



Bible Background

The Bible is full of stories of God and God's relationship to humans. As we learn in Road Trip! VBS, God is present with us everywhere we go! The Session 1 Bible story, from Genesis chapter 12, is about a man named Abraham and his wife Sarah. God told Abraham to move to a new place. Although moving to a new place can sometimes be a difficult thing, God promised Abraham that he would not be alone, but that God would be with him along this journey. The first 11 chapters in the Book of Genesis are about God creating everything, and God's relationship with and love for all people. However, those first 11 chapters also tell stories of humans who acted against God's wishes for them, and bad things that happened as a result of those actions. But Genesis Chapter 12 begins Abraham's story, and reflects a turning point in the Bible, as God promises blessings to Abraham instead of curses.

God told Abraham to leave his land, his family, and his father's household for a land God would show him. When God says to Abraham, "your land, your family, and your father's household," God is being increasingly specific. God is asking Abraham to leave all that he knows and to move to a place that is completely unknown to him. But it is known to God, and Abraham can trust God to be with him on his journey. So Abraham leaves all he knows and goes with God. Unlike people in some of the stories from the first 11 chapters of Genesis, Abraham responds obediently to God. This represents a turning point in the relationship between God and humans: because of Abraham's example, we know that we can trust God, as well. Once Abraham arrives in the land God has promised him, called Canaan, he visits three places. First is in the north, at a place called Shechem. Next, Abraham visits a place in the middle of this new land, between places called Bethel and Ai. Finally, Abraham goes toward the south, which the passage describes as an arid plain. Each of these stops along Abraham's journey would have been important to different groups of his descendants who would live in each respective region generations later.

At Shechem and near Bethel, Abraham responded to the things God had promised—land, descendants, and blessing—by building altars and worshipping God. In doing these things, Abraham began a tradition of worship that would be passed down for generations through Abraham's descendants. Abraham's descendants throughout Israel's history would view the promises God made Abraham as past, present, and future indicators of God's love and promise throughout generations. By hearing the stories of God's promises and God delivering on those promises, Abraham's descendants knew God would be with them along their journeys, as well. God told Abraham that he would be a blessing, and that all the families on earth would be blessed because of him. The most commonly accepted understanding of this blessing is that it would become so great that it would overflow to all people on the earth, including to us today! Because God blessed Abraham so that he and his descendants could bless all the other people in the earth, we can look at God's promises to know that God will also be with us along the journeys in our lives!



Bible Story
Abraham & Sarah
Follow God
(Genesis 12:1-9)

Mile Marker
God is with us on
the journey!

▲ Teacher Tip
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Bible Background

After God made the promise to Abraham that we learned about in Session 1, Abraham had a son named Isaac, and Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons who, through a series of events comparable to some of the most dramatic family dysfunction in history, ended up moving from the land Abraham settled and going to Egypt. Generations passed, and Abraham's descendants—the Israelites—were still in Egypt. The Israelites became slaves to the pharaoh of Egypt, but God led them out of slavery and promised to return them to the land that had been promised to their ancestor Abraham generations before. The Israelites met resistance from the pharaoh as they left Egypt, but God would guide them as they left Egypt and began their journey toward a new home.

The most direct route to the land that had been home to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have taken the Israelites along the western border of Canaan along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, through an area that would one day belong to a group of people called Philistines. Although the Philistines were likely not living in this area at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, this way would have still been heavily fortified by the pharaoh's army and the Israelites would have been immediately confronted. Instead, God directed them to leave Egypt by a different path, through the Reed Sea desert (also known as the Red Sea) in northeastern Egypt. The Israelites settled first in a place called Succoth, and then departed from this settlement as they continued out of Egypt. Exodus 13:21 describes God's presence with the Israelites as "a column of cloud to guide them and at night in a column of lightning to give them light." And God, through the presence of this column, leads the Israelites out of slavery.

This visible presence of God that is the column of cloud and lightning seems to be one and the same—it is just visible in different ways depending on the time of day. The images described in the passage reflect other ways the presence of God is described elsewhere in the Bible—such as a powerful storm or a dazzling light—as well as the burning bush through which God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3. The two leaders of the Israelites who had been established earlier in the narrative, Moses and Aaron, are noticeably absent from this passage (except the note about Moses carrying the bones of Jacob's son Joseph out of Egypt). This highlights the leadership of God over the Israelites as they begin their journey through the wilderness. They are not simply led by human leaders, but God is placed squarely in the front of this group as leader of the entire community. God would continue leading the Israelites through this pillar of cloud throughout their journey accounted in the Book of Exodus, before the climactic moment in Chapter 40 in which God's presence fills the dwelling place the Israelites built for God. The journey out of Egypt was never a direct path, even from the beginning. It was full of all kinds of twists and turns. There were moments where the Israelites turned away from God, and times where they felt they couldn't go on any further. But God was always with them! We know God is always with us—whether we're currently on a more direct path, or we find ourselves having taken an unexpected turn!



Bible Story

The Israelites Take the Scenic Route

(Exodus 13:17-22)

Mile Marker

God is with us when we go off course!

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Bible Background

Many centuries after the events described in the Session 2 story from the Book of Exodus, God sent a special message to a young woman named Mary. Mary was a Jewish woman, a descendant of Abraham and the Israelites who were led by God in the wilderness. God’s messenger, the angel Gabriel, told Mary that she would be the mother of a boy named Jesus, and that he would be God’s Son. When Mary heard this news, she went to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child. Elizabeth’s child, whose name would be John, would spend his life preparing other Jewish people for the message Jesus would spend his life preaching. In an act foreshadowing his future vocation, Luke says John leapt in Elizabeth’s womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the blessing Mary received, recognizing Mary’s unborn child as God’s Son and serves as the Book of Luke’s first prophet in the process.

Mary hears these things her relative tells her and responds with joy to the things God has done for her and her people. Her response is recorded in the Book of Luke, and is often referred to as the Magnificat, which is the first word of her response translated into Latin. Mary called God her savior—a word that was typically used by Roman citizens to extoll the military might of emperors and generals—and while she notes that God’s power and strength she also acknowledges an important aspect of God’s character: God’s love of and care for people who are poor and powerless. Mary understands that the work God is doing through her and will do through Jesus represents a reversal of fortune for those with low status like herself. God favors the lowly, and in God’s kingdom the weak and the poor will trade places with the powerful and the wealthy. This message is further revealed in the life and work of Jesus. For instance, Jesus taught his disciples, “Happy are you who are poor, because God’s kingdom is yours” (Luke 6:20), but “how terrible for you who are rich, because you have already received your comfort” (6:24). Mary understands this, praising God for coming to Israel’s aid and fulfilling promises made to Abraham all those generations before.

After receiving the news about her baby from God’s messenger, Mary must have felt all kinds of emotions: happy, scared, anxious, and perhaps many more. The journey from Nazareth to Elizabeth’s home in the Judean highlands would have given her plenty of time to dwell on any negative emotions she might have been feeling, and God was certainly with her on that journey and through those emotions. But Elizabeth’s prophetic joy was infectious, and Mary’s joyful response reveals the true nature of God’s justice, mercy, and love. God presence with Mary is evident in her joy, and God is with us when we’re joyful, too. Wherever we go, God goes with us, and we can respond to God’s love with joy. We can share joy with others, like Mary and Elizabeth. And we can share God’s love with other people so they can experience that joy, as well.



Bible Story
Mary & Elizabeth’s
Family Reunion
(Luke 1:39-56)

Mile Marker
God is with us when
we’re joyful!

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Bible Story

Jesus Visits Zacchaeus

(Luke 19:1-10)

Mile Marker

God is with us when we're lonely!

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Bible Background

Mary's son Jesus grew up and became a well-known and well-respected teacher in the Galilee region of Judea. The Book of Luke describes his teaching and his ministry, as well as miracles he performed to show the people that God loved them, and that he was God's Son. About halfway through the Book of Luke, the writer of the book begins to detail a journey Jesus and his disciples took from Galilee to Jerusalem. At one point on this journey, Jesus met a wealthy ruler who asked how to obtain eternal life. Jesus told him to sell everything he owned and distribute his money among the poor. The rich man would not let go of his wealth and left his interaction with Jesus sad.

Jesus' journey then took him to the city of Jericho, where a large crowd quickly formed around him. Jesus' reputation had followed him, and people wanted to meet him. There was a ruler among tax collectors in Jericho whose name was Zacchaeus. Tax collectors were already generally disliked by citizens of Roman-occupied territories like Judea because of the exploitative nature of their work to support the Roman Empire, but a ruler of those tax collectors would have been even more reviled. Zacchaeus was not a beloved figure in the community, but he was intrigued by the crowds surrounding Jesus and hoped to see this person who was so popular. Because he was too short to see over the height of the crowd, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to get a good look at Jesus. Jesus saw him in the tree and invited himself to be a guest in Zacchaeus' home. The crowd was shocked that Jesus would have anything to say to someone who was so justifiably despised within the community, and Zacchaeus surely noticed the crowd's tone grow sour when Jesus extended grace in this way. However, this grace moves Zacchaeus to a change of heart, and he does what the wealthy ruler Jesus met earlier in his journey to Jerusalem can not: he sells his possessions and distributes that money to the poor, and he repays fourfold the money he acquired through taxation corrupted under his leadership. Jesus leaves his encounter with Zacchaeus speaking of his salvation and reminding him of God's love.

Jesus' visit with Zacchaeus was not a detour on his journey to Jerusalem, but the very reason for it. The gospel of grace presented in the Book of Luke is tied to repentance, and the repentance Zacchaeus demonstrated bore fruit. Unlike the wealthy ruler from earlier on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, Zacchaeus did give up his wealth and receive Jesus' blessing. He shows that his heart and life have changed, and demonstrates how people with great wealth enter God's kingdom. God's work in Zacchaeus began before he ever met Jesus face to face. By humbly climbing a tree to see the subject of the crowd's interest, Zacchaeus has already begun to give up the power he enjoyed as a leader of tax collectors. His journey is out of one community—that of the tax collectors—through another entirely, as the crowd in Jericho rejects him and his acceptance by Jesus, before finally arriving in the beloved community of the kingdom of God. God is with us when we're lonely, as well. And like we see with Zacchaeus, God's work in our lives also welcomes us into the beloved community where grace is freely given.



Bible Story

On the Road with Paul

(Acts 18:1-11)

Mile Marker

God is with us near and far.

▲ Teacher Tip

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Bible Background

After Jesus' death and resurrection, his disciples continued the work of his teaching and ministry. Many new people joined this movement, and the mission spread further and further throughout the world. One of the people who joined the movement was a man named Paul. Paul was a Jewish man, but also very well acquainted with the world of the Roman Empire that had occupied Judea and much of the area around the Mediterranean Sea. Paul traveled all over this part of the world, spreading the good news of God's kingdom and the death and resurrection of Jesus. He visited groups of Christ-followers to provide encouragement and instruction, and shared the good news with anyone who wanted to know more about Jesus. One of the places Paul visited was a city called Corinth. Corinth, the capital city of its particular region, was a bustling center of commerce with a very diverse population. Due to its geographical features, it was a natural hub for both land and sea travel. Chapter 18 of the Book of Acts describes the time Paul spent in Corinth.

After Paul arrived in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla, a husband and wife who had recently arrived in Corinth after the Roman Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jewish people from Rome because of conflicts regarding a man named Chrestus. *Chrestus* was a common Latin name, but many scholars believe that Chrestus may have been a reference to Christ and the person over whom the Jewish population in Rome were disputing was Jesus. Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla all worked together creating leather goods as Paul talked to people at the synagogue on the Sabbath each week, sharing the gospel with those who gathered there. Eventually, some of the people at the synagogue in Corinth opposed and slandered Paul to the point that he decided to stop this weekly practice. Paul shook the dust from his clothes in an act reminiscent of Jesus' instruction to shake the dust from one's feet after being rejected for sharing the gospel. Instead, he went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshipped God, and established a group of Jesus-followers there. Some Jewish people from the synagogue, including the leader of the synagogue and his household, joined with Paul and were baptized as followers of Jesus. Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half before moving his mission to a new location, and the relationships he built with the church in Corinth lasted the rest of his life.

Paul would later write two letters to the church in Corinth that are preserved in our Bible today as the Books of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. One of the messages of 1 Corinthians is the importance of building others up, and giving one another encouragement and comfort. He tells the church in Corinth to work for the good of the community of believers, and to love one another so as to overcome divisions within the body of believers. These were common messages within Paul's letters to churches all over the Mediterranean region he traveled. Paul understood first-hand the importance of showing love and support wherever we are, and he understood that the Holy Spirit guides us everywhere we go. We can go anywhere God calls us, too, because we know God is with us near and far!