

GOD'S Story



FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE PROMISED RETURN

Stories retold by Becki Dudley

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Before you read this book...

“In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New the Old is revealed.”

—St. Augustine

While in place from the beginning, God’s redemptive plan for mankind was revealed over the course of time. It is in that light that the stories in this book are presented. The reader will get a small glimpse into the lives, times, and cultures of the people whose stories are told, some of whom lived thousands of years before Jesus — long before an understanding of His life and purpose were fully understood. So as you engage with this story, keep in mind that the narrative builds to a climax, just as it does in the Bible.


The stories have been paraphrased by the author. However, direct Scripture quotes are often used, having been included for the clarity and authority of God’s Word. These are italicized, with biblical references, throughout the book.

This is not an exhaustive retelling or commentary on the Bible in its entirety, but rather a selection of stories from God’s Word that highlight His redemptive plan for a fallen world.

Special Features:

- » Section summaries entitled *Threads of Hope* are included to help tie the story together
- » Helpful definitions at the end of each section
- » Designed for families and individuals of all ages; includes simple summaries for younger readers
- » Beautiful illustrations and maps.
- » Scripture references for each story

It is the author’s hope that this book will remind you of God’s goodness, faithfulness, and His sacrifice for us. May you, your family, and your faith be blessed by *God’s Story*.



Look for the summaries for younger readers. Quick and easy to read, they present each story in a simple way to engage a child’s interest.

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Preface

We live in a world of wonder and beauty. Full of stars and planets, animals and people, flowers, trees, oceans, and so much more! But as amazing as these things are, none have the power to create themselves out of nothing. You see, in time past, the universe as we know it did not exist. It all began when God chose to create. With power and creativity, He spoke the natural world into existence.

It is hard for us to comprehend that kind of power.

God is a supernatural being. He is eternal, not created, having no beginning or end. God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They co-exist and work together as one and are known as the Trinity. The prophet Isaiah had a vision (Isaiah 6:1–3) that gives us a tiny glimpse of God’s greatness:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

To be holy is to be absolutely good and pure. God does not choose to act in a way that is good and pure — His very being is good and sinless. He cannot think or act or be anything other than good. This is what sets Him apart from everything else that exists. And this is also why He must stand against that which is not good.

Mankind is unable to fully understand God, but thankfully the Bible teaches us enough about Him to understand what we need to know. The word **Bible** comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means “books.” The Bible is a collection of many different books, similar to a library. This collection includes different genres, such as history, poetry, and prophecy. The words in these books were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2 Timothy 3:16), which explains why the Bible is known as *God’s Word*. When put together, all these books tell **God’s Story**.

The best way to understand the Bible is to read and study the whole collection again and again over your lifetime. It is the best-selling book of all time. It has been printed in hundreds of languages and is loved the world over. While the Bible may be ancient, it never gets old! Its words are as true and powerful today as they were a thousand years ago.

This book is just a small sample of the Bible’s riches. It highlights the big story of the Bible — God’s redemptive plan in response to the sin and fall of mankind.

Redemption is the main theme that weaves its way throughout this story, from the Garden of Eden to the Cross of Christ. This has often been referred to as the *scarlet thread of redemption*.

We hope you enjoy this miraculous, true story.

Part One: Of Darkness and Light

A battle wages on the earth today, at least as old as the ground upon which we walk. It began when an angelic being challenged the one true God.

This being is commonly referred to as Satan in the Bible. However, there are many passages that assign other names to him. The evil one, the devil, the father of lies, the adversary, dragon, serpent, and ruler of the world are a few of them. These names give an apt description of his character. He is evil.

Satan was created by God and was a high-ranking guardian cherub. He was uniquely beautiful. But his heart became proud, and he fancied himself God's equal. He turned on his Creator and began the very long war against God.

Satan has a certain amount of power and uses it in an attempt to turn people away from God. Satan is clever and often works in the shadows. But he is also a master of disguise and can pretend to be an angel of light. Thankfully, he is not as powerful as God.

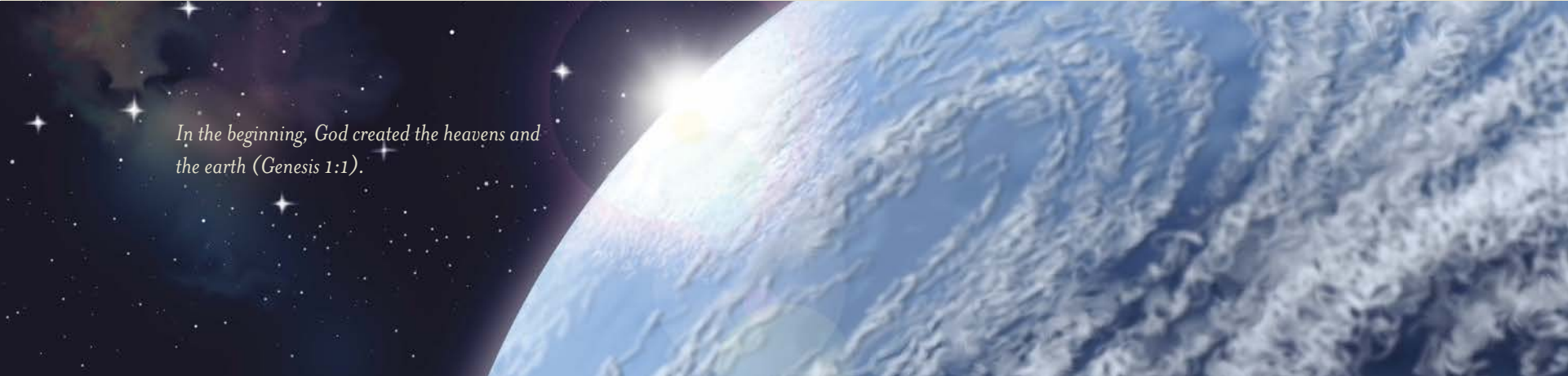
God has chosen to allow Satan to have influence over this world for a time. We may not understand God's reasons for this, but we can trust in His wisdom. At the very least, by allowing Satan to influence the earth, people will have the opportunity to understand for themselves the true nature of God and His enemy, of good and of evil.

As you read *God's Story*, you will learn that Satan's fate has already been decided. One day in the future he will be destroyed for good, and evil will no longer exist. Until then, we would do well to remember that he is an enemy of God and mankind.

Satan entices people to sin but cannot force anyone to do anything. God has given people free will to make their own decisions. Thankfully, God also understands our human weaknesses and has made forgiveness and restoration possible. Much will be said about this as you read through this redemptive story, which culminates on a cross outside of Jerusalem.

The contrast between God and Satan, between darkness and light, could not be more clear. One seeks to give life and abundance, and the other to bring death and destruction (John 10:10).

The Dawning of Time



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

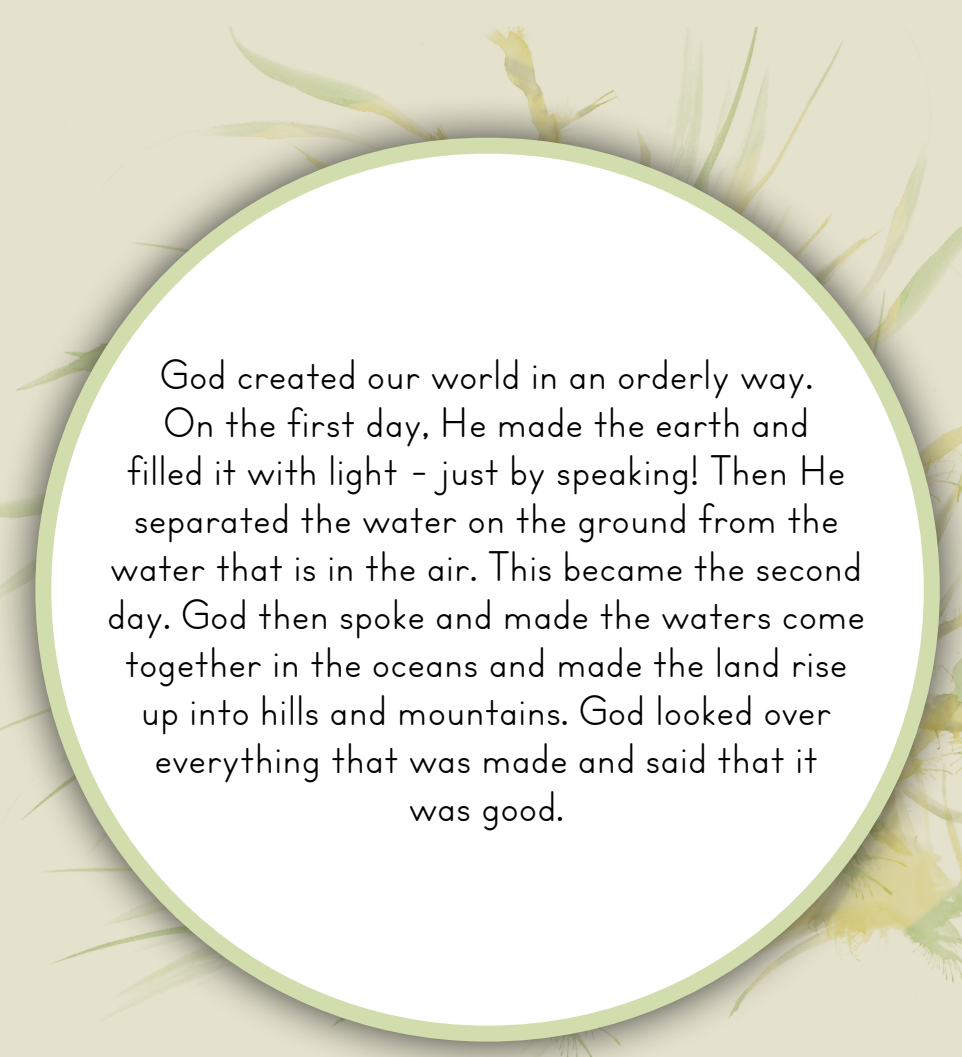
In the beginning, the earth was nothing like what we see today. It was shapeless, lifeless, and empty. Imagine a world without land or light or living things. There was only a dark and barren ocean. But the spirit of God hovered over this watery canvas. And where God is, there is life and purpose. He would create something incredible in this place. Something altogether amazing. Something that only He could do. And this creation would be a stunning display of His glory.

The appearance of light was part of God's plan for shaping this masterpiece. He simply spoke and this light appeared. In an instant, the darkness was exposed. And He called the light "day," and the darkness He called "night."

Then He created a space between the waters of the earth and the waters of the heavens. He called this space "sky." Today it is also known as the atmosphere. The atmosphere contains oxygen and other gases. It is an important part of the water and weather cycles, and it acts as a filter for the radiation produced by the sun. Without the sky, life on earth would be impossible.

Next, God directed the flow of all that water to one location and dry land to appear everywhere else. He called the dry land "earth" and the waters "seas." With perfect skill and artistry, God was shaping the world.

» Genesis 1:1–10



God created our world in an orderly way. On the first day, He made the earth and filled it with light - just by speaking! Then He separated the water on the ground from the water that is in the air. This became the second day. God then spoke and made the waters come together in the oceans and made the land rise up into hills and mountains. God looked over everything that was made and said that it was good.

Beauty and Purpose


After forming the sky, oceans, and land, God filled these spaces with life.

A wide variety of plants sprouted from the earth. Trees, herbs, and grasses in diverse shades of green dotted the landscape. These plants yielded seeds after their own kind. This was an amazing design feature that made sure the plants could reproduce themselves. Not only were the plants beautiful, they would provide a steady supply of food and oxygen for the creatures that would soon come. God was creating a habitat that would last.

Next, He made the sun, moon, and stars. People are drawn to the sky and can't help gazing at its vast beauty. But it has practical purposes also. From the earliest times, people learned to measure their days by sunlight, and weeks and months by the changing moon. This knowledge helped them know when to plant and when to harvest their crops. Also, the stars form constellations that have served as guides for people traveling by land or by sea. They are like a sparkling map in the sky.

» Genesis 1:11–19

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (Psalm 19:1–4).



After creating heaven and earth and filling them with light, God spoke again and began calling plants and seeds to life. Growing things began to rise up and thrive. Out of the rich soil came beautiful flowers, delicious plants for vegetables, fruit trees, and more. This wondrous evening and morning of creation became the third day. God then placed the sun, moon, and stars up in the sky. These would light the world and help us mark days and nights, months, special times, and the seasons. This was His fourth day of creating.

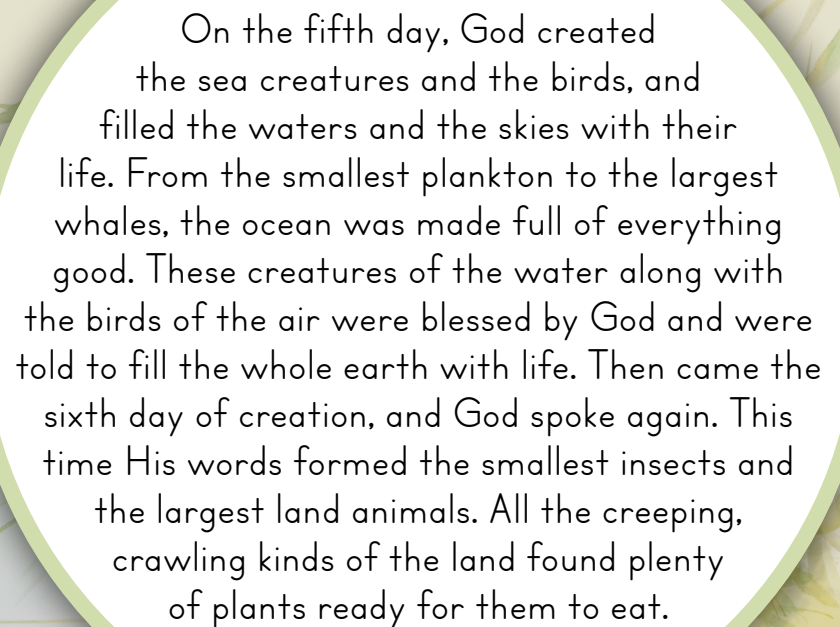
The Animal Kingdom

Next, God created a variety of aquatic creatures, from tiny snails to great big whales. God also made every kind of flying animal and pelicans, puffins, pigeons, parrots, and oh so many more! Birds of many colors, shapes, and songs took flight. Then He filled the earth with every kind of insect, amphibian, reptile, and mammal.

It must have been something to hear the singing, snorting, splashing, barking, roaring, buzzing, clomping, and chomping sounds of this wild new ecosystem. It was the world's very first "nature preserve." These animals would drink the water and breathe the oxygen from the first days of creation. They would eat the plants that came after that. Then they would "fertilize" the ground to help the next generation of plants grow strong.

Water, land, oxygen, plants, and living creatures thrived together. The sea, sky, and land were brimming with life. It was a miraculous accomplishment.

» Genesis 1:20–25



On the fifth day, God created the sea creatures and the birds, and filled the waters and the skies with their life. From the smallest plankton to the largest whales, the ocean was made full of everything good. These creatures of the water along with the birds of the air were blessed by God and were told to fill the whole earth with life. Then came the sixth day of creation, and God spoke again. This time His words formed the smallest insects and the largest land animals. All the creeping, crawling kinds of the land found plenty of plants ready for them to eat.



Made in His Image

God saved His greatest creation for last. He made man in His own image. It can be hard to understand what that means since we have never seen God. But here are a few things to consider.

Human beings can think and act in ways that animals cannot. We feel emotions. We have imaginations and creative abilities. We can communicate thoughts and feelings and ask questions. We have the capacity for wisdom. We have the ability to discern right from wrong. These abilities were not given to animals but are a reflection of God's image in mankind.

Though we have a natural body, being created in the image of God means we also have a spiritual nature. It is with our spirit that we can "connect" with God through prayer. It is with our spirit that we come to understand spiritual things.

And it is with our spirit that we can come to love and trust our Creator. No, we cannot know everything about God. But we can know enough to change our hearts and enrich our lives.


Adam was created first. His physical body was formed, and then God fashioned Eve from one of Adam's ribs. He chose to make her in this unique way to represent the unique bond shared by the man and the woman. They were one flesh, equal in value, and joined by God's design and blessing to perfectly complement one another. They were naked before their Creator, just like the animals. But they were not embarrassed or ashamed.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

In other words, God gave them authority over His creation, charging them to take good care of it. Their job was to reflect God's glory and goodness everywhere they went and to teach their children to do the same.

It was a very good plan.

» Genesis 1:26–31, 2



Everything on earth had been created by God's spoken word. Well, everything had been created except people. While it was still the sixth day of creation, God formed the first person, a man called Adam. He took the dust and shaped it into a man and breathed life into him. Adam was made in the image of God. Then God formed Eve from one of Adam's ribs. God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to have children and to rule over the earth and its creatures.

Between Two Trees

The LORD planted a garden in the east of Eden. It was the most beautiful place on earth, a sanctuary filled with an abundance of beautiful plants and trees. Interesting animals were everywhere. Adam and Eve were in the Garden, and God met with them there.

A river flowed through Eden, providing water for every living thing. From there it divided into four branches that watered the land outside the sanctuary, making life possible there too. One day Adam and Eve would leave the Garden, but for now, the Garden was home. They were safe there in the loving presence of their Creator. They were healthy, happy, and free.

Now, there were two unique trees in the center of the Garden, the only ones of their kind. They were called the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam he could eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That fruit was forbidden. God told him that if he ate of it, he would die. At this point in time, nothing had ever died. Not a plant. Not an animal. Nothing.

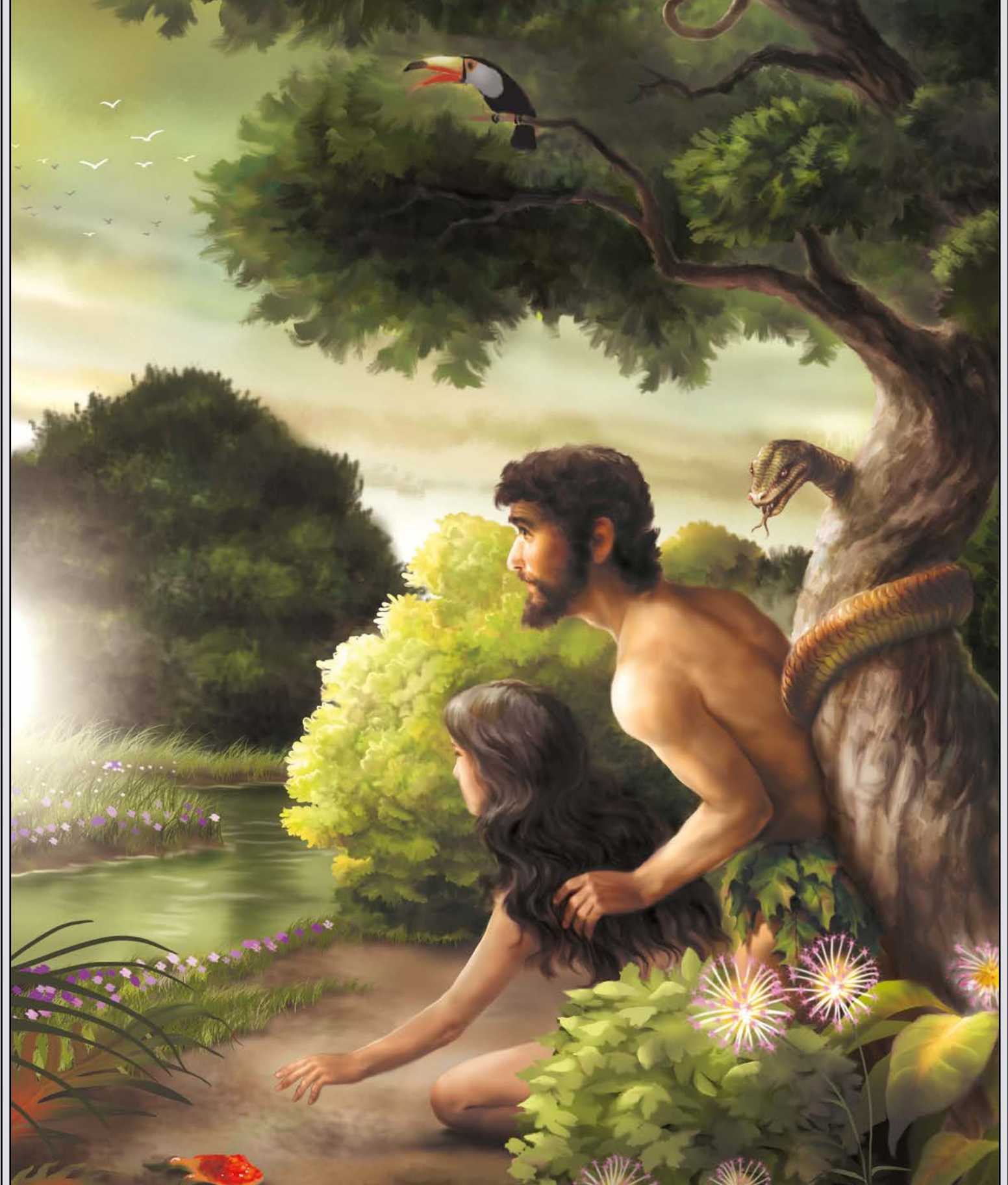
If they ate of that tree, everything would change. And not for the better.

God wanted His children to love and trust Him, but He did not force them to. Genuine love and trust must be freely given. Adam and Eve were not prisoners or puppets. They had the freedom to choose for themselves how to live.

» Genesis 2:8–16



When the seventh day came, God rested from all His creative work. It was after this that He planted a garden in an area called Eden. There was a river for fresh water flowing through the Garden, and it was filled with fruit trees and everything good that Adam and Eve would need to live there. Here they would take care of the Garden, and here they would live in perfect peace. There was no suffering and no sorrow, only joy. However, there was one tree in the garden that they were not supposed to eat from. This was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.



Hiding from God

There was another presence in the garden. Disguised as a serpent, Satan spoke to Eve. Slyly, smoothly, he would try to convince her to eat the fruit God had forbidden. He knew it would cause sadness, pain, and even death one day. But Satan cared nothing for her.

And he was very clever. First, he pretended to be something he was not. A simple serpent. A creature that Eve would have had no reason to fear at that time. Remember, nothing bad had ever happened. No one had ever been harmed by a serpent.

Next, he planted a seed of doubt in her mind. He said, “Did God actually say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden’?”

Satan wanted Eve to focus on the one thing God had forbidden instead of all the good things He had given her. If he could get her to do that, there was a good chance she would start to doubt God’s word. But Eve knew what God had said. She told the serpent that if they ate of that tree they would die.

“You will not die, for God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened! You will be like God, knowing good and evil,” Satan said. Why shouldn’t she know both good and evil? Shouldn’t she decide for herself what was right and what was wrong for her?

Eve had a choice — either trust the word of her Creator or the word of this clever creature. Remember, Adam and Eve had been told to rule over God’s creation. She had the authority to send the serpent away. But sadly, that is not what happened. She took a bite of the fruit. At first it tasted good, so she gave some to Adam. Adam had heard God’s warning, but he chose to eat the fruit also. And the knowledge of good and evil entered their bodies. Sin became a part of them.

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they experienced guilt and shame for the first time. Their sin was now exposed. They sewed fig leaves together for clothing, but this paper-thin attempt to cover their guilt was useless. So, when God came looking for them, they hid among the trees.

Now, God already knew what they had done and where they were hiding. He knew they were afraid. There would be consequences for their decision. But they needed to know they could still come to Him. So He called out for Adam, saying, “Where are you?”

Adam replied, “I heard you in the garden and I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.” Then Adam and Eve confessed what they had done, but their confession was laced with blame for another. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.

In the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve was a serpent. This was no ordinary snake, but the evil one called Satan in the form of a snake. Satan came to trick Adam and Eve to see if he could get them to betray God. First, He spoke with Eve, asking her about the forbidden tree. Then the snake lied and said that what God said wasn’t true. Surely, they wouldn’t die if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, Eve ate of the fruit then gave some to Adam, who also ate it. But soon all they felt was shame in this first sin.

» Genesis 3:1–13

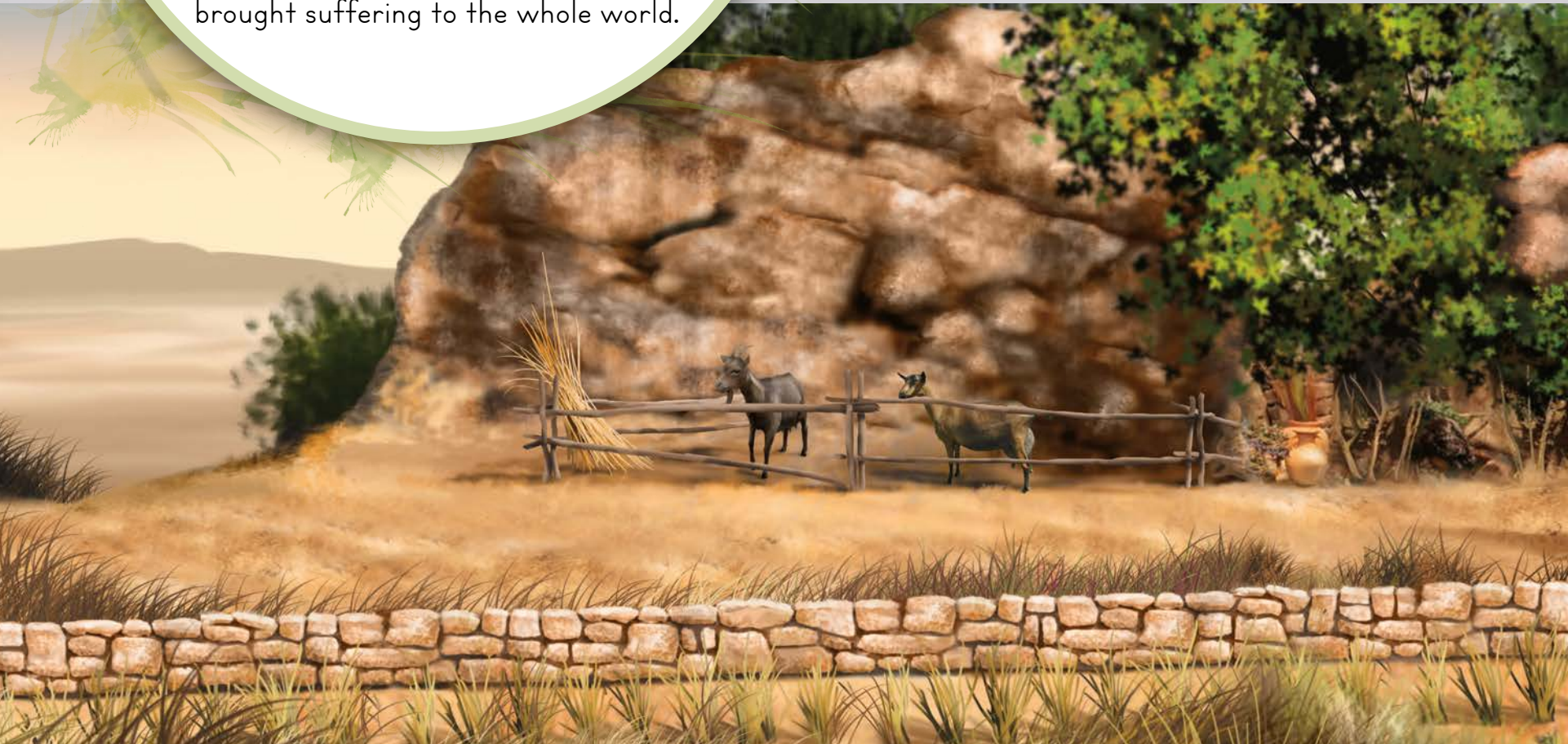
The Aftermath

God's response was both just and merciful. The serpent had wanted to be exalted above God, so God cursed him to spend the rest of his life slinking along the ground. And his eventual destruction was foretold. A Savior would come one day who would crush his evil head.

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel'" (Genesis 3:14–15; NIV).

God told Eve that she would experience pain in childbirth. This pain would be a reminder that disobeying God has unpleasant consequences.

After Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, they felt guilt for the first time. When He found them, they were hiding in the Garden. Because of his deception, the serpent was cursed by God to crawl on his belly. Because of her part, Eve would have pain whenever she gave birth to a child. And finally, Adam would be punished by having to work hard to harvest their food from the ground. Then both Adam and Eve were told to leave the beauty and peace of the Garden of Eden. They lost everything because of their sin that brought suffering to the whole world.



God told Adam that the ground would now be cursed because he had chosen to listen to his wife instead of God. From that point on, Adam would struggle to make a living from the earth.

Adam and Eve had enjoyed a relationship of harmony and mutual respect. But going forward, there would be times of conflict in their marriage. Their perfect partnership had become a casualty of sin. Finally, they would have to leave Eden. God did not want people to live forever with a sinful nature, and that is what would have happened if they had also eaten of the tree of life.

Adam and Eve would eventually die as a result of living in a cursed world. But first they would have an opportunity to live and to see many generations of their family live outside the Garden. And while they might still desire to reflect God's goodness and righteousness going forward, it would be much harder to do. Sin had become a part of them. They would fight temptation daily. And so would everyone who lived after them.

This may sound like a hopeless situation, but it was not. Even though Adam and Eve had broken their perfect relationship with God, He did not abandon them. Fig leaves did not provide adequate protection for Adam and Eve, so God made them sturdy clothing out of animal skins. This was the first time in history that blood was shed. Animals had to die so that the sin of man could be covered. How difficult it must have been for God to take the life of these beautiful animals He had recently created. He offered the very first sacrifice. And because of His great love, it would not be His last.

» Genesis 3





Life on the Outside

So Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden, and they headed into a wild and cursed landscape. It was an unknown land with unknown dangers. The first son born to them was named Cain. He grew up to be a farmer and raised crops from the ground. They had another son and named him Abel. He became a shepherd.

One year, when it was time for the harvest, Cain and Abel both offered a sacrifice to God. Cain chose to offer some of his crops as a gift to the LORD, but Abel offered the most perfect firstborn lamb from his herd.

God saw into their hearts and understood the motivation behind their gifts. He was pleased with Abel's sacrifice — it was like the one He Himself had made for Adam and Eve. He knew how hard it was for Abel to give up his little lamb. On the other hand, God was not satisfied with Cain's offering. This made Cain very angry. But God told him he would be accepted if he did the right thing and warned him to take control of his emotions.

Cain did not listen to God. Instead, he let his anger and jealousy grow to the point that he did something terrible. He convinced Abel to walk with him out to a field, and there, Cain killed him.

God gave Cain a chance to own up to what he had done. He asked him, "Where is your brother Abel?" But Cain would not confess or repent. Instead, he told God he didn't know where Abel was.

God replied, "What did you do? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground. So now you will be cursed from the ground and it will no longer produce crops for you."

What God had seen in Cain's heart was proved true by Cain's actions. He killed his brother out of jealousy. He had no remorse for what he had done and argued with God about his punishment. Ironically, he feared suffering the same fate he had inflicted on his brother. But even though Cain had shown no mercy to Abel, God showed mercy to Cain by putting a mark of protection on him so that he would not be killed. He would have time to consider his ways.

Then Cain fled to a faraway land. Away from Eden, away from his family, and away from the presence of God.

» Genesis 4

In time, after they left the Garden, Adam and Eve became the parents of two boys. Their oldest, Cain, grew up to be a farmer, and the younger son, Abel, grew up to be a shepherd. They both brought a sacrifice to the Lord. Cain brought something he had grown, and Abel brought an animal from his flock. Looking at their hearts, God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. This made Cain angry and jealous. In his anger, he killed his own brother and then lied to God about it. Even then, God showed mercy to Cain.

Two Paths

Cain's story is a sad reminder of how one sin can lead to another. His pride led to jealousy. His jealousy led to uncontrolled anger, which led to him killing his brother. Finally, he lied. At any point along the way, Cain could have repented and stopped this sad series of events. But he did not. He would rather walk away from all he had known than admit his own guilt. The roots of sin run deep.

He eventually settled in a land to the east of Eden. He built a city and had many children and grandchildren. His descendants were builders, musicians, and craftsmen who went on to build even more cities. Cain's influence was spreading in that part of the world, but sadly, it was an influence that did not include God. He led his family to pursue fame, prosperity, and personal pleasure instead. Not surprisingly, with each new generation, sin and evil grew and prospered.

Cain had made his choice. He would not submit to the will and rule of God. So it is no surprise that he and his descendants were not spreading the good image of God anywhere. Instead, they were spreading selfishness, pride, anger, and violence.

Adam and Eve must have felt a great deal of regret as they experienced the painful consequences of their sin. One son was dead, and the other was lost to them. But Eve conceived again and gave birth to another son.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters (Genesis 5:1–4).



Cain and Abel chose different pathways. The one path led Abel closer to God, while Cain walked away from God and His ways. Soon Cain's family followed his rebellious heart. His parents, Adam and Eve, eventually had a new child they named Seth. Seth grew up showing respect for God and His ways, just as Abel had. And it was through the family of Seth that the promised Savior would come. All people have the same choice to make as Cain and Abel and Seth did.

When Seth was born, Eve said, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel." With this child came hope for a new beginning.

Seth's family would worship God. After his son Enosh was born, people first began to call on the name of the LORD. It would be through the line of Seth that God would fulfill the promise He had made in the Garden. One day, long in the future, a descendant of Seth would crush the head of the enemy, defeating Satan once and for all.

Adam and Eve lived for many more years and had many more children. God allowed them to see several generations of grandchildren before they died. He blessed them even as they lived in a world broken by their sin.

Cain and Seth offer examples of two very different ways to live. One led his family away from God, and the other led his family toward God.

» Genesis 4–5

» 1 John 3:11–12

Thread of Hope


God is the giver and sustainer of life. He is holy and altogether different than humans.

Mankind was created in the image of God, who is perfectly righteous. Until they sinned, Adam and Eve were righteous also. This gave them the right to live forever in God's holy presence. But sadly, Adam and Eve chose another path. Satan entered the Garden and tempted Eve to disobey God. She listened to him and ate the fruit. Then she invited her husband to eat it also, and he did.

Because they sinned, Adam and Eve would have to leave the Garden and God's life-sustaining presence. They would have to live in a world that was cursed, and they would eventually die a natural death. But God had a plan to spare them from eternal death. He had promised in the Garden that one day Eve's offspring would crush the head of the enemy. That promise would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But until He came, God would mercifully allow the sacrificial death of animals to stand in the place of humans. One life for another, their scarlet blood pointing to the perfect sacrifice that was yet to come.

Even in a cursed world, Adam and Eve could still know God. And they could choose to love and obey Him. But sadly, they could also know evil and could choose to love and obey it as well. They would be faced with that choice for the rest of their lives. And so would everyone who lived after them. Cain and Seth serve as examples of these two choices.

- ☞ People who follow the path of Cain will insist on deciding for themselves what is right and what is wrong. They will not respect what God says about a matter. Instead, they will follow their own thoughts, feelings, and desires that have been distorted by sin. They will seek the honor and glory of mankind. This path leads to everlasting death (Proverbs 14:12).
- ☞ People who follow the path of Seth will desire to live in a way that honors God. They will accept that He is the supreme being who knows what is best. They will accept His instruction along with His love and His blessing. They will love Him in return and seek His honor and glory instead of man's. Even so, they will still fall short at times. On this path, God provides atonement for sin. This path leads to everlasting life (John 3:16).



glo·ry	of great honor, fame, or importance
ho·ly	perfectly good, pure, set apart from that which is not perfectly good or pure
of·fer·ing	a gift or donation
a·tone	to make up for, or to make something right again



A Flood Is Coming!

There were likely millions of people living on the earth by the time Noah came along. It had been over 1,000 years since Adam and Eve had left the Garden. Sadly, by this time, the hearts of almost everyone alive had turned cold toward God. More people had chosen the path of Cain than the path of Noah's ancestor Seth. Sin and wickedness prevailed on the earth. Satan must have been pleased.

Having seen enough, God was about to intervene in history. Noah was not a perfect man, but he walked with the LORD. He was a man of integrity and a preacher of righteousness. God told Noah He was going to send a Flood to clear the earth of corruption. Water would cover even the tallest mountains. It would wash away all evidence of man's rebellion.

God told Noah to build a large boat (or ark). The Ark would shelter Noah's family and a selection of animals during the Flood. This project took many years to complete, but Noah trusted God and did everything He said. When the time came, Noah and his wife, along with their three sons and their wives, entered the Ark. Then God closed the door, shutting them safely inside. There were eight people on board, along with male and female pairs of the animal kinds.

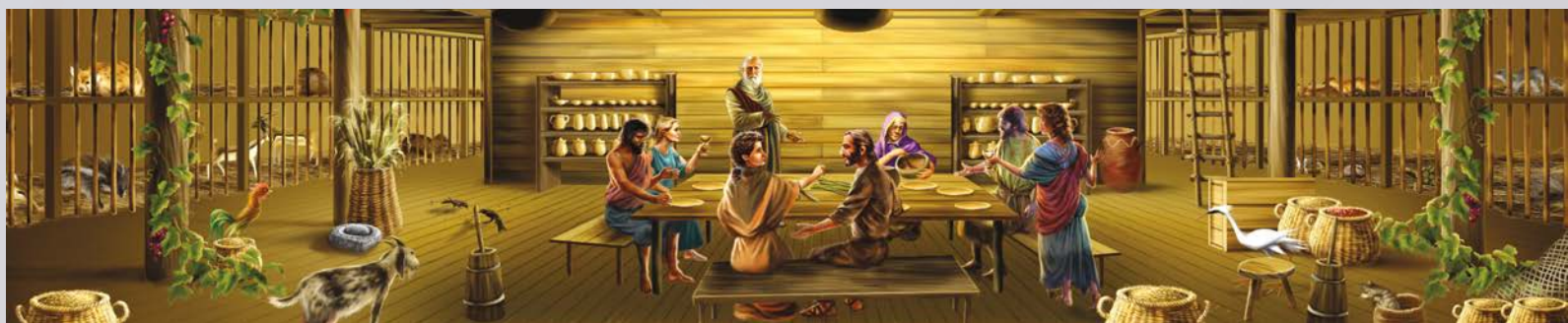
Then water burst forth from underground springs, and rain fell from the sky. It was a hard rain that did not stop for 40 days and nights. By this time, the earth was blanketed in water, just as it had been on the first day of creation. And every living thing on the land perished.

Noah and his family spent the next several months at sea. They were safe and had everything they needed. And no doubt, they were very thankful to be alive. Finally, the water began to recede. They must have been overjoyed when they began to see mountaintops peeking out of the water.

» Genesis 6-7, 8:1-5

» 2 Peter 2:5

Over one thousand years had passed since Adam and Eve left Eden. Millions of people lived in the world, but few remained who loved God. But God saw Noah, one who stayed true to Him. And God told Noah that a Flood was coming to cover the whole world. These waters were coming because of all the evil. Noah and his family would need to build an Ark, a large boat, for them and the creatures of the earth. And when they finished, a rain began to fall. Noah, his family, and the animal pairs were carried safely on the Ark.





A Fresh Start

Eventually the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Noah watched and waited. He waited for the landscape to appear. He waited for the ground to dry out. He waited for trees and plants to sprout and grow. But mostly, he waited for God's instruction. And when the time was right, God told Noah to leave the Ark.

It must have been wonderful to walk on dry land again. And to find fertile ground for crops and space for their family to grow. Imagine watching the animals scamper, run, and climb as they explored their new environment. What a joyful sound they must have made! Hope for a fresh start was all around.

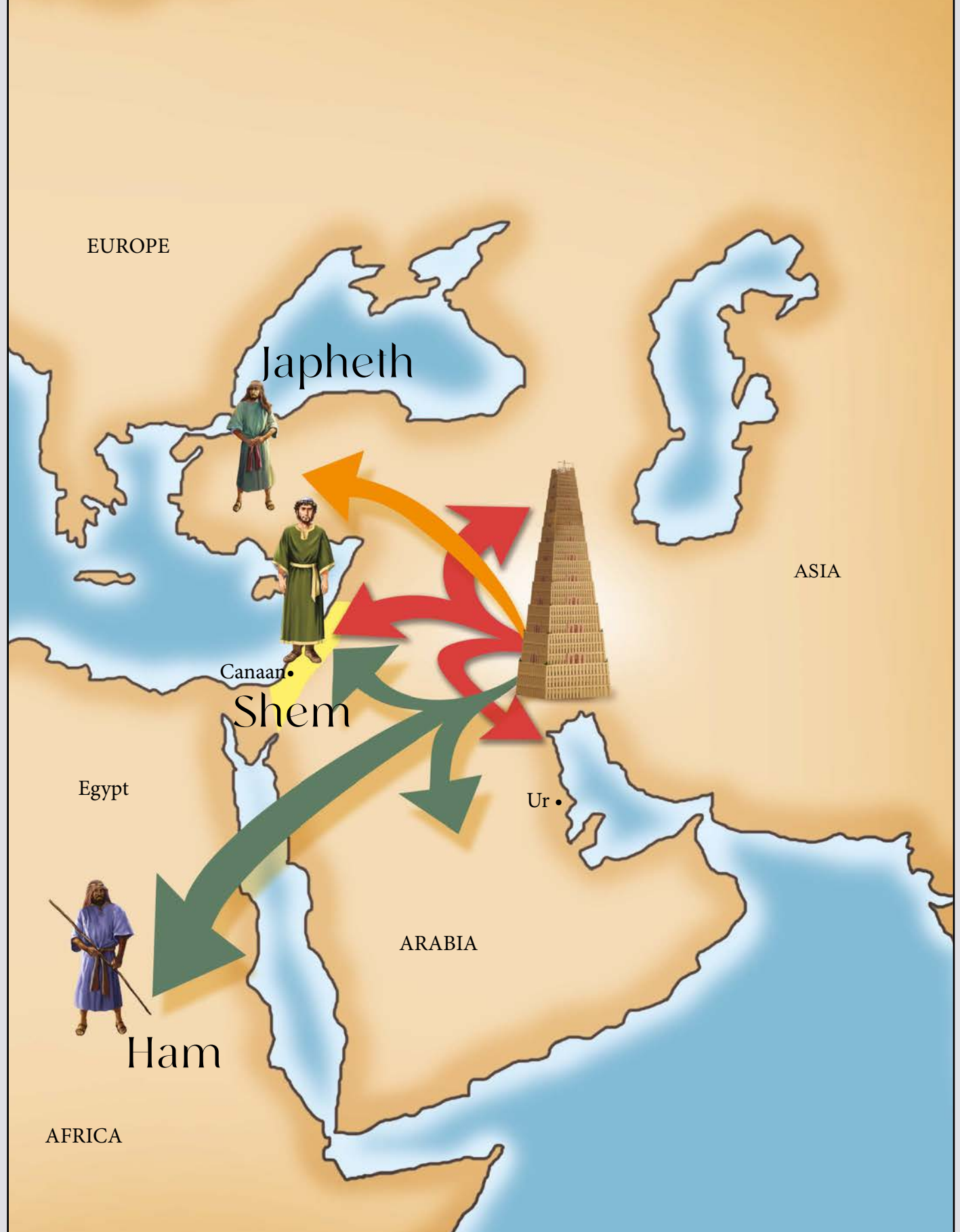
The first thing Noah did was build an altar and prepare a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, for He had saved them from the Flood. Then God blessed Noah and his sons. And just as He had instructed Adam and Eve so many years ago, He told them to be fruitful and multiply. He gave them a new chance to carry His good image to the ends of the earth.

God told Noah that so long as the earth remained, there would be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night. He would never send another flood to wash away man's wickedness. Instead, He gave Noah instructions for dealing with man's sinful nature. For the time being, people would be responsible for conducting their own justice.

Then God placed a rainbow in the clouds. It was a sign of His promise to never again destroy the earth with water. Still today, rainbows serve to remind God's people of His power, His protection, and His promise.

» Genesis 8–9

After the heavy rains stopped and the water began drying up, the Ark of Noah found a resting place on the mountains of Ararat. When he and his family could finally step outside, they offered a sacrifice to God. This was to give thanks to God for saving them and the creatures of the world. God made a promise that the earth would never be flooded like this again. This promise was marked by a rainbow in the clouds. Rainbows are reminders of God's promise still today.



Pride Meets Providence

God had told Noah and his family to migrate over the earth. But Noah's sons and their families found a pleasant plain in the land of Shinar (also known as Babylonia) and decided to settle there instead. They did not want to separate and move to unknown lands. They wanted to stay together. They wanted to decide for themselves where to live.

So they built a city and began construction on a tall tower. This ancient skyscraper was the first of its kind. It was a monument to their prideful rebellion. They said, "Let's build a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens. We will make a great name for ourselves here instead of spreading out over the earth."

It had not taken long for Noah's family to repeat the sins of their ancestors. The LORD knew that the intent of their hearts was evil. They had to be stopped or soon the world would be full of wickedness again.

At this time, all of Noah's descendants spoke the same language. This made it easy for them to stick together. So God confused their tongues. Suddenly, different families began speaking different languages. Imagine their confusion and frustration as they tried to understand one another. It became hard to get along and impossible to work together. Their big city dream was finished. This city came to be known as "Babel," which means confusion.

The families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth spread out in every direction according to their new languages. And as they walked away from Babel, confusion went with them. They would go on to settle various parts of the earth. They would build other cities and civilizations. At the same time, they created new and various false "gods" that were more to their liking — gods they believed they could control. The worship of these false gods often required evil acts and sacrifices that were inspired by Satan, the great deceiver.

This is how the different nations of the world began. God saw to it that His plan to populate the whole earth would be followed one way or another, while the plans of men came to nothing.

» Genesis 11



Noah and his family were supposed to fill the earth with their families and their faith. However, when they found land that seemed pleasing, they stopped traveling. And worse, after many years, Noah's descendants decided to build a tower to the sky to bring fame to themselves, but God saw their hearts and knew this tower would only increase their pride. Because they all spoke one language, He mixed up their languages so they would only be able to speak to a small group of people. Soon everyone went out from this city now known as Babel to fill the whole earth with people as God intended.

Out of a Far Country

Ten generations later, Terah (a descendant of Shem) lived in Mesopotamia with his three sons — Abram, Nahor, and Haran. They lived in Ur, a prosperous city near the Euphrates River. There were nice homes, gardens, markets, libraries, schools, and temples in Ur. The people who migrated here had created a fine city to live in. But they worshiped false gods.

God wanted mankind to understand that the idols they worshiped were not really gods at all. He is the one true God, and He wanted people to know it. So He set out to create a nation of people who would do just that. This nation would begin with Terah's son Abram.

One day, God spoke to Abram. Abram had surely heard stories of a God who had spoken to his ancestor Noah. So when he heard this voice for himself, he paid attention.

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3).

Abram listened and obeyed. God led him to the land of Canaan, only to find that the descendants of Ham had previously settled the land and created their own false gods. But God told Abram to settle there, so that is what he did.

One day, Abram asked the LORD how he would become a great nation since he and his wife, Sarai, had been unable to have children. Then the LORD told Abram to look at the night sky and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars — if you can even count them. That's how many descendants you will have.”

Abram believed the LORD. And that pleased the LORD. God entered into a covenant with him and gave him a new name, Abraham, which means “father of many nations.” He also gave Abraham's wife, Sarai, the new name Sarah because she would be the mother of nations. Together, they would form a new nation of people, and the LORD would be their God.

Then God told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in another land for 400 years. After that, they would inherit the land of Canaan. So Abraham knew that the fulfillment of God's promise would be a long time coming. Faith does not always produce an immediate reward.

» Genesis 12, 15, 17

» Joshua 24:2



Many years after Babel, and many miles from there in a land called Ur, God spoke to a man named Abram. God called Abram to leave his home and family to follow God's plan. God wanted to make Abram, his wife, Sarai, and their descendants into a nation that would bless the whole world. Though Abram and his wife were old and had no children, God promised them a child. God changed the man's name to Abraham, which means “father of many nations.” His wife's name was changed to Sarah. Their faith would be mentioned throughout Scripture.

Son of the Promise

After many years, Sarah gave up on having a child and suggested that Abraham have a baby with her servant, Hagar. Neither she nor Abraham asked God about this idea, but Abraham agreed. So he and Hagar had a son together and named him Ishmael. Naturally, there was tension in this home. God had intended marriage to be between one man and one woman, not two. Sarah became jealous of Hagar.

God had not needed Abraham and Sarah to help Him fulfill His promise. He had told them that a new nation would come from their union, and He was faithful to that promise. Miraculously, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was in her nineties, they had a son and named him Isaac.

Once Sarah had her own child, she insisted that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham was sad to see Ishmael go. But God comforted him, saying, “Do not be sad about the boy. Isaac will carry on the family name, but I will make Ishmael into a nation also.” Ishmael had been born because Abraham and Sarah had not trusted God. Nevertheless, God loved and blessed Ishmael. He became a skilled archer and eventually settled in the desert of Paran, far away from his father. He went on to have 12 sons and a daughter, and in time, they did indeed become a large nation.

One day, God decided to test Abraham’s faith. He told him to take young Isaac to the top of a mountain and sacrifice him there.

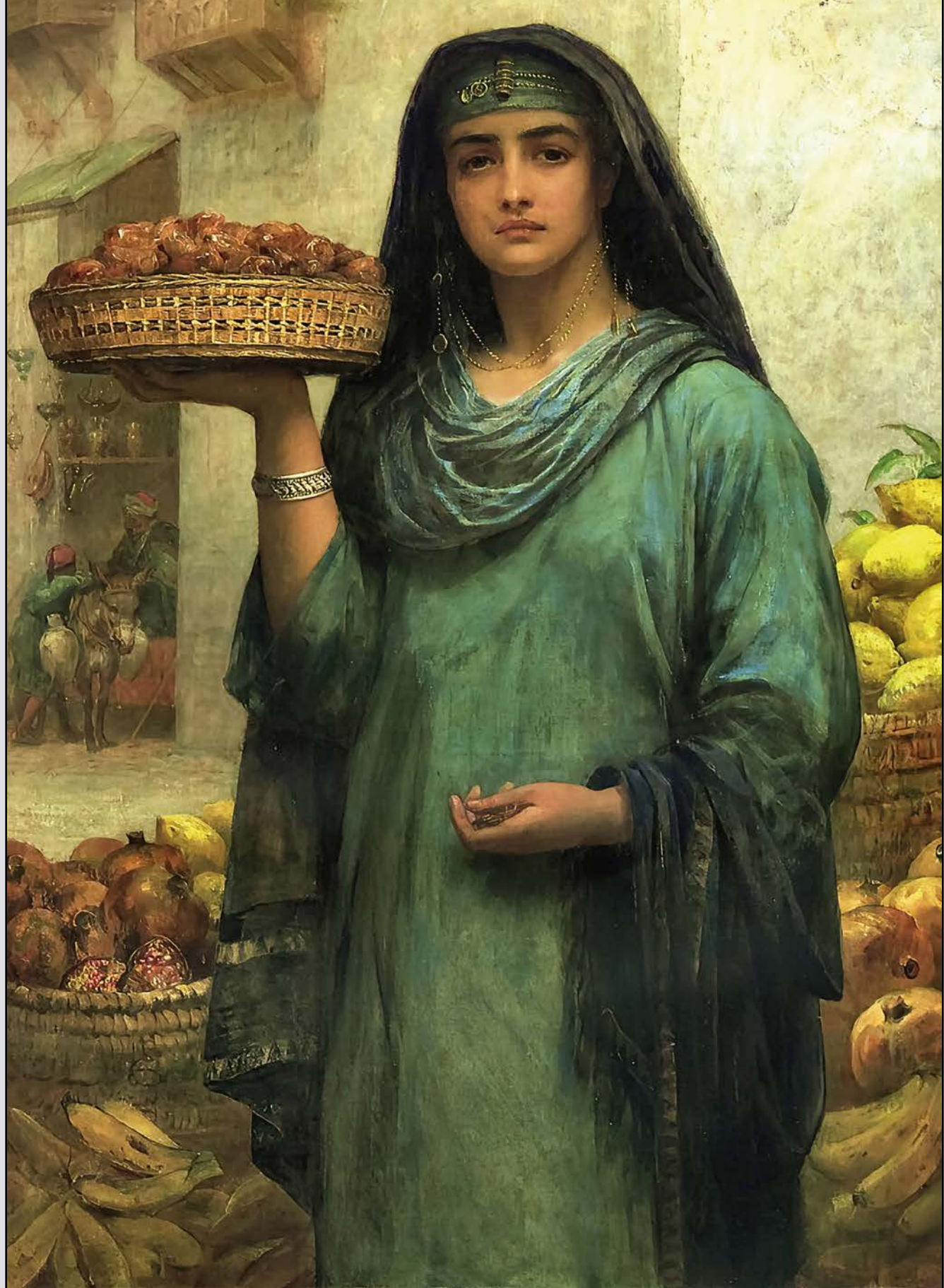
Abraham must have been confused, but he did what God said anyway. He placed his beloved son on an altar. God called out to him, “Abraham! Do not hurt the boy. Now I see that you truly trust me because you were willing to give your son up for me.” Just then, Abraham saw a ram that was caught in a brier nearby. He took the animal and offered it as a sacrifice in the place of his son. Then God said to him, “Because you have honored me, I will bless your descendants. In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

» Genesis 16-17, 21-22, 26

» John 3:16



Abraham and Sarah waited for the time they would have a baby, but she seemed unable to have a child. She thought Abraham should have this child of promise through her servant, Hagar. When Abraham and Hagar’s boy was born, they named him Ishmael. But then Abraham and Sarah had a son together in their old age. They named him Isaac. Sarah became jealous of Hagar, so they decided to send her and Ishmael away into the desert. Then God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. He was going to do this to honor God, but God provided a ram for the sacrifice instead.



A Family for Isaac

Years later, the time came for Isaac to marry, but Abraham did not want his son to marry a local woman. He was afraid they would persuade him to worship the false gods of the land. So he sent a trusted servant, Eliezer, back to the land he had come from. Abraham's brother Nahor still lived there, so Abraham told Eliezer to find Isaac a wife from his brother's family.

When Eliezer got there, he went to the local well and prayed. He asked the LORD to help him find the right wife for Isaac. "May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please give me a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — then I will know she is the one you have chosen."

Before he had even finished praying, a young woman named Rebekah arrived at the well. And she did exactly as Eliezer had asked. Then she told him she was the granddaughter of Nahor. Eliezer was so thankful! He bowed down and worshiped the LORD for answering his prayer.

Rebekah agreed to marry Isaac, and she left for Canaan with Eliezer. Isaac and Rebekah were childless for the first 20 years of their marriage. But then God blessed them with twins. One day, God told Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb; one will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Esau was born first, making him the oldest. Jacob was born shortly after, with his hand grabbing Esau's heel. Though they were twins, they looked nothing alike. And they had very different personalities. Esau loved to be outdoors. He grew up to be a skillful hunter who enjoyed bringing home wild game, making him the favorite son of Isaac. But Jacob preferred to stay near home and was favored by his mother.

» Genesis 24, 25:19–28

Isaac grew up strong in the Lord. When it was time for him to marry, his father Abraham sent a trusted servant, Eliezer, back to their homeland to find him a wife. Eliezer traveled there and prayed that God would lead him to the right woman. As he finished praying, the Lord led Rebekah to him. She showed kindness to Eliezer and told him she was of the household of Nahor. This was the sign Eliezer needed, and soon Rebekah was journeying back with him to Isaac. In time, she had twin sons named Jacob and Esau. God said they would become two nations.

Of Birthrights and Blessings

In those days, the firstborn son became the head of the family after his father died. This was known as the birthright. Isaac had received the birthright from Abraham and would pass it on to his firstborn son also. God told Isaac,

“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Genesis 26:3–5).

During this time in history, the firstborn son would become the head of the household when the father died. As Esau was the firstborn, it was expected that he would get this birthright. But that is not what happened. Esau sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob, for a pot of stew. Esau also married two women from Canaan against the wishes of his parents. His poor decisions cost him the birthright.

Everyone assumed that Esau would inherit the birthright when Isaac died. But Esau did not take this responsibility seriously. First, he had married two Canaanite women against his parents’ wishes. Then he had sold his birthright to his younger brother. It happened as he returned from hunting one day. He was very hungry and found his brother had made a pot of stew. Esau asked for some. But Jacob told him he would only give it to him in exchange for his birthright. Esau agreed to this, selling his place as head of the family for a bowl of stew. Esau showed disrespect for his parents, his position, and for the LORD with these decisions. Jacob took advantage of his brother’s impulsive nature and secured the birthright for himself.

Now, it was also the custom in those days for the father to declare a blessing over his children before he died. The firstborn son usually received a special blessing. And even though Esau had sold his birthright, Isaac planned to give him the firstborn blessing anyway. One day, Isaac sent Esau out to get some wild game, saying that he would bless him after eating it.

» Genesis 25:29–34, 26:34–35, 27

» Hebrews 12:15–16



Rebekah's Plan

Rebekah believed Jacob should receive the blessing instead of Esau because God had told her long ago that the older son would serve the younger. We are left to wonder if she had ever shared God's words with her husband. Regardless, Isaac and Rebekah disagreed on this important issue. So, while Esau was out hunting, Rebekah devised a plan to trick her husband.

Isaac was nearly blind in his old age, so she told Jacob to dress in Esau's clothes and pretend to be his brother. Jacob agreed. He even wrapped some goat skin around his arms so that he would appear to be hairy like Esau. Then he took some meat to his father and waited for the blessing.

At first Isaac was suspicious. Was this really his son Esau? But eventually, he was convinced, and he gave his blessing. "May God give to you the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth — an abundance of grain and new wine. May people serve you and nations bow down to you. May you be the master of your brothers. May those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed."

The plan had worked. But Rebekah and Jacob's deception was uncovered when Esau returned from hunting. Isaac was angry — to the point of trembling. But custom did not permit him to take the blessing back. He told Esau, "Look, I have made Jacob your master, I have given him servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. What is left that I can do for you, my son?"

Esau cried out, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Please bless me too!" Then Isaac said, "Behold, your dwelling place shall be away from the richness of the land, away from the dew of heaven above. You shall live by the sword and serve your brother. But when you rebel, you will tear his yoke from your neck."

Esau was bitter. Not only had Jacob taken his birthright, now he had taken his blessing as well. So he plotted to kill his brother. Rebekah heard about Esau's plan, so she convinced Isaac to send Jacob away.

"It is time for Jacob to get married," she said, knowing that her husband would send him back to Paddan Aram (Haran) to find a wife from her brother's family. Rebekah believed that with time, Esau would forget what had happened and Jacob could come home.



Along with the family birthright, the firstborn son would often receive a special blessing from his father as well. Rebekah, Jacob's mother, thought he deserved this over his brother, Esau. She made a plan to trick her own husband, who had grown frail and blind. While Esau was away hunting, she helped disguise Jacob as Esau and brought him to Isaac. The trick worked, and Jacob received the special blessing. When Esau came back, he became angry and bitter. But there was no taking back the blessing. Now Esau wanted to kill his brother, but God had another plan.