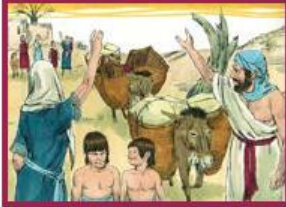
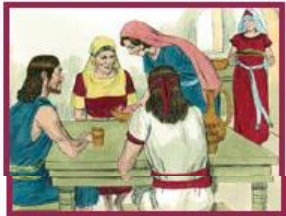


Ruth and Naomi

A man called Elimelech lived in Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons. His wife's name was Naomi. When his sons were young, a severe famine came to the land so Elimelech decided to move his family to the country of Moab where there would be more food to feed his family. Elimelech and his family believed in God and lived in Bethlehem with others who believed too. The people of Moab had their own gods they worshipped.



A few years later, Elimelech died leaving Naomi with her two sons. Both sons ended up marrying Moabite women and they all lived happily together for the next ten years.



However, disaster struck when both sons died.

Now Naomi was left only with her two daughters-in-law (who were called Orpah and Ruth). Naomi was devastated. She was too old to marry again and have more children so she decided to leave Moab and go back to Bethlehem. The three women started packing up their belongings. Before long, they were ready to leave and they set off on the long journey back to Bethlehem.

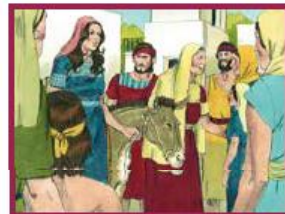


After a little while on the road, Naomi stopped and told Orpah and Ruth that they should go back to Moab. "There is no reason for you to stay with me," she said. "I am old and can give you no more sons to marry. Go back home and live with your mothers. I have nothing else I can give you." They all cried at the sadness of their situation. Orpah gave her mother-in-law a long hug, then turned around and headed back to Moab. Ruth also hugged Naomi but didn't let go.

"Look," said Naomi to Ruth. "Your sister-in-law is leaving to live with her own people and worship her own gods. Go with her." But Ruth would not go. Instead she said, "I will not leave you. Where you go, I will go, and where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will also die and be buried. I swear by almighty God that only death will be able to separate me from you."



When Naomi realised that Ruth would not be dissuaded, they journeyed the rest of the way to Bethlehem together. When they arrived, the whole village was excited. "Can that be Naomi?" they asked. "How wonderful that she has come home!"



Because Naomi and Ruth had no husbands to take care of them, they had to earn their own living. It was harvest season so Ruth decided she would go to the fields and glean the grain that was left on the ground after the men had harvested the crops. She worked hard in the field all day long, without even taking a break. She wanted to make sure that there was enough grain to keep Naomi fed and well.



The owner of the field noticed Ruth working in the field. "Who is that woman?" he asked one of his workers. "She is Ruth, the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi," he answered. It just so happened that the owner of the field (who was called Boaz) was a relative of Naomi's husband Elimelech. He decided to go and talk to Ruth. "From now on, stay in my field," he said. "Stay close to the other women who will be friendly to you. Don't worry about being harassed by any of the workers because I will tell them to leave you alone. And whenever you get thirsty, go and drink from the water buckets the servants have filled."



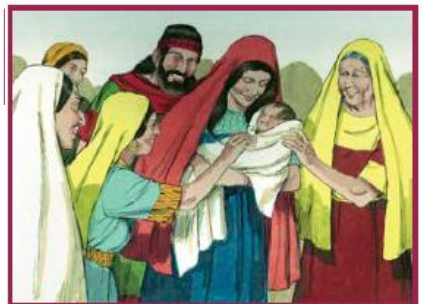
Ruth was overwhelmed by the man's kindness and bowed down at his feet. "Why do you treat me so well when I am a foreigner here? You don't even know me." "I have heard how you treated Naomi and the kindness you showed her. I heard about how you left your home and your own family to follow her so she wouldn't be lonely after the death of her husband and sons. God will reward you for such kindness and so will I." Ruth couldn't believe Boaz would be so generous but to prove he meant it, he prepared a meal for her and made sure she ate well.



When Ruth told Naomi what had happened she was overjoyed. "I thought God had forgotten us but he hasn't! Now you'll be safe working in the fields and we will have food to eat." Ruth continued working in the field until the harvest was over. Boaz continued to treat her kindly, even ordering the workers to drop more barley so there would be more for her to pick up.



Eventually Ruth and Boaz were married. Naomi was thrilled that Ruth could marry a relative of her husband's. She felt that God had truly blessed them all, especially once Ruth and Boaz had a son! The women of the town said to Naomi, "God be praised! He didn't leave you without family to carry on your life. May this baby grow up to be famous in Israel! And as for your daughter-in-law, she is more special than seven sons!"



Daniel and the Lions' Den

During the reign of King Darius, there were three vice-regents who helped the king run the kingdom. Out of these three vice-regents, Daniel was by far the most impressive. He was so good at his job, and so wise and helpful to his king, that he was put in charge of governing the whole kingdom.

The other vice-regents were jealous of Daniel and decided to try and make him fall from grace. They tried everything they could think of but they couldn't find any evidence of Daniel doing even one thing wrong. "The only way we can get rid of Daniel is if we use his religion against him," they said. They knew that Daniel prayed to his God every day and that he followed His laws. The other vice-regents conspired together, came up with a plan and went to see King Darius.

"We have spoken to all your governors and vice-regents. We all think you should pass a decree that forbids anyone to pray to any god or human except you for the next thirty days, Your Majesty. Anyone who does should be thrown into a den of lions. Put it in writing so the decree can't be changed." King Darius agreed and had the decree written up.



Daniel heard about the decree but continued to pray to God three times a day at his window, just as he had always done. He knew that worshipping God was more important than any law a man could make. The vice-regents went to Daniel's house, knowing exactly when he would be praying. They immediately went to tell King Darius that they had found Daniel going against the new decree.

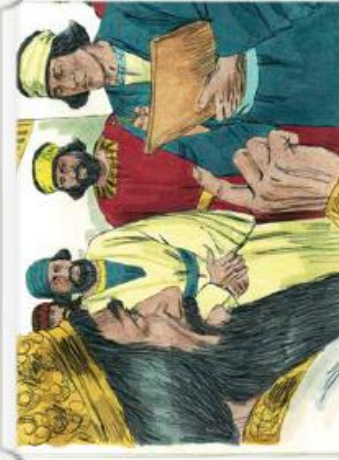
When King Darius found out that Daniel had broken the decree he was very troubled. He thought of everything he could do to save Daniel from facing punishment but there was nothing he could do. "The law says a decree can't be changed," the men reminded him. There was nothing Darius could do to save Daniel. He gave the order and the men seized Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. "Let's see your God rescue you now!" they sneered. They dragged a stone over the mouth of the den and left Daniel inside.



King Darius went back to the palace with a heavy heart. He fretted all evening and couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep either as he was so worried about Daniel and what he would find when he went back to the lions' den in the morning. At first light, Darius raced back to the den. To his utter amazement, he saw Daniel standing among the lions - and he was completely unharmed! "What happened?" asked the king.

"The Lord sent his angels and they closed the mouths of the lions," replied Daniel. "They didn't hurt me because God knew I had not done wrong by him. Nor have I done wrong by you, my king." The king was overjoyed and gave orders for Daniel to be lifted out of the den. There wasn't a scratch on him.

At the king's command, the men who had accused Daniel were thrown into the pit. Before their bodies hit the floor, the lions overpowered them and crushed their bones. King Darius knew that Daniel's God was the one true God so he wrote to all the people and nations, telling them about what had happened and that they should worship the Lord God who could perform such incredible miracles.



A

The Rich Fool

Jesus was talking to a big crowd of people. Someone shouted out, "Teacher, tell my brother to give me my fair share of the family inheritance."

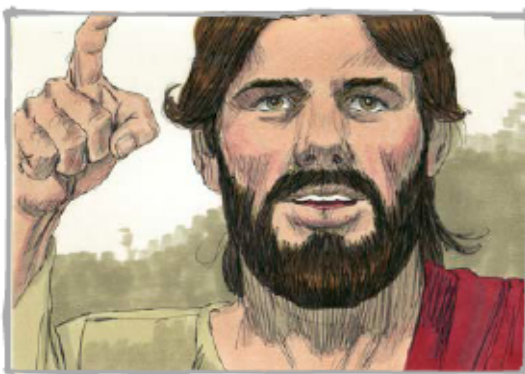
Jesus answered, "What makes you think I will be a judge or mediator for you?" He turned to the rest of the crowd and said, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed." Then he told them this parable:

A certain rich man had lots of land that produced masses of crops. He said to himself, 'I have so many crops that they will not all fit in my barn. I know! I'll build a new and bigger barn. I'll keep all my grain and goods and then I'll be able to sit back and retire knowing I am a rich man. I'll enjoy myself and all my riches.' Just then, God spoke to him and said, 'You fool! Tonight you will die and your barn full of goods - who gets it?' That is what happens when you fill your barn with goods instead of with God.



B

The Wise and Foolish Builders



Jesus was teaching a group of people about how God wants them to live their lives. He taught them many things. "Whoever hears my teachings and puts them into practice," he said, "is like a wise builder who builds his house on a foundation of solid rock. When the fierce rain falls and the water levels rise, the house will stand firmly on the rock and not be washed away.

However, those people who hear my teachings but do not act on them are like a foolish builder who builds his house on sand. When the rains come and the water rises, the house will be washed away and be destroyed by the storm." When Jesus finished speaking, the crowd were amazed. He taught them like someone of authority and not like the teachers of the law.

The Good Samaritan

An expert in the law asked Jesus a question to see how he would answer. He knew that the scriptures said that to have eternal life you had to love God with all your heart and soul, and that you also have to love your neighbour as you love yourself. "But who is my neighbour?" the expert asked Jesus. Jesus told him a parable:

A man was on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem when a band of robbers attacked him. They took his clothes and all his possessions, and beat him almost to death. They then ran off, leaving the man wounded and dying.



A priest happened to be going down the same

road but when he saw the injured man, he walked by on the other side.



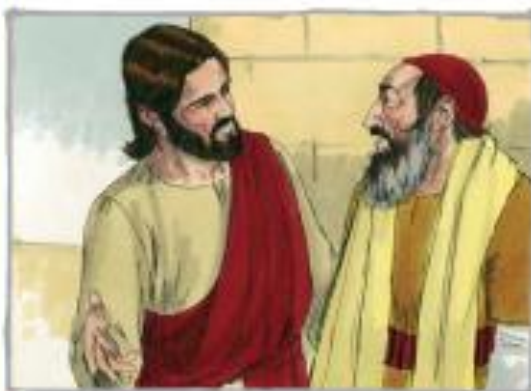
Next, a temple worker was walking along the same road and also saw the same man. He carried on going without stopping, just as the priest had done.

A little later, a man from Samaria was walking along the road and came

across the man. When he saw him, he felt sorry for him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn.



When they got to the inn, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said to him, 'Please take care of this man. If you spend any more on him than this, I will reimburse you when I return.'



Then Jesus turned to the expert of the law and said, "Which of the three men was a real neighbour to the man who was beaten up by robbers?" The man answered, "The one who showed pity." Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"

The Prodigal Son

Jesus was talking with a group of people. He told them a parable:



Once a man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Give me my share of your property now instead of waiting until your death. I want to go and make my own life.' So the father divided up his property between his two sons and gave them each their share.

The younger son soon left home to go and live as he pleased. He went to a foreign country and wasted his money on extravagant living. Soon he had spent all his

money and had nothing left. To make matters worse, a bad famine hit the land and he was left with nothing to eat.

He decided to go and work for a man who sent him to go and take care of his pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating but no one gave him a thing.

Finally, he came to his senses. 'My father's workers

have plenty to eat, and here I am starving to death! I will go to my father and tell him that although I am no longer worthy to be called his son, I will offer to work for him as a servant.' So he started making his way back home.

As he neared his father's house, his father saw him approaching. He felt sorry for him and ran towards him. When he reached his son, the father hugged and

kissed his son. 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But his father said to his servants, 'Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Get a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it for a feast so we can celebrate! This son was lost to me but now he is found!'

Everyone had begun to celebrate but the older brother was cross. He said to his father, 'For years I have worked for you and always obeyed you. But you have never given me even a small goat so I could have a feast with my

friends. And now my brother comes home, having wasted all your money, and you throw him a party. It isn't fair.'

His father replied, 'My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead but now he is alive. He was lost but now is found.'

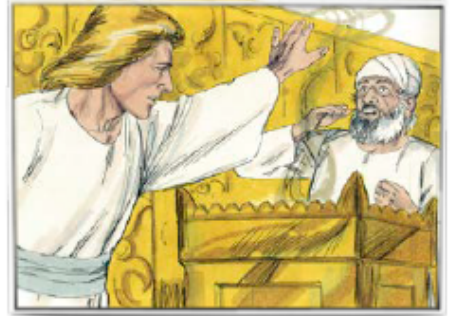


John the Baptist

During the rule of King Herod of Judea, there lived a priest called Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They had both wished for a child but had never had any children of their own. Now they were old and had lost hope of ever having a baby. Nonetheless, they were both righteous people and followed all of God's commandments.

One day, Zechariah was in the temple performing his duties when an angel of the Lord appeared to him. When Zechariah saw the angel, he was overcome with fear. "Don't be afraid," the angel said. "Your prayers have been heard and your wife will have a baby. She will give birth to a son and you will call him John. John will prepare the way of the Lord and will lead people back to God."

"How can this be?" asked Zechariah. "Elizabeth is too old to have children."

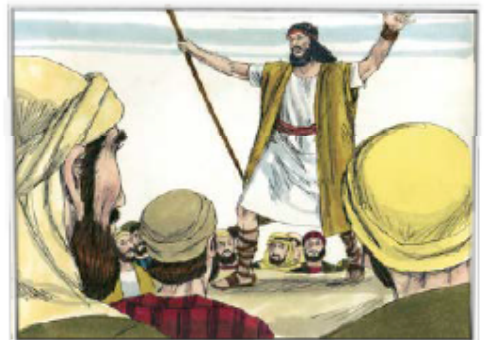


But the angel said, "I am a messenger of God and these things will happen. However, as you did not believe you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day these things happen."

When Zechariah left the temple, he tried to tell the people outside what had happened but he was unable to speak. They realised that he must have had a vision in the temple. Just as the angel had said, Elizabeth had a baby boy. Everyone rejoiced with them for finally having a child. They wanted them to name the baby Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth refused. "I shall name him John," she said.

While Elizabeth was pregnant with John, a relative of hers called Mary was also visited by the angel. Mary was told that she would have a baby even though she was not yet married to Joseph. He would be a very special baby and his name would be Jesus. Jesus and John the Baptist were born about six months apart.

John grew up to be a man of strong character. Instead of serving in the temple like his father, he lived in the desert where he wore clothes of camel hair with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. His only wish was to help people get ready for what was going to happen. To everyone he met, he said, "Change your heart and your minds! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" He wanted people to realise that Jesus was soon coming and that they should be ready. He encouraged people to turn away from doing bad things and turn back to God.



John started baptising people in the River Jordan. He baptised people who had turned away from their old ways and recognised that they had done wrong. Those who wanted to become right with God were washed clean by the baptism so they could start their lives again. Some of the Pharisees didn't like what John was doing. "Are you the Messiah?" they asked.

"I am not," replied John.

"Then why do you baptise people?"

John answered, "I baptise with water. There is one coming who is greater than me. I am not worthy to even untie his sandals."



When Jesus was ready to start his public mission, he went to John at the River Jordan. Lots of people were there listening to John talk. When Jesus reached the river, he asked John to baptise him. John didn't recognise Jesus. He baptised him as Jesus had asked and as he did so, he saw the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting on Jesus.

When John saw this, he knew that this man was the Messiah he had been waiting for. Over the next few days, he told his followers who Jesus was. Some of the people who heard him started following Jesus. These men became the first disciples of Jesus.