

CREATION: The Beginning of Life As We Know It

Bible Verse: Genesis 1-4; 6-9

Important Details: The StoryReader scripts are segments of scripture taken directly from Zondervan's THE STORY Bible (TNIV). Each script takes approximately 10 minutes to be read aloud. These segments have been formatted into a *Readers' Theater*. A Readers' Theater is an activity in which a few participants are asked to read directly from a script, with the intent of telling a story in a lively manner. Readers are **not expected to memorize or improvise** from the script, but use voice inflection and some gestures appropriate to their characters actions and words in order to bring the story to life.

Characters:

- Narrators #1, #2, & #3
- Adam's words
- Serpent's words
- God's words
- Eve's words

Tweaks to the Text:

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [When] the earth was formless and empty, God said,

GOD: "Let there be light,"

NARRATOR 1: And there was light...He separated the light from the darkness [and] called the light "day," and the darkness..."night."

NARRATOR 2: [He created] the sky...and the land...and the seas,...[the] plants...and [the] trees. And [then] God said,

GOD: "Let there be lights in...the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them...give light on the earth."

NARRATOR 2: God made two great lights...to govern the day and...to govern the night. He also made the stars...

NARRATOR 1: [Then] God created the creatures of the sea...and creatures [of the land.] [Finally] God created human beings in his own image...[He] blessed them and said to them,

GOD: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

NARRATOR 1:...And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...

NARRATOR 2: By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so...[He] blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done...

NARRATOR 1: Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man,

GOD: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die."

NARRATOR 2: [Then] God said,

GOD: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

NARRATOR 2: So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said,

ADAM: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

NARRATOR 1: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

NARRATOR 2: Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman,

SERPENT: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

NARRATOR 2: The woman said to the serpent,

EVE: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

SERPENT: "You will not certainly die...for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

NARRATOR 1: When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to

her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

NARRATOR 2: Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man,

GOD: “Where are you?”

ADAM: “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

GOD: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

ADAM: “The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

NARRATOR 1: Then the Lord God said to the woman,

GOD: “What is this you have done?”

EVE: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

NARRATOR 1: [Then, because they disobeyed,] the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden.

NARRATOR 2: [Adam’s wife] Eve [soon] became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. [As they grew older] Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering — fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry.

NARRATOR 1: Then the Lord said to Cain,

GOD: “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

NARRATOR 1: Now Cain [went with his brother Abel] out to the field. While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother...and killed him.

NARRATOR 3: The tragic accounts of the mistakes and poor choices of Adam and Eve, and their firstborn son Cain, are echoed in the later stories of hardship and tragedy for their children and their children’s children. As people began to populate the globe, leaving the area of Eden and traveling as far as feet and beast could carry them, humanity’s legacy of hate, anger, murder and deception play out as people continue to neglect their relationship with God. Eventually, nearly everyone just plain forgets their Creator and the whole point of being alive. For most people, life becomes one big party with no thought of consequences . . . except for one man.

NARRATOR 2: Noah was a righteous man...[who] walked faithfully with God. [The rest of the] earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. So God said to Noah,

GOD: "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out...I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you [and your family] will enter the ark.. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you..."

NARRATOR 2: [And] Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

NARRATOR 1: When the floodwaters came on the earth....Noah and his [family] entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of...animals came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

NARRATOR 2: For forty days...the waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water...Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

NARRATOR 1: The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days....At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat...So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds — everything that moves on the earth — came out of the ark, one kind after another.

NARRATOR 2:...Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him:

GOD: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you...Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

NARRATOR 3: The earth recovered from this great flood. Animal and plant life flourished. Noah's family repopulated the earth. The cycle of life continued, and people remembered God. It was time for God's next move, time to build a nation in a land that would become the cultural and ethnic home to ...well, that part of the story is yet to come.

GOD BUILDS A NATION

Bible Verse: Genesis 12–13; 15–17; 21–22; 32–33; 35; Romans 4; Hebrews 11

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Characters:

- Narrators #1, #2, & #3
- Abraham's words
- Jacob's words
- God's words
- Isaac's words
- Messengers' (2-3 Readers)

Tweaks to the Text:

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

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NARRATOR 1: PART ONE: THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

The Lord had said to Abram,

GOD: "Go from your country...to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

NARRATOR 1: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...even though he did not know where he was going. [Then] The Lord said to Abram...

GOD: "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them...So shall your offspring be."

NARRATOR 2: Abram believed the Lord, and...without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old — and that [his wife's] womb was also dead.

...God said to him,

GOD: "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham...I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of

you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you...to be your God and the God of your descendants after you...As for Sarai your wife, her name will be Sarah...I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations."

NARRATOR 2: Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said. [She] became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

NARRATOR 1: PART TWO: SACRIFICING ISAAC

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him,

GOD: "Abraham! Take...your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

NARRATOR 1: Early the next morning Abraham got up and...set out for the place God had told him about. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham,

ISAAC: "Father? The fire and wood are here...but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

ABRAHAM: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

NARRATOR 1: When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there...He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar...Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven,

GOD: "Abraham!...Do not lay a hand on the boy...I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

NARRATOR 1: Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

NARRATOR 3: PART ONE: JACOB & ESAU

[After Abraham and Sarah died,] Isaac married Rebekah. Twenty years after the wedding...Rebekah gave birth to twins. Esau, the elder,...was his dad's favorite. Jacob, the younger,...was clearly his mother's favorite. The two boys vied for the inheritance rights, and Jacob proved to be a master manipulator and schemer.

NARRATOR 2: *One day...as Isaac lay in bed, weak and blind, he asked [Esau] for a tasty meal of char-grilled wild meat. After the meal, Isaac would officially pass on his blessing — and God's favor — to Esau. This was to be Esau's long-awaited big day.*

NARRATOR 3: *Rebekah overheard Isaac's plan and came up with a plan of her own. She dressed her favorite, Jacob, in Esau's clothes. She quickly cooked up some goat meat and sent Jacob into Isaac's bedroom, posing as Esau...Old Isaac, squinting and touching, wondered if this was really [Esau.] ...Jacob lied to his aged dad. Isaac ate. Once more he touched Jacob's hand — covered with goatskins to resemble the hairy skin of swarthy Esau. Then he gave the blessing, also confirming the double share of the material inheritance, to Jacob.*

NARRATOR 2: *Soon after, Esau arrived with his own platter of grilled meat, only to discover that mom and brother had robbed him of his entire future. Angry to the point of fury, he threatened to kill Jacob. Rebekah intervened once more and sent Jacob to live with relatives until Esau's anger abated.*

NARRATOR 3: *For twenty years Jacob tended flocks and farmland [and grew his family], and finally he took his large family home to meet Esau once again. But Jacob was careful to approach Esau with respect and humility. The wounds between them were deep and long, and he wasn't sure if Esau was friend or foe.*

NARRATOR 1: Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau...When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said,

MESSENGERS: "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

NARRATOR 1: Then Jacob prayed,

JACOB: "O God...I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown [me]...Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me."

NARRATOR 3: That night [when] Jacob was left alone...a man wrestled with him till daybreak. [The man knocked] Jacob's hip [out of the socket]. Then the man said [to Jacob], "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

JACOB: "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

GOD [The Man]: "What is your name?"

JACOB: "Jacob."

GOD [The Man]: "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with human beings and have overcome."

JACOB: "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

NARRATOR 1: [Then] Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so...he himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.

NARRATOR 3: [After they reconciled,] Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him,

JACOB: "...let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone."

NARRATOR 3: After Jacob returned...God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him,

GOD: "A nation and a community of nations will come from you...The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."

JOSEPH: From Slavery to Deputy Pharaoh

Bible Verse: Genesis 37; 39; 41-48; 50

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Characters:

- Narrators #1, #2, & #3
- Joseph
- Jacob
- Potiphar's Wife
- God
- Brothers
- Pharaoh

Tweaks to the Text:

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(Opening is from The Story For Teens, Chapter Two)

NARRATOR 1: *Of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph was clearly Jacob's favorite—leading the rest of Jacob's sons to resent their younger brother. Jacob only heightened the family stress when he gave a beautiful coat to Joseph. And Joseph didn't help matters when he twice told his older brothers that he had a dream that they would someday bow to him. Finally, the brothers had heard enough from their arrogant little brother. They hatched a conspiracy. For seventeen-year-old Joseph, it would be a very bad day indeed.*

Narrator 2: [Joseph's] brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks...[When] Joseph came to [check on] his brothers, they stripped him of the richly ornamented robe he was wearing — and... threw him into [a] cistern.

NARRATOR 2: [Later,] when...merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him..., [and he was taken] to Egypt. Then [the brothers] got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took [it] back to their father...He recognized it and said,

JACOB: "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him...!"

NARRATOR 2: Then Jacob...mourned for his son many days.

NARRATOR 1: Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with [Joseph], Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

NARRATOR 2: Now Joseph was handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice...and said,

POTIPHAR'S WIFE: "Come to bed with me!"

NARRATOR 2: But...day after day, he refused to go to bed with her. One day...She caught him by his cloak...But he left [it] in her hand and ran out of the house. She kept his cloak...until his master came home. Then she told him this story:

POTIPHAR'S WIFE: "That Hebrew slave...came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

NARRATOR 2: When his master heard the story his wife told him, he burned with anger. [Potiphar] took him and put him in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he...granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison.

NARRATOR 3: *[Now] God [had] gifted [Joseph] with the unusual ability to discern the meaning of dreams. Once during his confinement, Joseph helped two of Pharaoh's civil servants interpret the story their dreams. When Pharaoh's [dreams] took a bizarre turn...He sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt, but no one could interpret them for him. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon.*

NARRATOR 1: *Pharaoh explained his two dreams...[and] Joseph told Pharaoh that the twin dreams foretold seven years of bumper crops to be followed by seven years of...famine. Joseph's recommendation to Pharaoh was to put a wise man in charge of storing food and preparing for the coming famine. The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and...[he] said to Joseph,*

PHARAOH: "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders..."

NARRATOR 3: *...For seven wonderful years...farms yielded enough for the people to eat well and still store up for the coming bad times. Then, as Joseph had predicted,...Egypt became hot and parched, and the crops withered. Because the drought was so severe, neighboring nations began to approach Egypt for help just to stay alive...*

NARRATOR 1: When [Joseph's father] Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, [he sent] ten of Joseph's brothers...down to buy grain from Egypt. Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him...As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

JOSEPH: "Where do you come from?"

BROTHERS: "From the land of Canaan...to buy food."

JOSEPH: "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

BROTHERS: "No, my lord,...[We] are honest men, not spies."

NARRATOR 3: [But Joseph] put them all in custody for three days. On the third day, Joseph said to them,

JOSEPH: "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die."

NARRATOR 3: This they proceeded to do. [After they brought back their youngest brother] Joseph [finally] said to his brothers,

JOSEPH: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt....Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

NARRATOR 3: Then he threw his arms around all his brothers and wept over them.

NARRATOR 2: So they went up out of Egypt and...told [their father],

BROTHERS: "Joseph is still alive!...He is ruler of all Egypt."

NARRATOR 2: Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

NARRATOR 3: So [when] Israel set out [for Egypt] with all that was his, God spoke to [him] in a vision at night and said,

GOD: "Jacob! I am the God of your father...Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

NARRATOR 3: When they arrived in [Egypt, Joseph] threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.

JACOB: "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."

NARRATOR 2: So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land...[After Jacob died, Joseph's] brothers...came and threw themselves down before him.

BROTHERS: "We are your slaves...!"

JOSEPH: "Don't be afraid...I will provide for you and your children."

NARRATOR 3: And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family...[and] he lived a hundred and ten years.

DELIVERANCE

Bible Verse: Exodus 1-7; 10-17

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Characters:

- Narrators #1 & #2
- God
- Moses
- Pharaoh

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NARRATOR 1: [After] Joseph and his brothers...[had] died, the Israelites...became so numerous that the land was filled with them. Then a new king [called Pharaoh]...came to power in Egypt. [The Egyptians] put slave masters over [the Israelites] to oppress them with forced labor...The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out. [But] God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with [them].

NARRATOR 2: Now [an Israelite named] Moses was tending the flock his father-in-law...[when] the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush....God called to him,

GOD: "Moses!...Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground...I am the God of your [fathers]...I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt...So I have come down to rescue them...I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people...out of Egypt."

MOSES: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...? I have never been eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue."

GOD: "Who gave human beings their mouths?...Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

MOSES: "Please send someone else."

NARRATOR: Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said,

GOD: "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite?...You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do...Take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it."

NARRATOR 1: Then Moses [went to meet Aaron and] told him everything the Lord had sent him to say. Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses.

NARRATOR 2: *Unfortunately, things didn't go so well with Moses and Aaron's first [meeting] with Pharaoh. He [only] made their slave labor even more difficult.* Then the Lord said to Moses,

GOD: "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go... Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt...and they will turn to blood.'

NARRATOR 1: But the Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. *The next plague included millions of frogs, hopping into every kitchen, every street and every field in Egypt. Pharaoh agreed to let the Hebrews go if Moses would get rid of the frogs. Moses prayed and the frogs died. [But] Pharaoh again stubbornly refused his part of the deal. So Moses hit the dust with his staff, and gnats swarmed the land...Still Pharaoh would not budge. God continued to show his power as he prepared to rescue his people.*

NARRATOR 2: *The cycle continued through plagues that included swarms of flies, a disease that killed livestock, terrible boils that afflicted people and animals, thunderstorms with destructive hail, devouring locusts, and a frightening time of darkness. After each devastating plague, Pharaoh assured Moses that he could leave with the people...But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go.*

NARRATOR 1: Now the Lord had said to Moses,

GOD: "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here..."

NARRATOR 1: So Moses said [to Pharaoh],

MOSES: "This is what the Lord says: '...Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, [including] the firstborn son of Pharaoh...There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt — worse than there has ever been or ever will be again...'"

NARRATOR 1: Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,

GOD: "...Tell the whole community of Israel that...each man is to take a lamb [and slaughter it.] Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on...the doorframes of [their] houses....On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals...and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

NARRATOR 2: The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt...During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron...

PHARAOH: "Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Take your flocks and herds...and go!"

NARRATOR 2: *God had remembered his enslaved people and rescued them. They packed their carts...and prepared for a long...journey.* By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.

NARRATOR 1: *When [Pharaoh] was told that the people had fled,...He took six hundred of the best chariots [and] he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly...and overtook them as they camped by the sea.* As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites...were terrified and cried out to the Lord. Moses answered the people...

MOSES: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today...The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

NARRATOR 1: Then the Lord said to Moses,

GOD: "...Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."

NARRATOR 2: Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground. The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea.

NARRATOR 1: Then...Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing..., and the Lord swept them into the sea...Not one of them survived.

NARRATOR 2: *This unforgettable escape impressed upon the Israelites that God was indeed taking care of them.* [Then] the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

GOD: "If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you."

NEW COMMANDS

Exodus 19–20, 24–25, 32–34, 40

IMPORTANT DETAILS

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These segments have been formatted into a *Readers' Theater*. A Readers' Theater is an activity in which a few participants are asked to read directly from a script, with the intent of telling a story in a lively manner. Readers are **not expected to memorize or improvise** from the script, but use voice inflection and some gestures appropriate to their characters actions and words in order to bring the story to life.

CHARACTERS

Narrator's words = BLACK

God's words = GREEN

Moses' words = BLUE

Israelites' words = RED (have a group of three read these parts simultaneously)

Aaron's words = PURPLE (one line)

TWEAKS TO THE TEXT

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

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Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible

NEW COMMANDS

Exodus 19–20, 24–25, 32–34, 40

ON THE FIRST day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt... [and] camped...in the desert in front of the mountain.

The LORD called to Moses from the mountain and said,

GOD

"This is what you are to....tell the people of Israel: 'You...have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'"

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear.

They stayed at a distance and said to Moses,

ISRAELITES

"Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

Moses said to the people,

MOSES

"Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

NEW COMMANDS: STORYREADERS SCRIPT

The LORD said,

GOD

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

"You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife...or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice,

ISRAELITES

"Everything the LORD has said we will do."

Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

Then Moses entered the cloud ...and stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Meanwhile in the valley below...when the [Israelites] saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron [The High Priest and Moses brother] and said,

ISRAELITES

"Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for ...Moses...we don't know what has happened to him."

NEW COMMANDS: STORYREADERS SCRIPT

Aaron answered them,

AARON

"Take off the gold earrings...and bring them to me."

So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then [the people proclaimed], "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf.

Then the LORD said to Moses,

ISRAELITES

"Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it..."

Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. ...the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

The next day Moses said to the people,

MOSES

"You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

So Moses went back to the LORD and said,

MOSES

"Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin..."

NEW COMMANDS: STORYREADERS SCRIPT

And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did.

Then Moses said to [The Lord],

MOSES

"What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? Now show me your glory."

The LORD said to Moses,

GOD

"Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke..."

So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning.

Then the LORD came down in the cloud...passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,

GOD

"The LORD...compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..."

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.

Then the LORD said:

GOD

"I am making a covenant with you...I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome...the work that I, the LORD...do for you."

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses...they were afraid to come

NEW COMMANDS: STORYREADERS SCRIPT

near him. But Moses called to them, [and] gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

[On the mountain] The LORD [had told] Moses,

GOD

“Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering...from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”

The best Hebrew craft workers used their skills in woodwork, metalwork, weaving and embroidering to provide the materials for the [sacred tent called the] tabernacle.

Then the cloud covered the tent...and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all...of Israel during all their travels.

WANDERING

Bible Verse: Numbers 10-14; 20-21; 25; 27; Deuteronomy 1-2; 4; 6; 8-9; 29-32; 34

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Characters:

- Narrator 1 & 2
- God
- Moses
- Caleb
- Israelites

Tweaks to the Text:

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Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: At the Lord's command through Moses...*The [Israelites] marched out from their year-long campout near Mount Sinai. God continued to guide them with the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night...*[And] again the Israelites started wailing and said,

ISRAELITES: "If only we had meat to eat! ...We never see anything but this manna!"

NARRATOR 1: The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord,

MOSES: "Where can I get meat for all these people? I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me..."

NARRATOR 1: The Lord said to Moses:

GOD: "Tell the people: '...Now the Lord will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will eat it...for a whole month — until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it — because you have rejected the Lord, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" ' "

NARRATOR 1: Now a wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea...All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered [many bushels of] quail...But...the anger of the Lord burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague.

NARRATOR 2: *[After] God had dealt harshly with the people's lack of faith, [he] said to Moses,*

GOD: "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites."

NARRATOR 2: [So] Moses sent [men] to explore Canaan...and at the end of forty days they returned. They gave Moses this account:

ISRAELITES: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large."

NARRATOR 2: Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said,

CALEB: "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

NARRATOR 2: But the men who had gone up with him said,

ISRAELITES: "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

NARRATOR 2: ...And Caleb...,who [was] among those who had explored the land, said,

CALEB: "The land...is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land...Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

NARRATOR 2: But the whole assembly talked about stoning [him along with Joshua, another of the men]. Then...the Lord said to Moses,

GOD: "How long will these people...refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?"

NARRATOR 2: *Grumbling, complaining, plotting, unbelieving—the Hebrews were slow learners. The story picks up again nearly 40 years later. The Promised Land lies before them again.*

NARRATOR 1: Now there was no water for the community, and the people quarreled with Moses and said,

ISRAELITES: "...Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has...no water to drink!"

NARRATOR 1: The Lord said to Moses,

GOD: "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

NARRATOR 1: So...he and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them,

MOSES: “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”

NARRATOR 1: Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. *The frustration and anger that had built up in Moses over the last 40 years came to expression. In his rage, Moses struck the rock rather than obeying God’s instructions to speak to it. Moses betrayed a lack of trust in God and respect for his presence among his people. The consequences were clear: Neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the Promised Land.*

NARRATOR 2: *As the battle for the Promised Land approached, Moses took a census and discovered that all the Israelites who had rebelled against God’s instruction to enter Canaan nearly 40 years earlier had passed away. After all these years, the next generation was finally poised to enter the land. So the Lord said to Moses,*

GOD: “Take Joshua..., a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.”

NARRATOR 2: *Moses did as the Lord commanded him. Moses’ final task regarding the anxious and excited people was a grand...speech.*

MOSES: The Lord your God has blessed you...He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years...God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts...Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and [face] nations greater and stronger than you...But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the Lord has promised you.

NARRATOR 2: *Though Moses often complained that he was not a public speaker, his strong words of encouragement kept the people faithful, focused and hopeful for many years. Moses knew God well, and he loved the people...The Lord told Moses,*

GOD: “Go up into the [mountains], and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession....you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel.”

NARRATOR 2: [So] Moses [went up into the mountains and] died there..., as the Lord had said. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

Bible Verse: Joshua 1-2; 6; 8; 10-11; 23-24

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Characters:

- Narrator 1 & 2
- God
- Joshua
- The King
- Rahab
- Spies (2 people)

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: After the death of Moses...the Lord said to Joshua:

GOD: "...You and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them...No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

NARRATOR 1: So Joshua ordered the officers of the people:

JOSHUA: "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.' "

NARRATOR 1: Then Joshua sent two spies [to the city of Jericho.] So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. [But] the king of Jericho [found out and] sent this message to Rahab:

KING: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

NARRATOR 1: But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said,

RAHAB: “Yes, the men came to me, but [the left, and...] I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.”

NARRATOR 1: So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road. But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them...Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them...

RAHAB: “...Please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you.” [She knew the Israelites were preparing to attack her city.]

SPIES: “Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her.

NARRATOR 1: So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall...when they [returned to camp they told], they Joshua,

SPIES: “The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands...”

NARRATOR 1: *Joshua organized the march to the land, with the ark of the covenant leading the way. When the priests carrying the sacred ark touched the river bank, the Jordan’s brisk flow ceased. All the people crossed on dry ground.*

NARRATOR 2: Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. Then the Lord said to Joshua,

GOD: “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

NARRATOR 2: When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord’s covenant followed them...So [Joshua] had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there....[Again] on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. On the seventh day, they... marched around the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army,

JOSHUA: “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!”

NARRATOR 2: When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet... the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city...Then they burned the whole city and everything in it. But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho.

NARRATOR 1: So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land. *[After leaving Jericho] God helped the Israelites to be victorious over [many armies.]* Joshua subdued the whole

region, including the hill country... All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. [Then, many more] kings joined forces to fight against Israel. The Lord said to Joshua,

GOD: "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel."

NARRATOR 1: So Joshua and his whole army came against them...and attacked them, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them...until no survivors were left. Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

NARRATOR 2: *God's promise to Abraham centuries earlier was coming to pass. A new nation was being formed. Much of the Promised Land was theirs; much still remained to be taken. In the meantime, their leader had some final words of encouragement and challenge.* After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel — their elders, leaders, judges and officials — and said to them:

JOSHUA: "I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you...Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed..."

NARRATOR 2: [And] Joshua made a covenant for the people, and...he reaffirmed...[God's] decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. After these things, Joshua...died at the age of a hundred and ten. Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel.

A FEW GOOD MEN...AND WOMEN

Bible Verse: JUDGES 2-4; 6-8; 13-16

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Characters:

- Narrator 1, 2 & 3
- Gideon
- Delilah
- Israelites
- Gods / Angel
- Samson
- Philistines

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NARRATOR 1: After [Joshua], another generation [of Israelites] grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. In his anger against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them...They were in great distress.

NARRATOR 2: Then the Lord raised up [men and women called] judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but...worshiped [other gods]. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them. But when the judge died, the people...*of Israel turned away from God again, and the cycle of social chaos began anew.*

NARRATOR 3: *[At one point, God] gave them into the hands of the [powerful] Midianites...[who destroyed their crops and oppressed them]. In their hunger and weakness, the Israelites appealed to God, who informed them that their big problem was not agricultural or military, but spiritual. To illustrate, God picked for service a farmer [named Gideon] from the weakest clan in his tribe. Like most new leaders, Gideon was uncertain if he could measure up. But God was looking for a faithful follower, not a decorated soldier.* When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said,

GOD: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior...Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand."

GIDEON: "Pardon me, my lord...but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in [the land], and I am the least in my family."

GOD: "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

NARRATOR 1: [So] the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon. [Gideon] and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them...[and] the Lord said to Gideon,

GOD: "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'"

NARRATOR 1: So Gideon sent [most] of the Israelites to their tents but kept...three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

NARRATOR 2: [When] Gideon and the...men with him reached the edge of the camp,...they blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. Grasping the torches in their left hands...they shouted,

ISRAELITES: "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

NARRATOR 2: While each man held his position around the camp,...the [Midianites ran out from their tents...confused, they fought and killed each other]. Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace forty years.

NARRATOR 3: No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites *forgot their faithful, holy God—and once again they suffered the consequences of their unbelief. Several Israelite leaders tried to keep enemies at bay, with mixed results. No one had Gideon's daring or success. But God was still working, and he sent an angel to make an extraordinary announcement.*

NARRATOR 1: Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man named Manoah had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said,

GOD: "...You are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. He will begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

NARRATOR 2: *The birth happened just as the angel said...This [boy named Samson], wild and unusually strong,...grew, and the Lord blessed him. [Once, when he was traveling with his mother and father] a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came on him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands...*

NARRATOR 3: [When he grew older], he fell in love with a [Philistine] woman...whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said,

PHILISTINES: "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him..."

NARRATOR 3: So Delilah said to Samson,

DELILAH: "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

NARRATOR 3: With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. So he told her everything.

SAMSON: "No razor has ever been used on my head...If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

NARRATOR 1: When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines...Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called,

DELILAH: "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"

NARRATOR 2: Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and [put him in] prison. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. While they were in high spirits, [the Philistines] shouted,

PHILISTINES: "Bring out Samson to entertain us."

NARRATOR 3: So they called Samson out of the prison...[and] they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand,

SAMSON: "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them."

NARRATOR 1: Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the Lord,

SAMSON: "Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes."

NARRATOR 2: Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said,

SAMSON: "Let me die with the Philistines!"

NARRATOR 3: Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived. He had led Israel twenty years. [But even] *after Samson, the Israelites continued their pattern of spiritual compromise during this sad period of their history.*

THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

Bible Verse: Ruth 1-4

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Characters:

- Narrator 1 & 2
- Naomi
- Ruth
- Boaz
- Overseer
- Guardian

Tweaks to the Text:

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Words in brackets = added words for context.

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NARRATOR 1: In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife, [Naomi], and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. [Some time later], Naomi's husband died, and she was left with her two sons. [Her sons both] married, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both [sons] also died,

NARRATOR 2: With her two daughters-in-law [Naomi] left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law,

NAOMI: "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness...to me."

NARRATOR 2: [So] Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

NAOMI: "Your sister-in-law is going back to her people...Go back with her."

RUTH: "Don't urge me to leave you...Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

NARRATOR 1: So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth, arriving in Bethlehem as the

barley harvest was beginning. And Ruth said to Naomi,

RUTH: "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

NARRATOR 2: So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to [Naomi's relative] Boaz. Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters,

BOAZ: "Who does that young woman belong to?"

OVERSEER: "She...came back from Moab with Naomi...She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now..."

NARRATOR 1: So Boaz said to Ruth,

BOAZ: "My daughter, listen to me. Stay here with the women who work for me. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

NARRATOR 1: At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him,

RUTH: "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"

BOAZ: "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done."

RUTH: "May I continue to find favor in your eyes. You have reassured me and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants."

NARRATOR 2: Then Ruth [went and] told her mother-in-law:

RUTH: "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,"

NAOMI: "The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our family guardians."

NARRATOR 2: So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to [gather food] until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her,

NAOMI: "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be [working] on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down...go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

NARRATOR 1: So [Ruth] went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law

told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went...to lie down... Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lied down...in the middle of the night... [this] startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

BOAZ: “Who are you?”

RUTH: “I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a family guardian.”

BOAZ: “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am a family guardian, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your family guardian, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it.”

NARRATOR 2: [In the morning Boaz] went back to town. [He] went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the family guardian he had mentioned came along. Then he said to the family guardian,

BOAZ: “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our [relatives]. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line. On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth, the widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”

NARRATOR 2: At this, the family guardian said,

GUARDIAN: “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it...Buy it yourself.”

NARRATOR 2: Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people,

BOAZ: “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of [her family]. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite...Today you are witnesses!”

NARRATOR 1: So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. [Soon] she gave birth to a son. Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

STANDING TALL, FALLING HARD

Bible Verse: 1 Samuel 1-4; 8-13; 15

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2, & 3
- God
- Hannah
- Samuel
- Eli
- Elders
- People

Tweaks to the Text:

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Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: There was a [woman]...from the hill country...[named Hannah]. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly:

HANNAH: "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and...give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life..."

NARRATOR 2: As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli [the priest] observed her...He [said]

ELI: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

NARRATOR 2: Then she went her way...and her face was no longer downcast...So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel.

NARRATOR 1: After he was weaned, she took the boy...to Eli, and she said to him,

HANNAH: "Pardon me...I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord..."

NARRATOR 2: [So] the boy Samuel [stayed there and] ministered before the Lord under Eli. The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up. And all Israel...recognized that Samuel was...a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear ...[and] revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

NARRATOR 3: Now the Israelites went out to fight [and were] defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. [So] the [Israelites] sent men to [bring] back the ark of the covenant, [the traveling chest carrying the Ten Commandments' tablets]. When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook...[and] the Philistines were afraid.

NARRATOR 2: [But] the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons...died. When [he heard about this], Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

NARRATOR 3: *No doubt the loss of his sons staggered Eli, but the loss of the ark of the covenant hit him even harder. The Philistines understood what a symbolic victory they had won and promptly placed the ark in [their] great temple. But God would not be mocked by the false gods of the Philistines. Israel had been brought here in the first place for the very purpose of showing the one true God to these people.*

NARRATOR 2: *[So] God afflicted the Philistines with physical problems, and after seven months of pure misery, the Philistines put the ark on a cart and sent it back to the Israelites. [Some time later,, Samuel became the leader of Israel and he] insisted that the Israelites stop worshiping pagan deities and return to the true God. He led the people in successfully subduing the Philistines.*

NARRATOR 1: When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders...[but] his sons did not follow [God's] ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel. They said to him,

ELDERS: "...Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

NARRATOR 1: [But] this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him:

GOD: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king...Listen to them and give them a king."

NARRATOR 3: [With God's help, Samuel chose] Saul [to be king. Saul was] as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else. Samuel said to all the people,

SAMUEL: "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."

NARRATOR 1: Then the people shouted,

PEOPLE: "Long live the king!"

NARRATOR 2: *Though [Saul] was chosen by God, he was a jealous, impatient and impetuous man. Yet he led the people into battle, and they rallied to support a strong central leader, forging a nation out of local tribes. [Samuel said to them,]*

SAMUEL: “Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.”

NARRATOR 3: *After Samuel’s stern warning, Saul attempted to reign successfully, but he seemed always to be one step behind common sense. When facing battle, [he] took matters into his own hands...[and disobeyed God’s instructions].*

NARRATOR 1: *Samuel, sad that Saul had failed as king, warned Saul that his time was up. It was time to find a successor. But having enjoyed the perks of high office, Saul would not go without resistance...[as we will see in our next story!]*

FROM SHEPHERD TO KING

Bible Verse: 1 Samuel 16-18; 24; 31; 2 Samuel 6; 22; 1 Chronicles 17; Psalm 59

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2, & 3
- God
- David
- Samuel
- Jesse
- Goliath
- Saul

Tweaks to the Text:

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Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: The Lord said to Samuel,

GOD: "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king...Do not consider his appearance or his height...The Lord does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

NARRATOR 1: Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him,

SAMUEL: "The Lord has not chosen these...Are these all the sons you have?"

JESSE: "There is still the youngest...He is tending the sheep."

NARRATOR 1: So he sent and had him brought in. Then the Lord said,

GOD: "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."

NARRATOR 1: ...and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came on David in power. [It still would be sometime before David grew into a man and took over as king.]

NARRATOR 2: Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war [against the Israelites.] A champion named Goliath...came out of the Philistine camp. [He was very tall and wore heavy armor.] Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel,

GOLIATH: "Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."

NARRATOR 2: On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were...terrified. [Meanwhile, Jesse was at home as all of his sons were on the frontlines ready to fight the Philistines] Jesse said to his son David,

JESSE: "See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel...fighting against the Philistines."

NARRATOR 2: [David] reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions. As he was talking with [his brothers], Goliath stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. David said to Saul,

DAVID: "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him...Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep...The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

NARRATOR 2: Saul said to David,

SAUL: "Go, and the Lord be with you."

NARRATOR 3: Then [David] took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

David said to the Philistine,

DAVID: "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty..."

NARRATOR 3: Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck [Goliath] on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

NARRATOR 1: [King] *Saul was impressed with David's victory over Goliath...[He] drafted David into service at the king's court. David and Saul's son Jonathan...formed a friendship...as strong as any brothers'. But David's popularity [led Saul to be]...consumed by anger and jealousy, [and] on numerous occasions Saul tried to kill David. Finally, David, in fear for his life, fled from Saul. But Saul was driven to hunt David down. In danger, David did what he always did: He poured out his fears to God and prayed for help.*

DAVID: "Deliver me from my enemies, O God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me..."

NARRATOR 2: No matter how close Saul got, David consistently outmaneuvered him. [One day, as he hid from Saul in a cave,] David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. [He]...called out to Saul,

DAVID: "My lord the king!...I spared you;...I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that...I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life."

NARRATOR 2: When David finished saying this, Saul...wept aloud.

SAUL: "You are more righteous than I...You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly... May the Lord reward you...I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands."

NARRATOR 3: *[After Saul died] God directed David to assert his calling as king. Soon afterward, David twice led the Israelites in decisive victories over the troublesome Philistines. This period also saw one of David's most important accomplishments: He [overtook] Jerusalem—making it Israel's national and spiritual capital.*

NARRATOR 1: *Aware that the treasured [Ark of the Covenant] deserved a majestic home, David began to conceive a permanent temple...David consulted with Nathan, a trusted prophet of God, about his plans. And the prophet's reply, reflecting God's mind on the matter, must have stunned David.*

GOD: 'You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in...the Lord will build a house for you...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.'

NARRATOR 2: *David organized an effective army with trusted leadership and used it strategically to stabilize [Israel.] David was a warrior, a poet and a man after God's heart. He was a leader who put God first, who loved and followed God. Everywhere the record showed that God blessed this shepherd-king. But David was not a perfect man...[as we will see in our next story.]*

THE TRIALS OF A KING

Bible Verse: 2 Samuel 11-12; 18-19; 31; 1 Chronicles 22; 29; Psalms 23; 32; 51

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2, & 3
- God
- David
- Nathan
- Bathsheba
- Messenger

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: In the Spring, [King] David sent [one of his generals, named] Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a [beautiful] woman bathing....David sent someone to find out about her. The [messenger returned and] said,

MESSENGER: "She is Bathsheba...the wife of Uriah the Hittite."

NARRATOR 2: Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying,

BATHSHEBA: "I am pregnant."

NARRATOR 2: So David sent [for] Uriah. When Uriah came to him...David ate and drank with him, and...made him drunk...Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among [the King's] servants; he did not go home. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote,

DAVID: "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

NARRATOR 1: [So] when the men of the city came out and fought against [the Israelites],...Uriah died. When [Bathsheba] heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him

a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord. The Lord sent Nathan [the prophet] to David. When he came to him, [he said]

NATHAN: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:"

GOD: 'I anointed you king over Israel,...Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?'

NARRATOR 2: Then David said to Nathan,

DAVID: "I have sinned against the Lord."

NARRATOR 2: *Unlike Saul, David didn't make excuses for his sin. Humbled and broken in heart, David acknowledged his sin and poured out his feelings in this prayer.*

DAVID: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;...blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

NATHAN: "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die."

NARRATOR 3: After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child, and he became ill [and eventually died. After mourning for his child,] [David] went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba...[Not long after,] she gave birth to [another] son, and they named him Solomon.

NARRATOR 1: *His sin forgiven, David again praised God with a full heart and continued to lead the army with great success. Among his own sons, however, a struggle was brewing. David failed to act as [his son] Absalom...challenged David's political position. David now faced uncharted territory—a rebellion from within his own family, an enemy who was also a beloved son. So...[when] all his men marched out in units of...thousands....,[David] commanded [his generals],*

DAVID: "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake."

NARRATOR 2: And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders. David's army marched out of the city to fight..., and the battle...spread out over the whole countryside. Now Absalom happened to meet David's men....and ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him. The king was shaken [when he heard of Absalom's death]. He...covered his face and cried aloud,

DAVID: "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

NARRATOR 3: *Absalom's rebellion was suppressed and the political damage repaired. Now David turned his attention to more pleasant concerns. The word of the Lord had come to David that the great temple project would fall to his successor, Solomon. So David gave orders to assemble the [materials needed to build the temple.] Then he called for his son Solomon and...said to [him]:*

DAVID: "Now, my son, the Lord be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the Lord your God, as he said you would..."

NARRATOR 1: *David knew his days as a warrior were over and his energy to lead a nation was waning. Still he resisted transferring power to his son Solomon. One day his lovely wife Bathsheba whispered in his ear:*

BATHSHEBA: *"Now, David, now is the time."*

NARRATOR 2: *And the king complied. [Soon, Solomon would become the wisest and richest King in Israel's history!]*

THE TRIALS OF A KING

Bible Verse: 1 Samuel 1-8; 10-11; 2 Chronicles 5-7

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2, & 3
- God
- David
- Solomon
- Hiram
- Singers

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: When the time drew near for [King] David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

DAVID: "I am about to go the way of all the earth...So be strong...and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands...Do this so that you may prosper in all you do..."

NARRATOR 1: [When] David [died], Solomon sat on the throne of his father...,and his rule was firmly established. [One night], the Lord appeared to Solomon...in a dream, and God said,

GOD: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

SOLOMON: "...My God, you have made [me] king... But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. So give [me] a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."

NARRATOR 1: The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him,

GOD: "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked....And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

NARRATOR 1: God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight...He spoke three thousand proverbs....[which offered] *practical insight into what it means to fear God, to have God-honoring relationships and how to wisely handle finances, work and life.* From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom...

NARRATOR 2: When [a king named] Hiram heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father David, he sent [messengers] to Solomon, because he had always been on friendly terms with David. Solomon sent back this message to Hiram:

SOLOMON: "You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple...But now the Lord...has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. I intend, therefore, to build a temple for God...My men will work with yours, and I will pay you...whatever wages you set. You know that we have no one so skilled in felling timber as [your people]."

NARRATOR 2: When Hiram heard Solomon's message, he was greatly pleased and said,

HIRAM: "Praise be to the Lord today, for he has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation. I...will do all you want in providing the cedar and juniper logs...And you are to grant my wish by providing food for my royal household."

NARRATOR 2: In this way Hiram kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and juniper logs he wanted, and Solomon gave Hiram...[plenty of] food for his household. Solomon continued to do this for Hiram year after year.

NARRATOR 3: In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt,...he began to build...*a temple...of spectacular beauty and historic significance. Construction took seven years of work by 180,000...laborers and nearly 4,000 supervisors. At the building site itself, [everyone] anticipated the inauguration of the house of God.*

NARRATOR 2: Then King Solomon summoned [all of the Israelites]. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests...brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple. [Then more than 120] trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord....The singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang:

SINGERS: "He is good; his love endures forever."

NARRATOR 3: Then Solomon stood before the altar, spread out his hands toward heaven and said:

SOLOMON: "Lord,...there is no God like you...The heavens...cannot contain you. How much less [is] this temple I have built! Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place."

NARRATOR 3: When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down..., they knelt...with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord.

NARRATOR 1: When Solomon had finished all these prayers..., He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

SOLOMON: “May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands ...he gave our ancestors.”

NARRATOR 1: Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. When Solomon had finished the temple..., the Lord appeared to him...and said:

GOD: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself.... My eyes and my heart will always be there. As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did,...I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever...But if you or your descendants turn away from me and...go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them...This temple will become a heap of rubble.”

NARRATOR 2: [Over time], King Solomon [became] greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart—even the Queen of Sheba came to from far away visit, seeking Solomon’s wisdom and bringing him lavish gifts].

NARRATOR 3: *[Now] during Solomon’s time, [having multiple wives] was considered normal (but was not [approved of] by God). Like other kings, Solomon had a large harem of wives, some of whom were from other nations. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods...So Solomon...did not follow the Lord completely, as David...had done.*

NARRATOR 1: The Lord became angry with Solomon.... So [he] said to Solomon,

GOD: “Since...you have not kept my covenant..., I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem.”

NARRATOR 2: *For Solomon, unfortunately, the irresistible draw of women had led to pagan worship...[It was] a bad decision from a fellow renowned for wisdom. [It was also a decision that marked] the beginning of the end—for Solomon’s reign, and for the nation of Israel as he knew it.]*

THE TRIALS OF A KING

Bible Verse: 1 KINGS 12-16

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Characters:

• Narrators 1, 2, 3 & 4 • God • Jeroboam • Rehoboam • Man of God • Elders

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: *[While Solomon was still King], God told a...young [man]...by the name of Jeroboam that he would be the future king...[of] all but one of the tribes of Israel. [But] Solomon was not ready to [give up] the throne and tried to kill Jeroboam, [so] Jeroboam fled to Egypt.*

NARRATOR 2: *After Solomon died, his own tribe of Judah automatically accepted his son Rehoboam as [their] next king. But much of [Israel] had grown to resent Solomon's heavy taxation and [the slavery he imposed] for his grand projects. When Jeroboam...heard [that Rehoboam was to be made King], he returned from Egypt..., and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him:*

JEROBOAM: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

NARRATOR 3: Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon...

REHOBOAM: "How would you advise me to answer these people?"

ELDERS: "If today you will be a servant to these people...and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."

NARRATOR 3: But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him...and said [to the people],

REHOBOAM: "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier."

NARRATOR 4: *[Before long, civil war broke out.] Rehoboam retreated to rule Judah (the smaller, southern region), while Jeroboam became king over Israel (the larger, northern region). God had forewarned that the kingdom would become divided because Solomon failed to [resist] pagan worship.... Already divided in worship practices, the nation now also became divided in politics, in priesthood, in security and in safety.*

NARRATOR 1: [Soon] Rehoboam...mustered the whole house of Judah...to make war against the house of Israel and to regain the kingdom...But this word of God came to...Rehoboam [through one of the prophets.]

GOD: "Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home,...for this is my doing."

NARRATOR 2: So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again, as the Lord had ordered. Then Jeroboam fortified [the city of] Shechem in the [hills]...and lived there. Jeroboam thought to himself,

JEROBOAM: "...If [my] people go up to [worship] in Jerusalem, [part of the Kingdom of Judah], they will again give their allegiance to...Rehoboam. They will kill me and return to [him]."

NARRATOR 3: [So Jeroboam] made two golden calves. He said to the people,

JEROBOAM: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel..."

NARRATOR 4: And this [idol worship] became a sin; the people came to worship the [golden calves instead of God.] Jeroboam...[even]...instituted a festival....[where he made sacrifices] to the calves he had made.

NARRATOR 1: [One day] a man of God came from Judah..., [just] as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord:

MAN OF GOD: "This is the sign the Lord has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."

NARRATOR 1: When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out..., he stretched out his hand [pointing at the man] from the altar and said,

JEROBOAM: "Seize him!"

NARRATOR 1: But the hand...shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God...Then the king said to the man of God,

JEROBOAM: "...Pray for me that my hand may be restored."

NARRATOR 1: So the man of God [prayed], and the king's hand was restored. [But] even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways.

NARRATOR 2: [Rehoboam's tribe of] Judah [also] did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done...The people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

NARRATOR 3: There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. *[After they died], various kings reigned in Israel and Judah. Most of them did evil. The only king considered good [was] King Asa of Judah...[He] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He understood that only... God was worthy of worship, and he cleaned...Judah of its idols.*

GOD'S MESSENGERS

Bible Verse: 1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2; 4; 6; Hosea 4-5; 8-9; 14; Amos 1; 3-5; 9

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Elijah
- Ahab

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: *[The downward spiral of Israel's Kings continued, as a man named] Ahab became king of Israel...[Ahab married] Jezebel, [the] daughter of a pagan foreign king. Ahab and Jezebel worshiped [a god called] Baal and hated the prophets of God. Now [a prophet of God named] Elijah...said to [King] Ahab,*

ELIJAH: "As the...God of Israel...lives...there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

NARRATOR 2: Then...the Lord [told] Elijah [to go live in a valley, where he would have food and water]. In the third year [of the drought], the word of the Lord came to Elijah, [and] Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. When he saw Elijah, he said to him,

AHAB: "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

ELIJAH: "I have not made trouble for Israel...But you...have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of [the false god] Asherah..."

NARRATOR 2: So Ahab assembled [the people and] the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said,

ELIJAH: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him...Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets...put [one] on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

NARRATOR 2: So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon...But there was no response; no one answered. At noon Elijah began to taunt them.

ELIJAH: "Shout louder! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or...maybe he is sleeping...."

NARRATOR 3: So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom.... But there was no response...Then...Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes [of Israel]...and built an altar in the name of the Lord. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed:

ELIJAH: "Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

NARRATOR 1: Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice...When all the people saw this, they...[fell down and cried out in awe.] Then Elijah commanded them [to seize the prophets of Baal]...Elijah said to Ahab,

ELIJAH: "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

NARRATOR 2: So Ahab went off [and] told [his wife] Jezebel everything Elijah had done...So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to [threaten to kill him]. Elijah was afraid and ran for his life...[out] into the wilderness. [There]...the word of the Lord came to him:

GOD: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

ELIJAH: "The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

GOD: "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for [I am] about to pass by."

NARRATOR 3: Then a...powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks..., but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. [Then] came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. The Lord said to him,

GOD: "Go back the way you came, and...anoint Elisha...to succeed you as prophet."

NARRATOR 1: So Elijah went from there and found Elisha... [who]...became his servant. [Soon,] Elijah's time had come to an end...Elijah and Elisha were walking along [a road] together, [when] suddenly a chariot...and horses of fire appeared..., and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

NARRATOR 2: *Elisha was left to carry on [God's] work, and his dramatic miracles made it clear that his God was one of unspeakable power and glory. In one instance, Elisha purified a spring to provide fresh water to an entire town. Another time, through Elisha's intervention, a poor widow and her sons were saved from financial ruin and slavery by a bottomless jar of oil. Elisha [even revived a boy from the dead!]*

NARRATOR 3: *Many kings came and went in Israel and Judah. Some [made] godly [decisions]; others made a mess of what they inherited. [After Elisha died] Jeroboam [the Second] took the reins and secured Israel's borders, but he never guarded Israel's soul. The worship of false gods and idol-making businesses flourished during his regime.*

NARRATOR 1: *Though more prophets warned the people...Israel didn't listen. They hardened their hearts and continued to ignore God's pleas to return to his ways, [and] the kings of Israel led the people into spiritual and social chaos.*

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Bible Verse: 2 Kings 17-19; Isaiah 3; 6; 13-14; 49; 53

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Isaiah
- Commander
- Hezekiah

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NARRATOR 1: [The Isrealites] worshiped other gods [and] did wicked things that [provoked] the Lord's anger. The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets...But they would not listen. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria.

NARRATOR 2: *Any semblance of a nation—a people with a common cause and heritage—was gone. In the southern kingdom of Judah, [a] young King [named] Hezekiah watched these developments take place. Hezekiah...began to reign [at the age of twenty-five]. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. [So] the king of Assyria sent his supreme commander...[to] Jerusalem...to intimidate Hezekiah. The...commander said,*

COMMANDER: "This is what...the king of Assyria, says: 'On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have the counsel and the might for war — but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?' Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the Lord? The Lord himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.' "

NARRATOR 1: Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew,

COMMANDER: "Hear the word of...the king of Assyria! Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?"

NARRATOR 1: [Some time later, the King of Assyria] sent messengers to Hezekiah [again] with this word:

COMMANDER: "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you... Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the [other] countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered?"

NARRATOR 2: Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed:

HEZEKIAH: "Lord, the God of Israel...you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth...Listen to the words [the King of Assyria] has sent to ridicule the living God...Deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God."

NARRATOR 2: Then [the prophet] Isaiah sent a message [in response] to [Hezekiah's prayers]:

ISAIAH: "This is the word that the Lord has spoken against [the King of Assyria]."

GOD: 'Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your messengers you have ridiculed the Lord. But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me. I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.'

ISAIAH: "Therefore this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria:
'He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here...By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the Lord. I will defend this city and save it...' "

NARRATOR 3: *That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp...So [the] king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew.*

NARRATOR 1: *The...prophet Isaiah achieved prominence during Hezekiah's reign, helping the king to stand-down the Assyrian threat by relying on God alone. [But] Isaiah's message [also] contained some bad news: Jerusalem would fall. Once announced, that event was sure to happen.*

ISAIAH: "See now, the Lord...is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support: Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves."

NARRATOR 2: *But the story was far from over...Isaiah's prophecies also foretold that after God's judgment, the Israelites would return home from Babylon and rebuild their nation, clearly revealing that the Lord God was in control of world events.*

ISAIAH: "The Lord will have compassion...once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. This is what the Lord says:"

GOD: 'In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land...to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' Then the whole human race will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer...'

NARRATOR 3: *The promised...return...of Judah was to be a precursor of something much more glorious that was still to come — God's greater plan for giving his people endless freedom and glory. Isaiah's prophecies ended with promises of a suffering Servant, the Messiah, who would usher in a glorious kingdom without end.*

ISAIAH: "He was despised and rejected by others...Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...he was pierced for our transgressions...; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied..."

NARRATOR 1: *In the meantime, faithful King Hezekiah died and was buried. Unfortunately, his son, Manasseh, did not follow the faithful example set by his father. Manasseh's reign actively supported detestable religious practices and brutal oppression. The righteous people in the land must have recalled fond memories of the good old days of Hezekiah, while enduring Manasseh's betrayals and compromise.*

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Bible Verse: 2 Kings 21; 23-25; 2 Chronicles 33; 36; Jeremiah 1-2; 4-5; 13; 21; Lamentations 1-3; 5; Ezekiel 1-2; 6-7; 36-37

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Ezekiel
- Jeremiah

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NARRATOR 1: [After the reign of Hezekiah, his son] Manasseh [became King and] did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He...erected altars to Baal and...[worshiped the stars]. He [even] sacrificed his own son in the fire.

NARRATOR 2: So the Lord brought against [Judah] the...[armies]...of Assyria, who... took [Manasseh away] to Babylon [as prisoner]. In his distress [Manasseh]...humbled himself greatly before...God. The Lord was moved...and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom.

NARRATOR 3: *[But] any feelings of new hope...[brought] by Manasseh's repentance were suppressed [by the kings that followed him]. [With few exceptions, several generations of kings] did evil in the eyes of the Lord. j.*

NARRATOR 1: [Eventually] Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and...all [of] Jerusalem [was carried] into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

NARRATOR 2: *Among [those exiled]...was a young priest named Ezekiel, a man of keen intellect... and spiritual insight. Ezekiel relayed to his fellow exiles the stern message of God's judgment. Jerusalem was still standing, but it was the beginning of the end.*

NARRATOR 3: *Back on the home front, things were going from bad to worse in Jerusalem. But God continued to pursue and warn his people. Another prophet, named Jeremiah, was called into service in a very interesting conversation with God. The word of the Lord came to [Jeremiah]:*

GOD: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

JEREMIAH: "Ah, Sovereign Lord...I do not know how to speak; I am too young."

GOD: "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you...I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. [The people of Judah] will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you..."

NARRATOR 1: *Knowing God was with him, Jeremiah shed his fears. Jeremiah felt deeply the burden of the people's sin and the coming...destruction of Jerusalem, the judgment of God for the people's sins of idolatry and pride.*

NARRATOR 2: *The words of Jeremiah were clear, but Judah's kings refused to listen. They grew increasingly brash, ignoring the prophet's warnings and wisdom. Finally Judah's kings had to face Babylon's full military muscle, rock hard and set to kill.*

NARRATOR 3: Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem, [this time] with his whole army. [The Babylonians] set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building [was] burned down.

NARRATOR 1: *Though Jeremiah was faced with sorrow and tragedy, he trusted in God's mercies — as did Ezekiel. Before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel [also] warned the people of the destruction that was to come. And yet once Ezekiel and his fellow exiles in Babylon received the news that Jerusalem had fallen, his message turned to hope. [God spoke through Ezekiel, saying]:*

GOD: "I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land...I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh..."

NARRATOR 2: [Then Ezekiel told of a vision given to him by God]:

EZEKIEL: The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones...bones that were very dry. He asked me,

GOD: "Son of man, can these bones live?"

EZEKIEL: I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Then he said to me,

GOD: "Say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.' "

EZEKIEL: So I prophesied as I was commanded....[and] they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army. Then he said to me:

GOD: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore...say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people...I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it.'"

DANIEL IN EXILE

Bible Verse: Daniel 1-3; 6; Jeremiah 29-31

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Daniel
- Shadrach/Meshach/Abednego
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Darius
- Official
- Administrator

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: *[While God's people were still in exile],* the king [of Babylon] ordered [his] court officials, to bring...some of the Israelites...to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

NARRATOR 2: Among those...chosen...were [three men named] Shadrach...Meshach...and Abednego. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

NARRATOR 3: *[In his pride, King] Nebuchadnezzar decided to erect a statue [of gold] some 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.* [He ordered that all the people]...fall down and worship the image..., and that whoever [did] not...[would] be thrown into a blazing furnace. [Soon after the decree, some of Nebuchadnezzar's officials said to him],

OFFICIAL: "...There are some Jews— Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego — who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

NARRATOR 1: Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego... [and] said to them,

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: "Is it true...that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?...If you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you...?"

NARRATOR 1: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him,

SHADRACH: "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter."

MESHACH: "If the God we serve is able to deliver us, then he will deliver us from the blazing furnace..."

ABEDNEGO: "But even if he does not,...we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

NARRATOR 2: Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with [them]. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

NARRATOR 3: The...furnace [was] so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers,

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

NARRATOR 3: Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the...furnace and shouted,

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

NARRATOR 1: So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and [everyone] saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said,

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...! They trusted in him and...were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God..."

NARRATOR 1: Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

NARRATOR 2: *[During that time, there was another Israelite in the King's service named] Daniel, who served with honor and distinction. He became a top administrator under [King Darius, who ruled several years after Nebuchadnezzar.]*

NARRATOR 3: Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators...that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. So [the other] administrators [were jealous of Daniel, and encouraged King Darius to] issue an edict...that anyone who [prayed] to any god or human being except [Darius will] be thrown into the lions' den. So King Darius [issued] the decree.

NARRATOR 1: When Daniel learned [of] the decree..., he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then [the other administrators] went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and...said...,

ADMINISTRATOR: "Daniel...pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."

NARRATOR 2: [Although he liked Daniel], the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel,

DARIUS: "May your God...rescue you!"

NARRATOR 2: At the first light of dawn [the next day], the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice,

DARIUS: "Daniel...has your God...been able to rescue you from the lions?"

DANIEL: "May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight..."

NARRATOR 2: The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

NARRATOR 3: *[Some time after this], Babylon [fell] to Persian invaders. [Within a year], the Persian [governor], issued a decree permitting Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. Thus, [almost] 70 years after [their exile] began,...[the Israelites] were going home, [just as the prophet Jeremiah had promised]!*

THE RETURN HOME

Bible Verse: Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1; 8

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Darius
- Priest
- Cyrus

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NARRATOR 1: In the first year [after Babylon had been overthrown], the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, [the] king of Persia, to make a proclamation:

CYRUS: "'The Lord...has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him [in] Jerusalem. Any of his people among you...may...go up to Jerusalem...and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel."

NARRATOR 2: King Cyrus [also] brought out the articles belonging to the temple..., which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem. *[Then] nearly 50,000 [Israelites were led] back home to begin their rebuilding mission. With long, hard labor ahead of them, the people remembered to put first things first.*

NARRATOR 3: When [they returned to the Promised Land], the Israelites...[gathered] in Jerusalem. Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on [the newtemple's] foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord. [Then] the priests...took their places...[and] with praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

PRIESTS: "He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever."

NARRATOR 1: And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, [and] the older [citizens], who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid. The people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

NARRATOR 2: [Before long], the enemies of Judah...set out to discourage the people [from]...building [the temple]. They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans. Thus the work on the house of God...came to a standstill [for about ten years], until...Darius [took over as the next] king of Persia.

NARRATOR 3: *Weary of the resistance [from their enemies], the Israelites began thinking that maybe this wasn't the right time to build the Lord's house after all. But God had different plans. Once again intervening, he sent his prophets to jump-start the temple project. Haggai's message helped shake the people out of their complacency.*

HAGGAI: "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house. [The temple] remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore,...[God has] called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

NARRATOR 1: [So] the people obeyed...[and] feared the Lord. Then [God] gave this message...to the people [through Haggai]:

GOD: "I am with you."

NARRATOR 2: So the Lord stirred up the spirit of...the people [and] they...began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty. *Haggai continued his prophetic message of encouragement. God had not forgotten his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he said. And he hinted at a glorious future promise that sounded too good to be true...*

HAGGAI: "...Be strong, all you people of the land, and work. For [God is] with you...Do not fear. This is what the Lord Almighty says:"

GOD: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth...and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory...And in this place I will grant peace...'

NARRATOR 3: *During the time of Haggai's ministry, [another prophet named] Zechariah...began his work in Jerusalem....Both men wanted to stimulate renewal in the temple rebuilding project. Like Haggai, Zechariah had a dual message:*

ZECHARIAH: *The temple is important, but it's a sign and symbol of something greater coming. Work on the temple; don't be afraid. But watch for the day when God will bless Jerusalem once again. This is what the Lord Almighty says:*

GOD: "Judah and Israel have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing...Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you...when your ancestors angered me...so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid."

NARRATOR 1: *Thanks to Haggai's and Zechariah's encouragement, the people returned to their work on the temple. However, they were not the only ones back at work. So was their opposition, this time from [other governors and officials of nearby regions. When King Darius heard of their plans to interfere with the rebuilding of the temple, he wrote to them, saying]:*

DARIUS: ...Stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I hereby decree [that] their expenses are to be fully paid out of [your] royal treasury,...so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed...must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven...May God...overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.

NARRATOR 2: The...[orders] King Darius...sent [were]...carried out with diligence. So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai...and Zechariah. They finished building the temple, [and]...the people of Israel...celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY AND COURAGE

Bible Verse: Esther 1-9

Important Details: The StoryReader scripts are segments of scripture taken directly from Zondervan's THE STORY Bible (TNIV). Each script takes approximately 10 minutes to be read aloud. These segments have been formatted into a *Readers' Theater*. A Readers' Theater is an activity in which a few participants are asked to read directly from a script, with the intent of telling a story in a lively manner. Readers are **not expected to memorize or improvise** from the script, but use voice inflection and some gestures appropriate to their characters actions and words in order to bring the story to life.

Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Esther
- Xerxes
- Haman

Tweaks to the Text:

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: [After most of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem, the King of Persia], King Xerxes, reigned from his royal throne in the [city] of Susa. The king [wanted a new wife, so he appointed] commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all [the most] beautiful young women [to him].

NARRATOR 2: Now there was in...Susa a Jew...named Mordecai, [whose ancestors] had been carried into exile from Jerusalem [years before]. Mordecai had a cousin named Esther, [who] had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

NARRATOR 3: When the king's order...had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to...Susa. Esther also was taken to the king's palace...[and] had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments [before she was presented to King Xerxes]. Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day he [waited outside the city gate] to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

NARRATOR 1: When the turn came for Esther...the king was attracted to [her] more than...any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval...So he...made her queen.

NARRATOR 2: [Not long after], Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. [While he was there, he overheard],...two of the king's officers...[become] angry and conspire to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were [captured].

NARRATOR 3: After these events, King Xerxes honored [a man named] Haman, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

NARRATOR 1: When Haman saw [this], he was enraged...Having learned who Mordecai's people were, Haman looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. Then Haman said to King Xerxes,

HAMAN: "There is a certain people dispersed among...your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different,...and they do not obey the king's laws. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them."

NARRATOR 1: So the king...said to Haman, ...

XERXES: "Do with the people as you please."

NARRATOR 2: [So Haman] sent [an order] to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy...all the Jews — young and old, women and children — on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. When Mordecai learned of all [this], he...went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. In every province to which the...order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.

NARRATOR 3: When Esther's...attendant came and told her [what had happened], she sent this [message] to Mordecai:

ESTHER: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

NARRATOR 3: [Esther knew that it was a risk to approach Xerxes for help,] for any man or woman [who approached] the king [—even his wife—]without being summoned [could be] put to death. [But even so], Esther put on her royal robes and [approached Xerxes]. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her...Then the king asked,

XERXES: "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? ...It will be given [to] you."

ESTHER: "If it pleases the king...let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."

NARRATOR 1: So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, and as they were drinking wine...the king again asked,

XERXES: "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

ESTHER: "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty,...grant me my life...and spare my people... For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated."

XERXES: "...Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

ESTHER: "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"

NARRATOR 2: Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king [was enraged, and had Haman executed.] Then the king's fury subsided. That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman...and Esther appointed [Mordecai] over [the] estate.

NARRATOR 3: [Xerxes also] granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating.

REBUILDING THE WALLS

Bible Verse: Ezra 7; Nehemiah 1-2; 4; 6-8; Malachi 1-4

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Antaxerxes
- Nehemiah
- Everyone

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: *[About] half a century [after God's people began returning home to Jerusalem, there was] a respected priest and teacher [named Ezra, who] was living in Babylon...[Ezra] took a serious interest in making sure that God's Law was heard and followed. [King Antaxerxes, the ruling King of Babylon, decided to send Ezra on a] journey [to] Jerusalem [with this mission]:*

ANTAXERXES: You are sent by the king...to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God...You are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel. And you, Ezra,...are to teach any who do not know [the law of God].

NARRATOR 2: *Loaded down with the king's gifts and supplies, Ezra led several thousand fellow Israelites on [the] journey to Jerusalem. He found the temple in good order, but he also discovered that the people were intermarrying with neighboring cultures who worshiped other gods. Appalled, Ezra tore his clothes in grief and wept as he prayed, confessing the people's sin and asking for God's mercy.*

NARRATOR 3: *About 13 years later, [another prophet named] Nehemiah, [an assistant] to the king of Persia...received news [that disturbed him]...The temple in Jerusalem was completed, but the wall of the city still lay in ruins. When [Nehemiah] heard [this], [he] sat down and wept [and prayed to God]:*

NEHEMIAH: "Lord,...I confess the sins we Israelites...have committed against you. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your...servants who delight in revering your name."

NARRATOR 1: *Nehemiah decided he would [go to Jerusalem and] lead the people in rebuilding the city's walls. After praying for God's help, Nehemiah approached the king, who was pleased to send Nehemiah on his way. [Once Nehemiah reached Jerusalem, he addressed all those] who would be doing the work.*

NEHEMIAH: "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

NARRATOR 2: *So they began this good work. Just as the Jews had received opposition from the neighboring peoples when they worked at rebuilding the temple a century earlier, they came under attack for trying to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. When [their enemies] heard that we were rebuilding the wall, [they] became angry...[and] ridiculed [and taunted] the Jews. Again Nehemiah prayed to God:*

NEHEMIAH: Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads...for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

NARRATOR 3: *So [the Jews] rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height...But when [Judah's enemies] heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.*

NARRATOR 1: *Meanwhile, the...strength of the laborers [was] giving out, and [the Israelites were afraid of an attack from all sides. So Nehemiah] stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places,...with their swords, spears and bows. [Then Nehemiah] said to...the people,*

NEHEMIAH: "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your people, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

NARRATOR 2: *[But an attack never came.] The wall was completed...in [only] fifty-two days,...[and] when [Judah's] enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of...God.*

NARRATOR 3: *[Now that the wall was completed],...both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to ensure that a pure system of worship was in place and to enforce the laws against intermarriage with ungodly nations. [So] Ezra [the teacher] brought the Law [of Moses] before the assembly...As [Ezra] opened [the book], the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord...and all the people lifted their hands and responded,*

EVERYONE: "Amen! Amen!"

NARRATOR 1: *Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground...All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law, [so] Nehemiah the governor...said to them all,*

NEHEMIAH: "Do not mourn or weep...Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

NARRATOR 2: [So] day after day,...Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God, [and the people celebrated]. They celebrated...for seven days [straight].

NARRATOR 3: *The Israelites had indeed rebuilt the temple and were worshiping God again; yet many of the people and priests strayed from the faith. God called Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, to offer a final word to the people. Through Malachi, God issued his warnings against the people's hypocrisy, but also reminded them of his never-ending covenant promise.*

GOD: I the Lord do not change...Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them... Remember the law I gave [Moses]...for all Israel....Return to me, and I will return to you...

BIRTH OF THE KING

Bible Verse: Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2; John 1

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Angel
- Mary
- Herod
- Magi
- Jesus

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: In the beginning [of time], [Jesus] was with God, and [Jesus] was God, [and] through him all things were made. [At just the right time],...[almost] *four hundred years [since God last spoke through his prophets]*, [Jesus] became flesh and [lived] among [the people].

NARRATOR 2: [Before Jesus came to earth] God sent [an] angel...to [the small village of] Nazareth,...to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of [King] David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said,

ANGEL: "Greetings!...Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will...give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and...God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

MARY: "How will this be...since I am a virgin?"

ANGEL: "The Holy Spirit will [grow the baby inside you], and the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

MARY: "I am the Lord's servant...May it be to me according to your word."

NARRATOR 3: Then the angel left her. [Now] Joseph...did not want to expose [Mary] to public disgrace [because of her pregnancy out of wedlock]...[So] he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

ANGEL: "Joseph...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

NARRATOR 1: When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel...had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. In those days [the emperor of Rome] issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world, [which then included Israel]. And everyone went to their own town to register.

NARRATOR 2: So Joseph [and Mary]...went...to Bethlehem the town of David, because [Joseph] belonged to the...[family] of David. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and [Mary] gave birth to...a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

NARRATOR 3: [Meanwhile], there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them...and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

ANGEL: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

NARRATOR 1: Suddenly a great company of [angels] appeared with the angel, praising God. When the angels had left them..., the shepherds...hurried off [to Bethlehem] and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby. When they had seen him, they spread the word...about this child, and all who heard it were amazed.

NARRATOR 2: After Jesus was born...Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked [King Herod, the ruler there],

MAGI: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star...and have come to worship him."

NARRATOR 3: When King Herod heard this he was disturbed...[so] Herod called the Magi secretly...and said,

HEROD: "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

NARRATOR 1: [So] they went on their way, and the star they had seen...went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

NARRATOR 2: [The magi found] the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they...presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel...appeared to Joseph in a dream.

ANGEL: “Get up...take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt...for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

NARRATOR 3: So [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother...and left for Egypt...When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under. [Finally], after Herod died, [Joseph brought his family back] to...Nazareth.

NARRATOR 1: When [Jesus] was twelve years old, [his family brought him to a] festival [in Jerusalem.] After the festival was over,...Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but [his parents] were unaware of it. [When they discovered he was missing] they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

NARRATOR 2: After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him,

MARY: “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

JESUS: “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

NARRATOR 3: But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And as Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and in favor with God and people.

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

Bible Verse: Matthew 3-4; 11; Mark 1-3; Luke 8; John 1-4

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Jesus
- Evil Spirit
- Samaritan
- John the Baptist
- Pharisees

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: In [the days before Jesus began his public ministry], [a man named] John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying,

JOHN: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!"

NARRATOR 1: People went out to [John] from...all [over the region]. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Then Jesus came...to be baptized by John. As soon as Jesus was baptized,...heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove. And a voice from heaven said,

GOD: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

NARRATOR 2: Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The [devil] came to him and [tempted him with food, political power, and more, if Jesus would worship him. But Jesus resisted, so] the devil left him...

NARRATOR 3: *Following the test in the wilderness, Jesus began his public ministry.* [One day, when] John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him...[he] said,

JOHN: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

NARRATOR 3: When...two [of John's] disciples heard...this, they followed Jesus. The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding [a young man named] Philip [and several others], he said,

JESUS: "Follow me."

NARRATOR 3: He appointed twelve [disciples in all] to be with him...[and they dropped everything and followed him.]

NARRATOR 1: [Not long after, Jesus went to] a wedding...in Galilee. When the wine was gone... Jesus said to the servants,

JESUS: "Fill the jars with water...[Then] draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

NARRATOR 1: They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, [and was amazed at how good the wine was.] What Jesus did [at the wedding]...was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples put their faith in him.

NARRATOR 2: [Once, while traveling], he came to a town in [the region of] Samaria...and Jesus...sat down by [a] well [at] about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her,

JESUS: "Will you give me a drink?"

NARRATOR 2: [She was surprised at his request, since Jews did not associate with Samaritans—especially Samaritan women.]

JESUS: "If you knew...who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

SAMARITAN WOMAN: "Where can you get this living water?"

JESUS: "...Those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

SAMARITAN WOMAN: "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

JESUS: "Go, call your husband and come back."

SAMARITAN WOMAN: "I have no husband,"

JESUS: "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband..."

SAMARITAN WOMAN: "Sir,...I can see that you are a Prophet...I know that the Messiah...is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

JESUS: "I, the one speaking to you — I am he."

NARRATOR 2: Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. The woman [then] went back to the town and [told] the people [about Jesus]. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony...

NARRATOR 3: [From there, Jesus and his disciples] went to [the town of] Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority... Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,

EVIL SPIRIT: "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?...I know who you are — the Holy One of God!"

JESUS: "Be quiet! Come out of him!"

NARRATOR 1: The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed, [and] news about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. The people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed...and Jesus healed many.

NARRATOR 2: [One day, at a home in] Capernaum, the people...gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door... Some men came [with] a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus..., they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man,

JESUS: "Son, your sins are forgiven...Get up, take your mat and go home."

NARRATOR 2: He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God.

NARRATOR 3: [Another time], while Jesus was having dinner at [a tax collector named] Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples...When the teachers of the law...saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples:

PHARISEES: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

NARRATOR 3: On hearing this, Jesus said to them,

JESUS: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

NARRATOR 1: After this, Jesus traveled about from one town...to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases...[and] were helping to support them out of their own means.

NARRATOR 2: *[For hundreds of years], the Jews [had been] convinced that when the long-awaited Messiah came, he would free the people from political oppression. They were looking for an earthly king to bring their nation into power. But Jesus' purpose was much deeper, his intentions [far] more significant...*

NO ORDINARY MAN

Bible Verse: Matthew 5-7; 9; 14; Mark 4-6; Luke 10; John 6

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Jesus
- Peter
- Religious Leader
- Jairus
- Disciples (#1 & #2)

Tweaks to the Text:

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: [As] Jesus [started drawing] huge crowds, [he]...taught them many things by [telling short stories, called] parables...[Once], *Jesus used a parable when he was questioned by a religious leader. [The man asked]:*

RELIGIOUS LEADER: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

JESUS: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

RELIGIOUS LEADER: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

JESUS: "You have answered correctly...Do this and you will live."

RELIGIOUS LEADER: "And who is my neighbor?"

JESUS: "A man was [traveling], when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite...saw him [and] passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him...and took care of him...Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

RELIGIOUS LEADER: "The one who had mercy on him."

JESUS: "Go and do likewise."

NARRATOR 2: *Jesus' teachings moved many people and changed lives. However, those who continually heard his parables and sermons were his disciples. At one point during their travels together, the disciples' trust in Jesus was put to the test when a violent storm overtook their boat. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. [When] the disciples woke him,...he got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves,*

JESUS: "Quiet! Be still!"

NARRATOR 2: Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples,

JESUS: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

NARRATOR 3: When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and...fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him,

JAIRUS: "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

NARRATOR 3: So Jesus went with him...When they came to the home of the synagogue leader,... people [were] crying and wailing loudly [because the girl had died]. [But Jesus] went in and...took [the girl] by the hand and said to her:

JESUS: 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'

NARRATOR 3: Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around. At this [everyone was] completely astonished.

NARRATOR 1: [Once, as Jesus was teaching, it had become] late in the day, so his disciples came to him [and said]

DISCIPLE #1: "Send the people away so that they can go...and buy themselves something to eat."

JESUS: "You give them something to eat."

DISCIPLE #2: "That would take almost a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

JESUS: "How many loaves do you have?"

DISCIPLE #1 "Five — and two fish."

NARRATOR 1: Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down....Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

NARRATOR 2: Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side [of the lake]...After he had dismissed [the crowd], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. But Jesus immediately said to them:

JESUS: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

NARRATOR 2: [Then Peter said]:

PETER: "Lord, if it's you...tell me to come to you on the water."

JESUS: "Come."

NARRATOR 2: Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out,

PETER: "Lord, save me!"

NARRATOR 2: Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

JESUS: "You of little faith...why did you doubt?"

NARRATOR 2: And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying,

PETER & DISCIPLES: "Truly you are the Son of God!"

NARRATOR 3: *Jesus...had a rock-solid sense of who he was, and he wanted his followers to know him to the core. As Jesus continued his ministry, he began to reveal more about who he was and why he had come...*

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

Bible Verse: Matthew 17; 21; Mark 8–12; 14; Luke 9; 22; John 7–8; 11–12

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Characters:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| • Narrators 1, 2 & 3 | • God | • Jesus | • Peter |
| • Rich Man | • Mary | • Disciples (1, 2, 3) | • Crowd Person (1, 2, 3) |

Tweaks to the Text:

Ellipses = words omitted within a sentence for the sake of conciseness. NOTE: No need to slow your reading when you see an ellipse.

Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: [While Jesus continued to travel with his disciples], he asked them [one day],

JESUS: "Who do people say I am?"

DISCIPLE #1: "Some say John the Baptist..."

DISCIPLE #2: "...Others say Elijah..."

DISCIPLE #3: "...And still others, one of the prophets."

JESUS: "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

NARRATOR 1: Peter answered [him]:

PETER: "You are the Messiah."

NARRATOR 1: Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said:

JESUS: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it..."

NARRATOR 2: [One day], Jesus took with him Peter, James and John..., and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. [Suddenly] a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said,

GOD: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

NARRATOR 2: When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them.

JESUS: "Get up. Don't be afraid."

NARRATOR 2: When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen...

NARRATOR 3: [Soon after that] a man named Lazarus was sick. [His] sisters, {Mary and Martha} sent word to Jesus. When he heard this, Jesus said,

JESUS: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

NARRATOR 3: When [Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days]. Mary...fell at his feet and said,

MARY: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

NARRATOR 3: When Jesus saw her weeping, and the [many] Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved.

JESUS: "Where have you laid him?"

MARY: "Come and see, Lord,"

NARRATOR 3: Jesus wept. {They traveled to the tomb.} It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

JESUS: "Take away the stone."

NARRATOR 3: When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice,

JESUS: "Lazarus, come out!"

NARRATOR 3: The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them,

JESUS: "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

NARRATOR 3: Many [saw] what Jesus did, [and] put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a [secret] meeting...[and] from that day on they plotted to take his life.

NARRATOR 1: [Meanwhile] as Jesus [continued] on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

RICH MAN: "Good teacher...what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

JESUS: "You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

RICH MAN: "Teacher...all these I have kept since I was a boy."

JESUS: "One thing you lack...Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NARRATOR 1: At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,

JESUS: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

NARRATOR 1: The disciples were...amazed, and said to each other,

DISCIPLES: "Who then can be saved?"

JESUS: "With human beings this is impossible, but ...all things are possible with God."

NARRATOR 2: As they approached Jerusalem...[Jesus' disciples brought a] colt [for] Jesus [to ride] and threw their cloaks over it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

CROWD PERSON #1: "Hosanna!"

CROWD PERSON #2: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

CROWD PERSON #3: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

ALL CROWD: "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

NARRATOR 2: [After he arrived in Jerusalem], Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

JESUS: "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.' "

NARRATOR 3: Now the Passover...Festival [was] only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. Then Satan entered Judas, one of the Twelve [disciples]. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

Bible Verse: Matthew 26–27; Mark 14–15; Luke 22–23; John 13–14; 16–19

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Characters:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| • Narrators 1, 2 & 3 | • Jesus | • High Priest | • Crowd (3-4 people) |
| • John (1 line) | • Pilate (1 line) | • Criminal 1 (1 line) | • Criminal 2 (1 line) |

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: [In Jerusalem, Jesus met with his disciples for the Passover Meal.] [During the meal] Jesus got up,...wrapped a towel around his waist,...and began to wash his disciples' feet....

JESUS: "Do you understand what I have done for you? Now that I...have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example...for you..."

NARRATOR 1: [Then] Jesus [became] troubled in spirit and testified,

JESUS: "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

NARRATOR 1: His disciples stared at one another, [not knowing what] he meant. [John] asked him,

JOHN: "Lord, who is it?"

JESUS: "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."

NARRATOR 1: Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him,

JESUS: "What you are about to do, do quickly."

NARRATOR 1: But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. [But] as soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out.

NARRATOR 2: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,

JESUS: "Take and eat; this is my body."

NARRATOR 2: Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying,

JESUS: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins..."

NARRATOR 2: [After the meal], they went out to...a [garden] called Gethsemane, and he said to them,

JESUS: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch..."

NARRATOR 2: Going a little farther, he fell...to the ground and prayed,

JESUS: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

NARRATOR 2: Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. [He said to them]:

JESUS: "Are you...sleeping? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise!...Here comes my betrayer!"

NARRATOR 2: While he was still speaking, Judas...arrived...[with] a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and...elders. Then] they arrested Jesus [and] took him to...the high priest. [Jesus' disciples fled], but Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest.

NARRATOR 3: [As he was questioned, Jesus remained silent]. Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus,

HIGH PRIEST: "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

JESUS: "You have said so...But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

NARRATOR 3: Then the high priest tore his clothes and said,

HIGH PRIEST: "He has spoken blasphemy!...He is worthy of death!"

NARRATOR 3: Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. [Meanwhile, outside, Peter was identified as one of Jesus' followers by three different people, and three times he denied it, just as Jesus said he would.]

NARRATOR 1: Early in the morning, all the chief priests...came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the [Roman] governor...to judge Jesus as a subversive threat. [After questioning Jesus and finding him innocent, Pilate] went out...to the Jews gathered [outside his palace] and said,

PILATE: "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

NARRATOR 1: [The crowd] shouted back,

CROWD: "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!"

NARRATOR 1: Barabbas [was a murderer who] had taken part in an uprising. [So] Pilate [released Barabbas and] took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe...As soon as the [crowd] saw him, they shouted,

CROWD: "Crucify! Crucify! Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

NARRATOR 2: Finally Pilate handed him over, [and] the [Roman] soldiers took charge of Jesus. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, [nailing his hands and his feet to a cross]...along with the criminals. [Jesus prayed]:

JESUS: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

NARRATOR 2: The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. The soldiers also came up and mocked him. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him:

CRIMINAL #1: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

NARRATOR 2: But the other criminal rebuked him.

CRIMINAL #2: "Don't you fear God...? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong...Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

JESUS: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

NARRATOR 3: So Jesus waited...for death to overcome him. Before [he died]...God poured out humanity's rightful punishment for sin upon [him]. And even the physical elements trembled. [At] about noon, ...darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon...[Then] Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

JESUS: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

NARRATOR 3: [Then, with his last breath], Jesus said,

JESUS: "It is finished."

NARRATOR 1: With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open...Those with him...were terrified, and exclaimed,

CROWD: "Surely he was the Son of God!"

NARRATOR 1: [And] all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

THE RESURRECTION

Bible Verse: Matthew 27 – 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 19 – 21

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Jesus
- Mary
- Cleopas
- Thomas
- Angel

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: [After Jesus had died, his body was prepared for burial, and placed it in a] new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. [Then], *to prevent any tampering with the body, [the tomb was] made...secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting [a] guard [in front of it].*

NARRATOR 2: Very early on the first day of the week [some of the women who were followers of Jesus] were on their way to the tomb [to anoint his body with spices and oils]...and [suddenly], there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven,...rolled back the stone and sat on it. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women,

ANGEL: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples...!"

NARRATOR 2: So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

NARRATOR 3: [Meanwhile], Mary [Magdaline] stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she... turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she...[thought]...he was the gardener. He asked her,

JESUS: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

MARY: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

JESUS: "Mary."

NARRATOR 3: She turned toward him and cried out...

MARY: "Teacher!"

NARRATOR 3: [And] Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news [that Jesus was alive].

NARRATOR 1: Now that same day two [of Jesus' followers] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked...Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them,

JESUS: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

NARRATOR 1: They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him,

CLEOPAS: "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

JESUS: "What things?"

CLEOPAS: "About Jesus of Nazareth...He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people...Our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. In addition, some of our women...went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They...told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive..."

JESUS: "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

NARRATOR 1: And...[Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going...they urged him strongly [to stay with them for dinner]. When he was at the table with them...he gave thanks, broke [bread], and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

NARRATOR 2: They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven [disciples] and...told what had happened...While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them,

JESUS: "Peace be with you."

NARRATOR 2: They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them,

JESUS: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

NARRATOR 2: When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he...said to them,

JESUS: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

NARRATOR 2: Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them,

JESUS: "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things..."

NARRATOR 3: Now Thomas,...one of the [disciples], was not with [them] when Jesus came. [And] he said to them [afterward],

THOMAS: "...Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were...I will not believe."

NARRATOR 3: A week later...Thomas was with them [when] Jesus came and stood among them... He said to Thomas,

JESUS: "Put your finger here; see my hands...Stop doubting and believe."

NARRATOR 3: [Then] Thomas [believed it was really Jesus, saying]:

THOMAS: "My Lord and my God!"

NARRATOR 3: Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said,

JESUS: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

NEW BEGINNINGS

Bible Verse: Acts 1 – 10; 12

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Characters:

• Narrators 1, 2 & 3 • Jesus • Peter • Saul • Angel • Stephen • Ananias

Tweaks to the Text:

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Words in brackets = added words for context.

Words in italics = summary sections from Zondervan's The Story Bible.

NARRATOR 1: [After he rose from the dead, Jesus] appeared to [his disciples] over a period of forty days. ...[Once,] While he was eating with them, he gave them this command:

JESUS: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised...in a few days you will [receive] the Holy Spirit...You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the ends of the earth."

NARRATOR 1: After he said this, he was taken up [into the sky] before their very eyes...[And] suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

ANGEL: "Men of Galilee...why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus...will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

NARRATOR 1: [Soon after that, a group of Jesus' followers] were together [praying in Jerusalem, gathered for a celebration called] Pentecost...Suddenly a sound like...a violent wind...filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other [languages]...[And] Jews [who had come to Jerusalem] from every nation [on earth could understand them!]

NARRATOR 2: Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

PETER: “People of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles...which God did...through him...And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God...raised this Jesus to life...[and made him] both Lord and Messiah....[So] repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

NARRATOR 2: ...About three thousand [people]...accepted his message [and] were baptized...that day. [The believers] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...[and] everyone was filled with awe at the many [miracles they] performed. All the believers...sold [their] property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad...hearts...And the Lord added to their number [every day].

NARRATOR 3: The priests...and the Sadducees were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people [about Jesus], [so] they seized Peter and John, and...began to question them:

HIGH PRIEST: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

PETER: “...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”

NARRATOR 3: When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus...After further threats they let them go.

NARRATOR 1: Now Stephen...[was a follower of Jesus, who] performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from [some religious leaders] who...stirred up...the elders and the teachers of the law. They brought [Stephen] before [them and] produced false witnesses [that accused Stephen of blasphemy]. Then the high priest asked Stephen,

HIGH PRIEST: “Are these charges true?”

STEPHEN: “You stiff-necked people!...You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him — you who have received the law...but have not obeyed it.”

NARRATOR 1: When [they] heard this, they were [so] furious...[that] they dragged him out of the city and [stoned] him [to death]. And [a young Pharisee named] Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against [Jesus’ followers], and [they] were scattered [and imprisoned] throughout Judea and Samaria.

NARRATOR 2: [And] Saul [continued] breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. [But one day, as he traveled to the city of Damascus],...a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him,

JESUS (VOICE FROM HEAVEN): “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

SAUL: "Who are you...?"

JESUS: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

NARRATOR 2: ...Saul got up from the ground, but...he could see nothing. So [his servants] led him into Damascus. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision,

JESUS: "Ananias!...Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man...named Saul. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

ANANIAS: "Lord...I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority to arrest all who call on your name."

JESUS: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."

NARRATOR 2: Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said,

ANANIAS: "Brother Saul, the Lord...has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

NARRATOR 2: Immediately...Saul...could see again. He got up and was baptized...At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God...[and] all those who heard him were astonished...

NARRATOR 3: When he came to Jerusalem, [the apostles] were all afraid of him. But Barnabas...told them how...the Lord had spoken to him. So Saul stayed...in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. Then the church throughout [the whole region] enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. *It was also during this time that Saul [changed his name] to "Paul." Because God's Spirit was leading them..., [Paul] and his colleagues boldly spoke about Jesus everywhere they went.*

PAUL'S MISSION

Bible Verse: Acts 13–14; 16–20; Romans 1; 3–6; 8; 12; 15; 1 Corinthians 1; 3; 5–6; 10; 12–13; 15–16; Galatians 1; 3; 5–6; 1 Thessalonians 1–5

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- God
- Paul
- Slave Woman
- Jailer

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: [Paul and Barnabas were] sent...by the Holy Spirit...[to preach the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles all over the Roman empire.] [They sailed to many cities, and eventually reached the city of] Lystra, [where] there sat a man who...had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul...saw that he had faith to be healed and called out,

PAUL: "Stand up on your feet!"

NARRATOR 1: At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they [mistook him and Barnabas for gods and offered] sacrifices to them. But when...Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they...rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

PAUL: "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God! ..."

NARRATOR 2: Once [in Philippi, Paul and his companions] were met by a female slave who...earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortunetelling. She followed Paul [for days], shouting:

SLAVE WOMAN: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."

NARRATOR 3: Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to [her],

PAUL: "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!"

NARRATOR 3: At that moment the [evil] spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and...brought them before the [authorities], [who] ordered them to be... flogged...[Then] they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

NARRATOR 1: About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted,

PAUL: "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

NARRATOR 1: The jailer...rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked,

JAILER: "...what must I do to be saved?"

PAUL: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

NARRATOR 1: Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, [and] at that hour of the night...he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

NARRATOR 2: After this, Paul [traveled to Berea, Athens] and [then] to Corinth. [In Corinth] he met a Jew named Aquila...[and his] wife Priscilla,... and because [Paul] was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when they [finally] opposed Paul and became abusive, he...said to them,

PAUL: "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

NARRATOR 2: One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision:

GOD: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

NARRATOR 3: [Encouraged], Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God...Paul [then] set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout [Asia Minor]..., strengthening all the disciples.

NARRATOR 1: [After some time, Paul returned to Ephesus.] Paul...spoke boldly [in the synagogue] there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them...refused

to believe.... So Paul left them...and [preached to others outside the synagogue]. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

NARRATOR 2: God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them...A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly...In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

NARRATOR 3: *Near the end of Paul's two-plus years in Ephesus, he wrote a very direct letter to the Christians in Corinth, [where the believers] were splintered into factions [over many issues]. Paul's letter spoke eloquently to issues they faced, concluding with a reminder that Christ has triumphed over death.*

NARRATOR 1: *He [also] wrote [a famous letter to the Christians in Rome, which] mapped out foundational truths...and answered tough questions about sin, grace, the Jewish law and the never-ending power of God's love. After [leaving Ephesus], Paul set his sights on Jerusalem. He felt urgently compelled by God to return there, even though...hardship awaited him.*

PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

Bible Verse: Acts 20–23; 27–28; Ephesians 1–6; 2 Timothy 1–4

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Jesus
- Paul
- Rioter (1 line)
- Commander (1 line)
- Crowd (5+ people; One line)
- Pharisees

Tweaks to the Text:

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NARRATOR 1: Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church...He said to them:

PAUL: "...Compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that...prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task of...[sharing] the good news of God's grace..."

NARRATOR 1: [The elders] all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. Then they accompanied him to the ship. [The] voyage [toward Jerusalem began, making several stops on the way]. [When they had stopped in Caesarea,...Paul's friends there began to fear for his life, and] pleaded with [him] not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered,

PAUL: "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

NARRATOR 2: After this, [they continued]...up to Jerusalem. [*Upon arriving*], *Paul was warmly received by the believers there.* [But] some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting,

RIOTER: "People of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place!..."

NARRATOR 2: The whole city was aroused...Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple... While they were trying to kill him,...the commander of the Roman troops...came up and arrested him, [ordering] that Paul be taken into the barracks. The crowd that followed kept shouting,

CROWD: "Get rid of him!"

NARRATOR 3: As they were shouting and [rioting], the commander ordered that Paul...be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there,

PAUL: "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

NARRATOR 3: [When he said this, the soldiers] withdrew immediately, [and the] commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put...a Roman citizen in chains. The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests...to assemble. Then he brought Paul...before them. Paul looked straight at the [Pharisees and Sadducees] and said,

PAUL: "...My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."

NARRATOR 1: When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees [over this hotly-debated issue of resurrection], and the assembly was divided. There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously.

PHARISEES: "We find nothing wrong with this man...What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

NARRATOR 1: The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces...[So Paul was taken] away from them. The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said,

JESUS: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

NARRATOR 2: The next morning [more than forty religious leaders] formed a conspiracy [to ambush and kill] Paul. But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said,

PAUL: "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him."

NARRATOR 2: So [the young man told the commander of the men who waited to ambush Paul the following day]. The commander...called two of his centurions and ordered them,

COMMANDER: "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea...tonight...so that [Paul] may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

NARRATOR 2: So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him [to Governor Felix] in Caesarea....Learning that [Paul] was [a Roman citizen], [Felix agreed to hear Paul's] case when [his] accusers [arrived]. Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in [the local] palace.

NARRATOR 3: *So [Paul was soon] placed...[as a prisoner] on a ship to Rome. [After stopping in several ports along the way, the conditions became] dangerous,...[and at one point, when a] storm [had] continued raging [for days],...[the whole crew of the ship had] given up...hope of being saved. [So] Paul stood up before them and said:*

PAUL: "...I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed...So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

NARRATOR 1: [Just as Paul had said, the ship ran ashore] on an island called Malta, [where the] chief official welcomed [Paul and his companions with] generous hospitality. After three months [there, they] put out to sea [again, and finally came to] Rome, [where Paul was greeted by other believers.]

NARRATOR 2: [Paul] was allowed to live by himself [there], with a soldier to guard him. For two whole years, ...[he] welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ — with all boldness and without hindrance...*During his final days, [Paul] wrote [several letters, including] one last...personal letter to Timothy, his co-worker and "son in the faith."...[in which he] pours out his heart [and bids farewell to his dear friend].*

PAUL: "...My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus...You...know all about my teaching, my way of life, [and] my...sufferings...For...the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith..."

THE END OF TIME

Bible Verse: Revelation 1 – 5; 19 – 22

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Characters:

- Narrators 1, 2 & 3
- Jesus
- John
- Angel
- Four Creatures (4 people)
- Elder 1 (1 line)
- All

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NARRATOR 1: *Decades after the resurrection, the church [was] facing intense persecution. The Roman Empire [insisted] that Caesar [was] a god, and anyone who [wouldn't] bow down to him [could be killed]. John, the last surviving disciple, [had] a vision direct from heaven, [which began with a vision of Jesus, in all his glory. John wrote]:*

JOHN: I saw...someone like a son of man...The hair on his head was white like wool, [and] his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet....Then he placed his right hand on me and said:

JESUS: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death...Write, therefore, what you have seen: both what is now and what will take place later."

NARRATOR 2: *[After this, John saw] a series of mysterious and symbolic scenes. The curtains of heaven [were] rolled back, and John [got to see] the final days of history when the utterly astounding glory of God and his plan for the world will be revealed.*

JOHN: I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said,

ANGEL: "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

NARRATOR 3: [The first thing John saw was] a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it...Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder...

NARRATOR 1: In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures...covered with eyes. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle...Day and night they never stop saying:

FOUR LIVING CREATURES: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!"

NARRATOR 2: Then...in the right hand of him who sat on the throne [was] a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And...a mighty angel [proclaimed] in a loud voice,

ANGEL: "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

JOHN: But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ...Then one of the elders said to me,

ELDER #1: "See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

NARRATOR 2: Then [there was] a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center before the throne...He went and took the scroll from...him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, [every] creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea [praised him], saying:

ALL: "To...the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

NARRATOR 3: Then [John] saw...[the] dead...standing before the throne, and [a] book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and everyone was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. All whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire.

JOHN: Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

ANGEL: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

NARRATOR 1: [Then] He who was seated on the throne said,

JESUS: "I am making everything new! It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give...the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children..."

NARRATOR 1: Then the angel showed [John] the river...of life...flowing from the throne of God...down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life,...And the leaves of the tree [were] for the healing of the nations.

JOHN: And when I had heard and seen [these things], I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me,

ANGEL: "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"

NARRATOR 1: [Then, at end of John's vision, Jesus offered a great promise to John and to God's followers].

JESUS: "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End...Yes, I am coming soon."

JOHN: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

