



GRACE
BIBLE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

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. It's 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 will 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 2, DAY 1

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 28:10-22

We pick up our story this week with Abraham's grandson Jacob, who's out on the run. He tricked his old, blind father (Isaac) into giving him the family blessing which was supposed to go to Esau, his older brother. Esau now wants him dead as a result. So Jacob flees home and sets out towards Haran. Things won't go so well for him there though. He'll actually be on the receiving end of some trickery and be exploited into hard labor for his uncle.

So here it is in between all that—death threats behind him, tough times ahead— that God meets him in a dream with promises and assurances of His presence. Jacob sees Heaven opened up and a flight of stairs reaching from Heaven to Earth. He sees angels (ministers of God's care and protection) ascending and descending the stairs. And God restates the promise made to Jacob's grandfather: I will give you this land on which you sleep. I will make your descendants like the sand of the dessert. Through your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed. And I will be present with you wherever you go. It's almost as if this little plot of land is becoming a new Eden—a place where God's people will be fruitful and multiplied, where God's blessings will spill over, where there will be a special "connection" between God's throne and man's home.

It actually has quite a few connections in our story. It resembles the day when Israel will, like Jacob, be a wanderer in the wilderness and God will build a tabernacle to be with them. It points forward to the day when the Son of God will take on flesh, descend from Heaven to Earth, tabernacle with God's people, and deliver them from their sins. And it points even further to when the city of God will one day descend from Heaven to a fully restored, new creation where tears and sadness will be no more and God's home will forever be with those He loves!

DISCUSS—What does God's promise and His presence mean for you today?



AND HE
WEPT
WITH THEM

GENESIS 45:15

A FORGIVING, BETRAYED KING

WEEK 2/DAY 2

SCRIPTURE READING

- Genesis 37-46 (from the *Jesus Story Book Bible—The Forgiving Prince*.

Or for a video reading of the Storybook Bible version .—

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okpGagOVOuo>

Have you ever stopped to consider how the Bible's story line would have played out had Joseph not forgiven his brothers? After all, they did throw him in a pit, sell him to slave traders for 20 shekels of silver, and essentially ruin his life for the next several years. At best we might expect him to deny their pleas for food. At worst, he could have rightfully imprisoned them or handed them a death sentence for their wicked crime. But think if he did. There'd be no Israelites delivered from Egypt years later, no entrance into the promised land for Abraham's offspring. There'd be no Moses, no Joshua, no tribe of Judah from which would come David, Solomon, or the promised messianic king. In other words, this great plan of blessing the families of the Earth through Abraham's family would have come to a screeching halt. Instead, Joseph finds a strange ability to forgive through the plan and purpose of God. Being convinced that even the painful and unfair trials he was dealt in life were somehow part of God's plan to save many, he was freed to forgive.

Joseph resembles another king who would one day be rejected by his family, sold for 30 pieces of silver, and suffer death at the hands of hate-filled sinners. But with a similar conviction that God was up to something incredible, that He was turning the world's hate, violence, and injustice in on itself to rescue the souls of many, Jesus was freed to cry out in love amidst the agony of the cross, "Father forgive them!"

DISCUSS

- Have you ever considered how powerful the strange business of forgiveness is in God's mission of redemption? Is God inviting you to extend forgiveness to someone today? How can you find freedom in the loving and gracious purpose of God to do so?

A close-up photograph of a green tree frog resting on a large green leaf. The frog's head is in the upper right, with its large, bulging eyes visible. An orange semi-transparent circle is centered over the frog's face, serving as a background for the text.

THAT YOU
MAY KNOW

EXODUS 10:2

GOD TO THE RESCUE

WEEK 2 /DAY 3

SCRIPTURE READING

- Exodus 3-13 (Jesus Storybook Bible—*God to the Rescue*)
- StoryBook Bible Reading—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xW3Q6cjMwLk>


Swarms of frogs leaping out of beds and cupboards? Hordes of locusts so thick that the sky seems dark? Painful boils and sores infecting people's skin, hail crushing crops and the animals grazing in the field? Is it just me, or is this a bit overkill? If God can do all this, He could've skipped the fuss and just magically transported the Israelites out of Egypt into the promised land. He could've softened Pharaoh's heart into simply letting them walk out from the get-go. But instead we get this dramatic display. AND God actually tells Moses (a few times) along the way, that He intends to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will NOT let God's people go until God is done unleashing all these plagues. So...why?

God puts it very simply: so that Israel may *know* that He is the only true God, worthy of their worship. Keep in mind, all that Israel had seen to that point was the power, the wealth, the success of Pharaoh and his mighty empire with its supposed gods. Power, money, success—these are all things that tempt people's worship. God wants their undivided loyalty, confidence, and obedience so that He can use them for His great mission and purpose. And so He goes over the top to prove His power, His worthiness, His ability to deliver and protect the people He loves.

DISCUSS

- What are you tempted to trust more than God Himself? What do you sometimes think is more able than God to make your life safe and satisfied?
- How has God shown to us His ability to save and defend? How has He proven that He is worthy of our confidence, our commitment to His purpose for our lives, and our faithful obedience?

TAKE it FURTHER: Sing together or listen to *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!*



YOUR GOD, HE
IS GOD IN THE
HEAVENS
ABOVE AND
THE EARTH
BELOW

JOSHUA 2:11

GOD'S HOSPITALITY

WEEK 2 /DAY 4

SCRIPTURE READING

- Joshua 2:1-21

If you were to jump ahead to the first page of Matthew and read the genealogy of Jesus, you'd come across the name Rahab. The interesting part is Rahab was not originally part of Israel's family. She was not a particularly important person. She was not exactly a virtuous woman or upstanding citizen (at least leading up to this story) Not to mention the obvious—she was a woman. (women usually were not considered important enough to list in family genealogies back then)

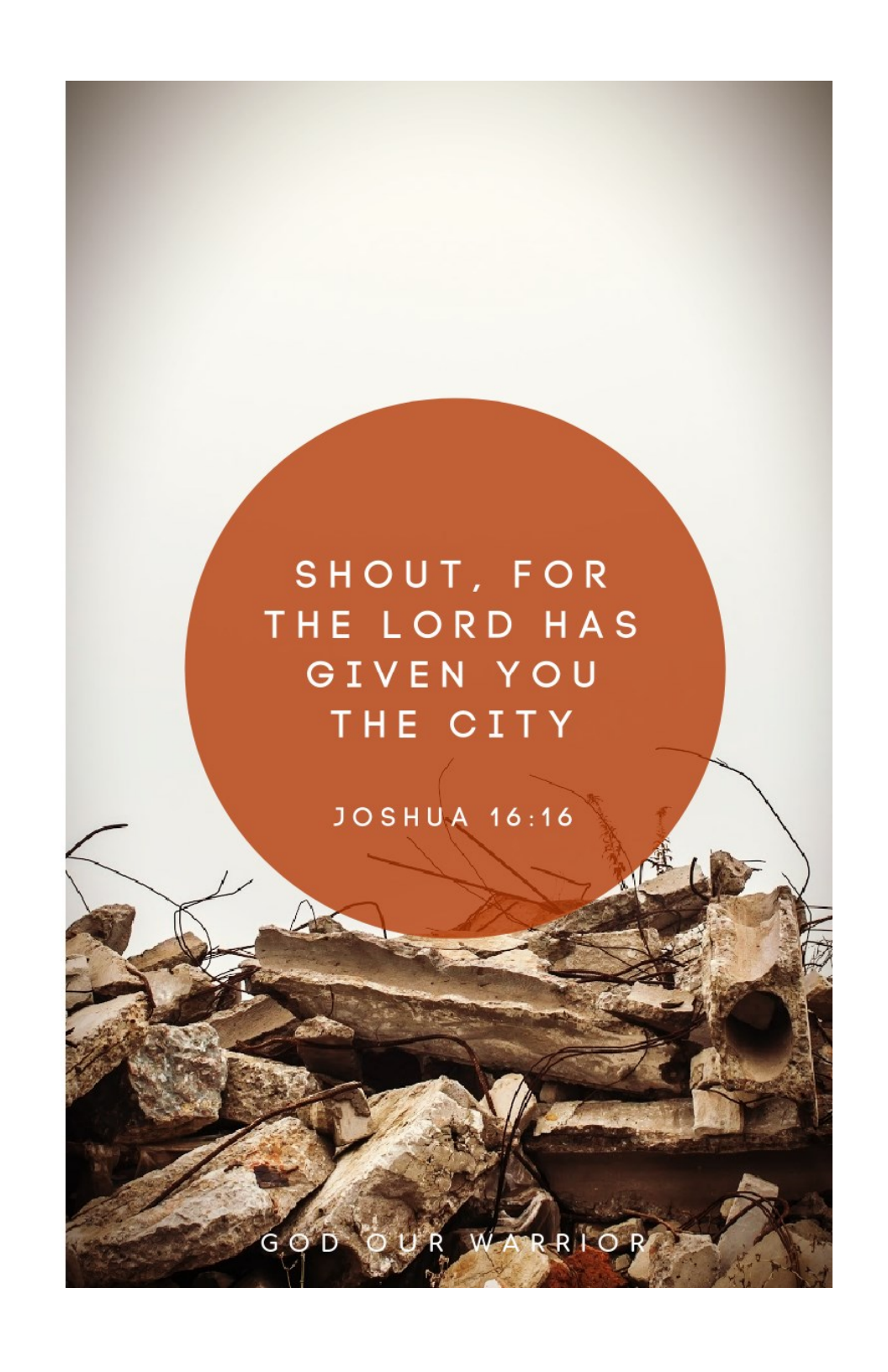
Today's passage is Rahab's story – her fear and respect for the one true God of Israel that she'd heard rumors about; her bravery inspired by that respect; her actions to save her family; her critical role in God's plan to establish His people in their new home.

It's also part of God's own story. In particular, we are reminded in the Rahab story that God has a gracious plan that ultimately includes those families and nations outside of Israel as well. Rahab's faith is used to rescue her family who then become part of God's chosen people. And it will be from the line of Rahab that we get the great King David and the even greater King Jesus.

Rahab's name in Jesus' genealogy is a neat little sign that this king comes, at least in part, from a line of sinners on the outside of the religious establishment, and that He has come to bestow God's blessings on those whom others might consider unimportant or those who don't have notable family names backing them up, or those who's character and past lifestyles are perhaps less than admirable. He takes His place alongside sinners on the outside of God's family so that He might share with them His status as a dearly loved Son.

DISCUSS-

How does the Rahab story challenge and/or encourage you?



SHOUT, FOR
THE LORD HAS
GIVEN YOU
THE CITY

JOSHUA 16:16

GOD OUR WARRIOR

WEEK 2 /DAY 5

SCRIPTURE READING

- Joshua 3 and 6 (*Jesus Storybook Bible—The Warrior Leader*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewXXQSMlCkk>

Sometimes, if I'm working with one of my kids on their sports skills, maybe their jump shot or their tennis backhand, I might show off a little...maybe whip a shot down the line that catches their attention or drain a 3-pointer from a ways out (not that that happens all that often!). The goal is not just to show off, but perhaps to be able to say to the kids, "See that? Stick with me, learn from me, and you'll be good to go."

In some ways, this story is like the one we read two days ago. God is almost showing off a bit. The Israelites are finally entering into their land of promise. They come to the fortress of Jericho with its massive walls protecting it. They perhaps wonder how in the world they'll be victorious. And God essentially wins the battle for them. Stick with me (He says), and you'll be good to go.

It's an important lesson they need to learn. Whenever the Israelites doubt the power, the promises, or the love of God for them, they usually go chasing after other gods and worthless idols. They bow in worship to those gods and do detestable things to make those dead gods happy. What they need is to remember and trust the might of the living God who has promised to faithfully work His power on their behalf...and proven He can do it!

It's the same thing we need. We need to remember the great promises God has pledged to us—us resurrection life in a new creation fully restored to its original goodness, a day where there is no more sin to shame us or death and loss to bring tears and regret, no more feeling distant from the one who made us and loves us. And we can look to the power that raised Jesus from the dead as proof that God is able to do it. We don't need the promises or temptations of cheap idols. We can wait faithfully on the return of the One who's already out in front, fighting...and winning(!) our battles for us.

