

THE
GREATEST
Story
EVER LIVED

ADVENT FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the weeks of Advent, we'll be providing these brief devotionals on the overarching storyline of the Bible leading up to the birth of Jesus. The goal is to help families see and appreciate the beautiful rescue operation God commits to for the sake of His beloved children. Its also aimed at helping us all remember our part in that same story as not only recipients of that redemption but also servants in the continuing mission. Each day there be a passage to read together followed by the explanation, devotional thought, and question or two for discussion. Most passages also have a corresponding section in the Jesus Storybook Bible if you would prefer to read the story from there. And the stories we use pair well with most Jesse Tree plans if that is part of your family tradition this time of year.

WEEK 1 / DAY 1

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 1 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—The Beginning: A Perfect Home*)

Have you ever tried to jumping in to a movie or tv show that your brother or sister started without you? They're halfway through it, and you're trying to make sense of it, wondering who the characters are, how they know each other, why one of them seems to be running for their life or is really excited about news they've just heard. You ask questions, but your sister just says, "Shhhhh!"

That's sorta what its like trying to understand the storyline of the Bible without reading the opening scenes. Its here in the beginning that we're introduced to the main characters—the gracious Builder and Life-giver, the servants called to fill up and care for their wonderful new home, the creatures and lights and plants that make this home the perfect place to live and worship. Its here in the beginning that we get a glimpse of the way things were always supposed to be...and the way things will one day be again! When we talk about Christian hope, this is essentially the picture of what we are hoping and waiting for. The coming of the king, the birth of Jesus, and His future return is all so exciting because He not only solved the problem of our sinfulness, but started the project of reclaiming and restoring our beautiful home...a project He fully intends to complete! That's why Christmas is a time for lighting up the darkness, singing carols of great anticipation, growing in our ability to wait faithfully, and tasting some of the joy that will one day be our unending experience in the beauty of creation and relationships restored!

DISCUSS

- Spend some time imagining together what it would have been like to enjoy the world in its original goodness. What would you most have enjoyed? What do you look forward to most?

TAKE IT FURTHER— bibleproject.com/explore/heaven-earth/

A photograph of a hand reaching up towards a branch with ripe red apples. The scene is set outdoors with bright sunlight filtering through the green leaves, creating a warm, golden glow. A semi-transparent dark circle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the text. The hand is positioned at the bottom, with fingers slightly spread, reaching towards the apples hanging from the branch above.

**What is this
you have
done?**

GENESIS 3:13

WEEK 1 /DAY 2

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 3 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—The Terrible Lie*)

How could they have ever doubted that God only wanted the best for them? How could they possibly think that God was being selfish or unfair after providing them their perfect home, caring for their every need, showering them with blessing upon blessing? How could they not love Him back enough and throw that lying snake out of the garden...let alone keep their hands off the tree God asked them to avoid?

But that's what happened. Adam and Even listened to the snake when he questioned God's goodness and lied about His character. They obeyed his voice instead of their Creator's. They took sides with the enemy. And when they did, the power of evil was let loose, and everything they once loved and enjoyed was now broken—their perfect home, their joy and innocence with one another, and their intimacy with God Himself. And perhaps worst of all, that evil now had a place inside their own hearts. They would forever hear the voice of the snake and be tempted to listen, tempted to follow him down the paths of sin and death far away from the One who had lovingly given them life.

The only hope now was if that Creator would one day enter into the darkness, chase them down the roads of death, and deal with the evil they had unleashed...even if it would break Him along the way. Do you think He loved them enough to do that? Do you think He loves and cares enough to do that to rescue you, you who like Adam and Eve are tempted to doubt God's goodness, disobey His commands, and side with His enemies? Christmas provides a clue.

DISCUSS

- How have you chosen your own desires over God's this week? How have you been tempted to believe Satan's lies about God's goodness and love?



**The Earth
was filled
with violence**

GENESIS 5:11

WEEK 1 / DAY 3

SCRIPTURE READING

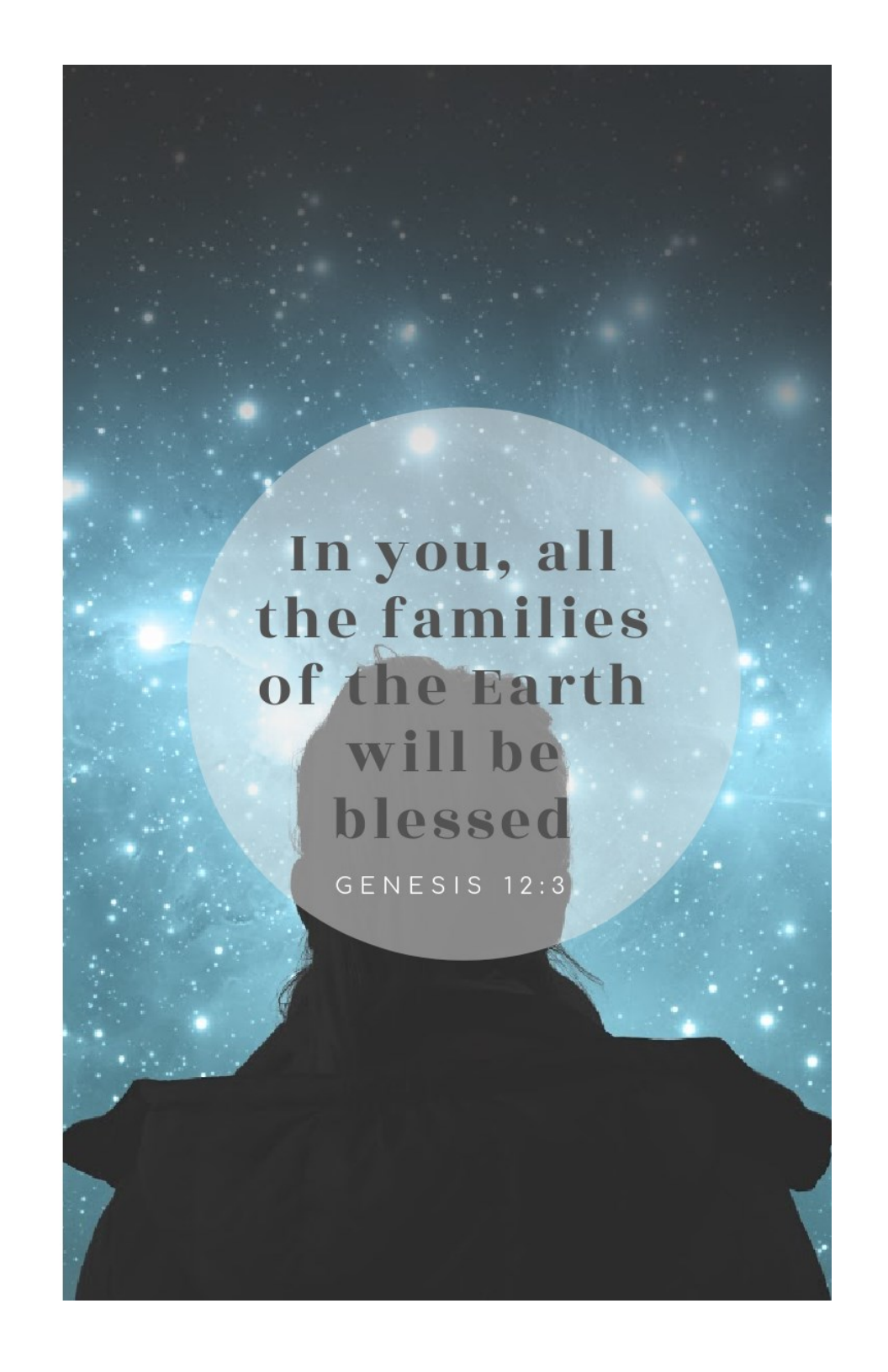
- Genesis 6:11-14, 7:11-8:3, 9:8-13 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—A New Beginning*)

It couldn't be that bad right? What's the worst that could happen? All they did was listen to a talking snake and eat a piece of fruit. But actually, if you were to read all the passages between Genesis 3 and Genesis 6, you'd find that that sin was pretty devastating. After Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, chapter 4 tells the story of a man's jealousy that led him to murder his own brother. Chapter 6 tells of strange and perverse sexual sin. And by the time we come to today's passage, we read that the earth was filled with violence and that every intention of men and women's hearts was only evil all the time (6:5). Just like if you open a window on a winter's day you allow the cold air to fill the room, when evil is allowed in and given a place inside creation, it fills the air, consumes the hearts of men and women, and wreaks complete havoc throughout creation.

And instead of allowing His creation to remain in that state of perpetual violence and evil, God steps in and with a heavy and sad heart judges the people and the world He had made. He sends the flood to wipe the earth of sinful hearts and lives. And...at the end, he makes a promise never to do it again. We catch a glimpse in this story of God's resolve to deal with the problem of sin, to not allow sin to forever destroy His good creation. And we also get the promise, that even if sin were to wreak its havoc yet again, God would find another way to intervene and stop it.

DISCUSS

- What does this passage teach us about the problem of sin? What does it teach us about God's right judgement? How does it point us to the cross of Jesus?
- How does this passage challenge or convict you?



**In you, all
the families
of the Earth
will be
blessed**

GENESIS 12:3

WEEK 1 /DAY 4

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-8 & 15-17 (or from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—Son of Laughter*)

Where have we heard this before—God speaks to a man and woman, gives them a land in which to make their home, and tells them they will be fruitful and multiplied? What God is doing here with Abraham and Sarah in many ways resembles what he did with Adam and Eve back on page one. In some sense, we're starting anew. Sin and evil had tarnished God's beautiful creation. Death, violence, and disobedience were ruining the life he intended for His people to enjoy. Even after God rescues Noah and his family from the flood, there is soon a strange scene of drunkenness and perversion (Gen. 9:18-25). And then we come upon more pride and rebellion at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). What God begins with Abraham is a new story with a new people, called out from among the nations, given a new home and promised great blessing. AND...we hear God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham children (12:3)! This is one of the most important verses for understanding the story of the Old Testament, even the storyline of the whole Bible. What God is doing with this family is ultimately about *all the families of the earth*. God is undertaking a plan to rescue all the peoples of the Earth from the curse of evil and the ruin of sin.

Centuries later, a young woman named Mary and a priest named Zechariah would both give thanks to God for remembering His mercy and the promises made to their forefather Abraham. (Luke 1) The promised blessing to all the nations through Abraham's seed was about to appear. The rescue mission was about to reach its climax.

DISCUSS

- How does Jesus fulfill the promise to Abraham? What does this promise and plan teach you about God?



**Take your only
son whom you
love**

GENESIS 22:2

WEEK 1 / DAY 5

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 22:1-14

Sometimes Amy will walk into the room, cozy up next to me, look at me with her cutest smile...and say the words that cause me great distress — "How much do you love me?" That's usually a pretty clear sign that she's either done something disappointing, like throw away the left-over sausage I'd been saving in the fridge, or she's about to ask me to do something she's knows I'm less than thrilled about.

You could say that the story in Genesis 22 is God's way of asking Abraham, how much do you love Me. And it's a really important question! Because remember, Abraham and his family have a crucial role to play in God's rescue mission. They're going to be His agents of blessing to all the families of the Earth. But that only works if their hearts are willing to serve God in love...if they're willing to love God even more than the treasures He gives them. God is promising to be gracious beyond measure to them, giving them healthy, abundant, and secure families and fruitful land (the two greatest treasures in the ancient world). Which is a good thing and possibly a dangerous thing. It's great because, who doesn't like treasure? But once you get your hands on treasure, can you ever take them off in service to God's purpose? Can you let it go? We already watched Adam and Eve fail miserably at that. They literally had paradise, but couldn't let go of the smallest portion to be obedient. What about Abraham?

What about you? You too have a vital role to play as God's ambassador (2 Cor. 5), His living witness (Acts 2), part of His royal priesthood to the unbelieving families of the Earth (1 Pet. 2). Do you love Him? The good news is that He has already proven His love to you. He has already taken His hands off *His* greatest treasure, His only Son, and given Him in love for you. That's why Christmas is good news—it is the proof that frees us to trust His love and commit ourselves in loving service and obedience for Him.

