

January 1

Genesis 1:27, 2:7-9, 19-20

In The Beginning

Having just been created by God, Adam the first man on earth, found himself surrounded by a beautiful garden called Eden. Up above the sun shone with a warm glow. Around him there were all kinds of trees with fruit to eat. There were many animals too, and all of them were tame. There were birds, furry animals, climbing animals and creeping insects. God brought all the creatures He had created to Adam, and whatever name Adam decided on, that was its name. Meanwhile, the Lord noticed that Adam had no one like himself to talk to. Although Adam was made in the image of God and could talk to God, Adam was human and there was no other creature on earth that was able to be his close friend and helper.

What makes me so special?

Isn't it wonderful to realize that of all the thousands of creatures God created, only Adam was made in His image? God placed a spirit inside Adam so that he could talk to God, be creative (like thinking up all sorts of names), love, and feel the need to be loved. When God made you He also placed a spirit inside you—a part of you that will live for ever and ever. "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). As part of God's beautiful creation, God took as much care to form you as He did when He formed Adam (Psalm 139:13). God has made you with a special purpose: to know Him and to bring Him pleasure; and whenever you pray, your spirit reaches out to the Lord, which makes Him very happy. Other creatures cannot do that because they do not have a spirit. That's what makes you so special!

Today's Verse:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1:1

January 2

Genesis 2:9, 15-17

The One in the Middle

Adam had lots of delicious fruit to choose from in the Garden of Eden. He was allowed to eat and grow whatever he wanted. Of all the many fruit trees, there was only one, right in the middle of the garden, from which God told him not to eat. The tree in the middle of the garden was the tree that gave knowledge of what is good and what is bad. The Lord told Adam that if he ate of the fruit, he would die.

Why can't I have everything I want?

Imagine being left alone in a room of colorful boxes filled with every imaginable treat. You are allowed to enjoy anything from the many boxes, except one box—a black box in the middle of the room—that you may not open. Would you ignore the black box and be happy to carry on enjoying the things in the colorful boxes? Or, would you move closer and closer to the black box, lift the lid slightly, and take a peep? The world is filled with many good things for us to enjoy and fun things to do. Yet sometimes we become bored and unhappy with the good things God allows us to have. Do you sometimes feel like being naughty just to see what will happen? Of the thousands of good words you know, do you sometimes find yourself saying a bad word? God knows that there are things that harm us, and there are things we may do that would hurt others. Because God knows what is good and what is bad for us, He clearly shows us in the Bible what we should and what we should not do.

Today's Verse:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. James 1:17

January 3

Genesis 2:18, 21-24

Someone Like Me

Before the day had ended, Adam suddenly became sleepy. Could it be that he was exhausted from thinking of different names for all the creatures? No, God was putting him to sleep! In fact, God made Adam sleep so well that he didn't even feel God taking out one of his ribs and closing him up again. Then God formed a woman from the rib and brought her to Adam. When he woke up from his deep sleep, he couldn't believe his eyes! Now Adam had a companion, a very special person who he could talk with and be with all day long.

Does God know when I am lonely?

If you have ever been lonely, you will know what Adam must have felt like before God made Eve to be his friend and wife. The beginning of a new year often brings changes. You may have recently moved to another town, started in a new school, or moved to a class without your best friends. It is often a time of loneliness; a time of being afraid and unsure of what to expect. Remember that God will always be there for you. He will never leave your side! Although you cannot see God, you can talk to him just like Adam did. If you long to have a special friend, ask God to help you meet someone who will enjoy the same things you do, someone who will be a loyal companion. God knows and understands when you are lonely because He made you to need a friend, and to be a friend.

Today's Verse:

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him. Genesis 2:18

The First Sin

The serpent was the most cunning of the creatures that God had made. One day, the serpent came to the woman God had given to Adam and asked, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" The woman quickly pointed out that there was only one tree from which they were not allowed to eat. If they did, they would die. "Ye shall not surely die:" the serpent replied. "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw how good the fruit looked, and thought it would make her wise, she took some of the fruit and ate it, and gave some to Adam to eat.

What is the difference between temptation and sin?

While the serpent was speaking to the woman, he was tempting her to do what God told them not to do. Temptations usually come through our senses, especially what we see and hear. The devil uses our senses to put bad thoughts in our minds and bad desires in our hearts. While we are being tempted, we have not done wrong. The temptation is not sin! However, temptation can lead to sin when we actually do what the devil is tempting us to do. The woman was close enough to the tree to see how beautiful it was. Remember that it is best to stay far away from places you could be tempted more easily.

Today's Verse:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. James 1:14-15

January 5

Genesis 3:7-10

The Cover Up

When Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit God had forbidden them to eat, they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to make clothes for themselves. That evening, when they heard God walking in the garden, they were afraid and hid among the trees. But God called to Adam, "Where art thou?" Adam replied, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

How can I get rid of my feeling of guilt?

When you've done something wrong, you don't want anyone to find out. You hope that somehow the guilt will just fade away. You try to cover up your sin by telling lies or pretending that nothing happened, and all the time you are afraid of being found out. The horrible feeling of guilt makes you feel sick as it chews away at your peace and joy. It's no fun to feel this way. The good news is that there is a way out. You can have peace in your heart again! There is only one way to get rid of the sin in your heart and the guilt that it brings; that is to admit that you have done wrong and ask God to forgive you. You also need to apologize to the person you wronged, and if possible, make things right. This takes courage, but it makes your character strong and helps your friendship with others to be built on a solid foundation. No one is perfect. We all do wrong and sin against God. But we can live a peaceful, happy life by confessing our sin the minute we slip up!

Today's Verse:

O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.
Psalm 69:5

January 6

Genesis 3:10-13

“Passing the Buck”

After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, they tried to hide. But God found Adam and asked him if he had eaten of the fruit He had told him not to eat. Adam answered, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” The Lord asked the woman, “What is this that thou hast done?” She replied, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

What should I do when others say it is okay to do wrong?

Have any of your friends ever said, “Just do it! No one will ever find out.” Deep down, you don’t have a good feeling about what they are daring you to do. Then, just to convince you, they add, “Everyone is doing it!” You start wondering if it really is wrong. It doesn’t seem that bad, and no one will find out anyway. Adam was in a situation like this. Just one bite of the forbidden fruit seemed reasonable. He had seen the woman eat of the fruit, and she seemed okay—she did not die as God said they would if they ate of it. Adam took a bite. Immediately his purity and innocence was ruined; and to spit the fruit out wouldn’t make things right again. Sin had entered Adam’s heart and broken the close friendship he had with God. You don’t need to learn the hard way and end up with regrets! Always say no to the things God and your parents have forbidden. Next time someone tells you to do wrong, say that it is sin and try to stay away from people who want you to disobey.

Today’s Verse:

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Proverbs 14:12

January 7

Genesis 3:14-21

Expelled

Sin had entered the heart of man, and God had to deal with it. God said to the serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:" Then God said to the woman, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." To Adam, He said, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;" Then God made proper clothes for Adam and Eve out of animal skins and sent them out of the garden.

Can God take away the trouble caused by sin?

Once we have sinned, some things change and will never be the same as they were before we sinned. If you have said something nasty about a friend, that friend may not want to visit anymore even though you said sorry. Breaking the rules in a game could get the whole team disqualified. Disobeying a safety rule could cause you to get hurt. The consequences of your sin affect you, and others. Although God forgives all your sin no matter what you have done, the problem and sadness that sin brings cannot simply be wiped away. Even so, God who is kind and loving will also help you as He helped Adam and Eve when He made clothes for them after they sinned.

Today's Verse:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

January 8

Genesis 4:1-7

A Right Way and a Wrong Way

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. One day, Cain brought some of his harvest and gave it as an offering to the Lord. Abel too, brought an offering: the first-born lamb of one of his sheep. The Lord was pleased with Abel's offering, but He did not accept Cain's offering. This made Cain furious! Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."

Is God pleased with any kind of worship?

Some people think that we can worship God in any way we want. Although God has given us the freedom to show our adoration in different ways, false acts of worship that may look impressive on the outside are an insult to God. We should always show honor and respect when we worship God. Think of how you would act if you were allowed to go right into the throne room of a king. God is the King of kings, and before we go in to worship Him, we should prepare ourselves by making sure that we have a right attitude, and that our hearts are clean. Think of three different ways to worship God that will please Him. Here are some verses that may help: Psalm 100:2, Luke 2:37, Matthew 2:11

Today's Verse:

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. John 4:24

January 9

Genesis 4:8-16

A Growing Problem...Sin

Cain was jealous because God had accepted Abel's offering, but not his. Because of this, he let anger to grow in his heart. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

How can I get rid of my feelings of anger and jealousy?

God warned Cain of the jealousy that had crept into his heart. But, instead of doing what is right, his angry heart made him think of a way to get rid of his brother. Feelings of anger and jealousy don't just go away on their own. When something happens that makes us feel jealous or angry, we must stop those selfish feelings and thoughts right away.

- Ask God to make your heart clean and to give you His peace.
- Go to the person with whom you are angry and talk about the way you feel. If the person has hurt you, tell him/her that you forgive them.
- If you are jealous of someone, make a point of being kind to that person. Also, be grateful for what you have—even the little things. Remember that you first need to take action (do what is right) before your feelings will start to change. By following Jesus' example of love, you will find it a lot easier to get along with others. Jesus did not tell us to like everybody (that would be impossible); He told us to love others!

Today's Verse:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 1 John 3:18

January 10

Genesis 6:5-13

Sin Makes God Sad

More and more people were being born, and all sorts of evil and violence spread wherever people settled. When the Lord saw how wicked people had become and how evil their thoughts were, He was sorry He had made them. However, there was one good man and his family who believed in God. His name was Noah. The Lord was pleased with Noah. God decided to put an end to all the evil by wiping out the whole human race.

Why do so few believe in God?

Do you sometimes wonder why there is so much violence and hatred in the world? Why does God allow wars, crime, and abuse? God grieves to see the beautiful world He created messed up by the people He created. His heart breaks to see those who cannot defend themselves being hurt. Yet, just as God gave Adam a choice between doing right and disobeying, God has given every person that same choice. Since Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, every person in the world has been born in sin. Because we are sinful, we do not have a natural longing to do right and follow after God. Yet the Lord patiently works in our lives, wanting to change our sinful hearts and make us pure. Even though God touches the heart of every person, some people want to carry on doing evil and they don't allow God to change their stubborn hearts (John 3:19).

Today's Verse:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

January 11

Genesis 6:13-22

Obedience Despite the Odds

God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it." So Noah did exactly as the Lord told him to do.

Why doesn't God just make wicked people vanish?

Noah was given a huge task. He had to build a boat that would take many, many years to complete. What thoughts would have gone through your mind if God had told you to build an ark? Would you perhaps have thought it rather unfair that you had to do such hard work just because others were so sinful? Was there not an easier way to get rid of the sin and wickedness? God made the universe with certain physical laws—for example, the Law of Gravity. Everything on earth gets pulled towards the center of the earth; and that is how we keep from falling off. Although God has the power to work outside of the natural laws He put in place, He often shows His power by using natural laws in a supernatural way. God does not rush into decisions or take shortcuts to carry out His will. He often chooses to show His power through people, and patiently waits for His perfect will to take place.

Today's Verse:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. Isaiah 55:8

January 12

Genesis 7:1-9

Two by Two

When Noah had finished building the ark, God said to him, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth." Noah did everything the Lord told him to do. He and his family went into the boat, and with them, every kind of animal you can think of—one male and one female of every living creature. Then God shut the door!

Do animals obey God?

God, the creator of the universe, has power over all He has made. God holds the whole of creation together. He makes sure that the sun rises and sets, that rain falls on dry ground, and that every creature—from the biggest to the smallest—has its place in His creation. Because God created animals, He has the power to make them do whatever He wants them to. However, animals cannot choose to obey or disobey God like we can. They are not aware of God the way we are because they do not have a spirit. God does not speak to animals the way He speaks to us. When animals do what God wants them to, they do it without having to think about it. Can you think of a time that God used birds to feed His servant in the desert? (1 Kings 17:4)

Today's Verse:

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? Mark 4:41

January 13

Genesis 7:11-24

And The Rain Fell!

When God shut and sealed the door of the ark, it started raining! It rained and rained, and the water streams under the earth burst open too. Slowly, but steadily, the water rose, and soon the big boat started to float. Within days the water covered the tallest trees, and some days later, the water had covered the highest mountain.

Are floods and earthquakes the judgment of God?

In the time of Noah, the people's wickedness was getting worse and worse. God decided to use a flood to give goodness a chance to rule on the earth again. At that time, only Noah was good—and he was already old. What do you think would have happened if Noah died and only the wicked were left to rule on earth? After the flood, the people slowly increased again, and they moved to different parts of the world. Some believed in God, but many did not. Today, the Church of Jesus is unstoppable! Jesus Himself said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." God is allowing goodness and evil to 'grow' side by side like good plants and weeds that grow next to each other (Matthew 13:24-30). Floods and other natural disasters happening in the world today are not the same as God's judgment in Noah's time. Usually, disasters also affect those who believe in God. Next time you hear of a flood or an earthquake or a hurricane, pray that those going through a difficult time will turn to God and be helped in their time of trouble.

Today's Verse:

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Romans 8:22

January 14

Genesis 8:1-5, 15-19

Blue Skies

While Noah and his family and all the animals were floating around in the ark, God kept His eye on them. He sent a wind to blow across the earth, and level of the water slowly started going down. God stopped the springs from gushing out water and He stopped the rain. After many months the water had gone down so much that the boat came to rest on a mountain. After some time, God said to Noah, "Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth." So Noah, his family and all the animals stepped out onto dry ground.

If the world is as bad now as it was in Noah's time, why doesn't God punish the wicked now?

God used the flood to make everything new. For a while, the evil that had brought such misery to the world was gone. It seemed as though the flood had washed the earth clean of sin. Yet, there was a problem: the hearts of people were still sinful, and soon evil started to spread again. Even with all the sin in the world today, God is still making things new. He is not using floods to get rid of sin from the earth, but the blood of Jesus to get rid of sin from the hearts of those who believe. God says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26). God is merciful and patient, He does not want anyone to die in sin. God is holding back his judgment of evil for as long as possible so that many people can be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

Today's Verse:

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Matthew 24:37

January 15

Genesis 9:8-17

God's Promise

God blessed Noah and his sons. He said to them, "And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein." Then God said to Noah, "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth."

Why are there rainbows?

Rainbows had not existed before the time of the flood. After the flood, God promised that He would never again wipe out the whole of creation. He placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign to the whole world of the promise He made to Noah. The rainbow helps us remember God's mercy and faithfulness. Whenever you see a rainbow it should also remind you of the many other promises God has made. All God's promises can be found in the Bible! Some special promises come with instructions from God and depend on our obedience. God will do what He promised if you do what he asks. Our God who is unchanging and all-powerful, can and will keep every promise He has made. Find a promise for every color of the rainbow, then draw a rainbow and write a promise in each color.

Today's Verse:

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. Psalm 145:13

January 16

Genesis 12:1-5

Get up and Go

When Abram was 75 years old, the Lord said to him, " Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" Then Abram, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot, took all they had and set out for the land of Canaan.

Why does God sometimes get us to move far away?

Abram was living a comfortable life. He was married, he had servants... and the weather was great! However, God had a much bigger plan for Abram, and to put that plan into action, He needed Abram to get up and move to the land of Canaan. God could see into the future to a time when there would be so many people born from Abram's children, it would be as hard to count them as it would be to count the grains of sand on the beach, or the stars in the sky. You could say that God had a dream for Abram: that through him all the people of the earth would be blessed. Abram obeyed God. He left the place where he had lived for so long and started his journey to a distant land. God may need you in the place you are now and move you somewhere else in the future. Who knows where and how God wants to bless you and make you a blessing to others?

Today's Verse:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11

January 17

Genesis 12:6-17

A Bad Plan

After a long journey, Abram, Sarai and Lot arrived in the land of Canaan. While Abram was in Canaan, there was a famine in the land. Because there was hardly any food, Abram decided to go to the land of Egypt, to live there. When he got there, he was afraid that the Egyptians would kill him and take His wife away. So he said to her, "Say you are my sister so that I will be treated well. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee." When Pharaoh saw how beautiful she was, he treated Abram well and took Sarai into his palace. But the Lord brought a serious disease on Pharaoh because he had taken Abram's wife.

Is it okay to tell a lie in certain situations?

In a tricky situation, doing things our way usually leads to trouble. When we put our trust in our own plans instead of putting our trust in God, we usually mess things up. Abram was afraid for his life. He thought that if he pretended that Sarai was just his sister the Egyptians would not kill him. His plan seemed to work at first, and Pharaoh gave him sheep, cattle and camels. But in exchange, he wanted Sarai. Abram's plan had gone wrong! But God stepped in and brought a disease on Pharaoh. Only then did Pharaoh find out that Sarai was actually Abram's wife and immediately gave her back to Abram. Do you think God had a better plan lined up so that Abram would not have had to deceive Pharaoh?

Today's Verse:

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 1 John 3:21

January 18

Genesis 13:1-12

You Choose

After a time, Abram went back to the land of Canaan with his wife and his nephew Lot. God had blessed Abram with many sheep, goats and cattle. Lot also had some flocks and herds. They had so many animals that there was not enough land for all of them and Lot's shepherds started quarrelling with Abram's shepherds. So Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen;" Then Abram let Lot choose the land that he wanted. When Lot saw the fertile valley of Jordan, he chose to move there, while Abram stayed in Canaan

Should one always let others choose first?

If you were given two slices of cake to share with a friend, would you let your friend choose a slice first, or would you take the biggest and hand the other to your friend? Abram could have decided which part of the land he wanted. But instead, he trusted God to bless him, no matter which part of the land Lot would choose. If you have something to share, you have the right to give what you want and keep what you want. Remember though, that the Lord loves a giving heart because He Himself is generous—He loves to pour out His blessing on us. Even though we seem to lose out by letting someone else choose the best, we will always end up with a far greater reward from God.

Today's Verse:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33

The Winner Takes Nothing

Lot went to settle in the valley near the city of Sodom where wicked people lived. One day, the king of Sodom joined kings from other cities to fight against an enemy. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost the battle, and the enemy took Lot with all his possessions. One of the men escaped and went to tell Abram what had happened. When Abram heard about Lot, he took his men to fight the enemy and defeated them. After Abram got back, the king of Sodom together with Melchizedek, who was a king and a priest, brought Abram gifts. Melchizedek blessed Abram and praised God for their victory. Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of the loot he had brought back. He also gave back all the belongings that the enemy had taken from the king of Sodom.

Should I give back something I have found or rescued?

Have you ever found something valuable? Have you ever climbed high up to get someone's tangled kite out of a tree, or reached down in to a gutter to rescue a little kitten? Because of your daring mission you may feel that you deserve to keep what you found. Abram had risked his life and the life of his men to rescue Lot and bring back the people and possessions of Sodom. Abram had every right to keep all the goods, and in fact, the king of Sodom said he could keep the loot, as long as he got his people back. However, Abram felt that it was not right to keep the things he had brought back because they weren't his in the first place. Abram set a good example for us to follow.

Today's Verse:

Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. Deuteronomy 22:1

January 20

Genesis 16:1-6

Listening to the Right Advice

After living in Canaan for ten years, Abram's wife still had no children. It seemed as though she could never have any, so she said to Abram, "I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her." Abram agreed, and let Hagar have a baby. While she was pregnant, Hagar became proud and looked down on Sarai because she couldn't have a baby of her own. Then Sarai complained to Abram, saying, "It is your fault that Hagar looks down on me." Abram replied, "She is your slave. Do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai became so mean and nasty towards Hagar that Hagar ran away.

Should I listen to the advice of others?

Many times, life is not as simple as we would like it to be. Sooner or later we come across tough problems that need to be solved. Sometimes the solution is obvious; other times it is not and we are faced with a difficult decision. Perhaps we may ask for advice, hoping that others can tell us the good and bad points of each choice. Unfortunately, some people's ideas come from things that have happened in their own lives. They only see the way a plan would work for them and not how it will affect you in the future—or how it will affect others. It is great to know that we can turn to God for wisdom and guidance. He not only sees into the future, but also leads us in the way that is best for us.

Today's Verse:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Psalm 32:8

January 21

Genesis 16:7-15

Abandoned, but not Forgotten

Sarai's servant Hagar was alone out in the desert. She felt rejected and abandoned. While she was at a spring, the angel of the Lord came to her and asked, "Whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" Hagar answered, "I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai." Then the angel said, Go back to her. The Lord has heard your cry. I will give you so many descendants that you will not be able to count them. You will have a son, and you will call him Ishmael. Then Hagar called the Lord who had spoken to her "Thou God seest me."

Does God see and care when I feel unwanted?

Have you been to a party where no one seems to notice you or talk to you? It seems as though the others look right through you. Maybe you don't even get invited to parties, and life is very lonely. Abram and Sarai had rejected Hagar, and maybe she wondered whether Abram's God had also forgotten her. She had no family to go to and no one to give her food. Yet God saw Hagar's tears and He felt the pain in her heart! God sees the pain of loneliness in every sad heart. In Isaiah 53:3, the prophet wrote that Jesus was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows who knew what it is like to suffer. Jesus, more than anyone else, knows what it feels like to be rejected. He wants to come to you and be your best friend, forever.

Today's Verse:

... I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.. Joshua 1:5

January 22

Genesis 17:1-5, 15 18:1-10

God's Way in God's Time

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord spoke to him again. He reminded Abram of His promise to give him many descendants and said, "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." Later, the Lord again spoke to Abraham in the middle of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing there. He invited them to stay and brought them water to wash their feet. Then he hurried to the tent and said to Sarah, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth." Then, as Abraham served his visitor their meal, one of them said, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son."

Should I remind God of His promises?

Years had passed since God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Maybe Abraham wondered whether God had forgotten His promise. Abraham had already tried to make God's promise work out in his own way by letting Hagar have a son. But somehow it wasn't the same. It wasn't the special way he expected God's promise to happen. But God had not forgotten! In His time God brought about a miracle by letting Abraham and Sarah have a son in their old age. God does not need to be reminded of His promises; yet by reminding Him, we are actually reminding ourselves and showing God that we are waiting patiently and trusting Him to do what He promised.

Today's Verse:

O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant. 2 Chronicles 6:42

January 23

Genesis 18:31-33, 19:15-26

A City in Flames

Abraham's nephew Lot had moved into the wicked city of Sodom. God told Abraham that He was going to destroy the whole city. Abraham pleaded with God saying, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" The Lord replied, "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." Then Abraham carried on speaking to the Lord. What if there are forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty? What if there are ten? Would you destroy them with the rest? The Lord replied, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Can God's people keep the world from becoming worse?

Did you know, long ago when a sailing ship went out to sea, the sailors had no way to keep their food frozen, so they used salt to keep their food from going bad. Abraham knew that God is a just God, and because He is completely fair, He would not destroy a wicked city if there were good people living in it. And so Abraham pleaded with God to spare the city if He could find just a few good people living in it—but there were not even ten. Where there is goodness there is life. If there had been some goodness in Sodom, God would have spared the city. Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth. We are keeping schools and cities from becoming completely rotten with sin, and God is holding back His judgment on the world because of us.

Today's Verse:

Ye are the salt of the earth... Matthew 5:13

January 24

Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-12

Isaac and the Offering

At the very time God had promised, He let Sarah have a baby, and Abraham named him Isaac. God's promise to Abraham had come true even though he and Sarah were very old. When Isaac was a young boy, the Lord said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Without questioning God, Abraham took Isaac and left with his servants early the next morning. On the third day, Abraham saw the place in the distance and told his servants to stay while he and Isaac went on ahead. Abraham and Isaac reached the place that God showed Abraham. Then Abraham built an altar and put wood on it. He tied up Isaac and laid him on the altar. But the angel of the Lord called from heaven, "Abraham, do not harm the boy. Now I know that you fear God. Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God,"

Why does God ask us to do difficult things?

If God can see our hearts, surely He already knows how much we love and trust Him. God does know all things (John 21:17), yet He sometimes puts our faith and commitment to the test (Deuteronomy 8:2). This test is not like a test you do at school where you need to get a certain score to pass. Even if you mess up altogether, God still loves you just as much and you still have eternal life by believing in Him (John 5:24). God's tests actually strengthen our 'faith muscles' and help us to realize how much we depend on Him. Usually it is in these times of testing that we grow the most in our spiritual lives. Because of Abraham's trust in God and his obedience, he is listed in the Bible as one of the great people of faith - see Hebrews 11:17.

Today's Verse:

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. Psalm 26:2

January 25

Genesis 22:13-19

God Provides!

Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar when the voice of the Lord stopped him. God said, "Do not harm the boy. Now I know that you fear God because you have not kept back your only son. Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." Just then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in a bush by its horns. He took the ram and sacrificed it to the Lord on the altar he had made. Abraham called that place Jehovah-jireh "The Lord Will Provide," and he and his son returned to his waiting servants.

What is a sacrifice?

A sacrifice is a costly gift—something that is precious and means a lot to the one making the sacrifice; as it did to the woman who poured expensive perfume on Jesus (Mark 14:3). A sacrifice could also be something one cannot see, like giving up a privilege or right. You could sacrifice your time by spending a whole afternoon looking after a younger brother or sister. Even though Abraham had been asked to do a very difficult thing, his love for God, and his complete trust in Him, made him willing to show total obedience. In Old Testament times, an animal was killed and put on a pile of large stones, called an altar. The sacrificed animal would then be burned. A sacrifice for sin is a very important sacrifice, and later on you will see how Jesus became a sacrifice for our sin. Just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, so God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to be a sacrifice for us. But unlike with Isaac, God did not spare Jesus, but sacrificed Him to die for our sins

Today's Verse:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10

January 26

Genesis 24:4, 10-20

An act of kindness

When the time had come for Isaac to get married, Abraham said to his servant, "Go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." Abraham's servant knew that the task he had been given was too big for him to do by himself. When he finally reached the country where Abraham had been born, he prayed to God saying, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master." Before he had even finished praying, a beautiful woman called Rebekah came along, so he asked her for a drink. She lowered her jar and said, "Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking." Then the servant knew that this woman was the one God had chosen.

Should I be kind to a stranger?

The Bible encourages us to be kind to others. Every kind and helpful action shows the love of Jesus working in our hearts. Unfortunately, some people take advantage of the kindness they receive from others. Some bad people may use a child's kindness as a trap to get something else they want. God sees your willing heart. If you would like to help a person you don't know, ask your parents to show you the best way to help the person. In this way you can still do good to those who need help, but in a way that is safe and keeps you free to serve God joyfully through your kind and helpful deeds.

Today's Verse:

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10

January 28

Genesis 27:18-23, 28-29

A father's blessing

Isaac and Rebekah got married and had two sons, Esau and Jacob. As time passed, Isaac became old and was blind. It was the custom for a father to speak a blessing on his eldest son. This is called a birthright. So Isaac called Esau and asked him to first go out and hunt for a wild animal and cook it for him. When Isaac's wife Rebekah heard this, she thought of a plan to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, because Jacob was her favorite son. While Esau was out hunting, Rebekah prepared a pot of goat meat. Then she gave Jacob the goatskin to cover his arms because Esau's arms were hairy, while Jacob's arms were smooth. As Jacob served the food to his father, Isaac asked, "I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not." Jacob held out his arm covered with the hairy goatskin. When Isaac felt it, he thought it was Esau standing there, and he spoke his blessing, but he was blessing Jacob.

What does it mean to be blessed?

Do you think that Jacob did a bad thing? What Jacob did was not right because he lied to his father and took the special blessing that was meant for Esau. But what is a blessing? One hears the words "bless you" so often that it doesn't seem all that special anyway. When a father or mother honors the Lord, God special favor is on their children. This blessing from God doesn't necessarily mean that a child will grow up to live a long and healthy life or become rich, but rather that God will draw the child close to Himself. God will answer the prayers of a parent and bless every son and daughter in the family, not just the eldest son.

Today's Verse:

And she gave the savory meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. Psalm 103:13

January 29

Genesis 28:5, 10-15

What a dream!

Esau hated his brother Jacob for having taken his father's blessing from him. Meanwhile, when his mother Rebekah found out that Esau was planning to kill Jacob, she suggested to her husband, Isaac, that Jacob should go to the country where his grandfather lived, to find a wife for himself there. And so Jacob left. On his way to Haran, as the sun was setting, he found a place to camp for the night. While he slept, he dreamed that he saw a stairway reaching up from earth to heaven. Angels were going up and down on it. Then the Lord said to him, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee,"

Does God still speak to us through dreams?

Do you wish that all your dreams would come true? You may have had a dream that seemed so real, that you were quite disappointed to wake up and find that it was only a dream. For Jacob, his dream did come true. God actually spoke to him in the dream and told him what would happen in the future. God can, and does, still speak to people through dreams, although it is not the usual way that God speaks to us. We have a more sure way to hear from God; and that is through reading the Bible. You can go back to a verse or passage from the Bible as many times as you like to see what God is saying to you. Unlike a dream; with God's Word, you don't even have to figure out the meaning. With the help of others and the Holy Spirit who lives in you, God will let you know details of His plan for your life when the time is right.

Today's Verse:

...Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Acts 2:17

January 30

Genesis 29:9-20

Seven Short Years

After many days, Jacob was near Haran; the place where he would look for a wife from his own people. As he talked to some shepherds at a well, Laban's daughter Rachel arrived with her flock of sheep. Jacob wasted no time in rolling away the heavy stone that covered the well so her flock could drink. When Rachel found out that Jacob was a relative of theirs, she ran home to tell her father about him, and Jacob stayed with their family for a month. Then Rachel's father Laban said to Jacob, "Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for naught? tell me, what shall thy wages be?" Jacob replied, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter." Laban agreed and Jacob worked for him for seven years, even though it seemed like only a few days because he loved Rachel so much.

Why must I go to school for so many years?

For Jacob, it took seven years of hard work to get what he wanted (in fact, it took twice as long). You will probably spend even more years studying and working hard at school to get what you want some day. Things that are worthwhile and lasting take time. Even creation took time. God could have brought everything into being in a split-second. But it took time and effort to make it perfect. In fact, God put so much into creating everything just right that He rested from all his work on the seventh day. Work hard and you will be rewarded for your effort. The work might be really difficult or it might be easy; whatever task needs to be done, always give it your best and when you look back, your years of studying will seem like a few days.

Today's Verse:

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want. Proverbs 21:5

January 31

Genesis 29:21-28

A deal is a deal

After seven years of working for Rachel's father, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled," So Laban gave a wedding feast and invited everyone. But that night after the feast, instead of giving Rachel to Jacob, Laban gave his older daughter Leah to him. The next day, Jacob went to Laban and said, "You tricked me!" Laban replied, "It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years." Jacob agreed to the new deal, and so, after the bridal week was over, Rachel became Jacob's wife as well, and Jacob had to work for Laban another seven years.

How should I react when I am tricked?

Have you ever made a deal with someone only to find out that you have been tricked? What should you do? • Maybe you are angry because you feel used and humiliated. Don't react in anger or take revenge. Don't let bitterness (hateful thoughts) make your life miserable. • Tell your parents or a teacher what happened. They may be able to make a wise decision like a judge does when two people have a disagreement about something. • If there is nothing that can be done to change the situation, accept what has happened and trust the Lord to make things right.

Today's Verse:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
Romans 12:19