



Israel in the time of Jesus

Jesus in Galilee

Galilee is the province around the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The area was important for farming. Jesus grew

up in Nazareth, a town in the province, and he performed his first miracle in Cana.

Capernaum: Jesus' Own Town

Jesus spent a lot of time in Capernaum. Mark called it Jesus' home (Mark 2:1), and Matthew called it Jesus' own town (Matthew 9:1). Before today's story, Jesus had already been healing people from diseases and demons in Capernaum. It's likely that Jesus often stayed in Peter's house,

where he healed Peter's mother-in-law. At least five of Jesus' disciples came from this area: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew.

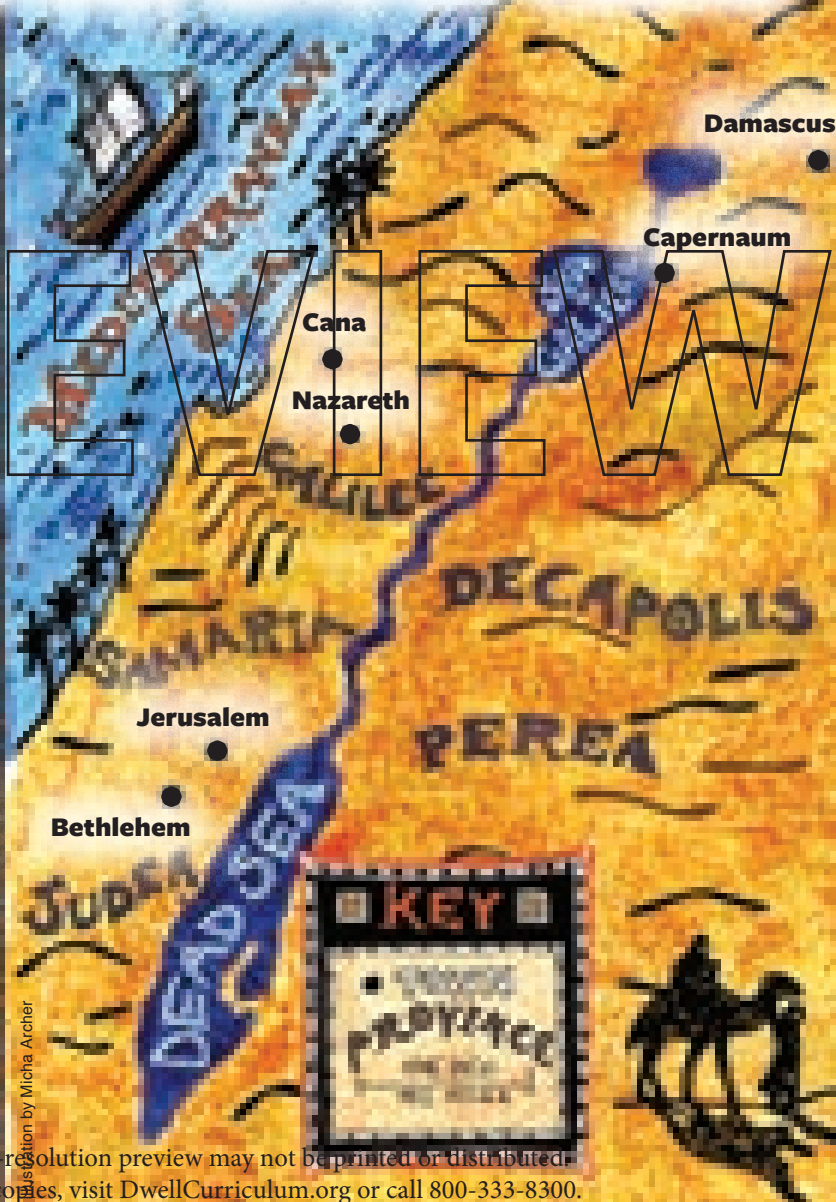


Illustration by Micha Archer



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Did You See *That!*?



What a rush!

You've never experienced anything like this before. A miracle, it was a miracle—and you were part of it. Up ahead on the street you see a camera crew and a reporter interviewing people. You want to tell your story, but you need a minute to let it all sink in. Use the questions below to help you jot down some notes for the evening news.

Your name _____ (make up a good name for yourself)

Who are you? _____
(you might be someone in the crowd, the guy who was healed, a friend of the guy who was healed, or one of the teachers of the law)

Why did you want to see Jesus tonight?

What did you hope would happen?

How would you describe what actually happened here?

What do you think this all means?

Some witnesses say there was a double miracle—the healing and the forgiveness of sins. Do you believe that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins? Why or why not?

Many are describing this as a story of faith—the faith of a group of friends who trusted Jesus for healing, and the faith of the rest of us, who must decide if we trust Jesus to forgive our sins. Do you agree with that? How would you describe faith?

Typically, houses in Capernaum had a stairway outside that led to the flat roof. Roofs were made of wooden beams with saplings strung across them. The roof itself was covered with tight briar branches and clay that would harden when it dried.

True Faith

PREVIEW

Use the questions below to reflect on the meaning of this story in your life.

What does this story tell you about faith?

If you could talk to Jesus face-to-face about your own faith, what would you say or ask?

Jesus first told the man, “Your sins are forgiven.” Write down anything you would like Jesus to forgive:

Next, Jesus told the man to stand up—healing him of whatever was causing his paralysis. Write down anything in your life you would like Jesus to heal:

What is true faith?

True faith is a sure knowledge of God’s promises and a firm trust that all my sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. — Q & A¹⁸

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Could this be the Messiah we've all been waiting for? In the passages below (or the ones your group is working on), **circle** locations of the town or areas that are mentioned, **underline** things Jesus did or said that hinted at who he is, and **draw a box** around the things other people said about Jesus.



You Are My Son

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."...

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

—Mark 1:9-11, 14-15

PREVIEW

A New Kind of Fisherman

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed. A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

Then they entered Capernaum. When the Sabbath arrived, Jesus lost no time in getting to the meeting place. He spent the day there teaching. They were surprised at his teaching—so forthright, so confident—not quibbling and quoting like the religion scholars. Suddenly, while still in the meeting place, he was interrupted by a man who was deeply disturbed and yelling out, “What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you’re up to! You’re the Holy One of God, and you’ve come to destroy us!” Jesus shut him up: “Quiet! Get out of him!” The afflicting spirit threw the man into spasms, protesting loudly—and got out. Everyone there was incredulous, buzzing with curiosity. “What’s going on here? A new teaching that does what it says? He shuts up defiling, demonic spirits and sends them packing!” News of this traveled fast and was soon all over Galilee.

—Mark 1:16-28, The Message

Everybody’s Looking for You

Directly on leaving the meeting place, they came to Simon and Andrew’s house, accompanied by James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed, burning up with fever. They told Jesus. He went to her, took her hand, and raised her up. No sooner had the fever left than she was up fixing dinner for them. That evening, after the sun was down, they brought sick and evil-afflicted people to him, the whole city lined up at his door! He cured their sick bodies and tormented spirits.

While it was still night, way before dawn, he got up and went out to a secluded spot and prayed. Simon and those with him went looking for him. They found him and said, “Everybody’s looking for you.” Jesus said, “Let’s go to the rest of the villages so I can preach there also. This is why I’ve come.” —Mark 1:29-38, The Message

If You Want To, You Can Cleanse Me

Jesus went to their meeting places all through Galilee, preaching and throwing out the demons. A leper came to him, begging on his knees, “If you want to, you can cleanse me.” Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, “I want to. Be clean.” Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy. Jesus dismissed him with strict orders: “Say nothing to anyone. Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest. This will validate your healing to the people.” But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over town. So Jesus kept to out-of-the-way places, no longer able to move freely in and out of the city. But people found him, and came from all over. —Mark 1:39-45, The Message

Early Christian symbols from the Catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome. Pictured here are the anchor, the Ichthus, and the Chi-Rho.



Ever heard of the Chi-Rho or wondered what the anchor stands for? Visit www.jesuswalk.com/christian-symbols to discover the ancient meaning of these Christian symbols.

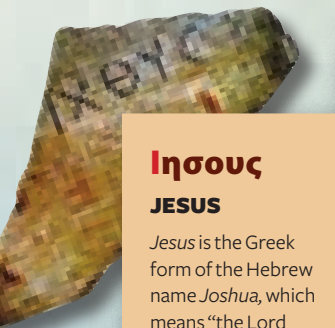
The Ichthus in Times of Trouble



REVEALED As persecution of Christians became more frequent and intense in the Roman Empire, the fish symbol became a password shared among underground believers. They used the fish to mark secret gathering places, especially within the catacombs. In this catacomb art the symbol was frequently coupled with communion imagery—the fish is depicted swimming with bread and a cup of wine on its back. The fish symbol also appeared on Christian gravestones and jewelry, and marked the homes of believers. After the threat of persecution had passed, the fish was inscribed on the Constantinian Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Since the fish symbol was unknown among pagans, it remained a more discreet and thus effective identifier for the persecuted Christians than a cross. Secrecy often meant the difference between life and death for believers or even the church's very survival. One story recounts how the fish symbol enabled fellow Christians to work together even when they didn't know each other. When meeting a stranger on the road, Christians would sometimes draw one arc of the fish in the dirt. If the stranger reciprocated by drawing the other arc, the believers could reveal their faith to each other without alerting Roman authorities and spies.

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Early Christians often used the sign of the fish as a secret symbol to declare their faith. The Greek word for fish is *Ichthus*, which is spelled like this in Greek characters: **ΙΧΘΥΣ**. Each character of the Greek stands for a word, which creates an acrostic creed:

Ιησους
JESUS

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "the Lord saves."

Matthew 1:20-21

Χριστος
CHRIST

Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Jesus was the Christ, or the Messiah, promised to Israel and to the world.

Matthew 16:13-20

Θεος
GOD

Jesus is God.

John 1:1-4

Υιος
SON

Jesus is also the Son of God.

John 1:32-34

Σωτηρ
SAVIOR

Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

Romans 10:9-10

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic* church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places

So, what do you believe?



What is a creed, anyway?

A creed is a statement of belief. The word *creed* comes from *credo*, the Latin word for “I believe.” Creeds are sometimes thought of as symbols that help people recognize each other—like the fish symbol that early Christians used. The Apostles’ Creed has been called the “Symbol of the Apostles.”

Try writing a statement of what you believe, or express it through song, poetry, or art.



Why was the Apostles' Creed written?

The Apostles' Creed wasn't actually written by the apostles. It was named the Apostles' Creed because it summarizes the *beliefs* of the apostles.

The creed probably began in Rome as part of a baptism ceremony. The person to be baptized was asked, "Do you believe in God, the Father almighty?" The answer was, "I believe." Then the person was asked, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord?" Again, the answer was, "I believe."

As Christianity grew, the creed was written down as a response to the question "What do you believe?" Christians wanted to say more than simply "Jesus is Lord," but they couldn't say everything found in Scripture! They needed a summary—so the Apostles' Creed stated their most important beliefs.

Do you find it hard to summarize what you believe? How could learning the Apostles' Creed help you decide what to say?



What is the Apostles' Creed all about?

Take a quick look at the three main parts of the creed, indicated by the words "I believe in." In a nutshell, those are the three most important words in the creed. They change the Apostles' Creed from just a bunch of facts to a confession of faith that comes straight from the heart.

Notice that the creed is organized around the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Most of the creed is about Jesus because early Christians faced many questions about who Jesus really was and is; they wanted to ensure that people from all times and places understand that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth, died, arose, and ascended to heaven.

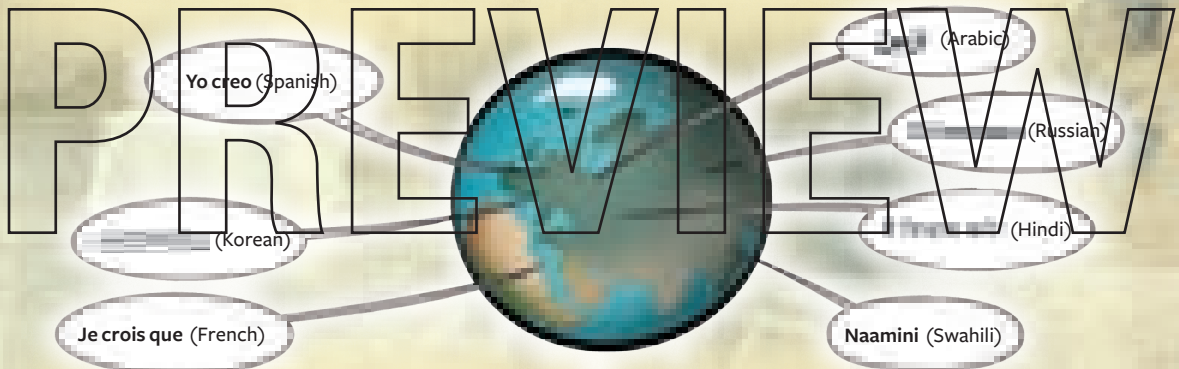
The Apostles' Creed is a little like a Hallmark card we pick out for someone we love. We didn't write the words, but they can still express the thoughts of our hearts. Does the Apostles' Creed summarize what you believe about God?

How old is the Apostles' Creed?

Really, really old. The first written version of the creed dates to around 350 years after the birth of Christ—that makes it around 1,650 years old, give or take a few.

Today, the Apostles' Creed is the most popular Christian creed in the world. In hundreds of languages and thousands of denominations, Christians everywhere confess their one faith by saying the Apostles' Creed. To hear what “I believe” sounds like in other languages; visit Google Translate at **translate.google.com** to listen!

Why do you think these words have lasted so long and are being used all over the world?



What is the Apostles' Creed used for today?

Maybe you've said the creed aloud with your congregation on Sunday in worship. When you do that, you're confessing your personal faith. You're reminding yourself and telling God, “This is what I believe.”

But you're also taking your place beside millions of Christians of all times and places who are confessing their faith using the same words. So the Apostles' Creed helps you sense that you are one with Christians all over the world.

One of the uses of the Apostles' Creed is to instruct God's people. An explanation of the Apostles' Creed is found in just about every catechism, including the Heidelberg Catechism.

How does

Credo... I believe

Read the Apostles' Creed again, and
reflect on the questions below:

your mind wrestle with this puzzle—ONE God in THREE persons? How would you describe the Trinity?

When you think about Jesus, how do you usually picture him? On the cross? At the right hand of God? Ascending? Coming in judgment?

PREVIEW

When have you known God as your Father almighty? Very little is said about the Holy Spirit in the Apostles' Creed. If you were writing a creed, what would you say about the Holy Spirit?

**Who is
God?**

God is one, spiritual being: eternal, invisible, almighty, infinite, and completely wise, just, and good. This one God exists from eternity in three distinct persons: **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** — Q&A 20

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Apostles' Creed

believers around the world and across the ages. When we recite something often enough, though, the words simply roll off our tongues and we don't think about what we're saying.

So when we were given the opportunity to plan part of a worship service, we decided to try to express the Apostles' Creed in a new way. We wanted the people in our church to hear it with fresh ears in a way that would help all of us think about what we were saying.

Because we wanted to use the members of our youth group to present the creed, we wrote a dramatic reading for eight people. You could easily reduce the number of readers by reassigning lines.

We wanted to add words of explanation to the creed, but rather than making them up we decided to draw them from reliable sources—after all, we're still in high school and we wanted to get it right. So most of the words that are not directly from the Apostles' Creed are adapted from the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

**Dramatic
Reading
by Lynnae
Keely
and Sarah
Hofman**

Reader 4: I believe

Reader 1: I believe

Reader 5: I believe

Reader 6: I believe in God

Reader 7: the Father Almighty

Reader 2: Almighty

Reader 8: Creator

Reader 3: Maker

Reader 4: of all things

Reader 7: visible and invisible.

Reader 1: I believe in God the

Father Almighty

Reader 8: Creator of heaven
and earth.

Reader 6: I believe

Reader 5: in Jesus Christ

Reader 3: his Son

Reader 5: his only Son

Reader 8: our Lord

Reader 6: who was conceived
by the Holy Spirit

Reader 7: and was born of the
virgin Mary.

Reader 2: He came into the
world

Reader 1: from heaven

Reader 6: he lived with us

Reader 4: he taught us

Reader 2: he suffered under
Pontius Pilate.

Reader 3: He was crucified

Reader 5: crucified

All: died

Reader 7: for us.

Reader 8: He descended into
hell

Reader 1: so that we don't
have to.

Reader 4: The third day

All: he rose

*Readers 1, 4, 5, 2 say "he rose"
overlapping each other, until
finally*

Reader 6: he rose from the
dead.

Reader 3: and ascended into
heaven

Reader 7: and is seated with
God

Reader 2: the Father Almighty.

Reader 5: From there he will
come to judge the living and
the dead.

Reader 1: I believe

Reader 4: in the Holy Spirit

Reader 3: living among us

Reader 8: and in us.

Readers 1, 6: I believe

Reader 7: in the holy catholic
church,

Reader 2: the church

Reader 6: universal.

Readers 1, 6, 8: I believe

Reader 3: in the communion
of saints.

Reader 4: All of us

Reader 5: share in Christ

Reader 2: as members of the
body.

Readers 1, 4, 6, 8: I believe
Reader 7: in the forgiveness
of sins.

Reader 5: Grace

Reader 8: God's grace

Reader 3: God's grace for us.

Readers 1, 2, 4, 6, 8:

I believe

Reader 6: in the resur-
rection of the body.

Reader 2: My body will
be raised from the
dead

Reader 7: just as
Christ was raised.

All: I believe

Reader 8: in the
life everlasting.

Reader 3: I will
have

Reader 4:
what no eye
has seen

Reader 5:
no ear
has heard

Reader 6: no human
heart has ever imagined.

Reader 7: I will praise God
eternally.

All: I believe!

Reader 5: Amen.

READERS

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Who Is God?

PREVIEW



PREVIEW

GOD IS...

Group 1


- Genesis 1:1-2
- Isaiah 6:1-3
- Revelation 22:13
- Isaiah 64:8
- John 6:35

Group 2

- John 4:24
- Psalm 67:4
- Psalm 18:2
- Psalm 23:1
- 1 John 4:16

Group 3

- Psalm 86:5
- John 14:6
- 1 Timothy 1:17
- Romans 11:33-36
- Matthew 20:34

A close-up photograph of three hands holding smartphones. The top hand, with blue nail polish, holds a phone with a green case. The bottom-left hand, with teal nail polish, holds a phone with a gold case. The bottom-right hand, with purple nail polish, holds a black phone. All three screens display a worksheet with a title, a list of items, and a table. The word 'PREVIEW' is overlaid in large, outlined letters across the center of the image.

PREVIEW

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God is the almighty creator of heaven and earth and the eternal Father of Jesus Christ. God is also my faithful Father, the one I can trust to provide whatever I need for body and soul. — from Q&A 21

God sent bread and meat directly from heaven to feed the Israelites. What are some of the ways God provides for you and your family?

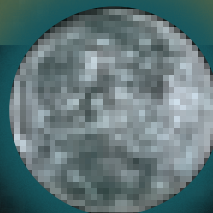
Spend a quiet moment thanking God for taking care of you.

The Israelites worried that they wouldn't have enough to eat. What worries you?

Talk to God about these things—ask God for what you need.

**We trust that our heavenly Father takes
care of everything in our world.**

—from Q&A 22

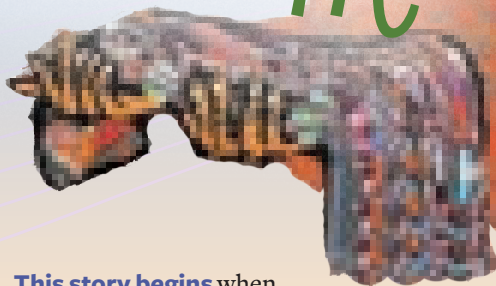


Is it easy or hard for
you to trust God?

PREVIEW

*Talk to God about
that too, asking God
to help you let go of
worries and depend
on him to take care
of you.*

Dad's Favorite



This story begins when

Joseph was seventeen years old and helping his brothers herd the flocks. They were his half-brothers, actually, the sons of his father's wives, and Joseph brought his father bad reports on them.

Joseph's father loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was the child of his old age. He made him a stylish coat with custom stitching that Joseph wore all the time. When his brothers realized that their father loved him more than them, they grew to hate him—they wouldn't even speak to him.

Joseph Dreams Big

One night, Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said, "Listen to this dream I had. We were all out in the field gathering bundles of wheat. All of a sudden my bundle stood straight up and your bundles circled around it and bowed down to mine." His brothers said, "So! You're going to rule us? You're going to boss us around?" And they

hated him more than ever because of his dreams and the way he talked.

Down Goes the Dreamer

Not long after that, his brothers had gone off to pasture their father's flocks.

Jacob said to Joseph, "Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are doing and bring me back a report."

Joseph's brothers spotted him off in the distance. By the time he got to them they had cooked up a plot to kill him. The brothers were saying, "Here comes that dreamer. Let's kill him and throw him into one of these old cisterns; we can say that a vicious animal ate him up. We'll see what his dreams amount to."

Reuben heard the brothers talking and intervened to save him. "We're not going to kill him. No murder. Go ahead and throw him in this cistern out here in the wild, but don't hurt him."

When Joseph reached his brothers, they ripped off the fancy coat he was wearing, grabbed him, and threw him into a cistern. The cistern was dry; there wasn't any water in it. Then they sat down to eat their supper.

Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites with their camels loaded with spices, ointments, and perfumes to sell in Egypt. The brothers pulled Joseph out of the cistern and sold him for twenty pieces of silver.



Then they took Joseph's coat, butchered a goat, and dipped the coat in the blood. They took the fancy coat back to their father and said, "We found this. Look it over—do you think this is your son's coat?" He recognized it at once. "My son's coat—a wild animal has eaten him. Joseph torn limb from limb!" Oh, how his father wept for him.

The New Boss

After Joseph had been taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, Potiphar, an Egyptian, one of Pharaoh's officials and the manager of his household, bought Joseph from them.

As it turned out, GOD was with Joseph and things went very well with him. He ended up living in the home of his Egyptian master. His master recognized that GOD

Wrongly Accused

Joseph was a strikingly handsome man. As time went on, his master's wife became infatuated with Joseph and one day said, "Sleep with me."

He wouldn't do it. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master doesn't give a second thought to anything that goes on here—he's put me in charge of everything he owns. He treats me as an equal. The only thing he hasn't turned over to me is you. You're his wife, after all! How could I violate his trust and sin against God?"

She pestered him day after day after day, but he stood his ground.



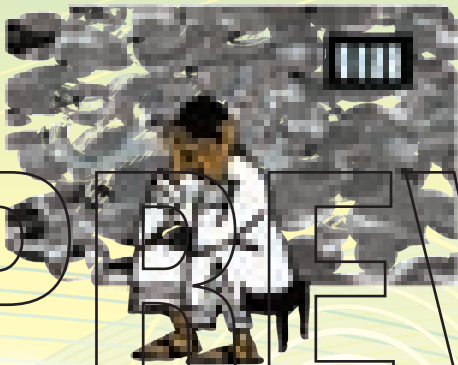
was with him, saw that GOD was working for good in everything he did. He became very fond of Joseph and made him his personal aide. He put him in charge of all his personal affairs, turning everything over to him. From that moment on, GOD blessed the home of the Egyptian—all because of Joseph. The blessing of GOD spread over everything he owned, at home and in the fields, and all Potiphar had to concern himself with was eating three meals a day.

On one of these days he came to the house to do his work and none of the household servants happened to be there. She grabbed him by his cloak, saying, "Sleep with me!" He left his coat in her hand and ran out of the house. When she realized that he had left his coat in her hand and run outside, she called to her house servants: "Look—this Hebrew shows up and before you know it he's trying to seduce us. He tried to make love to me but I yelled as loud as I could. With all my yelling and screaming, he left his coat beside me here and ran outside."

When his master heard his wife's story, he was furious. Joseph's master took him and threw him into the jail where the king's prisoners were locked up.

Joseph in Jail

But there in jail GOD was still with Joseph: He reached out in kindness to him; he put him on good terms with the head jailer.



PREVIEW

The head jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners—he ended up managing the whole operation. The head jailer gave Joseph free rein, never even checked on him, because GOD was with him; whatever he did GOD made sure it worked out for the best.

The Cupbearer's Break

As time went on, it happened that the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt crossed their master, the king. Pharaoh was furious with his two officials and put them in custody under the captain of the guard; it was the same jail where Joseph was held. The captain of the guard assigned Joseph to see to their needs. The king's cupbearer and baker, while being held in the jail, both had a dream on the same night, each dream having

its own meaning. When Joseph arrived in the morning, he noticed that they were feeling low. So he asked them, the two officials of Pharaoh who had been thrown into jail with him, "What's wrong? Why the long faces?"



They said, "We dreamed dreams and there's no one to interpret them."

Joseph said, "Don't interpretations come from God? Tell me the dreams." And when they told him their dreams, he interpreted them.

Joseph had bad news for the baker, but he told the king's cupbearer that his dream meant he would be getting his job back within three days. "Only remember me when things are going well with you again," Joseph said. "Tell Pharaoh about me and get me out of this place. I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. And since I've been here, I've done nothing to deserve being put in this hole."

The King's Big Problem

Two years passed and Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile River. Seven cows came up out of the Nile, all shimmering with health, and grazed on the marsh grass. Then seven other cows, all skin and bones, came up out of the river after them and stood by them on the bank of the Nile. The skinny cows ate the seven healthy cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

He went back to sleep and dreamed a second time: Seven ears of grain, full-bodied and lush, grew out of a single stalk. Then seven more ears grew up, but these were thin and dried out by the east wind. The thin ears swallowed up the full, healthy ears. Then Pharaoh woke up. When morning came, he was upset. He sent for all the magicians and sages of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but they couldn't interpret them to him.

Seven Years and Seven Years

The head cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the Pharaoh about how he had interpreted his dream. Pharaoh at once sent for Joseph. They brought him on the run from the jail cell. He cut his hair, put on clean clothes, and came to Pharaoh. "I dreamed a dream," Pharaoh told Joseph. "Nobody can interpret it. But I've heard that just by hearing a dream you can interpret it."

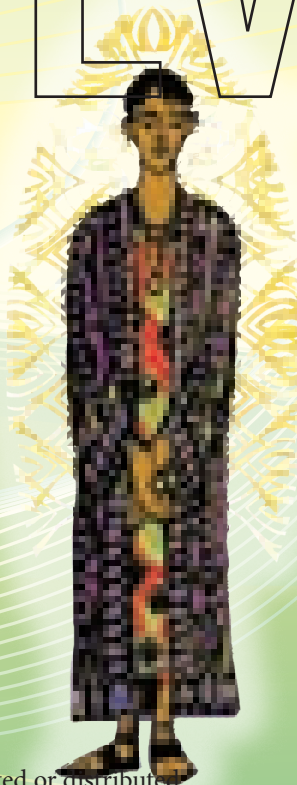
Joseph answered, "Not I, but God. God will set Pharaoh's mind at ease. Your dreams both mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh what he is going to do."

Then Joseph told Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in the land of Egypt. He advised the king to find a wise and experienced man and to put him in charge of the country. His job would be to store up food during the seven years of plenty so that Egypt would not be devastated by the seven years of famine. This seemed like a good idea to Pharaoh and his officials.

Joseph's Dream Comes True

Then Pharaoh said to his officials, "Isn't this the man we need? Are we going to find anyone else who has God's spirit in him like this?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "You're the man for us. God has given you the inside story—no one is as qualified as you in experience and wisdom.

"From now on, you're in charge of my affairs; all my people will report to you. Only as king will I be over you." So Pharaoh commissioned Joseph: "I'm putting you in charge of the entire country of Egypt." Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his finger and slipped it on Joseph's hand. He outfitted him in robes of the best linen and put a gold chain around his neck.



God Had a Plan

After the seven good years came to an end, the seven years of famine arrived, just as Joseph had said. All the surrounding countries experienced the famine, but because Joseph was successful in storing up food during the seven years of plenty, Egypt still had food. People came from all over to buy food from Egypt—and eventually Joseph's brothers came.

When his brothers arrived, they treated Joseph with honor, bowing to him because of his position as second in command to Pharaoh. Joseph recognized them immediately, but they didn't know who he was. It took a while before Joseph was ready to reveal himself to them.



Joseph spoke to his brothers: "I am Joseph. Is my father really still alive?"

But his brothers couldn't say a word. They were speechless—they couldn't believe what they were hearing and seeing. "Come closer to me," Joseph said to his brothers. They came closer. "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. But don't feel badly; don't blame yourselves for selling me. God was behind it. God sent me here ahead of you to save lives. There has been a famine in the land now for two years; the famine will continue for five more years. God sent me on ahead to pave the way and make sure there was a remnant



in the land, to save your lives in an amazing act of deliverance. So you see, it wasn't you who sent me here but God. He set me in place as a father to Pharaoh, put me in charge of his personal affairs, and made me ruler of all Egypt."

But his brothers still feared that Joseph would retaliate. After their father's funeral they talked among themselves: "What if Joseph is carrying a grudge and decides to put us back for all the wrong we did him?"

So they sent Joseph a message, "Before his death, your father gave this command: Tell Joseph, 'Forgive your brothers' sin—all that wrongdoing. They did treat you very badly.' Will you do it? Will you forgive the sins of the servants of your father's God?"

When Joseph received their message, he wept.

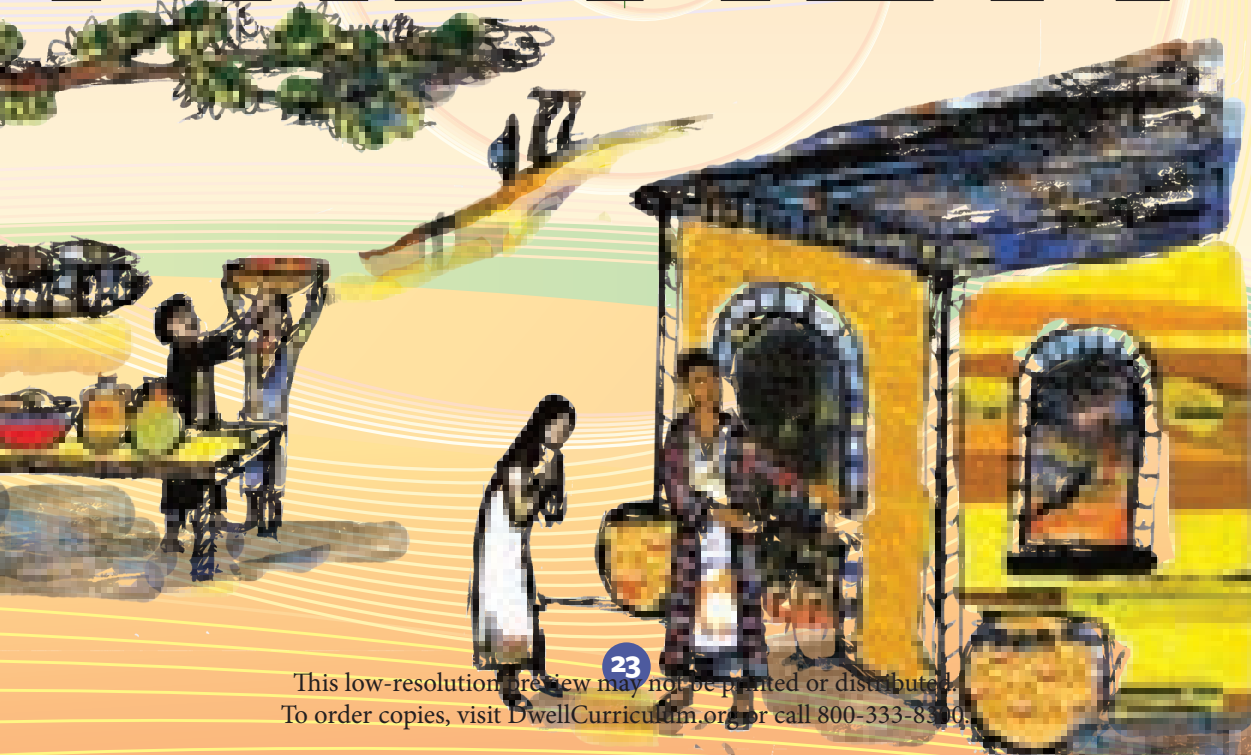
Then the brothers went in person to him, threw themselves on the ground before him and said, "We'll be your slaves."



Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid. Do I act for God? Don't you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see all around you right now—life for many people. Easy now, you have nothing to fear; I'll take care of you and your children." He reassured them, speaking with them heart-to-heart.

Adapted from The Message, passages from Genesis 37; 39-42; 45; and 50

PREVIEW



How should you think about the troubles of the world?

I should trust that God rules and shapes what is happening in our world to his own purpose. The future is safe, because our world belongs to God. — Q & A 23

Bringing Good out of Evil



PREVIEW If you were Joseph, what do you think would upset you more, being sold into slavery by your own brothers, or being thrown in prison for a crime you didn't commit? Why?

- How did God bring something good out of these bad situations?
- What do you think would have happened if Joseph hadn't gone through these hard times?
- I wonder if God always brings good out of the bad things that happen in life.

- Have you ever seen God make something good come out of a bad situation in your life?

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Sometimes it's hard to imagine that anything good could come out of a bad situation you're facing. But Jesus is there, even when you don't feel his presence. Read the verses below and use the space around them to sketch your thoughts, prayers, and hopes.

Seeing Past Today

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose...

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?...

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,

nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— **Romans 8:28, 31-32, 35, 38, NRSV**

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.

— **Romans 40:1-3, NRSV**

1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. **2** She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. **3** Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. **4** Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. **5** She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. **6** The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. **8** But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. **9** The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you!

He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. **14** The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach.

15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. **16** But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

—Revelation 12

Star Wars
C

Diving into the Story

1. Who are the three main characters in this story?

_____ (vv. 1-2)
_____ (v. 3)
_____ (v. 5)

4. Try to tell the story of Revelation 12 in three or four sentences.

5. What do you think is the most important part of this story for us? Why?

6. The war between God and Satan is still going on today. God says to you, "Love me with all your heart . . . and love your neighbor as yourself." What does Satan say to you? Invent a commandment that Satan would like you to obey.

7. Compare how we as Christians feel about Christmas and how Satan and the forces of evil must feel about Christmas.

2. Who do these characters represent?

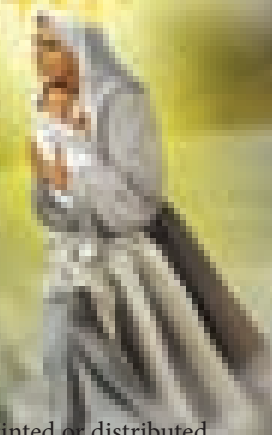
_____ (v. 17b)
_____ (v. 9)
_____ (v. 10)

3. Choose a color for each of these characters and, using a marker or crayon of that color, underline or lightly color the verses that apply to each of these characters.



Christmas

PREVIEW



A Light in the Darkness

Christ came as the light of the world to defeat Satan once and for all. At his birth Jesus crushed Satan's power and began to transform the world by calling people back to God and undoing the evil that Satan and sin have caused.

PREVIEW

Good is stronger
love is stronger
light is stronger

life is stronger

Victory is ours,

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African
activist and opponent of apartheid

Now, as Christ's followers we are lights to the world as well. We are part of the cosmic battle between good and evil! The Holy Spirit works through us to continue fighting against evil and calling others to experience the good and perfect love of Jesus. One day Christ will come again to finally claim his victory and fully transform all of creation into the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be no more evil, tears, or sin!

than **evil;**

than **hate;**

than **darkness;**

than **death.**

through him who loves us.

Victory!

Revelation 12

Sketch your own picture of Revelation 12. When you finish, write a title for your work. Or, if you'd rather, illustrate just one part of the story.

PREVIEW



Create an Acrostic

Use the words “Christmas Victory” to create an acrostic poem. Each letter should start a sentence that honors Jesus or celebrates Christmas. Starting with “C” you may write something like “Christ came at Christmas, a gift of God” or “Christ is king!” Work your way through all the letters. Then, when you’re finished, consider sharing your acrostic with the group or reading it as the closing prayer.

Pray and Act

List some of the evil you still see in the world—include both everyday things like people lying to each other and bigger issues like world hunger and violence. Now spend some quiet time asking God to bring change and victory to these situations. Cross off each one as you pray for it. Then think about what you could do to shine Jesus light in those situations. Write down one or two ideas—like walking away when someone is gossiping or volunteering at a local soup kitchen. Commit to doing them this week.

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Both Sides of the Story

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down
his sweet head; the stars in the sky
looked down where he lay, the
little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the

sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

*Silent night, holy night, all is calm,
all is bright, 'round yon Virgin
Mother and Child, Holy Infant
so tender and mild, sleep in heav-
enly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*

—Revelation 12:1-5, stanza 1 of “Away in a Manger” (American, 1885) and “Silent Night” (Joseph Mohr, 1818).

Dive, Year 1, Unit 3

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