

HANI CORE STORY LIST

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1. Creation of angels – Job 38:4-7, Isa. 14.12-15, Ezek. 28.12-17

I will tell you the story of the Most High God, the Creator of this world, and about His love for all of us. This story is long, and I will only tell you parts of it. Each small story I tell is a part of the larger story in a book called the Bible. The Bible is not the word of man, but the word of God. God spoke these words to men thousands of years ago, and the men wrote them down for us to remember, understand and obey. The words are completely true and we can trust them, because they are the words of God. These words will show us the path to live as God wants us to live, and to know Him forever.

This first small story is the story of what things were like before the world was created. Before the world was created, the one true God, the Creator, the Most High created the spirits. These spirits were not God, but were made by God to live in heaven with Him. God made them perfect and beautiful. They lived in the presence of God and were set apart to serve Him. The spirits were sinless and good. This holy gathering of spirits was created to worship God and serve His purposes. The Bible called them angels. They are mighty beings, but are created to be lower than God and subject to His control.

The angels were with God when he created our world. They sang together and shouted for joy when God laid the foundations of the world

There was one angel who was the most perfect, wise and beautiful. He was especially chosen by God as the highest angel. But his perfection caused him to want more. He desired to sit on the throne of God and be God himself. He said, "I will rise to the top of heaven. I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on God's mountain. I will rise above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High God."

But the Most High God saw this evil in him, this pride, this wanting to be God. The Most High, who is perfectly good, cast him away from the mountain of God where the angels assembled, for he is not God, nor can he match God's power. The angel who was cast away was named Satan, the devil, which means the one who accuses, because he accuses or condemns. Satan gathered many angels with him in his rebellion to leave the assembly of God. These angels became evil, also, and are called demons. Together, as they follow their leader Satan, they seek to deceive men with lies, to lead them away from God and to ruin their lives.

But many, many more angels continue to live in the assembly of God, singing his praises all the time. They are the special, powerful messengers of God and serve his purposes in the world.

1. Creation of the world – Gen 1.1-25

In the beginning, God created the sky and the earth. The earth was empty and had no shape. Darkness covered the ocean and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God said, “Let there be light!” And there was light. God saw that the light was good. So he divided the light from the darkness. God named the light “day” and the darkness “night.” Evening passed, and morning came. This was the first day.

Then God said, “Let there be something to divide the water in two!” So God made the air to divide the water in two. Some of the water was above the air, and some of the water was below it. God named the air “sky.” Evening passed, and morning came. This was the second day.

Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered together so the dry land will appear.” And it happened. God named the dry land “earth.” He named the water that was gathered together “seas.” God saw that this was good.

Then God said, “Let the earth produce plants. Some plants will make grain for seeds. Others will make fruit with seeds in it. Every seed will produce more of its own kind of plant.” And it happened. The earth produced plants. Some plants had grain for seeds. The trees made fruit with seeds in it. Each seed grew its own kind of plant. God saw that all this was good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day.

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons, days and years. They will be in the sky to give light to the earth.” And it happened. So God made the two large lights. He made the brighter light to rule the day. He made the smaller light to rule the night. He also made the stars. God put all these in the sky to shine on the earth. They are to rule over the day and over the night. He put them there to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that all these things were good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fourth day.

Then God said, “Let the water be filled with living things. And let birds fly in the air above the earth.” So God created the large sea animals. He created every living thing that moves in the sea. The sea is filled with these living things. Each one produces more of its own kind. God also made every bird that flies. And each bird produces more of its own kind. God saw that this was good. God blessed them and said, “Have many young ones and grow in number. Fill the water of the seas, and let the birds grow in number on the earth.” Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fifth day.

Then God said, “Let the earth be filled with animals. And let each produce more of its own kind. Let there be tame animals and small crawling animals and wild animals. And let each produce more of its kind.” And it happened. So God made the wild animals, the tame animals and all the small crawling animals to produce more of their own kind. God saw that this was good.

3. Creation of man – Gen 1.26-2.25

Also on the sixth day God said, “Let us make human beings in our image and likeness. And let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky. Let them rule over the tame animals, over all the earth and over all the small crawling animals on the earth.”

When the Lord God created the sky and earth, he took dust from the ground and formed man from it. The Lord breathed the breath of life into the man’s nose. And the man became a living person. Then the Lord God planted a garden in the East, in a place called Eden. He put the man he had formed in that garden. The Lord God caused every beautiful tree and every tree that was good for food to grow out of the ground. In the middle of the garden, God put the tree that gives life. And he put there the tree that gives the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed through Eden and watered the garden.

The Lord God put the man in the garden of Eden to care for it and work it. The Lord God commanded him, “You may eat the fruit from any tree in the garden. But you must not eat the fruit from the tree which gives the knowledge of good and evil. If you ever eat fruit from that tree, you will die!”

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is right for him.” From the ground God formed every wild animal and every bird in the sky. He brought them to the man so the man could name them. Whatever the man called each living thing, that became its name. The man gave names to all the tame animals, to the birds in the sky and to all the wild animals. But the man Adam did not find a helper that was right for him. So the Lord God caused the man to sleep very deeply. While the man was asleep, God took one of the ribs from the man’s body. Then God closed the man’s skin at the place where he took the rib. The Lord God used the rib from the man to make a woman. Then the Lord brought the woman to the man.

And the man said, “Now, this is someone whose bones came from my bones. Her body came from my body. I will call her ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of man.” So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife. And the two people will become one body. The man and his wife were naked, but they were not ashamed.

So God created human beings in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. God blessed them and said, “Have many children and grow in number. Fill the earth and be its master. Rule over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the sky. Rule over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God said, “Look, I have given you all the plants that have grain for seeds. And I have given you all the trees whose fruits have seeds in them. They will be food for you. I have given all the green plants to all the animals to eat. They will be food for every wild animal, every bird of the air and every small crawling animal.” And it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and it was very good. Evening passed, and morning came. This was the sixth day.

So the sky, the earth and all that filled them were finished. By the seventh day God finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day he rested from all his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day. He made it holy because on that day he rested. He rested from all the work he had done in creating the world.

4. The first sin and judgment – Genesis 3

Now the snake was the most clever of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day the devil came in the form of a snake and spoke to the woman. He said, “Did God really say that you must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

The woman answered the snake, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. But God told us, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden. You must not even touch it, or you will die.’”

But the snake said to the woman, “You will not die. God knows that if you eat the fruit from that tree, you will learn about good and evil. Then you will be like God!”

The woman saw that the tree was beautiful. She saw that its fruit was good to eat and that it would make her wise. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of the fruit to her husband, and he ate it. Then, it was as if the man’s and the woman’s eyes were opened. They realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made something to cover themselves.

Then they heard the Lord God walking in the garden. This was during the cool part of the day. And the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees in the garden. But the Lord God called to the man. The Lord said, “Where are you?”

The man answered, “I heard you waking in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked. So I hid.”

God said to the man, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from that tree? I commanded you not to eat from that tree?”

The man said, “You gave this woman to me. She gave me fruit from the tree. So I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What have you done?”

She answered, “The snake tricked me. So I ate the fruit.”

The Lord God said to the snake, “Because you did this, a curse will be put on you. You will be cursed more than any tame animal or wild animal. You will crawl on your stomach, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. You descendants and her descendants will be enemies. He child will crush you head. And you will bite his heel.”

Then God said to the woman, “I will cause you to have much trouble when you are pregnant. And when you give birth to children, you will have great pain. You will greatly desire your husband, but he will rule over you.”

Then God said to the man, “You listened to what your wife said. And you ate fruit from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from. So I will put a curse on the ground. You will have to work very hard for food. In pain you will eat its food all the days of your life. The ground will produce thorns and weeds for you. And you will eat the plants of the field. You will sweat and work hard for your food. Later you will return to the ground. This is because you were taken from the ground. You are dust. And when you die, you will return to the dust.”

The man named his wife Eve. This is because she is the mother of everyone who ever lived. The Lord God made clothes from animal skins for the man and his wife. And so the Lord dressed them. Then the Lord God said, "Look, the man has become like one of us. He knows good and evil. And now we must keep him from eating some of the fruit from the tree of life. If he does, he will live forever." So the Lord God forced the man out of the garden of Eden. He had to work the ground he was taken from. God forced the man out of the garden. Then God put angels on the east side of the garden. He also put a sword of fire there. It flashed around in every direct. This kept people from getting to the tree of life.

Cain and Able Story is important to put here!

5. Judgment of a Sinful World – Noah and the Flood – Genesis 6:1 – 9:19

As Adam and Eve had children, the number of people on earth began to grow. Hundreds of years passed and the number continued to grow. But the Lord saw that the human beings on the earth had become very wicked. He also saw that the thoughts in their hearts were only about evil all the time. The Lord was sorry he had made human beings on the earth. His heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, “I will destroy all human beings that I made on the earth. And I will destroy every animal and everything that crawls on the earth. I will also destroy the birds of the air. This is because I am sorry that I have made them.”

But a man named Noah pleased the Lord. He was a good man. He was the most innocent man of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

People on earth did what God said was evil. Violence was everywhere. God saw that all the people of the earth only did evil. So God said to Noah, “People have made the earth full of violence. So I will destroy all the people from the earth. Build a large boat of cypress wood for yourself. Make rooms in it and cover it inside and outside with tar. This is how big I want you to build the boat: 140 meters (450 feet) long, 23 meters (75 feet) wide and 14 meters (45 feet) high. Put a door in the side and an upper, middle and lower deck inside the boat. I will bring a flood of water on the earth. I will destroy all living things that live under the sky. But I will make an agreement with you. You, your sons, your wife and your son’s wives will all go into the boat.

“So you and your family go into the boat. Take with you seven pairs, each male with its female, of every kind of clean animal. And take one pair, each male with its female of every kind of unclean animal. Take seven pairs of all the birds of the sky, each male with its female. This will allow all these animals to continue living on the earth after the flood. I will send rain on the earth. It will rain 40 days and 40 nights. I will destroy from the earth every living thing that I made.”

Noah did everything that the Lord commanded. He and his family went into the boat to escape the waters of the flood. All the clean animals, unclean animals, birds and everything that crawls upon the ground came to Noah. They went into the boat in groups of two. Then the Lord closed the door behind them.

On that day the underground springs split open and the clouds in the sky poured out rain. The rain fell on the earth for 40 days and nights. Water flooded the earth for 40 days. As the water rose, it lifted the boat off the ground. The water continued to rise, and the boat floated on the water above the earth. The water rose so much that even the highest mountains under the sky were covered by it. The water continued to rise until it was more than 6 meters (20 feet) above the mountains.

So God destroyed from the earth every living thing that was on the land. All that was left was Noah and what was with him in the boat. And the waters continued to cover the earth for 150 days.

But God remembered Noah and all the animals with him in the boat. God made a wind blow over the earth, and the water went down. After 150 days, the water had gone down so much that the boat touched land again. It came to rest on one of the mountains. After many more days, the water drew back and the land dried out. So Noah went out with his sons, his wife and his sons’ wives. Every animal and every bird went out of the boat. They left by families.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord. Noah took some of the clean birds and animals. And he burned them on the altar as offerings to God. The Lord was pleased with these sacrifices. He said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of human beings. Their thoughts are evil even when they are young. But I will never again destroy every living thing on the earth as I did this time. As long as the earth continues, there will be planting and harvest. Cold and hot, summer and winter, day and night will not stop."

Then God blessed Noah and his sons. He said to them, "Have many children. Grow in number and fill the earth. Every animal on earth and every bird in the sky will respect and fear you. So will every animal that crawls on the ground and every fish in the sea respect and fear you. I have given them to you. Everything that moves, everything that is alive, is yours for food. Earlier I gave you the green plants. And now I give you everything for food. But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it, because blood gives life. I will demand your blood for your lives. That is, I will demand the life of any animal that kills a person. And I will demand the life of anyone who takes another person's life. Whoever kills a human being will be killed by a human being. This is because God made humans in his own image."

Then God said to Noah and his sons, "Now I am making my agreement with you and your people who will live after you. I will never again destroy all living things by floodwaters. A flood will never again destroy the earth. I am putting my rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the agreement between me and the earth."

6. The Tower of Babel – Genesis 11:1-9

As time went by, the people of the earth began to multiply greatly. At this time, the whole world spoke one language. Everyone used the same words. As people moved from the East, they found a large flat area in the land of Shinar. They settled there to live.

They said to each other, “Let’s make bricks and bake them to make them hard.” So they used bricks instead of stones, and tar instead of mortar. Then they said to each other, “Let’s build for ourselves a city and a tower. And let’s make the top of the tower reach high into the sky. We will become famous. If we do this, we will not be scattered over all the earth.”

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built. The Lord said, “Now, these people are united. They all speak the same language. This is only the beginning of what they will do. They will be able to do anything they want. Come, let us go down and confuse their language. Then they will not be able to understand each other.”

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth. And they stopped building the city. That is where the Lord confused the language of the whole world. So the place is called Babel. So the Lord caused them to spread out from there over all the whole world.

7. God's Promise to Abraham – Genesis 12:1-8

Many years later, a man named Terah took his son Abram, Abram's wife Sarai and Abram's nephew Lot. They moved away from the land of Shinar and planned to go to the distant land of Canaan. But they stopped halfway in the city of Haran. There they settled down to live.

After Terah died, the Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives and your father's family. Go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make you famous. And you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you. I will place a curse on those who harm you. And all the people on the earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram left Haran as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him. At this time Abram was 75 years old. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot and everything they owned. Abram had no children because his wife Sarai was not able to have children. They took all the servants they had gotten in Haran. They set out from Haran, planning to go to the land of Canaan. In time they arrived there.

Abram traveled through that land. He went as far as the great tree of Moreh at the city of Shechem. The Canaanite people were living in the land at that time. The Lord appeared to Abram. The Lord said, "I will give this land to your descendants." So Abram built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. Then Abram traveled from Shechem to the mountain east of the city of Bethel. And he set up his tent there. There Abram built another altar to the Lord and worshiped him.

Abram was very rich in cattle, silver and gold. During this time Lot was traveling with Abram. Lot also had many sheep, cattle and tents. Abram and Lot had so many animals that the land could not support both of them together. Abram's herders and Lot's herders began to argue.

So Abram said to Lot, "There should be no arguing between you and me. Your herders and mine should not argue either. We are brothers. We should separate. The whole land is there in front of you. I you go to the left, I will go to the right. I you go to the right, I will go to the left."

Lot looked all around and saw the whole Jordan River Valley. He saw that there was much water there. It was like the Lord's garden. So Lot chose to move east and live there. In this way Abram and Lot separated. Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived among the cities in the Jordan Valley.

After Lot left, the Lord said to Abram, "Look all around you. Look north and south and east and west. All this land that you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as many as the dust of the earth. I anyone could count the dust on the earth, he could count your people. Get up! Walk through all this land. I am now giving it to you."

So Abram moved his tents. He went to live near the great trees of Mamre. This was at the city of Hebron. There he built an altar to the Lord.

8. The Birth of Isaac and God Providing a Substitute Sacrifice for Isaac – Genesis 17: 1-19; 18:1-15; 21:1-8; 22:1-18

When Abram was 99 years old and his wife Sarai 89 years old, the Lord appeared to him. The Lord said, “I am God All-Powerful. Obey me and do what is right. I will make a special agreement between us. I will make you the ancestor of many people.”

Then Abram bowed facedown on the ground. God said to him, “I am making my agreement with you. I will make you the father of many nations. I am changing your name from Abram to Abraham. This is because I am making you a father of many nations. This agreement will last forever. I will be your God and the God of all your descendants.”

God also said to Abraham, “I will change the name of Sarai, your wife. Her new name will be Sarah. I will bless her. I will give her a son, and you will be the father. She will be the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will come from her.”

Abraham bowed facedown on the ground and laughed. He said to himself, “Can a man have a child when he is 100 years old? Can Sarah give birth to a child when she is 90?”

But God said to Abraham, “Sarah your wife will have a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will make my agreement with him.”

When Sarah heard this, she laughed to herself, “My husband and I are too old to have a baby.”

Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘I am too old to have a baby’? Is anything too hard for the Lord? No! I will return to you at the right time a year from now. And Sarah will have a son.”

The Lord cared for Sarah as he had said. He did for her what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant. And she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. Everything happened at the time God had said it would. Abraham named his son Isaac.

When the child grew older, God tested Abraham’s faith. God said to him, “Abraham!”

And he answered, “Here I am.”

Then God said, “Take your only son, Isaac, the son you love. Go to the land of Moriah. There kill him and offer him as a whole burnt offering. Do this on one of the mountains there. I will tell you which one.”

Early in the morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took Isaac and two servants with him. He cut the wood for the sacrifice. Then they went to the place God had told them to go. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey. My son and I will go over there and worship. Then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the sacrifice and gave it to his son to carry. Abraham took the knife and the fire. So Abraham and his son went on together.

Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!”

Abraham answered, “Yes, my son.”

Isaac said, “We have the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb we will burn as a sacrifice?”

Abraham answered, “God will give us the lamb for the sacrifice, my son.” So Abraham and his son went on together. They came to the place God had told him about. There, Abraham built an altar. He laid the wood on it. Then he tied up his son Isaac. And he laid Isaac on the wood on the altar. Then Abraham took the knife and was about to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven. The angel said, “Abraham! Abraham!”

Abraham answered, “Yes.”

The angel said, “Don’t kill your son or hurt him in any way. Now I can see that you respect God. I see that you have not kept your son, your only son, from me.”

The Abraham looked up and saw a male sheep. Its horns were caught in a bush. So Abraham went and took the sheep and killed it. He offered it as a whole burnt offering to God. Abraham’s son was saved. So Abraham named that place “The Lord will provide.”

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time. The angel said, “The Lord says, ‘You did not keep back your son, your only son, from me. Because you did this, I make you this promise by my own name: I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. They will be as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. And they will capture the cities of their enemies. Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed. This is because you have obeyed me.’”

9. Jacob – Joseph – Israel into Egypt – Genesis 25.19-26, 28.10-17, Gen 35.22-27, Exodus 1.1-14

When Isaac was 40 years old, he married Rebekah. She could not have children. So Isaac prayed to the Lord for her. The Lord heard Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant. And when the time came, Rebekah gave birth to twins. The older was named Esau and the younger Jacob.

When Jacob was older, his father Isaac commanded him, "You must not marry a Canaanite woman from this land. Go instead to our relatives in Haran and marry a woman from there. May God All-Powerful bless you and give you many children. May the Lord give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham."

So Jacob set out for Haran. In Haran God gave him two wives. When Jacob came back from there, God appeared to him. God blessed him and said, "Your name is Jacob. But you will not be called Jacob any longer. Your new name will be Israel. I am God All-Powerful. Have many children and grow in number as a nation. You will be the ancestor of many nations and kings. I gave Abraham and Isaac land. I will give that same land to you and your descendants." Then God left him. Jacob set up a stone on edge in that place where God had talked to him. He poured a drink offering and oil on it to make it special for God. And Jacob named the place Bethel, which means "the house of God."

Jacob had 12 sons. He had six sons by his wife Leah: Reuben the first born, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. He had 2 sons by his wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. He had 2 sons by Rachel's slave girl Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. And he had 2 sons by Leah's slave girl Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

Many years later there was a very bad famine. The famine lasted for seven years and there was no food in Canaan. But God provided for Israel and his family. He led them to move to the land of Egypt where there was food. Israel took his 12 sons. And each son took his own family with him. There was a total of 70 people who went there. Joseph, Israel's son, was very famous in Egypt and loved by the king. The king treated the family of Israel kindly because of Joseph.

Some time later, Joseph and his brothers died, along with all the people who had lived at that same time. But the people of Israel had many children, and their number grew greatly. They became very strong, and the country of Egypt was filled with them.

Then a new king began to rule Egypt. He did not know who Joseph was. This king said to his people, "Look! The people of Israel are too many! And they are too strong for us to handle! We must make plans against them. If we don't, the number of their people will grow even more. Then if there is a war, they might join our enemies. Then they could fight us and escape from the country!"

So the Egyptians made life hard for the people of Israel. They put slave masters over the Israelites. The slave masters forced the Israelites to build cities for the king. These cities were supply centers in which the Egyptians stored things. The Egyptians forced the Israelites to work even harder. But this made the Israelites grow in number and spread more. So the Egyptians became more afraid of them. They forced the Israelites to work even harder. The Egyptians made life hard for them. They forced the Israelites to work very hard making bricks and mortar. They also forced them to do all kinds of hard work in the fields. The Egyptians showed no mercy to them in all their hard work.

The king of Egypt commanded all his people: “Every time a boy is born to the Israelites, you must throw him into the river. But let all the girl babies live.” But the Israelite nurses who helped the women have babies did not do as the king told them because they feared God instead. They let all the boys babies live. God blessed the nurses. And the Israelites continued to grow in number and become stronger.

10. The Calling of Moses and the Plagues – Exodus 2.1-3.22, 7.1-7

An Israelite woman from the family of Levi gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. She hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she put him in a basket. She put the basket among the tall grass at the edge of the river. Later, the daughter of the king of Egypt came to the river to take a bath. There she found the baby and felt sorry for it. She raised the child as her own and named him Moses.

When Moses became a man, he visited his people, the Israelites. He saw that they were forced to work very hard. He saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite man. Moses looked all around and saw that no one was watching. So he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. When the king heard about what Moses had done, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses ran away from the king and went to live in the land of Midian. He married a woman and lived there forty years.

One day Moses was taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. He was in the desert and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire coming from a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. So Moses said, "I will go closer to this strange thing. How can a bush continue burning without burning up?"

The Lord saw Moses was coming to look at the bush. So God called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

Then God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals. You are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt. And I have heard their cries when the Egyptian slave masters hurt them. I am concerned about their pain. I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I will bring them out of that land. I will lead them to a good land with lots of room. This is the land where food grows – the land of Canaan. So now I am sending you to the king of Egypt. Go! Bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt!"

But Moses said to God, "I am not a great man! Why should I be the one to go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?"

God said, "I will be with you. This will be the proof that I am sending you: You will lead the people out of Egypt. Then all of you will worship me on this mountain. But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go. Only a great power will force him to let you go. So I will use my great power against Egypt. I will make miracles happen in that land. After I do this, he will let you go. And I will cause the Egyptian people to think well of the people of Israel. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people."

But Moses answered, "I am not a good speaker. The king will not listen to me."

The Lord said to Moses, "I have made you like God to the king of Egypt. And your brother Aaron will be like a prophet for you. Tell Aaron your brother everything that I command you. Then let him tell the king of Egypt to let the Israelites leave his country. But I will make the king stubborn. Then I

will do many miracles in Egypt. But he will still refuse to listen. So then I will punish Egypt terribly. And I will lead my divisions, my people the Israelites, out of that land. I will punish Egypt with my power. And I will bring the Israelites out of that land. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded them. Moses was 80 years old, and Aaron was 83 when they spoke to the king.

11. The Passover: The Blood and the Lamb – Exodus 11-12

Through Moses and Aaron, God worked many miracles to show his power to the king. In these mighty ways he punished the king of Egypt. God turned all the water in Egypt to blood. Then he sent frogs to cover the land. After this he sent small gnats that were like dust everywhere. Then he sent insects to plague all the Egyptians. After this the Lord sent a disease to kill all the farm animals of the Egyptians. Then he sent a plague of sores that covered the Egyptian people all over their bodies. Later he sent very large hailstorm upon the land that destroyed the crops and the trees. Next the Lord God sent locusts to eat all that was left by the hail. After this he sent a darkness over the land of the Egyptians for three days. It was so thick that the people could not see one another.

After each plague, God gave the king of Egypt the chance to set the people of Israel free. But the king of Egypt was stubborn and refused. And during each plague, God protected the people of Israel. He did that all would know that he was with them. God showed his might power so that his name would be known through all the earth.

Now the Lord had told Moses, “I have one more way to punish the king and the people of Egypt. After this, the king will send all of you away from Egypt. Tell the men and women of Israel to ask their neighbors for things made of silver and gold.” The Lord had caused the Egyptians to respect the Israelites.

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: “Both of you are to tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth day of this month each man must get one lamb. It is for the people in his house. There may not be enough people in his house to eat a whole lamb. Then he must share it with his closest neighbor. There must be enough lamb for everyone to eat. The lamb must be a one-year-old male. It must have nothing wrong with it. Keep the animal with you to take care of it until the fourteenth day of the month. On that day all the people of the community of Israel will kill these animals. They will do this as the sun goes down. The people must take some of the blood. They must put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. On this night they must roast the lamb over a fire. Then they must eat it with bitter herbs and bread mad without yeast.

“This is the way you must eat it: You must be fully dressed as if you were going on a trip. You must have your sandals on, and you must have your walking stick in your hand. You must eat it in a hurry. This is the Lord’s Passover. That night I will go through the land of Egypt. I will kill all the first-born of animals and people in the land of Egypt. I will punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. But the blood will be a sign on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. Nothing terrible will hurt you. You are always to remember this day. Celebrate it with a feast to the Lord. Your descendants are to honor the Lord with this feat from now on.”

So now the people bowed down and worshiped the Lord. They did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.

At midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt. The firstborn of the king, who sat on the throne, died. Even the firstborn of the prisoner in jail died. Also all the firstborn farm animals died. The king, his officers and all the Egyptians got up during the night. Someone had died in every house. So there was loud crying everywhere in Egypt.

During the night the king called for Moses and Aaron. He said to them, “Get up and leave my people. You and your people may do as you have asked. Go and worship the Lord. Take all your sheep and

cattle as you have asked. Go. And also bless me.” The Egyptians also asked the Israelites to hurry and leave. They said, “If you don’t leave, we will all die!”

The people of Israel did what Moses told them to do. They asked the Egyptian neighbors for things made of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord caused the Egyptians to think well of the Israelites. So the Israelites took rich gifts from the Egyptians.

Then on that same day, the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt. There were about 600,000 men walking. This does not include the women and children. Many other people who were not Israelites went with them. A large number of sheep, goats and cattle went with them.

The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. On the day the 430 years ended, the Lord’s divisions of people left Egypt. That night the Lord kept watch to bring them out of Egypt.

12. God Gives His Holy Law--the Ten Commandments – Exodus 19:1-20:21, Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Exactly three months after the Israelites had left Egypt, they reached the Desert of Sinai. They camped in desert front of Mount Sinai. Then Moses went up on the mountain to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain. The Lord said, “Say this to the family of Jacob. And tell this to the people of Israel: “Every one of you has seen what I did the to he people of Egypt. You saw how I carried you out of Egypt. I did it as an eagle carries her young on her wings. And I brought you here to me. So now obey me and keep my agreement. Do this, and you will be my own possession, chosen from all nations. Even though the whole earth is mine, you will be my kingdom of priests. You will be a nation that belongs to me alone.’ You must tell the Israelites these word.”

So Moses went down and called the older leaders of the people together. He told them all the words the Lord had commanded him to say. And all the people answered together, “We will do everything he has said.” Then Moses took their answer back to the Lord. The Lord told Moses, “Go to the people and have them spend today and tomorrow preparing themselves. They must wash their clothes and be ready by the after tomorrow. On that day I, the Lord, will come down on Mount Sinai. And all the people will see me. But you must set a limit around the mountain. The people are not to cross. Anyone who touches the mountain must be put to death.

Then Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He made them prepare themselves for service to God. And the people washed heir clothes. Then Moses said to the people, “Be ready in three days. Do not have sexual relations during this time.”

It was the morning of the third day. There was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud on the mountain. And there was a very loud blast from a trumpet. All the people in the camp were frightened. Then Moses led the people out of camp to meet God. They stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke. This happened because the Lord came down on it in fire. The smoke rose from the mountain like smoke from a furnace. And the whole mountain shook wildly. The sound from the trumpet became louder. Then Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him.

Then God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.

“You must not have any other gods except me.

“You must not make for yourselves any idols. Don’t make something that looks like anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the water below the land. You must not worship or serve an idol. This is because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. A person may sin against me and hate me. I will punish his children, even his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But I will be very kind to the thousands who love me and obey my commands.

“You must not use the name of the Lord your God thoughtlessly. The Lord will punish anyone who is guild and misuses his name.

“Remember to keep the Sabbath as a holy day. You may work and get everything done during six days each week. But the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the Lord your God. ON that day no one may do any work: not you, you son or daughter, or your men or women slaves. Neither your animals

nor the foreigners living in your cities may work. The reason is that in six days the Lord made everything. He made the sky, earth, sea and everything in them. And on the seventh day, he rested. So the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother. Then you will live a long time in the land. The Lord your God is going to give you the land.

“You must not murder anyone.

“You must not be guilty of adultery.

“You must not steal.

“You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

“You must not want to take your neighbor’s house. You must not want his wife or his men or women slaves. You must not want his ox or his donkey. You must not want to take anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

The people heard the thunder and the trumpet. They saw the lightning on the mountain and smoke rising from the mountain. They shook with fear and stood far away from the mountain. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself. Then we will listen. But don’t let God speak to us, or we will die.”

Then Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid. God has come to test you. He wants you to respect him so you will not sin.” The people stood far away from the mountain while Moses went near the dark cloud where God was. God gave Moses many more laws to help explain the Ten Commandments.

Then Moses taught the people, “Listen, people of Israel! The Lord is our God. He is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. Always remember these commands I give you today. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and walk along the road. Talk about them when you lie down and when you get up. Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign. Tie them on your forehead to remind you. Write them on your doors and gates.”

13. The Sacrificial System – The Tabernacle and Sacrifices – Exodus 40, Leviticus 1, 10, 16-17

The Lord said to Moses, “On the first day of the month, set up the Holy Tent, which is the tent where I will meet them. Put the Holy Box, that contains the Ten Commandments, in the Meeting Tent. It is the Box of the Agreement between us. Above this box is where I will meet with you. Hang the curtain in front of the Holy Box. Then bring in table that should be there. Also bring the golden lampstand and set up its lamps. Put a gold altar for burning incense in front of the Box of Agreement. Then put another curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tent. Put an altar for burnt offerings in front of the entrance of the Holy Tent. Put a large bowl between the Holy Tent and the altar. This is where Aaron and his sons, who will be priests, will wash their hand and feet before entering the Holy Tent or offering sacrifices on the altar.”

Then a cloud covered the Meeting Tent. The greatness of the Lord filled the Holy Tent.

The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Meeting Tent. The Lord said, “Tell the people of Israel: ‘On whatever days you bring an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering one of the cattle. Or you may bring one of the sheep or goats. If anyone offers a whole burnt offering from the cattle, it must be male. It must have nothing wrong with it. The person must take the animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent. Then the Lord will accept the offering. The person must put his hands on the animal’s head. Then the Lord will accept that burnt offering. It will remove the person’s sin so he will belong to God. The person must kill the young bull before the Lord. Then the priests must bring its blood to the altar. They must sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. Then the priest must burn all the animal’s parts on the altar. And its smell is pleasing to the Lord. The burnt offering may also be a sheep, goat or bird.’”

God told Moses about many other types of sacrifices the people should make year-round to be forgiven of various types of sins and not to be cut off from God.

Two of Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their pans for burning incense before God. But they did not use the special incense God as commanded them to use. So fire came down from the Lord and destroyed Nadab and Abihu. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord was speaking about when he said, ‘I must be respected as holy by those who come near me. Before all the people I must be given honor.’”

At that time the Lord spoke to Moses. “Each year, Aaron, your brother the high priest, and future high priests may enter the Most Holy Place in the Tent of Meeting only on one day -- the Day of Cleansing. Before he enters, he must offer a bull for a sin offering. And he must offer a male sheep for a whole burnt offering. He must wash his whole body with water, then put on his special high priest clothes.

“Aaron must take two goats. He will bring them before the Lord at the entrance to the Meeting Tent. Aaron will throw lots for the two goats. One lot will be for the Lord. The other lot will be for the goat that removes sin. Then Aaron will take the goat that was chose for the Lord and offer it as a sin offering. He must bring its blood into the room behind the curtain, the Most Holy Place. There he will sprinkle the blood on the Holy Box. The people in Israel have been unclean. So Aaron will perform the acts to make the Most Holy Place ready for service to the Lord. Then it will be clean from the sins and crimes of the people of Israel. He must do this because the Meeting Tent stays in the middle of the unclean people. So Aaron will perform the acts to remove the sins from himself and his family and all the people of Israel so they will belong to the Lord.

“The other goat was chosen by lot to remove the sin. Aaron must bring it alive to the Lord. He will put both his hands on the head of the living goat. Then he will confess all the sins and crimes of Israel over the goat. In this way Aaron will put the people’s sins on the goat’s head. Then he will send the goat away into the desert. So the goat will carry all the people’s sins on itself. It will go to a lonely place in the desert. The special law for removing the sins of the Israelites so they will belong to the Lord should be done one time every year.”

So they did all the things the Lord had commanded Moses.

14. God Sends Prophets To Call the People Back From Their Sin – Judges 2, 2 Kings 17:7-18; Jeremiah 25:4-7

After many years, God brought the people of Israel to the land of Canaan. For a while they followed God. After those people had died, however, their children grew up. They did not know the Lord or what he had done for Israel. So they did evil and worshiped the idols of the other people who lived around them. The Israelites did what the Lord said was wrong. The Lord was angry with them. He sent robbers to attack them and take their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them defeat them. They lost because the Lord was not on their side. The Lord had sworn to them this would happen. So the Israelites suffered very much.

Then the Lord chose leaders called judges. These leaders saved the people of Israel from the robbers. But the Israelites did not listen to their judges. They were not faithful to God. In the past the people of Israel obeyed the Lord's commands. But now the Israelites stopped obeying the Lord. Many times the enemies of Israel hurt the Israelites. So the Israelites would cry for help. And each time the Lord felt sorry for them. Each time he sent a judge to save them from their enemies. The Lord was with those judges. But when each judge died, the Israelites again sinned and worshiped the false gods. They became worse than their ancestors. The Israelites were very stubborn; they refused to change their evil ways.

Many, many years passed and eventually the people of Israel chose kings to rule them. Some kings like David were men who followed God and taught the people to follow God. But many more were evil and taught the people of Israel to do evil. The Israelites sinned against the Lord their God. He had brought them out of Egypt. He had rescued them from the power of the king of Egypt. But the Israelites honored other gods. They secretly sinned against the Lord their God. They built places in all their cities where false gods were worshiped. They put stone pillars and idols on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense to the false gods. The Israelites did wicked things that made the Lord angry. They served idols. They also tried to find out the future by magic and witchcraft. And the Lord had said, "You must not do this." The Lord sent prophets to warn them. They were men who spoke God's words to them accurately. The Lord said, "Stop your evil ways. Obey my commands and laws. Follow all the teachings that I commanded your ancestors to obey. I sent you this law through my servants the prophets."

But the people would not listen. They were stubborn, just as their ancestors had been. They rejected the Lord's laws and the agreement he had made with their ancestors. And they refused to listen to his warnings. They worshiped useless idols and became useless themselves. They did what the nations around them did. And the Lord had warned them not to do this. They always chose to do what the Lord said was wrong. So he was very angry with the people of Israel. He removed them from his presence. Enemies conquered them and took them away from the land of Canaan. Only the one Israelite tribe descended from Israel's son Judah was left in the land of Canaan. But even the tribe of Judah did not obey the commands of the Lord their God.

The Lord spoke to his people through the prophets. They said, "The Lord has sent his servants the prophets to you over and over again. But you have not listened to them. You have not paid any attention to them. They have said, 'Stop your evil ways. Stop doing what is wrong. Do this so you can stay in the land. This is the land that the Lord gave to you and your ancestors long ago. He gave it to you to live in forever. Don't follow other gods to serve them or to worship them. You must not worship idols that are the work of someone's hands. That makes the Lord angry and he will punish you.'

“But you did not listen to me,” says the Lord.

15. The Message of the Prophet Isaiah – Isaiah 6:1-10, 44:6-20, 59:1-8

This is the story of Isaiah, a might prophet sent from God to call the people of Israel back to himself. This is the vision Isaiah son of Amoz saw. God showed Prophet Isaiah what would happen:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a high throne. His long robe filled the Temple. Flaming heavenly creatures stood aboe him. Each creature had six wings. They used two wings to cover their faces. They used two wings to cover their feet. And they used two wings for flying. Each creature was calling to the others:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of heaven’s armies. His glory fills the whole earth.”

Their voices caused the frame around the door to shake. The Temple filled with smoke. I said, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure. And I live among people who are not pure. But I have seen the King, the Lord of heaven’s armies.”

On the altar there was a fire. One of the flaming heavenly creatures used a pair of tongs to take a hot coal from the fire. Then he flew to me with the hot coal in his hand. The creature touched my mouth with the hot coal. Then he said, “Look, your guilt is taken away because this hot coal has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away.”

Then I heard the Lord’ voice. He said, “Whom can I send? Who will go for us?”

So I said, “Here I am. Send me!”

Then the Lord said, “God and tell this to the people: ‘You will listen and listen, but you will not understand. You will look and look, but you will not learn.’ Make these people stubborn. Make them not able to understand what they hear and see. Otherwise, they might really understand what they see with their eyes and hear with the ears. They might really understand in their minds. If they did this, they would come back to me and be forgiven.”

This is the message of Isaiah:

The Lord says, “I am the beginning and the end. I am the only God. There is no other God like me. If there is, then that god should come and prove it. Who has announced coming events from the beginning? He should tell what will happen in the future. Don’t be afraid! Don’t worry! I have always told you what will happen. You are my witnesses. There is no other God. I know of no other Rock. I am the only one.”

Some people make idols, but they are worth nothing. People love them but they are useless. Who made these false gods? Who made these useless idols? The workmen who made those gods will be ashamed! Those workmen are only human. If they all would come together, they would all be ashamed and afraid.

A man cuts down a tree. That tree grew by its own power in the forest. The man burns half the wood in the fire. He uses the fire to cook his meat. And he eats the meat until he is full. He burns the wood to keep himself warm. He says, “Good! Now I am warm. I can see because of the fir’s light.”

But the man makes a statue from the wood that is left. He calls it his god. He bows down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "You are my god. Save me!" Those people don't know what they are doing. They don't understand! It is as if their eyes are covered so they can't see. Their minds don't understand. That man who makes the idol doesn't know what he is doing. His confused mind leads him the wrong way. He cannot save himself. He cannot say, "This statue I am holding is a false god."

Surely the Lord's power is enough to save you. He can hear you when you ask him for help. It is your evil that has separated you from your God. Your sins cause him to turn away from you. And then he does not hear you. With your hands you have killed others. Your fingers are covered with blood from killing people. With your lips you have lied. With your tongue you say evil things. People take each other to court unfairly. No one tells the truth in arguing his case. They accuse each other falsely and tell lies. They cause trouble and create more evil. They hatch evil like eggs from poisonous snakes. If you eat one of those eggs, you will die. If you break one open, a poisonous snake comes out. People tell lies as they would spin a spider's web. The webs they make cannot be used for clothes. You can't cover yourself with those webs. The things they do are evil. They use their hands to hurt others. They eagerly run to do evil. They are always ready to kill innocent people. They think evil thoughts. Everywhere they go they cause ruin and destruction. They don't now hoe to live in peace. There is no fairness in their lives. They are dishonest. Anyone who lives as they live will never have peace.

16. The Message of the Prophet Elijah – 1 Kings 16:29 – 18:46

Ahab was one of the kings who ruled in Israel. He did more evil than any of the kings who were before him. He built altars to the false god Baal. He did more things to make the Lord, the God of Israel, angry than all other kings before him.

Now Elijah was a prophet from Israel. Elijah said to King Ahab, "I serve the Lord, the God of Israel. As surely as the Lord lives, I tell you the truth. No rain or dew will fall during the next few years unless I command it."

The Lord spoke his word to Elijah: "Leave this place. Go and hide near the Kerith brook. You may drink from the brook. And I have commanded birds to bring you food there." So Elijah did what the Lord told him to do. The birds brought Elijah bread and meat every morning and every evening. And he drank water from the brook.

After a while the brook dried up because there was no rain. Then the Lord spoke his word to Elijah, "Go to the town of Zarephath and live there. I have commanded a widow there to take care of you." So Elijah went to Zarephath. When he reached the town gate. He saw a widow there. He was gathering wood for a fire. Elijah asked her, "Would you bring me a little water in a cup? I would like to have a drink." As she was going to get his water, Elijah said, "Please bring me a piece of bread, too."

The woman answered, "I have no bread. I have only a handful of flour in a jar. And I have only a little oil in a jug. I came here to gather some wood. I will take it home to cook our last meal. My son and I will eat it and then die from hunger."

Elijah said to her, "Don't worry. Go home and cook your food as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread from the flour you have. Bring it to me. Then cook something for yourself and your son. The Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'That jar of flour will never become empty. The jug will always have oil in it. This will continue until the day the Lord sends rain to the land'"

So the woman went home. And she did what Elijah told her to do. So Elijah, the woman and her son has enough food every day. The jar of flour and the jug of oil were never empty. This happened just as the Lord, through Elijah, said it would.

Some time later the widow's son became sick. He grew worse and worse. Finally he stopped breathing. So the woman said to Elijah, "You are a man of God. What have you done to me? Did you come here to remind me of my sin? Did you come here to kill my son?"

Elijah said to her, "Give me your son." So Elijah took the boy from her and carried him upstairs. Elijah laid the boy on the bed in the room where he was staying. Then he prayed to the Lord. He said, "Lord my God, this widow is letting me stay in her house. Why have you done this terrible thing to her? Why have you caused her son to die?" Then Elijah lay on top of the boy three times. Elijah prayed to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy live again!" The Lord answered Elijah's prayer. The boy began breathing again, and he was alive. Elijah gave the boy to his mother and said, "See! Your son is alive!"

The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know you really are a man from God. I know that the Lord truly speaks through you!"

During the third year without rain, the Lord said to Elijah, “Go and meet King Ahab. I will soon send rain.” So Elijah went to meet Ahab.

When the king saw Elijah, he said, “Is it you – the biggest troublemaker in Israel?”

Elijah answered, “I have not caused trouble in Israel. You and your father’s family have caused all this trouble. You have not obeyed the Lord’s commands. You have followed the false god Baal. Now tell all Israel to me at Mount Carmel. Also bring the 450 prophets of Baal there.”

So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to Mount Carmel. Elijah stood before the people. He said, “How long will you try to serve both Baal and the Lord. If the Lord is the true God, follow him. But if Baal is the true God, follow him!” But the people said nothing.

Elijah said, “I am the only prophet of the Lord here. But there are 450 prophets of Baal. So bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull. Let them kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood. But they are not to set fire to it. Then I will do the same with the other bull. You prophets of Baal, pray to your god. And I will pray to the Lord. The god who answers the prayer will set fire to his wood. He is the true God.” All the people agreed that this was a good idea.

So the prophets of Baal prayed to Baal from morning until noon. They shouted, “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound. No one answered. They danced around the altar they had built. In the afternoon they prayed louder. They cut themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed. The afternoon passed and the prophets continued to act wildly. But no voice was heard. Baal did not answer.

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Now come to me.” So they gathered about him. Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord because it had been torn down. Then he dug a small ditch around it. Elijah put wood on the altar. He cut the bull into pieces and laid them on the wood. Then Elijah told the people to pour 12 large jars of water on the meat and the wood. There was so much water that it filled the ditch.

The prophet Elijah went near the altar. He prayed, “Lord, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. I ask you now to prove that you are the God of Israel. And prove that I am your servant. Show these people that you, Lord, are God. Then the people will know that you are bringing them back to you.”

Then fire from the Lord came down. It burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones of the altar and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch. When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground. They cried, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God!” Then the people captured all the prophets of Baal, and Elijah killed them all.

The Elijah said to Ahab, “Now, go, eat and drink. A heavy rain is coming.” After a short time the sky was covered with dark clouds. The wind began to blow. Then a heavy rain began to fall.

17. The Message of the Prophet Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1:1-9; 2:1-37; 3:12-15; 36, 38:1-13

At another time, the Lord spoke these words to Jeremiah. “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

Then I, Jeremiah, said, “But Lord God, I don’t know how to speak. I am only a young man.”

But the Lord said to me, “Don’t say, ‘I am only a young man.’ You must go everywhere that I send you. You must say everything I tell you to say. Don’t be afraid of anyone, because I am with you. I will protect you,” says the Lord. Then the Lord reached out with his hand and touched my mouth. He said to me, “See, I am putting my words in your mouth.”

This is what the Lord says:

“When you were a young nation, you were faithful to me. You loved me like a young bride. You followed me through the desert. It was a land that had never been planted. The people of Israel were holy to the Lord. They were like the first fruits of his harvest. Those who tried to hurt Israel were judged guilty. Disasters happened to them,” says the Lord.

This is what the Lord says, “I was fair to your ancestors. Why did they turn away from me? Your ancestors worshiped useless idols. And they became useless themselves. I brought you out of Egypt. I brought you into a fertile land. I did this so you could eat its fruit and produce. But you came and made my land unclean. You made it a hated place. The priests didn’t ask, ‘Where is the Lord?’ The people who know the teachings didn’t know me. The leaders turned against me. The false prophets prophesied in the name of Baal. They worshiped useless idols.

“Go look to the ends of the earth. See if there has ever been anything like this! Has a nation ever exchanged their old gods for new ones? (Of course, their gods are not really gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glorious God for idols worth nothing! Skies, be shocked at the things that have happened. Shake with great fear!” says the Lord.

“My people have done two sins. They have turned away from me. And I am the spring of living water. And they have dug their own wells. But they are broken wells that cannot hold water. Your evil will bring punishment to you. The wrong you have done will teach you a lesson. Think about it and understand. It is a terrible evil to turn away from the Lord your God. It is wrong not to fear me,” says the Lord, the Lord of heaven’s armies.

“Why do my people say, ‘We are free to wander. We won’t come to you anymore’? A young woman does not forget her jewelry. A bride does not forget the decorations for her dress. But my people have forgotten me for more days than can be counted! You really know how to chase after love. Even the worst women can learn evil ways from you. You say, ‘I am innocent. God is not angry with me.’ But I will judge you guilty of lying. It is because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’

“Come back, unfaithful people of Israel,” says the Lord. “I will stop frowning at you. I am full of mercy. I will not be angry with you forever. All you have to do is admit your sin.”

The Prophet Jeremiah's servant wrote down all these words from the Lord and many more on paper. The words were sent to the king. But when he and all his officers heard the words, the king had the papers burned in a fire. The king and his servants were not frightened! They did not tear their cloths to show their sorrow. The king's servants tried to keep him from burning the papers, but he would not listen to them. Instead he tried to arrest Jeremiah. But the Lord hid him from the king.

At a later time, under a new king, the officers took Jeremiah and threw him into a well. The well did not have any water in it, only mud. And Jeremiah sank down into the mud and was left there to die. However, later men came and lifted Jeremiah out of the well by ropes. And Jeremiah stayed under guard in jail.

18. The Message of the Prophet Jonah – Jonah 1-4

During these days, Israel was surrounded by many strong nations. Many of these nations did evil in God's eyes. One of the most powerful and evil of these nations was Assyria. The capital of that nation was the city of Nineveh.

The Lord spoke his word to an Israelite named Jonah son of Amittai: "Get up, and go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it. I see the evil things they do."

But Jonah got up to run away from the Lord. He went to a city of the seacoast. There he found a ship that was going the opposite way from Nineveh! Jonah paid for the trip and went aboard. He wanted to run away from the Lord.

But the Lord sent a great wind on the sea. This wind made the sea very rough. So the ship was in danger of breaking apart. The sailors were afraid. Each man cried to his own god. The men began throwing the cargo into the sea. This would make the ship lighter so it would not sink.

But Jonah had gone down into the ship to lie down. He fell fast asleep. The captain of the ship came and said, "Why are you sleeping? Get up! Pray to your god! Maybe your god will pay attention to us. Maybe he will save us!"

Then the men said to each other, "Let's throw lots to see who caused these troubles to happen to us." So the men threw lots. The lot showed that the trouble had happened because of Jonah. Then the men said to Jonah, "Tell us what you have done. Why has this terrible thing happened to us?"

Jonah said to them, "I am an Israelite. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven. He is the God who made the sea and the land." Jonah told them that he was running away from the Lord.

The men were very afraid. They asked Jonah, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down?"

Jonah said to them, "Pick me up, and throw me into the sea. Then it will calm down. I know it is my fault that this great storm has come on you."

So the men cried to the Lord, "Lord, please don't let us die because of taking this man's life. Please don't think we are guilty of killing an innocent man. Lord, you have caused all this to happen. You wanted it this way." Then the men picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea. So the sea became calm. Then they began to fear the Lord very much. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord. They also made promises to him.

And the Lord caused a very big fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. While Jonah was in the stomach of the fish, he prayed to the Lord his God. Jonah said, "I was in danger. So I called to the Lord, and he answered me. I was about to die. So I cried to you, and you heard my voice."

Then the Lord spoke to the fish. And the fish spit Jonah out of its stomach onto the dry land. Then the Lord spoke his word to Jonah again. The Lord said, "Get up. Go to the great city Nineveh. Preach against it what I tell you."

So Jonah obeyed the Lord. He got up and went to Nineveh. It was a very large city. It took a person three days just to walk across it. Jonah entered the city. When he had walked for one day, he preached to the people. He said, "After 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed!"

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God. They announced they would stop eating for a while. They put on rough cloth to show how sad they were. All the people in the city did this. People from the most important to the least important did this.

When the king of Nineveh heard this news, he got up from his throne. He took off his robe. He covered himself with rough cloth and sat in ashes to show how upset he was.

He made an announcement and sent it through the city. The announcement said:

"By command of the king and his important men: No person or animal should eat anything. No herd or flock will be allowed to taste anything. Do not let them eat food or drink water. But every person and animal should be covered with rough cloth. People should cry loudly to God. Everyone must turn away from his evil life. Everyone must stop doing harm. Maybe God will change his mind. Maybe he will stop being angry. Then we will not die."

God saw what the people did. He saw that they stopped doing evil things. So God changed his mind and did not do what he had warned. He did not punish them.

But Jonah, the Israelite, was very unhappy that God did not destroy the foreign city. He complained to the Lord, "I knew this would happen. I knew it when I was still in my own country. It is why I quickly ran away. I knew that you are a God who is kind and shows mercy. You don't become angry quickly. You have great love. I know you would rather forgive than punish them. Lord, please kill me."

Then the Lord said, "Do you think it is right for you to be angry?"

Jonah went out and sat down outside the city to see what would happen. The Lord made a plant grow quickly up over Jonah. This made a cool place for him to sit. Jonah was pleased to have the plant for shade. The next day God caused the plant to die. God sent a hot wind to blow. The sun became very hot on Jonah's head. He became very weak. He wished he were dead.

But God said this to Jonah: "Do you think it is right for you to be angry because of the plant?"

Jonah answered, "It is right for me to be angry! I will stay angry until I die!"

And the Lord said, "You showed concern for that plant, which was here one day and gone the next. Then surely I can show concern for the great city of Nineveh. There are 120,000 people living there. Those people simply do not know right from wrong!"

19. The Prophets Promise a Coming Savior – Isaiah 7:14, 8:19 – 9:7, Isaiah 53

Again, the prophet Isaiah spoke God's word:

Some people say, "Ask the mediums and fortune-tellers what to do. They whisper and mutter and ask dead people what to do." But I tell you that people should ask their God for help. Why should people who are still alive ask something from the dead? You should follow the teachings and the agreement with the Lord. The mediums and fortune-tellers do not speak the word of the Lord. Their words are worth nothing.

People will wander through the land troubled and hungry. When they become hungry, they will become angry. Then they will look up and curse their king and their God. They will see only trouble and darkness and awful gloom. And they will be forced into the darkness.

But suddenly there will be no more gloom for the land that suffered. Now those people live in darkness. But they will see a great light. They live in a place that is very dark. But a light will shine on them. God, you will cause the nation to grow. You will make the people happy. And they will show their happiness to you. It will be like the joy during harvest time. It will be like the joy of people taking what they have won in war.

The Lord himself will give you a sign: A virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel, which means "God is with us."

A child will be born to us. God will give a son to us. He will be responsible for leading the people. His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace. Power and peace will be in his kingdom. It will continue to grow. He will rule as king on David's throne and over David's kingdom. He will make it strong, by ruling with goodness and fair judgment. He will rule it forever and ever. The Lord of heaven's armies will do this because of his strong love for his people.

The Prophet Isaiah continued to speak God's word:

Who would have believed what we heard? Who saw the Lord's power in this? He grew up like a small plant before the Lord. He was like a root growing in a dry land. He had no special beauty or form to make us notice him. There was nothing in his appearance to make us desire him. He was hated and rejected by people. He had much pain and suffering. People would not even look at him. He was hated, and we didn't even notice him.

But he took our suffering on him and felt our pain for us. We saw his suffering. We thought God was punishing him. But he was wounded for the wrong things we did. He was crushed for the evil things we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him. And we are healed because of his wounds. We all have wandered away like sheep. Each of us has gone his own way. But the Lord has put on him the punishment for all the evil we have done. He was beaten down and punished. But he didn't say a word. He was like a lamb being led to be killed. He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is being cut. He never opened his mouth. Men took him away roughly and unfairly. He died without children to continue his family. He was put to death. He was punished for the sins of my people. He was buried with wicked men. He died with the rich. He had done nothing wrong and had never lied.

But it was the Lord who decided to crush him and make him suffer. So the Lord made his life a penalty offering. But he will see his descendants and live a long life. He will complete the things the Lord wants him to do. He will suffer many things in his soul. But then he will see life and be satisfied. My good servant will make many people right with God. He carried away their sins. For this reason I will make him a great man among people. He will share in all things with those who are strong. He willingly gave his life. He was treated like a criminal. But he carried away the sins of many people. And he asked forgiveness for those who sinned.

Isaiah spoke these words from God 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

20. The Story of the Vineyard – Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 22:33-45

It was this same Jesus Christ who told this story to teach the people:

“A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it and dug a hole for a winepress. Then he built a tower. He leased the vineyard to some farmers and left for a trip. Later, it was time for the grapes to be picked. So the man sent a servant to the farmers to get his share of the grapes. But the farmers grabbed the servant and beat him. They sent him away with nothing. Then the man sent another servant. They hit him on the head and showed no respect for him. So the man sent another servant. They killed this servant. The man sent many other servants. The farmers beat some of them and killed others.

“The man had one person left to send, his son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying ‘The farmers will respect my son.’

“But they said to each other, ‘This is the owner’s son. This vineyard will be his. If we kill him, then it will be ours.’ So they took the son, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

“So what will the owner of vineyard do to these farmers when he comes?”

The people said to him, “He will surely kill those evil men. Then he will lease the vineyard to some other farmers. They will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

And Jesus said, “So I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you. It will be given to people who do the things God wants in his kingdom.”

21. The Birth Of Jesus – Luke 1:26 – 2:20, 2:52

Several hundred years passed after the prophets spoke to the Israelite people who were also called the Jews. God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin who lived in the Jewish town of Nazareth, in an area called Galilee. She was engaged to Mary a man named Joseph from the family of King David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, “Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you.”

But Mary was very confused by what the angel said. Mary wondered, “What does this mean?”

The angel said to her, “Don’t be afraid, Mary, because God is pleased with you. Listen! You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen? I am a virgin!”

The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit of God will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God. God can do everything!”

Mary said, “I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!” Then the angel went away.

Several months later, the Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar sent an order to all people in the countries, including Israel, that were under Roman rule. The order said that they must list their names in a register. And everyone went to his own hometown to be registered.

So Joseph left the Nazareth in the area of Galilee. He went to the town of Bethlehem in the Israelite area of Judea. This town was known as the town of King David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (Mary was now pregnant.) While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed.

That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and suddenly they became very frightened. The angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. Today your Savior was born in David’s town. He is Christ the Lord. (Christ means “the chosen one.”) This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box.”

Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying: “Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God.”

Then the angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. We will see this thing the Lord told us about.”

So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph. And the shepherds saw the baby lying in a feeding box. Then they told what the angels had said about this child. Everyone was amazed when they heard what the shepherds said to them. Mary hid these things in her heart; she continued to think about them. Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything that they had seen and heard. It was just as the angel had told them.

The baby was named Jesus. This name had been given by the angel before the baby began to grow inside Mary. As Jesus grew, he learned more and more and grew physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.

22. The Baptism of Jesus – Luke 3:1-33; John 1:19-37; Matthew 3:13-15; Mark 1:12-15

About thirty years after the birth of Jesus, God spoke through the prophet John. John lived in the desert. He went all over the area around the Jordan River and preached to the people. He told them that they should be baptized (that is, lowered and the water and raised back up) and change their hearts to turn away from their sins. Then they would be forgiven of their sins.

The prophet Isaiah spoke about him 700 years before. He said: “This is a voice of a man who calls out in the desert, saying, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord. Make the roads straight for him. Every valley should be filled in. Every mountain and hill should be made flat. Roads with turns should be made straight, and rough roads should be made smooth. And all people will know about the salvation of God!’”

Crowds of people came to be baptized by John. He said to them, “You poisonous snakes! Who warned you to run away from God’s anger that is coming? You must do the things that will show that you really have changed your hearts. Don’t say, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you that God can make children for Abraham from these rocks here. The ax is now ready to cut down the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The people asked John, “What should we do?”

John answered, “If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that too.”

Even tax collectors came to John to be baptized. They said to John, “Teacher, what should we do?”

John said to them, “Don’t take more taxes from people than you have been ordered to take.”

The soldiers asked John, “What about us? What should we do?”

John said to them, “Don’t force people to give you money. Don’t lie about them. BE satisfied with the pay you get.”

All the people were hoping for the Christ, the Chosen One, to come, and they wondered about John. They thought, “Maybe he is the Christ.”

John answered everyone, “I baptize you with water, but there is one coming later who can do more than I can. I am not even good enough to untie his shoes. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, “Look, the Lamb of God. He takes away the sins of the whole world! This is the One I was talking about. I said, ‘A man will come after me, but he is greater than I am, because he was living before me.’ I came baptizing with water so that the people of Israel could know who he is.”

Jesus came to John and wanted John to baptize him. But John tried to stop him. John said, “Why do you come to me to be baptized? I should be baptized by you!”

Jesus answered, "Let it be this way for now. We should fulfill all that is right." So John agreed to baptize Jesus.

Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water. While he was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit of God came down on him. The Spirit was in the form of a dove. Then a voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

Then the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert alone. He was in the desert 40 days and ate nothing during that time. While he was in the desert, he was tempted by Satan, but did not sin. Then angels came and took care of Jesus.

After this Jesus went into the Jewish land of Galilee and preached the Good News from God. Jesus said, "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives. Believe the Good News!"

23. Jesus Calls the Apostles – Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11; 6:12-16; Mark 3:11-15; Matthew 4:23-25

One day Jesus was standing beside the Sea of Galilee in the land of Galilee. Many people were pressing all around him. They wanted to hear the word of God. Jesus saw two boats at the shore of the sea. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Jesus got into one of the boats, the one which belonged to the fisherman Simon. Jesus asked Simon to push off a little from the land. Then Jesus sat down in the boat and continued to teach the people on the shore.

When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Take the boat into deep water. If you will put your nets in the water, you will catch some fish.”

Simon answered, “Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish, but we caught nothing. But you say to put the nets in the water; so I will.” The fishermen did as Jesus told them. And they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. They called to their friends in the other boat to come and help them. The friends came, and both boats were filled so full that they were almost sinking.

The fishermen were all amazed at the many fish they caught. When Simon who was also called Peter saw what had happened, he bowed down before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!” James and John, the sons of Zebedee were amazed too. (James and John were Simon’s partners.)

Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. Come and follow me. From now on you will be fishing for men.” When the men brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus went everywhere in the Jewish land of Galilee. He taught in the places where the Jews met to study God’s word. There he preached the Good News about the kingdom of God. And he healed all the people’s diseases and sicknesses. The news about Jesus spread all over the country, and people brought all the sick to him. These sick people were suffering from different kinds of diseases and pain. Some were suffering very great pain, some had evil spirits, some were epileptics, and some were paralyzed. Jesus healed all of them. When the evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and shouted, “You are the Son of God!” But Jesus strongly commanded the spirits not to tell who he was. Many people followed him. These people came from the Jewish lands of Galilee and Judea and even from outside the Jewish area. They also came from the Jewish capital city of Jerusalem.

A little while later, Jesus went off to a mountain to pray. He stayed there all night, praying to God. The next morning, Jesus called his followers to him. He chose 12 of them, whom he named apostles, which means “those who are sent out.” He chose them so that they would be with him, and that he might send them out to share the Good News and to have the authority to cast out evil spirits. These twelve were Simon (Jesus named him Peter) and Andrew, Peter’s brother; James and John, Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon (called the Zealot), Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot. This Judas was the one who gave Jesus to his enemies.

24. Jesus and Nicodemus – The New Birth – John 3:1-21

There was a man named Nicodemus who was an important Jewish religious leader. One night Nicodemus came to Jesus. He said, Teacher, we know that you are a teacher sent from God. No one can do the miracles you do, unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth. Unless a person is born again, he cannot be in God’s kingdom.”

Nicodemus said, “But if a man is already old, how can he be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s body again. So how can he be born a second time?”

But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth. Unless someone is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter God’s kingdom. A person’s body is born from his human parents. But a person’s spiritual life is born from the spirit. Don’t be surprised when I tell you, ‘You must all be born again.’ The wind blows where it wants to go. You hear the wind blow. But you don’t know where the wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every person who is born from the Spirit.”

Nicodemus asked, “How can all this be possible?”

Jesus said, “You are an important teacher in Israel. But you still don’t understand these things? I tell you the truth. We talk about what we know. We tell about what we have seen. But you don’t accept what we tell you. I have told you about things here on earth, but you do not believe me. So surely you will not believe me if I tell you about the things of heaven! The only one who has ever gone up to heaven is the One who came down from heaven – the Son of Man. Everyone who believes in him can have eternal life.

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. God did not send his son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him. He who believes in God’s Son is not judged guilty. He who does not believe has already been judged guilty, because he has not believed in God’s only Son. People are judged by this fact: I am the Light from god that has come into the world. But men did not want light. They wanted darkness because they were doing evil things. Everyone who does evil hates the light. He will not come to the light because it will show all the evil things he has done. But he who follows the true way comes to the light. Then the light will show that the things he has done were done through God.”

25. Jesus Has Authority to Forgive Sin – The Story of the Paralyzed Man & Jesus Eats With Sinners – Mark 1:45 - 2:17

The news about Jesus spread more and more. That is the reason Jesus could not enter a town if people saw him, for there were so many people. But people came from all the towns to where he was, even in the desert. One day Jesus went to the town of Capernaum where he often stayed. The news spread that he was at home. So many people gathered to hear him tell God's Word that the house was full. There was no place to stand, not even outside the door. Jesus was teaching them. Some people came, bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus. Four of them were carrying the paralyzed man. But they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd. So they went to the roof above Jesus and dug a hole in the roof. Then they lowered the mat with the paralyzed man on it. Jesus saw that these men had great faith. So he said to the paralyzed man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven."

Some of the Jewish religious teachers were sitting there. They saw what Jesus did, and they said to themselves, "'Why does this man say things like that? He is saying things that are against God. Only God can forgive sins!'"

At once Jesus knew what these teachers God's law were thinking. So he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to tell this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to tell him, 'Stand up. Take your mat and walk'? But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, stand up. Take your mat and go home." Immediately the paralyzed man stood up. He took his mat and walked out while everyone was watching him.

The people were amazed and praised God. They said, "We have never seen anything like this!"

One of the twelve apostles that Jesus was chosen was named Matthew. Jesus had seen Matthew sitting in his tax office, for he was a tax collector. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Matthew stood up and followed Jesus.

Later that day, Matthew gave a big feast for Jesus, and Jesus was at his house eating. There were many tax collectors and sinful people eating with Jesus and his followers. Many people like this followed Jesus. The teachers of the law saw Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners. They asked his followers, "Why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus heard this and said to them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor. It is the sick who need a doctor. Go and learn what this means: 'I want faithful love more than I want animal sacrifices.' I did not come to invite good people. I came to invite sinners to turn away from their sin."

26. Jesus Has Power over Nature: He Calms the Sea – Mark 4:35-41

One evening after Jesus had finished teaching the crowds of people, he said to his followers, “Come with me across the sea.” He and his followers left in a boat. There were also other boats with them. A very strong wind came up on the sea. The waves began coming over the sides and into the boat. It was almost full of water. Jesus was at the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The followers went to him and woke him. They said, “Teacher, do you care about us? We will drown!”

Jesus stood up and commanded the wind and the waves to stop. He said, “Quiet! Be still!” then the wind stopped, and the sea became perfectly calm.

Jesus said to his followers, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

The followers were very afraid and asked each other, “What kind of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

27. Jesus Has Authority Over Demons – Mark 5:1-20

Jesus and his followers went across this small sea and landed on the other side. When Jesus got out of the boat, a naked man came to him from the caves where dead people were buried. This man, who lived in the caves, had an evil spirit living in him. No one could tie him up, not even with a chain. Many times people had used chains to tie the man's hands and feet. But he always broke the chains off. No one was strong enough to control him. Day and night he would wander around the burial caves and on the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones. While Jesus was still far away, the man saw him. He ran to Jesus and knelt down before him. Jesus said to the man, "You evil spirit, come out of that man."

But the man shouted in a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, promise that you will not punish me!"

Then Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?"

The man answered, "My name is Legion, because I have many spirits in me." He begged Jesus again and again not to send the spirits out of that area.

A large herd of pigs was eating on a hill near there. The evil spirits begged Jesus, "Send us to the pigs. Let us go into them." So Jesus allowed them to do this. The evil spirits left the man and went into the pigs. Then the herd of pigs rushed down the hill into the sea and were drowned. There were about 2,000 pigs in that herd.

The men who took care of the pigs ran away. They went to the town and to the countryside, telling everyone about this. So people went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man who had had the many evil spirits. The man was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. The people were frightened. Some people were there who saw what Jesus had done. They told the others what had happened to the man who had the demons living in him. And they also told about the pigs. Then the people began to beg Jesus to leave their area.

Jesus was getting ready to leave in the boat. The man who was freed from the demons begged to go with him. But Jesus would not allow the man to go. Jesus said, "Go home to your family and friends. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." So the man left and told the people in the area about the great things Jesus had done for him. All the people were amazed.

28. Jesus Feeds Five Thousand Men – Matthew 14:13-36; John 6:1-9

One day Jesus got into a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. But when the crowds heard about it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus arrived, he saw a large crowd. He felt sorry for them and healed those who were sick.

Late that afternoon, his followers came to Jesus and said, “No one lives in this place. And it is already late. Send the people away so that they can go to the towns and buy food for themselves.”

Jesus said to his follower Philip, “Where can we buy bread for all these people to eat?” (Jesus asked Philip this question to test him. Jesus already knew what he planned to do.)

Philip answered, “We, your followers, would all have to work a month to buy enough bread for each person here to have only a little piece.”

Another follower there was Andrew. He was Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew said, “Here is a boy with five loaves of bread and two little fish. But that is not enough for so many people.”

Jesus said, “Bring the bread and the fish to me.” Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves of bread and the two fish. Then he looked up to heaven and thanked God for the food. Jesus divided the loaves of bread. He gave them to his followers, and they gave the bread to the people. All the people ate and were satisfied. After they finished eating, the followers filled 12 baskets with the pieces of food that were not eaten. There were about 5,000 men there who ate, as well as women and children.

Then Jesus made the twelve followers get into the boat. He told them to go ahead of him to the other side of the small sea. Jesus stayed there to tell the people they could go home. After he said good-bye to them, he went alone up into the hills to pray. It was late, and Jesus was there alone. By this time, the boat was already far away on the sea. The boat was having trouble because of the waves, and the wind was blowing against it.

Between three and six o’clock in the morning, Jesus’ followers were still in the boat. Jesus came to them. He was walking on the water. When the followers saw him walking on the water, they were afraid. They said, “It’s a ghost!” and cried out in fear.

But Jesus quickly spoke to them. He said, “Have courage! It is I! Don’t be afraid.”

Simon Peter said, “Lord, if that is really you, then tell me to come to you on the water.”

Jesus said, “Come.”

And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, “Lord, save me!”

Then Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, “Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?”

After Peter and Jesus were in the boat, the wind became calm. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, “Truly you are the Son of God!”

29. Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life – John 11:1-53

There was a man named Lazarus who was sick. He lived in the town of Bethany, where Jesus' friends Mary and her sister Martha lived. Mary's brother was Lazarus, the man who was now sick. So Mary and Martha sent someone to tell Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When Jesus heard this he said, "This sickness will not end in death. It is for the glory of God. This has happened to bring glory to the Son of God." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. But when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. Then Jesus said to his followers, "Let us go to Bethany. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I am going there to wake him."

The followers said, "But Lord, if he can sleep, he will get well."

Jesus meant that Lazarus was dead. But Jesus' followers thought that he meant that Lazarus was really sleeping. So then Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him now."

Jesus arrived in Bethany. There he learned that Lazarus had already been dead and in the tomb for four days. Bethany was about three kilometers from the Jewish capital city, Jerusalem. Many Jews had come there to comfort Martha and Mary about their brother.

Martha heard that Jesus was coming, and she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you anything you ask."

Jesus said, "Your brother will rise and live again."

Martha answered, "I know that he will rise and live again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will have life even if he dies. And he who lives and believes in me will never die. Martha, do you believe this?"

Martha answered, "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Promised One, the Son of God. You are the One who was coming to the world."

After Martha said this, she went back to her sister Mary. She talked to Mary alone. Martha said, "The Teacher is here and he is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. Jesus had not yet come into the town. He was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews were with Mary in the house, comforting her. They saw Mary stand and leave quickly. They followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to cry there. But Mary went to the place where Jesus was. When she saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus saw that Mary was crying and that the Jews who came with her were crying, too. Jesus felt very sad in his heart and was deeply troubled. He asked, "Where did you bury him?"

"Come and see, Lord," they said.

Jesus cried. So the Jews said, "See how much he loved him."

But some of them said, "If Jesus healed the eyes of a blind man, why didn't he keep Lazarus from dying?"

Again Jesus felt very sad in his heart. He came to the tomb. The tomb was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. Jesus said, "Move the stone away."

Martha said, "But, Lord, it has been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell."

Then Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

So they moved the stone away from the entrance. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me. But I said these things because of the people here around me. I want them to believe that you sent me." After Jesus said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with pieces of cloth, and he had a cloth around his face.

Jesus said, to them, "Take the cloth off of him and let him go."

There were many Jews who had come to visit Mary. They saw what Jesus did. And many of them believed in him. But some of them went to the Jewish religious leaders. They told them what Jesus had done. Then the priests and leaders called a meeting of the Jewish council. They asked, "What should we do? This man is doing many miracles. If we let him continue doing these things, everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman conquerors will come and take away our Temple and our nation."

One of the men there was Caiaphas. He was the high priest that year. Caiaphas said, "You people know nothing! It is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed. But you don't realize this."

Caiaphas did not think of this himself. He was high priest that year. So he was really prophesying that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation. And not only would he die for the nation, but for all God's children scattered among the various nations. This would bring them together and make them one.

That day they started planning to kill Jesus.

30. Abraham, Lazarus and the Rich Man – Luke 16.19-31

One day Jesus said, “There was a rich man who always dressed in the finest clothes. He lived in luxury every day. There was also a very poor man named Lazarus, whose body was covered with sores.” (This is not the same Lazarus Jesus raised from the dead.) “Lazarus was often placed at the rich man’s gate. He wanted to eat only the small pieces of food that fell from the rich man’s table. And the dogs would come and lick his sores! Later, Lazarus died. The angels took Lazarus and placed him in the arms of Abraham in heaven. The rich man died, too, and was buried. But he was sent to hell, where the dead are, and had much pain. The rich man saw Abraham far away with Lazarus in his arms. He called, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to me so that he can dip his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am suffering in this fire!’

“But Abraham said, ‘My child, remember when you lived? You had all the good things in life, but all the bad things happened to Lazarus. Now Lazarus is comforted here, and you are suffering. Also there is a big space between you and us. No one can cross over to help you. And no one can leave there and come here.’

“The rich man said, ‘Then please send Lazarus to my father’s house on earth! I have five brothers. Lazarus could warn my brothers so that they will not come to his place of pain.’

“But Abraham said, ‘They have the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets to read; let them learn from them!’

“The rich man said, ‘No, father Abraham! If someone came to them from the dead, they would believe and change their hearts and lives.’

“But Abraham said to him, ‘No! If your brothers won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, then they won’t listen to someone who comes back from the death.’”

31. The Last Supper – Matthew 26:1-5, 14-35; Luke 22:14-20

Jesus told his followers, “You know that the day after tomorrow is the day of the Passover Feast. On that day the Son of Man will be given to his enemies to be killed on a cross.”

Then the leading priests and older Jewish leaders had a meeting at the palace of the high priest. The high priest’s name was Caiaphas. At the meeting, they planned to set a trap to arrest Jesus and kill him. But they said, “We must not do it during the feast. The people might cause a riot.”

Jesus was in Bethany. He was at the house of a man named Simon who had a harmful skin disease. While Jesus was there, a woman came to him. She had a jar filled with expensive perfume. She poured this perfume on Jesus’ head while he was eating.

His followers saw the woman do this and were upset. They asked, “Why waste that perfume? It could be sold for a great deal of money, and the money could be given to the poor.”

But Jesus knew what happened. He said, “Why are you troubling this woman? She did a very beautiful thing for me. You will always have the poor with you. But you will not always have me. This woman poured perfume on my body to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth. The Good News will be told to people in all the world. And in every place where it is preached, what this woman has done will be told. And people will remember her.”

Then one of the twelve followers went to talk to the leading priests. This was the follower named Judas Iscariot. He said, “I will give Jesus to you. What will you pay me for doing this?” The priests gave Judas 30 silver coins. After that, Judas waited for the best time to give Jesus to the priests.

On the first day of the Passover Week, the followers came to Jesus. They said, “We will prepare everything for you to eat the Passover Feast. Where do you want to have the feast?”

Jesus answered, “Go into the city of Jerusalem to a certain man. Tell him that the Teacher says, ‘The chosen time is near. I will have the Passover Feast with my followers at your house.’” The followers did what Jesus told them to do, and they prepared the Passover Feast.

In the evening Jesus was sitting at the table with his 12 followers. They were all eating. Jesus said to them, “I wanted very much to eat this Passover meal with you before I die. I will never eat another Passover meal until it is given its true meaning in the kingdom of God.”

Then Jesus said, “I tell you the truth. One of you 12 will turn against me.”

This made the followers very sad. Each one said to Jesus, “Surely, Lord, I am not the one who will turn against you. Am I?”

Jesus answered, “The man who has dipped his hand with me into the dipping bowl is the one who will turn against me. The Son of Man will die. The Scriptures say this will happen. But how terrible it will be for the person who gives the Son of Man to be killed. It would be better for him if he had never been born.”

Then Judas said to Jesus, “Teacher, surely I am not the one. Am I?” (Judas is the one who would give Jesus to his enemies.)

Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

While they were eating the Passover meal, Jesus took some bread. He thanked God for it and broke it. Then he gave it to his followers and said, "Take this bread and eat it. This bread is my body that I am giving for you. Do this to remember me."

Then Jesus took a cup. He thanked God for it and gave it to the followers. He said, "Every one of you drink this. This is my blood which begins the new agreement that God makes with his people. This blood is poured out for many to forgive their sins. I tell you this: I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

32. Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit – John 13:26 – 14:31

During the Passover meal, Jesus took a piece of bread, dipped it into the bowl and gave it to Judas Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus said to Judas, “The think that you will do – do it quickly!” None of the men at the table understood why Jesus said this to Judas. Judas accepted the bread Jesus gave him and immediately went out. It was night.

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man receives his glory. And God receives glory through him. If God receives glory through him, then God will give glory to the Son through himself. And God will give him glory quickly.”

Jesus said, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me. Where I am going you cannot come. I give to you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.”

Simon Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow now. But you will follow later.”

Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I am ready to die for you!”

Jesus answered, “Will you really die for me? I tell you the truth. Before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don’t even know me.”

Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. And trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house. I would not tell you if this were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back. Then I will take you to be with me so that you may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. So how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way. And I am the truth and the life. The only way to the Father is through me. If you really knew me, then you would know my Father, too. But now you do know him, and you have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need.”

Jesus answered, “I have been with you a long time now. Do you still not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. So why do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you don’t come from me. The Father lives in me, and he is doing his own work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the miracles I have done. I tell you the truth. He who believes in me will do the same things that I do. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And if you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you. Then the Father’s glory will be shown through the Son. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will do the things I command. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper. He will give you this Helper to be with you forever. The Helper is the spirit of truth. The

world cannot accept him because it does not see him or know him. But you know him. He lives with you and will be with you.

“I will not leave you all alone like orphans. I will come back to you. In a little while the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live, too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father. You will know that you are in me and I am in you. He who knows my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me. And my Father will love him who loves me. I will love him and will show myself to him.”

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you plan to show yourself to us, but not to the world?”

Jesus answered, “If anyone loves me, then he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not obey my teaching. This teaching that you hear is not really mine. It is from my Father, who sent me.

“I have told you all these things while I am with you. But the Helper will teach you everything. He will cause you to remember all the things I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.

“I leave you peace. My peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don’t let your hearts be troubled. Don’t be afraid. I have told you these things now, before they happen. Then when they happen, you will believe. I will not talk with you much longer. The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me. But the world must know that I love the Father. So I do exactly what the Father told me to do. Come, let us go.”

When they had sung a song of praise to God, they left and went to the Garden of Gethsemane.

33. The Betrayal and Trial of Jesus – John 18:1 – 19:16

Jesus had met often in the Garden of Gethsemane with his followers. Therefore Judas Iscariot knew where the place was. So Judas led a group of soldiers to the garden. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Jesus knew everything that would happen to him. Jesus went out and asked, “Who is it you are looking for?”

The men answered, “Jesus from Nazareth.”

Jesus said, “I am Jesus.” When Jesus said, “I am Jesus,” the men moved back and fell to the ground. Jesus asked them again, “Who is it you are looking for?”

They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus said, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, then let these other men go.”

Simon Peter had a sword. He took out the sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back. Shall I not drink of the cup the Father has given me?” Jesus touched his ear and healed him. Then all the followers left Jesus and fled.

Then the soldiers arrested Jesus. They tied him up and led him first to Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Simon Peter and another one of Jesus’ followers went along after Jesus. A girl at the door of the high priest’s house said to Peter, “Aren’t you also one of that man’s followers. Peter answered, “No, I am not!” It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a fire. They were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter was standing with them, warming himself.

The high priest asked Jesus questions about his followers and his teaching. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to everyone. I have always taught in the teaching houses and in the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I never said anything in secret. So why do you question me? Ask the people who heard my teaching. They know what I said.”

When Jesus said this, one of the guards standing there hit him. The guard said, “Is that the way you answer the high priest?”

Jesus answered him, “If I said something wrong, then say what was wrong. But if what I said is true, why do you hit me?” Then Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas the high priest. Jesus was still tied.

Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, “Aren’t you one of that man’s followers?”

Peter denied it and said, “No, I am not.”

One of the servants of the high priest was there. This servant was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The servant said, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” Again Peter said it wasn’t true. Just then a rooster crowed.

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas' house to the Roman governor's palace. The Roman people had conquered the Jewish lands and were in control of them. It was early morning. Pilate, the governor, came out to them and asked, "What charges do you bring against this man?"

They answered, "He is a criminal. That is why we brought him to you."

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own Jewish law."

They answered, "But we are not allowed by the Romans to put anyone to death."

Then Pilate went back inside the palace. He called Jesus to him and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus said, "Is that your own question, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew. It was your own people and their leading priests who brought you before me? What have you done wrong?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it belonged to this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be given over to the Jews. But my kingdom is from another place."

Pilate said, "So you are a king!"

Jesus answered, "That is true. I was born for this: to tell people about the truth. That is why I came into the world. And everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me."

After this, Pilate went out to the Jews again. He said to them, "I can find nothing to charge against this man. But it is your custom that I free one prisoner to you at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to free this 'king of the Jews'?"

They shouted back, "No, not him! Let Barabbas go free!" (Barabbas was a robber and murderer.)

Then Pilate ordered that Jesus be taken away and whipped. The soldiers used some thorny branches to make a crown. They put this crown on Jesus' head and put a purple king's robe around him. Then they came to Jesus many times and said, "Hail, King of Jews!" They were hitting Jesus in the face. Again Pilate came out and said to them, "Look! I am bringing Jesus out to you. I want you to know that I find nothing I can charge against him." Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is the man!"

When the leading priests and the guards saw Jesus they shouted, "Kill him on a cross! Kill him on a cross!"

But Pilate answered, "Take him and nail him to a cross yourselves. I find nothing I can charge against him."

The Jews answered, "We have a law that says he should die, because he claims to be the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. He went back inside the palace and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus did not answer him. Pilate said, "You refuse to speak to me? Don't you know that I have the power to set you free and power to have you killed on a cross?"

Jesus answered, "The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God."

After this, Pilate tried to let Jesus go free. But the Jews cried out, "Anyone who makes himself king is against the Roman emperor. If you let this man go, you are not the emperor's friend."

So when Pilate heard this, he sat down in the judge's seat. He asked them, "Do you want me to kill your king on a cross?"

The leading priest answered, "The only king we have is the Roman emperor!" So Pilate gave Jesus to them to be killed on a cross.

34. The Crucifixion and Burial – John 19:16-42; Luke 23:32-48; Mark 15:37-39; Matthew 27:51-66

The soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own wooden cross, Jesus went out to a hill. There they nailed Jesus to the cross. They also nailed two criminals to crosses, one on Jesus' right and one on the left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Pilate put a sign on the cross. It read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

After the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, they took his clothes and divided them among themselves. The people stood watching. The leaders made fun of Jesus. They said, "If he is God's Chosen One, the Christ, then let him save himself. He saved other people, didn't he?" Even the soldiers made fun of him.

Jesus' mother stood near his cross. Jesus saw his mother. He also saw the follower whom he loved standing there. He said to his mother, "Dear woman, this man will be your son." Then he said to the follower, "Take her as your mother." From that time on, this follower took her to live in his home.

One of the criminals on the cross next to him began to shout insults at Jesus: "Aren't you the Promised One? Then save yourself! And save us too!"

But the other criminal stopped him. He said, "You should fear God! You are getting the same punishment as he is. We are getting what we deserve. But this man had done nothing wrong!" Then the criminal said to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!"

Then Jesus said to him, "Listen! What I say is true: Today you will be with me in paradise!"

After several hours, at noon, the whole country became dark. The darkness lasted for three hours. At three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you left me alone?"

To make all the Scripture come true, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." The soldiers took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar. Then they put it on a branch and lifted it to Jesus' mouth. Jesus tasted the vinegar. Then he cried out in a loud voice, "Father, I give my life to you." Then he said, "It is finished." He bowed his head and died.

Then the thick curtain next to the Most Holy Place in the Temple split in two from top to bottom. Also, the earth shook and rocks broke apart. The graves opened, and many of God's people who had died were raised from death. They went into the city of Jerusalem, and many people saw them.

The army officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus saw this earthquake and everything else that happened. They were very frightened and said, "He really was the Son of God!" Later one of the soldiers from Pilate came to make sure he was dead. He stuck his spear into Jesus' side.

Many women were standing at a distance from the cross, watching. These were women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for him. Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were there.

Late in the day, a rich man named Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus. (Joseph was a Jewish leader, but was a secret follower of Jesus, because he was afraid of the other Jewish leaders.) Pilate gave his permission. So Joseph came and took Jesus' body away.

Nicodemus went with Joseph. Nicodemus was the man who earlier had come to Jesus at night. These two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it with burial spices in pieces of cloth. Nearby was a garden. The garden had a new tomb, cut in a wall of rock, where no one had ever been buried. The man laid Jesus in that tomb quickly. For it was the day before the Sabbath. When the sun went down, the Sabbath day would begin and they would all have to rest from work, as the Law of Moses commanded. Joseph rolled a very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb.

The women who had come from Galilee with Jesus followed Joseph. They saw the tomb and saw inside where the body of Jesus was laid. Then the women left to prepare perfumes and spices for his burial.

But the next day, on the Sabbath day, they all rested.

The next day, the Sabbath day, the priests and leaders went to Pilate. They said, "Sir, we remember that while that liar was still alive he said, 'After three days I will rise from death.' So give the order for the tomb to be guarded closely till the third day. His followers might come and steal the body. Then they could tell the people that he has risen from death. That lie would be worse than the first one."

Pilate said, "Take some soldiers and go guard the tomb the best way you know." So they all went to the tomb and made it safe from thieves. They did this by sealing the stone in the entrance and then putting soldiers there to guard it.

35. The Resurrection – Luke 24:1-49; John 20:24-31

Very early on the first day of the week, the women came to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. They brought the spices they had prepared. At that time there was a strong earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven. The angel went to the tomb and rolled the stone away from the entrance. He was shining as bright as lightning. His clothes were white as snow. The soldiers guarding the tomb were very frightened of the angel. They shook with fear and then became like dead men.

When the women came, they found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. They went in, but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, two angels in shining clothes suddenly stood beside them. The women were very afraid and bowed their heads to the ground. The angels said to the women, "Why are you looking for a living person here? This is a place for the dead. Jesus is not here. He has risen from death! Do you remember what he said in Galilee? He said that the Son of Man must be given to evil men, be killed on a cross, and rise from death on the third day. Then the women remembered what Jesus had said.

These women left the tomb and told all these things to the 11 apostles and the other followers. But they did not believe the women. It sounded like nonsense. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He looked in, but he saw only the cloth that Jesus' body had been wrapped in. Peter went away to be alone, wondering about what had happened.

That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town nearby. They were talking about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself came near and began walking with them. (They were not allowed to recognize Jesus.) Then Jesus said, "What are these things you are talking about while you walk?"

The two followers stopped. Their faces were very sad. The one named Cleopas answered, "You must be the only one in Jerusalem who does not know what just happened there."

Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about?"

The followers said, "It is about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet from God to all the people. He said and did many powerful things. Our leaders and priests gave him up to be judged and killed. They nailed him to a cross. But we were hoping that he would free the Jews. It is now the third day since this happened. And today some women among us told us some amazing things. Early this morning they went to the tomb, but they did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels. The angels said Jesus was alive! So some of our group went to the tomb, too. They found it just as the women said, but they did not see Jesus."

Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to realize what is true. You should believe everything the prophets said. They said a long time ago that the Promised One must suffer these things before he enters his glory." Then Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. He started with Moses, and then he talked about what all the prophets had said about him.

They came near the town and Jesus acted as if he did not plan to stop there. But they begged him, "Stay with us. It is late; it is almost night." So he went in to stay with them.

Jesus sat down with them and took some bread. He gave thanks for the food and divided it. Then he gave it to them. And then, they were allowed to recognize Jesus. But when they saw who he was, he disappeared. They said to each other, “When Jesus talked to us on the road, it felt like fire burning in us. It was exciting when he explained the true meaning of the Scriptures.”

So the two followers got up at once and went back to Jerusalem. There they found the 11 apostles and others gathered. They were saying, “The Lord really has risen from death!”

While the followers were telling them about it, Jesus himself stood among those gathered. He said to them, “Peace be with you.”

They were fearful and terrified. They thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus said, “Why are you troubled? Why do you doubt what you see? Look at my hands and feet where they put nails through them. It is I myself! Touch me. You can see that I have a living body; a ghost does not have a body like this.”

After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and feet. The followers were amazed and very happy. They still could not believe it. Jesus said to them, “Do you have any food here?” They gave him a piece of cooked fish. While the followers watched, Jesus took the fish and ate it.

He said to them, “Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen – everything in the Law of Moses, the books of the prophets and King David’s songs.

Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He said to them, “It is written that the Promised One, the Christ, would be killed and rise from death on the third day. You saw these things happen – you are witnesses. You must tell people to change their hearts and lives by turning from their sins. If they do this, their sins will be forgiven. You must start at Jerusalem and preach these things to all the nations. Listen! My Father has promised you something; I will send it to you. But you must stay in Jerusalem until you have received that power from heaven.”

But Thomas, one of the 12 apostles was not there when Jesus appeared to them. The others told Thomas, “We saw the Lord!”

But Thomas said, “I will not believe it until I see the nail marks in his hands. And I will not believe until I put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side.”

A week later the followers were in the house again. Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand here in my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you see me. Those who believe without seeing me will be truly blessed!”

Jesus did many other miracles before his followers that are not written in the Bible. But these have been written down so that you can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then, by believing, you can have life through his name.

36. Jesus Returns to the Father – Acts 1:1-11; Matthew 28:18-20

The apostles saw Jesus during the 40 days after he was raised from death. Jesus talked to the apostles he had chosen. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told them what they should do. During this forty days, he showed himself to them and proved in many ways that he was alive. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God. Once when he was eating with them, he told them not to leave Jerusalem. He said, “The Father has made you a promise which I told you about before. Wait here to receive this promise. John baptized people with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The apostles were all together. They asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to give the kingdom back to the people of Israel?”

Jesus said to them, “The Father is the only One who has the authority to decide dates and times. These things are not for you to know. But the Holy Spirit will come to you. Then you will receive power. You will be my witnesses – in Jerusalem, in all the surrounding area of Judea, in nearby Samaria, and in every part of the world. All power in heaven and on earth is given to me. So go and make followers of all the people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have told you. You can be sure that I will be with you always. I will continue with you until the end of the world.”

After he said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up. A cloud hid him from their sight. As he was going, they were looking into the sky. Suddenly two men wearing white clothes stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? You saw Jesus taken away from you into heaven. He will come back in the same way you saw him go.”

Then the followers went back from there and returned to Jerusalem.

37. Jesus is Our High Priest and Suitable Sacrifice – Hebrews 1:1-3, 8:1-6, 9:1-28, 10:11-23

Later, as the Holy Spirit spoke to one of the apostles, he wrote down what the Spirit said about Jesus. He showed how Jesus was the promised answer for us. He showed how Jesus was the perfect sacrifice to bring us forgiveness and bring us into a right relationship with God. This is what he said:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these last days God has spoken to us through his Son. God has chosen his Son to own all things. And he made the world through the Son. The Son reflects the glory of God. He is an exact copy of God's nature. He holds everything together through his powerful word. The Son made people clean from their sins. Then he sat down at the right side of God, the Great One in heaven.

Here is the point of what we are saying: We have a high priest who now sits at the right side of God's throne in heaven. Our high priest serves in the Most Holy Place – heaven. He serves in the true place of worship that was made by God, not by men.

Every high priest on earth has the work of offering sacrifices to God. So our high priest must also offer something to God. If our high priest were now living on earth, he would not be a priest. I say this because there are already priests here among the Jews who follow God's law of giving sacrifices. The work they do as priests, however, is only a dim copy of the true worship in heaven. For when Moses was ready to build the Holy Tent, God warned him: "Be very careful to make everything by the plan I showed you on the mountain." But the priestly work that has been given to Jesus is much greater than the work that was given to the other priests. In the same way, the new agreement that Jesus brought from God to his people is much greater than the old one given to Abraham and Moses. And the new agreement is based on promises of better things.

The first agreement had rules for worship. And it had a man-made place for worship. The Holy Tent was set up for this. The first area in the Tent was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place. In it was a golden altar for burning incense. Also there was the Holy Box that held the laws of the old agreement.

Now the priests could go into the Holy Place. But only the high priest could go into the second room, the Most Holy Place, and he did that only once a year. He could never enter the inner room without taking blood with him. He offered that blood to God for himself and for the people's sins. The Holy Spirit uses this to show that the way into the Most Holy Place was not open. This is an example for us today. It shows that the sacrifices offered cannot make the worshiper perfect in his heart. These rules about sacrifices were rules to be followed until the time of God's new way.

But Jesus Christ has come as the high priest of the good things we now have. The tent he entered is greater and more perfect. It is not made by men. It does not belong to this world. Christ entered the Most Holy Place only once – and for all time. He did not take with him the blood of goats and cows. His sacrifice was his own blood. He entered the Most Holy Place and set us free from sin forever. The blood of goats and cows were sprinkled on the people who were unclean to make their bodies clean again on the outside.

How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through the eternal Spirit as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make our hearts clean from useless acts. We are made pure so that we serve the living God.

So Christ brings a new agreement from God to his people. Those who are called by God can now receive the blessings that God has promised. These blessings will last forever. They can have those things because Christ died so that the people who lived under the first agreement could be set free from sin.

When Moses told all the people the commands of the first agreement, he sprinkled the Holy Tent, the holy book and all the people with blood. The law says that almost everything must be made clean by blood. And sins cannot be forgiven without the shedding of blood.

So the copies of the real things in heaven had to be made clean by animal sacrifices. But the real things in heaven need much better sacrifices. Christ went into the real Most Holy Place – heaven itself. He is there now before God to help us. But Christ did not go into heaven to offer himself as a sacrifice many times like the high priest on earth. Then he would have had to suffer many times since the world was made. But Christ came only once and for all time. He came at just the right time to take away all sin by sacrificing himself. Everyone must die once. After a person dies, he is judged. So Christ was offered as a sacrifice one time to take away the sins of many people. And he will come a second time, but not to offer himself for sin. He will come again to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Every day the earthly priests stand and do their religious service. Again and again they offer the same sacrifices. But those sacrifices can never take away sins. But Jesus Christ offered one sacrifice for sins, and it is good forever. Then he sat down at the right side of God. And now Christ waits there for his enemies to be put under his power. With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy. And when these have been forgiven, there is no more need for a sacrifice for sins.

So, brothers, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place. We can do this without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death. We can enter through a new way that Jesus opened for us. It is a living way. It leads through the curtain – Christ's body. And we have a great priest over God's house. So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith. We have been cleansed and made free from feelings of guilt. And our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed. We can trust God to do what he promised.

38. The Giving of the Holy Spirit and the Young Church – Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-41

After Jesus was raised up to heaven, the followers of Jesus went back to Jerusalem to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. When they entered the city, they went to an upstairs room where they were staying. The apostles were there. So were some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, the brothers of Jesus and other followers. They all continued praying together.

When the day of the feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a noise came from heaven. It sounded like a strong wind blowing. This noise filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like flames of fire. The flames were separated and stood over each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak different languages. The Holy Spirit was giving them power to speak these languages.

There were Jews in Jerusalem for the feast who had come from all over the world. When they heard this noise, a crowd came together. They were all surprised because each one heard them speaking in his own language, now matter which country he came from. They asked, "How is this possible for these men from Galilee to speak all of our languages? We hear them telling in our own languages about the great things God had done!"

Peter stood up with the rest of the apostles. In a loud voice he spoke to the crowd: "What Joel the prophet wrote about is happening here today:

‘God says: In the last days I will give my Spirit freely to all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. At that time I will give my Spirit even to my servants, both men and women. And they will prophesy. I will show miracles in the sky and on the earth. Then anyone who asks the Lord for help will be saved.’

“Listen to these words: Jesus from Nazareth was a very special man. God clearly showed this to you by the miracles God did through him. You all know this, because it happened right here among you. Jesus was give to you, and you killed him. With the help of evil men you nailed him to a cross. But God knew all this would happen. This was God’s plan which he made long ago. God raised Jesus from death. God set him free from the pain of death. Death could not hold him.

“King David prophesied this about him: ‘I keep the Lord before me always. Because he is close by my side, I will not be hurt. So I am glad, and rejoice. Even my body has hope. This is because you will not leave me in the grave. You will not let your Holy One rot.’

“Brothers, I can tell you truly about David, our ancestor. He died and was buried. His grave is still here with us today. David was a prophet and knew what God had said. God had promised David that he would make a person from David’s family a king just as he was. David knew this before it happened. That is why he said: ‘He was not left in the grave. His body did not rot.’

“David was talking about the Christ rising from death. So Jesus is the One who God raise from death! And we are all witnesses to this. Jesus was lifted up to heaven and is now at God’s right side. The Father has given the Holy Spirit to Jesus as he promised. So now Jesus has poured out that Spirit. This is what you see and hear. God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. He is the man you nailed to the cross!”

When the people heard this, they were sick at heart. They asked Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?”

Peter said to them, “Change your hearts and lives by turning from sin, and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you. It is also for your children and for all who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord calls to himself.

Peter warned them with many other words. He begged them, “Save yourselves from the evil of today’s people!” Then those people who accepted what Peter said were baptized. About 3,000 people were added to the number of believers that day. They continually spent their time learning the apostles’ teaching. And they continually shared their lives together, ate together and prayed together.

The apostles were doing many miracles. And everyone felt great respect for God. All the believers stayed together. They shared everything. They sold their land and the things they owned. Then they divided the money and gave it to those people who needed it. This was the pattern of the believers every day: Sometimes they would meet in the Temple. They had one mind together. They broke bread in each other’s homes. From house to house they ate together with glad and sincere hearts. They praised God, and all the people liked them. More and more people were being saved every day; the Lord was adding those people to the group of believers.

39. The Bold Witness of the Believers – Acts 4:1-37; Acts 5

One day the apostles Peter and John saw a crippled man at the temple gate begging for money. Peter healed him in the name of Jesus Christ. The man jumped up, stood on his feet and began to walk and jump in the temple, praising God. All the people were amazed. When a crowd gathered, Peter and John told them that it was the power of Jesus that had healed the man. They told the people to turn away from their sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, a group of men came up to them. There were Jewish priests, the captain of the temple soldiers and some religious leaders. They were upset because the two apostles were teaching the people. Peter and John were preaching that people will rise from death through the power of Jesus. The Jewish leaders grabbed Peter and John and put them in jail. It was already night, so they kept them in jail until the next day. But many of those who heard Peter and John preach believed the things they said. There were about 5000 men in the group of believers.

The next day the Jewish leaders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. The high priest and his family were there. They made Peter and John stand before them. They asked them: “By what power or authority did you do this?”

Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said to them, “Rulers of the people and you older leaders, are you questioning us about a good thing that was done to a crippled man? Are you asking us who made him well? We want all of you and all the Jewish people to know that his man was made well by the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth! You nailed him to a cross, but God raised him from death. This man was crippled, but he is now well and able to stand here before you because of the power of Jesus! Jesus is the only One who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been give to save people. And we must be saved through him!”

The leaders saw that Peter and John were not afraid to speak. They understood that these men had no special training or education. So they were amazed. Then they realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. They saw the crippled man standing there beside the two apostles. They saw that the man was healed. So they could say nothing against them. The Jewish leaders told them to leave the meeting. Then the leaders talked to each other about what they should do. They said, “What shall we do with these men? Everyone in Jerusalem knows that they have done a great miracle! We cannot say it is not true. But we must warn them not to talk to people anymore using that name of Jesus. Then this thing will not spread among the people.”

So they called Peter and John in again. They told them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “What do you thing is right? What would God want? Should we obey you or God? We cannot keep quiet. We must speak about what we have seen and heard!” The Jewish leaders could not find a way to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had been done. So the Jewish leaders warned the apostles again and let them go free.

Peter and John left the meeting and went to their own group. They told them everything that the priests and leaders had said to them. When the believers heard this, they prayed to God with one purpose. They prayed, “Lord, you are the One who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in the world. Pilate and the Jewish leaders, and the Jewish people all came together against Jesus here in Jerusalem. Jesus is your holy Servant. He is the One you made to be the Promised One. These people made our plan happen; it happened because of your power and your will. And now, Lord, listen to what they are saying. They are trying to make us afraid! Lord, we are your servants. Help us to be

brave to speak your word. Prove your word by showing your power; make sick people well make miracles happen by the power of Jesus, your holy servant.”

After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke God’s word without fear.

The apostles did many miracles among the people. More and more men and women believed and were added to the group of believers. The high priest and all his friends became jealous. They took the apostles and put them in jail. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail. He led the apostles outside and said, “Go and stand in the Temple. Tell the people everything about this new life.” The apostles obeyed, went to the temple and began to preach the next morning.

However soldiers came and arrested the apostles. They brought them before the Jewish leaders. The leaders had them beaten. They told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again. Then they let them go free. The apostles left the meeting full of joy because they were given the honor of suffering disgrace for Jesus. The apostles did not stop teaching people. Every day in the Temple and in people’s homes they continued to tell the Good News – that Jesus is the Christ.

40. Jesus Will Return One Day in Judgment – Revelation 20:10 – 21:8; 22:1-21

Jesus often told his followers that he will return one day in power. He gave this vision to John the apostle of what his coming will be like. John wrote:

At the end of the earth, Satan, who tricked the people of the earth, was thrown into a lake of burning fire. There he will be punished day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. Earth and sky ran away from him and disappeared. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And the book of life was opened. There were also other books opened. The dead were judged by what they had done, which was written in the books. Then Death was thrown into the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared. Now there was not sea. And I saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. This holy city is the new Jerusalem. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne. The voice said, "Now God's home is with men. He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain. All the old ways are gone."

The One who was sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, because these words are true and can be trusted."

The One on the throne said to me: "It is finished! I am the Beginning and the End. I will give free water from the spring of the water of life to anyone who is thirsty. Anyone who overcomes will receive this. And I will be his God, and he will be my son. But those who are cowards, who refuse to believe, who do evil things, who kill, who sin sexually, who do evil magic, who worship idols, and who tell lies – all these will have a place in the lake of burning fire."

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. The river was shining like crystal. It flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the street of the city. The tree of life was on each side of the river. It produces fruit 12 times a year, once each month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of all people. Nothing that God judges guilty will be in that city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there. And God's servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. There will never be night again. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun. The Lord God will give them light. And they will rule like kings forever and ever.

The angel said to me, "These words are true and can be trusted. The Lord is the God of the spirits of the prophets. He sent his angel to show his servants the things that must happen soon."

Jesus said, "Listen! I am coming soon! I will bring rewards with me. I will repay each one for what he had done. He who obeys the words of prophecy in this book will be happy. I am the Beginning and the End. Yes, I am coming soon!"

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

This is the end of the part of the story we will tell on this tape. The story is much fuller. We have simply told you enough so that you, too, can believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for your sins. You too can turn from your sins and trust in Jesus to save you. If you turn to follow and obey him, he will forgive you of your sins and give you an eternal relationship with him – now and in heaven one day.