

# The Big God Story

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the rivers, the oceans, the sun, moon, and stars, the trees, the birds, and animals of every kind. Last of all, He created the first man and woman: Adam and Eve. These first people were created by God to be in relationship with Him in a beautiful garden. Sadly, one day Adam and Eve disobeyed God. This sin broke their close relationship with Him, and this sin led to consequences. One consequence was that they had to leave the garden. But God promised that, one day, a Redeemer would come to restore that relationship. This promised Redeemer would be the salvation for everyone. After God made this promise, people began to wait for the promise to be fulfilled.

Only a short time passed before the world had become so evil that God decided to destroy all of mankind with a flood, except for one man who remained righteous and his family. That man's name was Noah. God instructed him to build a giant boat, called an ark, and fill it with animals God would bring to him. After Noah, his family, and the animals were all safely inside the ark, God closed the door and it began to rain. It rained and rained for 40 days. All the evil people drowned, because they weren't in the ark. When the water dried up (after a year), God made a covenant, or promise, with Noah and all of creation to never destroy the world with a flood again. God sealed His covenant by placing a rainbow in the sky so we would always remember His promise. After this, Noah's family had many children and repopulated the earth.

Another man who received a covenant from God was born from Noah's family line. His name was Abraham. God made a special covenant with Abraham, which means that God gave him an everlasting promise. God told Abraham that the nation of Israel would come from his family line. Israel would show others the love relationship between God and mankind, so other nations would want to know God too. God also told Abraham that the promised Redeemer would be born to his family line. But years and years went by, and Abraham's wife never got pregnant. Then, when Sarah was old and had given up hope, she finally had the baby God had promised. God wanted Abraham and Sarah to learn to trust Him even when it took a long time for them to get what they were hoping for.

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, waited 25 years for God to fulfill His promise. Their promised son's name was Isaac. When Isaac grew up, he had a son named Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, which means One Who Strives with God. Then Israel had twelve sons, one of whom was sold into slavery by his brothers. His name was Joseph. Joseph was taken to Egypt and treated unfairly. However, God was taking care of Joseph and had a plan. He allowed Joseph to rise to power under the king of Egypt, called the pharaoh. During a famine, a time without food, Joseph's entire family came

# The Big God Story

to Egypt to get grain from the king's storehouse. Joseph was the one in charge of the food distribution, and because God had put him there, Joseph's family survived! By keeping his family alive during the famine, God's plan kept the line of the Redeemer alive too!

Many years after the time of Joseph, the Hebrew Israelites became slaves to the Egyptians. The Hebrews cried out for a redeemer to save them from their hard labor and unfair treatment. The king of Egypt had made a law that every little Hebrew boy born in Egypt had to be thrown into the Nile River. But Moses' mother saw that her little boy was wonderful when he was born, and she hid him for three months. When he got too big to hide anymore, she made a very brave decision to save her son. She hid him in a basket in the grass of the Nile River. The king's daughter found the baby and decided to raise him as her own son. So Moses grew up as a prince of Egypt. God had chosen Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Moses was one of the people God used to prepare His people for their real Redeemer, who was going to lead them out of their slavery to sin.

Under the leadership of Moses, the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness before entering into the land that God promised to them—a land where they could worship God. When the Israelites were out in the wilderness, God made another covenant. The covenant was given to Moses to give to all of God's people, in order to make them His treasured possession. God also gave them His laws for how to live their lives. But because the people complained and grumbled once God freed them from the Egyptians, they spent the next 40 years wandering in the desert. During this time, a new generation grew up with a new respect for God and His power. They were not tempted to worship false gods, like their fathers once did in Egypt. God gave them miraculous food each day, called manna, and He physically guided them through the desert in the form of a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. God called Joshua to be the leader of this new generation and to lead them into the Promised Land. During years of battle, God led His people to conquer the Promised Land that He set aside for them.

After Joshua, the Israelites got weary of fighting battles and settled down to raise families. They began to forget their relationship with God, and so God raised up other nations to war against them and discipline them. When the people cried out for salvation from their enemies, God gave Israel leaders, called judges, to help fight for them. The Israelites were faithful to God again, for a time, and then they disobeyed again. This kept happening over and over again: forgetting God, being overtaken by other nations, crying out to God, and then victory over their enemy through a judge. This time of the judges lasted for over 450 years. The last two judges were dishonest and made the people angry. They demanded that they have a king like the other

# The Big God Story

nations around them. Despite God's warning that kings would take people's money through taxes, their daughters as wives and slaves, and their sons to wars, the people insisted on having a king.

God's people cried out for a king because they saw that all the other nations had one. God reminded them that having a king would not be good for them, and that He was their King. The people were stubborn and wouldn't listen, so Saul became the first to reign as king. God soon rejected him because of his pride and disobedience. God anointed David as the second king. David was a humble shepherd boy who loved and worshipped God. He is known as a man after God's own heart, not because he was perfect—David made a lot of bad choices in his life—but because he lived in close relationship with God throughout his life.

David's son Solomon became the third and final king of the united 12 tribes of Israel. During the reign of Solomon's son there was rebellion, and the nation split in two: the 10 tribes in the north, called Israel, and two tribes in the south, now named Judah. The lineage of the promised Redeemer followed the tribe of Judah in the south. Israel, in the north, had only evil kings who led their people into great sin. Prophets pleaded with the people to repent of their sin and follow God's plan for them. Israel would not obey or repent and was eventually destroyed by Assyria. Although Judah, in the south, had some good kings, they also had many bad ones. Prophets begged them to see what had happened to their brothers and sisters in the north, but they didn't listen. Judah was eventually captured by the Babylonian Empire because of its disobedience. The city of Jerusalem, the home of God's people, was completely destroyed. Daniel was a teenager in Judah when the Babylonians came. They took him and many other teens as prisoners back to Babylon. They wanted to train these teens to work for the government there. Daniel and three of his friends figured out how they could do their jobs for the Babylonian government while still being faithful to God.

Even while the people of Judah were far from their homes in places like Babylon, some of them kept faith alive. Because they were from Judah, they came to be called Jews. Eventually, Babylon fell to the Persian Empire. Then a man named Xerxes (zerk-sees) became king of Persia. He threw a big party, and he told his queen, Vashti, to come and show off her beauty. But she said no. So he banished her and started looking for a new queen. Through some amazing events, he took a Jewish orphan girl named Esther to be his queen. God used Queen Esther to save His people from death when a powerful man in Persia tried to have them all killed.

Many years after Esther saved the Jews, a Jewish man named Nehemiah was working for another king of Persia. Nehemiah had grown up in Persia

## The Big God Story

and had never been to his homeland of Judah. But Nehemiah asked the king to send him back to his homeland as governor. He wanted to lead the people in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and its walls. Enemies tried to interfere with the rebuilding, but with God's help Nehemiah was able to accomplish what God had sent him to do.

Not long after the time of Nehemiah, something strange happened: God was silent. He was still working and moving in the lives of His people, but He chose not to speak through a prophet, priest, king, or judge. We don't have any biblical record of His words. God's promise was still alive, but it was hidden. Nearly four hundred years passed before the opening words in the New Testament. In the first pages of Matthew and Luke, we read that the promise God made in the garden remained throughout the passing of thousands of years! The moment that had been promised since the garden had finally come true in a small town called Bethlehem. Jesus was born!

The awaited Messiah was here on earth! Jesus became Immanuel, "God with us." He grew up leading a perfect life. He never sinned. He never did anything wrong. When Jesus began His ministry, He chose 12 disciples and taught them about who He was and how they should live in relationship with God and others. He cared for the poor, healed the sick, raised the dead, and was a friend to the outcast. He lived and proclaimed God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus came to earth to teach people and to show them in person what God was like. But He also came in order to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin. His death on the cross made it possible for God to forgive our sins, and restore our relationship with Him! Jesus was and is the promised Redeemer! The story does not end with Jesus' death. It gets even better! Jesus rose from the dead! His love was so great that even death did not have power over Him! Then, Jesus went to heaven and sent us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to live out His charge to us: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). In the early church, people like Peter and Paul were led by God's Spirit to boldly teach the things Jesus told them. Today, the Holy Spirit continues to work in each of our lives, allowing us to be a part of His story until He returns.

One day, Jesus will return in victory riding on a white horse to announce that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Those who love God and have accepted His Son, Jesus, will live with Him in heaven forever, in relationship with God—the way it all began in the garden. The way it should be. And from that day on and for all of eternity, we will be with the promised Lord and Redeemer, forever and ever. Amen!