

The Road to Redemption

Children's Study – Part 2 (Devotions 21-40)

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Children's Study Day 21 - Water from the Rock

Parent Notes

Today's study introduces the Holy Spirit, who is a gift all believers receive through their faith in Jesus. The story of the water from the rock is a 'type', foreshadowing the truth that Jesus had to die (be struck, like Moses struck the rock) but then, the Holy Spirit would come to fill believers with the resources they need for their new life. It's incredible, all the things the Holy Spirit does for us! The entire New Testament is full of instruction and stories of His work in believers' lives!

Story : Water from the Rock (Based on Exodus 17:1-7, John 7:37-38)

The Israelites were not hungry any more - they had all the manna they could eat, each and every day. That didn't help when they were thirsty, though, and water was really hard to find out in the desert. One day, the water ran out and the people started to complain again. "Do you want us to die here?" they yelled at Moses. "You should have left us in Egypt if you were just going to bring us out here where there is no water to drink!" They were so angry that poor Moses thought it might be him they killed! It really wasn't his fault because God was leading the people with his special cloud and fire, but that didn't stop them blaming Moses.

God had a special clue He wanted to leave in the Bible for people in the future to understand, so that is why he gave Moses a strange instruction. He told Moses to take his wooden staff and hit a really big rock with it. Now, if I hit a rock with a stick, I wouldn't expect much to happen, but God did something amazing! He made water gush out, like a water volcano. It wasn't just a little bit, but enough for a million people, and it was fresh and clear. Wow! The Israelites must have been so excited! Water for all of their families, and their animals, too. Do you think they would now trust God the next time they found themselves facing a hard challenge instead of complaining?

I wonder what the special clue was that God had left behind for us? Jesus knew what it was, of course, because he is God's Son. One day, he stood up in the middle of a crowd of people and shouted, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! Then rivers of living water will flow from their heart." He was saying that he was like that rock in the desert, and when Moses had struck it, it showed that Jesus was going to have to die, BUT when he came alive again, he was going to share a special gift with everyone. This gift was like that amazing, clear, fresh, bubbly water that had gushed from the rock. It is the Holy Spirit, and everyone who believes in Jesus is given the Holy Spirit as a special gift.

The Holy Spirit is an amazing helper, who does so many things it's hard to write them all down. One thing he does is help you to pray, and another thing is to help you to understand the Bible. He is sometimes called the 'comforter' which means that he helps you feel calm and takes away your fear. No wonder Jesus said the Holy Spirit was like that rushing, gushing water ... full of life! The Holy Spirit helps us as we wait for our forever life with Jesus in heaven.

I wonder what the next clue about Jesus will be? Isn't it amazing how all of the Bible tells us about Jesus, even before he came to live on Earth?

Questions

1. Why were the Israelites so unhappy?
2. What did God tell Moses to do?
3. What happened when Moses struck the rock?
4. What clue had God left in this story to teach us about Jesus? (Who is the rock? What gift do believers receive that is like the water?)
5. What are some of the things which the Holy Spirit can help you with?
6. Do you think it sounds fun to have 'rivers of living water flow from your heart' like it rushed out of that rock? What do you think that means?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you that you did not leave us alone when you went back to heaven. You left us the Holy Spirit to look after us, to help us to understand the Bible and to pray. That's a wonderful gift! Amen.

Activity

What is something fun you could do with water? Could you have a bubble bath, play on a water slide or drink through a long, curly straw? What else could you do with water that is special, just like the Holy Spirit?



Children's Study - Day 22 - The Ten Commandments

Parent Notes

The law of God was given to the Israelites to show them how to live according to the high standards of a perfect, holy God. He knew they would not be able to keep all the rules; they were there to show the people they could not be saved by themselves. Until Jesus came and died for the sins of the world, God put in place a system of animal sacrifice to allow for the Israelites' sins to be covered. When Jesus came, he fulfilled the law because he WAS perfect and sinless. His death, in our place, brought us back to God.

Story: The Ten Commandments (Based on Exodus 19-20, Matthew 5:21-22)

The Israelites had been out of Egypt for a whole two months when God led them to a mountain called Mount Sinai. There, He told them that He wanted them to be His special treasure, which meant that out of all the people in the whole Earth, they would be the ones He stayed close to, looked after and led. To do that, however, they would need to keep His rules because just like He is holy and perfect, He wanted His people to live in ways that showed their love for Him and for each other.

The Israelites liked the sound of being special to God, so they said, "Yes! We WILL keep Your commands!" They spent two days getting ready to meet with God to make their firm promise to Him, washing their clothes and keeping their minds on Him for all that time. On the third day, they made their way to the mountain.

"Don't go too close," Moses warned the people. "It is a holy mountain because God is there."

The Israelites were OK with not going too close because they were pretty scared about talking to God themselves. As they waited nervously at the foot of the mountain, it shook like an earthquake, and billows of smoke went up as God came down like fire. A horn blew, long and loud. Then, when Moses spoke to God, He THUNDERED back and the horn blew again. There were even flashes of lightning! The people huddled close to each other and stared, wide-eyed, at this amazing show of God's power.

God called Moses to go up onto the mountain, where He gave Moses some special rules for the Israelites to live by, called the Ten Commandments. There were other rules added to those ones, too; more than six hundred in the end! But the first ten were the most important. They were, 1. Don't serve any gods but Me. 2. Don't make idols and worship them. 3. Don't use God's name as a swear word. 4. Keep the Sabbath day special. 5. Respect your mother and father. 6. Don't kill anyone. 7. Stay true to your husband or wife. 8. Do not steal. 9. Do not tell lies about people. 10. Don't be jealous.

So now the people knew what living a holy life looked like. If they wanted to be perfect, and obey God, they had to keep all the laws, all of the time. They wanted to be God's special people, but it looked very difficult. In fact, it looked impossible.

That was the whole point of the law. God was showing His people that they *couldn't* live lives so perfect and pure that they didn't need his promised seed to save them. The law was there to point the way

to Jesus! For the times when they sinned (broke the law) God was going to provide a way for their sins to be forgiven, and that way would point to Jesus, too. We will find out more about that on Day 24.

It IS important to love God and love others, like the commandments teach us, but we can't keep all of them perfectly. Even if we don't kill anyone (like the fifth commandment says) Jesus explained that anyone who hates another person or calls them names is also breaking that law. He wanted us to understand that the commandments are about our hearts and the thoughts we think, as well as what we do. Is it possible for any of us to go through our whole lives without even one teeny nasty word or thought against another person, or one time of putting something else as more important than God? What do you think?

The Israelites couldn't keep all of the rules, and we can't keep all of the rules, either, but the promised seed could! When he came, and DID keep all of the law, Jesus *fulfilled* the law. That meant, he filled it to its fullest - it was about him! He was going to make everyone right with God again. He was going to keep the covenant promise for us so we could all be in relationship with God, and be His special treasure forever!

Questions

1. What did God want the Israelites to be? His special ...?
2. How would God look after the Israelites if they promised to obey His law?
3. What was it like for the Israelites, watching God come down on the mountain?
4. Can you name some of the ten commandments?
5. How many rules were there in all?
6. Would any of the Israelites be able to keep all of the laws?
7. Why did God give the law if it was so impossible to perfectly obey it? (Who was the law pointing to?)

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that You love us like we are Your special treasure. Thank you that Jesus came and filled the law, because he was so good and perfect he kept all of the rules. Help us to love God and love others, too. Amen.

Activity

Ten Commandments memory game: The Israelites had a lot of rules to remember but we will practise remembering just ten things. Get an adult to load a tray with ten things from your house ... like a pair of scissors, a pen, a shoe, a toy etc. Everyone can stare at the things for one minute, then the tray is covered and you have to try and remember everything that was on it. The person who remembers the most is the winner. If that is too easy, try with twenty things!



Children's Study - Day 23 - God's Special Tent

Parent Notes

The plans for the Tabernacle (a special 'tent' and courtyard to be used to worship God) take up many chapters of Exodus. The people contributed much wealth which they had taken out of Egypt, as well as their skills and time to create the beautiful dwelling for God. Tomorrow, we will find out more about the parts of the Tabernacle, but for today, the key point for the children to understand is that God wants to be with His people so he made a way for it to happen for a time, until Jesus came and made everything right again, forever.

Story: God's Special Tent (Based on Exodus 25-31 and Matthew 1:22-23)

After Moses had written down all the laws God had given to the Israelites, God had a new job for him to do. You see, although God talked to Moses, who was the special helper He had chosen to lead His people, God wanted to be closer to ALL of the people. He had said He would be their God, and He now wanted to live with them, there in that wilderness camp. The Bible word for 'living' or 'staying' with people is 'dwelling' and that's what God planned to do. He planned to 'dwell' with them.

God met with Moses up on top of the mountain and, for forty days and nights, explained to him exactly what needed to be done. The trouble was, that the people weren't great at keeping God's laws! Right from the moment that they agreed to keep them all, they began to break them. There was going to need to be a separate place for God and the people to be near each other without them ever coming close enough to touch because He was perfect and holy, and they were full of bad thoughts and actions.

And God was so right! Even while Moses was busy getting instructions from God about making a special tent for Him to 'dwell' in, the Israelites were panicking and deciding they needed an idol instead of God to lead them. God had only JUST FINISHED saying 'do not make any idols' and they made a huge golden cow. We will find out more about that extremely bad idea on Day 27, but it showed that they weren't going to be able to obey the law - not if they could break one of the most important rules so quickly.

Even after the idol had happened, God still wanted the special tent to be made. It would be called the 'tabernacle' or dwelling place. God told Moses there needed to be a courtyard, like a fenced off area. Then, inside that fence, there would be the special tent. It had to have a curtain inside it, to keep the people away from the MOST HOLY PLACE, where God would dwell, but God would be there, in the cloud during the day and the fire during the night. He would dwell in that Most Holy Place, until it was time for the people to move on, then He would rise up and lead them.

The Israelites took the gold, jewellery and special cloth that the Egyptians had given to them and used it to make the most special tabernacle they could. They needed to pack up the Tabernacle and carry it carefully on oxen carts wherever they went, but they were happy to do that, because it meant God could stay with them. It was a lot of hard work, and it wasn't quite the same as God being really close, like He had been back in the Garden of Eden, but it was still very special to have the wonderful, mighty God making a home with them.

The Tabernacle was good, but most importantly, it was a huge clue about something much better that would come. When Jesus, the promised seed finally arrived, he was called Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. Jesus brought God and people together in a much better way than the Tabernacle ever could. He WAS both God and man; and because He died for us, we are all made right with God again. Also, we now have the Holy Spirit inside us. That makes us all like special tents for God, doesn't it? He LOVES to dwell with us!

Questions

1. What instructions did God give Moses for forty days and nights?
2. What bad thing did the Israelite people do while He was away?
3. What was God's plan for living with His people?
4. What was the name of the special tent? How did the people help make it?
5. When Jesus was born as a baby, he was called 'Immanuel'. Do you remember what that means?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that You LOVE to live with us. You have even put your Holy Spirit inside us! Thank you that You were looking for a way to bring us close to you again, and You made a way with Jesus. Amen.

Activity

Make a tent out of chairs and blankets like the Tabernacle in the desert. You could play in your tent, read a book in it, or even sleep in it, if it's a really good one (and your parents say yes!)



Children's Study - Day 24 - It's All About Jesus!

Parent Notes

There is such a wealth of ways in which the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers point to Jesus, that we could spend forty days just looking at the Tabernacle, the laws regarding feasts and festivals, sacrifices and offerings, the role of the priests and the faithfulness of a holy God to a sin-filled people. It is very hard to shrink all that down into a few days when the topics are quite complicated, especially for children.

Today's key point is that God made a system of sacrifices so that the Israelites could have their sins forgiven as they looked ahead to when the promised seed would come. Each part of the Tabernacle was a clue pointing toward Jesus.

Story: It's All About Jesus! (Based on Leviticus 1, Exodus 40, Hebrews 9)

The special tent, called the Tabernacle, needed some extra-special things to go with it, so Moses called together the very, very, very best helpers from the Israelites. Some of these helpers were brilliant at weaving cloth for the curtains and walls of the tent, others could carve wood or work with metals, which was important because there was gold, silver and bronze all used to make the things in God's special tent. There were even some jewels placed into the clothing for the high priest to wear.

God's plan for the Tabernacle was that it would be a place He could be close to His people, but there was still that huge problem of them disobeying his law all of the time. A holy God would have to turn away and leave, if the wrong things (the sins) of the people were not somehow covered up. God knew all the sin would be dealt with properly, when Jesus came to Earth and died to be the punishment for all the sin that had ever happened ... but that was still thousands of years away!

Hmmmm, what could God do about it? Well, of course He already had a plan. God would let the person who did wrong be made right again if they brought an animal to the Tabernacle and offered it there. The animal's life would take their place, and God would forgive the person. It wasn't easy, but the plan worked for those long years while the Israelites waited for the promised seed. When Jesus came and died, He did it ONE TIME and that was the end of the old plan. It wasn't needed any more because Jesus, who did no wrong, died for all the sins that had ever been done by all the people who had ever lived, as well as for the sins that would be done by the people born AFTER he died!

Did God leave any clues in the Tabernacle to remind the Israelites that this plan wasn't forever - that something much better and long-lasting was coming? Of course He did! From the one-and-only gate into the Tabernacle courtyard, which pointed to Jesus being the only way to God, the whole place was about Jesus! The big bronze altar reminded everyone that one day, the promised seed would give up his life for them. The bronze wash basin where the priests always had to wash their hands, reminded everyone that Jesus would wash away their sin and make them clean. Within the Tabernacle tent, in the Holy Place, the Table of Showbread told them that the one who would give them new life was on his way, and the golden lampstand said that he would show everyone the way to God. Then, there was the altar of sweet smelling incense that reminded the people to pray to God, who was right there, just on the other side of the curtain in a small room called the 'Holy of Holies' or 'Most Holy Place.' We are going to find out more about that last part of the Tabernacle tomorrow. Something AMAZING happened to the curtain that blocked off the Most Holy Place when Jesus died on the cross, but you will have to wait until next time to find out what it was!

Questions

1. Can you name some of the special things that were put into the Tabernacle - in the courtyard and the tent?
2. What types of helpers did Moses ask to make them?
3. How many gates were there through the fence into the courtyard of the Tabernacle?
4. What did the Israelites bring as offerings to take their place for their sins?
5. What reminded people to pray to God?
6. What is the name of the very most special place inside the Tabernacle?
7. How many times did Jesus need to die to take the place of all the people who have sinned in the world (that's everyone!)

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the special talents You give to people - like the weavers, wood carvers and metal workers who made your special Tabernacle and all of the things inside it. Help us also to do our best with the special talents You have given each of us! Amen.

Activity

What is something you really enjoy doing? Are you good at drawing, dancing, playing sports, reading or brightening up people's days with your smile? Can you think of a way to serve God with one of your talents? God loves it when His children help those around them. Even if it's something small like a letter or drawing you could send to someone who is lonely, or using your free time to help your Mum or Dad in the garden to grow some vegetables to share, it's all loving others, which means you are loving God!



Children's Study - Day 25 - Jesus the Highest Priest

Parent Notes

Explaining what a priest is and does could be a bit tricky to children, except by linking the idea to that of a pastor/minister in the church. The basic idea is that the priests spent their lives helping the people of Israel to come closer to God, because they looked after the sacrifices and offerings, and all the parts of the Tabernacle. Tomorrow, we learn about the Day of Atonement, which includes the 'scapegoat' and has more information about the role of the High Priest. Today, we will focus on how special Jesus is, and include how, when he died, the curtain in the temple tore in two which showed he had opened up the way for people to go directly to God.

Story: Jesus the Highest Priest (Based on Hebrews 9 and 10, Matthew 27:50-51)

God decided that the people from the tribe of Levi should look after the Tabernacle. Of those, Moses' brother Aaron was called the High Priest and his sons and their sons after them were to be the priests who were kept busy in the Holy Place looking after the lamp, putting out fresh bread, burning sweet-smelling incense and helping with all the sacrifices and offerings that the people wanted to bring. All the while, however, they did not touch the curtain which blocked off the final part of the tent. This 'Most Holy Place' was where the last piece of Tabernacle furniture was kept (the Ark of the Covenant) and where God was present within the tent.

The Ark of the Covenant was like a big wooden box covered in gold. Inside it was a jar of manna, the Ten Commandments carved onto two stone tablets, and Aaron's rod which was a wooden staff that had burst into blossoms and grown ripe almond nuts to prove that he was God's chosen high priest. The

Ark of the Covenant was covered with a special lid made of gold. Two angels called cherubim decorated the lid, their golden wings reaching upwards. God told Moses that there, between the cherubim, is where He would talk with Moses through the curtain.

Even with all the offerings they brought, the Most Holy Place was not a safe place for anyone to go. It was filled with the glory of God and no one would dare push aside that curtain and walk in because they would die! The only man who *did* enter the Most Holy Place was the High Priest and that was only one day a year. When he did, it was only after a lot of washing and sacrificing. We will learn about that 'Day of Atonement' tomorrow, but apart from that one time, no one could go near to God and live. God is too holy and perfect so sin can't go near Him.

That was the way it was until the promised seed came and made the perfect, one and only needed sacrifice of his life for all the people. THEN we saw what a REAL high priest could do! Jesus was the one who truly brought God and people back together again. He proved it because, the very moment that he died on the cross, something AMAZING happened. By then, the Tabernacle had been made into a stone temple, and the curtain that blocked off the Most Holy Place was thick and strong and huge. It reached all the way from the roof of the temple down to the floor and was said to be as thick as a man's hand. Sometimes, this curtain is described as being so strong, you could have hitched two horses to it and had them race off, pulling in different directions, and it still wouldn't rip to pieces!

Well, as soon as Jesus breathed his last breath, that curtain started to tear. The rip began at the top, right up by the roof, so it wasn't torn by any man even if they *had* been strong enough to tear it. Down, down, down went that tear until the curtain hung in two pieces, and the Most Holy Place was wide open for the first time ever. You see, Jesus had made all things right again! He was telling us that now anyone who believes in him, isn't just able to creep up to God's presence and take a nervous wee peep before hurrying away ... no, the Bible says we can 'MARCH BOLDLY IN' and "BE CONFIDENT' in the presence of God. That was something the Israelites could only have dreamed of, but it all came true when Jesus died, then rose back to life again.

Questions

1. What was the special box called that was kept inside the Most Holy Place?
2. What three things were inside that golden box?
3. What would happen between the two golden angels on top of the Ark of the Covenant?
4. What was the rule about who could go into the Most Holy Place?
5. What happened to the curtain of the Most Holy Place when Jesus died on the cross?
6. Are we able to go near God now?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we don't have to be nervous or afraid about being close to You. Jesus made the way for all people to be made right so we can run and jump and skip and dance into Your presence. Thank you that there is nothing blocking us anymore. Amen.

Activity

Find some old newspaper or junk mail your Mum and Dad don't need. See how thick you can fold the pages before you can't tear through it anymore. Think about how no person could have torn that thick curtain, only the power of God!



Children's Study - Day 26 - A Tale of Two Goats

Parent Notes

You may be thankful to know that we are almost out of the animal sacrifice stories! One more today and then we begin to make our way out of the wilderness and into other parts of the Old Testament that point forward to Jesus. Today's story of the two goats teaches us that Jesus not only took our place so that we do not face death and eternal separation from God, but he took all of our sins away from us. In him, we are made clean and new. The Day of Atonement is celebrated by Jews as their most solemn holy day of the year, however for almost 2000 years they have not been able to perform the ritual of the sin offering and scapegoat because the temple was destroyed in 70AD, and with it the Most Holy Place. They look forward to a time when their temple is rebuilt and they can return to offering the animal sacrifices that were so much a part of their faith. We, however, know that no further sacrifices are required - they were pointing the way to Jesus and he has now come and fulfilled their purpose.

Story: A Tale of Two Goats (Based on Leviticus 16:1-25)

That extra-special, God-filled, Most Holy Place stayed shut off behind the curtain of the Tabernacle for three hundred and sixty-four days every year. That left only one day a year when the high priest went into it, and even then, only for a short time. This was on the Day of Atonement, a day when all the people came together to tell God they were sorry for all of the sins they had done, so that they could be forgiven. It was a day for everyone, all together, and it was a very solemn time. Do you know that word? It means kind of sad and quiet; with the people thinking deeply and not talking much because it was such a holy day. They didn't work, or eat, or play or laugh. They just watched and waited.

Ten days earlier, trumpets had been blown to warn the people that it was time to get ready for the Day of Atonement. They had spent those days praying and saying sorry to God and each other for anything they might have said or done which was bad. Now it was time for them to gather around the Tabernacle and wait for the High Priest to do all the things God had said must be done that day.

After washing himself and dressing in fresh, clean linen, the High Priest was ready for the two goats to be brought in front of him. One of these would be sacrificed to cover the sin of the people, and the other was going to be sent out into the wilderness. The High Priest reached into a little box and took out two stones. Without looking at them, he held one over one goat and one over the other, then he opened his hands to see which was which. The goat under the stone labelled 'For God' was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled around inside the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the Altar to make everything pure and clean. This meant the sin of the Israelites was dealt with, done, paid for because the goat had taken their place and paid the price for their sin instead of them. In faith, they were looking forward in time to the sacrifice of the promised seed, who would take their place like the sin offering goat had done, but once and for all, not over and over again every year.

The trouble was, that even though the sin offering goat had taken their place and their sin was forgiven, the Israelites still knew they had done wrong in what they had thought and done that year. They still felt terrible about it and knew they had failed God and each other. God wanted to show them that He could also *take their sins away* - far, far away, forever. So, the High Priest put his hands on the second goat and listed all of the sins the people might have done, as if he was carrying them off the people and laying them down onto the goat. After that, the goat was taken away out of the camp, far out into the wilderness and left there, never to be seen again. It was called the 'scapegoat' because it was the one who carried everyone's sins - they had gone from the people of Israel and would not ever come back. Now the people understood! They were right in God's eyes, clean and fresh and new! What a special day!

Of course, the death of the sin offering goat and the disappearance of the scapegoat were both big clues pointing to Jesus. The goats couldn't really save anyone - it's only faith in Jesus that makes people right with God. He took our place in dying for sin, so that we can live forever in heaven, *and* he carried our sins far, far away so that when God looks at us, He sees us fresh and clean in His Son. I'm glad God put the story of the scapegoat in the Bible; like the Israelites who went home happy because they knew all the

bad things they had said and done that year had been taken away forever, it makes me happy to know that Jesus makes me fresh and clean and right-with-God, too.

Questions

1. How many times a year could someone go into the Most Holy Place? Who was that person?
2. How did the people feel on the Day of Atonement? What did they do to make sure they were ready for it?
3. What did the High Priest do to decide what would happen to each of the goats?
4. One goat was a sin offering, to take the punishment for the people's sins. What was the other goat called? What did it show the Israelites?
5. There are at least three clues about Jesus in this story (he is like the High Priest, the sin offering goat who died, and the scapegoat.) Can you explain what one of the clues teaches us about Jesus?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for how the story of the two goats teaches us so much about Jesus. He took our place when he died to pay the price of all of our sins AND he carried all of our sins so far away that we are left clean and fresh, and right with You. Thank you for loving us so much, You want us to be close to You. Amen.

Activity

The carrying game: the scapegoat carried all the sins of the people away. Can you crawl all the way across a room like a goat with something on your back ... a cushion or a toy, maybe even a plastic cup with a little bit of water in it? If that's easy, what about if you add another thing, and another thing? How much can you carry without it all slipping off?



Children's Study - Day 27 - The Extremely Bad Idea

Parent Notes

We made a brief mention of the Golden Calf idol on Day 23, but today we return to focus on it as an example of how it was impossible for mankind to keep the law. If the Israelites, who had seen the hand of God move in mighty power to rescue them from Egypt, and who had only just entered a solemn covenant with God promising to keep his commands, failed so epically then there really is no hope for any of us to be saved based on our own merits. Thankfully, the old covenant was there as a dim shadow of the real hope to come. It pointed the way forward in time to when Jesus died for us and God considered us perfect and right because of the sacrifice of His son.

Story: The Extremely Bad Idea (Based on Exodus 32)

It's hard to imagine anyone in the world having an idea as bad as one that the Israelites had while they were camped at Mt. Sinai. They had been rescued from Egypt by God's mighty miracles, including terrifying plagues and the Red Sea opening wide to let them through. They were fed every day by manna, the bread-like flakes which appeared like dew in the morning, and God had even made fresh water gush out of a rock for them. They had literally just promised to obey all of God's commands, making a solemn covenant with Him which meant He would be their God and they would be His special people ... and don't forget the thunder and lightning and blasting trumpets, too. All of that had happened and yet they had one of the worst ideas in all of history.

The trouble was, the Israelites were not very good at trusting God, and patience was not something they did at all well. When Moses went up on the mountain for forty days and forty nights to get all the instructions from God about how to build the Tabernacle, the people began to feel uneasy. They were used to Moses speaking to God for them, and then him telling them what to do. They began to wonder if Moses was never coming back - and if that meant they should just leave the mountain. But which way would they go? They needed God to lead them. Or did they?

Remember, these people had grown up in Egypt. Their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers had been born there. The people of Egypt worshipped all sorts of gods ... not the one, true, mighty God, but ones they thought were real. So, it seemed to these Israelites that maybe a different god would do, one they could make themselves. Can you imagine anything more foolish than making something with your own hands and calling it God? Well, that's what they did. The people went to Aaron, Moses' brother, and demanded that he make them a god to lead them! This would have been a good moment for Aaron to say things like, 'No! I'd rather die than make an idol,' or 'How dare you break God's commandments!' or 'You better ask God to forgive you FAST!'

Unfortunately, Aaron was afraid because there were A LOT of very angry Israelites yelling at him. So, instead of telling them off, he said, "Give me your gold earrings," and he melted that gold down and formed it into the shape of a golden calf.

"Hooray!" shouted the people. "This is the god that led us out of Egypt!"

Aaron made an altar in front of that statue and told the people that the next day would be a festival for the Lord.

Up on the mountain, God told Moses that he needed to return to the camp because the people had made an idol and were worshipping it. Moses hurried away, clutching in his arms the two precious tablets of stone God had given him. On them, God had engraved His commandments with His own hand, which was the covenant He had made with the people of Israel to always be their God. When Moses arrived at the camp, he could not believe his eyes! The people were having a party! They had sacrificed to the Golden Calf and were dancing around it and feasting. Moses was so shocked and angry that he threw those stone tablets down where they smashed to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

The party ended fast. As soon as the people saw Moses, they realised they had made a terrible mistake. Aaron knew it, too. He tried to get out of trouble by telling Moses that he had thrown the earrings into the fire and the calf had marched right out, but Moses wasn't believing that lie. He melted the calf down, ground it up and made the people drink the powder. He said that he would return to God to ask for forgiveness for them, but in his heart he knew that there was no point trusting the people to keep God's commands. They couldn't do it. No one could ever keep all the laws they needed to, to be perfect enough to be close to God. The only hope for all the people in the world would be a new covenant, one that only God needed to keep. *He* could be trusted to always do what was good and right and to keep His promises.

When Jesus died for us, that's exactly what happened. Jesus brought in a new covenant, a promise that our sins would be forgiven, and we could be friends with God. All we needed to do was to have faith in Jesus; God would do the rest. We remember this new covenant when we have communion. The grape juice reminds us of how we don't need animal sacrifices anymore. Jesus died one time, for all time, for all people, forever. Now that's a covenant we can all keep!

Questions

1. How long was Moses away on the mountain? How did the Israelites feel about him being gone for so long?
2. What did they think would be a good idea? Who did they tell to make it?
3. What did Aaron make for the people? How did they celebrate?
4. What was Moses carrying when he came down the mountain? What did he do when he saw the terrible sin of the Israelites?
5. What excuse did Aaron try to give? What punishment did Moses give the people?
6. What makes the new covenant of Jesus better than the old one?
7. What do we do at church which helps us to remember the new covenant?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we do not have to be perfect to be one of Your children. Help us to remember, that although we will make mistakes, maybe even REALLY, REALLY mess things up like the Israelites did, You forgive us because of Jesus. Thank you that You keep Your promises and You never change. Amen.

Activity

Do you have a mortar and pestle in your house for grinding up spices? What about a rolling pin, or even the bottom of a mug or plate? Take a handful of rice bubbles, a biscuit or something else crunchy and grind it to crumbs like Moses ground up the Golden Calf (just grinding it, don't smashing down on it, or you might break something and that WOULD be bad!) As you grind away, you could talk about some of the things that people in our country might have as idols instead of a golden calf. What things do we think about more than God, or put more energy into trying to own? You could sprinkle your crumbs onto a glass of water and try to drink them down, if you really want to!



Children's Study - Day 28 - The Bronze Serpent

Parent Notes

This story of the bronze serpent has, quite by accident, ended up next to the story of the Golden Calf. Children of inquiring minds and mature enough years might wonder why the Israelites are said to have made such a terrible mistake in creating the golden calf when they were then told to look to a bronze serpent in faith to be saved from death. The difference is that they knew it was God who was saving them (directed by Moses) so the bronze serpent was only an object for them to look upon to receive the healing from God - it had no special powers of its own. Also, God had placed the bronze serpent into history as a 'clue' to point the Israelites towards the promised seed, Jesus, and how he would die. The bronze serpent did not and could not save the people, but it could point the way to the Son of God who COULD and DID save all people, forever!

Story: The Bronze Serpent (Based on Numbers 21:4-9, John 3:13-21, John 12:27-36)

The Israelites ended up in the wilderness for a REALLY long time because they weren't just grizzlers and grumblers, but they were also too afraid to go into the land that God had promised them. They didn't trust God to help them fight the people who lived in that wonderful green land of juicy grapes and sweet honey, so they were stuck in the wilderness for a whole forty years in all. That was a tough place for them to live because, as well as water and food being hard to find in the desert, it was full of dangerous creatures like scorpions and snakes.

One day, when the Israelites were fed up with the long journey, they grumbled loudly against God. "We hate this horrible manna!" they wailed. "Why did you bother bringing us out of Egypt if we were going to suffer like this?"

Suddenly, a whole horde of desert snakes burst into the camp and began biting the people. The venom was deadly poisonous and some people died. "Help! Pray to the Lord for us," the Israelites cried to Moses. "We have sinned against God; ask Him to take these snakes away!"

God provided a way for the Israelites to be healed by their faith in Him. He told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and put it on a pole, then to lift it up high for the people to see. They knew they had sinned, like Adam and Eve had sinned in the Garden of Eden by listening to the snake. That bronze snake

on a pole showed them God would forgive their sin and heal them from the poisonous venom. All they had to do was look at the bronze serpent with faith that God would heal them, and he would do it.

That was exactly what happened, and no one who looked at the bronze serpent died. That's not the end, though. We CAN'T leave the story there as if that's all there is to it, because it was more than a short story about snake bites in the desert. God was leaving us a HUGE clue about the one who would come and save people from death, once and for all. That pole, lifted high for everyone to see, was pointing the way to the cross, where God's Son would make the way for all sin to be forgiven, once and for all! We know this is the message of the bronze serpent because Jesus said it himself;

"And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life," Jesus told the people who had gathered around him one day. Those people knew the story of the Israelites and the snakes, but they were confused about what Jesus was trying to explain to them. Lifted up? Son of Man? Huh?

It's so easy for us to see exactly what he meant. Jesus is both Son of God AND Son of Man and he was put on the cross to die, with those who loved him looking up at him sadly, their hearts broken. I wonder if any of them remembered what he had said about being lifted up like the bronze serpent. I wonder if they understood that Jesus chose to be there because he was taking their sin away so they could live forever? I'm glad that wasn't the end of the story and that Jesus came back to life again! It's all such good news that John wrote a very famous Bible verse about it. You might already know it. It goes like this, 'For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'

Questions

1. What made the desert a hard place to live in? Why did the Israelites end up stuck there for forty years?
2. What were the Israelites complaining about before the snakes came?
3. What did God tell Moses to do so that the Israelites could be healed?
4. What did the Israelites need to do if they were bitten?
5. How did the bronze snake on the pole point ahead to when Jesus would come and save everyone, forever?
6. What does it mean to have 'eternal life'? Why is that even better than being saved from a snake bite?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for showing us how easy it is for us to be Your children. The Israelites who had been bitten, only had to look at the bronze serpent and you healed them. We only need to have faith in your Son and we are alive with You forever! Thank you for loving all the people in the world, and especially thank you for loving us! Amen.

Activity

When Jesus died on the cross, that was a sad way of being lifted up, but the Bible talks about some other meanings for 'lifting up'. It says, we can 'lift up a song' to God, or 'lift up hands in prayer' or 'lift up our eyes' towards heaven, thinking of the wonderful future God has for us there. Can you sing a song or say a prayer that praises God for all He has done for us? 'Lord, I Lift Your Name on High' is a great song for this!



Children's Study - Day 29 - The Very Best Kingdom

Parent Notes

Jesus said that we all must receive the Kingdom of God like 'little children'. I assume this means their easy, accepting faith, trust and wonder are what is needed for all of us to welcome this gift of God, and to understand that there is nothing else we need to add to it except our faith. In fact, Jesus was angry with his disciples for trying to block parents from bringing their children to him to bless. It is a lovely reminder of how precious these little ones are to God.

Story: The Very Best Kingdom (Based on 1 Samuel 10:17-26, John 3:1-21 and Mark 10:14-15)

Finally, the Israelites did enter the promised land. They were led in by Joshua, Moses' helper, and found it was a delightful place with plenty of food and space. Other people lived in the land, too, and sometimes this meant wars would break out. Usually, it was at the same time that the Israelites had forgotten about worshipping God and keeping his laws so God would have to raise up a brave leader to help them in the battles and remind them about Him, which was when things would go well again for a time. These leaders were called judges. You might know the name of some of them as they were very famous - there was Deborah, a woman prophet who also went into battle; Gideon who put his fleece out to test if he had heard from God or not, and Samson, the extra-strong man who became weak when his hair was cut. All in all, there were fifteen judges over a period of around 300 years before the Israelites decided they would like a king instead. Then Samuel, one of God's prophets and the last judge of Israel, helped the Israelites appoint (that means put into place) a king. That made the Israelite nation a kingdom, which was called the 'Kingdom of Israel.'

God decided that a young man named Saul would be the best king. Saul was handsome, tall and strong, which helped make him very popular with the Israelites so they were excited with God's choice. Saul wasn't so sure - when his name was called out, the people had to go and find him because he had hidden amongst the bags! Despite that uncertain start, God's Spirit came upon Saul and, before long, he was leading the Israelites on a rescue mission to fight off the enemy Ammonites who had put an Israelite city to siege. The Israelites won a huge victory and saved the day. "Long live the king!" they shouted and held a special ceremony to get Saul properly settled into his new role.

Unfortunately, having a king didn't solve all the problems for the Israelites. They remained a people who liked to worship idols and who weren't very careful about living according to the laws God had given them. Over time, the twelve tribes split away from one, united kingdom, into two separate kingdoms and there were long periods where fierce superpowers swept in and kicked the Israelites out of their homes and towns.

What the Israelites really needed was the promised seed to bring to Earth a kingdom of pure goodness, love and truth where no evil could live. They needed a king with the power and authority to rule forever, in a place where the hearts of people were changed and made new, where their bodies never became sick or died and where God would always be close to them.

When Jesus began walking the roads of Israel, one of the things he talked about ALL THE TIME was the 'Kingdom of God'. He said, 'the Kingdom of God is near' which was very true as he was right there, the ruler of that kingdom! He said, 'you all need to be born again, then you can be part of my kingdom' which meant, everyone needed to believe in Him and be made clean by the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Jesus also said that the Kingdom of God was worth more than the richest of treasures, and that it was going to grow and grow as more and more people believed in him. Truly, the kingdom would *only* be full of goodness and love. That makes it the very best kingdom of all, doesn't it?

Questions

1. What did the judges of Israel do? Can you name one of the most famous ones?
2. What did the Israelites decide they wanted instead of the judges?

3. Who was the first king of Israel? What did he do when his name was called out?
4. What happened when the Holy Spirit came upon Saul?
5. Did the Kingdom of Israel live happily ever after, with everyone together as one big united family?
6. How is the Kingdom of God better than any kingdom of the world? What do we need to do to be part of the Kingdom of God?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we can be part of a kingdom where there is only goodness and love. Thank you that You are powerful and mighty to rule forever. Help us to spread the good news about the Kingdom of God, so that it grows and grows. Amen.

Activity

Did you know that the Bible talks about crowns which people will wear in heaven? You could design your own crown by drawing one, colouring in one that your Mum or Dad prints off the internet, or you could make one out of cardboard and decorate it with sparkly stickers and craft bits and pieces.



Children's Study - Day 30 - Jesus, Son of David

Parent Notes

David is the most loved and well-known king of the Old Testament, and many prophecies about the promised seed refer to the Messiah (which is what the Jews call the promised seed) being of David's family line. Examples are the 'son of David' or the 'branch from the root of Jesse' (David's father). The Israelites went through many cycles of judgement for turning away from God, then being overthrown by enemy nations and often killed in sieges or exiled out of their land. During those times, prophets would rise up and speak words of hope about the coming king from the 'house' (or lineage) of David who would bring them back to the land, give them safety, establish righteousness (goodness and purity, without sin) and reign over them forever. No wonder that several times in the New Testament we see people crying out to the 'Son of David' to help them. In today's story, we learn a little about David, but more about how the Bible points us to Jesus, a king in David's line.

Story: Jesus, Son of David (Based on 1 Samuel 17, 2 Samuel 7)

After a time ruling over Israel, King Saul sinned so badly that God decided a different man should get ready to take his place. God picked someone no-one would have expected - the eighth son of Jesse, a sheep farmer. This young man was called David and he had to wait many years before he became king, but all the while God's Spirit was on him, helping him to do many great things. One of these is a story you might know very well - the story of a giant and an army of men too scared to fight him.

The Philistine army was trying to take over the land and get rid of the Israelites. They were camped out on one side of a valley with King Saul and the Israelite army on the other side. Instead of rushing across the valley and fighting, the Philistines had a plan that they thought would save them a heap of trouble - they put forward a champion called Goliath, a huge giant of a man dressed in bronze armour carrying a massive spear. Now, the Philistines knew for sure that no one could fight Goliath and win, so they were delighted with the idea of a fight between champions - their Goliath with one man from Israel. Whoever won, would win the whole thing - and the losers would become the slaves.

Easy peasy, the Philistines thought.

Arrgh, help! the Israelites thought, all of them trembling with fear. Goliath was ENORMOUS and, along with his spear, he had a javelin and a huge sword, too. They wouldn't be able to get anywhere near

him before he killed them three times over. King Saul tried to encourage his men to fight, promising them money and his daughter to marry, but for forty days and nights, not a single man said yes.

One day, young David came to camp, bringing some food for his brothers. When he heard about Goliath, all he thought was, *How dare this Philistine mock God like this?* He didn't hesitate for even a second. "I'll fight him!" he said.

King Saul wasn't sure this was a good idea - sending a young lad who didn't even have armour or a sword against the best warrior in the world? *There's only one way that would end*, he thought dubiously, but David insisted. "I have protected flocks of sheep all of my life, fighting off lions and bears," he declared. "Besides, God is with me - it is His battle so He will kill the giant."

Saul finally agreed and tried to lend David his own armour, but it was far too big. David set off across the valley in his simple shepherd clothing with only his wooden staff, a sling and some small stones. Goliath would have laughed, except he was too busy being angry that Israel would send such a pathetic warrior against him. He yelled and screamed and shouted at David, telling him exactly how he planned to kill him. David calmly stood his ground, then replied, "I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies! Everyone will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord's battle, and He will give you to us!"

Goliath leaped forward to attack, but SMACK! a stone from David's sling hit him in the forehead and he fell with a crash, like a mighty tree struck down by one blow of an axe. Quick as a flash, David grabbed Goliath's sword and chopped his head off!

The Philistines stood, frozen with shock, their eyes as wide as pudding bowls. Then, as one, they turned and SPRINTED away - chased by the army of Israelites shouting with triumph. David had shown the Israelites that it was God who would save them, and now they had faith enough to chase down an army of any size and strength.

It was years later that David finally became king. During all of that time he waited patiently for God's timing and, one day, Saul died and at last it was David's turn to sit on the throne and rule over Israel. David was not only a mighty warrior and a wise leader; he always remembered his days as a shepherd and he liked to write poems and songs about God and about the promised seed who would come. David was known as a 'man after God's own heart' because he had so much faith and he showed love and forgiveness to many people.

One of the ways we know David had a heart for God was because he desperately wanted to make a temple for God - a beautiful, strong building; a special place which would be much better than the tent-like Tabernacle. God said no, it wasn't yet time, but that one of David's sons would build it. Then he told David something special about another son - a descendant of his who would come sometime many years in the future. This 'son' of David would be the king of a kingdom that would not end, one full only of goodness and love. This was a covenant - a promise - and it did come true. When Jesus came to Earth one thousand years later, some people called him 'Son of David' which shows they had been waiting for the promise to be fulfilled ... and it was, when he died on the cross. It will be fulfilled even more when Jesus comes again to be king over all of the Earth.

Questions

1. Why did God decide that Israel needed a different king?
2. What was David like as a young man - what work did he do and how many brothers did he have?
3. Who was attacking Israel? What challenge did they give to King Saul and the Israelites?
4. What was Goliath like? Why wasn't David afraid of Goliath? How did he kill the giant?
5. What else do we know about David, except that he was a famous warrior?
6. What promise did God give about a 'son' of David's who would come sometime in the future? Who is sometimes called 'Son of David' even though it was a thousand years later that he was born?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for being a God we can trust. Help us to have a faith like David, who knew You were with him, and so he was not afraid. Thank you for Jesus, the Son of David, who is a king of love and forgiveness. Amen

Activity

Time for a chase! Get someone to pretend to be a Philistine soldier, standing in the middle of a clear space (outside is best). Everyone else stands a few metres away like the Israelites on the other side of the valley. When an adult shouts 'GO', the Israelites chase the Philistine soldier as fast as they can. If the Philistine soldier makes it to the end of the room/driveway/garden first they are the winner, but if they are (gently) tagged by an Israelite, then they have lost. Be careful - we don't want any injuries in this battle!



Children's Study - Day 31 - Jesus the Good Shepherd

Parent Notes

Our king, Jesus, is not distant and uninterested in our lives. He calls himself the Good Shepherd, and says that he knows his sheep. He protects us, leads us to rest and is with us through the hardest valleys in our lives. Your child can be comforted by knowing that Jesus is like a shepherd who carries the young sheep in his arms, but who is strong and powerful to protect them, too. He even lays down his life for us. If you are ever asked what God is like, then the shepherd king is a meaningful way to explain who our God is.

Story: Jesus the Good Shepherd (Based on John 10:7-18, Psalm 23)

Just like King David started off his life as a shepherd, Jesus also calls himself a shepherd - a GOOD shepherd.

Have you seen farmers herding big flocks of sheep from their motorbikes, whistling commands to their dogs to chase the sheep down a road or into a paddock? Well, things were a bit different when Jesus talked about being a good shepherd. Instead of a motorbike and dogs to round up the sheep, a shepherd back then walked with the sheep and stayed with them, making sure they were safe from dangers like deep valleys and wolves. If a ferocious animal attacked, then the shepherd would fight for the sheep with his staff or, like David, with a shepherd's sling. The shepherd knew all of his own sheep, and they knew his voice. If flocks got mixed up, that was no problem. All the sheep had been raised by their own shepherd and knew his voice. He just called their name, and they would come!

Each day, the shepherd would lead his flock to peaceful places with fresh water and lush green grass to eat. If they had to walk along difficult paths, he was with them, and if there were any hurt or very young sheep, then he would carry them. If a sheep got lost, the shepherd knew, because he checked on each one of them and noticed if they were missing. He would tuck the others away safely in the pen, then go and find the one who had wandered off.

Jesus said that just like a shepherd cared for his sheep, that he cares for each of us. He comforts us in hard times and helps us choose the right way to live, the way that leads to peace. He loves us so much that he even died for us. It is very special to have a shepherd king - one who is powerful and mighty, but also loving and close to us. God explained that was exactly the type of king the promised seed would be.

King David wrote a beautiful poem about our shepherd king. It is called Psalm 23 and says something like this; 'The Lord is my shepherd; he gives me everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. He makes me strong, and guides me along the right paths. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for He is close beside me.' Then David, thinking of those animals he used to fight off from his flock and how he had to use his shepherd's hook to pull his sheep from danger, wrote of God, 'Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. Even when I am surrounded by enemies, I am safe! You give me so many blessings, they overflow from my cup. No matter where I go, You come after me because You love me so much. I will live with You forever!'

Have you ever had a pet lamb which you fed with a bottle of milk each day? Did the lamb bleat and race to the fenceline as soon as it heard you calling it ... or maybe even just because it heard you playing

outside? That's a bit like us and God - He knows us and we know Him. We hear his voice, telling us the right choices to make and telling us we are loved by Him. No wonder Jesus is called the Good Shepherd!

Questions

1. What was being a shepherd like in the olden days of Israel? How did a shepherd make his sheep move from place to place? What if his flock got mixed up with another flock?
2. What were some of the dangers a flock of sheep might face? How would a shepherd protect them?
3. What were some of the beautiful words that David wrote in Psalm 23?
4. How is Jesus like a shepherd to us?
5. How is a shepherd king different from the sort of king who rules on a throne far, far away from the people living in his land?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that You are not far away from us. Instead, You know each of us by our names and care for us. You are strong and mighty to protect Your people, but kind and loving to each one of us. Thank you for being a shepherd king. Amen.

Activity

You could ask your Mum or Dad to print off a copy of Psalm 23 for you to decorate with lovely pictures of green grass and fresh water (or maybe a few scary pictures of wolves and valleys too.) Another idea would be to draw a picture of a sheep and glue something fluffy like cotton balls all over it to remind you that you are one of God's sheep!



Children's Study - Day 32 - The King who Suffered

Parent Notes

The crucifixion is a grim story for adults, let alone children. Therefore, we will not be focussing on the details of it, aside from a few key points. The main message today is that the way Jesus would die is a huge clue left in scripture a thousand years before it happened, and his suffering shows that he understands all the pain and sadness humans go through. Also, he said 'It is Finished' which means, his task was done! Mankind was safe! Amen and Amen!

Story: The King who Suffered (Based on Psalm 22, Mark 15, John 19)

King David was sick - REALLY sick. His bones ached, he was so thirsty that his tongue stuck to his mouth. It felt like his strength was pouring out of him like water from a cup. Worst of all, no one wanted to come near him to help him. Instead, they just stared at him and made fun of him saying things like, 'Isn't this the one who thought God would save him?' While he was lying sick and weak in his bed, they played a game of dice with the prize being David's clothes! David felt so alone, as if God himself had turned away from him. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" he cried.

Actually, the words that David wrote in Psalm 22 weren't all about something that really happened to him. Many of the words were a prophecy, a huge clue, pointing to the way that Jesus, the promised seed, would die. There are things that David wrote which he COULD NOT have known about unless God told him, because no one was killed on a cross until hundreds of years after David himself died. When David wrote the psalm, full of pain and suffering, he was actually writing about how Jesus the Son of God would suffer as he carried the sins of the world and paid for them with his own life. That's not to say that David *wasn't* used to suffering - despite being a king, he had a really difficult life. He had to live in hiding for

seven years because Saul was jealous of him and wanted him killed. One of his sons died and another tried to take the throne from him. One of the people closest to him pretended to be his best friend but was really his enemy, and David had to live with knowing he had killed a man that didn't deserve to die. He was a king, but a king who suffered, which means he felt a great deal of sadness and pain.

David pointed the way to Jesus with the words he wrote in Psalm 22. Some of the things he said were that the promised seed would be 'pierced' in his hands and feet, which is exactly how people were nailed to the cross. Jesus' body would be stretched out so his bones were out of place and his heart would struggle before failing. Those things happened to Jesus. People shook their heads at him and shouted out horrible words like, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" The soldiers threw dice to see who was lucky enough to win his clothes, just like Psalm 22 had said would happen.

Jesus said some very important words on the cross - even though it was difficult to breathe, he wanted people to understand a few last things before he died. He said, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me," which were exactly the words of King David in Psalm 22! I wonder if he was telling his mother and those he loved who were standing there near him that this had been planned all along; he was the promised seed and this needed to happen? It could have been that, or perhaps the reason he said it was that God could not be near Jesus while he carried all the sin of the world. We know that a pure and holy God can't be close to anything bad or evil. That's a very sad thought, but it wasn't the end. Jesus had one more thing to say - just three ordinary words we hear all the time, but they never meant so much as they did that day.

"It is finished!" Jesus said, and then he died.

Finished? As in ended? What had ended? Well, it wasn't Jesus! He came back to life three days later. No, what he had finished was the job he had come to Earth to do. He had become a man, and suffered all the things people do - pain, loneliness, being poor, being hated, losing friends, having people he loved die, everything! But, in all of that, he had never sinned because he was also God. Now people could return to closeness with God, because Jesus had paid the price for all sin for all time. And to prove it was truly done, that huge curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom, opening the way for all people to go into God's presence.

There are so many clues in the Old Testament, aren't there? I wish we had time to learn them all but we need to leave the story of King David for now and move on tomorrow to learn about Daniel, another man who pointed the way to Jesus.

David might have known what it was to suffer, but he didn't leave a sad ending to Psalm 22. Just like Jesus on the cross has a happy ending, David wrote, 'Praise the Lord! God helps all those who call to Him for help! He is the mighty ruler of the whole world! People will speak of the wonderful things He has done forever!'

Now *that's* a good ending to a Psalm!

Questions

1. Did all of the things that David wrote about in Psalm 22 happen to him, or were some things there to point the way to Jesus?
2. What were some of the things that happened to Jesus on the cross that had been written about by David one thousand years before they happened?
3. What words did Jesus say on the two different times he spoke on the cross (as described in today's story?)
4. What did Jesus mean when he said, 'It is finished?'
5. What are some of the ways people suffer in this world? Does Jesus understand all of the sadness and pain people feel? Why is it that he can understand us so well?
6. How is it possible that Jesus never said, thought or did anything that was bad? What happened when he died that proved he had paid the price for sin and made a way back to God for anyone who believes in him?

Prayer

Dear God, it is amazing that You told people things that weren't even invented yet to write into the Bible as clues about the promised seed. That proves You had a plan from long, long ago to bring us back close to You again. Thank you that Your Son became a man who understands everything that people suffer. Amen.

Activity

It's hard to think about the cross and how Jesus died. It's also hard to go through the things that make us sad, or sore, or worried. As a family, or just you by yourself, you could decorate a jar or small container to be a prayer pot. Then, each time you are sad or worried, you could draw a little picture or write a prayer about it and drop it into the jar. Jesus understands everything because he went through it all himself. He delights to comfort his children and help them. In a few months or a year, you could look back inside the pot and remember what you prayed about to see how Jesus answered your prayer.



Children's Study - Day 33 - Daniel Sees the Future

Parent Notes

Daniel is one of the famous Bible characters whose life is full of stories children love to hear. The three men in the fiery furnace, Nebuchednezzar's golden statue, Daniel in the Lion's Den and the Writing on the Wall are all well-known but, unfortunately, we don't have time to study these wonderful stories of courage and drama during the Road to Redemption. Instead, we are only going to peek at a story about one of the dreams that Daniel interpreted, and add in a quick reference to the visit of the angel Gabriel to Daniel, when he gave Daniel the specific prophecy of when the Messiah would come.

Story: Daniel Sees the Future (Based on Daniel 1, 2, 9)

Daniel was a young man who lived in the land of Judah. His family were quite rich and important, but that didn't help him when King Nebuchednezzar of Babylon sent his army into the land to take it over. In fact, it was because Daniel was such a fine young man that he and other noblemen of his age were captured and taken away to Babylon. King Nebuchednezzar thought it was a good plan to get these young leaders on his side, so he treated them well and told his staff to train them up in the language and books of Babylon. He even ordered that fancy food from his own tables be served to them.

Daniel wasn't about to fill his body with anything that broke the laws of his faith so he decided to only eat vegetables and drink water. Three other young men did the same and God blessed them all with wisdom and knowledge. To Daniel, God also gave the gift of being able to explain the meaning of dreams and visions. (Visions are like dreams, but a person is awake when they see them.)

That gift came in awfully handy one day. King Nebuchednezzar dreamed such an incredible dream that he simply could not sleep until he knew what it meant. It seemed so real and so important that he was certain it held a message for him. He needed an explanation, but he didn't want anyone making up any old story about it - he wanted the truth and he came up with a way to get it. He told his magicians and wise men that they had to tell him WHAT he dreamt, and THEN what it meant. That threw the magicians and wise men into a panic. They told the king that no one could possibly do that! Oh oh - the king didn't like that. "Kill them all!" he roared, and that included Daniel and his friends! But Daniel prayed to God, and God showed him the dream and what it meant so Daniel went to King Nebuchednezzar and said,

"Only God knows what was in your dream and He showed it to me. You dreamed of a huge, frightening statue of a man. Its head was gold, its chest and arms were silver, its thighs were bronze and

its feet were a mixture of iron and clay. It stood, tall and shining in the sun until a rock SMASHED into the statue and pounded it to dust. Then, the rock turned into a huge mountain.”

“Yes, yes!” King Nebuchednezzar exclaimed eagerly, sitting forward on his throne. “That is the dream! Tell me now what it means!”

“Your Majesty, the God of Heaven has allowed you to be strong and powerful,” Daniel replied. “Your empire, Babylon, is in control of all the lands in this part of the world. This is the head of gold. But, one day another country will come and fight you. They will take over this land. On the statue, they are the chest of silver. As time goes on there will be another empire (the bronze thighs) and one more again before, suddenly, the glorious, neverending kingdom of God arrives. That kingdom will rule forevermore and everyone will bow down to God and worship God. God’s kingdom is like the rock that grew into a mountain and filled the whole Earth.”

Nebuchednezzar was delighted with Daniel. He made Daniel the chief wise man, and the ruler of the province of Babylon and gave him many gifts. His three friends were also rewarded. The other wise men and magicians were pleased to be alive, but also jealous of Daniel. That jealousy ended up in stories like the fiery furnace where Daniel’s friends were thrown to be burned to death but ended up completely fine, not even smelling of smoke. Daniel missed out on that as he was away at the time, but he was thrown into a lions’ den another time because he also chose only to worship God.

The explanation Daniel gave about the different empires represented by the huge statue of the man came true. Several different empires took turns as the most powerful in the world until it got to the time of the Romans, who were the feet of iron and clay on the statue. The Romans were in power over the Jews when Jesus was born, and it was Roman soldiers that killed him. Their empire kind of fizzled out in the end and now the world is as we know it - lots and lots of countries but no one empire in power over all of them.

That means, we are in the waiting time for God’s kingdom to come and fill the whole world. When Jesus comes back to Earth, he is coming as the King of all kings and he will rule an amazing kingdom which is only full of goodness and joy.

Daniel did not only explain the dreams of other people - sometimes he had visions himself. One day an angel called Gabriel came to him and told him the exact number of years before the promised seed would come. Those years counted down through time until the year when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. We know that as Palm Sunday and will learn all about it next time.

Questions

1. How did Daniel end up in Babylon?
2. What special gift did God give to Daniel?
3. What did King Nebuchednezzar ask his magicians and wise men to do? What did he say when they failed?
4. What happened after Daniel prayed to God for help?
5. What was the king’s dream and what did it mean? How did the king reward Daniel?
6. Who arrived in Jerusalem then the exact number of years the angel had told Daniel had passed?
7. Which part of history are we at now, according to the statue dream?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that You showed the world so many truths before they happened, so all people can know and understand that You are God. Help us to be like Daniel and his friends who said no and stood firm against what they knew was sinful. Amen.

Activity

Do you have any playdough or another type of modelling clay that you could make into a statue like the one in Nebuchednezzar’s dream? The best thing about playdough is that you can smash it all back into its pot at the end, like the rock from the dream, but you could also form a statue from Lego or blocks.



Children's' Study - Day 34 - The Coming of the King

Parent Notes

Most Christian families will be aware of the events of the first 'Palm Sunday', the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and was received with excitement by the people who laid their cloaks on the ground and waved palm branches to greet him. It is sad to think that, before the week was over, those same people would instead be shouting, 'crucify him', but the most important thing that happened that day was that Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy written by Zechariah. It is fitting that during the week of the Road to Redemption which has focussed on the kingdom, we have the arrival of the king.

Story: The Coming of the King! (Based on Matthew 21, Psalm 118:22-28, Zechariah 9:9)

King David did not only write sad psalms - some of the psalms he wrote were really happy, even those that pointed ahead to the coming promised seed. Some psalms are called psalms of 'praise' which means they thank God for the things He has done and tell the world how amazing He is. Psalm 118 is a psalm that David wrote remembering how God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. It was used on happy days, like festivals, to help people to praise God. However, there was one interesting sentence in that psalm that didn't come true until a thousand years later when Jesus arrived. It said, 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.'

These days we don't often build houses with stone foundations. Usually, a house is built on sturdy wooden pillars and planks of wood. In Israel, however, they used stones and the very first stone they placed was called the cornerstone. It was chosen carefully and was large and sturdy and perfectly shaped so that the rest of the house or temple that followed it would be strong and straight and perfect. Have you ever tried to stack firewood neatly, build a huge tower or build a dam with stones? It's really hard to make everything line up right and if you start off badly, it goes worse and worse from there.

When some of the leaders tried to tell Jesus off for teaching God's word and healing people, Jesus reminded them of that cornerstone verse. He was telling them that they were like the builders who looked at the perfect stone but decided it wasn't good. They didn't want it, just like the leaders looked at Jesus and wanted to get rid of him. We know Jesus IS the cornerstone, the one who sets everything right and who is the beginning of a whole family of people who believe in him. If you believe in Jesus, the Bible calls *you a living stone*. That's because all of us together make up the family of God, like a big beautiful building and it all starts with Jesus.

The leaders didn't like the way people were beginning to crowd around Jesus and follow him, so Jesus knew that it was dangerous to go into Jerusalem - he knew that once he was there the leaders would arrest him and take him to the Romans who would kill him on the cross. That didn't stop him, though. It had been planned from way back in the Garden of Eden that he would give his life to pay the price for everyone's sin, and at last that time had come.

"Go ahead of me into the city," he told two of his followers. "You will find a donkey tied up there. Bring it to me and I will ride it into Jerusalem." He was about to fulfil a clue God had given the prophet Zechariah. It said, 'Be full of joy, everyone! Shout out loud! See - here comes your king! He is good and he is mighty but he is also humble. He comes to you riding on a donkey.'

The men found the donkey just as Jesus had told them, and they brought it back to him. He climbed onto the donkey's back and began to ride into the city. The King of kings was coming, but not on a mighty war horse like a proud and rich king might come, but humbly on a donkey, because Jesus was coming to lay down his life and die.

The people were excited to see Jesus. He had done so many miracles, like making blind people see and people walk again, feeding thousands of people, and even bringing a dead man back to life. They started shouting, 'Hosanna, hosanna!' (which means 'God save us') and 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' They even said 'hail to the King of Israel' and 'Praise God for the Son of David!' They took off their cloaks and laid them on the ground so not even the donkey hooves would touch the dust,

and they cut palm branches to wave. The words they shouted came from that same psalm David had written - the one about the cornerstone.

The people hoped that Jesus was the promised seed - and they were right about that - but there was one thing they got wrong. He was not coming to fight the Roman soldiers and make the people free - he had a far bigger and more important job to do. He was coming to take the sin of the world onto himself and pay for it with his life, to bring people back to God and give them life that never ended. So it wasn't very surprising that a few days later, those same excited people who waved and shouted 'Praise God' and 'Hosanna' at Jesus shouted something different. They changed their minds about him being the promised one and instead shouted 'put him on the cross' or 'crucify him' which was very sad, of course, even if it was part of God's plan.

Now when we think about that time when Jesus entered Jerusalem, we call it the 'triumphal entry' which means 'celebrating a great victory' because the people were so excited and that they called him the Son of David, the promised one. Also, in acting out the prophecy of Zechariah, Jesus was showing himself as the king of God's kingdom. However, it was only a little taste of the real triumphal entry to come. The Bible says that the next time Jesus comes to Earth, he will not be humbly riding on a donkey. The Bible says he will come on the clouds, shining with glory, and everyone will see him. All the other prophecies about him will come true and no one will ever be confused again about who he is. That will be the most triumphal entry of all!

Questions

1. What is a cornerstone? Who is the cornerstone, the one our faith is built on?
2. Who are the living stones that are also being built into God's family?
3. Why did Jesus go to the city of Jerusalem even though he knew that he would be killed if he went there?
4. What did he tell two of his followers to go and get for him?
5. What did it mean that Jesus was riding a donkey into Jerusalem - what prophecy was he making come true?
6. What did the people in the crowd do and say when they saw Jesus coming?
7. What will it be like the next time Jesus, the King of kings, comes?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we are part of Your family, like living stones being built up together into a beautiful temple. Thank you for Jesus, who is like a cornerstone, the beginning of our new life and friendship with you. Help us to praise You, like the people shouted praise to Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. Amen.

Activity

Have you ever tried to build a human pyramid? That's when everyone is on their hands and knees and you try to build up layers of people. The bottom layer is people kneeling side by side, then for the next layer up the person kneels on two of those bottom layer people and up and up it goes. You might not have enough people in your family to do that - or it might be a bit dangerous if some of you are too little, so instead you could build a pyramid out of your soft toys or blocks. See how high you can make it go and think of how we are living stones, all part of God's family.



Children's Study - Day 35 - Jonah and the Great Fish

Parent Notes

The Bible does not mention a whale as the 'great fish' Jonah is swallowed by, but it does say that God 'arranged' for this creature to swallow him! Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh to warn them about

the judgement of God, because the Assyrians were violent, wicked people, the enemies of the Jews. While God did look after Jonah, the real message of the story is repentance - the people of Nineveh believed the man who miraculously emerged from the belly of the great fish, and they immediately 'repented', praying to God to save them. Jesus used the story of Jonah to point to how he would die and come back to life, and also to show the religious leaders that the people of Nineveh listened to Jonah, yet one 'greater than' Jonah was with them and yet they refused to believe in Him. It's an AMAZING clue, one of the biggest yet (literally.)

Story: Jonah and the Great Fish (Based on Jonah 1-3, Matthew 12:38-42, Luke 11:29-32)

If there was anyone that the prophet Jonah did not want to speak to, it was an Assyrian. The Assyrians were the most powerful force in the world at the time when Jonah was alive. They were wicked and terribly violent because they believed that making people afraid of them was the best way to win any fight. Jonah could not believe his ears when God told him to travel to the city of Nineveh, the enormous main city of Assyria with its 120 000 people. He especially did not want to give them the message that God was planning to destroy them if they did not change their ways because, deep down, Jonah was hoping God WOULD punish them.

I won't do it, he decided rebelliously. *I will go as far and as fast in the opposite direction as I can!* So Jonah went and boarded the first ship sailing AWAY from Nineveh and, exhausted, he settled down for a good sleep.

Suddenly, the ship was struck by a huge wind! God had HURLED (that means thrown) a strong wind over the sea, a gale so fierce that it seemed the ship would be torn to pieces. The sailors could do nothing - none of their skills worked against such an immense storm. They woke Jonah up and 'cast lots' which means throwing something like dice or stones to find out if any of them was to blame. The lot fell to Jonah, who wasn't at all surprised.

"Who are you?" the men demanded, and Jonah's reply frightened them even more.

"I am a Hebrew," Jonah said. "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

If Jonah's God had made the sea, and had made the wind, it meant there was no getting away from Him and, sure enough, even though the sailors kept trying to row to land, they couldn't do it.

"It's all my fault," Jonah told them. "This storm will only stop if you throw me into the sea."

The men didn't want to do it, but the wind grew even more violent and they knew they would all die if they did not do as Jonah said. They picked him up and threw into the raging sea. Instantly, the wind stopped and the sea went calm! The sailors were stunned at this amazing power that could turn a storm on and off as easily as we today might turn on and off a tap.

Jonah, meanwhile, was tumbling down, down, down to the bottom of the sea where seaweed clung to his clothes, down to the very bottom of the mountains in the darkest depths. He was certain he was about to die when, out of nowhere, a giant fish appeared! It opened its mouth wide and swallowed Jonah, saving him from drowning!

For three days and three nights, Jonah was kept safe in the belly of the great fish. He prayed during that time, asking God to forgive him, and asking Him for help. I am not sure who was the most surprised when God commanded the fish to spit Jonah onto dry land - Jonah who breathed life-giving, fresh air and blinked against the bright sunlight, or the Ninevites. The people of Nineveh worshipped a false god called Dagon, who was pictured as half fish and half man. That a great fish would deliver a man onto their shore - from the depth of the sea, three days after he had been tossed overboard? It was a miracle they could not ignore.

Jonah warned the people of God's judgement that would fall on them if they did not repent (turn away) from their wickedness. The people believed Jonah. They took off their nice clothing and put on rough sackcloth, then sat in ashes and ate no food, all to show how sorry they were. They asked God to change His mind about punishing them. God did, and those people were saved.

The story of Jonah and the Great Fish is one of the big clues God put in the Old Testament to point to Jesus and the cross. Jesus told the leaders of Israel that he would be in the grave for three days and three nights, like Jonah was in the whale, meaning that he would die and come back to life. He told them that they needed to learn from the people of Nineveh - those people had listened to Jonah and repented, and here Jesus was, the Son of God, far greater than Jonah. The leaders needed to believe Jesus, but they didn't. Instead, they asked for a sign, an extra special miracle to help them to believe, so Jesus told them they would have the sign of Jonah - which meant he would be in the grave like Jonah was in the fish, but he would come back to life, like Jonah was spat out onto the shore! I think that clue was as big as the GREAT BIG FISH, don't you?

Questions

1. What did God want Jonah to do, and why did Jonah run away instead?
2. What happened after Jonah went to sleep on the boat? How did the sailors decide whose fault it was?
3. What rescued Jonah from the sea?
4. How long was Jonah in the fish? What did he pray to God?
5. How did Jonah end up on dry land? What did he do then?
6. What did the people of Nineveh do?
7. Who did Jesus tell the religious leaders was greater than Jonah?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that no one is too wicked (or bad) to be saved. Thank you for the story of Jonah and the Great Fish which showed the world that You planned for Jesus to die and come back to life. Thank you for all the amazing things You do! Amen.

Activity

It might have been a whale that swallowed Jonah, or it could have been a huge fish, or even a sea creature no one had even seen before. How big do you think it would have to be to fit Jonah in its belly? Snuggle up in a ball and get your Mum or Dad to wrap you tight and snug in a blanket (not so tight you can't breathe!) Imagine what it might have been like for Jonah - what would it have looked like, smelt like, felt like - what sounds might he have heard?



Children's Study - Day 36 - Jesus, God with Us

Parent Notes

Rather than studying the 'suffering servant' scripture written by Isaiah, for the children we will look at a few different prophecies of Isaiah that predicted Jesus' birth. The first 'coming' of Jesus was as the 'lamb' who takes away the sin of the world. His second coming will be the 'king', powerful and majestic. Isaiah describes them both in his beautiful words.

Story: Jesus, God with Us (Based on Messianic Prophecies from Isaiah, see adult study for references.)

God's people had waited a long, loooooonnnnggg time for the promised seed to come. From the moment in the Garden of Eden when sin and death came into the world because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, through generation after generation (that means from a grandad to a dad to a son and on and on and on...) the promise had been the ray of light in the darkness, for people to hold onto with faith.

Sometimes, like in the time of the flood, there were only a few people holding onto the promise; but sometimes, like when a million Israelites were led out of Egypt by Moses, it shone bright. Though God's people failed Him, and turned to false gods and idols, He did not take the promise away and there was always someone like Abraham or Moses or David to remind people that the seed WAS coming. One of the prophets who wrote the most words about this promised seed was Isaiah. He lived at a tough time in the history of God's people, where their land was overtaken by other countries and the people were killed or scattered far apart from each other. Isaiah reminded those who remained alive that, one day, God would rescue them and Isaiah was the prophet who explained that God would come as a baby!

That's an amazing thought, isn't it? That God, who made the world, would come and be born as a tiny, helpless human baby ... and not in a king's palace, either. No, when Jesus was born, it was to a very poor family and there was nothing about him that made him super popular. He was not amazingly handsome and he didn't LOOK like a king, but inside he was both God and man, and he was waiting until the time was right for him to show he was the promised seed. Isaiah prophesied it like this; 'Look! The young woman will become pregnant! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'

Isaiah told us that Galilee would be the place where the glory of God would shine - and that's exactly the place where Jesus walked around for three years doing miracles to prove he was the promised seed. Isaiah also prophesied that someone would come first to get everyone ready, 'a voice calling in the wilderness', announcing that the seed was nearly here, which is exactly what John the Baptist did.

God told Isaiah everything that he wrote, which is why it all happened exactly as Isaiah said it would. Some of what Isaiah wrote wasn't nice, but it was true. It was about how Jesus would suffer and die, and also that God's special people, the Jews, wouldn't believe Jesus was the promised seed. They would turn away from him, even though he was there to carry their sin and even though he told them so many times that he WAS the promised seed. He showed it with his miracles, he spoke the words of the Old Testament prophets that he was making come true and he even gave HUGE clues like 'I am the true bread from heaven' and 'I am the Good Shepherd' which were things God's people should have understood. Some of them did, like the disciples and other men and women who believed, even when their family and friends thought they were foolish.

One day, everyone in the world will understand who Jesus is - that he is 'God with us'. Some will understand because people like you and your family and your friends and the church will tell them. Some might read the Bible for themselves, or pray to God when they are in trouble and find He answers their prayers. *Everyone* WILL eventually understand because Jesus will come back to Earth again. The Bible says when that happens EVERY EYE will see him coming on those clouds of glory. Isaiah described it as being as if the first time Jesus came it was as a quiet lamb, who let people kill him so he could pay the price for the sins of the world. The second time Jesus comes, he will be a powerful and mighty king, ready to be the King of all kings (which means the most powerful of all, by far.)

Here are some more of the beautiful words Isaiah wrote which encouraged God's people in those long, hard years of waiting; 'For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

Questions

1. How long had people been waiting for the promised seed to come?
2. Who were some of the people we have learnt about who were full of faith even in hard times and never forgot the promised seed who was coming?
3. How did God appear to us on Earth? What can you remember about the Christmas story that shows Jesus was born in a poor family?
4. What is that special name for Jesus that means 'God with us'?
5. What are some of the other things Isaiah prophesied about Jesus?
6. Isaiah called Jesus wonderful, mighty and everlasting .. Can you think of any other amazing words for him?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that You loved us enough to want to be with us, even if it meant being born as a little baby. Thank you that, even though many people turned away from You, You still kept your promise and sent your Son to Earth. Help us all to be like Noah and Abraham and Moses and David who trusted You with hearts full of faith. Amen.

Activity

Isaiah wrote that the promised seed, the son of David, would be like a banner raised high for all the nations of the world to see. Could you make a banner to put up high in your bedroom or over the doorway of your house that proclaims something about Jesus? You could use the words of Isaiah like 'Prince of Peace' or you could think of some great words yourself.



Children's Study - Day 37 - The Light of the World

Parent Notes

In the Bible, light can symbolise many things. Light was made first at the Creation of the world. We know that sunlight is life - without it, there would be no light on our planet. Light is used to lead us through dark places, and it reveals what is hidden in the dark. The glory of God shines bright like light and we are told that we are like 'clay pots' of God's light who carry the treasure of the good news to the world.

When Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the World', there are many things he could have meant. I think it could be a mixture of all those aspects of light written here. The world went dark while Jesus was on the cross because the light of the world was dying, but we know death COULD NOT put that light out, and when he rose again to life, he shone bright enough to draw all people of the world to him, if they are willing to believe.

Story: The Light of the World (Based on John 1, 8:12, 9 and 2 Corinthians 4:1-7)

When Jesus was walking along one day, he came across a man who had been born blind. The man had never seen *anything*, not even once. The man couldn't work so had to beg for money to live, which was a very hard and lonely life to lead. Jesus made a paste out of mud and smeared it on to the man's eyes. "Go and wash this off," he told him, and so the man made his way to a pool and obediently washed the mud away. As soon as he had done that, he found he could see! He was so excited that he couldn't wait to tell everyone.

His friends and neighbours couldn't believe it was true. "This isn't the same man who begs us for money each day! It must be someone else!" they decided. "It's not possible that a man born blind could suddenly see." But the man insisted, "It IS me! I WAS that blind beggar, but now I can see! Jesus made some mud for my eyes, and when I washed that off, I was healed!"

The people finally believed him, and took him to the Pharisees, who were the leaders of the synagogue (the Jewish church.) The man told his story all over again. Some of the Pharisees decided that Jesus must be sent from God as that's the only way he could have done such an amazing thing; others said, no, Jesus was a sinner and not from God. They had a huge argument about it.

"Get the man's parents in," one of the Pharisees suggested. "They might be able to explain what happened."

But the man's parents were afraid to say much at all. They knew that the Pharisees had made a rule that anyone who said Jesus was the promised seed would be thrown out of the temple and not allowed to come back. So, the Pharisees tried one more time to make the man change his story.

“Look,” he snapped, annoyed that they were making this so difficult, when really, it was so simple. “I don’t know anything about Jesus except this one thing - I was blind and now I see. That makes him full of God’s power, doesn’t it?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” the Pharisees scoffed, and threw him out. Later, Jesus heard what had happened and came to see that the man was OK. “Do you know who the Son of Man is?” he asked, using one of the names of the promised seed.

The man replied, “I don’t, but I would like to. Who is he?”

Jesus grinned at him, “You have seen him! He’s speaking to you!” Immediately, the man fell onto the ground to worship Jesus. He had been healed by the promised one! He couldn’t believe how his life had changed in just one day.

There were some Pharisees standing nearby, listening to their conversation. “I came into the world to make blind people see,” Jesus said, “but also to make seeing people blind.” What he meant was, some people wouldn’t believe in him, because they could not see the truth. The Pharisees were very grumpy when he said that and growled, “I hope you aren’t talking about us!”

“You think you can see, but you can’t,” Jesus sighed, shaking his head sadly. He hoped they would one day understand that the promised one, God’s own Son, was there, right in front of them. They refused to believe and that made them blind in their spirits, even though they could see with their eyes.

Another time, Jesus called out to the crowds, “I am the Light of the World. Follow me and you will never walk in darkness. I will lead you safely to God.”

Jesus is the bright shining glory of God, he is the one through which the light of Creation was made, and his pure, perfect light showed how sinful mankind was. He leads us to God, because when we believe in him, we become children of God.

Paul, who wrote lots of books of the Bible, said that we should think of ourselves as little pots made of clay. We might not look very special on the outside, but inside us is the light of the world, Jesus! He is like treasure for us to share with everyone, so they can become children of light, too.

Questions

1. How long had the man been blind? What did he have to do to get money?
2. What did Jesus put on the man’s eyes? What did the man have to go and do before he could see?
3. What happened after the man told people he could see - did they believe him?
4. How did the Pharisees feel about the man being healed? Did they think Jesus was from God or not?
5. What happened when Jesus found the man again? What did they talk about?
6. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees ‘blind’?
7. Why does Paul call believers ‘clay pots’? What treasure is inside us?

Prayer

Dear God, You can do such amazing things! Healing a man who was blind all of his life should have been impossible, but nothing is impossible for You! Thank you that we are like clay pots, full of special treasure because you live inside us. Help us to shine our light bright for everyone to see that You are alive!

Activity

Does your Mum or Dad have some candles that you could light when it is dark? If you put out a circle of candles on a table, and sit quietly around it, you could have your own service called a Tenebrae service. It’s a way to remember that Jesus, the light of the world, died on the cross for us. Slowly, slowly, each candle is blown out until only one remains. Your Mum or Dad carries that one away as if it is Jesus going into the tomb for 3 days. Then, there needs to be a big CRASH like everyone clapping their hands, or a pile of books being dropped on the kitchen floor. That’s like the stone being rolled away from the tomb. Now the Jesus candle can come back because he rose again!

Another idea is to do a blind trust walk - the man who had been born blind from birth would have had to trust others to lead him safely in new places. Who could you trust to lead you around if you close your eyes (or blindfold yourself?) Give your helper a turn afterwards!



Children's Study - Day 38 - Jesus Says Goodbye

Parent Notes

Sometimes, when people know they are going to die, they prepare messages to tell their loved ones, often recording them so their words can be replayed over and over again once they have passed on. Jesus knew the time for his death was drawing close, and had long desired to spend a final evening alone with his disciples to speak directly to them about the things he felt were most important that they understood. These words are a comfort to all believers, for he spoke them to us, as well as to the disciples in that room more than 2000 years ago.

Story: Jesus Says Goodbye (Based on John 13 and 14)

It was Passover time in Israel, when everyone stopped their work and took a special day to remember how God had rescued their ancestors from Egypt, protecting them by the blood of the Passover Lamb from the final plague, and then leading them out through the Red Sea to safety. The day after Passover was the start of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, with its special days of rests (called Sabbaths). Everyone who could go, travelled to Jerusalem for that week, so it was packed with people and it was hard to find anywhere to stay. Jesus knew that he was going to die that week - that was part of God's plan, because he was the real meaning of the Passover Lamb, and by his death everyone in the world would be free from sin and death, in an even better way than the Israelites back in Egypt. He wanted a final evening all alone with his disciples, to tell them the things that he wanted them to remember, so he had arranged for a room that he and his disciples could use away from the busy crowds.

As Jesus and his disciples settled down for a last meal together, Jesus noticed the men were arguing, and as he realised what it was about, his heart sank. The men were snapping at each other about who was the greatest of them, the most important! Did they not understand that God himself had come to Earth, and become a poor, helpless baby so he could save people's lives? The men should have understood that loving each other, and all the people outside of the door, was the greatest thing they could do with their lives. That was the only 'greatest' they should be worrying about!

Suddenly, Jesus pushed back his chair and stood up. He wrapped a towel around his waist and poured a bowl of clean water, then he did something that made the disciples' mouths drop open in shock! Jesus knelt down on the floor and took one of the men's feet in his hands. Placing it into the basin, he began to wash the dirt off. This was a job that only slaves and servants would do, or sometimes a student might do it for one of the important religious teachers, but NEVER would a teacher do it for someone beneath him. The men watched in stunned silence as Jesus slowly made his way around the room, gently, silently showing them how the promised seed, the one they had been waiting for since the beginning of time, had come to love and serve.

There was one disciple who couldn't hold back his shock any longer. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Peter protested. "No, Lord, never! Never, never, ever! It's not right!"

Jesus replied, "This isn't about being clean of dirt, Peter. I've come to cleanse people from their sins. This shows that you belong to me."

"Then wash all of me!" Peter suggested, but Jesus shook his head. "That's not needed," he said softly. "You are already clean because you believe in me."

When he had washed everyone's feet, Jesus sat down again. "You call me teacher and Lord," he said, "and that's exactly right - I am those things. So, because you have seen me, your Lord, wash your

feet, now you can remember that loving each other and looking after each other is what I want you to do, too. None of you are more important than the other - and even if you were, I am the Lord of all of you and I washed your feet like a slave, so you should do the same. Never forget how important love is.”

Jesus saw the men looked worried and ashamed. “Don’t be sad and troubled,” Jesus told them. “I am going to make a place for you in my Father’s home. You know the way there, don’t you?” He was talking about heaven, but Thomas didn’t understand.

“We have no idea where you are going!” he exclaimed. “How can we know the way?”

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father, except through me,” Jesus replied. “Listen, all of you! Everything I have done shows you that I am in my Father and He is in me. And, as soon as I have gone to be with him, I will send you the Holy Spirit to live inside you. Then you will be in us, too. Father, Son, Holy Spirit and you, all together. The Holy Spirit will comfort you and help you until we can be together for real again, in the Kingdom of God.”

The men were still a little uncertain. It sounded to them like Jesus was saying goodbye, as if he was truly planning to die, but they didn’t want to believe he really meant that. What they *did* know, was never again would they argue about who was the greatest. The greatest one of all had knelt at their feet and washed dirt from their filthy skin. They would never forget that Jesus, the Son of God, had shown them that loving people was what was important. That was the commandment he wanted them to keep.

Questions

1. Why was Jerusalem so busy and crowded?
2. What did the day of Passover remind the Jewish people about?
3. Why was it God’s plan for Jesus to die during the week of Passover?
4. What were the disciples arguing about?
5. How did Jesus show them that they should never be worried about who was the greatest?
6. What is the commandment Jesus wanted them to keep?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lives in those who believe. Thank you that we can be close to You and to Jesus. Help us to love our family, our friends and the people we meet, like Jesus showed us we should do. Amen.

Activity

Partly fill a bowl or bucket with warm water. You could add some nice smelling soap or bath salts, if you like! Take turns washing and drying the feet of your family, thinking about how Jesus wants us to love and serve people, just like he did in the story today.



Children’s Study - Day 39 - The Special Supper

Parent Notes

Different churches have different expectations as to whether or not children can freely partake in communion, so some children may grow up with it being a routine part of their church experience, and others may be required to wait until they are baptised or confirmed. Whether or not they participate, however, they should still be able to understand the key message of the bread and wine/grape juice that is served as a communion ‘meal.’ The cup represents the blood of Jesus and the bread represents Jesus’ body which was beaten and killed for our sake. Above all, communion is a celebration of what Jesus has done for us and it reminds us to look forward to eternal life in his kingdom where there will be ‘a wedding feast of the Lamb’ where believers and Jesus meet and eat together again.

Story: The Special Supper (Based on Luke 22:14-20)

Do you remember how God made a promise to Noah that he would never again destroy the whole world with a flood? What did God put in the sky as a sign of that promise? What about the promise God gave to Abraham that he would have so many descendants that there would be more of them than stars in the night sky? Moses and the Israelites also had another of these special promises given to them - that God would be their God and look after them if they kept his laws. He had to give them rules about animal sacrifices, too, because they were always breaking the laws and needed to have their sins forgiven by something giving its life in place of them. The promise that God gave through Moses is called the 'old covenant'. In fact, all of those big promises between God and men were called 'covenants' and they kept the hope of the promised seed alive from generation to generation.

The trouble with the Moses covenant was that it relied on people to obey God's rules, and they really were hopeless at that. The rules were there to help them take care of each other, to keep themselves clean and healthy, have good relationships with their families and serve God in the tabernacle and temple, so they were great rules, but having a list of rules written on stone tablets or scrolls of paper wasn't enough - the rules needed to be written on people's hearts and minds. People needed God to live IN them, and then HIS voice would help them to know how to live. And that was precisely what happened in the covenant that began when Jesus died.

Everyone who believes in Jesus, the Son of God, is part of this covenant, even children like you. It has a very short name, so it might not sound exciting, but it really is! Listen to this story about Jesus and the disciples and see if you can hear the name of this covenant;

The night before Jesus died, while the disciples were gathered together with him, he picked up a piece of bread from the plate in front of him and held it up, until everyone stopped talking and looked intently at him, waiting to see what he was going to say.

As they watched, Jesus broke the bread into pieces and passed a piece to each of them. "This is my body, broken for you," he said. "Do this to remember me."

The disciples quietly ate their piece of bread, their eyes still fixed on Jesus. They didn't like to think of his body being broken, but before they could ask him what he meant, Jesus had picked up the cup of wine.

"This," Jesus proclaimed, "is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. Do this every time you drink it to remember me." He passed the cup to the nearest disciple and each man took a sip before passing it to the person next to them. As the men swallowed some of the red wine, their hearts were so full of different emotions they scarcely knew how they felt.

The New Covenant? It was here? Now? The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had told the Israelites that one day a new covenant would come ... so that was wonderful and amazing and exciting if it was here. But ... the old covenant had been sealed with the blood of animals ... Did this new covenant mean Jesus had to die? Was it really HIS blood that would seal it? Looking at the last, broken pieces of bread on the plate and the cup of wine that was nearly empty made it all seem very real, and very soon.

"I *will* drink this cup with you in the kingdom of God," Jesus promised them firmly. "In the meantime, remember me by coming together to break bread and drink from the cup of wine. The New Covenant is ready, and it is sealed in my blood."

Jesus did not need to tell them what the New Covenant was. Every little Jewish girl and boy were taught about the promised covenant that God would make with the people of Earth one day. In the new covenant, God said he would forgive each person's sins and not remember the sins again. He would be their God, and they would KNOW him. God's instructions would not be written on stone and paper, but on their hearts and minds. All the work would be done by God, so the covenant COULD NOT and WOULD NOT be broken. The covenant would begin when Jesus died. Unlike the animal sacrifices that went on year after year, he would die one time and forever, because HE was good, and he was PERFECT so his death would be enough.

There was a terrible night ahead for the disciples. After supper, they would walk out into the darkness with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane where, one by one, the men would fall asleep and

leave him lonely and alone as he prayed for God to give him strength. Then, Judas, one of the disciples, would bring soldiers to arrest Jesus - yes, one of Jesus' own friends would do that to him. The other disciples would run away. The next morning, Jesus would be led out to be put on the cross and die because that had to happen first, then the new covenant would begin.

It DID begin and not long after Jesus rose to life again, the disciples began meeting to break bread and share the cup of wine. Soon, lots and lots of people came to believe that Jesus was the promised seed, and they put their faith in him. They met together to break bread, too. To start with, the special meal was called the Lord's Supper, but in time it also became known as 'communion' because that word means 'sharing'.

Still today, 2000 years later, believers all over the world share a time of remembering Jesus and how it was through his death (his broken body) and his blood (which paid the price for all the sins of the world) that they are part of the new covenant. They also think about how, one day, there will be an amazing feast in heaven called the 'Wedding Feast of the Lamb', which is where we all get to eat and drink with Jesus in his kingdom that will never end. There won't be a single sad thought that day - it will only be happiness and joy.

Questions

1. What is the name of the covenant that the people had been waiting for?
2. What did Jesus do with the bread? What did he do with the cup of wine?
3. What is the special meal called?
4. What do we remember when we have communion?
5. Can you remember one of the amazing parts of the New Covenant?
6. What special feast do we look forward to having one day?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that we have this special meal as a sign of Your new covenant with us. Help us to remember that when we take communion (or watch the adults taking it) that it's all about Jesus - his body and his blood - that cleansed us from our sins and made us right with You. Thank you that we get to meet Jesus for real at the Wedding Feast in heaven! Amen.

Activity

The early Christians in the first churches met often, sometimes to share the Lord's Supper (communion) together, but also to share meals, pray, listen to the disciples teach them and to give their money to anyone who needed help. Communion means 'sharing' and the early church was GREAT at sharing everything. Most of all, they shared their belief in Jesus! What could your family share with another family? Could you meet together for a meal, pray together, or read the Bible together?

OR maybe you could make a drawing about communion, and what it means. Then, you could give it to the church for them to display the next time it is communion day, so everyone can understand how special the Lord's Supper is!



Children's Study - Day 40 - Up from the Dead!

Parent Notes

At last we have reached the end of the journey, but please don't think you need to stop the daily habit of Bible reading and prayer as a family, now that you have it going so well! Finding a really strong children's Bible that doesn't miss too much out, or dumb it down, would be a good start to future Bible reading and prayer times. Otherwise, reading a gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John,) or the Book of Acts

aloud would be another great idea. Today's key message is HE IS RISEN! Jesus is alive and it's time to be happy and celebrate!

Story: Up from the Dead! (Based on Luke 24, Matthew 27-28, Isaiah 53:9)

The afternoon that Jesus died, his body was taken down from the cross by the soldiers. A rich man called Joseph of Arimathea was a follower of Jesus, but secretly, because he was scared of the other Jewish leaders. Once Jesus died, he was too sad to care about what anyone thought anymore. He went straight to Pontius Pilate, the Roman general who had been in charge of putting Jesus on the cross, and asked for Jesus' body so that he could lay it safely into a grave. Joseph gently wrapped Jesus' bruised and torn body into a pure white linen cloth and arranged to have it carried out of the city to his tomb.

In those days, if you had enough money, you got a nice tomb ready for when you died. Joseph owned a new tomb that had recently been carved out of the rock; it was clean and empty. He tenderly laid Jesus there, taking all the care he could with the precious body. Do you think Joseph knew that he was fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah, who said the promised seed would be put in a rich man's grave? I don't think he did - he was simply showing Jesus all the love he could.

Joseph stared sadly at the cloth-wrapped body for a while, before sighing and turning away. He had to leave because it was late afternoon now and the Sabbath day of rest was about to begin when no work could be done. Joseph groaned with effort as he pushed the heavy stone across the doorway, then he walked away, back towards the city.

Joseph didn't notice a group of women huddled away, out of sight. They were Jesus' mother and some others who loved Jesus. They had stayed with him all day long as he died on the cross, and still stayed with him now, as close as they could get. They wanted to place perfume and spices on his body as a last act of love for Jesus so had followed Joseph to find out which tomb to come back to. Like Joseph, there was nothing they could do until the Sabbath was over.

Shockingly, despite them being the leaders of the Jews, it was the religious leaders who broke the Sabbath! The next morning, they went to Pilate and demanded that he put soldiers outside of the tomb to guard it, in case anyone got clever ideas about stealing the body and pretending Jesus had come back to life.

"Alright," Pilate agreed, adding, "make it as secure as you can."

So guards took up their position outside of the tomb, and everyone waited and waited and waited. Then, on Sunday morning, as the first rays of dawn touched the sky ... RUMBLE, RUMBLE, SHAKE, SHUDDER, CRRRASSSSSHHH!!! The guards were thrown to and fro, terrified because the stone had rolled away! Then, a bright glowing light shone as an angel dressed in pure white settled down to sit upon the stone. That was too much for the guards, they fainted, splat to the ground. Just then, Mary and another woman arrived, having hurried there as soon as daylight had shown them that the Sabbath was over. They froze in shock when they saw the open tomb, but then their eyes fell on the angel and they gasped and shrank back.

"Don't be afraid," the angel told them. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who died on the cross, but he's not here! He has risen from the dead, just like he said he would! Have a look, and you will see for yourself!"

So the women cautiously shuffled forward and peeked into the tomb. The linen was still there, but the body had gone! Jesus had sat up and unwrapped the linen before folding it neatly and setting it aside.

"It's true," Mary breathed.

"He's alive," whispered the other woman.

Then, both of them at once, suddenly shrieked with joy! They grabbed each other and held on tight, feeling like they might fly apart with happiness!

"We have to tell the disciples!" Mary said.

"Yes! We have to tell EVERYONE!" the other woman agreed, and with one, final, joy-filled look at that empty tomb, they took off at a run.

They were only part way down the path when Jesus met them!

"Lord! It is you!" they gasped, as they sank to the ground and worshipped him.

That was only the start of a very exciting day. There was a lot of running to and fro from the tomb to the city and back again. The news spread until all the followers of Jesus knew. Jesus, however, disappeared until later that day when he popped up next to two men who were walking down a road from the city towards a town called Emmaus.

You know what happened next, because we heard about it on the first day of the Road to Redemption journey. Jesus listened as the two men wondered out loud about the strange events of the past few days, when Jesus, the man they had thought might have been the promised seed, had died on the cross and been buried. They described how, just that morning, some of the women had found an empty tomb and had insisted that Jesus was alive.

"You foolish men," Jesus told them. "Don't you know that it was written by Moses and the prophets that the Messiah must come and suffer and die, but then he would rise to life again?" So he explained it all to them, starting at the beginning of the world, with Adam and Eve and the terrible sin, and the ray of light about the promised seed who would come and make it right one day. Through the covenants of Noah and Abraham and Moses and David, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel. He told them about the ark and the water from the rock and the bronze serpent and the sign of Jonah. By then, they had reached the place the men were to stay, and they invited the stranger to eat with them.

As they all sat down together, the stranger picked up a piece of bread and slowly broke it into pieces, and gave it to them. That's when they knew - was it the reminder of the covenant meal of communion, or the sight of the nail scars in his hands? We don't know which, but the men were CERTAIN it was him.

"Jesus!" they shouted. "It IS you! You ARE alive!"

Then Jesus disappeared, and the men got up, tripping over the chairs in their haste to get out of the door. They raced that long road back to the city! They had to tell everyone that Jesus was alive - he had come and redeemed the whole world by giving his life to take the place of the punishment that Adam and Eve had brought upon them. And now, anyone who believed in him could live forever. Jesus had fought death and he had won. The End!

Or is it just the beginning, because there's a whole new kingdom out there that will come one day and, when that happens, we will all meet its king. Then we can say thank you to Jesus, face to face.

Questions

1. Who looked after Jesus' body? Where did he put it?
2. What did the religious leaders ask Pilate for? Why?
3. What happened on Sunday morning to the tomb and to the guards? Who sat on the stone?
4. What did the angel tell the women? What did they see inside the tomb?
5. Who did the women meet when they ran to tell the disciples about Jesus being alive?
6. Who did he visit on the road to Emmaus? What did he tell them?
7. Will we get to meet Jesus one day? What would you like to tell him?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for this Road to Redemption journey of forty days that has taught us so much about You. Thank you that You gave us this time to learn about the clues You had put in the Bible that point to Jesus so, even at a very young age, we can believe in him. We are redeemed, which means, your Son paid for us with his life. Thank you, always and forever, Amen.

Activity

Party time! How could you celebrate that Jesus is alive? A 'He is Risen' cake with lots of candles because he is the light of the world? Some happy music to dance to? Maybe a hot cross bun breakfast? Think of a way that your family can celebrate Jesus being alive again, and all of the great things you have learnt!

P.S. Bye for now! Here is a blessing for you; 'May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.'