoken about his son?**
Zechariah said that John would be called a prophet of God and would go before the Messiah to prepare the people for Him. John would tell them that how they can have salvation and that their sins will be forgiven. He also said John would prepare the way for the Lord.

- ***Challenging***

1. **Before Zechariah, how long had it been since God had spoken to his people by a prophet? Why do you think God had been silent to His people for so long?**
It had been 400 years since a prophet had spoken (and 500 years since God had sent an angel to speak to them). Answers will vary on why God was silent for so long, but Got Questions suggests that God gave His people 400 years to study Scripture, seek God, and prepare for the coming Messiah. (What were the 400 years of silence? <https://www.gotquestions.org/400-years-of-silence.html>)
2. **What did Malachi prophesy about the Messiah's messenger? What was God's message to Daniel?**
Malachi said the messenger would come ahead of the Messiah and prepare them for Him. (The full passage from Malachi says that the messenger would tell the people when the Messiah was near, and that they should prepare for him by repenting.) God told Daniel when to expect the Messiah. (In Daniel 2 his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream - the 4-part statue - foretold that the Kingdom of God (the Stone not cut by human hands) would come during the rule of the 4th empire (Rome). Also, Daniel had specified the time when the Messiah would come (Daniel 12: 11 - 12 - the prophecy of the 70 weeks specified the time).)

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

3. This would have been Zechariah's one and only day to serve in the Temple. Why might Zechariah have used that opportunity to pray for the Messiah to come?

Zechariah would have been familiar with both the teachings of Malachi and Daniel and so would be aware that the time of the Messiah was near. And he probably would have wanted the Messiah to come and rescue Judah from Roman rule and Herod, their fake king of the Jews.

4. Zechariah entered the first room of the Temple to burn the incense. The first room was separated from the second room by a heavy drape. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the second room, the Holy of Holies - and he could only enter once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. He would burn incense and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the mercy seat of the Ark. The blood was to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. God said that He would appear in the Holy of Holies. What do you think were God's purposes in closing off the second, inner room?

This showed the separation of men from God. God was so holy, and his people so unworthy, that the people could not enter the Temple at all; only one priest could enter the first room and even then he was separated from the second room where God's presence was.

5. Do you think Zechariah would have still been praying for a son? Why or why not? Why do you think Gabriel's first words to him were that he would have a son?

Zechariah and his wife were now both old, it was physically impossible for Elizabeth to become pregnant. So it's likely that Zechariah had long since given up praying for a son. When Gabriel tells Zechariah his prayer for a son would be answered, this showed that our prayers do not go unheard and can be answered long after we've given up on them.

6. What did Gabriel tell Zechariah about his son? How would this fulfill Malachi's prophecy?

Gabriel told Zechariah that the son's name was to be John; Elizabeth would be the mother; he would be a joy and delight; he would make many people very glad; he would bring many of the people of Israel back to God; he would prepare the way for the Lord; he would make the people prepared for the Lord; and he would live in the spirit and power of Elijah. Malachi had said that God would send Elijah to prepare the people for the Messiah.

Chapter Two: Believing God for the Unlikely

2.3 Zechariah: Breaking the Silence

7. How did Zechariah respond to Gabriel's message that he and Elizabeth would have a son? Why was it both understandable for him to respond this way - yet at the same time ridiculous for him to do this?

Zechariah questioned Gabriel asking him how he could be sure of this, pointing out that he and Elizabeth were old. It was understandable because they were too old to have children; it was ridiculous because he was not believing what he saw right in front of him - the archangel Gabriel in the Temple.

8. Why might Gabriel have silenced Zechariah until his son was born? What did you learn about Zechariah from this story?

Zechariah, like his people, showed lack of trust in God; his people had faced silence for 400 years after Malachi, and so Zechariah would now be disciplined with another form of silence. Answers will vary, but we learn that Zechariah was both fallible and given to doubt but also righteous and capable of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

9. While Elizabeth was pregnant with John, Mary visited Elizabeth. Mary was pregnant with Jesus at the time. Elizabeth said to Mary, "Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her" (Luke 1:43-45). What do you learn about Elizabeth from all this?

Elizabeth may have battled disbelief as well and doubted her pregnancy until the baby was big enough to move around in her womb. But by the time Mary came, she was trusting God for both John and the Messiah, Jesus. Interestingly, she says that it is a blessing to believe that God would fulfill His promises.

10. a. What did Zechariah prophesy about John?

He said that John would be the messenger of the Messiah; he would give the people how they could be saved; and that their sins can be forgiven. And that John would be called a prophet of God.

- b. How did his words match the meaning of what Gabriel had spoken about his son?

Gabriel said that John's birth would make many people very glad and he would bring back many people to God. He also said John would prepare the way for the Lord.

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c. What do you learn about God from His plans for this messenger? We learn that God has "tender mercy", and that He is willing to give people salvation by forgiving their sins. We also learn that He has plans and will fulfill them.

11. What did you learn about prophecy from this story?

Prophecy can be given a long time before it will be fulfilled, but it will be fulfilled - and when it is fulfilled it will be accurate.

Noah and the Ark

Genesis 5, 6, 7, 8

Background:

The World-Wide Flood

Of the more than 200 cultures that have their own account of the flood the following aspects of the story are common:

- 88% describe a favored family
- 70% attribute survival to a boat
- 95% say the sole cause of the catastrophe is a flood
- 66% say that the disaster is due to man's wickedness
- 67% record that animals are also saved
- 57% describe that the survivors end up on a mountain
- Many of the accounts also specifically mention birds being sent out, a rainbow, and eight persons being saved

Source: David Guzik, *Enduring Word, Genesis 7- God Destroys the World with a Flood*, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-7/>

The Table of Nations

Genesis chapter 10 lists the nations that descended from Noah through his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth and the regions they spread to. This chapter is often called "The Table of Nations". The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, connected this list with the nations around him. From these two sources we can map out the early distribution of these three people groups.



Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.1 Noah and the Ark

Reference for map: Barry J. Beitzel, *The Table of Nations*, The New Moody Atlas of the Bible, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago (2009).

Before you read:

Do you know of a situation that became so bad, people had to start over again? The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about how a situation can go so far wrong, that destruction and a fresh start is the best solution. This may help them understand God's decision. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Put the story in the right order. The first one is done for you.

- a) God told Noah to build an ark and bring in pairs of all kinds of animals. ___5___
- b) Noah was not like other people, and he walked faithfully with God. ___3___
- c) Over a year later, the earth was finally dry. ___8___
- d) The people on the earth were always thinking about and doing evil things. ___1___
- e) Noah's family came out of the ark, and he sacrificed animals to God. ___9___
- f) God decided to flood the earth and make a new beginning. ___4___
- g) God felt sorrow when He saw what people were doing. ___2___
- h) Noah and his family went into the ark, and God shut the door. ___6___
- i) God put a rainbow in the clouds to show his covenant that He would never again destroy all living things. ___10___
- j) The ocean springs burst open, and it rained for 40 days and nights. ___7___

Match the following words with their meanings.

___f___ 1. blame

a. animals used by people

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___h___ 2. deck	b. a black substance that makes things waterproof
___a___ 3. livestock	c. evil saying or event
___g___ 4. spring	d. a formal and serious agreement or promise
___b___ 5. tar	e. caring feelings
___e___ 6. concern	f. to be responsible for evil
___c___ 7. curse	g. a source of water coming up from the ground
___d___ 8. covenant	h. floor level in a boat or ship

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above

1. Noah pleased God, because he was without ___blame___ , unlike the people of his time.
2. The ark was covered in ___tar___, it had three ___decks___ , and there was room for all the ___livestock___ and the wild animals.
3. God showed ___concern___ for everyone and everything in the ark by drying up the earth.
4. Rain poured down from the skies and water burst up from the ___springs___ of the oceans.
5. God made a ___covenant___ with Noah's family and the animals to never again put a ___curse___ on the ground to destroy it.

Re-tell the Story

- A. Noah was a godly man. God told him that He was going to destroy the earth, and therefore Noah was to build an ark. God told Noah how to construct it.
- B. God told Noah that pairs of every kind of land animal and creature would come to the ark. Noah was to pack every kind of food on the ark to feed the animals and his family.
- C. Springs at the bottom of the ocean burst open, and rain poured from the sky. The animals and Noah's family had all entered the ark. The Lord shut the ark. It rained for 40 days. The waters rose until they were 7 metres above the mountains. All life was destroyed except for those on the ark. The flood lasted 150 days.

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- D. At the end of the 150 days, the waters began to recede. The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. After some time, when the mountain tops could be seen.
- E. After Noah's family and all the animals left the ark, Noah built an altar and gave a sacrifice to God.
- F. Noah removed the covering from the ark and saw that the ground was dry. Noah's family and the animals had been on the ark for about a year. God told Noah to bring his family and the animals out of the ark. Noah built an altar to honor God. God gave Noah the sign of the rainbow as a promise that a flood would never again destroy the whole earth.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. How was Noah different than the people around him?
Genesis 6:9 says that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." It also says that the people around him were corrupt and violent.
2. Why did God decide to destroy all the people?
The people of the earth had become very sinful and had filled the world with harmful acts. (If allowed to continue, they probably would have killed off everyone who differed from them and believed in God.)
3. How difficult do you think it would be to build an ark like Noah's? How long might it take?
Answers will vary. Find out who in the class has done any building and get their ideas. Even with heavy equipment and power tools, it would likely be over a year, assuming Noah had the help of his sons. (In January 2020, China built a new hospital with a capacity of 1000 beds in 10 days to meet the needs of those who contracted the Wuhan coronavirus. But they had a tremendous work force.)
4. Why do you think God didn't just give an ark to Noah?
Answers will vary. Perhaps building the ark was a test of obedience and faith for Noah, and a warning to his godless neighbours.
5. What do you think Noah's friends, relatives, and neighbours were saying while he was building the ark?

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Answers will vary. They probably thought at best that he had not discerned God's true intent, or that perhaps he was suffering from a delusion or some other type of mental illness. But since the Scripture says that all the people of the world at that time were corrupt and violent, they probably thought him stupid at best and probably a madman. They may have hated him for suggesting that their behaviour was unacceptable to God.

6. **About how long were they shut up in the ark? [See Gen 7:11 and 8:14]**
The flood began in the 2nd month, 17th day, and they walked out on dry land a year later in the 2nd month on the 27th day. That's a long cruise!
7. **Why do you think that Noah sacrificed animals to God when they finally got out on dry land?**
He was grateful for God's great mercy. The sacrifice of a whole burnt offering was also for atonement. Noah had been a witness to God's great anger and perhaps he wanted to make a clean beginning.
8. **What was the covenant that God made with Noah and the animals? Why do you think God made the rainbow a sign of this covenant?**
God promised that He would never again destroy all life on earth by a flood. Answers will vary on why God chose the rainbow. But the memory of that flood would be taught to many generations afterwards, and so the people would be terrified every time there was a heavy or a prolonged rain. Rainbows usually appear at the end of a rainstorm - so then the sight of a rainbow would put their fears at rest. And a rainbow is obvious to everyone who can see.
9. **What does the Bible teach about the family of mankind?**
We are all descendants of Noah and his wife, or more specifically of Shem, Japheth, and Ham and their wives. (We have genetic variability built into our DNA, and the isolation of small populations would have driven the expression of recessive genes.)

- ***Intermediate***

1. **How would you compare Noah to the people of his time?**
Noah is described as godly and without blame. He walked faithfully with God. The people of his time were sinful because their actions were mean and harmful to one another. (Other translations use the word 'violent'.)

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2. Describe what life must have been like for Noah during the time that he was building the ark. What do you think were the reactions of Noah's friends and neighbours during this long building time? Would you have reacted the same way?

Answers will vary. The Bible doesn't tell us, but we can guess that there would be long hours of chopping down trees, stripping the branches, cutting the planks, and building the ark - decade after decade. (Actually, many men would find this enjoyable.) There would likely have been constant criticism and mocking by the corrupt people nearby, just like there would be today if someone began such a project where we live.

3. Whose plan was it to build the boat and fill it with animals and food? What can you learn about God from this boat building process?

This was all God's idea. God showed care for the animals; He designed a practical way to house and feed them. He showed care for Noah by having him take all of his family onto the ark. He showed that His plan for mankind would not be thwarted. He showed justice in His destruction of people who were altogether corrupt and violent.

4. Well over 100 cultures across the world have accounts of a global flood in which a sole family survived on a boat. What do you think about the truth of this story?

Answers will vary. If 100 cultures across the world said that a particular plant was good for medicine, most people would immediately cultivate that plant for pharmaceutical production. But in the case of the flood accounts, people may find it difficult to believe the water rose high enough to cover mountains above 7 meters.

5. What is the first thing you would do when you got off the ark? What did Noah do? What does that show about his relationship with God?

Answers will vary. I think I would have first run around to see how the earth had changed. Noah made a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice would have been very costly, since he had few animals at the time. Noah's priority was serving God. He was grateful for God's great mercy. The sacrifice of a whole burnt offering was also for atonement. Noah had been a witness to God's great anger, and perhaps he wanted to make a clean beginning.

6. What promise did God make to His creation? What was the symbol of this promise? What are your feelings when you see a rainbow?

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3.1 Noah and the Ark

God promised that He would never again destroy all life on earth by a flood. Answers will vary on why God chose the rainbow. But the memory of that flood would be taught to many generations afterwards, and so the people would be terrified every time there was a heavy or a prolonged rain. Rainbows usually appear at the end of a rainstorm - so then the sight of a rainbow would put their fears at rest. And a rainbow is obvious to everyone who can see. Answers will vary on feelings when looking at a rainbow, but some people might bring up songs or poems or paintings that include rainbows.

7. According to the Bible, all people are descendants of Noah. How does that affect how people from different parts of the world should view each other?

Answers will vary. Interestingly most people share a common viewpoint on right and wrong, values, what makes for a good marriage, a good job, a good parent, etc. And people make intercultural and interracial marriages, showing that they do view each other as equals and as valuable. But there have been many cases when our sinful nature has led otherwise, and we engage in war, racism, prejudice, persecution, and genocide.

- *Challenging*

1. In the English Standard Version translation of *Genesis 6*, it uses words like 'thoughts were only evil continually', 'corrupt', and 'filled with violence' to tell what God saw on the earth.
 - a. What do you think people were doing at that time?

Answers will vary. *Gen 6:6* talks of God's pain or 'deep grief'. People were likely committing every criminal act in the book as well as being mentally cruel to one another in horrible ways.
 - b. Describe the differences between Noah and the people around him.

Noah is described as righteous and walking faithfully with God. He would not be mistreating others, but would put God's will before his own self interest. His life would be opposite to his neighbours who would do anything to get what they wanted with total disregard for others.
2. What can you learn about God from the plans for the ark, and from the building of the ark?

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3.1 Noah and the Ark

God showed care for the animals; He designed a practical way to house and feed them; He showed care for Noah by having him take all of his family onto the ark.

The work itself of chopping down all those trees, preparing them for sawing into planks, and building the ark itself was probably enjoyable work for Noah and his sons; but it would have had its share of sore muscles and injuries and so also be a work of endurance and faith.

God showed justice in His destruction of people who were altogether corrupt and violent (the full Scripture of Genesis 5 shows that demonic activity permeated that society). God showed long suffering in that He warned those by the 100 years or so that Noah spent building the ark.

3. What might life have been like for Noah while building the ark? - i.e. how would his family, relatives, friends, and neighbours have reacted? What would make you think that Noah was or wasn't a crazy man?

Although he may have enjoyed the long project of building the ark, he would have had to face the doubts of his family, and the criticism of relatives, friends, and neighbours. Since the people were corrupt and violent, he was probably mocked and scorned regularly; and since his life and work were one of faith in the God they'd rejected, they probably hated him and may have attacked his family and vandalized his work.

Noah's faith was not crazy. But today many think that Christians who talk about God's coming judgment, or believe that Jesus might return in our lifetime, are crazy.

4. Why didn't God just take Noah from the earth, like He did with Enoch? Why put him through the task of building the ark, and experiencing the flood?

Answers will vary. God's character and purposes are unchanging, but how He works out His purposes in each person differs. Enoch's rapture was one type of warning to the people of that time. Noah's ark was a different type of warning. (Yet the people ignored both.) Noah's task perpetuated God's plan for humans and gave us the warning to respect God and stay away from corruption and violence.

5. In Matthew 24, Jesus told his disciples, ¹³⁷ *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man*".

2 Peter 3:3-6 says, ³ First of all, I want you to know that in the last days men will laugh at the truth. They will follow their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "He promised to come again. Where is He? Since our early fathers

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died, everything is the same from the beginning of the world. ⁵ But they want to forget that God spoke and the heavens were made long ago. The earth was made out of water and water was all around it. ⁶ Long ago the earth was covered with water and it was destroyed."

Are people today like they were in the time of Noah?

Answers will vary. There is a lot of similarity between people today and those described in 2 Peter 3. But people are not yet as totally corrupt and violent as they were described to have been in Noah's time.

6. What promise did God make with Noah, his family, and the animals? Why do you think God used a rainbow as the sign of this covenant? What are your feelings when you see a rainbow? Do you know of any poems, songs, or paintings about rainbows?

God promised that He would never again destroy all life on earth by a flood. Answers will vary on why God chose the rainbow. But the memory of that flood would be taught to many generations afterwards, and so the people would be terrified every time there was a heavy or a prolonged rain. Rainbows usually appear at the end of a rainstorm - so then the sight of a rainbow would put their fears at rest. And a rainbow is obvious to everyone who can see. Most people enjoy its beauty. Hopefully people will know of some songs, etc. about rainbows. In the West there are the songs, "Sunshine, Lollipops, and Rainbows", "I can sing a Rainbow", and of course the famous "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" from The Wizard of Oz.

7. According to the Bible, all people are descendants of Noah and his wife - or more specifically descendants of Shem, Japheth, and Ham and their wives. How does that affect how people should relate to each other?

Answers will vary. Interestingly most people share common viewpoints on right and wrong, values, what makes for a good marriage, a good job, a good parent, etc. And people make intercultural and interracial marriages, showing that they do like each other. Even in wartime, there have been acts of friendships between otherwise enemy peoples. It's one basis of seeing inherent worth in all people. But despite this, our sinful nature has led to prejudice, intolerance, war, and genocide.

John Mark: Nine Passages Mark 14; Acts 12,13,15; Col. 4;
Phil. 1; 2 Tim. 4; 1 Peter 5

Background:

Agrippa I and the Herods

In the time of King Solomon's son, Rehoboam, a civil war tore ancient Israel apart into a northern and a southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians and its people became the ten lost tribes. The southern kingdom, Judea, was conquered by the Babylonians. Following the return from the Babylonian exile, Judea was ruled over by the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans.

In 41 B.C. Rome appointed Herod the Great ruler over Judea (Jesus was born in Bethlehem during his reign). Herod had five wives and seven sons. Following his death, the rule of Judea was divided among three of his sons:

- Judea, Samaria, and Idumea were ruled by Archelaus.
 - He was the reason Joseph took Mary and Jesus north to Nazareth in Galilee.
 - He was later deposed by Rome and his territory ruled over by Roman governors.
 - Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor in the time of Jesus).
- Galilee and Perea were ruled by Antipas.
 - He is the Herod that Jesus referred to as "that fox."
 - When the Jewish Sanhedrin sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate for sentencing, Pilate sent Him on to Herod Antipas. Antipas questioned Jesus. When Jesus refused to answer Antipas' questions, Antipas and his soldiers mocked Him, dressed him in an elegant robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.
 - Antipas is also the Herod that married his brother's wife, Herodias, and imprisoned and killed John the Baptist.



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3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

- The northeaster territories were ruled by Philip (his mother was Cleopatra of Jerusalem).

Herod had murdered three other sons: Antipater III, Alexander, and Aristobulus IV (father of Agrippa I).

A seventh son, Herod II (Philip I) (son of Mariamne II) lived in Rome. His wife, Herodias, left him for his half-brother Herod Antipas. It was Herodias' daughter, Salome, whose dance pleased Antipas so much that he offered her anything she wanted. She asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

Agrippa I was still a child when Herod the Great murdered his father (Aristobulus IV). His mother took him to Rome. There his classmates were the Roman elite, and this positioned him for political favour.

When his uncle Philip died, his friend and Roman emperor Caligula made Agrippa I king over Philip's territory (AD 37). His uncle Antipas tried to denounce Agrippa, but Caligula deposed Antipas and gave Agrippa that territory as well (AD 39).

In A.D. 41, Claudius, the next Roman Emperor, gave him the territory of Judea and Samaria as well. So, Agrippa came to rule over all the territory that had once belonged to his grandfather, Herod the Great.

King Herod Agrippa I imprisoned and killed James, the brother of John (and son of Zebedee) who was the leader of the church. Agrippa then imprisoned Peter (but the angel released him). Acts 12:19-23 records that soon after this Agrippa went to Caesarea to give a public address. Acts 12:22 says that the people there shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man". Verse 23 says, "Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died."

Agrippa I had one son, Herod Agrippa II, and two daughters, Bernice and Drusilla. Drusilla was the consort of the Roman governor, Felix. When Paul was arrested by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, Felix imprisoned Paul to appease the Jews. Felix was succeeded by Festus, who kept Paul imprisoned. When King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice visited Festus, Festus brought Paul before them and Paul defended the gospel to them.

Before you read: Details are important to any story. Can you think of a story that although you know it well, yet you still find new details in it each time you read it?

The purpose of this question is to get students thinking about the importance of small details. Those familiar with the Bible often discover new things about a passage each time they read with the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Change these False statements to True:

1. Mark stayed with Jesus when he was arrested.
Mark ran away naked when Jesus was arrested_
2. Mark was the only one in his family who followed Jesus.
Mark's mother and cousin, Barnabas followed Jesus.
3. Mark was a helper to Peter and Paul, but not a writer.
Mark was a helper to Peter and Paul, and he was a writer of Mark's Gospel.
4. Saul was John Mark's cousin.
Barnabas was John Mark's cousin.
5. John Mark stayed in Asia Minor, even when Paul and Barnabas were persecuted.
John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas when they were persecuted.
6. Paul gave John Mark another chance on his second journey.
Barnabas gave John Mark another chance, but Paul did not on his 2nd trip.
7. Mark never helped Paul again.
Mark helped Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome.

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3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

8. Mark stayed fearful all his life.

Mark showed courage later by helping Paul when he was in prison and by staying with Peter during persecution.

Match the following words with their meanings.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ___h___ 1. desert | a. fine points or facts |
| ___c___ 2. resurrection | b. someone who treats people unfairly because of religion, nationality or political beliefs |
| ___a___ 3. details | c. returning to life after being dead |
| ___f___ 4. crucified | d. not wearing clothes |
| ___b___ 5. persecutor | e. stop eating for a period of time |
| ___g___ 6. sheet | f. killed by nailing to a cross |
| ___d___ 7. naked | g. a big piece of cloth |
| ___e___ 8. fasting | h. to leave someone in their time of need |

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above

1. Each of the passages has just one or two ___details___ about Mark.
2. When Jesus was arrested, the crowd grabbed Mark's linen ___sheet___ , and he ran away ___naked___.
3. When Jesus was arrested and ___crucified___, most of his disciples ___deserted___ him.
4. After Jesus' ___resurrection___, Saul was a ___persecutor___ of the church, but he changed after he saw Jesus alive.
5. The Spirit of God spoke to the Antioch church when they were worshipping and ___fasting___.

Discussion

- *Easier*
 1. Why do you think Mark included the embarrassing story of the young disciple who fled naked when Jesus was arrested? (Passage 1)

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3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

This is perhaps because he had been the young man. (Mark was Peter's spiritual son. Mark's gospel is an account of Peter's life as a disciple and also includes stories of Peter's failures - which Peter must have told Mark.)

2. **How do you think John Mark met the apostle Paul? (Passage 2)**

The church in Antioch (Syria) sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to bring a gift to the church there. Barnabas was from Jerusalem, and he was the cousin of John Mark. Barnabas and Paul may have stayed at John Mark's mother's house in Jerusalem or have visited there. (Since it was a gathering place for believers (Background).)

3. **What happened to the apostle Paul on his missionary trip through Asia Minor (now Turkey) after Mark deserted? (Passage 4)**

He faced intense persecution. At one point he had been dragged out of a city, stoned, and left for dead.

4. **Why did Paul not want to take John Mark with him on his next missionary trip through Asia Minor? Who was willing to give John Mark a second chance? (Passage 5)**

Paul did not think it wise to take John Mark with them again, because John Mark had deserted them the first time they took him. (Paul knew his work was very important, and he probably did not want to risk any distractions that might be caused by an immature team member.) Mark's cousin Barnabas disagreed strongly with Paul, and he took Mark with him.

5. **In how many of his letters did Paul mention Mark? What does this tell you? (Passages 6 - 9)**

There are three letters in which Paul mentions Mark. This tells you that Mark became a mature Christian who would no longer run away or leave when things did not go well. It also tells you that Paul changed his mind about Mark, and that he thought well of Mark.

6. **How had the apostle Peter 'deserted' Jesus when he was a disciple? (Passage 9)**

Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times the night (actually the early morning) that Jesus was arrested. (He was afraid to let the crowd know that he was a disciple.)

7. **Why do you think Peter "adopted" John Mark as his spiritual son? (Story 7)**

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3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

Peter was willing to give Mark the same second chance that Jesus had given him. Peter had experienced Jesus' forgiveness of him when he deserted Him. And Peter had gone on from his early failures to do much for the church.

- *Intermediate*

1. Do you think that Mark's story about the young disciple who fled naked was a story about himself? Why do you think he included it?

Bottom line is we don't know. Mark's description of the man could be vivid because he was the young man, or it could be because Peter had described the scene of that night in detail to Mark.

Mark may have wanted to include the story because he wanted the readers to understand how fallible the disciples were, and how frightened they were; and to contrast the reaction of the disciples with that of Jesus' calmness and willingness to submit himself to the mob.

2. The Jerusalem church often gathered to pray in the home of Mark's mother. How do you think this would have impacted John Mark?

According to Acts 12:12-14, many had gathered and were praying for Peter in the home of John Mark's mother. So that family must have been believers. John Mark would have known the apostles personally and would have heard them teach and would have witnessed the persecution of the apostles.

3. How do you think John Mark met the apostle Paul?

The church in Antioch (Syria) had sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to bring the church there a gift. Barnabas was from Jerusalem, and he was the cousin of John Mark. Barnabas and Paul may have stayed at John Mark's mother's house when they were visiting Jerusalem, or they may have visited there. (Since it was a gathering place for believers, they would have at least visited there at some point.)

4. What happened to the apostle Paul on his missionary trip through Asia Minor (now Turkey)?

He faced intense persecution. At one point he had been dragged out of a city, stoned, and left for dead.

5. Why did Paul not want to take John Mark with him on his next missionary trip through Asia Minor? Who was willing to give John Mark a second chance?

Paul did not think it wise to take John Mark with them again, because John Mark had deserted them the first time they took him. (Paul knew his work was very important, and he probably did not want to risk any distractions)

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that might be caused by an immature team member.) Mark's cousin Barnabas disagreed strongly with Paul, and he took Mark with him

6. In how many of his letters did Paul mention Mark? What does this tell you? Passages 6-9 records three letters in which Paul mentions Mark. This tells you that Mark became a mature Christian who would no longer run away or leave when things did not go well. It also tells you that Paul saw this change in Mark, they were reconciled, and that he appreciated Mark's service.
7. How had the apostle Peter 'deserted' Jesus when he was a disciple? Did Peter change?
Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times the night (actually the early morning) that Jesus was arrested. (He was afraid to let the crowd know that he was a disciple.) But, Peter died rather than deny Jesus later in life.
8. Why do you think Peter "adopted" John Mark as his spiritual son?
Peter was willing to give Mark a second chance because Jesus had given him a second chance. Peter had experienced Jesus' forgiveness of him when he deserted Him. And Peter had gone on from his early failures to do much for the church.

- *Challenging*

1. Do you think that Mark's story about the young disciple who fled naked was a story about himself? Would you have wanted to include such an embarrassing story about personal failure, if you knew it would be read by all the churches?
Answers will vary here. Bottom line is we just don't know. Mark's description of the young man could be vivid because he was the young man, or it could be vivid because Peter had described the scene of that night in detail to Mark. Mark may have wanted to include the story because he wanted the readers to understand how fallible the disciples were, and how frightened they were; and to contrast the reaction of the disciples with that of Jesus' calmness and willingness to submit himself to the mob.
2. The Jerusalem church often gathered to pray in the home of Mark's mother. How do you think this would have impacted John Mark?
According to Acts 12:12-14, many had gathered and were praying for Peter in the home of John Mark's mother. So that family must have been believers. John Mark would have known the apostles personally and would have heard them teach and would have witnessed the persecution of the apostles.

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3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

Because he was known to the apostles, this may be how he came to be connected to Barnabas and Paul.

3. How do you think John Mark met the apostle Paul? Was this meeting a coincidence?

The church in Antioch (Syria) had sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to bring the church there a gift. Barnabas was from Jerusalem, and he was the cousin of John Mark. Barnabas and Paul may have stayed at John Mark's mother's house when they were visiting Jerusalem, or they may have visited there. They would have at least visited there at some point.

Got Questions says that a biblical definition of *coincidence* would be "what occurs together by God's providential arrangement of circumstances." And that "The administration of the universe is not based on serendipity. The Bible says that God's purposes will prevail and that He is in control of even the most random event. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

4. Why did Paul not want to take John Mark with him on his next missionary trip through Asia Minor? Who was willing to give John Mark a second chance?

Paul had faced intense persecution, and John Mark had deserted him rather than stay to support him. So Paul would not think it good to take John Mark with them again. Paul knew his work was very important, and he probably did not want to risk any distractions that might be caused by an immature team member. Mark's cousin Barnabas disagreed strongly with Paul, and he took Mark with him

5. In how many of his letters did Paul mention Mark? What does this tell you about Mark? About Paul?

Passages 6-9 records three letters in which Paul mentions Mark. This tells you that Mark became a mature Christian who would no longer run away or leave when things did not go well. It also tells you that Paul saw this change in Mark, they were reconciled, and that he appreciated Mark's service.

6. On the night Jesus was arrested on the Mount of Olives, the soldiers took Him to the home of the high priest. Peter and another disciple followed them into the courtyard of the home. There Peter was asked three times if he was one of Jesus' disciples, and each time Peter said he was not. John 21: 15 - 19 records that after Jesus' resurrection, he asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter responded each time, "You know that I love you." Jesus told Peter to take care of His followers and to "Follow me!"

Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.2 John Mark: Nine Passages

a. What did Jesus' forgiveness build into Peter?

Answers will vary here. Peter learned his own fallibility and need for forgiveness. Peter also saw how he himself had been strengthened and changed by Jesus. And so Peter learned the value that God places on a man who fails; and the wisdom of that value.

b. How were Peter and John Mark alike?

Peter had also failed Jesus publicly when he denied knowing Jesus three times the night (actually the early morning) that Jesus was arrested. (He was afraid to let the crowd know that he was a disciple.)

Jesus commissioned Peter in front of all the other disciples. ("Feed my sheep..."). Because of this, Peter was willing to give Mark a second chance.

Joseph in Prison

Genesis 39:19-23; 40:1-23

Background

Biblical Dreams and Dreamers

God used dreams and visions several times in the Bible to communicate with people. Visions were common, and an absence of them could be due to a lack of prophets or to the disobedience of God's people.

Old Testament Dreams and Visions

God used visions in the Old Testament to reveal His plan, to further His plan, and to put His people in places of influence. Some examples are:

- *Abraham:* God used a vision to restate the Abrahamic Covenant and remind Abram that he would have a son and be the father of many nations (Gen 15:1).
- *Jacob:* Jacob, with his mother's help, stole Esau's firstborn inheritance. Jacob then fled Esau's anger. On his journey Jacob had his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven on which angels ascended and descended. In this dream Jacob received God's promise that Abraham's blessing would be carried on through him (Genesis 28:10-17).
- *Samuel:* Samuel had his first vision as a young boy. God told him that judgment was coming upon the sons of Samuel's mentor, Eli. The young Samuel was faithful to relay this information, and God continued to speak to Samuel the rest of his life (1 Samuel 3).
- *Daniel:* As He had done for Joseph, God placed Daniel in a position of power and influence by allowing him to interpret a foreign ruler's dream. This is consistent with God's propensity to use miracles to identify His messengers. Daniel himself had many dreams and visions, mostly related to future kingdoms of the world and the nation of Israel (Daniel 2:4).

New Testament Dreams and Visions

Visions in the New Testament also served to provide information that was unavailable elsewhere. Specifically, God used visions and dreams to identify Jesus and to establish His church. Some examples are:

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3.3 Joseph in Prison

- *Joseph:* Joseph intended to divorce Mary when he found out she was pregnant, but God sent an angel to him in a dream, convincing him that the pregnancy was of God. Joseph then went ahead with the marriage. After Jesus was born, God sent two dreams, one to tell Joseph to take his family to Egypt so Herod could not Kill Jesus; the other to tell Joseph that Herod was dead and that he could return home. (Matthew 1:20; 2:13)
- *Paul:* Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him to leave Asia Minor and come to Macedonia and help them. After this Paul got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that god had called him to preach there (Acts 16:9-10). And so the gospel went to Eastern Europe.
- *Peter:* While Peter was praying on the rooftop of a house in Joppa, God have him a vision of animals lowered in something like a sheet. A voice from heaven told Peter to kill the animals (some of which were "unclean" - that is forbidden under the Mosaic Law to be eaten) and eat them. The vision served to show that Christians are not bound by kosher law and that God had pronounced the Gentiles themselves as "clean"; that is, heaven is open to all who follow Jesus. (Acts 10:9-15)
- *John:* Nearly the entire book of Revelation is a vision John had while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. John's vision explains in more detail some of the events that God had shown Daniel. (Revelation)

<https://www.gotquestions.org/dreams-visions-Bible.html>

Before you read: Have you ever had to wait a long time to get out of a bad situation? What happened?

The purpose of this question is to reflect on the difficulties of waiting and the importance of patience in trusting God. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

Encourage students to express honest thoughts. Steer them back to the story if discussion gets sidetracked.

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3.3 Joseph in Prison

Passage Questions

Choose the best answer:

1. d: both a and c
2. b: sold him to traders
3. d: someone had lied about him to his owner
4. a: were prisoners with Joseph
5. b: after two years
6. d: all of the above
7. c: Joseph told him the meaning

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. __h__ jealous | a. surely |
| 2. __f__ favouritism | b. someone owned by another person |
| 3. __e__ bow down | c. people who had magic powers |
| 4. __g__ seize | d. Egyptian king |
| 5. __b__ slave | e. to bend the body to show great respect |
| 6. __d__ Pharaoh | f. liking someone more than others |
| 7. __a__ firmly | g. hold by force |
| 8. __c__ magicians | h. to be angry because someone has what you feel should be yours |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. Jacob showed __favouritism__ to his son, Joseph, so his brothers were very __jealous__.
2. Joseph's brothers __seized__ him and sold him to traders as a __slave__ in Egypt.
3. Joseph had dreams that his family __bowed down__ to him.

Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.3 Joseph in Prison

4. ___Pharaoh___ sent for Joseph because he could interpret dreams.
5. The ___magicians___ could not tell the king the meaning of his dreams.
6. Pharaoh's dream came in two forms to show him that God had ___firmly___ decided to do it.

Re-tell the Story

Genesis 40

- A. The Pharaoh's baker and wine taster were put in prison. Joseph was put in charge of them. Both had dreams but didn't understand their meanings. Joseph told them that only God knows the meaning of dreams and asked them to tell him what they had dreamed.
- B. Joseph told the wine taster that his dream meant that in three days Pharaoh would free him from prison and give him his job back. Joseph asked him to remember him and to speak to Pharaoh about him. (But the wine taster forgot about Joseph.)
- C. Joseph told the baker that his dream meant that in three days Pharaoh would have him killed.

Genesis 41

- A. Pharaoh had two dreams, one after the other. He woke up after each dream. The dreams worried him, and he wanted to know what the dreams meant.
- B. In Pharaoh's first dream, seven healthy, fat cows were eating grass by the Nile river. Then seven ugly and skinny cows ate up the seven fat cows.
- C. In Pharaoh's second dream, seven healthy and good heads of grain grew from one stem. Then seven thin and dry grains of head swallowed up the seven healthy heads.
- D. When the chief wine taster remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams and told Pharaoh about that, Pharaoh had Joseph brought to him. Joseph told Pharaoh that he couldn't interpret dreams, but God would give Pharaoh the answer he wanted.
- E. When Pharaoh told Joseph his dream, Joseph told Pharaoh that both dreams meant the same thing: Egypt would have seven good years with lots of food, but these would be followed by seven years when there wouldn't be enough food. He told Pharaoh that this would happen for certain and happen soon. Joseph told Pharaoh that therefore he should appoint officials to store all

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3.3 Joseph in Prison

the extra food from the seven good years and use to feed the people during the seven bad years; in this way Egypt wouldn't be destroyed.

- F. Pharaoh was pleased with Joseph and put him in charge of his palace. He said that Joseph would be second in command to Pharaoh himself.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. **Why did Joseph's brothers hate Joseph?**

He was the son of their mother's sister who was their father's favorite wife. He had dreams about them bowing to him.

2. **How did Joseph end up in Egypt?**

His brothers sold him to traders who then sold him as a slave in Egypt.

3. **Why was Joseph sent to prison?**

Someone lied about him. (His owner's wife falsely accused him of trying to rape her after he refused her advances.)

4. **Who were the two men who were sent to prison? Why were they sad?**

The wine-taster and the baker had offended Pharaoh and were sent to prison. They were sad because they could not understand the meaning of their dreams.

5. **What did Joseph ask the wine taster to do for him?**

He asked the wine taster to remember him when he went back to work for Pharaoh. (This shows that Joseph was sure of the dream's meaning.)

6. **Was Joseph's interpretation of their dreams correct? Was the wine taster good at keeping promises?**

Yes, the wine taster went back to work for Pharaoh, and the baker was killed. The wine taster forgot about Joseph and did not keep his promise for 2 years.

7. **What did Pharaoh dream about? Why was Joseph sent to Pharaoh?**

Pharaoh dreamed about seven thin cows devouring seven fat cows, and seven thin and dry heads of grain swallowing seven healthy heads of grain. None of the magicians could interpret the dreams but the wine taster remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him.

Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.3 Joseph in Prison

8. **What did Pharaoh's dreams mean? How important were these dreams?**
The dreams revealed Egypt's future: there would be seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine. These dreams were important for Egypt's survival (and the surrounding nations).
9. **What did Pharaoh decide to do about Joseph? How important was this job?**
Pharaoh decided to put Joseph in charge of collecting and storing the harvest during the seven good years, then distributing it during the seven years of famine. This job was extremely important for Egypt's survival.
10. **What role does God play in this story? Do you think he does the same for us?**
God arranged all of Joseph's circumstances and because Joseph was patient and obedient to God, everything happened as planned. (Answers will vary.)

- *Intermediate*

1. **What caused Joseph's brothers to hate Joseph? How should they have responded to Joseph's dreams?**
He was the son of their mother's sister who was their father's favorite wife. He had dreams about them bowing to him. They should have either accepted the dreams or ignored Joseph if they didn't believe him.
2. **How did Joseph end up in Egypt?**
He was sold as a slave by his jealous brothers and brought to Egypt.
3. **Why was Joseph sent to prison?**
Someone (his owner Potiphar's wife) lied about him (she said Joseph had tried to rape her; the truth was that Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and he ran from her). Potiphar probably still liked Joseph, so he didn't kill him. Although the charge was false, Potiphar would still have to get rid of Joseph because either the wife or Joseph would come to harm.
4. **What were the roles of the two men who were sent to prison? How did Joseph interpret their dreams?**
The wine taster and the baker offended Pharaoh and were sent to prison. Joseph told them that the wine taster would be restored to Pharaoh's favour, but the baker would die.
5. **What did Joseph ask the wine taster to do for him? What does this show about Joseph's confidence in his interpretation of the dream?**

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3.3 Joseph in Prison

He asked the wine taster to speak to Pharaoh about getting him out of prison when he got his job back. Joseph was sure that the wine taster would get his job back.

6. **Was Joseph's interpretation of their dreams correct? Was the wine taster good at keeping promises? How important was this to God's plan for Joseph?**

Yes, the wine taster went back to work for Pharaoh, and the baker was killed. The wine taster forgot about Joseph. The timing was important because Pharaoh had not been given his dream yet. If Joseph had become known as a dream interpreter perhaps the intensity and subsequent relief of Pharaoh would not have put Joseph in such a key position.

7. **What did Pharaoh dream about? How successful were his wise men and magicians at explaining his dreams? Why was Joseph sent to Pharaoh?**
Pharaoh dreamed about seven thin cows who devoured seven fat cows, and seven thin and dry heads of grain that devoured seven healthy heads of grain. None of the magicians could interpret the dreams but the wine taster remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him.

8. **What did Pharaoh's dreams mean? How important were these dreams? Why did God use dreams to speak to Pharaoh?**

The dreams revealed Egypt's future: there would be seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine. These dreams were important for Egypt's survival (and the surrounding nations). Pharaoh might not have listened to a prophet, but he believed dreams were from the gods.

9. **What did Pharaoh decide to do about Joseph? How important was this job? Do you think that this quick decision was a good way to do things? How would this decision affect Egypt?**

Pharaoh decided to put Joseph in charge of collecting and storing the grain during the seven good years, and distributing it during the seven years of famine. This job was extremely important for Egypt's survival. Although it would seem a very quick decision it was based on the fact that God favoured Joseph enough to reveal the important message of the dream. This action would save the nation of Egypt and the surrounding nations during the time of famine.

Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.3 Joseph in Prison

10. What role does God play in this story? Do you think he does the same for us?

God arranged all of Joseph's circumstances and because Joseph was patient and obedient to God, everything happened as planned. (Answers will vary.)

- *Challenging*

1. What caused Joseph's brothers to hate Joseph? How should they have responded to Joseph's dreams? What were the real causes of the rift in this family?

He was the son of their mother's sister who was their father's favorite wife. He had dreams about them bowing to him. They should have either accepted the dreams or ignored Joseph if they didn't believe him. There was intense rivalry and jealousy already in this family.

2. How did Joseph end up in Egypt? Why was Joseph sent to prison? Do you think he still trusted God after these injustices?

He was sold as a slave by his brothers and brought to Egypt. (The wife of the man who bought him falsely accused him of trying to rape her. Actually it was her who was trying to seduce him. When he refused her advances, she lied about him to her husband.) However when he was in prison he acknowledged God's power when he interpreted the dreams of the wine taster and the baker. He showed hope in God's power by asking the wine taster to help get him out of prison.

3. What were the roles of the two men who were sent to prison? What did Joseph tell them about God? How did Joseph interpret their dreams?

The wine taster and the baker offended Pharaoh and were sent to prison. (The wine taster dreamed about a vine which had three branches. In his dream the wine taster squeezed the grapes from these branches and gave the cup to Pharaoh. The baker dreamed he was carrying 3 baskets of bread on his head and some birds ate the bread.) Joseph told them that only God knows what dreams mean. He told the wine taster that he would be restored to Pharaoh's favour, but the baker would be killed.

4. Was Joseph's interpretation of their dreams correct? What happened to the men? Was the wine taster good at keeping promises? How important was this to God's plan for Joseph? Do you think God has this level of planning for each of our lives?

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3.3 Joseph in Prison

Yes, the wine taster went back to work for Pharaoh, but the baker was killed. The wine taster forgot about Joseph. The timing was important because Pharaoh had not been given his dream yet. If Joseph had become known as a dream interpreter perhaps the intensity and subsequent relief of Pharaoh would not have put Joseph in such a key position. (Answers will vary.)

5. What did Pharaoh dream about? How successful were his wisemen and magicians at explaining his dreams? Why was Joseph sent to Pharaoh? Who is the true interpreter of dreams? What does this show about Joseph's relationship with God?

Pharaoh dreamed about seven thin cows devouring seven fat cows, and seven thin and dry heads of grain swallowing seven healthy heads of grain. None of the magicians could interpret the dreams but the wine taster remembered Joseph (after two years! - so no he wasn't good at keeping promises!) and told Pharaoh about him. Joseph still trusted God despite the long wait.

6. What did Pharaoh's dreams mean? How important were these dreams? Why didn't God just tell Pharaoh what was about to happen? Why use dreams? How does Joseph fit into this?

The dreams revealed Egypt's future: there would be seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine. These dreams were important for Egypt's survival (and the surrounding nations). Pharaoh might not have listened to a prophet, but he believed dreams were from the gods. He didn't believe in God and so might have rejected any outright message from Him. Joseph was able to be a bridge of communication to Pharaoh.

7. What did Pharaoh decide to do about Joseph? How important was this job? Why do you think Pharaoh awarded such an important job to Joseph? Does this suggest that Pharaoh might have respected the God of Joseph?

Pharaoh decided to put Joseph in charge of collecting and storing the grain during the seven years of abundance and distributing it during the seven years of famine. This job was extremely important for Egypt's survival. Although it would seem a very quick decision it was based on the fact that God favoured Joseph enough to reveal the important message of the dream. This action would save the nation of Egypt and the surrounding nations during the time of famine. Although Pharaoh may not have believed in God, he did believe his dreams.

Chapter Three: Carrying on in the Faith

3.3 Joseph in Prison

8. What role does *God* play in this story? Do you think he does the same for us?

God arranged all of Joseph's circumstances and because Joseph was patient and obedient to *God*, everything happened as planned. (Answers will vary.)

Midwives of Egypt and Moses' Parents Exodus 1; 2:1-10

Background:

Will the Real Pharaoh of Exodus Please Stand Up?

Cecil B. DeMille chose Ramesses II (1279-1213 B.C.) as the pharaoh of Egypt for his movie, *Exodus* (released in 1956). Later, so did Ridley Scott in his *Exodus: Gods and Kings* of 2014. This was because the Bible says that the Israelites lived in the Land of Rameses and built the storage town of Rameses. But *Genesis 47:11* also called the land Rameses when Jacob (Israel) and his family first moved there, long before the enslavement and the pharaoh of Exodus.

It's known that the writers of the books of the Bible often used the name of a town as it was called in their time, rather than the actual name of the town as it was called back in the time of the story. So, the town Rameses may have had another name in Moses' time.

1 Kings 6:1 says Exodus occurred 480 years before Solomon began to build the Temple (about 966 BC), so that would put the Exodus in the times of Amenhotep II (~1427-1400 BC). But the evidence for him is weak and speculative. And it's known that the dates for the reigns of the pharaohs have a very wide margin of error.

Some suggest Thutmose II (ca. 1492-1479 BC). The mummies of Thutmose II, his wife (and half-sister) Hatshepsut, "son" Thutmose III (DNA tests on the mummies of Thutmose II and III show no biological relationship), all show skin lesions. An inscription by Hatshepsut in her Underground Temple states that Egypt had gone to pieces in Thutmose II's time and that the Egyptian god Ra had not saved the country from this ruination. When Thutmose III came to power, he retook control of Canaan which Egypt had lost under Thutmose II.

Proverbs 18:17 says, "The first to state his case seems right, until his opponent begins to cross-examine him." Many more pharaohs have been argued for as candidates, and each argument has its strengths and weaknesses.

One thing historians do agree on is that the descriptions in Exodus give an accurate picture of life in ancient Egypt at the time. Egypt did use bricks made with straw; did enslave people from neighbouring areas (including Israelites) to work as slaves for construction, farming, and herding; and did treat their slaves harshly. And archaeologists have found imprints of slave huts - unique in design to those of the ancient Israelites - in the times of Ramesses III (1184-1153 BC) and Ramesses IV

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

(1153-1147 BC). But they don't know whether these Israelite slaves were from Moses' time, or were captives from later times.

Before You Read:

What is the biggest risk you have taken? Was the risk worth it?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about risk and its possible cost. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

True or False

1. The number of Israelites greatly increased in Egypt. T
2. The king of Egypt was afraid the Israelites would join his enemies. T
3. The Israelites became fewer in number after they were enslaved. F
4. The king wanted the midwives to kill all the Hebrew babies. F
5. The midwives obeyed the king. F
6. Moses' mother placed him in a basket. T
7. The king found Moses among the tall grass of the river. F
8. Moses was hidden by his parents for four months. F

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <u> d </u> risk | a. hard work |
| 2. <u> g </u> deal with | b. a supervisor of slaves |
| 3. <u> b </u> slave driver | c. feed a baby with milk from a woman's breast |

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 4. ___f___ pity | d. chance of something going wrong |
| 5. ___a___ labour | e. thick, black liquid that is waterproof |
| 6. ___h___ stem | f. feeling sorry for someone |
| 7. ___e___ tar | g. do something about a difficult situation |
| 8. ___c___ breast-feed | h. main, straight part of a plant |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

Re-tell the Story

- A. The king of Egypt was worried about the Israelites because there were so many of them. He thought the Israelites would join his enemies and fight against Egypt.
- B. The king of Egypt forced the Israelites to become Egypt's slaves. The Egyptian slave drivers treated the Israelites badly and made them work hard. The Israelite slaves built storage cities for the king (the pharaoh).
- C. The king wanted to reduce the population of the Israelites. At first he told the midwives to kill the male babies as they were born. But because the midwives had respect for God, they wouldn't do this. So then, the king ordered that every Israelite baby boy was to be thrown into the Nile River. (The king's soldiers made sure that all the baby boys were killed.)
- D. Moses was born during this time. His mother hid him for three months. Then she prepared a basket of reeds and coated it with tar so that it would float. She put Moses into the basket and hid him in the reeds of the Nile. His sister (Miriam) watched nearby.
- E. The king's daughter went to the Nile to take a bath.
- F. The princess saw the basket and sent one of her slaves to get it and bring it to her. When the princess saw baby Moses crying, she felt sorry for him. Moses' sister (Miriam) went up to the princess and asked her if she should go get a Hebrew woman to breast-feed the baby. The princess said yes and that she would pay the woman to take care of the baby. When Moses became old enough, the princess took him to be her adopted son. It was the princess who gave him the name, Moses. The name meant, "I pulled him out of the water."

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities
4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. How many of Jacob's children and grandchildren first came to Egypt?
There were seventy.
2. Why was the king worried about the Israelites?
They were growing rapidly in number and he worried that they might join his enemies.
3. What did the king do to the Israelites?
He made them slaves and treated them harshly.
4. What did the king ask the midwives to do?
He asked them to kill the Hebrew boys as soon as they were born.
5. Did the midwives obey the king? What did they tell the king?
No, because they feared God more; so they told him the Israelite women gave birth quickly before they got there.
6. How did God bless the midwives?
God gave them families of their own.
7. What did Moses' parents do?
They hid Moses after he was born and later put him in a basket in the tall grass (reeds) next to the river.
8. What happened to Moses after he was put in the basket in the river?
He was discovered by one of the king's daughters.
9. Who did Pharaoh's daughter pay to breast-feed baby Moses? How did this happen?
Moses' sister, who was watching nearby, asked Pharaoh's daughter if she would like her to find a Hebrew wet nurse for her new baby. His sister then went and got her mother to be the nurse. So Moses' mother looked after him until he was older - and pharaoh's daughter the mother to do this!
10. Why did Moses' parents hide their baby?
Hebrews 11:23 says "because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."
11. What do you think about Pharaoh's command? Would you have dared to disobey?
Answers will vary.

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

- *Intermediate*

1. How many children and grandchildren of Jacob first came to Egypt? Why do you think their numbers grew so quickly?

There were seventy. God was blessing and multiplying the tribes as He promised Abraham. In the time of Joseph, they were prosperous. (Answers will vary.)

2. What were the worries of the king about this foreign group in Egypt?

They were growing rapidly in number and he worried that they might join his enemies.

3. What was the king's solution?

He made them slaves and treated them harshly. He hoped that they would become weak.

4. What did the king want the midwives to do? What did he hope to accomplish?

He asked them to kill the Hebrew boys as soon as they were born. He hoped to reduce the male population and maybe force the Israelite women to marry Egyptians.

5. How did the midwives defy the king? What kind of risk did they take? How did they excuse themselves?

The midwives feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. They could have been executed for disobeying the king, but he accepted their explanation that the "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

6. How did God reward the midwives? Do you think this was a good reward?

God gave them families of their own. Yes, they were saving lives and standing up to a king. They deserved to be blessed.

7. What did Moses' parents do? Why was this risky?

They hid Moses after he was born and later put him in a basket in the tall grass (reeds) next to the river. They could have been severely punished for breaking the law.

8. Describe what happened to Moses after he was put in the basket in the river. Do you think the family knew who might find the basket?

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

He was discovered by one of the king's daughters. They might have known where she bathed. They probably hoped a wealthy Egyptian family would take him in.

9. Who looked after baby Moses? What happened to his mother? How important to God's plan was it that Moses was raised in the king's household?

Moses' sister who was watching nearby asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should find a Hebrew wet nurse for her new baby. When Pharaoh's daughter said yes, the sister when and got her mother. And so Moses' mother looked after him until he was older, and the pharaoh's daughter paid her to do this! Moses would be educated and learn how to behave in the king's court. He would make social connections to important people.

10. What were reasons mentioned in Hebrews as to why Moses' parents hid him. Would you do the same for your children?

Hebrews 11:23 says "because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (Answers will vary.)

11. Do you have any further questions or comments about the story?

Answers will vary.

• *Challenging*

1. How many descendants of Jacob first came to Egypt? What do you think caused their numbers to grow so quickly? What are the usual causes of growing populations?

There were seventy. God was blessing and multiplying the tribes as He promised Abraham. In the time of Joseph, they were prosperous. Populations grow when there is enough food for everybody. (Answers will vary.)

2. What were the worries of the king about this foreign group in Egypt? Can you see any modern-day parallels?

They were growing rapidly in number and he worried that they might join his enemies. People are still afraid of foreign groups of people especially when they are a large group.

3. What was the king's solution? Do you think his worries were justified? Was his treatment of the Israelites based on any truth? Was it legal or fair?

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

He made them slaves and treated them harshly. He hoped that they would become weak. There probably was no reason to fear them until he began to treat them badly. There was no sign that they wanted to join the king's enemies. It was legal because the king could make the laws, but of course it wasn't fair.

4. What did the king want the midwives to do? What did he hope to accomplish? Do you think this was an effective plan?

He asked them to kill the Hebrew boys as soon as they were born. He hoped to reduce the male population and maybe force the Israelite women to marry Egyptians. It might have worked except God wouldn't allow that to happen.

5. How did the midwives defy the king? What kind of risk did they take? How did they excuse themselves?

The midwives feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. They could have been executed for disobeying the king, but he accepted their explanation that the "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

6. How did God reward the midwives? Do you think this was a suitable reward? Why or why not?

God gave them families of their own. Yes, they were saving lives and standing up to a king. They deserved to be blessed. In Hebrew culture having children was a sign of God's blessing.

7. What did Moses' parents do? Why was this risky? Would you have taken this chance?

They hid Moses after he was born and later put him in a basket in the tall grass (reeds) next to the river. They could have been severely punished for breaking the law. Most people will do anything to save their children.

8. Describe what happened to Moses after he was put in the basket in the river. Do you think the location of the basket was important? Do you think the family knew who might find the basket?

He was discovered by one of the king's daughters. They might have known where she bathed. They probably hoped a wealthy Egyptian family would take him in.

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.1 Midwives of Egypt and Moses' parents

9. Who looked after baby Moses? What happened to his mother? How important to God's plan was it that Moses was raised in the king's household? Do you think his parents knew what might happen?

Moses' sister, who was watching nearby, asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should go to find a Hebrew wet nurse for her new baby. Pharaoh's daughter said yes, and so the sister went to get her mother. And so Moses' mother looked after him until he was older, and the king's daughter paid her to do this! Moses would be educated and learn how to behave in the king's court. He would make social connections to important people. He also would have a better chance of survival there. As a free man he was able to leave Egypt.

10. What were reasons mentioned in Hebrews as to why Moses' parents hid him. Would you do the same for your children?

Hebrews 11:23 says "because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (Answers will vary.)

11. Do you have any further questions or comments about the story?
(Answers will vary.)

A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

John 9:1-41

Background:

The Pharisees and Sadducees

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were both religious sects within Judaism during the time of Christ. Both groups honored Moses and the Law, and they both had a measure of political power. The Sanhedrin, the 70-member supreme court of ancient Israel, had members from both the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees are known to us through a couple of passages of Scripture and through the extant writings (documents still in existence) of the Pharisees. Religiously, the Sadducees were more conservative in one doctrinal area: they insisted on a literal interpretation of the text of Scripture; the Pharisees, on the other hand, gave oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God. If the Sadducees couldn't find a command in the Tanakh, they dismissed it as manmade.

Given the Pharisees' and the Sadducees' differing view of Scripture, it's no surprise that they argued over certain doctrines. The Sadducees rejected a belief in the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8), but the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees denied the afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death, but the Pharisees believed in an afterlife and in an appropriate reward and punishment for individuals. The Sadducees rejected the idea of an unseen, spiritual world, but the Pharisees taught the existence of angels and demons in a spiritual realm.

Socially, the Sadducees were more elitist and aristocratic than the Pharisees. Sadducees tended to be wealthy and to hold more powerful positions. The chief priests and high priest were Sadducees, and they held the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were more representative of the common working people and had the respect of the masses. The Sadducees' locus of power was the temple in Jerusalem; the Pharisees controlled the synagogues. The Sadducees were friendlier with Rome and more accommodating to the Roman laws than the Pharisees were. The Pharisees often resisted Hellenization (embracing the Greek culture), but the Sadducees welcomed it.

Jesus had more run-ins with the Pharisees than with the Sadducees, probably because of the former's giving pre-eminence to oral tradition. "You ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition," Jesus told them (Mark 7:8, NLT; see also

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Matthew 9:14; 15:1-9; 23:5, 16, 23, Mark 7:1-23; and Luke 11:42). Because the Sadducees were often more concerned with politics than religion, they ignored Jesus until they began to fear He might bring unwanted Roman attention and upset the status quo. It was at that point that the Sadducees and Pharisees set aside their differences, united, and conspired to put Christ to death (John 11:48-50; Mark 14:53; 15:1).

The Sadducees as a group ceased to exist after the destruction of Jerusalem, but the Pharisees' legacy lived on. In fact, the Pharisees were responsible for the compilation of the Mishnah, an important document with reference to the continuation of Judaism beyond the destruction of the temple. In this way the Pharisees laid the groundwork for modern-day Rabbinic Judaism.

Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Sadducees-Pharisees.html>

Before You Read: Can you think of a way that people are blind in their thinking?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about human nature. Human beings do not want to believe what is inconvenient or threatening to their interests. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Number the story so it is in the right order. The first is done for you.

- a. 5 The Pharisees questioned the man to see if Jesus really healed him.
- b. 3 Jesus put mud on the blind man's eyes.
- c. 8 The Pharisees threw the blind man out of the synagogue because they were angry with him.
- d. 1 Jesus said he was the light of the world.
- e. 9 Jesus told the man that he was the Son of Man.
- f. 4 The blind man washed in the pool of Siloam, and he was able to see.
- g. 2 Jesus spit on the ground.

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- h. 6 The man said he had been born blind, and that Jesus was a prophet.
- i. 10 Jesus declared his purpose of coming into the world was so that the blind would see and those that see would become blind.
- j. 7 The man said that only someone from God could heal a man born blind.

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. <u>e</u> honour | a. say something is true |
| 2. <u>h</u> spit | b. Jewish place of worship |
| 3. <u>g</u> signs | c. to show love for God |
| 4. <u>f</u> prophet | d. having done something wrong |
| 5. <u>b</u> synagogue | e. greatly respect |
| 6. <u>i</u> Son of Man | f. a person who spoke the words of God |
| 7. <u>c</u> worship | g. miracles |
| 8. <u>a</u> claim | h. to push water or saliva out of your mouth |
| 9. <u>d</u> guilty | i. Messiah - the person who prophets said God would send |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

- 1. The blind man called Jesus a prophet.
- 2. Because the Pharisees claimed to see, they were guilty.
- 3. Jesus spit on the dirt to create mud.
- 4. When Jesus told the man that he was the Son of Man, the man believed and worshipped Jesus.
- 5. Giving sight to a man who was born blind is a sign from God.
- 6. The Pharisees honoured Moses and God's Law, but they did not understand God.
- 7. The Pharisees threw the man out of the synagogue, because they didn't like what he said.

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4.2 A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

Re-tell the Story

- A. Jesus saw a man who was blind and who had been blind since birth. (It's not included here, but His disciples had asked Him if the man was blind because he had sinned, or if the man was born blind because his parents had sinned.) Jesus told His disciples that the man was blind so that God's power could be shown by what was about to happen.
- B. Jesus made some mud with some of the dirt on the ground and His own spit. He put the mud on the blind man's eyes then told him to wash the mud off in the Pool of Siloam. The blind man did this, and he became able to see.
- C. (It's not included here but it was the man's told friends who brought him to the Pharisees after he had told them about this miracle). The Pharisees questioned the man. They said that Jesus could not be from God since He had healed on the Sabbath.
- D. The Pharisees did not believe that the blind man had been healed, so they sent for his parents and questioned them. The parents would only say their son had been born blind because they were afraid of the Pharisees (they were afraid the Pharisees would put them out of the synagogue (the centre of the Jewish community) if they verified that it was Jesus who healed their son. So they told the Pharisees that they didn't know how their son was healed, and to ask the son himself about this).
- E. The Pharisees accused the blind man of lying and told him to tell the truth about how he had been healed. The blind man told them he'd already told them that Jesus had healed him and asked them if the reason they wanted to hear it again was because they wanted to become Jesus' disciples too. The Pharisees said they knew God spoke to Moses, but they didn't even know where Jesus was from. The blind man told them that if Jesus didn't come from God, then He wouldn't be able to perform miracles. The Pharisees then told him he had been deep in sin at birth and threw him out of the synagogue.
- F. When Jesus heard that the man had been thrown out of the synagogue, He went to see him. Jesus told him that He was the Son of Man. The man believed and worshiped Jesus. Jesus said He came into the world to judge it and so the blind will see and those who claim to see will become blind. Pharisees who were there asked if He was saying they were blind. Jesus told them that if they were blind they would not be guilty of sin, but since they claimed to see, they remained guilty of sin.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. Why did Jesus say the man had been born blind?

Jesus said it was so that God's power could be shown.

2. What did Jesus say about himself?

Jesus called himself the light of the world and the Son of Man.

3. What happened after Jesus put mud on the blind man's eyes?

Jesus told him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. When he did this, he was able to see for the first time. The people were amazed (his friends and neighbours asked him how it happened. He told them what Jesus had done).

4. Why did the Pharisees think the person who healed the blind man was not from God?

Jesus broke the Sabbath rules by working on the Sabbath. (But if Jesus does the work God requires of Him, he is not disobedient.)

5. Did the Pharisees think the blind man's sin caused his blindness?

Yes, because they accused him of being "deep in sin" since birth. (It was a cultural belief at the time that His or his parents sin caused God to withhold His blessings.)

6. Why did the blind man become annoyed with the Pharisees when they questioned him again?

He had already told them what had happened, but they didn't seem to believe him.

7. What did the Pharisees do when the blind man told them Jesus must be from God?

They didn't like what he said so they threw him out of the synagogue.

8. Why did Jesus look for and find the blind man?

He had heard he had been thrown out of the synagogue. He wanted to ask him if he believed who Jesus was.

9. What did Jesus say about his purpose for coming into the world?

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

- *Intermediate*

1. In *John 9:2*, the disciples ask Jesus about the blind man, "Rabbi, who sinned? Was this man born blind because he sinned? Or did his parents sin?" What did Jesus answer? How did what Jesus say differ from the common beliefs?

Jesus said it was so that God's work could be shown. (The people were told by Moses that God would bless them and allow "none of these diseases" to afflict them if they obeyed Him. It was true but sometimes there were other reasons why God allowed people to be sick.)

2. What did Jesus mean when he said, "I am the light of the world."?

Jesus called himself the light of the world. Light allows people to see. He is the source of not only vision but understanding of spiritual matters. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

3. What happened after Jesus covered the blind man's eyes with mud? Why were the people so amazed by this healing?

Jesus told him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. When he did this, he was able to see for the first time. The people were amazed (his friends and neighbours asked him how this happened. He told them what Jesus had done.) They were amazed because this had never been done before. No one born blind ever received their sight. This is something only God can do. Psalm 146:8 "the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous."

4. Why did the Pharisees think the man who healed the blind man was not from God? How important was keeping the Sabbath to the Pharisees?

Jesus broke the Sabbath rules by working on the Sabbath. (But if Jesus does the work God requires of Him, he is not disobedient.) Keeping the Sabbath had become one of the overriding rules for the Pharisees beyond the importance of loving one's neighbour.

5. What did the Pharisees mean when they said the blind man was deep in sin at his birth?

They meant his or his parents sin caused God to withhold His blessings. They believed God only blesses the righteous. Therefore, if you are not blessed, then you must be sinful.

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.2 A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

6. **Why did the blind man become annoyed with the Pharisees when they questioned him again? What should they have understood?**
He had already told them what had happened, but they didn't seem to believe him. They should have understood the special nature of this miracle and gone to Jesus with their questions. The blind man could not really answer any of their theological questions.
 7. **What did the Pharisees do when the blind man told them Jesus must be from God? Were they right to do so?**
By their own logic, a sinner would not be able to do this miracle, and so if Jesus performed this miracle, He could not be a sinner. Therefore, in order to maintain their narrative, the man born blind must be lying. They didn't like what the man born blind said so they threw him out of the synagogue. (They had made a rule to throw out anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, but the man had not done so until after Jesus spoke with him again. Therefore, they were breaking their own rules when they threw him out.)
 8. **What was Jesus' purpose in looking for and finding the blind man?**
He had heard he had been thrown out of the synagogue. He wanted to ask him if he believed who Jesus was. It was important that the blind man acknowledge the healing and who had healed him and what that meant.
 9. **Jesus declared his purpose of coming into the world was so that the blind would see and those that see would become blind. What does this mean?**
Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." God's purpose was to reveal the truth: some would "see" the truth others would be blind to it.
- ***Challenging***
 1. **What did Jesus mean when he said, "I am the light of the world."? How profound a statement is that?**
Jesus called himself the light of the world. Light allows people to see. He is the source of not only vision but understanding of spiritual matters. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."
 2. **What happened after Jesus covered the blind man's eyes with mud? Why were the people so shocked by this healing?**

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.2 A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

Jesus told him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. When he did this, he was able to see for the first time. The people were amazed and brought him to the Pharisees. (His neighbours and friends asked him how it happened. He told them what Jesus had done.) People were shocked because this had never been done before. At that time no one born blind ever received their sight. This is something only God can do. Psalm 146, 8 says, "The Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous."

3. In Isaiah 61:1 we read prophecy about the Messiah/Son of Man:

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners.*

What does that imply about Jesus?

This implies that Jesus is the Messiah because Jesus released the blind man from his prison of darkness and proclaimed good news to this poor beggar by showing him that He was the Son of Man, the promised Messiah. (This is why the beggar worshiped Jesus when he believed.)

4. How important was keeping the Sabbath to the Pharisees? How could this commandment given by God lead them to think Jesus was not doing God's work?

Jesus broke the Sabbath rules by working on the Sabbath. But if Jesus does the work God requires of Him, he is not disobedient. Keeping the Sabbath had become one of the overriding rules for the Pharisees beyond the importance of loving one's neighbour. They were using the Laws of Moses to maintain a spiritual stranglehold on the people. (Some churches still do the same! Beware of legalism!)

5. *In John 9:2, the disciples ask Jesus about the blind man, "Rabbi, who sinned? Was this man born blind because he sinned? Or did his parents sin?"* What did the Pharisees mean when they said the blind man was already deep in sin at his birth? How does that relate to what the disciples believe? What did Jesus reveal about this kind of belief?

They meant that the sin of the man or the sin of his parents had caused God to withhold His blessings - God only blesses the righteous, therefore if

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.2 A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

you are not blessed, then you are sinful. The disciples thought the same when they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? This logic is faulty because God may have other purposes for allowing his people to be afflicted. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

6. Why did the blind man become annoyed with the Pharisees when they questioned him again? What should they have understood? What does that reveal about the Pharisees?

He had already told them what happened, but they didn't seem to believe him. They should have understood the special nature of the miracle and gone to Jesus with their questions. The blind man could not really answer any of their theological questions. They were questioning the wrong person. The Pharisees may have been reluctant to confront Jesus again as they had never been successful in their arguments.

7. What did the Pharisees do when the blind man disagreed with them? Were they right to do so? Do you think they did the right thing for the situation at the time?

By their own logic, a sinner would not be able to do this miracle, so if Jesus did the miracle, then Jesus could not be a sinner. So, the only alternative the Pharisees had was to say that the man born blind was lying when he said that Jesus healed him. They didn't like what the man was saying so they threw him out of the synagogue. (They had made a rule to throw out anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, but the man had not done so until after Jesus spoke with him again. Therefore, they were breaking their own rules when they threw him out.) No, they should have followed up by asking Jesus about why he had healed this man. Jesus would have told them the same as he said to his disciples: this was the work of God.

8. What was Jesus' purpose in looking for and finding the blind man? Why was this action important for the blind man's understanding of what had happened?

Jesus had heard that he had been thrown out of the synagogue. He wanted to ask the man if he believed who He was. It was important that the blind man acknowledge the healing and who had healed him and what that meant. It was clarification, follow-up, and confirmation of the man's testimony: Jesus had healed him as only God could; Jesus was the Messiah.

Chapter Four: Standing up to Authorities

4.2 A Beggar Questions the Pharisees

9. Jesus declared his purpose of coming into the world was so that the blind would see and those that see would become blind. What does this mean? Do you think the Pharisees understood him? Why or why not?

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." God's purpose was to reveal the truth: some would "see" the truth and others would be blinded to it. Most of the Pharisees were blind to the truth. Matthew 15:12-14 states, "then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this? He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." Of course, the Pharisees did not consider themselves spiritually blind, so they would not accept the teachings of Jesus, preferring to lean on their own understanding instead. Proverbs 3:5,6 warns us to, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight

Stephen Schools the Sanhedrin Acts 6:1-15; 7:1-60; 8:1-3

Background:

The Hellenists vs. the Hebrews

Around 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the Babylonian Empire, conquered Jerusalem and took its people as exiles back to Babylon. About seventy years later Cyrus the Great, king of the Persian Empire, conquered Babylon. Cyrus allowed the exiled Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. But only 50,000 of the two or three million Jews living in Babylon were willing to return and rebuild. And when they returned, they were still under Persian rule.

The Jews longed to regain an independent nation, but about 331 BC, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire and put the entire region under Macedo-Greek rule.

Alexander's kingdom literally linked Europe to the Orient. The Greek language became the common language of a new world-culture permeated by Greek language, art, science, philosophy, morals (or lack thereof), laws, public affairs, and idol-worshipping religion. Alexander offered Greek citizenship to all his conquered peoples. The Jews of Judea were free to move, work, and trade as full Greek citizens throughout the Greek Empire.

Many of the Jews embraced this new culture. But those in Jerusalem saw this as an existential threat to their own culture, faith, and God's call on them as His people. And so, division arose between those who accepted and worked within Greek culture (the Hellenized Jews (the Hellenists)) and those in Jerusalem who maintained a strictly Judaic culture, and the Hebrew (and Aramaic) language (the Hebraic Jews (the Hebrews)).

While Alexander was alive, the Greeks treated the Jews with a *laissez faire* attitude. Following Alexander's death, the region was divided into four kingdoms, each ruled by one of Alexander's generals, among them Ptolemy and Seleucid. Judah was fought over by the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, but finally came under Seleucid rule.

The 8th Seleucid king over Judea, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, was determined to Hellenize the Hebraic Jews. Some of the ways he went about this were:

- building a gymnasium in which athletes could train and compete in the nude, right by the Temple in Jerusalem, and inviting the Temple priests to join in
- burning every copy of the Torah he could find

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- outlawing Jewish holidays and rituals on pain of death
- killing any male baby that was found to have been circumcised
- erecting a statue of Zeus in the Temple, and sacrificing a pig to Zeus on the Temple altar
- forcing the priests throughout Judea to offer sacrifices to Zeus

This led to the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid rule. The Maccabees (a Hasmonean priestly family) ultimately won against the Seleucids, took back much of the land that had belonged to ancient Israel, and re-established a mostly independent dynasty. But this was done via an alliance with Rome. Then around 60 B.C., Rome took over Judea.

In the time of the early church there was Jewish opposition to Rome. But there were still some hard feelings between the Hellenistic background believers and the Hebraic background believers. A complaint arose that when the church was distributing daily food to their widows, they overlooked the Hellenist widows. That is when the apostles decided to have the church select seven men to put in charge of the food distribution to make sure that all of the widows were looked after. Stephen was one of the seven and judging by his name, he was a Hellenist.

Before You Read: Can you think of any example when someone suffered because of doing the right thing?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about the cost of standing up to power. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Match the sentence beginning with the right ending:

___d___ 1. The first church met

a. ...because he was full of the Holy Spirit.

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- | | | |
|---------|---|--|
| ___b___ | 2. The Jerusalem church | b. ...gave food to its poor widows. |
| ___e___ | 3. The unbelieving Jews hated Stephen | c. ... of murdering Jesus |
| ___a___ | 4. Stephen was wise, and he did signs and wonders | d. ...in the Temple courts |
| ___g___ | 5. People told lies about Stephen | e. ...because he argued wisely against them in public. |
| ___c___ | 6. Stephen accused the Sanhedrin | f. ... so they scattered to other places. |
| ___f___ | 7. Christians in Jerusalem were afraid of arrest | g. ...so the people were stirred up and he was arrested. |

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | | |
|---------|------------------|--|
| ___d___ | 1. widows | a. not willing to listen or change |
| ___b___ | 2. publicly | b. openly, in front of a lot of people |
| ___e___ | 3. stir up | c. spread out |
| ___h___ | 4. accusation | d. usually poor women whose husbands have died, |
| ___a___ | 5. stubborn | e. make somebody emotional |
| ___g___ | 6. Blameless One | f. to be very sad about someone or something |
| ___c___ | 7. scattered | g. the one without sin that the prophets said would die for others' sins (Messiah) |
| ___f___ | 8. mourned | h. saying someone has done something wrong |

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above.

Another name for the Son of Man is ___Blameless One___.

1. Two-year-old children can be very ___stubborn___.
2. The church of Jerusalem helped poor ___widows___ by giving them food.
3. When Stephen ___publicly___ shamed non-believing Jews, they made ___accusations___ against him and ___stirred up___ the people.

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4. After Stephen was killed, the church ___mourned___ for him.
5. Saul began to destroy the church, and many Christians ___scattered___ outside Jerusalem.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. Who formed the first church? Where was it located?
The 12 apostles (the disciples had replaced Judas Iscariot with Matthias (Acts 1:20-23) of Jesus formed the first church. It was located in Jerusalem.
2. How did the church take care of its widows?
The church distributed food to the widows every day. (They also shared all their possessions with anyone who had any need.)
3. Did Stephen's opponents question him alone, or in public? Why do you think they wanted to do that?
They questioned him in public. They probably thought they could win the argument and convince the crowd that the Christians were wrong in their belief.
4. Why did Stephen's opponents become angry?
Stephen was full of the Spirit and wisdom and so was able to win against the arguments of his opponents. (So Stephen was winning over the crowd for Jesus - the opposite of what his opponents counted on.)
5. What did Stephen's opponents do?
They secretly persuaded some men to become false witnesses against Stephen. These false witnesses were to say that Stephen spoke against the law of Moses, and against "this holy place" (the Temple.)
6. What did Stephen say about God in Israel's history?
Stephen said that God had remained faithful to Israel throughout its history.
7. What did Stephen say about his people, the people of Israel?
Stephen said that Israel would not obey or listen to God. He said they opposed the Holy Spirit, and harmed the prophets and had betrayed and murdered the Blameless One (the Messiah, Jesus).
8. What did Stephen see when he finished his speech?

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4.3 Stephen Schools the Sanhedrin

Stephen saw heaven open, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

9. What happened to the church after Stephen's death? What good came from that?

The church was severely persecuted from that day on. Most of the believers were forced to flee Jerusalem.

(The believers spread the gospel and formed new churches wherever they went.)

10. What happened to Saul?

Saul went from being a persecutor of the church to an effective apostle of the church. (And Paul was the one who brought the gospel to the Gentiles.)

- *Intermediate*

1. When did the first church form? Where did they meet?

The church first formed following Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They met in the Temple courts in Jerusalem. (They also met in homes.)

2. What does the early church's care of its widows show?

They took care of each other. The 12 apostles (the apostles had replaced Judas Iscariot with Matthias (Acts 1:20-23)) considered care of widows to be important work. They acted like a family.

3. What was Stephen like?

Stephen was one of the seven who were chosen because they were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. He was full of God's grace and power. God was able to use him to perform great wonders and signs. He knew the history of his people, and he understood their failures and God's grace to them.

4. Why do you think his opponents opposed him publicly? How did that hurt their cause?

His opponents must have thought they could win against him in a public debate; and that this would discredit Jesus and His followers in the public's eye. But they hurt their cause when it was Stephen would publicly win against them.

5. What did his opponents tell the false witnesses to say? Why did they want them to say that?

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They were to say that they had heard Stephen speak against Moses and against God. They wanted the opponents to say that because the public venerated Moses and worshipped God - so this would cause the public to become furious with Stephen.

6. **Why do you think Stephen gave a speech on Israel's history? Why did this upset his opponents?**

Stephen showed that his accusers were lying; he did venerate Moses and worship God - that in fact it was the Israelites and their leaders who failed to be faithful to God - they wouldn't listen or obey, they opposed the Holy Spirit, they tried to hurt the prophets, and they had murdered the Blameless One (the Messiah). Stephen's opponents were self-righteous and not ones to let their actual history get in the way of their self-perception: so they were furious when Stephen challenged them.

7. **What happened when Stephen finished his speech?**

The members of the Sanhedrin were furious. They covered their ears and yelled as loud as they could, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him to death.

8. **Why would Stephen ask God not to "hold this sin against" his murderers?**

He was simply following the example of his Saviour, Jesus. Perhaps he still hoped they would see the truth. In fact, Saul did change and become a Christian.

9. **What happened to the church? Where did they go? (see map)**

A great persecution broke out against the church, and the church fled Jerusalem. The map shows that they fled to the northern regions of Judea (and into Samaria - not shown on map), to Damascus and Antioch (in Syria), and to Cyprus.

10. **Stephen's life was cut short. But what did he accomplish?**

He was a great witness to the public and to the Sanhedrin. The ensuing persecution of the church drove the believers into other regions - and they spread the gospel to these regions. Saul became Paul and took the gospel even further (into Cyprus, Lycia and Pamphylia, Asia, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Rome).

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- **Challenging**

1. Describe how the early church formed and what it was like.

The twelve apostles (they had replaced Judas Isacariot with Matthias (Acts 1:20-23)) formed the first church in Jerusalem following Pentecost. They met in the Temple courts every day. Acts 2:42-46 tells us that they shared their possessions and took care of their poor and their widows.

2. How large was the early church becoming? Why do you think it grew so quickly?

It was increasing in size every day and had grown to thousands. (Acts 2:41 says that three thousand people in Jerusalem became believers following Peter's proclamation of the gospel that first Pentecost.) It would have grown so quickly because of the strength of the apostle's preaching and the good witness of the church.

3. Describe Stephen's character.

Stephen and the others of the seven that were chosen to help with church administration were picked because they were, "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom." And the passage says that Stephen was full of God's grace and power. He knew the Scriptures well and could interpret them well. He was so persuasive that he could win against his opponents. Despite the fact that he was a powerful speaker and could perform great wonders and signs, he took on the work of distributing foods to widows. He was compassionate and had a heart for the lost. As he was dying, he called out to God to forgive those who were stoning him to death.

4. Why did Stephen's opponents want to question him publicly? What were they wanting the people to believe?

They believed they could win the debate with Stephen and wanted to do so in public so that they could dissuade the public from listening to him and the church. They wanted the people to believe that Jesus was not the Messiah, and that they should leave the church and return to the synagogues and the teachings of the Pharisees.

5. Why was Stephen able to argue well against them? Does God give everyone wisdom? Why is God's wisdom important to have?

God gave Stephen great wisdom and Spirit. Proverbs 2 says the Lord gives wisdom, but we have to call out for it and search for it as for hidden treasure and apply our heart to it. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding

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fault, and it will be given to you. Wisdom is defined as the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting. It enables you to pick choices that produce good. Proverbs 9: 10 tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. 1 Cor. 3:19 says that the wisdom of the world is folly.

6. **What did the false witnesses accuse Stephen of? Why did they choose this to accuse him of?**

They accused him of speaking against Moses and God. They said that Stephen never stopped speaking against "this holy place" (probably the Temple) and the law. The Jews venerated Moses and they knew that the law had been God's gift to them (though now God had given them something much better in Christ). By telling the Jews that Stephen taught against what they held dear, they hoped to discredit him and his teaching in their eyes.

7. **How did Stephen defend himself to the Sanhedrin? Why do you think he chose this to give a speech on? What did Stephen accuse his opponents of?**

Stephen spoke on the history of God's dealings with Israel (from the time of Abraham to the time of the Babylonian exile). This showed that he knew the Scriptures well and that what he was saying was from those Scriptures. This showed that Stephen did not speak against Moses and God as his opponents were saying. Stephen turned the tables and showed that it was in fact the Israelites who had frequently opposed Moses and God. He accused his opponents of being just like those Israelites who had persecuted the prophets, for now they were persecuting the Messiah that the prophets had spoken about.

8. **Why would Stephen ask God not to "hold this sin against" his murderers?**

He was simply following the example of his Saviour, Jesus. Perhaps he still hoped they would see the truth. In fact, Saul did change and become a Christian.

9. **What did Stephen's life accomplish for God's purposes?**

The power of his witness inspired a great persecution to break out. This scattered the believers out of Jerusalem and northward into Samaria, Syria (the cities of Damascus and Antioch), and Cyprus (see map). Wherever the believers fled, they took the gospel with them, and started small house churches. Although Saul was a leading persecutor, the memory of Stephen must have remained in him and goaded him. That prepared him for the later encounter with Jesus when He appeared to Saul (on the road

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to Damascus to arrest Christians there). And Paul would become the apostle who brought the gospel to Asia Minor (Turkey) and Europe.

Elijah and the Contest

1 Kings 17:1-4; 18:1-40; 19:1-17

Background

Baal and Asherah

Baal was the supreme male god in Canaan and Phoenicia. He was a fertility god responsible for earth's crops, supposedly by sending the rain, and he supposedly enabled people to be fertile and produce children. Worship of Baal sometimes involved child sacrifice.

Asherah was the main female goddess in Canaan and Phoenicia. She is the same goddess as Ashtoreth (aka Ishtar, Astarte). She was a goddess of love and war, and worship of her involved divination, and ritual prostitution.

When God withheld the rain from the entire region for three years, he proved that it was He who controlled the rain, not Baal. This is reinforced when God provided the fierce rainstorm following the slaughter of the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

Mount Horeb

Mount Horeb was also known as Mount Sinai, and Mount Paran. When the Israelites were travelling from Egypt to Canaan in the Exodus, Moses struck a rock at Horeb to provide water. Moses climbed Mount Horeb and received the Ten Commandments along with all the laws and commandments that God gave him there for the Israelites to live by.

There are many proposed sites for Mount Horeb. Since it is also called Mount Paran, it is assumed to be in the Wilderness of Paran. It would help to know the route of the Exodus, but that is much debated as well.

Some locate Mount Horeb to the west of the Gulf of Aqaba in the Sinai Peninsula; others to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba in Saudi Arabia.

The Wicked Kings of the Northern Kingdom

Israel split apart during the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon - and grandson of King David, of the tribe of Judah.

When Solomon was on the throne, he taxed the 12 tribes heavily, causing resentment. Solomon married many pagan women and he served and worshipped their gods - in direct disobedience to God. Although Solomon had started out well, God told Solomon

Chapter Five: Trusting God in Difficult Circumstances

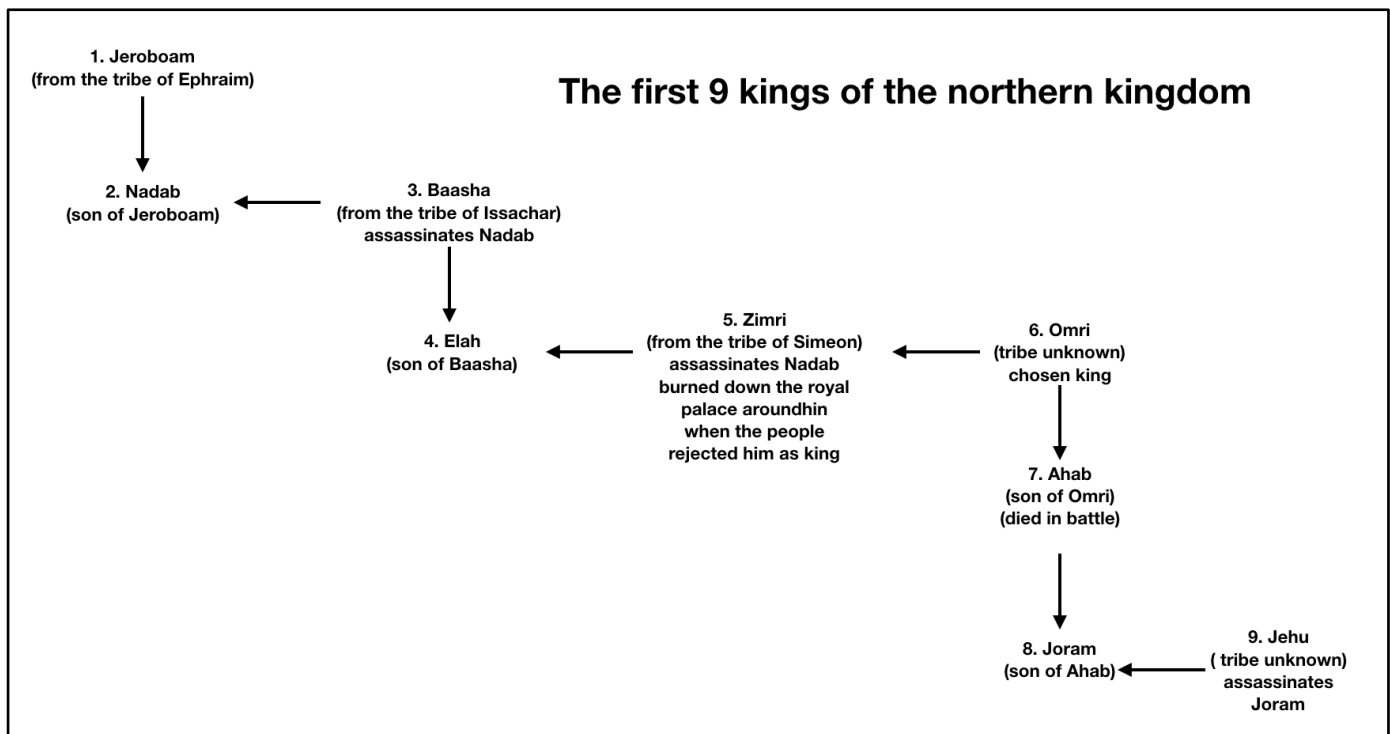
5.1 Elijah and the Contest

bluntly that because of this worship of other gods, He would tear the kingdom away from Solomon and give it to one of his subordinates.

Jeroboam, from the tribe of Ephraim, was an official of high standing in Solomon's eyes. When Jeroboam was off alone on a journey from Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah met up with him. He said God would take ten tribes from Solomon and make Jeroboam their king. God promised Jeroboam that if he would walk in obedience to Him and do what was right, He would be with him and build an enduring dynasty for him.

When Solomon found out about this, he tried to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam fled to Egypt. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam inherited the throne, the ten tribes sent for Jeroboam. They then asked Rehoboam for relief from the taxes, but Rehoboam answered harshly and said he would increase their burden. The ten tribes then made Jeroboam their king and broke away in a civil war.

Jeroboam's first act was to make two golden calves for his people to worship, and to stop all pilgrimages to Jerusalem. His son (Nadab) who succeeded him was wicked as well. All of the northern kingdom's kings were wicked, and their history was one of continuous turnover, usually by assassination. The first five dynasties of northern kings are shown below.



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Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, had become king of Sidon (Phoenicia) after assassinating the previous Sidonian king.

The southern kingdom of Judah retained Rehoboam, David's grandson, as king. From the time of David to the time of the return from Babylonian exile, Judah kept an unbroken line of kings from the Davidic dynasty.

Before You Read: Tell about the most exciting contest you have seen, either in sports, school or the workplace. What did the contest prove?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about what a contest is and what it might prove. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Change these False sentences to be True:

1. Ahab was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah.
Ahab was the king of the northern kingdom of Israel
2. Jezebel worshipped the God of Israel.
Jezebel worshipped Asherah and Baal
3. Baal stopped the dew and rain for three years.
God stopped the dew and rain for three years
4. Ahab asked Elijah to hold a sacrifice to Baal on Mount Carmel.
Elijah told Ahab to gather all the people on Mount Carmel.
5. Ahab respected Elijah because he was God's prophet.
Ahab hated Elijah because he was God's prophet.
6. Baal answered his prophets by lighting the fire.
God answered Elijah by burning up the bull, wood, altar and water.
7. The prophets of Baal thought that offering gold would please him.

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The prophets of Baal thought that dancing and cutting themselves with swords and spears would please him.

8. It rained because the people believed that God was most powerful.
It rained because Elijah prayed.

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| __h__ 1. dew | a. affect in a certain direction |
| __f__ 2. trouble | b. a ditch; a long narrow channel dug in the ground |
| __i__ 3. tease | c. gift of something valuable to God |
| __a__ 4. influence | d. table for worship |
| __g__ 5. drought | e. vehicle with 2 wheels |
| __b__ 6. trench | f. problems or difficulties |
| __d__ 7. altar | g. no rain to grow things |
| __c__ 8. sacrifice | h. small drops of water that form on grass and leaves in the morning |
| __e__ 9. chariot | i. make fun of someone |

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above.

1. It was Ahab who caused ___trouble___ in Israel because he was worshipping Baal.
2. Ahab and Jezebel ___influenced___ many people to worship Baal.
3. Elijah dug a ___trench___ around his altar.
4. There was a ___drought___ for three years because God stopped the ___dew___ and the rain.
5. Elijah offered a bull as a ___sacrifice___ on the ___altar___.
6. When Baal did not answer the people's cries, Elijah ___teased___ them.
7. King Ahab rode in a ___chariot___ pulled by horses.

Re-tell the Story

- A. Ahab, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel (also called Samaria), and his wife, Jezebel chose to worship the god Baal. Because of this, many people in the northern kingdom were influenced to also worshipped Baal.
- B. The prophet Elijah told king Ahab that there would be no dew or rain in the northern kingdom for the next few years. Elijah said there would be no rain until he said so.
- C. For three years there was no rain. (During that time Jezebel tried to kill all the prophets of the God of Israel.), Ahab and Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah. But they could not find him. searched every nation and kingdom for Elijah.
- D. Elijah came to Ahab and told him to send for all the people of Israel and 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah said to have them meet him on Mount Carmel. He had the prophets of Baal choose a bull, sacrifice it and put it on their altar to Baal. He told the prophets of Baal to pray to Baal to send fire from heaven and burn the sacrifice. Elijah told the people that he would also build an altar and ask the God of Israel to send fire from heaven and burn his sacrifice. Elijah told the people that the god who sent the fire was the one and only God.
- E. The prophets of Baal danced around their altar and called to Baal from morning until noon. They cut themselves with swords and spears and continued calling on Baal until evening. But Baal didn't answer.
- F. Elijah called the people to come to him. He repaired an old altar to God and rebuilt it with 12 stones - one for each tribe of Israel. He put his sacrificed bull on the altar. He dug a trench around the altar.
- G. Elijah asked the people to fill four large jars with water and pour the water over his sacrifice and the altar - and to do this three times.
- H. When it was time for the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed and asked God to let everyone know that He was the God of Israel so that they might turn their hearts to him. God sent down fire and it burned up the sacrifice, the wood and the stones, and all the water in the trench.
- I. After Elijah prayed, the skies turned black, and there was a huge rainstorm that brought rain to the northern kingdom.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. Who was Ahab? Who was Jezebel?

Ahab was the (seventh) king of the northern kingdom of Israel. He was a wicked king. Jezebel was his wife. They both influenced the people to worship Baal and disobey God.

2. What was Baal? What did the people think Baal could do?

Baal was a false god (he was worshipped by the people of Sidon where Jezebel was from, he was also worshipped by the Canaanites). People thought that he was the god who brought the rain and the dew, and so enabled crops to grow.

3. Why do you think Elijah told Ahab that God would stop the rain and dew?

This was to show the Israelites that God was in control of the rain and dew, not Baal. And it was to discipline them (and especially Ahab) for worshipping and serving Baal.

4. Why did Ahab and Jezebel want to kill Elijah?

Elijah was proving God's power over their god, Baal. This insulted their god and in so doing diminished their status. I Kings 18:4 says that Jezebel killed as many of the prophets of God as she could find, and that Ahab searched all of the northern kingdom and the neighbouring kingdoms as well trying to get Elijah.

5. How many prophets of Baal and Asherah (the goddess who was Baal's mother) came to Mount Carmel and called on Baal?

450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (Baal's mother, who was a goddess) came to Mount Carmel.

6. How many prophets of God were on Mount Carmel to call on God?

It appears that there was only Elijah there, for there is no mention in the story of any other prophets of God being in attendance. Jezebel had succeeded in killing so many of them, that the remaining prophets may have still been in hiding. Elijah believed he was the only prophet that was left still alive. (In the full Bible text from these passages in I Kings, we learn that 100 were in hiding.)

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5.1 Elijah and the Contest

7. **What did Elijah tell the prophets of Baal to do?**

He told them to prepare their altar to Baal by piling wood on it, choose their bull, cut it up in pieces and place the pieces on the wood. Then they were to call on their god, Baal, to send down fire to ignite the wood.

8. **How did Elijah tease the prophets of Baal?**

Elijah told them to consider that Baal's delay in responding to them could be because he was deep in thought, on the toilet, away on a trip, or sleeping - so he told them to shout louder so they could wake him up. Elijah knew that Baal was nothing more than an idol, and that the extreme efforts of the prophets of Baal would have no effect. He wasn't mocking them but their false god. In the Bible, God gives short shrift to idols and falsehoods.

9. **How did Elijah prepare the altar of God?**

He took 12 stones, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and used them to repair the altar. He put a pile of wood on the stones, then cut up the other bull and put it on the wood. Then he dug a trench around the altar. Lastly, he poured water over the altar, until the trench was full.

10. **Why did the people now say that the Lord is God?**

They saw the evidence right in front of them; the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah spent the day calling to Baal and cutting themselves to impress Baal; but their god didn't answer them. One prophet of God (Elijah) said a simple prayer, and his God answered immediately.

11. **Why would Elijah order the prophets of Baal and Asherah to be killed?**

He knew that they were an evil influence in the nation and so very dangerous to have around. (Prostitution was part of Asherah worship, and child sacrifice was part of Baal worship.) Killing these leaders was also an attack on Jezebel's influence and power.

- ***Intermediate***

1. **Who were Ahab and Jezebel? Were they well suited for each other?**

Ahab was the wicked king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jezebel was his wife (and a leader in Baal and Asherah worship.) They were both evil, so they would have been birds of a feather who flock together.

2. **What was Baal? What did the people think Baal could do? Why did they leave serving God for serving Baal?**

Baal was a false god (he was worshipped by the people of Sidon where Jezebel was from and also worshipped by the Canaanites). People thought

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that he was the god who brought the rain and the dew, and so enabled crops to grow.

The people followed the example of their king and queen. (But they also were probably enamoured with a false idol who did not demand righteousness from them, as God did.)

3. **Why did Elijah tell Ahab that God would specifically stop the rain and dew?**
This was to show the Israelites that God was in control of the rain and dew, not Baal. The ensuing drought would discipline them (and especially Ahab) for worshipping and serving Baal.

4. **1 Kings 18:4 says, "Ahab's wife Jezebel had been killing off the LORD's prophets. So Obadiah (a servant of Ahab, but a worshipper of God) had hidden 100 prophets in two caves. He had put 50 in each cave. He had supplied them with food and water." Why do you think Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah and the other prophets?**

Ahab and Jezebel had become enemies of God by worshipping idols. Jezebel killed as many of the prophets of God as she could find. Ahab probably didn't know who Elijah was at first, but he blamed Elijah for the drought, and he wanted him dead. The drought showed that it was God, not Baal, who controlled the rain and dew; this showed Baal to be a false god, and called into question Ahab and Jezebel's position as leaders of the people.

5. **How many prophets of Baal and Asherah (the goddess who was Baal's mother) came to Mount Carmel and called on Baal? How had the worship of Baal spread so quickly?**

450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (Baal's mother, who was a goddess) came to Mount Carmel.

The northern kingdom had long ago abandoned their own God, and had readily accepted new, false gods. (They had accepted false gods from the time of their first king.)

6. **How many prophets of God were on Mount Carmel to call on God? Why weren't there more prophets of God there?**

It appears that there was only Elijah there, for there is no mention in the story of any other prophets of God being in attendance.

Jezebel had succeeded in killing so many of them during the time of the drought, that the remaining prophets may have still been in hiding. Elijah believed he was the only prophet that was left still alive. (In the full Bible text from these passages in I Kings, we learn that several were in hiding.)

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7. **What did Elijah tell the prophets of Baal to do? How did these prophets call on their god?**

He told them to prepare their altar to Baal by piling wood on it. Then they were to take the bull they'd selected and prepare it by cutting it up in pieces and placing the pieces on the wood. Then they were to call on their god, Baal, to send down fire to ignite the wood.

They called on Baal from morning until noon, then they danced around the altar; they cut themselves with knives and swords; and they raved from the afternoon until the evening.

8. **Why did Elijah tease the prophets of Baal? Do you think it's okay to mock a false god in front of those who worship that god?**

Elijah knew that Baal was nothing more than an idol, and that the extreme efforts of the prophets of Baal would have no effect. He wasn't mocking them but their false god. In the Bible, God gives short shrift to idols and falsehoods.

Answers will vary on whether it's okay to mock a false god to its believers. Although our society would frown on this, we follow God, not our society. However, God leads in different ways: here Elijah mocks Baal, but in Acts Paul uses the worship of a pantheon of false gods as a jumping off point to introduce the gospel He tells the Athenians, "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship - and this is what I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23). (Note however, that Paul doesn't commend their religiousness, he merely uses it as a tool for the gospel.)

9. **How did Elijah prepare the altar of God? Why did he prepare it this way?**

He took 12 stones, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and used them to repair the altar. He put a pile of wood on the stones, then cut up the other bull and put it on the wood. Then he dug a trench around the altar. Lastly, he poured water over the altar, until the trench was full.

This way Elijah could not be accused of lighting the fire himself; nor could anyone else. Nor could it light by natural causes, for it was soaking wet. It could only be set on fire if God showed His power.

Chapter Five: Trusting God in Difficult Circumstances

5.1 Elijah and the Contest

10. **Why did the people now say that the Lord is God?**

They saw the evidence right in front of them; the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah spent the day calling to Baal and cutting themselves to impress Baal; but their god didn't answer them. One prophet of God (Elijah) said a simple prayer, and his God answered immediately.

11. **Why would Elijah order the prophets of Baal and Asherah to be killed?**

He knew that they were an evil influence in the nation and very dangerous to have around. Prostitution was part of Asherah worship, and child sacrifice was part of Baal worship. Killing these leaders was also an attack on Jezebel's influence and power.

- ***Challenging***

1. **Who were Ahab and Jezebel? How were they alike?**

Ahab was the (seventh) king of the northern kingdom of Israel. He was a wicked king and Jezebel was his wife (and a leader in Asherah and Baal worship. She supported those false prophets directly.) They were both evil, and from evil families, so they would have been birds of a feather who flock together.

2. **What was Baal and what was he supposedly able to control? Why were the people of the northern kingdom enamored with Baal?**

The people of the northern kingdom had stopped serving God in the time of their first king. Since people thought that Baal was the god who brought the rain and the dew, and so enabled crops to grow, they may have thought this was a god they needed in a dry country (Israel was dependent on rainfall for water).

And the people followed the example of their king and queen. (And they also were probably enamored with a false idol who did not demand righteousness from them, as God did.)

3. **Why did Elijah tell Ahab that God would specifically stop the rain and dew?**

This was to show the Israelites that God was in control of the rain and dew, not Baal. The ensuing drought would discipline them (and especially Ahab) for worshipping and serving Baal.

4. **1 Kings 18:4 says, "Ahab's wife Jezebel had been killing off the LORD's prophets. So Obadiah (a servant of Ahab, but a worshipper of God) had hidden 100 prophets in two caves. He had put 50 in each cave. He had supplied**

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them with food and water." Why do you think Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah and the other prophets?

Ahab and Jezebel had become enemies of God by worshipping idols. Jezebel killed as many of the prophets of God as she could find. Ahab probably didn't know who Elijah was at first, but he blamed Elijah for the drought, and he wanted him dead. Elijah showed the entire kingdom that it was God, not Baal, who controlled the rain and dew; this diminished Ahab and Jezebel's prestige in the eyes of the people.

5. How many prophets of Baal and Asherah came to Mount Carmel and called on Baal? How many prophets of God were on Mount Carmel to call on God? Why weren't there more prophets of God there?

450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (Baal's mother, who was a goddess) came to Mount Carmel.

It appears that there was only Elijah there representing the prophets of God. There is no mention in the story of any other prophets of God being in attendance. Jezebel had succeeded in killing so many of them during the time of the drought, that the remaining prophets may have still been in hiding. Elijah believed he was the only prophet that was left still alive. (In the full Bible text from these passages in I Kings, we learn that 100 prophets were in hiding (18:4).)

6. How did the prophets of Baal call on their god? How did Elijah call on his God?

They called on Baal from morning until noon, then they danced around the altar; they cut themselves with knives and swords; and they prophesized from the afternoon until the evening.

Elijah said a short, simple prayer. He acknowledged who God is and asked Him to prove He was God and that he (Elijah) was his servant - so that the people would know that He is God, and that He will perform this miracle to bring the people back to Himself.

7. Why did Elijah tease the prophets of Baal? Do you think it's okay to mock a false god in front of those who worship that god?

Elijah knew that Baal was nothing more than an idol, and that the extreme efforts of the prophets of Baal would have no effect. He wasn't mocking them but their false god. In the Bible, God gives short shrift to idols and falsehoods.

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Answers will vary on whether it's okay to mock a false god to its believers. Although our society would frown on this, we follow God, not our society. However, God leads in different ways: here Elijah mocks Baal, but in Acts Paul uses their worship of a pantheon of false gods as a jumping off point to introduce the gospel He tells the Athenians, "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship - and this is what I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23). (Note however, that Paul doesn't commend their religiousness, he merely uses it as a tool for the gospel.)

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This way Elijah could not be accused of lighting the fire himself; nor could anyone else. Nor could it light by natural causes, for it was soaking wet. It could only be set on fire if God showed His power.

9. Do you think that the people were convinced that the Lord is God?

The people were convinced - at least for the moment. They were convinced enough to allow the killing of the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

They were convinced because they saw the evidence right in front of them; the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah spent the day calling to Baal and cutting themselves to impress Baal; but their god didn't answer them; yet when one prophet of God (Elijah) said a simple prayer, his God answered immediately.

10. Why would Elijah order the prophets of Baal and Asherah to be killed?

He knew that they were an evil influence in the nation and very dangerous to have around. (Prostitution was part of Asherah worship, and child sacrifice was part of Baal worship.) Killing these leaders was also an attack on Jezebel's influence and power.

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel 6:1-28

Background:

Timeline

627 BC	The prophet Jeremiah begins to warn the people of Judah about the 70-year exile in Babylon, the coming of the Messiah and his death	Jeremiah
605 BC	Babylon conquers Judah and begins the exile of the Jews to Babylon	2 Kings, Daniel
605 BC	Daniel begins to prophesy in Babylon	Daniel
593 BC	Ezekiel begins to prophesy in Babylon	Ezekiel
539 BC	The Persian Empire conquers the Babylonian Empire	Daniel

Daniel and the Babylonian exile

The Babylonian Conquest of Judah and Exile of the Jews

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, conquered Jerusalem. About one hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had warned King Hezekiah of Judah about this. Isaiah wrote, *"The time is coming when everything in your palace - all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now - will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left," says the Lord. "Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king."* (Isaiah 39:6). (NLT) But Hezekiah, and the kings that followed him, were indifferent to Isaiah's warning.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-Nego in Babylon

Daniel, and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were all from royal families. They would have been young teenagers when they were seized by Nebuchadnezzar's army and taken to Babylon. There they were made into eunuchs, immersed in the training of Babylon, given Babylonian names, and then put into service in the royal court.

These four young men all took a vow that despite what had happened to them, they would serve their God faithfully. Their refusal to serve the Babylonian gods got them

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

into trouble. Hananiah, Misahel, and Azariah (now called by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) were thrown into the fiery furnace; Daniel (now called by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar) was thrown into the lions' den. But God miraculously protected each of them from being harmed.

God gave great aptitude to each of these four young men, and all of them ended up in prominent government positions.

Daniel interprets dreams and signs from God

God also gave Daniel the ability to understand and interpret dreams. When Daniel was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar both the content and the meaning of his "dream of the statue", Nebuchadnezzar made him prime minister over Babylon. (Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the four beasts was a prophetic dream of four Gentile empires that would rule over the region - and Daniel's people - from the time of Babylon to the coming of the Messiah.)

Daniel also interpreted the "writing on the wall" for Belshazzar, the drunken and last king of the Babylonian Empire. Daniel witnessed the conquest of the city of Babylon by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 539 B.C. Daniel then served Darius the Mede, the governor that Cyrus placed over Babylon. (Some scholars think that Darius may have been a title for an official known as Gubaru in ancient documents.)

The destruction of Jerusalem

The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah were contemporaries of Daniel. Jeremiah had warned the people of Judah to submit to Babylonian rule, but they continually rebelled. Nebuchadnezzar returned twice with his army to quell the Jewish rebellion (in 597 B.C., and again in 586 B.C.). By the end of this, the Babylonians had demolished Jerusalem's walls, Solomon's Temple, and the royal palace. The people of Jerusalem were either killed or taken to Babylon; only a few farmers and vineyard workers were left behind to keep the land productive.

The return from Babylonian exile

The prophet Jeremiah also said that the exile to Babylon would last 70 years. Daniel studied Jeremiah's writings, prayed for this return, and lived to see it. (Only a small percentage of the exiled Jews were willing to return the 1000 km to Jerusalem and rebuild the city from its rubble.) Daniel was an old man by the time of the return, and he remained in Persia. He is still venerated in Iran to this day.

References to Daniel in other books of the Bible

Ezekiel, Daniel's contemporary, wrote of Daniel (Ezekiel 14:12-14). The writer of Hebrews alluded to Daniel when he wrote of "...the prophets: who through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions" (Hebrews 11:32, 33). Jesus spoke of Daniel by name, validating him as the author of the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15,16).

Before You Read: What is the greatest rescue you have ever heard about or have ever experienced yourself?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about impossible situations and God's hand in them. (Even those who do not know God may have a sense of divine intervention.) Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

True or False

1. Daniel was from Jerusalem. T
2. Darius was king of Babylon. F
3. Daniel was wise and had good judgment. T
4. Darius made Daniel a governor. T
5. The administrators and high officers were happy for Daniel's success. F
6. Darius was angry with Daniel and wanted him killed. F
7. Darius hoped that Daniel's God would save him. T
8. The lions did not touch Daniel. T
9. Darius did not believe in Daniel's God. F

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ___f___1. youths | a. accuse of breaking a law |
| ___h___2. accountable to
(someone) | b. even though |
| ___a___3. bring charges
against | c. place where wild animals live |
| ___c___4. den | d. a name of respect for a king or queen |
| ___g___5. wound | e. hurt |
| ___b___6. in spite of | f. young people |
| ___e___7. harm | g. an injury caused by a cut or blow |
| ___d___8. Your Majesty | h. under (someone's) authority |

Fill in the Blanks with the vocabulary words above

1. There are many ___youths___ on the high school soccer team.
2. Daniel could not be taken out of the lions' ___den___ until morning, but he had no ___wounds___ because he was not ___harmed___ by them.
3. Daniel continued to pray to God ___in spite of___ knowing he could be killed.
4. The royal rulers ___brought charges against___ Daniel because they did not want to be ___accountable to___ him.
5. If Queen Elizabeth II came to visit our class, we would call her "___Your Majesty___".

Re-tell the Story

- A. Darius was so pleased with Daniel's abilities that he made Daniel the head of all his administrators and royal rulers in the kingdom of Babylon. The other administrators and some of the high officers in Babylon resented Daniel because of this.
- B. It was Daniel's custom to go up to the roof of his house three times a day and pray and ask God for help.

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- C. The resentful administrators went to Darius. They told him that Daniel was showing disrespect for Darius by praying to his own God and not to Darius. (They had tricked Darius into passing a law that said everyone must pray to him and only him for one month.) They reminded Darius that a Persian law could not be revoked, and that Daniel's punishment was to be thrown into the lion's den.
- D. Darius tried for the rest of the day to find a way to save Daniel, but he couldn't find a way to do this. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den.
- E. The king couldn't eat or sleep that night. As soon as the sun began to come up, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.
- F. The king called out to Daniel and asked if God had been able to save him from the lions. Daniel said, "Your Majesty, may you live forever!". He told Darius that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions and that they hadn't hurt him at all. Daniel said God did this because he hadn't done anything wrong in God's sight. He told Darius that he had never done anything wrong to him either.
- Darius had Daniel released, and the plotters thrown into the lions' den along with their families; the lions killed them. Darius then wrote to all the people in Babylon to respect and honor Daniel's God, and he praised Him.

Discussion

- *Easier*
 1. Look at the map. How big was the Persian Empire?
It extended from eastern Europe to China, and from Russia to halfway down into Egypt.
 2. How did Darius organize the government of his kingdom?
He divided the region (the Babylonian Empire) into 120 provinces, each with its own ruling official. These officials then reported to three administrators.
 3. Why did Darius want to place Daniel over the other royal rulers?
He was impressed with Daniel's great ability (and Daniel had previously served Babylon as a prime minister, so he was very experienced).
 4. How did Daniel pray? How often did Daniel pray?
He went to a room on his rooftop, faced Jerusalem and prayed three times a day.

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(1 Kings 8:3 says, "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place." It was also Jewish custom to pray three times daily: morning, afternoon, and evening prayer - in connection with the three daily sacrifices in the Temple. King David said he prayed "evening, morning, and afternoon" (Psalm 55:17). Although this habit of prayer was voluntary in Daniel's time, the Great Assembly (the ruling Jewish religious leaders) made this a duty in Jewish life after the return from Babylon.)

5. What new law did the leaders and rulers want Darius to make?

They wanted the people to pretend that Darius was a god and offer their prayers - probably requests and praise - to Darius (actually only for one month as a type of tribute to him - but that was enough time to bring charges against Daniel). If any person refused to pray to Darius or prayed to any god other than Darius, they would undergo capital punishment (refusing to do this would probably be seen as treasonous refusal acknowledge Persian rule). In this case the capital punishment was to be thrown into a den of lions.

6. Why do you think Darius signed this new law?

Darius may have liked the idea of being treated as a god for one month. (This would also be a way of encouraging the people of the former Babylonian Empire to acknowledge the authority of Persian rule. That may have been what persuaded Darius to accept this suggestion.)

7. Why was Daniel thrown in the lions' den?

The law said that the people of Babylon could only offer their prayers to Darius. If they prayed to anyone else, they would be thrown to the lions. Daniel continued to pray on his rooftop room to his God.

8. Did Darius want to rescue Daniel? How do you know this?

Yes, when the men demanded Daniel's death under the law, Darius was struggled for the rest of the day trying to find a way to save him. (And he fasted and didn't sleep that night. But the laws of the Medes and Persians were considered to be so binding that even a king couldn't break them. And if Darius was to be considered a god, then he couldn't be seen as having been wrong about any law he wrote; therefore, he could not revoke a law he'd written.)

9. Who did the lions eat?

Darius commanded that the men who had accused Daniel be thrown into the lions' den (along with their wives and children. It was a Persian law that if a

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

man was found guilty and deserving death, his family was killed as well.) (Interestingly, Darius only kills those who brought the accusation, not all the officials who had agreed to ask Darius to pass that law. So many of the officials were probably innocent dupes of the plotters and hadn't realized that the law was just a bait for executing Daniel.)

10. What did Darius learn about Daniel's God?

Darius said that "He is the living God and He will endure forever." He also said that God rescues and saves his people and performs miraculous signs and wonders. He said that God's kingdom would never be destroyed, and his rule will never end.

• *Intermediate*

1. How far did the Persian Empire extend?

It extended from the borders of eastern Europe to the borders of China, and from the borders of Russia to halfway down Egypt. It controlled 7.5 million kilometers of territory and was considered the most powerful empire of its time.

2. Describe how Darius organized the government.

He divided the region into 120 provinces, each with its own ruling official. These officials then reported to three administrators.

3. Why did Darius choose Daniel to oversee the other royal rulers?

He was impressed with Daniel's great ability. Daniel had previously served Babylon as a government advisor, so he was very experienced. Nebuchadnezzar had been impressed with him as well. (Nebuchadnezzar had found him better than all his other advisors.)

4. Describe how Daniel said prayers.

He went to a room on his rooftop, looked out a window that faced Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day.

(1 Kings 8:3 says, "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place." It was also Jewish custom to pray three times daily: morning, afternoon, and evening prayer - in connection with the three daily sacrifices in the Temple. King David said he prayed "evening, morning, and afternoon" (Psalm 55:17). Although this habit of prayer was voluntary in Daniel's time, the Great Assembly (the ruling Jewish religious leaders) made this a duty in Jewish life after the return from Babylon.)

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

5. Why did the other administrators resent Daniel?

They were probably jealous of Daniel. They probably wanted that honour for themselves. Also, Daniel was not a native Babylonian, he was one of the Jewish exiles, and although he had served the Babylonian kings faithfully, he was still considered as an outsider; Daniel didn't honour Babylonian gods and didn't join in Babylonian feasts. And Daniel was probably in his eighties by then, so they may have thought the job should go to a younger man.

6. What did the people of Babylon have to do to show honour to Darius?

They had to pretend that Darius was a god and offer their prayers - probably requests and praise - to Darius (actually just for one month as a tribute, but this was long enough for them to have Daniel killed). If people refused to pray to Darius or prayed to any other god, they would undergo capital punishment (refusing to do this would probably be seen as treasonous refusal acknowledge Persian rule). In this case the capital punishment was to be thrown into a den of lions.

7. Why do people 'fast', or go without food? Why do you think Darius went without food, enjoyment or sleep?

Fasting is one way people appeal to God. When the men demanded Daniel's death under the law, Darius struggled for the rest of the day trying to find a way to save him. And he fasted that night - perhaps an appeal to his gods or perhaps even to Daniel's God. (But the laws of the Medes and Persians were considered to be so binding that even a king couldn't break them. And if Darius was to be considered a god, then he couldn't be seen as having been wrong about any law he wrote; therefore, he could not revoke a law he'd written.)

8. What did Darius say to Daniel when he went into the lion's den? What does this show about Darius?

When Daniel was about to be thrown into the lions' den, Darius said, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you" (v. 16).

This showed that Darius respected Daniel's faith, Daniel's service to his God, and Daniel's God.

9. What did Darius do first thing in the morning? What was he hoping for?

First thing in the morning, he hurried to the lions' den and asked Daniel if his God was able to rescue him.

Darius was hoping that Daniel's God had rescued him. (Darius had no hope in men to rescue Daniel, for Darius was king and yet could not rescue him. And

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Darius may have prayed to his nations' gods for rescue, so he knew they couldn't rescue either. So, Daniel's God was his only hope.)

10. What happened to those who had plotted against Daniel? Do you think this was a just punishment?

They were thrown into the lions' den (along with their wives and children. In Persian law, this was the customary way of dealing with those who committed crimes worthy of capital punishment.) The plotters would have been aware of that law and had been willing to take that risk. Daniel was Darius' governor, so plotting to kill Daniel was an act of treason against Persia. Proverbs 26:27 says, "If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead" (NLT).

11. What did Darius say about Daniel's God?

Darius said that "He is the living God and He will endure forever." He also said that God rescues and saves his people and performs miraculous signs and wonders. He said that God's kingdom would never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. (This makes you wonder if Darius had saving faith.)

- *Challenging*

1. How far did the Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great extend? Do you think an army of that time would be able to control such a large area?

It extended from the borders of eastern Europe to the borders of China, and from the borders of Russia to halfway down Egypt. It controlled 7.5 million kilometers of territory. Although it was considered the most powerful empire of its time, it must have been difficult to rule over. Alexander the Great of the Macedo-Greek Empire had no problem conquering it in 334 BC.

2. Describe the government that Darius set over Babylon.

He divided the region into 120 provinces, each with its own ruling official. These officials then reported to three administrators.

3. Why do you think Darius promoted Daniel to such a high position?

He was impressed with Daniel's great ability. Daniel had previously served Babylon as a government advisor, so he was very experienced. Nebuchadnezzar had been impressed with him as well. (Nebuchadnezzar had found him better than all his other advisors.)

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

4. Describe how Daniel said prayers. Why do you think he prayed this way?

He went to a room on his rooftop, looked out a window that faced Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day.

(1 Kings 8:3 says, "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place." It was also Jewish custom to pray three times daily: morning, afternoon, and evening prayer - in connection with the three daily sacrifices in the Temple. King David said he prayed "evening, morning, and afternoon" (Psalm 55:17). Although this habit of prayer was voluntary in Daniel's time, the Great Assembly (the ruling Jewish religious leaders) made this a duty in Jewish life after the return from Babylon.)

5. Why did the other administrators resent Daniel? How did they try to remove him from office?

They were probably jealous of Daniel. They probably wanted that honour for themselves. Also, Daniel was not a native Babylonian, he was one of the Jewish exiles, and although he had served the Babylonian kings faithfully, he was still considered as an outsider; Daniel didn't honour Babylonian gods and didn't join in Babylonian feasts. And Daniel was probably in his eighties by then, so they may have thought the job should go to a younger man.

6. What did the people of Babylon have to do to show honour to Darius? Do you think the people would have agreed to do this?

They had to pretend that Darius was a god and offer their prayers - probably requests and praise - to Darius (actually just for one month as a tribute). If they refused to pray to Darius or prayed to any other god during this time, they would undergo capital punishment. The people probably had to obey as refusing to do this would probably be seen as treasonous refusal acknowledge Persian rule. And since the Babylonians worshipped many gods anyways, they probably were accepting of this, (especially since it was only for one month).

7. How hard did Darius try to keep Daniel from being thrown to the lions? Why was he unsuccessful?

When the men demanded Daniel's death under the law, Darius struggled for the rest of the day trying to find a way to save him. And he fasted that night - perhaps an appeal to his gods or perhaps even to Daniel's God.

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5.2 Daniel in the Lions' Den

The laws of the Medes and Persians were considered to be so binding that even a king couldn't break them. (And if Darius was to be considered a god, then he couldn't be seen as having been wrong about any law he wrote.)

8. **What did Darius say to Daniel when the men were about to throw Daniel to the lions? Why would Darius say this?**

When Daniel was about to be thrown into the lions' den, Darius said, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you" (v. 16).

Darius had nothing else to rely on except Daniel's God. Darius was king, and yet was unable to save him - so he knew that no man could save him. At no point does Darius call out to a Babylonian or Persian god - so he knew they couldn't save Daniel. Darius respected Daniel, and so he must have come to respect Daniel's God.

9. **How was Darius affected by what was done to Daniel? What did he do first thing in the morning? Do you think it was reasonable for Darius to hope that Daniel survived?**

Darius was in anguish. He spent the night fasting. He refused all entertainment. He couldn't sleep all night.

First thing in the morning, he hurried to the lions' den and asked Daniel if his God was able to rescue him.

This was reasonable because Darius knew that Daniel was reasonable. The Bible says that Daniel had great understanding and judgment. Therefore, Darius would have to conclude that Daniel's faith in his God must be reasonable. Darius said that Daniel served his God faithfully. Therefore, Darius was justified in hoping that Daniel's God would rescue him.

10. **What happened to those who had plotted against Daniel? Do you think this was a just punishment?**

They were thrown into the lions' den (along with their wives and children). In Persian law, this was the customary way of dealing with those who committed crimes worthy of capital punishment. The plotters would have been aware of that law and had been willing to take that risk. Daniel was Darius' prime minister, so plotting to kill Daniel was an act of treason against Persia. Proverbs 26:27 says, "If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead" (NLT).

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11. How did Darius honour Daniel's God? Do you think Darius had faith in God? What do you think Daniel may have thought of the experience?

Darius said that "He is the living God and He will endure forever." He also said that God rescues and saves his people and performs miraculous signs and wonders. He said that God's kingdom would never be destroyed, and his rule will never end.

It looks as if Darius may have had saving faith. He had faith in God's character, and he had faith that God existed. He had some trust that God would rescue Daniel from the lions. Gotquestions.com says that there is a series of tests in 1 John that help us know if someone is truly "in the faith." A few of these are below:

- Enjoying fellowship with Christ and other Christians
- Admitting and confessing your sin
- Being obedient to God's word
- Seeking to do what is right; maintaining a clear conscience

We don't see Darius confessing his sin in the book of Daniel. But he may have done this later in his life.

In Daniel 10:11, God's messenger tells Daniel that he is highly esteemed. Daniel exhibited peace when thrown to the lions. He was not bitter towards Darius. God had given Daniel many prophecies concerning the near and distant future. Daniel may not have understood all that was happening to him, but he would have trusted that it was for God's glory.

Peter and John in Prison

Acts 4:13-21; 5:12-42

Background:

First Century Prisons

Derek Jeter writes in his article, "Doing Time in a First Century Prison":

The Mamertine Prison in Rome could have been called the "House of Darkness." Few prisons were as dim, dank, and dirty as the lower chamber Paul occupied. Known in earlier times as the Tullianum dungeon, its "neglect, darkness, and stench" gave it "a hideous and terrifying appearance," according to Roman historian Sallust.¹

It sounds like sufficient punishment to spend any amount of time in Mamertine, but prisoners in the ancient world were rarely sent to prison as punishment. Rather, prisons typically served as holding cells for those awaiting trial or execution. We see this throughout Scripture. Mosaic Law made no provision for incarceration as a form of punishment. Jeremiah was imprisoned under accusation of treason (Jeremiah 37:11-16) but was transferred to the temple guardhouse after an appeal to King Zedekiah, who sought to protect the prophet (37:17-21). And though Jeremiah was later thrown into a cistern, the purpose was to kill him, not imprison him (38:1-6). Even Jesus temporarily endured incarceration just before His trials and execution.

<https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/doing-time-in-a-first-century-prison>

Before You Read: Was there a time in your life when you had some wonderful news? Who did you tell about it first?

The purpose of this question is to get people thinking about the excitement of sharing wonderful news and hopefully engendering some empathy with the disciples who were told to shut up. Feel free to share your own experiences and encourage a few students to do the same. Keep it brief and steer them back to the topic, if they get sidetracked.

'What Do You Think'

This section is for students to speak freely. Not everyone needs to answer all the questions. It is to get them thinking and talking. Steer them back to the story if discussions get sidetracked.

Passage Questions

Choose the best answer:

1. d both a and c
2. d both b and c
3. a the apostles were very popular with the people
4. c were ordinary men with no training
5. b an angel opened the doors and brought them out
6. d all of the above
7. c a & b

Match the following words with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. <u> e </u> proclaiming | a. feeling or knowing you have done something wrong |
| 2. <u> c </u> point of view | b. other people's bad opinion of you |
| 3. <u> d </u> judges | c. way of thinking |
| 4. <u> h </u> arrested | d. authorities who decide if you are guilty |
| 5. <u> f </u> jealous | e. speaking publicly about someone or something |
| 6. <u> j </u> scatter | f. unhappy feeling when someone has what should belong to you |
| 7. <u> a </u> guilty | g. get people to agree with you |
| 8. <u> g </u> win over | h. to be caught by the police |
| 9. <u> i </u> whip | i. hit with a thin object, cutting the skin |
| 10. <u> b </u> shame | j. spread over an area |

Use the words above to complete the following sentences.

1. The apostles were proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah.

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2. The Jewish leadership ___arrested___ the apostles because they were very ___jealous___ of how crowds followed them.
3. The high priests thought the apostles were making them ___guilty___ of shedding Jesus' blood.
4. Peter and John challenged the Sanhedrin to be the ___judges___ of what was right from God's ___point of view___.
5. Gamaliel ___won over___ the religious leaders, when he said that if the apostles were not from God, they would ___scatter___ and accomplish nothing.
6. After the Sanhedrin had ___whipped___ them, the apostles were full of joy, because they considered it an honor to suffer ___shame___ for Jesus name.

Discussion

- *Easier*

1. Why did the Jewish leadership notice Peter and John?
They knew that Peter and John had had something to do with the healing of the beggar man. They were also astonished that Peter and John were untrained, ordinary men and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.
2. Why were they confused about what to do with the apostles?
They could not dispute the healing. They wanted to stop them so that people wouldn't believe in Jesus. But they couldn't decide how to punish them because they knew that all the people were praising God for the miracle.
3. What did the Jewish leadership order them to do?
They warned them to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus.
4. How did Peter and John answer them?
Peter and John said, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."
5. Why were crowds bringing sick people to the apostles?

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People knew that the apostles could heal in Jesus name. (They were even bringing their sick into the streets so that Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by.)

6. **Why did the Sanhedrin arrest the apostles?**

The high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy over their popularity, and perhaps their power.

7. **What happened when the Sanhedrin sent for the apostles to be taken out of jail?**

The officers did not find them there, so they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside."

8. **What did Peter say when he was accused of disobeying the Sanhedrin?**

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than people!"

9. **What was Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin?**

He told them to let Peter and John go because unless their purpose and activity was from God they would fail. But if their purpose and activity is from God, the Sanhedrin would not be able to stop the apostles; they would only find themselves fighting against God.

10. **How did the Sanhedrin treat the apostles?**

They called the apostles in and had them whipped. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

11. **What was the apostles' reaction to this treatment?**

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering shame for Jesus. (It did not stop them from speaking. "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:42).)

• ***Intermediate***

1. **What caused the Jewish leadership to notice Peter and John? What did they realize about the apostles? Why was this unusual?**

They knew that Peter and John had had something to do with the healing of a beggar man. And they could see that they were ordinary men with no

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formal education. Ordinary men did not usually perform miracles- it was the role of prophets and those with special anointing from God. They also knew that Peter and John had been with Jesus. They would have been surprised that Peter and John could continue the miracles after they had Jesus killed.

2. **What did the Jewish leadership order them to do? Why do you think they didn't try to kill the apostles?**

They warned them to speak no longer to anyone in the name of Jesus. Peter and John were extremely popular at this point so any action against them would cause a riot.

3. **How did Peter and John answer them? How did they become so bold?**

Paul and John said "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They knew they were doing what God wanted. They were motivated by their love of Jesus.

4. **Why were crowds bringing sick people to the apostles?**

The people had seen that God was using the apostles to heal people. They were bringing their sick and those suffering from evil spirits.)

5. **Why did the Sanhedrin arrest the apostles? What does this show about the spiritual state of the Jewish leadership?**

The high priest and all his associates were filled with jealousy. The apostles clearly had God's favour which was something they should have had as the spiritual leaders of God's chosen people. They refused to acknowledge that despite their having had Jesus put to death, God was now doing the same miracles through His apostles.

6. **What happened when the Sanhedrin sent for the apostles to be taken out of jail? Why are these details important?**

The officers did not find them there, so they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." The details often indicate a story is true.

7. **What did Peter say when he was accused of disobeying the Sanhedrin? Explain what you think he meant.**

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Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than people!" Peter is implying that he has a direct connection to God and that he is no longer under the authority of the Sanhedrin. (Answers will vary.)

8. What was Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin? How wise, do you think, is his advice?

He told them to let the apostles go because unless their purpose and activity was from God they would fail. But if they were from God, they would not be able to stop these men; they would only find themselves fighting against God. (Answers will vary.)

9. How did the Sanhedrin treat the apostles? Do you think they were being fair?

They called the apostles in and had them whipped. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles had broken no law, so their punishment was unjust and unlawful. The Sanhedrin just wanted to assert their power.

10. What was unusual about the apostle's reaction to this treatment?

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. Acts 5:42 says that day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. They rejoiced in their suffering and didn't stop teaching about Jesus.

• *Challenging*

1. What caused the Jewish leadership to notice Peter and John? What led up to this part of the story? (Read Acts 3) What did they realize about the apostles? Why was this unusual? How does this show the power of the Holy Spirit?

Peter and John had healed a beggar in the name of Jesus and the whole city was in an uproar about it. The beggar was shouting loudly the praises of God. The leaders noted that Peter and John had had something to do with this.

They were astonished that Peter and John were unschooled, ordinary men and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Ordinary men did not usually perform miracles- it was the role of prophets and those with special anointing from God. Peter and John did have a special anointing: the Holy Spirit was available to all those who believe.

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2. What did the Jewish leadership order them to do? Why do you think they didn't try to kill the apostles?

They warned them to speak no longer to anyone in the name of Jesus. Peter and John were extremely popular at this point so any action against them would cause a riot.

3. How did Peter and John answer them? Do you think you could have answered the authorities as boldly as Peter and John? How did they become so bold?

Paul and John said "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They knew they were doing what God wanted. They were motivated by their love of Jesus.

4. Look at Acts 5:15 . The people of Jerusalem brought out their sick when they heard Peter was passing by. Why were they doing this? What did this show about the impact of Peter and John's ministry?

People were bringing their sick into the streets so that Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by. The people had seen that God was using the apostles to heal people. The demonstration of His power confirmed that God's favour was on these men and that their words were true.

5. Why did the Sanhedrin arrest the apostles? What does this show about the spiritual state of the Jewish leadership?

The high priest and all his associates were filled with jealousy. The apostles clearly had God's favour which was something they should have had as leaders of God's chosen people.

6. What happened when the Sanhedrin sent for the apostles to be taken out of jail? Why are these details important? How do details add to the apparent truthfulness of a testimony?

The officers did not find them there, so they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." The details often indicate a story is true.

7. What did Peter say when he was accused of disobeying the Sanhedrin? Explain what you think he meant. Why is that important?

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than people! (Answers will vary.) Peter is implying that he has a direct connection to God through the Holy Spirit. He is very confident of this

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connection. He is also saying that he is no longer under the authority of the Sanhedrin.

8. What was Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin? How wise, do you think, is his advice? Did the Sanhedrin listen to him?

He told them to let them go because unless their purpose and activity was from God they would fail. But if it is from God, they would not be able to stop these men; they would only find themselves fighting against God. (Answers will vary.) They let them go but not without punishing them.

9. How did the Sanhedrin treat the apostles? Do you think they were being fair? How should they have treated the apostles?

They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles had broken no law, so their punishment was unjust and unlawful. The Sanhedrin just wanted to assert their power. They should have left them alone and listened to the message God was giving them.

10. What was unusual about the apostle's reaction to this treatment? Would you have reacted the same way? How does the grace of God figure into this?

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. Acts 5:42 says, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah." They rejoiced in their suffering and didn't stop teaching about Jesus. (Answers will vary.) God gave them the grace to endure and boldness to oppose the authorities and keep obeying Him.

