

God Had a Plan for Joseph

The story of Joseph is packed full of moments that resonate with us. Maybe you were the favorite child or the favorite child's sibling. Some people resonate with being cast away from family or being undeservingly welcomed into a new family. Some resonate with finding favor with an enemy or showing favor to an enemy. In Joseph's story, we can see ourselves and our need for Jesus in so many ways.

On at least four occasions in Joseph's journey, others gave him tremendous blessings. Though Joseph lost some of these earthly treasures, he remained faithful to the Lord. We normally focus on Joseph's adversity, but we can't miss that both the lows and highs of Joseph's life were also marked by God's blessing through others.

First, Joseph's father blessed him with a beautiful multi-colored robe as a representation of his favored status. This tangible symbol was taken from him when his brothers sold him into slavery. Yet Joseph remained faithful.

Next, Potiphar blessed Joseph by making him overseer of his entire household. The role lent itself to all the tangible and monetary things anyone could want. But when Joseph fled from the advance of Potiphar's wife, it was all taken from him. Yet Joseph remained faithful.

Third, the prison warden blessed Joseph by making him overseer over the entire prison. Finally, Pharaoh blessed Joseph by placing him as second in command over all of Egypt, putting Joseph in a position to save his family from famine.

Joseph refused to let the evil actions of others steal his faith. When he had the chance to take away from others who had taken from him, Joseph showed generosity instead.

We experience various common grace blessings from the Lord every day. These blessings can tempt us to worship the gift rather than the Giver. Like Joseph, we must remain steadfast under trial and faithful to the Lord. In famine and in plenty, blessed be the name of the Lord. He is good and in control.

God Controls Everything

In research, there is a common practice used to measure data: the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test is a baseline, assessing the state of something prior to experimental factors being introduced. As is suggested by the name, this happens prior to the experiment.

The post-test is a comparison, designed to compare the outcome of the experiment to the pre-test results in order to assess change. As the name suggests, the post-test comes after the experiment.

In the life of Job, we find a man who goes through the most traumatic experiences imaginable. Job lost his kids, his wealth, his career, and his friends. His sheep even burned up! (It's true, read Job 1:16.) Job's life was turned upside down. His joy was low and his sorrow was high.

It's fascinating to look at Job's life before and after this series of trials. Prior to Job's losing all he had, Job is described as blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. He had great spiritual fortitude and great material wealth.

Following his extended trial, Job repented of his wavering trust in God. Job was restored to God, and God restored his wealth to a greater degree than before.

The pre-test and post-test of Job's journey demonstrate a man who, in the big picture, was unshakable in his relationship with God. Though he had high and low moments during the trial, Job was fully restored to God. Like Job, our faithfulness does not mean that there won't be moments of struggle or slipping, but it does mean that overall, our faith in God remains and grows.

If you aren't in the midst of a trial, know that God is strengthening your trust in Him so that when difficulty does come—and it will—your pre-test shows a strong faith that can endure. And if you are in the midst of great challenges right now, strive to endure so that a post-test might demonstrate that your love and trust of God has remained and even increased.

Trials are inevitable. Trust in God, who controls everything. Anticipate that trials will come, and aim for growth on the other side.

Prophets Told About Jesus' Birth

We are taking a break from the chronological journey through the Bible to focus on Christmas. When Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, all of creation fell under a curse. (See Gen. 3:17-19.) We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We've inherited the curse of death from Adam. (See Rom. 3:23; 5:12.)

Throughout the Old Testament, the consequences of sin are obvious. God's people were separated from Him; they did not enjoy the intimate relationship with their Creator for which He had created them. God's people were affected by sickness and pain. Corruption spread quickly throughout the earth. The situation seemed hopeless, yet God did not leave His people without hope.

It was into this hopelessness that God spoke. Hundreds of messages came through the prophets concerning a coming Messiah—One who would rescue people from their sins. But when would this Promised One come? How would He come? Would the people recognize Him?

The prophets Isaiah and Micah—who both lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born—spoke specifically of the Messiah's birth. Isaiah told King Ahaz what the Lord would do. "The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). He described the birth of a Prince of peace—a Son of David who will reign forever. (Isa. 9:6-7) Isaiah said that He would be a King! (Isa. 11:1-5) The prophet Micah named the specific town—Bethlehem—in which Jesus would be born. (Mic. 5:2)

As you talk with your kids about the prophecies concerning Jesus' birth, help them understand that everything God said about Jesus' birth came true. Hundreds of years later, Jesus was born into the world.

God's plan to save people from sin and death was not a secret plan. God used the prophets to give hope to His people. They said God would send a Messiah—born into the world as a baby to live the perfect life people fail to live and die the guilty death we deserve.

Angels Spoke to Mary and Joseph

This week, kids learned that people had been waiting a long time for Jesus. God hinted at His coming in the garden of Eden when He promised a seed to conquer the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) The prophets told of His coming hundreds of years before His birth. **The baby Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, as well as other Old Testament prophecies, about the coming Savior. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled God's plan of redemption that God planned before the world began.**

In the Bible, God sometimes used angels to communicate His message to people. Angels spoke to Abraham in Genesis 18. The Angel of the Lord spoke to Balaam in Numbers 22. Now Mary and Joseph, the earthly parents of Jesus, each received a special visit from an angel to announce the birth of God's promised Messiah.

The angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary surprised her. By His grace, God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus. The angel's message revealed much about this promised child.

First, He would be great in both being and nature. He would be the Son of the Most High. Jesus is the Son of God, and the Lord God promised to give Him the throne of His father David. These words fulfilled the prophecy given to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom would have no end.

The good news that Jesus was coming into the world was good news because of why He was coming. An angel revealed Jesus' purpose to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins." The gospel is the good news of what God has done for us through Christ.

The announcement of Jesus' birth is not the beginning of the gospel; God had been planning for this moment since before the beginning of time. (See Eph. 1:3-10.) Help your kids understand that God's plan has always been to save sinners and bring them back to Himself. Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh saves," is the culmination of that plan.

Jesus Was Born

From the moment sin entered the world, its consequences were obvious. God's people were separated from Him; they did not enjoy the intimate relationship with their Creator for which He had created them. People were affected by sickness and pain. Corruption spread quickly throughout the earth. The situation seemed hopeless, yet God did not leave His people without hope.

It was into this hopelessness that God spoke. Hundreds of messages came through the prophets concerning a coming Messiah—One who would rescue people from their sins. But when would this Promised One come? How would He come? Would the people recognize Him?

The prophet Isaiah—who lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born—spoke specifically of the Messiah's birth. Isaiah told King Ahaz what the Lord would do. "The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). He described the birth of a "Prince of Peace"—a Son of David who will reign forever. (Isa. 9:6-7) Isaiah said that He would be a King! (Isa. 11:1-5)

Everything God said about Jesus' birth came true. Hundreds of years later, Jesus was born into the world. After Jesus was born, Mary laid Him in a manger. A king in a manger! It was so unlikely. But Jesus was no ordinary baby. He was God's Son, sent in the most humble of positions, "not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

As you celebrate Christmas with your children, remind them that **the birth of Jesus was good news! Jesus was not an ordinary baby. He was God's Son, sent to earth from heaven. Jesus came into the world to bring peace between people and God. He came to save people from their sins and to be their King.**

December 11, 2022 (Christmas, Session 4)

Jesus Was Dedicated

Last week, kids learned about Jesus' birth and the message angels gave to shepherds—the first people to see the Messiah. The Lord spoke to Moses: “Consecrate every firstborn male to me, the firstborn from every womb among the Israelites, both man and domestic animal; it is mine” (Ex. 13:2).

Consecrate means “to dedicate to a sacred purpose.” God’s people were to set apart their firstborn as belonging to the Lord. The firstborn of sacrificial animals were sacrificed to God, and the firstborn of humans and donkeys were redeemed—a lamb was sacrificed instead. God’s law for the consecration of the firstborn had a purpose: to remind the people that the Lord brought them out of Egypt by the strength of His hand. (See Ex. 13:14-16.)

After a woman gave birth, she was “unclean,” and she would observe a period of purification—a reminder that we are all born in sin. Then she would bring to the priest a young lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. (See Lev. 12:1-6.) If a woman could not afford a sheep for the sacrifice, the law allowed her to take two pigeons or two turtledoves instead. (Lev. 12:8)

This is what Mary did. When Mary’s days of purification were complete, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem, where they presented Him to the Lord and offered a sacrifice. Though Jesus was not born in sin, He identified with sinners even as a baby. This initial act introduced Jesus’ perfect life of obedience to the law.

While Mary and Joseph were at the temple, God graciously revealed to a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna that Jesus was the One—the promised Messiah they had been waiting for. Imagine their joy. At last!

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised the arrival of a king who would redeem God's people. When Jesus arrived, Simeon and Anna knew He was the promised Messiah. Today, we have faith that Jesus is God's Son. We can trust Jesus for our salvation. When God opens our eyes to the good news of the gospel, we can live and die in peace, for our eyes have seen His salvation.