



“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.” Luke 1:30 NIV

Good News For Those With Stories of Grief

A Message for Women Who Share Stories of
Personal Misfortune and Grief



“The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

Words of the formerly barren Elizabeth upon fulfillment of God’s promise that she would bear a son.

(Luke 1:25 NIV)



“Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Words of Jesus to the woman who lovingly wept at his feet seeking forgiveness of her sins.

(Luke 7:48, 50 NIV)



Good News for Those with Stories of Grief
(The Grief Stories)

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Permission is granted for adapting and translating these stories and concepts. These are presented for the purpose of engaging the attention of those women who have the practice of sharing their life's grief stories, so they might see there is a greater power at work in their lives to bless and change their circumstances. And through the stories they might know the Savior who came to forgive their sin and bring the possibility of eternal life and blessing, a comfort for their grief.

Bible stories are derived from the New International Version text with direct quotation and adaptation as needed to facilitate the narrative of the stories.

Cover picture from "Telling the Story..." Bible Teaching pictures. International Mission Board and New Tribes Mission.

❧ Contents ❧

Introduction to Grief Stories.....	1
Eve’s Story—The First Sorrow.....	7
Four Women Who Lost Their Families.....	11
A Servant Girl’s Cry.....	15
Where Is the Son That God Promised?.....	19
A Mother’s Fear for Her Favorite Son.....	25
An Unloved Wife and a Barren Wife.....	29
The Ordeal of Tamar the Widow.....	33
A Sister’s Mistake.....	37
The Prostitute Who Saved Her Family.....	41
A Young Woman’s Only Hope.....	45
God Answered Hannah’s Prayer.....	51
A Good Wife and a Surly Husband.....	55
God Redeemed Bathsheba’s Sorrow.....	59
The Wise Woman’s Two Sons.....	65
Two Prostitutes and a Wise Ruling.....	69
A Starving Widow’s Last Meal.....	73
The Widow’s Oil.....	77
The Shunammite Woman’s Lament.....	79
Two Wicked Women Who Came to Grief—	
Jezebel the Wicked Wife.....	83
Athaliah the Wicked Grandmother.....	87
The Queen Who Risked Her Life.....	89
Good News and a Big Problem for Mary.....	95
A Sinful Woman Seeks Forgiveness.....	99

Where Are Your Accusers?.....	101
Living Water for a Thirsty Woman.....	103
The Widow's Only Son Died.....	107
The Persistent Widow.....	109
The Widow's Offering.....	111
The Sick Woman Who Touched Jesus.....	113
The Woman Who Was Bound by Satan.....	117
The Woman Who Cried for Mercy.....	119
The Plight of Two Sisters.....	121
Five Foolish Virgins.....	125
A Sword Will Pierce Your Soul.....	127
Sorrow in the Garden.....	131
The Last Great Sorrow.....	135
A Good Woman Who Died.....	139
Lydia, a Woman Who Opened Her Heart	141
Using Bible Stories to Acclimatize.....	143
The Storying Session.....	147
Asking for Decisions.....	151
Alternative Story Presentation.....	157
Sample Storying Lesson.....	157
Resources for Storying to Women.....	161
The Meaning of Bible Names in the Stories.....	165



☞ GRIEF STORIES FOR WOMEN ☞ From the Bible

“The real difference between the women in the Bible is not status. It doesn’t matter that one is rich and another poor, one a leader and another from a disrepectful life, or barren or with child. The real difference between the daughters of Eve is whether or not they know the God who made them and look to him alone for forgiveness of sin, blessing in life’s circumstances, and when this life is ended, an eternity of blessing and comfort in the presence of Jesus the Savior who suffered for their sake and died for their sins.” (Adapted from *Her Name is Woman*.¹)

Background

Among Muslim women in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia there is a custom of sharing stories of misfortune, suffering and grief which have befallen them. The women gather and begin to tell their stories. The more persistent ones and those with the stories possessing the greatest misfortune and suffering prevail. Those who have had no misfortunes happen to them simply have no story to tell and thus keep silent.

There is a strictly enforced protocol among many of the groups about what kinds of stories can be told and the manner in which the stories are told. For some there is a rhythmic pattern to the stories. Practices and customs may vary, but the central thing remains in the telling of the misfortune or grief stories among a woman’s peers.

Benedicte Grima has chronicled this phenomenon in a study of Paxtun women in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. In their stories of misfortune the women release their emotion in a performance of storytelling that validates their hardships and suffering. The women create their own image of themselves in life stories for their own consumption. There are two basic types of stories—life stories and misfortune narratives.

Grima writes, "Misfortune and illness are generally recognized as events, and as events, they provide contexts for interaction, for the communication and interpretation of experience."² There is a mandatory form of visit to inquire about the misfortune, usually one's health.

In telling of the narratives the floor is held by anyone who is able to gain another's attention even though someone else may be telling their story. A woman can do what she does in these sessions because the social and cultural framework in which the telling of her story takes place provides the occasion (illness and loss) for the performance. (p. 114)

The Need

In Bible Storying experiences women were encountered who rejected any "Christian" teaching. Many of these among Muslims were conservative in their beliefs and culture. Among those in Hindu societies the devotion to village deities and Hindu beliefs regarding the next and succeeding lives led to a rejection of foreign "Christian" teaching.

Implication for Bible Storying

Since this is an area of intense interest to women of this religious background and among these cultures, it should provoke some interest among the women to hear stories of other women who suffered in some way or another. While it is realized that the Bible stories are limited in how much they can be adapted for retelling, especially by recasting or adding additional story content, it may be possible to work with existing biblical material to adapt the story somewhat to follow the tradition. The intent is to get the women to hear these stories from the Bible as an introduction to the Bible. Further, the intent is not only to chronicle the misfortunes of the women whose stories are told, but to conclude with an ending that points to the love of God and His grace in covering life's deepest

sorrows and needs and bringing peace to the troubled heart as well as forgiveness of sin.

Purpose of this Manual

The purpose of this manual then is to present the stories to capture the attention and interest of primarily Muslim women, to hold their attention as they hear God's Word speak *to* their lives as it speaks *of* the lives of others. And the purpose continues to begin the building of a relationship with the God who created them, as they learn of His plan for restoring a broken relationship with them through the Promised One.

The manual does not attempt to strongly evangelize women until the last stories are reached. At any point of growing interest and openness this set of stories may be discontinued and the more traditional core list of redemption stories may be used. This set of grief stories seeks to initiate and strengthen the possibility of a relationship with God like that expressed through God's love and desire to forgive and bless the women in the Bible stories. And it seeks to develop a basic trust in the Bible stories and a desire to hear more. The stories do not attempt to constitute an "oral Bible" as they are strongly thematic and certain liberties are taken in the telling of each story by combining some elements from other stories.

No Lessons or Teaching Accompany the Stories

Because these women are rejecting "Christian" teaching no attempt is made to include Christian teaching as a typical Bible Storying lesson. Initially it was hoped that the stories themselves would provoke comment and discussion and, indeed, this proved the case. Listeners related to many of the stories and wanted to talk about what happened and about the ending in which God redeemed the life and suffering of the women in the stories. Over time and perhaps many stories a trust

relationship can begin to build between the women listeners and the patient Bible storyer.

When the questions arise then is the opportunity to review other stories, explore Bible verses, and through dialog to help the women to internalize the stories and draw hope and openness from them.

Sharing the Stories

The stories may be shared in the same storying lesson manner that chronological Bible stories are shared in a strictly evangelistic or discipling track. This would involve a recalling of previous stories (especially ones which in some way relate to the new story) and talking about the implications in these stories for the present lives of the women. As different crises and local events trigger interest, it may be desirable to select stories which relate to these current events rather than holding to a chronological timeline presentation pattern. The stories are listed in this set in a general chronological order, though some Gospel stories are out of order.

Tell the new story after reading a selected portion of it from God's Word (if that is helpful for the women—it usually is). Afterward, let the women talk about the story and what it is saying to them. Ask them to recall what happened to the person. How did their life change for the better or worse? Was there a good ending to the story? Does it suggest there is hope for those women whose lives include worries, misfortunes, sorrows and grief? What might the story mean to someone today? What did God do for the person?

In the initial stories simply tell the story and let the women respond as they volunteer. Much of the structure will depend upon how the group is recruited, assembled, or entered to get access to the women. As stories build a relationship, it should be possible in time to expand the lesson around the story.

As interest develops in the stories and the events which follow in subsequent stories, look for opportunities to move toward a more evangelistic track with the redemptive Bible stories.

The *God and Woman*³ Bible story manual is a resource for storying lessons when the women are receptive to more evangelistic stories and accompanying lessons. The lessons are sensitive to generic worldview issues and perceived needs of women living in South Asian countries. In developing these Bible story lessons the fact that many women perceived heaven as a place of reward for Muslim men and in many cases felt their chance of entering heaven was remote. So a second story set attempted to take this lack of desire for heaven into account by developing it as a relationship made possible with God through Jesus.

So *Heaven Is For Women*⁴ is a more aggressive set of evangelistic story lessons for those seeking heaven as a reward or destination beyond this present life or for those who see their greatest desire simply to meet the family and personal needs of the present. So instead of a destination after death, heaven is approached as a relationship providing acceptance, forgiveness of sin and promise of eternal life that can begin in this present life. The concept of an eternal blessed relationship growing out of forgiveness for sin as a result of God's grace and provision for salvation through knowing Jesus as Savior will be new to some of the women. It will take time and patience to communicate this truth to them.

Basic Bible Storying is a basic text covering all aspects of Bible Storying methodology from developing the story lessons to teaching the story lessons and some ministry strategies of use. Copies are available from Church Starting Network www.ChurchStarting.net.



☞ EVE'S STORY ☞ THE FIRST SORROW

Bible Background: Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18, 21-25; 3:1-16, 20-23; 4:1-16, 25; 5:1-4; 2Co 11:3; Galatians 4:4; 1Ti 2:13-15

For the Storyer: This story and the others which follow are being crafted to look at the plight of a woman where misfortune has entered her life and the outcome of that misfortune. Remember the purpose of these stories is to engage those women in the primarily Muslim world who have a tradition of sharing their grief stories. Perhaps these stories cannot compete with the women's misfortune stories in terms of complications and emotional stress, nevertheless, the stories are told to demonstrate that while bad things certainly happen in this life, there is a greater purpose to life and a loving God who longs to help one to overcome their troubles. And that comfort is possible through the relationship opened by Jesus and his suffering

Tell the Story:

EVE'S STORY—THE FIRST SORROW

After God created the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, all the plants, trees, birds, fish and animals, He created man and woman. God created man and woman in his own image. It was man that God made first. He formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being. God placed the man, Adam, in a garden God had planted; Adam's work was to care for it. God said to Adam, "You may eat fruit from any of the trees in the garden, but you must not eat fruit from the tree of knowing good and evil. For the day you touch it you will die." God saw that the man had no suitable companion. So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and while

the man was sleeping, God opened his side and removed bone and flesh, and then closed up the man's side. From the bone and flesh God made a woman and brought her to the man. The man said, "She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man." The man and his wife were both naked but they felt no shame.

One day the serpent which was more crafty than all the wild animals said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden'?" The woman answered, "We may eat fruit from any of the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree growing in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom like God, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate it. Then the man and woman's eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves, and the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden.

When God called out to the man, "Where are you?" he answered, "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 from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit and I ate it." Then God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

So God placed a curse upon the serpent and said, "I will put a deep hatred between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman God said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

To the man Adam God said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' the ground is now cursed because of you and it will produce for you thorns and thistles. Through painful toil and sweat you will eat of what you grow all the days of your life until one day you return to the dust you were taken from. From dust you were taken and to dust you will return."

Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living. God made clothing from the skins of animals to clothe the man and woman and banished them from the garden and placed an angel with a flaming sword to guard the entrance.

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to a son and named him Cain. She said, "With God's help I have brought forth a son." Later she conceived again and gave birth to another son and named him Abel. Cain became a farmer like his father Adam and Abel a shepherd taking care of the family flocks.

One day Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to God. His brother Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. God looked with favor upon Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering God did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face downcast. God spoke to Cain, "Why are you angry? If you do what is right, you and your offering will be accepted. Be very careful, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must overcome it."

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out into the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother and killed him. God spoke to Cain again, "Where

is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," Cain said, "am I my brother's caretaker?"

God said to Cain, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and are driven from this ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will become a restless wanderer on the earth."

So Cain went out from God's presence and lived in another land. Later Adam lay with his wife, Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to another son and named him Seth. For she said, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Afterward Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters. The prophet Noah was a descendant of Seth, the son of Adam. And all people on earth are descendants of Noah's three sons after the great flood. Eve's sorrow in the loss of a son was turned to joy by God's gift of another son who was righteous and feared God. And through this son's descendant God would fulfill His promise to crush the Evil One.



A Verse to Remember: "The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..." (Numbers 14:18a).

☞ FOUR WOMEN WHO LOST ☞ THEIR FAMILIES

Bible Background: Genesis 5:28-30; 6:1-7:10, 23; 8:16, 18; 9:1; Isaiah 45:18b

For the Storyer: This story is a telling of the Flood story looking at the aspect of the four unnamed women in the story whose families perished in the flood. These four unnamed women were selected by God's grace to survive and so to have an important role in rebuilding the population of the earth.

Tell the Story:

FOUR WOMEN WHO LOST THEIR FAMILIES

After Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, had killed Abel, his brother, God gave another son who was named Seth. Then Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters. Now many generations had passed since the days of Adam and Eve. When the number of men began to increase on the earth, there were daughters born to them. At this time the sons of God, that is, some of the spirits God had created, saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose, and had children by them.

God saw this and was not pleased with what happened. For God saw how great the people's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil all the time. So God said, "My Spirit will not struggle with man forever, for he is mortal. His days will be one hundred twenty years." By this God was giving the people a time to repent, to turn from their sin and live in a way pleasing to God. Because of their evil and wickedness, God's heart was grieved that He had made man. The people did not repent, so God said, "I will destroy mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth."

But God saw that a man named Noah was righteous, blameless among all the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah found favor in God's eyes. In his family Noah was the firstborn son of his father Lamech. After Noah was born, his father had other sons and daughters. Noah was married and with his wife had three sons who also were married. Noah's sons were named Shem, Ham and Japheth. But the names of Noah's wife and the three sons' wives were not given.

The earth was so corrupt and full of violence because of the people, that God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people and their families. So make for yourself an ark (or large boat) of cypress wood." Then God revealed to Noah how to build the large boat to carry his family and all the animals that God would bring to Noah. God said to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the boat—you and your sons, and your wife and your sons' wives with you. Noah was careful to do all that God commanded him to do.

When at last the boat was finished, God said to Noah, "Go into the boat, you and your wife and your sons with their wives. I will send rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights until the whole earth is flooded and every living creature with the breath of life will perish." So Noah obeyed God and took his wife and his sons and his sons' wives and entered the large boat. Then God closed the door. After seven days passed rain began to fall and continued for forty days and nights. Soon the whole earth was flooded. Every person living on earth who was not in the boat with Noah perished in the flood. All other members of Noah's family, his wife's family and the families of his sons' wives all perished.

The waters continued upon the earth for many days. At last God remembered Noah and those who were with him in the boat, and He sent a wind to dry up the water. When the earth was dry again, God said to Noah, "Come out of the boat, you and your wife, and your sons and their wives." Noah offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God. Then God promised, "Never again will I destroy all

living creatures as I have done because of man's wickedness, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."

So God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and replenish the earth...I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you." The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with their wives were Shem, Ham and Japheth. From these sons and their wives came all the people who were scattered over the whole earth. For God did not create the earth to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited with people. Noah's wife and the wives of Shem, Ham and Japheth had all lost their families when God judged the earth. But God had a purpose for the four women and the children they would bear to their husbands.

Today we are all descendants of Noah and his sons and their wives. We are part of the new family God gave to them. But God was preparing an even more wonderful family for all mankind. God would provide a way for that new family to escape the coming judgment at the end of this age just as He had provided a way for Noah's family to escape the terrible flood in that day.



A Verse to Remember: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

or

"In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation'" (Isaiah 25:9).

or

"The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).

(Select one of these verses to be memorized or another appropriate for your listeners.)

Note: Many of the stories may have far too many proper names or detail. If so, leave out the additional names or simply refer to them in some way as minor characters in the stories or places in a way that is descriptive if needed as part of the story.

Many of the women in this storyer's experience were however interested in names of women and in family details. So several family tree diagrams have been included to supply this information and a chart to suggest the typical meaning of Bible names.

In another experience a woman listener wanted to know how Mary and Elizabeth were related. To satisfy her interest it was necessary to go back to Jacob and his sons Levi and Judah and briefly trace their descendants through Aaron and David, and then on to Elizabeth of the priestly line and Mary of the kingly line from David. This evidently answered her curiosity and she permitted the story to continue. Be sensitive to questions like this as it increases interest. If certain questions continue to arise in the stories, then consider some key background explanation before commencing the story.

🌀 A SERVANT GIRL'S CRY 🌀

Bible Background: Genesis 12:16; 16:1-16; 17:10, 23-27; 21:8-21; 25:12-18; Galatians 4:22-31 (*Do not refer to this passage, it is for your background reference only.*)

For the Storyer: This is, of course, a story of great importance to the target audience. It must be told with great sensitivity, yet accurately to set the record straight. To preserve the story flow and for simplicity, it is here told as one uninterrupted story without the birth of Isaac narrative intervening. Similarly, the birth of Isaac is told without reference to Ishmael. Combining the two stories makes the one story overly long and also loses the sharper focus the listeners get from the independent stories.

Tell the Story:

A SERVANT GIRL'S CRY

While they were in Egypt Abraham and Sarah had been given many Egyptian menservants and maidservants. After they returned to Canaan many years passed and still Sarah had no son as God had promised to Abraham. Sarah had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar, so she said to Abraham, "God has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abraham agreed to do what Sarah said. So after Abraham had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarah his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to Abraham, Sarah's husband, to also be his wife. Abraham slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarah said Abraham, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May God judge between you and me." "Your servant girl is in your hands," Abraham said. "Do with her whatever

you think best." Then Sarah mistreated Hagar, and Hagar ran away from her mistress.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring beside the road in the desert. The angel said, "Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarah," she answered. Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too many to count." Then the angel of the Lord said to Hagar:

"You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him. He will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

Hagar gave this name to God who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." So that well was called *well of the Living One who sees me*.

When the time came Hagar bore Abraham a son. Abraham gave the child the name Ishmael which means *God hears*. Abraham was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. Later God gave to Abraham the rite of circumcision of all the males as a sign of God's covenant. God said, "Every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household, or bought with money and are not your offspring." On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was now ninety-nine years old and his son Ishmael was thirteen.

On that same day God had also said to Abraham that Sarah was to bear a son who would be the son God had promised. Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Then God said, "I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of

twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, a son Sarah will bear to you next year.”

After Isaac was born, on the day he was weaned, Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking. Sarah said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac!” The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son that he loved. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of your maidservant into a nation also, because he is your son.”

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. Hagar went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then Hagar went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” As she sat nearby, tears filled her eyes as she began to cry.”

God heard Hagar and the boy crying. The angel of God called from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. Hagar went and filled the skin with water and gave her son a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up. Ishmael lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt. Ishmael had twelve sons beginning with Nebaioth his firstborn and Mahalath his sister. His twelve sons became tribal rulers according to their settlements and

camps. When Abraham died, Ishmael and Isaac buried him in the cave where Sarah Abraham's wife was buried. Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and was gathered to his people. His descendants lived in the area near the border of Egypt. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

God loved Ishmael, saved his life and that of his mother Hagar. God blessed Ishmael and gave him a large family for Abraham's sake. But he was not the son promised to Abraham through whom God was going to bless all people. It would be through Isaac and his descendants that God would fulfill his promise.



A Verse to Remember: "Cast all your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall" (Psalm 55:22). (See also 1 Peter 5:7)

or

"Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer" (Psalm 4:1).

🌀 WHERE IS THE SON THAT GOD PROMISED? 🌀

Bible Background: Genesis 11:26-31; 12:1-5, 10-20; 15:1-5; 16:1-16; 17:15-226; 18:1-15; 21:1-21; Joshua 24:2;

For the Storyer: This story touches on the very sensitive issue of Ishmael and Isaac and who was the authentic son of promise. This presentation attempts to be both sensitive and accurate. If questioned or challenged the storyer should simply say: That is what the Bible says, which are the words God caused to be written and preserved.

Tell the Story:

WHERE IS THE SON THAT GOD PROMISED?

One of the descendants of Shem, the son of Noah, was a man named Terah. He lived in Ur, a city in the far land of the Chaldeans. Many of the people of Ur worshiped idols as did Terah and his relatives. Terah had three sons: Abram as he was then known, Nahor and Haran. While still in Ur, Haran died, leaving a son named Lot. Nahor's wife was Milcah.

Abram's wife was Sarai who was also his sister. But Sarai was barren. Terah, together with his son Abram and his wife Sarai, and Lot the son of his brother, set out from Ur to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached a place called Haran, they settled there until Terah died. Then God spoke to Abram saying, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

So Abram took Sarai his wife and his nephew Lot and journeyed to the land of Canaan. God had promised Abram: "I will make you into a great nation, I will make your name great, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram had left his people as God had

told him when he was seventy-five years old and Sarai was sixty-five.

When there happened to be a famine in the land of Canaan, Abram went down to Egypt to live there for awhile because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, Abram said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife. Then they will kill me but will let you live. Tell them you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. When Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh who took her into his palace to be one of his wives. Pharaoh treated Abram well for Sarai's sake, and Abram acquired many sheep, cattle, male and female donkeys, camels, men-servants and maid-servants. But God inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai.

So Pharaoh summoned Abram, "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent Abram on his way, with his wife and all the possessions Pharaoh had given him.

Some time later Abram said to God, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and my servant will inherit my estate? You have given me no children; so my servant will be my heir." Then God spoke to Abram, "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." The God took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be."

At another time God said to Abram, "No longer will

you be called Abram; your name will be *Abraham*, for I have made you a father of many nations. As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be *Sarah*. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by Sarah. She will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a son at the age of ninety?" Then God said, "Yes, your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with Isaac whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

The Lord had also appeared to Abraham when three visitors came near Abraham's tent. He invited the men to come, wash their feet and take rest while some food was prepared. After the men had eaten, one of them who was the angel of the Lord asked, "Where is Sarah your wife?" "There in the tent," Abraham replied. Then the angel of the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent. Abraham and Sarah were already old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure?" Then the angel of the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But the angel said, "Yes, you did laugh."

God was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and God did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter,

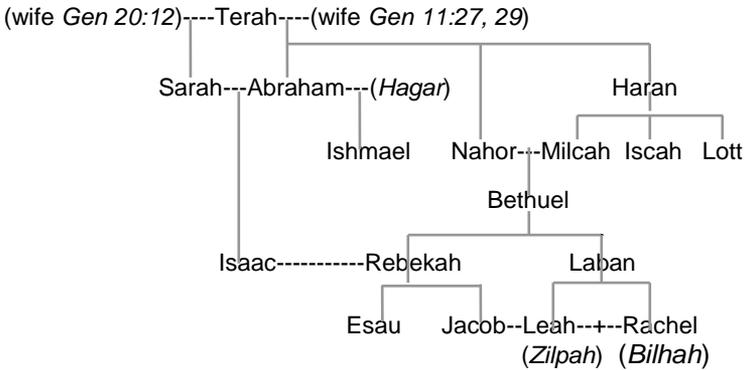
and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

God had promised a son to Abraham and Sarah. God fulfilled his promise. It would be through Isaac, the son of Abraham, that God would fulfill his promise to bless all peoples.



A Verse to Remember: “Now faith is being sure of what he hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

Abraham’s Family



Some Other Wives and Children

Abraham had other sons with Keturah after Sarah died. One named Midian was father of the Midianites. Moses married his first wife Zipporah who was daughter of Jethro the priest of Midian. (Exodus 2:16, 21)

Ishmael had 12 sons and at least one daughter (Mahalath, also called Basemath Genesis 28:9/Genesis 36:3.

Esau married Mahalath (Genesis 28:8-9) along with his other Canaanite wives, Judith the daughter of Beerli and Basemath daughter of Elon (Genesis 26:34) who was also called Adah in Genesis 36:2. Later he married a fourth wife named Oholibamah the daughter of Anah (Genesis 36:2).

Lot had two daughters who had sons by him, the first named Moab became father of the Moabites and the younger Ammon of the Ammonites.

One of Esau's grandsons by Adah was Amalek who became father of the Amalekites and a source of much grief to Abraham's other descendents. Kings of the Amalekites later had the royal name Agag. In the days of Esther it was Haman the Agagite who wanted to destroy all of Esther's people.

At the birth of Jesus, Herod, who was then king, was an Idumean (Edomite) whose people were descended from Esau.

🌀 A MOTHER'S FEAR 🌀 FOR HER FAVORITE SON

Bible Background: Genesis 23:1; 24:2-4, 51, 57-58, 63-67; 25:19-34; 27:1-28:9

For the Storyer: This is a long story in which Rebekah is introduced, then her plight of barrenness, then her fear of losing her favorite son after the clever deception to get Isaac's blessing for Jacob. The story has a good ending in that Jacob's life is spared. But be sure that it does not leave the listeners thinking that Rebekah's cleverness has saved the day. It was really God who saved Jacob for a greater purpose.

Tell the Story:

A MOTHER'S FEAR FOR HER FAVORITE SON

Abraham's wife, Sarah the mother of Isaac, had died. So Abraham called his trusted servant Eliezer and said to him, "Swear to me that you will not get a wife for my son Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I am living. Instead, go to my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac." Abraham's relative had a daughter named Rebekah who agreed to return with the servant. When Rebekah saw Isaac standing in the field she asked, "Who is that man?" The servant replied, "He is my master." When Rebekah heard this, she covered her face with her veil and got down off the camel to meet her new husband.

Isaac took Rebekah as his wife into the tent of his mother Sarah and married her. So Rebekah became his wife and Isaac loved her. But she remained barren for twenty years. God had promised to bless Isaac and through his descendant to bless all peoples.

Finally Isaac prayed on behalf of Rebekah, asking God to open her womb. God answered Isaac's prayer for

Rebekah and soon she was carrying not one child but two. The babies jostled each other within her. So she said, "Why is this happening to me?" When she inquired of the Lord, the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, one people will be stronger than the other, the older will serve the younger."

When the boys were born the first was red and his body was like a hairy garment, so they named him Esau which means *hairy*. The second was named Jacob. Esau was the favorite of his father Isaac and was himself a man of the open fields and a skillful hunter. But Jacob had smooth skin and was a quiet man who was the favorite of his mother and preferred to remain near her in the tents.

One day when Esau came in from the fields he was very hungry. He saw that his brother Jacob had prepared some tasty stew. When he asked for some, Jacob asked for Esau's birthright in return. Gladly Esau gave up his birthright as the oldest son for some food. After he had eaten and drank his fill, Esau went on his way. In that way he despised his birthright.

Later when aged Isaac wanted to give Esau his favorite son his blessing, Rebekah helped Jacob to cleverly deceive blind Isaac so that Isaac gave the blessing intended for Esau to Jacob. Rebekah had heard Isaac telling Esau to go find some wild game and bring it home to prepare some tasty food for him. Then Isaac would give Esau his blessing. When Rebekah heard what Isaac was planning to do, she called for her favorite son Jacob. "Quickly, go kill two goats and bring them to me," Rebekah explained, "I will prepare some tasty food for your father to eat and then he will give to you his blessing." Jacob protested, "But mother, if my father discovers that I am not his favorite son Esau, he will bring down a curse on me instead of his blessing." "Let his curse fall upon me," Rebekah replied. Again Jacob protested saying, "My hands are smooth and not hairy like my brother Esau's hands." So Rebekah made some coverings of goat skin for Jacob's hands and neck. Then she got one of Esau's best robes and put it upon Jacob.

“Now go, take this food to your father and he will bless you.”

It happened just as Rebekah said. Isaac asked several times if it were really Esau. Each time, Jacob replied, “I am Esau, your firstborn.” His father had touched him and felt the hairy hands, then Isaac asked that Jacob bend down so he could kiss him. When Isaac smelled the smell of Esau in the clothes, he was convinced at last and gave his blessing to Jacob.

Later when Esau returned and learned what had happened, he was very angry that Jacob had first taken his birthright and now had stolen the blessing which rightfully belonged to him. And so Esau thought to kill Jacob, but not until after his father Isaac had died. When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban and stay with him until your brother’s anger subsides. When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

So Rebekah thought of a clever plan to save her son Jacob. She would convince her husband to send Jacob away to escape Esau’s threat of death. Then Rebekah said to her husband Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite wives of Esau. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from among Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.”

At this time Jacob had not yet married a wife, though his brother Esau had two wives from among the local women. So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, “Do not take a wife from among these Hittite women. Go at once to our relatives, the house of your mother’s people. Take a wife for yourself, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful.” Then

Isaac sent Jacob on his way to the house of Laban, his mother's brother.

When Esau learned that his father had blessed Isaac and sent him on his way with the command, 'Do not marry a Hittite woman,' he realized how displeasing the Hittite women were to his father, so Esau went and married Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, in addition to the wives he already had.

So Rebekah had saved the life of her favorite son Jacob, and was comforted knowing that he would take a wife from among her own relatives. But it was really God who had saved Jacob's life because He had a purpose for Jacob and his descendants. It would be one of Jacob's descendants whom God would anoint to bless all peoples.



A Verse to Remember: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

❧ AN UNLOVED WIFE ❧ AND A BARREN WIFE

Bible Background: Genesis 29:4-30:24; 35:16-26

For the Storyer: Where there are multiple wives there is often the matter of one more loved than the others. This can lead to heartbreak and jealousy. In this story Rachel clearly is the loved one though she remains barren for a long time. Leah hopes her fertility will cause her husband to love her. The names given to the boys reflect the agony and feelings in the hearts of their mothers.

Tell the Story:

AN UNLOVED WIFE AND A BARREN WIFE

Jacob's mother Rebekah did not want him to marry Hittite women as his brother Esau had done. Rebekah despised the Hittite women. So she convinced her husband Isaac to send their youngest son Jacob off to find a wife from among Rebekah's relatives. When Jacob arrived near the place of Rebekah's relatives he stopped by a well and saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother. Jacob kissed her and began to weep aloud. He told her he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. Rachel ran to tell Laban her father.

So Laban said to Jacob, "You are my own flesh and blood. Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah and the younger was Rachel. Leah had a pretty face but Rachel was beautiful and lovely in form. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better to give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a marriage feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to Leah as her maidservant. When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob angrily said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish out this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in exchange for another seven years of work."

And Jacob did so. He finished out the week with Leah, and then Laban gave his daughter Rachel to be Jacob's wife. Laban also gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And so he worked for his uncle Laban another seven years.

When God saw that Leah was not loved, He opened her womb, but Rachel remained barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son and named him Reuben for she said, "God has seen my misery, surely my husband will love me now." Again she conceived and gave birth to another son and named him Simeon saying, "Because God heard that I am not loved, he gave me another son." Again Leah conceived and gave birth to another son and named him Levi saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have given him three sons." She conceived a fourth time and gave birth to another son and named him Judah and said, "This time I will praise God." Then she stopped having children.

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob became angry with her and replied, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" Then Rachel said, "Here

is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I can build a family through her." Jacob slept with Bilhah who conceived and gave birth to a son and named him Dan saying, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Rachel named him Naphtali and said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister and I have won."

When Leah saw what that she had stopped having children, she gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. She, too, conceived and gave birth to a son and named him Gad and said, "What good fortune!" Leah's maidservant Zilpah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Leah named him Asher saying, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy."

During the wheat harvest Reuben, Leah's oldest son, went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But Leah said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "Jacob can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So Jacob slept with Leah that night. God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son saying, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." His name was Issachar. Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son saying, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." She named him Zebulun. Some time later Leah gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She gave birth to a son and named him Joseph saying, "God has taken away my disgrace." Then she said, "May God add to me yet another son."

Some time later after Jacob and his wives and children had left that place and returned to the land of Abraham and Jacob's father Isaac, Rachel again conceived and began to give birth with great difficulty. As she was giving birth the midwife said, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." Then as Rachel breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni which means *son of my trouble*. But Jacob named him Benjamin, or *son of my right hand*. Then Rachel died and was buried on the road that leads to Bethlehem.

Later Reuben the firstborn dishonored his father for he went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah and Jacob heard about it.

Though it was Rachel that Jacob loved, God had a special purpose for Leah's son, Judah, who was the ancestor of David. Rachel's son, Joseph, would go before his people into Egypt to prepare the way for them to live there. Joseph's two sons would be leaders among the tribes of Israel who were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God had promised many descendants and now there were twelve families who would soon be a great nation of many people.



A Verse to Remember: "The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made" (Psalm 145:13b).

🌀 THE ORDEAL OF TAMAR THE WIDOW 🌀

Bible Background: Genesis 38:1-30; 46:12; Leviticus 18:15; 20:12

For the Storyer: This is the often overlooked story of Judah, his three sons and Tamar, the double widow of Judah's first two sons. Tamar cleverly seduced Judah her father-in-law into having children by her after realizing Judah's third son Shelah would not be given to her. Judah's first two sons were wicked and God ended their lives. Judah feared for the life of his third son. Judah's first wife was a Canaanite woman. It is likely that Tamar was a descendant of Abraham, the one God desired to be an ancestor of Jesus through her son Perez. The laws of adultery and promiscuity were not given to the people until the days of Moses. Later this would be punishable by death of both parties.

Tell the Story:

THE ORDEAL OF TAMAR THE WIDOW

During the days of Jacob and his twelve sons when they lived in the land of Canaan, Judah the fourth son of Jacob left his brothers and went down to stay with a friend named Hirah. While there Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. Judah married her and lay with her. His wife conceived and gave birth to a son who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a second son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah.

Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in God's sight, so God put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan his second son, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother."

But Onan knew the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his seed on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in God's sight, so God put him to death also.

Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had ended mourning and recovered from his grief, he went up to a place where his men were shearing his sheep. When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to where the men shear his sheep," she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance of a town along the way. For she thought that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she covered her face. He did not realize that she was really his daughter-in-law. So he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."

"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked him. "I'll send you a young goat from my flock," Judah promised. "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" Tamar asked. Judah said, "What pledge should I give you?" "Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," Tamar answered. So Judah gave the seal and his staff to Tamar and he slept with her. Tamar became pregnant by Judah. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

Meanwhile Judah sent with his friend the young goat he had pledged in order to get back from the woman the seal and its cord and staff he had given her in pledge. But the woman could not be found. The friend Judah sent even asked the men of the town, "Where is the shrine

prostitute who was beside the road?" "There hasn't been any prostitute here," they said. So the friend reported back to Judah, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.'"

Then Judah said, "Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her."

About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of the babies put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, "This one came out first." But when the baby drew back his hand, his brother came out, so the midwife exclaimed, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez (*breaking out*). Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, then came out and was given the name Zerah.

Thus Tamar the widow was vindicated and at last had her sons of which God had a purpose for Perez, who was the ancestor of David, who was the ancestor of the Promised One of God that would bless all peoples.



A Verse to Remember: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth" (Psalm 127:3-4).

🌀 A SISTER'S MISTAKE 🌀

Bible Background: Exodus 2:1-9; 15:20-21; Numbers 12:1-15; Deuteronomy 24:9; Micah 6:4

For the Storyer: The story of Miriam, the older sister of Moses and Aaron begins with the birth of Moses. She is not mentioned again until the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea when she leads the women in rejoicing. Later, she along with Aaron, demonstrate a jealousy toward Moses' leadership. This was apparently triggered by a rejection of Moses' Cushite wife. God judged Miriam's sin and punished her with a leprous condition for a week before healing her and restoring her to fellowship in the camp. Since Miriam was the one to suffer it is likely that she was the one inciting the questioning of Moses' role as leader. There is irony in that the good person is the one who does wrong. Her name means *rebellion*.

Tell the Story:

A SISTER'S MISTAKE

When the descendants of Abraham who were known as Hebrews began to multiply in Egypt, the king of Egypt gave an order to kill all the boy babies. Amram and Jochebed were descendants of Jacob's son Levi. They had a daughter born first named Miriam. Later they had a son named Aaron. It was after the birth of Aaron that the order was given to throw all the boy babies into the river.

Three years later Jochebed gave birth to another son who was a fine baby, strong and healthy. She hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, Jochebed got a basket for the baby and coated the basket with tar and pitch. Then she put her child in it and placed it among the reeds in the river. The older sister Miriam stood at a distance to see what would happen to the baby.

That same day the king of Egypt's daughter came to the river to bathe while her attendants were walking along the river bank. She happened to see the basket hidden among the reeds and sent her servant girl to get it. When the king's daughter opened the basket, she saw the baby who was crying. She felt sorry for the child and said, "This is one of the Hebrew children." Then Miriam the baby's sister came forward and said, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" "Yes, go," the king's daughter answered, "take the baby and nurse him, and I will pay you." So Miriam went and got the baby's own mother, Jochebed, who nursed the baby until he was old enough to be weaned. Then Jochebed sent the baby back to the king's daughter to be raised as her own son. The king's daughter named the baby *Moses* because she said, "I drew him out of the water." Miriam had helped to save the life of baby Moses.

After many years passed, God sent Moses to tell the king of Egypt to let the Hebrew people go; to release them from slavery, so they could return to their own country. The king of Egypt stubbornly refused to listen and obey. After God had sent many plagues upon Egypt at last the king let the people go. As Moses led the people out of Egypt the king changed his mind and pursued the Hebrews to bring them back. The Hebrews were trapped between the army of Egypt and the sea. When they people cried out in terror, God told Moses to stretch out his hands over the water. That night the waters of the sea divided so when morning came the people escaped through the sea. Then God closed the waters, covering the Egyptians. So Moses sang a song praising God. Then Miriam, the older sister of Moses, and herself a prophetess, took a tambourine in her hand and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted..."

God continued to speak to Moses telling him what to do as he led the people. Then something happened that brought great suffering to Miriam. Moses married a Cushite wife, a woman not from among the Hebrew

people. Miriam and Aaron became jealous of Moses and began to talk against Moses because of the Cushite wife saying, "Has God spoken only through Moses? Hasn't God also spoken through us." God heard what Miriam was saying and was not pleased. At once God said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three came out to stand before God who had come down in a pillar of cloud and was standing at the entrance to the Tent summoning Aaron and Miriam.

When both of them stepped forward, God said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses...with him I speak face to face. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

The anger of God burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy. He said to Moses, "Please, my Lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. So do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."

So Moses cried out to God, "Please heal her!" Then God replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." So Miriam was confined outside the camp as an unclean person for seven days. After her punishment was ended she was restored to cleanness and brought back inside the camp.

Even though Miriam had done a good work, and was a prophetess, when she sinned, God judged her sin and punished her. But it was also God who cleansed her sin and forgave her foolish words of jealousy. God was preparing a way to cleanse all people of their sin so they would not have to remain outside the camp, that is, outside the presence of God. It is God's desire to cleanse

all people from their sin and restore them to fellowship with their Creator.



A Verse to Remember: “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool’” (Isa 1:18).

Note: *Ritual purity and uncleanness are issues among many societies. Leprosy—whether true leprosy or a disease that disfigures like leprosy—is a cause for being shunned by the community. In addition, in communal societies to be cut off or put out of the community is a severe punishment as one’s identity is partly through the role in the community.*

This story looks toward the later stories and prophecies of being cleansed by God from the scarlet stain of sin.

Jealousy is also a common issue among many where any person who receives “too much” honor is pulled down by others who believe they are just as deserving. The jealousy may lead to a showdown in which one of the parties loses and the other wins.

☞ THE PROSTITUTE ☞ WHO SAVED HER FAMILY

Bible Background: Joshua 2:1-21 ; 6:17, 20-25;
Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25

For the Storyer: There is irony in this story as in the story of Miriam where the good person was the sinner. Here the sinner is the good person who fears God and has faith in his salvation. The theme of the story is a fear that leads to obedience and thus to salvation for Rahab and for her family. Her distress was in knowing what was going to happen to her people because of their sinfulness. And she knew that her own life and that of her family were in great danger of certain destruction. God honored her faith by saving her, but also honored her by including her as one of the ancestors of Jesus.

Tell the Story:

THE PROSTITUTE WHO SAVED HER FAMILY

Before the Hebrews entered again the land of Abraham, their leader sent two spies into the first city they would pass to spy it out. The city of Jericho was a fortified city with a very strong wall around it. So the spies crossed over into the land and entered Jericho. They went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. The presence of the spies was reported to the king of Jericho who sent this message to Rahab, "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house. They have come to spy out the land."

But Rahab had taken the two men and hidden them. She replied to the king, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may still catch them." So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads down to the river. The city gates were

then closed. Rahab had taken the two spies up to the roof of her house and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out to dry on the roof.

Before the spies lay down for the night, Rahab went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that God has given this land to you. A great fear of you has fallen on us. All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how God dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. We heard what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who opposed you. You completely destroyed them. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by your God that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, that you will save us from death."

"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when God gives us the land."

So Rahab let the two men down safely by a rope through the window, for her house was part of the city wall. She had said to them, "Go to the hills so those who pursue you will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return. Then go on your way."

The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down. And you must bring your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

"Agreed," Rahab replied. "Let it be as your say." So she went the two spies on their way. Then she tied the scarlet cord in the window. When the men left Jericho, they stayed three days in the hills until the pursuers had finished searching all along the road and returned without finding them. Then the two men returned to their leader and reported all that had happened and what Rahab had said.

The city of Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Hebrews camped outside. God said to them, "I have delivered Jericho into your hands." Then God revealed to the Hebrews what they must do for the city to fall. Then they were to enter in and destroy the city and all its people because of their sinfulness. Their leader Joshua said, "The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to God and given over to destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent."

When the Hebrews obeyed what God told them to do the walls of Jericho collapsed. Then they rushed into the city to destroy all its inhabitants. The leader Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her." So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp. So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men that Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho.

Later one of the men named Salmon married Rahab and she had a son named Boaz who would show kindness to another young woman who had lost her husband. This same Rahab was an ancestor of the Promised One that God sent to bear the sins of many and bring God's forgiveness of sin to all who would receive that forgiveness.



A Verse to Remember: "I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:13-14).

🌀 A YOUNG WOMAN'S ONLY HOPE 🌀

Bible Background: Numbers 25:1-2; Ruth 1-4; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 3:27; Jeremiah 48:35

For the Storyer: The story of Ruth is a grief story for sure. A young woman's husband has died leaving her childless. She cannot easily go back to her parents who have married her off. Ruth is a descendant of Moab, the son of the incestuous relationship of Lot and one of his daughters. The Moabites worshiped the vile god Chemosh with sexual immorality at high places and with sacrifices of children, especially the firstborn. So her hope lay in a marriage with a godly man, someone who worshiped the God of Naomi, the God of Abraham's people.

Tell the Story:

A YOUNG WOMAN'S ONLY HOPE

There was a famine in the land of Judah so Elimelech and his wife Naomi left Bethlehem where they lived and went into the land of Moab with their two sons Mahlon and Kilion. After a time Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. The two sons each married a Moabite woman, one named Ruth and the other Orpah. After they had lived there ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion died, leaving Naomi without her husband and without her two sons. Naomi heard God had provided food in her own land, so she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return.

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May God show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead husbands and to me. May God grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to Naomi, "We will go back with you to your people." But Naomi insisted, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your

husbands? Return home, my daughters, I am too old to have another husband. Even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grow up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because God's hand has gone out against me."

At this the young women wept again. Then the one named Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her to return to her home.

So the two women continued back to Bethlehem. When they arrived there the whole town was stirred because of them. The women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me *Mara* because God has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but God has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? God has brought misfortune upon me." Naomi returned with Ruth to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Naomi had a relative on her husband's side named Boaz, a man of standing. Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the barley fields so that I might pick up the leftover grain wherever I find favor." Naomi said, "Go ahead, my daughter." Ruth found herself gleaning in the field belonging to Boaz. When Boaz came to the field he greeted the harvesters and then asked, "Whose young woman is that?" The foreman replied, "She is from Moab and returned with Naomi. She asked to glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters. She went into

the field and has worked steadily until now, except for a short rest.”

Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go get a drink from the water jar my men have filled.” When Ruth heard these words, she bowed low to the ground and said, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner.”

Boaz replied, “I have been told all about you and what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you do not know. May you be richly rewarded by the God of Abraham, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” At mealtime Boaz invited Ruth to come and share bread and roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and then got up to begin gleaning again. Boaz told his men to drop some stalks of grain for her. Later she threshed her grain and took the barley back to Naomi. When Naomi asked where she had gleaned, Ruth told her about Boaz. Then Naomi said, “May God bless him! God has not stopped showing kindness. He is a close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.” Ruth added, “He said to stay with his workers until they finish harvesting the grain.” Ruth gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. During this time she continued to live with Naomi, her mother-in-law.

One day Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, I should try to find you a home where you will be provided for. Tonight Boaz will be winnowing his barley on the threshing floor. So wash and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.” “I will do what you say,” Ruth replied. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything Naomi told her to do.

When Boaz finished eating and drinking and lay down in good spirits, Ruth approached quietly and uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night Boaz woke up and discovered Ruth lying there. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she replied, "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." "God bless you, my daughter, this is a great kindness you have shown me. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. Don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. But there is a kinsman-redeemer who is nearer kin than I. If he wants to redeem, good, if not, I will do it."

Ruth got up before morning and returned to Naomi who asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Ruth told her everything that happened. Then Naomi said, "He will not rest until the matter is settled today."

Boaz went into the town and approached the nearer kinsman-redeemer and said, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to her husband Elimelech. I thought to bring the matter to your attention. Will you redeem it?" "I will redeem it," the kinsman-redeemer said. Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you also acquire the dead man's widow to maintain the name of the dead with his property." Hearing this, the kinsman-redeemer replied, "Then I cannot redeem it as it might endanger my own estate." So the kinsman-redeemer said, "Buy it yourself. I cannot do it." All the town elders sitting at the gate heard the agreement.

So Boaz took Ruth as his wife. She conceived and gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi, "Praise be to God, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. He will sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law who loves you is better than seven sons." Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse who was the father of David. God had turned Ruth's

sadness and Naomi’s bitterness into joy. And God had a purpose for the child who was an ancestor of the Promised One of God who would be blessing for all people.



A Verse to Remember: “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lamentations 3:25-26).

Note: *In Muslim societies a person’s genealogy is very important. In some countries men can recite their genealogy back many generations. Women are also interested in families, especially the wives and children. In most of these societies having a son is key to survival of the family line and holding on to family property. Marrying relatives is sometimes practiced as well to retain property.*

The Descendants of Judah



☞ GOD ANSWERED HANNAH'S PRAYER ☞

Bible Background: 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11, 18-21, 26

For the Storyer: Yet another story of two wives, one with children and the other barren and distressed. The wife with children delighted in tormenting the barren wife until she wept and would not eat. The husband loved the barren wife and was especially kind to her. This continued for some time until God answered her prayer for a son.

Tell the story:

GOD ANSWERED HANNAH'S PRAYER

There was a certain man from the hill country whose name was Elkanah. He had two wives, one called Hannah, and the other Peninnah. It was Peninnah who had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to God at Shiloh where the tabernacle was located.

Whenever the day came for Elkanah to offer the fellowship sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, for God had closed her womb. And because God had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year.

Whenever Hannah went up to the house of God her rival provoked her until she wept and would not eat. Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh after the sacrifice time, Hannah stood up. The old priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the tabernacle. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and

prayed to God. And she made a vow saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to God for all the days of his life. He will be dedicated to God.

As she kept on praying to God, the priest Eli watched her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she had been drinking too much and said to her, "How long will keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine!"

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to God. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." Hannah said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Very early the next morning Elkanah and his wives arose and worshiped before God and then back to their home. Elkanah lay with his wife Hannah, and God remembered her. So Hannah conceived and in the course of time gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel saying, "Because I asked God for him."

When Elkanah again went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to God and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before God and he will live there always." "Do whatever seems best to you," Elkanah her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; may God make good his word."

After Samuel was weaned, Hannah took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three year old bull, some fine flour, and a skin of drink, and brought him to the

house of God at Shiloh. When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli the priest and said to him, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to God. I prayed for this child, and God has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him back to God. For his whole life he will be given over to God."

Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart rejoices in the Lord...she who was barren has borne seven children, but she has had many sons pines away." Then Elkanah and his two wives and children returned to their home. But the boy Samuel remained at the house of God and ministered before God under the priest Eli.

Each year his mother Hannah made a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife saying, "May God give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to God." Then they would return home. And God was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of God. For he continued to grow in stature and in favor with God and with men.



A Verse to Remember: "Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me" (Psalm 86:6-7).

🌀 A GOOD WIFE AND A SURLY HUSBAND 🌀

Bible Background: 1 Samuel 25:2-42; 1 Chronicles 3:1

For the Storyer: This is an interesting story of a wife who did not deserve the husband she had. He was a foolish and stingy man. His attitude and insults nearly provoked David to bloodshed. But quick thinking and quick action by an honorable woman saved the day.

Tell the Story:

A GOOD WIFE AND A SURLY HUSBAND

The prophet Samuel had died and was buried and all the people mourned for him. David who was anointed by God to be the next king of Israel, moved down into the Desert of Maon. A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing at Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was stingy and surly in his dealings.

While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. So David sent ten young men, and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. Say to him, 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! Now I hear that it is sheep shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them. And the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them'."

When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of

Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why would I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but instead our master hurled insults at them. Yet these men of David were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can do, because danger is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of drink, five slaughtered and dressed sheep, a basket of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. David had just said, "It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid back evil for good. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if I leave alive by morning one male of all who belong to him!"

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the

ground. She fell at his feet and said, "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the young men you sent. Now since God has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as you live and as God lives, may your enemies and all who intend to harm you be like Nabal. So please forgive your servant's offense, for God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for you. And when God has brought my master success, remember your servant."

David said to Abigail, "Praise be to God who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been alive by daybreak." Then David accepted from Abigail's hand what she had brought to him, and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request."

When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. About ten days later, God struck Nabal and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise be to God who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. God has kept me from doing wrong and has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head."

Then David sent word to Abigail asking her to become his wife. David's servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife." Abigail bowed down with her face to the ground

and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants." Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maidservants, went with David's servants and became his wife.

God gave David a son named Daniel, the son of Abigail of Carmel. (also known as *Kileab* 2 Samuel 3:3) By humbling herself Abigail saved the lives of the men in her husband's household. For she was more honorable than Nabal her stingy husband.



A Verse To Remember: "The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14).

or

"Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 18:12).

or

"When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).

☞ GOD REDEEMED BATHSHEBA'S SORROW ☞

Bible Background: 2 Samuel 11:1-25; 23:13-17, 27, 34, 39; 1 Kings 1:11-21, 28-31; 1 Chronicles 3:5

For the Storyer: This is a well-known story. The preface to the story about David's refusal to drink water which he said represented the blood of his mighty men gives the relationship that David had with both Eliam (Ammiel) the father of Bathsheba, and with Uriah the Hittite the husband of Bathsheba. The focus is usually upon David and his sin and confession. But it was Bathsheba who was dishonored, then she lost her husband, and finally a love child born of that adulterous union with David. But God redeemed the evil David had done and gave another son who would become the great king Solomon and another less well known son Nathan who was the ancestor of Mary the mother of Jesus. (1 Chronicles 3:5/Luke 3:31)

Tell the Story:

GOD REDEEMED BATHSHEBA'S SORROW

It was during harvest time when three of David's mighty men came to him at the cave where he camped. The Philistines, an enemy of Israel, were then camped in the valley. The men heard David longing for a drink of water from the well that is near the gate of Bethlehem. So the three mighty men broke through the enemy lines, went to Bethlehem and drew water from the well that is near the gate. And they carried the water back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead he poured it out before the Lord. "Far be it from me, O Lord, to drink this!" he said. "Does this water not represent the blood of my men who risked their lives to get it?" And David would not drink the water. Such were the exploits of David's mighty men. Among the thirty bodyguards were Eliam the father of

Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite who was the husband of Bathsheba.

In the spring at the time when kings go off to war, David sent his commander and the army of Israel against the Ammonites. But David remained behind in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to David, and he slept with her. She had just purified herself from her uncleanness. Bathsheba returned to her home, discovered she had conceived, and sent word to David saying, "I am with child."

So David sent word to his commander of the army, "Send Uriah the Hittite." When Uriah came to him, David asked how the fighting was going and how the soldiers were doing. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and David sent a gift after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all David's servants. He did not go down to his house.

When David was told, Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you come from a distance? Why didn't you go to your home?" Uriah said to David, "The army of Israel is living in tents in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem for that day and the next. At David's invitation Uriah ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat with David's servants; he did not go home.

In the morning David wrote a letter to his commander of the army and sent it with Uriah. In the letter David said,

“Put Uriah in the front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.” It happened as David had asked. The commander sent a messenger to give an account of the battle. Then he told him, “Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.” When David heard these words he said, “Tell the commander, “Don’t let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Continue the attack.” So David lightly dismissed the death of Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba.

When Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife, heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore David a son from the time he slept with her. But the thing David had done displeased God.

So God sent Nathan the prophet to David. He said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared a meal for the traveler who had come to him.

David burned with anger against the rich man and said to Nathan, “As surely as God lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” (see *Exodus 22:1*)

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what God says, ‘I anointed you king over Israel. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise God by doing

evil in his eyes? Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own'."

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against God." Nathan replied, "God has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because you have done this, the son born to you will die." After Nathan had gone home, the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David became ill and died.

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. Bathsheba also gave birth to three other sons. When David was old the son of another wife had himself proclaimed king. Bathsheba heard of it and went to see the aged King David in his room. She bowed low and knelt before the king and said, "My lord, you swore to me your servant that Solomon your son would be king and sit on your throne." David talked with Nathan who confirmed what was happening with the other son of David. Then David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him. David swore an oath and said, "Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." Then Bathsheba bowed low with her face to the ground and kneeling before the king, said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

The son of David's adulterous union with Bathsheba had died. But now Bathsheba's son Solomon would be Israel's greatest king. Another son of Bathsheba, Nathan, would be an ancestor of Mary the mother of the Promised One. God redeemed Bathsheba's sorrow and turned it into gladness.



A Verse to Remember: "...And you may be sure that your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

or

"For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin" (Psalm 38:17-18).

or

"I said, 'O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you" (Psalm 41:4).

☞ THE WISE WOMAN'S STORY ☞ OF HER TWO SONS

Bible Background: 2 Samuel 14:1-24

For the Storyer: This story is a bit different in that it is a story within the story. And it is just a fictional story which was used to accomplish a purpose. It is of interest because it deals with the supposed plight of a woman who has reported the loss of one son and is about to lose another. The plan is to appeal to the king and get his commitment to help her and then to shift the focus back on the king and his own son who is estranged from him.

Tell the Story:

THE WISE WOMAN'S STORY OF HER TWO SONS

To understand this story you need to know the stories that happened before. It began when one of King David's sons named Amnon desired to sleep with his half-sister Tamar. The girl had resisted him but he forced her to lie with him and then rejected her, leaving her distraught and violated.

Tamar's real brother Absalom vowed to take revenge on Amnon for dishonoring his sister. Cleverly Absalom invited all his brothers to a feast at sheep shearing time. While they were eating Absalom ordered his men to strike down Amnon and kill him. When this happened the remaining brothers fled for their lives. The report came to David that Absalom had killed all the king's sons. David tore his clothes and prostrated himself on the ground. Then another report came saying, "Only Amnon is dead". Meanwhile Absalom had fled to a nearby country and sought asylum and stayed there three years.

After David had mourned for his dead son he was finally consoled and in his heart he now longed to see Absalom

again. David's army commander knew what was in David's heart so he devised a plan to get David to bring Absalom home again. The commander sent a messenger to a place called Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there.

The commander said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any perfumes or lotions. Behave like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead. Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And so the commander put the words in her mouth.

When the wise woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell at his feet with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she cried out, "Help me, O King!"

The king asked her, "What is troubling you?"

She replied, "I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead. I, your servant, had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, 'Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of the brother that he killed.' For they were thinking to get rid of the dead husband's only remaining heir as well. My clan would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant upon the face of the earth."

The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order in your behalf."

But the wise woman from Tekoa said to him, "My lord the king, let not the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt."

The king replied, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again."

Then the woman said, "Then let the king invoke the Lord his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed."

The king replied, "As surely as the Lord lives not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground."

Then the woman said, "Now let your servant speak a word to my lord the king."

"Speak," the king replied.

The woman began to say, "Why have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his own banished son? Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, 'I will speak to the king; perhaps he will do what his servant asks. Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God is giving us.'

And now your servant says, 'May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the Lord your God be with you!'"

Then the king said to the woman, "Do not keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you."

"Let my lord the king speak," the wise woman said.

So the king asked, "Isn't the hand of my army commander with you in all this?"

The woman answered, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn aside to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your commander who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. Your commander did this to change the present situation. My lord the king has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land."

The king said to his army commander, "Go, bring back the young man Absalom."

Then the commander went to the banished son Absalom and brought him back to Jerusalem where the king lived. But the king said, "He must go to his own house; he must not see my face." So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.



A Verse to Remember: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

or

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation..." (Colossians 1:22-23).

❧ TWO PROSTITUTES ❧ AND A WISE RULING

Bible Background: Deuteronomy 17:15, 17; 1 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29, 30, 32; 11:1-8

For the Storyer: The familiar story of Solomon's wise decision concerning who was really the mother of the living baby. Because of what happened both women were greatly disturbed though for different reasons. Solomon wisely saw a way to draw out the true mother and expose the one pretending to be the mother. Solomon's wisdom, however, did not protect him from unwise decisions later in life which were not pleasing to God.

Tell the Story:

TWO PROSTITUTES AND A WISE RULING

After Solomon was crowned king he had gone to offer a sacrifice to God. That night God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have made me king in place of my father. But I am like a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people wisely and to distinguish between right and wrong."

The Lord was pleased with what Solomon had asked for. God said, "I will do what you have asked, I will give you a wise and discerning heart for administering justice." And God added, "If you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore, wisdom greater than all the men of the East.

Some time later two prostitutes came to King Solomon and stood before him. One of them said, "My lord, this

woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw it wasn't the son I had borne."

The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours."

But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king.

The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while the other one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive'."

Then King Solomon said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one woman and half to the other woman."

The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!"

But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"

Then the king gave this ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother."

When the people heard the verdict the king has given, they held King Solomon in awe, because they saw that he had great wisdom from God to administer justice.

King Solomon loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—women from among the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations which the Lord had told the descendants of Abraham, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. Solomon followed Asherah the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. On a hill east of Jerusalem Solomon built a place to worship Chemosh the detestable god of Moab. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart has turned away from the Lord, the God of Abraham who had appeared to him twice. So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will tear your kingdom away from you and give it to another. For the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime.

So the man who had spoken three thousand proverbs and composed over one thousand songs, and gave wise ruling for others, himself came to ruin because of the foreign wives he had married against the Lord's good advice.



A Verse to Remember: "So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in the way the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess" (Deuteronomy 5:32-33).

or

"A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother" (Proverbs 10:1).

or

"Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart...Turn my eyes away from worthless things; renew my life according to your word" (Psalm 119:34, 37).

☞ A STARVING WIDOW'S LAST MEAL ☞

Bible Background: 1 Kings 17:1-24; Luke 4:25-26

For the Storyer: A little story residing inside the larger story of Elijah's calling the people of Israel to return to Jehovah God. It is easy to miss the fatalism expressed by the widow as she gathered a pitiful handful of sticks to cook the last meal for herself and her son during the famine which resulted from God's judgment of the sin of Israel and the royal family. She had resigned herself and her son to a fate of starvation. Amazingly, God had chosen to help her, not an Israelite, but a Sidonian from the same land where the queen and her false gods came, and at the same time to provide for the needs of his faithful prophet Elijah. Later when the widow's son becomes sick and dies, she asks if God had judged her sin by taking her son's life.

From the widow's own words we see that she knew of the God of Abraham. She trusted God to do for her what the prophet said God would provide. She expressed awareness of her sin and thought God had judged her sin by taking her son's life. Finally, she expressed faith in Elijah as a man of God and confessed that the word of the Lord was true.

In his first sermon back in Nazareth Jesus referred to this story which angered his listeners because the woman was a foreign woman that God helped.

Tell the Story:

A STARVING WIDOW'S LAST MEAL

The king had disobeyed the command of God and married a foreign wife who brought with her foreign gods and their priests. The false gods and their worship was judged as sin in Jehovah God's sight. So Jehovah God sent the

prophet Elijah to pronounce a judgment upon the land. One of the false gods was Baal who was considered to be the storm god, the god of rain. So the judgment upon the people was to have no rain until Jehovah God gave permission through his prophet Elijah. So the prophet Elijah said to the king, "As the Lord, the God of Abraham lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." And so a drought came and lasted three and a half years.

Then God's word came to Elijah and said, "Go to a desert place and hide, drink water from a small stream, and I will send the birds to feed you." So Elijah did what God told him. God was faithful to do what He promised, for God sent birds with bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And Elijah drank water from the small stream.

Some time later the stream dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then God said to Elijah, "Go at once to Zarephath, a town in Sidon, outside of Israel, and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to feed you." So Elijah did what God told him to do.

When Elijah arrived at Zarephath, at the town gate, a widow was there gathering some sticks to build a fire for cooking. Elijah called to her and asked her, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? As the widow was going to get Elijah some water he called to her again, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home to make a fire and cook a last meal for myself and my son, so that we may eat it—and then we will starve and die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me. Then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the

Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land'."

The widow went away to her home and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. So the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet Elijah.

It happened some time later the son of the widow became ill. He grew steadily worse and worse, and finally he stopped breathing. The woman said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied to the woman. So Elijah took the boy from the woman's arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on the bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then the prophet stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from his room into the widow's house. Elijah gave the son back to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth!"

Later, after Elijah demonstrated who was the true God of the land before all the people, the people confessed saying, "The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God." Then God sent rain upon the land and the drought was ended.



A Verse to Remember: "The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Psalm 146:9).

or

"...the Lord is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him" (Psalm 111:4b-5a).

☞ THE WIDOW'S OIL ☞

Bible Background: 2 Kings 4:1-7

For the Storyer: Several of the stories of Elijah and Elisha have great similarity in meeting the needs of a destitute woman. This story is distinct because it involves the woman's debts and the provision of oil to sell to pay off the debts. It is again similar in that for the woman to receive God's blessing she must do what the prophet (speaking on behalf of God) tells her to do. This she does and by a miracle enough oil is provided in the containers to settle her debts. We are not told what happened afterward except that she and her sons (who were presumably young and therefore not yet able to sustain her) could live off the oil that remained after she sold enough to pay her dead husband's debts.

Tell the Story:

THE WIDOW'S OIL

In that day there was a company of prophets who served God. Elisha was their leader. One of the prophets died leaving behind a widow and several small sons. The prophet had owed some creditors during his lifetime and now they were coming to settle their accounts with the widow.

So the widow of the man who had been a prophet cried out to Elisha, "Your servant, my husband, is now dead. You know how my husband revered the Lord during his lifetime. Now his creditors are coming to take away my two boys as slaves to settle the accounts."

Elisha replied to the woman, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"

"Your servant has nothing there at all," the widow replied, "except a little oil."

So Elisha said to the woman, "Go around to your neighbors and ask for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Gather as many as you can. Then go inside with your sons and shut the door behind you. Pour the oil you have into all the jars, and as each one is filled, put it aside and fill another."

The woman left Elisha and with her two sons went to the neighbors to ask from them all the empty jars they had. When these were collected the woman shut the door as Elisha had instructed. Her sons began to bring the jars to her and she began to fill them. She poured oil from her container into each jar until it was filled. When the jar was filled she said to her sons, "Bring me another jar."

At last her sons said to her, "There is not another jar remaining. All have been filled." Then the oil stopped flowing.

The woman went and told Elisha that she had done as he told her. Elisha said, "Now go and sell the oil and pay your debts to the creditors. You and your sons can live on the oil that is remaining."

In this way God supplied what the woman needed so she could pay her debts, keep her sons and continue to support them.



A Verse to Remember: "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you" (Psalm 31:19).

☞ THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN'S LAMENT ☞

Bible Background: 2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6

For the Storyer: The story of a well-to-do woman of Shunem who was childless. She was kind and thoughtful and wanted to do something nice for the holy man. In return Elisha interceded for her to have a son. Then the son died suddenly in his mother's lap. In great distress she sought out the prophet and accused him of raising her hopes. Elisha returned to restore the boy to life. Later Elisha helped the woman to recover the land she had left behind during a famine.

Tell the Story:

THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN'S LAMENT

One day the prophet Elisha went to a town called Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever Elisha came by, he stopped there to eat. The woman said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put a bed and a table, chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So the servant called her, and she came to stand before him. Elisha said to the servant, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

The woman replied, "I have a home among my own people."

Again Elisha asked, "What can be done for her?"

Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old."

Then Elisha said, "Call her." So the servant called the woman, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

"No, my lord," the woman objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha told her.

The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers in the field. "My head! My head!" the boy cried to his father. His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother."

After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. The Shunammite woman went up and laid her dead son on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.

"Why go to him today?" her husband asked, "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath."

"It's all right," the woman replied. She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When Elisha saw the woman in the distance, he said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'"

"Everything is all right," she told the servant. But when she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but

Elisha said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why."

"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" the woman said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'"

So Elisha said to Gehazi, "tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."

But the child's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So Elisha got up and followed the woman.

Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, Elisha said, "Take your son." The woman came in, fell at Elisha's feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

Later Elisha said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the Lord has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years. The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in a nearby land seven years.

At the end of the seven years she returned from that land and went to the king to beg for her house and land. The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God. The king was asking Gehazi, "Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done." Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life, came to beg the king for her house and land.

Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." The king asked the woman about it, and she told him.

Then the king assigned an official to her case and said to him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now."



A Verse to Remember: "May your unfailing love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise" (Psalm 119:41).

☞ TWO WICKED WOMEN ☞ WHO CAME TO GRIEF

Bible Background: 1 Kings 16:30-33; 19:1-2; 21:1-16; 2 Kings 8:26; 11:1-20; 9:30-37; 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:21

For the Storyer: In the story of Jezebel we see that she brought with her the false religion Baal and the fertility cult Asherah and their prophets which she fed at her table. When Elijah made a stand for the true God and put to death Jezebel's prophets of the false gods she threatened to end his life. Then when her husband the king was depressed because he could not buy the vineyard of Naboth, Jezebel cleverly had Naboth convicted of blasphemy and put to death.

Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel and married to the king of Judah. She attempted to destroy the royal family and rule as queen. But one of the princes was hidden away and finally brought out and crowned. Athaliah shouted treason but was caught and put to death by those loyal to the young king.

Tell the Story:

TWO WICKED WOMEN WHO CAME TO GRIEF—JEZEBEL

When Ahab, son of Omri, became king of Israel, he did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of the kings before him, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians. Jezebel brought with her worship of the false god Baal and of Asherah, the Sidonian sexual goddess. She had her husband to build a temple to Baal and to set up an altar for the worship of Baal. She also had her husband set up an Asherah pole which was a symbol of the male sexual organ. This greatly angered God.

Jezebel fed her four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah from her own

table. Because of them the people of Israel were led into sin. God sent the prophet Elijah to judge their sin. There would be no dew or rain in the land until Elijah gave the word. Then Elijah challenged the false prophets of Baal and Asherah to a sacrifice on the mountain. The true God would send down fire to burn up the sacrifice. The prophets of Baal and Asherah called, chanted, danced and cut themselves all day but there was no fire. When Elijah called upon his God, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. The people's hearts were turned back to God. Elijah had all the false prophets seized and put to death.

When Jezebel heard what happened she sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of my prophets." But Elijah escaped from Jezebel who continued her evil influence in the land.

Some time later King Ahab coveted a vineyard belonging to a man named Naboth in Jezreel. He said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

Ahab answered her, "Because I said to Naboth, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Jezebel said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up! I'll get the vineyard of Naboth for you.

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But set two scoundrels opposite him and have them to testify that Naboth has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So the people took him outside and stoned Naboth to death. Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to her husband, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth that he refused to sell to you. He is no longer alive, but dead." When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard.

What happened greatly displeased God who sent the prophet Elijah to say to Ahab, "You have murdered a man and seized his property. In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours! Because you have provoked me to anger and have caused the people to sin." And concerning Jezebel God says: "Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of the city." There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of God, urged on by Jezebel his wife.

Then God sent the prophet Elisha to summon a man who was to destroy the house of Ahab. The prophet said to Jehu, "As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground in the city, and no one will bury her."

After Jehu had killed the son of Ahab he went to the city where Jezebel lived. When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. As Jehu approached she called out, "Have you come in peace, you murderer?"

Jehu looked up at the window and called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three palace eunuchs looked down at him. "Throw her down!" Jehu shouted. So the eunuchs grabbed Jezebel and threw her down so that her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. Jehu went inside to eat and drink and said, "Take care of the cursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." But when the servants went outside to bury Jezebel, they found nothing but her skull, her feet and her hands.



A Verse to Remember: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth" (Psalm 34:15-16).

Tell the Story:

TWO WICKED WOMEN WHO CAME TO GRIEF—ATHALIAH

Over in Judah, the other half of Solomon's former kingdom, King Ahaziah married the daughter of Jezebel. Her name was Athaliah. And she influenced the king to commit evil just as Ahab her father and Jezebel her mother had done in Israel.

It happened that Joram the son of Ahab and brother of Athaliah had been wounded in battle. So Ahaziah went from Jerusalem to Jezreel to visit his uncle while he recovered. While Ahaziah was there Jehu came seeking the relatives of King Ahab to kill them. Joram cried out, "Do you come in peace?" But Jehu replied, "How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?"

Joram ordered his chariot to flee and called out to Ahaziah, his nephew, "Treachery! Ahaziah." But Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders and he died. When Ahaziah saw what happened, he fled up the road with Jehu chasing him shouting, "Kill him, too!" Ahaziah was wounded but escaped to another place and died there. His servants brought his body back to Jerusalem.

When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. But the sister of Ahaziah saved one of the royal princes named Joash by hiding him and his nurse in a bedroom. So evil Athaliah did not find him. He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of God for six years while Athaliah ruled the land as queen.

In the seventh year Jehoiada the priest sent for army commanders and guards and had them brought to the temple. There he made a covenant with them and put them under oath. Then he showed them the king's son who had been hidden for six years. He ordered them to station themselves around the young Joash to protect

him. At the arranged time Jehoiada brought out the king's son and put a crown on him and proclaimed him king. They anointed him; the people clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

When Athaliah heard the noise made by the guards and the people, she went to the temple. She looked and there was the king, standing there with the officers and trumpeters beside the king. The people were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Athaliah began to tear her robe and called out, "Treason! Treason!"

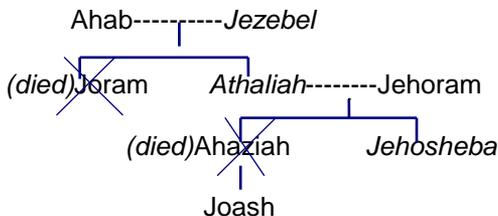
Jehoiada the priest ordered the guards to bring her out between the ranks of guards and kill anyone who tries to follow her. She must not be put to death in the temple of God." So the guards seized Athaliah as she reached the place where horses enter the palace grounds, and there she was put to death.

The people destroyed the temple of Baal and smashed all the altars to Baal and the other idols and killed the priests of Baal. Then the city was quiet, because Athaliah had been killed with the sword at the palace.



A Verse to Remember: "But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him" (Psalm 37:38-40).

A Family Tree of Jezebel and Athaliah



👉 THE QUEEN WHO RISKED HER LIFE 👉

Bible Background: Esther 2:7, 10, 12-17, 4:1-17; 5:1-8; 7:1-8; 8:3-7

For the Storyer: Esther's story is familiar. She is selected to be the new queen. By a fortunate circumstance (no doubt of God's making) her uncle Mordecai overhears a plot on the king's life. Later Haman is honored by the king. But Haman uses his new position to begin an evil plot to eradicate Esther's people as he poses them a menace to the kingdom. Mordecai persuades Esther to go before the king to tell him what is happening. Esther fears for her life as the king must recognize her by holding out his staff to her or she will be killed. She takes the risk and is received and then begins her plan to reveal the plot of Haman. Haman seals his fate when he throws himself upon Esther to beg for mercy. Esther reveals what is about to happen and the king acts to give Esther's people the right to protect themselves.

Tell the Story:

THE QUEEN WHO RISKED HER LIFE

Queen Vashti had dishonored the king by refusing to appear and be displayed before all the people. So she was banished, never again to appear before the king. Her royal position was to be given to another. The king's attendants suggested that a search be conducted for another to take Vashti's place. Beautiful virgins would be brought in from all over the kingdom and groomed for one year and then presented before the king. He would then select the new queen from among them.

One of the descendants of Abraham was named Mordecai. He had a cousin whose name was Esther. He had raised her as his own daughter because her father and mother had died. She was lovely in form and features. When the edict went out to gather the girls and bring them to the

palace, Esther was also taken and entrusted to Hegai the eunuch who was in charge of the harem. Esther pleased him and so won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Esther had not revealed her ancestors and family background because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day Mordecai walked near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was doing.

Before a girl's turn came to go in to the king she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem and be in the care of the eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

When the time came for Esther to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the one in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So the king set a royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

When two of the king's officers plotted to take his life, Mordecai overheard them and reported the matter to Esther who then reported it to the king. When the plot was found true the two officers were put to death and Mordecai given the credit in the royal records.

Then the king happened to honor a man named Haman by giving him a high position. Haman was angry that

Mordecai did not bow before him as all the royal officials did. Mordecai revealed that he was a descendant of Abraham. So Haman devised a plan to destroy all of Mordecai's people who lived in the kingdom. Haman told the king there were a certain people dispersed throughout the kingdom who kept themselves separate. Their customs were different and they did not obey the king's orders. So Haman suggested a royal decree be given to destroy them and Haman even offered to give the king some money.

When Mordecai learned of all that Haman had done, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city wailing loudly and bitterly. When Esther's maid and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther summoned one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her to find out what was troubling Mordecai.

Mordecai told him everything that had happened including the amount of money Haman had offered to give the king for destroying all Mordecai's people. Mordecai also gave to the eunuch a copy of the royal decree and asked him to explain it to Esther and to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and to plead with him for her people.

The eunuch reported to Esther all that Mordecai said. Then Esther replied, "Go tell Mordecai all the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: That they be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to them and spare their life. But thirty days have passed since I was last called to go to the king."

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house that you alone of all Abraham's

descendants will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for us will come from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this."

Then Esther said, "Go gather all our people who are in the city and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days or nights. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. The king asked her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Ask even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

If it pleases the king," Esther said, "let the king and Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared. At the banquet when the king asked Esther what was her petition she replied, "It is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to my banquet again tomorrow and I will answer the king's question."

Haman meanwhile was enraged with Mordecai who still refused to bow down to him. When Haman went to his house he boasted to his wife that he was the only one besides the king who was invited to Esther's banquet. And he said, "Esther has invited me again tomorrow."

So the next day the king and Haman attended Esther's banquet. While they were eating and drinking the king asked Esther, "What is your petition? I will give it to you, even up to half of the kingdom." Then Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it

pleases your majesty, grant me my life, and spare my people. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had been merely sold as slaves I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

"Who is the one doing this?" the king demanded, "Who has dared do such a thing?"

"Haman is the one," Esther said. Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in a rage and went out into the palace garden. Haman stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. Just as the king returned from the garden Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will you even molest the queen while she is with me in the palace?" Then Haman was led away to be executed.

Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman. Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she rose and stood before him. The king wrote a new decree giving Esther's people the right to assemble and defend themselves. The estate of evil Haman was given to Esther. And the king honored Mordecai who left the king's palace wearing royal garments of blue and white. For Esther and her people it was a time of happiness and joy with feasting and celebrating. Esther had risked her life and saved her people.



A Verse to Remember: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

or

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

☞ GOOD NEWS AND A BIG PROBLEM ☞ FOR MARY

Bible Background: Numbers 5:5-31; Deuteronomy 22:20-21; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-56

For the Storyer: This is the traditional story of the angel's announcement to Mary that she would give birth to a son. And that son would have no earthly father; a difficult thing to explain to society in that day. Read Numbers 5:5-31. The test for an unfaithful wife given in the day of Moses was an ordeal before the priest with the outcome determining if she had really been unfaithful or not, and with fearful consequences for the guilty woman. In Deuteronomy 22:20-21 the girl would be in danger of stoning for dishonoring her father's house by her assumed promiscuous act.

Joseph was a kind man who sought to put Mary away quietly without a public scandal. The waiting period after betrothal was to prove the girl's virginity. At the end of the year of waiting, the marriage was consummated. In that day a young man became a man at age thirty and began to live an adult life. On the other hand, it was expedient to marry off a girl as quickly as possible when she physically became a woman before some misfortune befell her to spoil her virginity and thus dishonor her family.

Tell the Story:

GOOD NEWS AND A BIG PROBLEM FOR MARY

The prophet Isaiah had spoken a prophecy in the days of King Ahaz of Judah. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, *a name meaning God with man.*" Even back in the Garden of Eden when God judged the sin of the serpent, He said an unusual thing: "I will put hostility between you (*the serpent*) and woman,

and between your (*the serpent's*) offspring and hers; *he (the offspring of woman—a son)* will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." In those days a son was never reckoned by his mother, but always by his father. So even these words of God speak of a son known only of his earthly mother.

It was six months after God had sent the angel Gabriel to Jerusalem to announce that aged Elizabeth and Zechariah were going to have a son. This son was to be named John and he would be the one to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Now the angel appeared again in Nazareth, a town in the northern province of Galilee, this time to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! God is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at the angel's words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. God will give him the throne of his father David, he will rule over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How can this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age. She who was said to be barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am God's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah where Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered the house and greeted Elizabeth the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

Then Mary sang a song of praise saying, "My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name." Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband was a righteous man and he did not want to expose her to public disgrace. So he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until after she gave birth to her son. And he gave him the name Jesus according to the words of the angel.



A Verse to Remember: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

☞ A SINFUL WOMAN ☞ SEEKS FORGIVENESS

Bible Background: Luke 7:36-50

For the Storyer: There are several issues in this story. One is the comment that the woman had lived a sinful life in that town. Simon the Pharisee apparently knew her reputation. The other issue is that Simon was “checking out” Jesus by inviting him into his home to get a close up look at Jesus. He is appalled that Jesus, acclaimed to be a prophet by many, seems not to know that the woman touching him was a sinner, thereby polluting him. There is also irony in the story as the “good” person is the “bad” person (Simon who neglected the duties of a good host); and the “bad” person is the “good” person (the sinner woman who honors Jesus by her actions). She is obviously very troubled by her sinful past which she has presumably left and it is likely that Jesus had some part in bringing her to conviction of her sin, to repent and change her life. Now she has an opportunity to repay Jesus and to express her deep emotion for his role in changing her life.

Tell the Story:

A SINFUL WOMAN SEEKS FORGIVENESS

One of the Pharisees named Simon had invited Jesus to have dinner with him. So Jesus entered the Pharisee’s house and was reclining at the table with him. Then a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house. She entered the house bringing with her an alabaster jar of perfume. She came to stand behind Jesus at his feet weeping so that her tears began to wet the feet of Jesus. Then she began to wipe the feet of Jesus with her hair, she kissed his feet and poured perfume on Jesus’ feet.

When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, "If this man really were a prophet he would know who is touching him, what kind of woman she is—a sinner!"

Jesus knew what he was thinking in his heart and so answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, Teacher," Simon said.

Jesus then told this story, "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him a quite large amount of money, and the other owed a much smaller amount. When it came time to repay the moneylender, neither man had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house but you did not give me any water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, had not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put fragrant oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

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



A Verse to Remember: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

☞ WHERE ARE YOUR ACCUSERS? ☞

Bible Background: Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; John 8:1-11

For the Storyer: This story speaks of the unfairness of those who accosted and accused only one party of an adulterous affair. The woman was taken for whatever reason and shamefully brought and cast before Jesus. It is obvious that there was less concern about her sinful act than a desire to have a basis for trapping Jesus and accusing him. It was what we call a "Catch-22" situation in which whatever is done, whichever direction is the decision, it is likely to be wrong and thus a basis for accusation. The woman was only a pawn in this plot.

Tell the Story:

WHERE ARE YOUR ACCUSERS?

Jesus had spent the night praying on the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts in Jerusalem. There many people gathered around Jesus and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the Law of Moses and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand in shame before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. (*Really the law said 'If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.'*) Now what do you say?" The teachers of the law and Pharisees were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Jesus.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When the teachers and Pharisees kept on questioning him, Jesus straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to

throw a stone at this woman.” Again Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard Jesus began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”



A Verse to Remember: “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities...As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10, 12).

🌀 LIVING WATER FOR A THIRSTY WOMAN 🌀

Bible Background: 2 Kings 17:24, 33-34; John 4:4-29, 39-42; 6:35; 7:37-39

For The Storyer: This story is the familiar one of the Samaritan woman at the well who appears to be living a lonely life as a disreputable person because she was drawing water from the well outside the village, alone and at a time when other women were not likely to be present. Perhaps her life was a string of failed marriages and now she was living with a man she was married to. She was thirsty for acceptance and looking for the Messiah.

Tell The Story:

LIVING WATER FOR A THIRSTY WOMAN

Another time Jesus was passing through the land of Samaria, among a people the Jews did not like nor associate with. At noontime Jesus sat down by a well dug in the days of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Soon a woman was coming from the village to draw water. She was alone with no other women accompanying her. When she drew near the well Jesus spoke to her, "Please give me a drink of water." The woman was surprised at Jesus' request and said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" For the woman knew that the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst again. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

So the woman said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw more water."

Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she admitted.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands! And the man you now live with is not your husband! What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman replied, "I can see you are a prophet." Then she quickly changed the subject saying, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain. But you Jews claim the place we must worship is in Jerusalem."

At this Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know...Yet a time is coming when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am the Messiah!"

The woman left her water jar at the well and ran back to the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Messiah?" Many of the people in the town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them, and

he stayed two more days. Because of his words many more believed in him. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know this man really is the Savior of the world!"

So a woman who had a bad reputation brought good news to her neighbors. She had lived in disrepute because of her many marriages and promiscuous relationship. But Jesus had accepted her in her great need and gave her the greatest gift of all—eternal life and salvation because of her belief in him.



A Verse to Remember: "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them" (John 7:37b-38).

☞ THE WIDOW'S ONLY SON DIED ☞

Bible Background: Luke 7:11-17

For the Storyer: This brief story speaks of the tragic circumstances of a woman who was widowed and now has lost her only son, the one who would care for her. Apparently the woman was well-known in the town. The people who followed the coffin were sharing in the widow's grief, but they were not family. And the plight of widows in that day was not good. Jesus' compassion is rewarded by an expression of praise.

Tell the Story:

THE WIDOW'S ONLY SON DIED

Jesus was in Galilee moving from place to place. He had been in the large city of Capernaum where he had just healed a Roman Centurion's servant. Now Jesus had continued to travel to a smaller town in Galilee called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd of followers accompanied him along the way.

As Jesus approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out to the burial ground. In that day a person was usually buried with some haste the same day they died. The dead person was a young man, the only son of his mother who was herself a widow.

A large crowd from the town was following along with her mourning and crying out according to their custom. When Jesus saw the woman and saw her tears, his heart went out to her, and he said, "Don't cry."

Then Jesus approached the coffin and touched it. Those carrying the coffin stood still. Then Jesus said to the dead body, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk. Jesus gave him back to his mother.

When the people saw what happened they were all filled with awe and began to praise God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said, "God has come to help his people." News about what Jesus did began to spread throughout the region.



A Verse to Remember: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...'" (John 11:25-26)

🌀 THE PERSISTENT WIDOW 🌀

Bible Background: Exodus 22:22; Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 1:17; Luke 18:1-8; James 1:27

For the Storyer: This parable is one Jesus told while teaching about prayer. In that day unscrupulous people were quick to take advantage of a widow and, without a husband or son to care for her, she found herself at the mercy of the society. This story doesn't say what the case was about, but she likely was struggling with an adversary about land or some inheritance.

Tell the Story:

THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

God spoke through the prophets saying, "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan." Again he said, "...learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of widows." And there was a warning, "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."

One time when Jesus was teaching his disciples about prayer he told a parable to remind them that they should always pray and not give up. Jesus said: "In a certain town there was a judge who feared neither God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to the judge with her plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

For some time the judge refused to grant the woman's plea for justice. But finally he became weary with her persistent pleading and said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man returns will he find faith on the earth?"



A Verse to Remember: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 6:11).

❧ THE WIDOW'S OFFERING ❧

Bible Background: Deuteronomy 10:18; 26:12; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

For the Storyer: Another story about a poor widow who gave all that she had into the temple treasury. While she gave her few coins into the treasury Jesus was watching and knew her pitiful situation. He commented on her faithfulness in spite of her poverty.

Tell the Story:

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Moses had said this about widows, "God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving them food and clothing." And again God had said to the people, "When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, you shall give it to, among others, the fatherless and widows so they may eat and be satisfied."

Jesus and his disciples were at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd entering the temple and putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts of money. But then came a poor widow who put in two very small copper coins which were worth very little.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. The rich all gave gifts out of their wealth. But this poor woman have given out of her poverty. She put in everything—all she had to live on!"



A Verse to Remember: "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." (2 Corinthians 8:12).

☞ THE SICK WOMAN ☞ WHO TOUCHED JESUS

Bible Background: Leviticus 15:25-30; Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48

For the Storyer: This story of the sick woman who touched Jesus is one-half of the pair of stories, the other half being the raising of Jairus' dead daughter. The woman was as good as dead in her uncleanness as she could not worship in the temple or synagogue, cook food for men to eat, and any place she sat or lay upon became unclean, as well as anyone she touched.

Tell the Story:

THE SICK WOMAN WHO TOUCHED JESUS

Jesus had just stepped out of a boat when a large crowd gathered around and welcomed him. One of the worship hall leaders, named Jairus, came to see Jesus. The man knelt before Jesus and said, "My only daughter of twelve years is dying, please come and place your hands on her so she will be healed and will live." Jesus got up and went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed all around Jesus nearly crushing him. A woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years was there in the crowd. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all her money. No one could heal her, she only grew worse. When she heard about Jesus she joined the crowd and came up behind Jesus in the crowd and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was at last freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

The crowd denied touching him. "You see the people pressing against you," one of his disciples named Peter said. "How can you ask you touched me?"

Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, and seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came and fell at Jesus' feet trembling with fear. And she confessed in the presence of all the people that she was the one who touched him and why, and that she had been instantly healed.

"Take heart, daughter," Jesus said, "your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." And the woman was healed from that moment.

But while Jesus was still speaking someone came from the house of Jairus saying, "Your daughter is dead. Don't trouble the teacher any more."

Jesus heard what was said to Jairus. So he said to him, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

When Jesus arrived at the home of Jairus there were flute players and many mourners gathered already weeping and wailing loudly. "Stop the wailing," Jesus demanded. "The girl is not dead but asleep." The crowd laughed at him, knowing that the girl was dead. After Jesus had put everyone out of the room except three of his disciples and the dead girl's mother and father, he took the girl by the hand and said, "My child, I say to you, get up!"

Immediately the girl stood up and walked around. The parents were completely astonished. Then Jesus gave strict orders not to tell anyone what happened. And he told the parents to give the girl something to eat, she was hungry.



A Verse to Remember: “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lamentations 3:25-26).

or

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

☞ THE WOMAN WHO WAS BOUND ☞ BY SATAN

Bible Background: Isaiah 53:4; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:19

For the Storyer: This unnamed woman had some terribly crippling condition that had her in its grasp for eighteen long years. She didn't go seeking Jesus. He saw her and called her come to him. It happened on a Sabbath and added fuel to the criticism against Jesus for healing on a holy day. Her condition was attributed to Satan; Jesus released her from his grip.

Tell the Story:

THE WOMAN WHO WAS BOUND BY SATAN

Again it was a Sabbath day of worship when Jesus was in the worship hall teaching. There was present that day a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all.

When Jesus saw her, he called to her to come forward and said to her, "Woman, you are now set free from your infirmity." Then Jesus put his hands on her, and immediately the woman straightened up and began to praise God.

The ruler of the worship hall did not like what he saw happening because Jesus had healed on a Sabbath when work was forbidden. The ruler was indignant and said to the people, "There are six days for work; so come and be healed on those days, and not on the Sabbath."

Jesus answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then shouldn't this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

When Jesus said this, all those who opposed him were humiliated. But the people were delighted with all the wonderful things Jesus was doing. For Jesus himself had said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." The prophet Isaiah said about the Messiah, "He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows."



A Verse to Remember: "All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!'" (Luke 4:36).

✠ THE WOMAN WHO CRIED ✠ FOR MERCY

Bible Background: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 3:11-12; 7:24-30

For the Storyer: This is the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was suffering from demon-possession. She was not a daughter of Abraham. So Jesus tested her faith and she passed the test and received the mercy she begged for.

Tell the Story:

THE WOMAN WHO CRIED FOR MERCY

Jesus' ministry was to be mainly in Galilee. But at one time Jesus went up into the region of Tyre and Sidon. There he entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence a secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him a foreign woman who lived in that place came to Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My little daughter is suffering terribly from possession by an evil spirit." She was begging Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

However, Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send the woman away, for she keeps crying out after us."

Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep among Abraham's descendants."

Then the woman came and knelt down before Jesus and begged him more urgently, "Lord, help me!" she begged.

Jesus replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. First let the children eat all they want."

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs that fall from the table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, you have great faith! For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter. Your request is granted.”

The woman went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon was gone. The woman’s daughter was healed from that very hour. Whenever the evil spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him and cried out: “You are the Son of God.” But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.



A Verse to Remember: “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (Matthew 8:16).

☞ THE PLIGHT OF TWO SISTERS ☞

Bible Background: Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:1-9; Luke 10:38-42 ; John 11:1-45; 12:1-8

For the Storyer: There are three stories in which Martha and Mary are featured. First is the introductory story of Jesus visiting in their home. Next comes the story of Lazarus' sickness and the sisters' desire that Jesus come to heal him. When Jesus arrives the sisters are in deep distress because Lazarus has died before Jesus arrived. Jesus tells them not to worry, only to believe (have faith). The Jews believed that when a person died their spirit stayed nearby until the body began to decay—usually by the third day. On the fourth day a person was really dead! In the third story Mary provides an act of honoring Jesus but is criticized for her extravagant act while Jesus defends her action.

Tell the Story:

THE PLIGHT OF TWO SISTERS

Jesus and his disciples came to the village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister named Mary who sat at Jesus' feet listening to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by all the cooking and preparations in the kitchen and Mary was not helping. Finally Martha came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," Jesus answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her."

Later Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary lay very sick. The sisters sent word for Jesus to come. When Jesus heard this, he said, "His sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that the One come from God

may be glorified through it." Jesus loved the two sisters and their brother Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, Jesus remained where he was two more days. Then Jesus told his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him." His disciples said, "Master, if he sleeps, he will get better." For the disciples thought Jesus meant natural sleep. So then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

On his arrival at Bethany Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany is near Jerusalem. Many friends of Martha and Mary had come to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again." She answered, "Yes, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the One from God who was to come into the world." After Martha had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus who had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha met him. When Mary's friends who were in the house comforting her saw how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw

her weeping and her friends weeping also, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid his body?" Jesus asked. "Come and see, Lord," the friends replied. Then Jesus wept. When the friends saw him, they said, "See how much he loved Lazarus!" But some of them mocked saying, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across its entrance. "Take away the stone," Jesus said. "But, Lord," said Martha the sister of the dead man, "there will be a bad smell, for he has been dead four days." Then Jesus reminded her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe you sent me."

When Jesus had finished praying, he said in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with the burial cloths. Jesus said to them, "Take off the burial cloths and let him go."

Many of the friends who had come to visit Mary, when they saw what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some doubted and went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. The religious leaders began to plot from that day on to take the life of Jesus.

Shortly afterward Jesus again arrived at Bethany where Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived. A dinner was being given in Jesus' honor. Lazarus was present at the table with Jesus. Martha was serving. Then Mary came in with a jar of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' head and feet and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot who later betrayed Jesus, objected saying, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was

worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he would help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this story is told throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."



A Verse to Remember: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:26).

❧ FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS ❧

Bible Background: Matthew 25:1-13; 2 Peter 3:11-12; Revelation 16:15

For the Storyer: This is a short story that speaks of the agony of being excluded due to one's foolish lack of preparation. There is implied the embarrassment of not being admitted to the wedding festivities even after being invited. The parable looks to the return of Jesus and the need to be prepared for no one knows the hour of his return.

Tell the Story:

FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS

Jesus was teaching on the kingdom of heaven. He had just told a story to remind the listeners that they must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when no one expects him to return. So Jesus told the following parable about ten virgins who were invited to take part in a wedding festival at night.

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any extra oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and all the virgins became drowsy and soon fell asleep.

At midnight the cry rang out: "Here comes the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out."

“No,” the wise ones replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”

But while the foolish virgins were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the five foolish virgins arrived. “Sir! Sir!” they pleaded, “Open the door for us!”

But the bridegroom replied, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.”

Then Jesus said, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Another wrote about the time of the Lord’s return: “Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps their clothes with them, so they may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” And “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”



A Verse to Remember: “...For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come upon them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape”
(1 Thessalonians 5:2-3)

☞ A SWORD WILL PIERCE YOUR SOUL ☞

Bible Background: Luke 1:29, 34; 2:34-35, 49-51; 8:19-21 (Mark 3:20-35); John 19:25-27; Acts 1:14

For the Storyer: The Gospel writer Luke gives more insight into the mind and heart of Mary as he tells the story of Jesus. He mentions the things that Mary treasures (ponders and hides) in her heart—first the words of the angel about her son to be, then the words of aged Simeon in the temple, the rebuke by Jesus when he was twelve, the rebuke again when Mary and Jesus' brothers came to get him, and finally the heartbreak of seeing Jesus shamefully exposed and treated like a common criminal when put to death on the cross. Yet he performed a last final act of care for Mary in providing a caretaker for her (John 19:25). Seeing her son die in this way was no doubt the sword that aged Simeon referred to as piercing Mary's soul. In the end Mary believed fully in Jesus and joined the other believers in daily prayer.

Tell the Story:

A SWORD WILL PIERCE YOUR SOUL

Mary lived in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. She was a descendant of David and betrothed to one named Joseph. It was during the year before they came together as man and wife that the angel appeared to Mary with the good news that she had found favor with God and was going to give birth to a son who was to be named Jesus. Mary was troubled by the angel's greeting. But the angel told her not to be afraid. There had been the problem when Joseph her husband found that she was with child even before they came together. In the old days of Moses, the Law called for putting to death those persons thought to have done such a shameful thing. The angel had assured Joseph that what was happening was of God and that he was to take Mary as his wife but not to sleep with her until after the child was born.

After the time of Mary's purification from giving birth were ended it was required for her to go to the temple to offer a sacrifice for her sin and another for her cleansing. This was required by the purification law God gave back in the days of Moses. At the temple that day was an old man who was righteous and devout. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Moved by the Holy Spirit he came daily to the temple courts and waited. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus he took him in his arms and exclaimed, "This is the One who fulfilled what the prophets had said!" Mary and Joseph marveled at the words of Simeon about the child. Then Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and said to Mary about the baby: "This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many will be revealed. *And a sword will pierce your own soul, too.*"

Twelve years later when Jesus was twelve Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem at the time of the great Feast of the Passover. Afterward as they returned home Jesus was not found among the other young people. After three days of anxious searching they found Jesus sitting in the temple talking with the religious leaders. Mary said to Jesus, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you." Jesus' reply was, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Mary and Joseph did not understand what he was saying to them. But Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

When Jesus was about thirty years of age he had begun his public ministry. Many people began to follow him to hear his teaching about the kingdom of God. Others found fault in his teaching and presumed that Jesus was possessed of an unclean spirit. As Jesus was traveling about from one town and village to another along with his twelve apostles he entered a house and a large crowd had gathered to hear him. He was teaching the people with many parables. There had not even been time for him to eat. When his family, that is, Jesus' mother and brothers

heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." The religious leaders present were saying, "He is possessed of a demon!"

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent someone inside to call Jesus. The crowd of people was all around Jesus when the person said, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

The opposition and hatred against Jesus had grown stronger and stronger. He was loved by the crowds for his teaching and miracles. But the religious leaders had grown more and more jealous and fearful of him. At last they found a way to have Jesus betrayed into their hands, accused of blasphemy and insurrection, and sentenced to death.

The Roman soldiers had stripped Jesus of his clothing and beaten him, mocked him, and finally led him out to the place of crucifixion where he was nailed to a wooden cross. He was publicly and shamefully exposed as the soldiers below gambled for his clothing, even his woven undergarment. Among those standing nearby watching the horrible scene were some of the women who had followed Jesus, and there was Mary his own mother. Seeing Mary and the trusted disciple John standing nearby Jesus said, "Dear woman, here is your son." And to John the trusted disciple he said, "Here is your mother."

Then Mary watched the agony and suffering of Jesus all that day from the third hour until the ninth hour. She heard the cruel words of those religious leaders who mocked Jesus saying, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah, the Chosen One." Even one of those being crucified with Jesus had mocked him saying, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" About the sixth hour there was darkness that came over the whole

land. During this time Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Some who heard the words of Jesus thought he was calling out to the great prophet Elijah. And they said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down." Then Jesus had said, "It is finished!" Shortly afterward he spoke again, "Father, into your hands I give my spirit." Saying this he bowed his head and died.

Mary and the other women saw Jesus as he suffered in great agony those hours, and they saw as some of the secret followers of Jesus came to claim his body and to anoint it with spices and wrap it in strips of linen in accordance with the burial customs. It was nearly sundown when the Sabbath began so they laid the body of Jesus in a nearby tomb which had never been used and sealed the opening with a large stone. The women watched this and saw where the body of Jesus was buried. Then they went home very sad and agreed to return early on the day after the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body with fragrant spices.

So very early on that first day of the new week the women arrived at the tomb and found that it was open. An angel seated inside told them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen. Remember, his words that he told you, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day raised again." Then the women remembered Jesus' words.

After Jesus had returned to heaven, His mother Mary and even the brothers of Jesus believed in him and joined the other followers and women in daily prayer.



A Verse to Remember: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10).

☞ SORROW IN THE GARDEN ☞

Bible Background: Matthew 12:40; 28:1-10; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; 16:1-10; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-2, 10-18

For the Storyer: Many times Jesus had told his followers that he must suffer and die and be raised to life again on the third day. Mark records three times when Jesus told his disciples about his coming death and that he would be raised to life again. While many times Jesus was speaking only to his disciples, there were times when others were present who heard his words and were troubled. (Mark 10:32) When the religious leaders asked for a sign Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah who was three days in the fish. When Jesus went to restore Lazarus to life he had told Martha, "I am the resurrection." Later, when a meal was held in Bethany honoring Lazarus and Jesus it was Mary who anointed Jesus. When Judas criticized what she did, Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She has done a good thing. She has anointed me for the day of my burial."

Tell the Story:

SORROW IN THE GARDEN

The women who had followed Jesus from Galilee were present at his crucifixion and saw where his body was laid. They went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath. After the Sabbath, very early on the first day of the week, the third day after Jesus had died, the women took their spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

Among them was Mary Magdalene, the one that Jesus had cast seven demons from. There were also Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of the king's household, Mary the mother of James, and Salome who brought spices so they might anoint the body of Jesus. Along the way they asked

each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they arrived at the tomb they saw the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled away. For there had been a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat on it. When the women entered the tomb they saw the angel, a young man whose appearance was like lightning dressed in a robe white as snow, sitting on the right side. The women were alarmed and in fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.

"Don't be afraid," the angel said, "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his followers to meet him in Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." Then the angel reminded the women the words of Jesus, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day raised again." Then the women remembered Jesus' words. So trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb afraid, yet filled with joy. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" The women came to him and clasped his feet and worshiped him.

The women had gone to tell the disciples of Jesus what they had seen and heard. But the disciples did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

When Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. When she saw the empty tomb she ran to tell the disciples of Jesus, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and I don't know where they have put him." Afterward she returned to the tomb and stood outside weeping. As she wept she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and another at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away,"

she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking it was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned toward him and cried out, "Teacher!" Then Jesus said, "Don't cling to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go tell my brothers, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

So Mary of Magdala went to the disciples of Jesus with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her.



A Verse to Remember: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again" (Luke 24:7).

"...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3b-4).

☞ THE LAST GREAT SORROW ☞

Bible Background: Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 53:5, 12b; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 13:42; 25:31-32; Mark 9:48; Luke 16:19-31; John 14:1-3; Acts 4:12; 16:31; 1Thessalonians 4:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 9:28; Jude 15; Revelation 20:12, 15

For the Storyer: The last great sorrow will be that of the final separation of the unbelievers from those who have believed in the One sent from God, Jesus the Messiah. For the living the separation will come even as they are working or sleeping when the faithful will be taken away. The unbelieving who are left behind will be gathered by the angels for the judgment. The books will be opened to see what each person has done both good and bad. For the unbeliever there will be darkness, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. It will be a terrible torment, sorrow and shame forever.

Tell the Story:

THE LAST GREAT SORROW

A time is coming when there will be one last great sorrow which will last an eternity. Whether you experience it or not is up to you. It is a choice you will make. On the night before Jesus was crucified he told his disciples, "I am going away. In my Father's house are many rooms. I will prepare a place for you. And I will come again to receive you, so that you may be where I am."

Jesus told several stories about what was going to happen to those who believed in him and those who did not. One was a story about two men, one a rich man and the other a poor beggar named Lazarus. When Lazarus died angels came and carried him to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and found himself in the flames of torment. When he saw Lazarus with Abraham he cried out, "O,

father Abraham, send Lazarus so that he might dip his finger in water and place it on my tongue. For I am in great torment in this place.”

Abraham replied, “Lazarus cannot come to you and you cannot come to us. In your lifetime you received good things and Lazarus evil things. Now he is comforted and you are in torment.”

Then again the rich man begged Abraham, “Please send Lazarus to warn my five brothers so they don’t come to this place.” But Abraham replied, “Your brothers have Moses and the prophets. Let your brothers listen to them.” One last time the rich man begged, “But if someone should rise from the dead and warn them, they would listen.” But Abraham replied, “Even if someone should rise from the dead, your brothers would not listen.”

In the story we see that the rich man was not in torment because he was rich, but because he had not listened to the words of Moses and the prophets. Now he was in torment immediately at his death. One of the prophets had said, “But he (the Messiah) was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...he poured out his life unto death...for he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

On the day that Jesus died on the cross, one of the criminals being crucified at the same time said to him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Later, another prophet named Stephen was being stoned to death because he believed in Jesus. As he was dying, Stephen looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father waiting to receive him.

On the day that Jesus returned to heaven, as he was taken up into the clouds, two angels spoke to the followers who were watching, “This same Jesus, who has

been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." In another place it says, "You must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

"The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Another said, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And those who are believers will be with the Lord forever."

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." "Jesus will judge everyone, and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

The prophet named John had a vision of the great judgment. He wrote these words: "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, they were thrown into the lake of fire."

The great prophet Daniel said, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Talking about this terrible judgment Jesus said for those who are cast out it will be everlasting darkness, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

The prophet David wrote about the book of one's life when he said, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." The God who made you knows what you will do. He has prepared two places, one for believers and one for those who do not believe. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father but by me." The Scriptures say: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." And "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we may be saved."

The picture is clear. One day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Those who believe in him, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, will be gathered to Jesus and receive eternal blessing and everlasting life. Those whose names are not found in the book of life will be cast into everlasting destruction and torment. It will be the last great sorrow. It is your choice. Which will you choose? Will it be life or death in the flames of torment? You must decide in this life.



A Verse to Remember: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

☞ A GOOD WOMAN WHO DIED ☞

Bible Background: Acts 9:32-43; Matthew 10:1-2a;
John 11:21-27

For the Storyer: Tabitha (or Dorcas—use only Tabitha to keep the name simple) was a godly woman who was known for her good works and loved by all. Now she had become sick and died. Her body was being prepared for burial. But there was good news, for the believers heard that one of the disciples of Jesus was in a nearby town. They sent for Peter who came and through prayer raised the dead Tabitha back to life. Those who had been grieving for the dead Tabitha were now filled with joy as she was alive again. Many there believed in Jesus because of what happened.

Tell the Story:

A GOOD WOMAN WHO DIED AND LIVED AGAIN

One of the disciples of the Messiah Jesus was traveling about the country and came to visit those who believed in Jesus in a town called Lydda. There Peter found a paralyzed man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years.

Peter said to Aeneas, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your bed." Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda saw what happened and turned to follow Jesus.

In a nearby town called Joppa there was a follower of Jesus named Tabitha who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died. Her friends washed her body and placed it in an upstairs room.

The town of Lydda was near Joppa, so when the other believers heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two

men to him and urged Peter, "Please come to Joppa at once!"

Peter went with them, and when he arrived the believers took Peter to the upstairs room where Tabitha's body lay. All the widows stood around Peter crying and showing him the nice robes and other clothing that Tabitha had made while she was still living.

Peter sent all the people out of the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed. After finishing his praying, Peter turned toward the dead woman. He said, "Tabitha, get up!" Tabitha opened her eyes, saw Peter, and she sat up. Peter took Tabitha by the hand and helped her to stand on her feet. Then Peter called all the believers and the widows and presented the now alive Tabitha to them.

This became known all over Joppa and many people began to believe in Jesus because they saw his power to raise Tabitha to life again. Remember that Jesus had told another woman named Martha that he was the resurrection and that whoever believed in him would live again.



A Verse to Remember: ..."I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

✿ LYDIA, A WOMAN WHO OPENED HER HEART ✿

Bible Background: Acts 16:13-40

For the Storyer: This is a rather lengthy story if all the events are told in full. However the focus is on Lydia who opened her heart to Jesus after listening to Paul's message. The part about Paul and Silas' imprisonment will be summarized to keep the story simple and then closed again with the final meeting at Lydia's house. Read the story aloud several times and then tell it in your own words.

You may need to deal with Paul's approaching a group of women to converse in a public place. And later Paul's visit to a woman's house where no man or husband is mentioned. Also the matter of baptism of believers may need some explanation.

Tell the Story:

Lydia, a Woman Who Opened Her Heart

A follower of Jesus named Paul was traveling and came to a certain city where he stayed several days. On the Sabbath, that is, the day of worship, he went outside the city gate where he expected to find a place of prayer. He sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening as a business woman named Lydia who was a worshiper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to believe Paul's teaching. Later Lydia and members of her household were baptized in the river. For Jesus had commanded his followers to go and teach all things he had commanded and to baptize them in the name of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Later Lydia invited Paul and his companion to her home. She said, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord Jesus,

come and stay at my house.” And so she persuaded Paul and his companions.

While Paul and his companion stayed in that place a slave girl who had an evil spirit followed Paul and said, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who is telling you how to be saved.” Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left the girl.

The owners of the slave girl accused Paul and had him arrested and thrown into prison where he was beaten and kept locked in chains. About midnight Paul and his companion were singing hymns to God and praying. Suddenly there was an earthquake and the prison doors were opened and Paul’s chains fell off. The prison keeper was about to kill himself for fear the prisoners would escape. But Paul assured him that all were there.

The prison keeper brought Paul and his companion out and asked Paul, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household. Then Paul spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house. The prison keeper washed their wounds. Then the prison keeper and all his family were baptized.

When daylight came Paul and his companion were released and told, “Now you can go in peace.”

After Paul and his companion came out of prison, they went to Lydia’s house. There they met with the believers and encouraged them. Then Paul and his companion left that city.

A Verse to Remember: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

🔗 USING BIBLE STORIES TO ACCLIMATIZE 🔗

Order Of Presenting the Stories

These grief stories have been presented in a chronological order as they are found in the Bible. But they do not all need to be used nor must they be used in the chronological order presented in the Bible. It is helpful to generally keep the Old Testament stories together and those of Jesus together and following the Old Testament ones. If stories are used out of order there may be need to give some background for the story to give an understanding of the circumstance in which the story happened. Do this in a concise manner as a simple narrative historical reference or facts before beginning the story. Transition into the story with something like: "Now here is the story of Ruth that happened in those days..." Then begin the story.

Initial Engagement

The purpose of these selected stories for women is to engage their attention by the stories about the life problems and circumstances the women in the Bible stories found themselves in. The focus is not entirely upon the problem or circumstance but upon what happened to alleviate the problem or deliver from the circumstance. The stories are selected and told with the belief that God noticed the plight of each woman and was the One to initiate an opportunity for deliverance. In a world when the rights of men transcend those of women and where the circumstances often favor an outcome more favorable to men, the stories point toward God's love, provision and favor for the women as well.

Building A Relationship

After the initial engagement by attracting attention and holding it through the stories selected to be used, there is the opportunity to begin building a relationship through trust in God. Not only does God see and hear of the plight

of those in the stories and provide their deliverance, but He has a plan and purpose for their lives, redeeming them from a life of misfortune. The relationship initiated in the Old Testament stories then continues in the stories of Jesus who exhibited a kindness and grace toward those needing healing of body, release from oppression, and forgiveness of their sin.

Relevance Of Grief Stories

Stories of misfortune and grief have a universal appeal. There is interest in the unfortunate circumstances of others. Many of the stories the listeners can easily identify with as their cultures are similar to that of Bible times. The stories begin where they are and hopefully move toward a positive attitude toward the Bible as the source of the stories, and toward the merciful God and his Promised One who feature in the stories.

Letting Grief Stories Point Toward A Savior and His Grace

As the stories provoke more interest in the Bible and its other stories of forgiveness and salvation, the storyer should be prepared to take advantage of any developing openness. It is not enough simply to entertain or stop with building a favorable attitude toward the Bible and Jesus. But as the opportunity arises, either in the grief story sessions or in any supplemental story sessions, the stories and the discussions should begin to point toward Jesus the Savior. It is wise for the storyer not to force too much too soon on the listeners but to let the Holy Spirit begin to do a work among them. The degree of directness in pointing to Jesus will depend upon the target women and their openness. Knowing their worldview with its barriers is essential, and being able to read the spiritual temperature and responsiveness of the listeners is important.

Failure to take advantage of any interest among the women and move toward sharper focus on their predicament as helpless sinners with the Savior God

provided may result in further inoculating them against the gospel.

Bridging Into An Evangelism Track

The Evangelism Track stories normally begin in Genesis and proceed chronologically to the stories of Jesus and the cross. This is probably still the best track to follow for several reasons. The Old Testament stories provide the needed background and foundation for understanding the gospel:

- a. the problem of sin and how it separates the sinner from God,
- b. that God judges all sin and punishes the sinner,
- c. that God must be the One to forgive sin with a blood covering (blood representing life of the substitute),
- d. that God had a plan and promise for his Anointed One to bear our suffering and to die in our place,
- e. that Jesus is God's Anointed One, the Messiah,
- f. that we can have God's forgiveness if we confess our sins, and we can have salvation by believing on Jesus.

Bringing Closure

The strategy must include closure through an opportunity to believe in Jesus. The stories must touch their lives in an affective way. Pre-story dialog to build interest and post-story discussion can help the women to internalize the truths they are learning.

Motivating An Ongoing Strategy

The women will share some of the stories with others. They should be encouraged to do so. Repetition of the stories will help them to remember the stories and to keep the essential elements of the stories accurate. Look for anyone in the group who has an unusual interest in the stories and who expresses the desire and ability to retell the stories. Let this person become the assistant to review previous stories before telling the new one. Arrange time to go over the stories and to talk about their

meaning. If your assistant is not yet a believer, but a willing helper, take advantage of her openness.

Bridging Into A Prayer Ministry

The initial object of the grief stories is to attract a group and to build interest in the Bible stories, especially those that closely parallel the lives of the women. The stories can logically provide an opportunity to begin a prayer ministry among the women as they are led to share the needs in their lives. In praying for their needs be sure to include forgiveness for their sins. Keep a prayer notebook of each request and when and how God answered it. Remind the women of God's faithfulness to answer prayer when reviewing the testimonies of those prayed for.

☞ The Storying Session ☞

Overview

In an ideal storying session there is a pre-story time in which the listeners are engaged and their attention drawn to issues or themes related to the story. Proper preparation is essential so the story will do more than just entertain. The main story is told in an interesting manner using any appropriate helps like visuals, models, objects, drama, or songs. A time follows for internalizing and digesting the truths in the stories.

For those who are put off by “preaching” or “Western style teaching” it may only be possible to tell the stories and let the women talk about the stories if they care to. Continue to pray that a time will come when their curiosity, interest and desire to learn will open them to a discussion that helps internalize the Bible truths gleaned from the stories.

An Ideal Storying Session

1. **Pre-story dialog** to engage the women’s attention, to focus their attention on the themes and truths in the stories, to *prepare* their minds and hearts for the story.
 - a. Appropriate cultural greetings.
 - b. Use the opportunity to hear what has happened recently in the lives of the women. (The storyer may need to tell her story to initiate a desire for others to tell their stories.)
 - c. Review of an earlier story(ies) or referral to a recently told story that introduces the theme of the new story. (Mind the time!)
 - d. Ask thought-provoking questions that can lead to a discussion in which the women can express their opinions (right or wrong). The purpose is to get to the affective level and open their thoughts along a track leading into the new story. (If the women are suspicious of the motive, then do whatever is

possible to provide opportunity.)

- e. As relationship grows give the women a listening task to provide some structure or basis for a response immediately after the story.
2. **Read a part of the new story from the Bible**, if that is appropriate.
- a. If the storyer's literacy and the women's lack of literacy is an issue, and reading from the Bible would put them off, then quote from memory some of the story to anchor the story in the Bible with the Bible opened.
 - b. Handle the Bible as a holy book would be handled according to their custom. This will likely involve any wrapping or protection for transportation, how the Bible is held, and where the Bible is placed when not holding it while telling a story.
 - c. If the women prefer that the story be read (and some do in certain cultures as that makes it more authoritative), then do so instead of telling the story. (*See Alternative Story Presentation.*)
3. **Tell the story** as you have prepared it.
- a. A bridging story (brief introductory story to bridge into or give background or other explanation may be necessary) could precede the main story. A mention or short review of one the earlier stories as brought up in the Pre-Story Dialog can serve the same purpose. Skillfully transition into the main story.
 - b. Tell the new story in an interesting, yet accurate manner. Remember that some listeners may want to challenge the veracity of the story and may even ask to see where it says that in your Bible.
 - c. Be sure to use an "unmarked" Bible that does not have any markings or notes written on the pages which would show disrespect for a holy book.
 - d. Hold the Bible as a signal that the story is coming from the Bible or, if a reading stand is used to hold the Bible, have the Bible opened before you as a signal. If having an open book before you when telling the story separates a literate storyer from

illiterate listeners, do keep the Bible open on the stand or table, but do not hold it.

- e. When the story is finished, stop, put the Bible down, or close it to signal that the story from the Bible is finished.
4. **Use a Post-Story Dialog time** to lead the women to reflect on the story and its implication for their lives. Use dialog time as the women are open to it. If they are not open or there is reluctance to hear non-story talk, then continue with just the stories until they begin to ask questions and thus give their own opening for response.
- a. Can one of the women retell the story? Give them an opportunity. Get another retelling if the first is inaccurate. "Would someone else like to tell the story?" How did the women hear the story? Notice what they include in their retelling, it is a clue to what interests them.
 - b. Let people respond to the Listening Task. Get several contributions.
 - c. Some storyers prefer to have a structured dialog time in which prepared factual questions are asked to test the listeners' comprehension. Later questions should then lead to personal implication and application to their life. (See *Sample Story Session*.)
 - d. If there is reluctance for what the women perceive as Western teaching or preaching, then answer any questions with a story if you are able. For stories that jump ahead to yet uncovered topics or themes, put them off until you come to that part of the Bible story.
 - e. As interest and opportunity begin to grow, begin to ask for and lead in intercessory prayer for the women in the group and their expressed needs. Later you can get them to talk about how God answered the prayers.
 - f. Close with a memory verse, proverb or brief psalm expressing one's need and God's provision for meeting that need or expressing His love.

☞ Asking For Decisions ☞

The primary purpose in sharing the Bible story is to lead listeners to profess their faith in Christ. By publicly professing their faith the listeners demonstrate the work of Christ in their lives. The public profession of faith is a testimony to others in the group who are still undecided. It is helpful for the storyer to know who has reached this point of decision and who has not. Learn to look for cultural ways this decision is communicated.

Early Responders

It may be that along the way various members of the group have come under early conviction because of the stories or issues discussed in the sessions, and are already asking what to do. For those who begin asking early it is wise to test them to see what they already understand about salvation. Do this privately as other members of the group may not be ready to consider such a decision.

If the indications come late in the storying then it could be helpful to encourage those expressing a desire to respond to wait just a bit so that a general invitation can be made to the whole group so that others might respond (if that is appropriate as fear of making an open decision is very real).

While this story set was prepared primarily for acclimatizing hostile or resistant women by letting them see how God expressed His love toward unfortunate women in the Bible stories, there is the underlying intent to evangelize. There is enough information in the stories, memory verses and any discussion the stories may have raised to bring some of the listeners to a point of expressing their faith in Christ as the women did in the stories.

The stories have been soft presentations without preaching to the listeners or forcing on them more than a

limited amount of teaching that directly challenges their worldview. How then to give an opportunity for them to express their faith in Jesus as Savior as a continuation of the good relationship developed through the stories?

One way is to have a review session in which all the key issues related to sin and God's provision for covering sin and forgiving the sinner are revisited.

Another is to use Isaiah 53 as a narrative in which all that was going to happen to Jesus and that which he was going to do are reviewed. He was to take up our infirmities (healing), carry our sorrows (bringing hope where there was none) and take our sin and guilt upon himself, suffering in our place so that it was his punishment that brought us peace with God.

Another would be ask which of the women in the Gospel stories do the listeners identify with? What has God done for them? What does God need to do for them? Do they see themselves as needing God's forgiveness as well as God's healing and blessing? Do they see Jesus acting in God's behalf with God's authority and love? If they had lived in that day, would they, too, have sought Jesus? Would they be willing to seek Jesus today? The Bible says, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks." (Heb 12:25) and again "See to it...that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

While the salvation presentation is often reduced to a series of propositional questions that with the right answers one is said to be saved, many of these women will make an emotional decision of the heart and not of the head. Their heart will be inclined to Jesus, probably first as a great prophet and miracle worker, then also as one who cares by forgiving sin and who changes the unfortunate circumstances of one's life. And that greatest unfortunate circumstance is our broken relationship with the Father who created us.

While it is good to have a group presentation of the Gospel, it is very likely you the storyer will need to follow this up with one-on-one invitations in a private setting. Fear of family retribution may greatly inhibit the women's ability to make a public response of her profession of faith in Christ. The women may not know whom they can trust, even in their own close circles. This needs to be taken into consideration. You may need to ask each woman simply to talk to Jesus in her heart, confessing that she, too, is a sinner who needs God's forgiveness, that she realizes that Jesus loves her and has the authority to forgive her sin, and that he has already paid for her sin, and that forgiveness is hers for the asking, just as the women in the stories sought Jesus' help in their lives. Then in her heart she needs to make a promise to Jesus that as he gives her courage and strengthens her faith she will make known her decision to believe in Jesus as her Savior.

The sinner's prayer is fine for this closure as the two of you (or at most one of two close friends) talk and pray together. Then it would be good to close by praising God for His goodness and for sending Jesus into the world to help us in our great need.

Signaling Belief

If the primary target group is Muslim women in rural areas, there may be a need to indicate different ways to *safely* express one's faith in Jesus. For some women it may mean only a nod of the head at decision time. For others a whispered word in the storyer's ear or a mark on paper can be an alternative way to express their decision. It is always good to have an oral expression or testimony if possible as this serves to strengthen both the believer and those listening. Where persecution is strong, a quiet "heart" decision leading into a changed life and desire for discipleship may be all that is possible.

The Storyer's Own Testimony

The storyer may want to end with her own testimony of how she professed faith in Christ as Savior and what that decision means to her. This sets an example and may trigger the same response in others. Previous experience with inquirers and new believers in the area will suggest what is the best approach to follow.

The New Believer's Turmoil

Realize the turmoil that the new believer may be experiencing. A wonderful thing has happened in her life and she wants to share it but realizes that other family members may not receive the news gladly. Also she has many thoughts and questions about how her life now will be different than it was before. She will need immediate affirmation and support. The sure work of Satan will be to cast doubts over the validity of her decision and to bring immediate opposition to weaken her resolve to follow Christ. Scripture memory is very important to strengthen new believers as a resource they can call up out of their heart.

Prayer For Each Listener Is Essential

The point of decision is critical. The storyer has been praying all along for her own preparation as well as for the women to have open and attentive hearts. Now the prayer is for faith and courage of each listener to do what the Spirit is leading them to do. Pray for each listener by name. Pray for family members known to be opposed to the gospel who might hinder a decision.

Delayed Decisions

Some decisions may be delayed in coming. Never give up hope that the gospel will prevail. Pray for a quiet decision that each listener can make public in due time. Be prepared to repeat key stories if response is slow in coming. A review of the key stories will serve to strengthen new believers and to begin their discipling. It

also gives time for slow responders to think about their decision. Encourage the sharing of testimonies by those who have professed faith in Jesus as Savior.

Backsliding or Recanting

This will happen. Some women may have second thoughts after getting away from the group. Others may come under severe family pressure or persecution. For those who practice folk religion petitions and worship, it may take some time for them to be able to discontinue the practice. Be patient and pray with them. Use appropriate story lessons to strengthen them and to challenge them to rely upon Jesus alone. Those who backslide are not lost to the cause. Be patient with them, continuing to pray for them. The seed has been planted in their hearts.

🌀 Alternative Story Presentation 🌀

There are target groups which may prefer that the Bible story be read. They may signal this by listening more attentively when the story is read rather than told. Being constrained to read the story requires that the story be followed as it is written in the Bible. One of the advantages of telling the story is that it can be shaped a bit for telling. Shaping the story allows for telescoping longer stories into a more compact story. It allows for simplifying some elements like numbers, too many proper names, and repetition. Be sure to retain all the essential elements which contribute to the theme.

Preference for reading or verbatim recitation comes from their previous experience and religious practice. This has been especially reported in some West Africa countries.

🌀 SAMPLE STORY SESSION 🌀

This is a sample storying session illustrating the pre-story dialog and the post-story dialog possibilities. Think about each story and how best to introduce it to the women with whatever background they may need from other Bible stories.

Be prepared to ask some questions to sensitize the listeners to the theme in the story. If working with hostile or resistant women then it may be best just to tell the stories in the beginning, and as their interest in the stories grows, and the relationship with them develops, then begin to add pre-story discussion time to whet their interest and prepare them for the story.

Following the story the intent is not to *teach* the story which they have heard and may understand better than you, but to help the women to think about what the story is saying to them and to internalize in their lives the truths in the story.



✿ A SINFUL WOMAN SEEKS FORGIVENESS ✿

Bible Background: Luke 7:36-50

For the Storyer: There are several issues in this story. One is the comment that the woman had lived a sinful life in that town. Simon apparently knew her reputation. The other issue is that Simon was “checking out” Jesus by inviting him into his home to get a close up look at Jesus. Simon is appalled that Jesus, acclaimed to be a prophet by many, seems not to know that the woman touching him was a sinner, thereby polluting Jesus.

There is also irony in the story as the “good” person is the “bad” person (Simon who neglected the duties of a good host); and the “bad” person is the “good” person (the sinner woman who honors Jesus by her actions). She is obviously very troubled by her sinful past which she has presumably left and it is likely that Jesus had some part in bringing her to conviction of her sin and to repent and change her life.

Now she has an opportunity to repay Jesus and to express her deep affection for his role in changing her life.

Talk About These Things:

1. A proverb says: “Do not judge or you will be judged (Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37).
2. Have you ever been judged by others who watched you? Were they right in their judgment?
3. Do you need forgiveness for something you have done?
4. Do you have a debt too great to repay?
5. What would you do for someone who forgave your greatest debt?
6. Who would you turn to for forgiveness?
7. Recall one of the previous stories in which an act of kindness helped a woman.

Read From the Bible: Luke 7:37-38

Tell the Story:

A SINFUL WOMAN SEEKS FORGIVENESS

One of the Pharisees named Simon had invited Jesus to have dinner with him. Jesus entered the Pharisee's house and was reclining at the table with him. Then a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. She entered the house bringing with her an alabaster jar of perfume. She came to stand behind Jesus at his feet weeping so that her tears began to wet the feet of Jesus. Then she began to wipe the feet of Jesus with her hair, she kissed his feet and poured perfume on Jesus' feet.

When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, "If this man really were a prophet he would know who is touching him, what kind of woman she is—a sinner!"

Jesus knew what he was thinking in his heart and so answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, Teacher," Simon said.

Jesus then told this story, "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him a quite large amount of money, and the other owed a much smaller amount. When it came time to repay the moneylender, neither man had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the biggest debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house but you did not give me any water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has

not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put fragrant oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this that even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace.”

Talk About These Things:

1. What did the woman in the story do?
2. What did Simon think about her?
3. What did Jesus think about her? What do his words tell us about his thoughts?
4. What did Jesus say to Simon?
5. What did Jesus say to the woman?
6. What do you think Jesus could do for you?
7. What could you do for Jesus to show your love?
8. Can you think of a story about forgiveness? Could you tell it to the group?

A Verse to Remember: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9).

❧ RESOURCES FOR STORYING TO WOMEN ❧

1. J. O. Terry, *God & Woman*, 1998.
A resource manual of 90 Bible story lessons specially selected for Muslim women in the Indian sub-continent area. The manual contains an introductory section on women's typical worldview issues which relate to the stories and accompanying lessons.
Supplemental lessons on idolatry are available for use with Hindus. biblestorying@iname.com
2. J. O. Terry, *Heaven Is For Women*, Singapore, 2000.
A collection of 35 Bible story lessons with special focus on Muslim worldview issues in the Indian sub-continent area. Stories are selected and used to present heaven/eternal life as a relationship beginning in this life more than a destination after this life. Lessons begin with God's care and provision for women in the Old Testament and continuing with Jesus' kindness toward women and teaching in the Gospels. biblestorying@iname.com
3. Annette Hall, Producing Mature Fruit, Church Strengthening Ministry, Manila, Philippines, 1999.
A resource manual of evangelism and discipleship lessons originally prepared for use among immigrant Muslim women in France. The lessons are not storying in format but may easily be used with storying when teaching the lessons. biblestorying@iname.com .
3. Benedicte Grima, The Performance of Emotion Among Paxtun Women (*The Misfortunes Which have Befallen Me*), University of Texas Press, 1992. 241p.
Drawing on fieldwork conducted over a nine-year period Grima shows how stories of grief or sadness are a vital medium of exchange through which relationships are formed and exchanged among women in this Muslim culture. This is a study of Paxtun women living in the border area between the Middle East and South Asia.

4. Roberta Standish, "With Women in the West", Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road, MARC. pp 205-208

A helpful reminder of the value of Bible stories telling about Jesus' relating to women in need. Also the value of relationships which are expressed through stories and the Person of Jesus who makes possible a relationship with the Father who, many assume, is far away and to be feared.

5. Helen Watson, Women in the City of the Dead, C Hurst & Co. Ltd., London, 1992.

A collection of tales and life histories told by women who live in the City of the Dead (a graveyard) in Cairo. Each chapter is an introduction to a person, and a story-telling session in which reflects the life or character of the story-teller herself. The author shows how women responded to the stories, and the value they placed on them.

(Review by E. Maxwell adapted from SEEDBED VIII/4, 1993.)

6. Thelma Sangster, The Torn Veil, Marshall Morgan and Scott, Marshall Pickering, 34-42 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FB, 1984.

This is a narrative of the suffering of a young woman torn from her family because of finding Christ as her Savior in a miraculous healing. For those not familiar with the book it is a powerful testimony of faith and endurance in the face of persistent condemnation by a family and culture hostile to faith in Christ.

7. Gien Karssen, Her Name Is Woman, Books 1 & 2, NavPress, 1994.

Excellent studies of the lives of the Bible's women to draw out the conflicts in their lives by exploring the stories and questions the stories have raised about the women's relationship to God.

Each story is coupled with relevant Scripture passages and a list of questions to discuss.

8. P. Newton & M. Rafiqul Haqq, Women In Islam, Voice of the Martyrs, P.O.Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005, U.S.A.

A compilation of Qur'an and Hadith teaching on the status and role of women in pure Islam. 54 pages/paper

9. Christine Mallouhi, Mini-Skirts, Mothers & Muslims, STL Distributors, P.O.Box 300, Carlyle, Cumbria CA3 0Qs, UK. 109 pages/paper

☞ THE MEANING OF BIBLE NAMES IN STORIES ☞

Aaron— <i>bright or shining</i>	Laban— <i>white</i>
Abel— <i>breath or vapor</i>	Lazarus—from <i>Eleazar</i> or <i>God has helped</i>
Abigail— <i>father of joy</i>	Leah— <i>gazelle</i>
Abraham— <i>father of a multitude</i>	Levi— <i>joined</i>
Abram— <i>exalted father</i>	Lot— <i>veil or covering</i>
Adam— <i>man</i>	Mahalath— <i>sickness, anxiety</i>
Ahab— <i>father's brother</i>	Mahlon— <i>sickly</i>
Ahaziah— <i>Jehovah grasps</i>	Martha— <i>lady</i>
Asher— <i>happy</i>	Mary—from <i>Miriam</i> or <i>rebellion</i>
Athaliah— <i>God is exalted</i>	Miriam— <i>rebellion</i>
Bathsheba— <i>daughter of the oath</i>	Moses— <i>draw out</i>
Bilhah— <i>timid, bashful</i>	Nabal— <i>foolish</i>
Boaz— <i>fleetness or strength</i>	Naomi— <i>pleasant</i> (later asked to be called <i>Mara</i> or <i>bitter</i>)
Cain— <i>possession</i>	Naphtali— <i>wrestling</i>
Dan— <i>a judge</i>	Nebaioth— <i>heights</i>
David— <i>well-beloved or commander</i>	Noah— <i>rest or comfort</i>
Elijah— <i>my God is Jehovah</i>	Onan— <i>strong</i>
Eliezer— <i>God is help</i>	Peninnah— <i>pearl</i>
Elisha— <i>God is salvation</i>	Rachel— <i>ewe</i>
Elizabeth— <i>God is my oath</i>	Rahab— <i>wide</i>
Er— <i>watchful</i>	Rebekah— <i>ensnarer</i>
Esau— <i>hairy</i>	Reuben— <i>behold a son!</i>
Esther— <i>a star</i>	Ruth— <i>beloved, a friend</i>
Eve— <i>life</i>	Salmon— <i>shady</i>
Gabriel— <i>man of God</i>	Samuel— <i>sounds like heard by God</i>
Gad— <i>fortune</i>	Sarah— <i>princess</i>
Gehazi— <i>valley of vision</i>	Sarai— <i>contentious, or my princess</i>
Hagar— <i>flight</i>	Shelah— <i>a petition</i>
Ham— <i>black</i>	Shem— <i>name</i>
Hannah— <i>grace</i>	Simon—from <i>Simeon</i> or <i>hearing</i>
Isaac— <i>he laughed</i>	Solomon— <i>peaceful</i>
Ishmael— <i>God hears</i>	Tamar— <i>palm tree</i>
Issachar— <i>rewarded</i>	Terah— <i>it may mean</i>
Jacob— <i>supplanter, one who takes the place of another</i>	
Japheth— <i>enlargement</i>	
Jehoiada— <i>Jehovah knows</i>	
Jehu— <i>Jehovah is he</i>	

Jesus—Jehovah is salvation	<i>hindrance</i>
Jezebel— <i>unmarried or chaste</i>	Uriah— <i>light of Jehovah</i>
Joash— <i>Jehovah is strong</i>	Vashti— <i>best</i>
Joram— <i>Jehovah is exalted</i>	Zebulun— <i>a habitation</i>
Joseph— <i>may he add</i>	Zechariah— <i>whom Jehovah remembered</i>
Judah— <i>praised</i>	Zilpah— <i>dropping</i>
Kilion—(<i>Chilion</i>) <i>wasting away</i>	

Names were often very meaningful in the stories and are given here as a resource for discussion and interest of the listeners.

¹ Gien Karssen, *Her Name is Woman*, Book 1, NavPress, 1994. p. 11.

² Benedicte Grima, *The Performance of Emotion Among Paxtun Women*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1993. p. 81.

³ J.O.Terry, *God and Woman*, International Mission Board, SBC, 1998.

⁴ J.O.Terry, *Heaven is for Women*, International Mission Board, SBC, 2000.