

Monday

## Genesis 6:1–9:17

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, all people are born sinners. As time went on, more and more people were born, filling the earth that God had made. The Lord saw the great wickedness of the people and the evil in their hearts. This grieved God, and he said, "I will wipe out mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth."

But God had a promise to keep. God had promised Adam and Eve that he would send someone from their offspring to be the Savior of the world. So God could not wipe out all of their offspring. There was one man named Noah who found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was an upright and righteous man, the Bible says. God told Noah he was going to destroy the earth and everyone and everything in it. He would do this because the wickedness of the people had grown so great. God in his grace decided to save Noah and his family.

God told Noah to build an enormous boat called an ark. God told him to put food in the ark and God sent two of every kind of land animal and bird. And Noah did exactly as God commanded. When all the animals and everyone in Noah's family were in the ark, God shut the door. Then it began to rain. It rained for forty days and forty nights. Every day the water outside the ark grew deeper and deeper. At last the water was so deep that it even covered the mountaintops. Everyone and everything on the earth was killed and destroyed by the flood. But by God's grace, Noah and his family were safe.

Once the rain stopped, it still took many days for all of the water to dry up. At last the ground was dry, and Noah and his family and all of the animals could leave the ark. Noah gave offerings to God and thanked him for saving him and his family. God blessed Noah and his family.

God promised Noah never again to send a great flood to destroy all of the people and animals and the whole earth. Then God put a rainbow in the sky and said that it would be a sign and a reminder of his promise.

Many centuries later, God's own Son, Jesus would be born from Noah's descendants (just as we all are). And because of God's great love, Jesus would suffer and die on the cross to pay for the sins of the whole world, so that all who trust in Jesus will be saved from God's righteous judgment and punishment on the earth for their sin.

- **How does God feel about sin?**
- **How can we avoid and be saved from God's judgment on our own sin?**

Close with prayer

## DECEMBER WEEK ONE: JOB

### Tuesday **Job**

Job is described as “one who feared God and turned away from evil.” He loved God, yet many difficult things happened to him. All of us have experienced terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days, just like Job. Sometimes we have a string of terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days when it just seems that nothing goes right and no one is listening.

Now Job, the Bible says, was a believer. But one day, Satan appeared before God, who was seated on his throne. Satan said that he had been walking up and down the earth. God replied with a question. God asked Satan if he had observed his servant Job. Job, God said, was an upright man, one who feared God and hated evil. In the whole world there was no one as faithful as Job.

To God, Satan gave a challenge. Satan claimed that Job would not be faithful if God would stop protecting him. Satan thought that if he was allowed to test Job, then Job would reject God. So Satan asked God for permission to test Job. Satan believed that he could make Job sin, but God knew that although Job was a rich man, Job was also a godly man and that Job would not reject him. God granted Satan permission and told Satan to do what he desired to Job, but not to take Job's life. Happily Satan agreed and left to attack the faithful man, Job.

In one morning Satan sent thieves to steal Job's cattle, 500 pairs of oxen and 500 donkeys, and kill the servants guarding them. Next fire fell from heaven and burned up Job's 7,000 sheep and the servants with them. As if that wasn't enough, more thieves stole Job's 3,000 camels and killed his servants guarding them.

Then Satan sent a great wind that rose up and hit the four corners of the house and caused the house to crumble while all Job's sons and daughters were in the house. All of Job's children were killed.

The Bible said that Job tore his clothes, in mourning, shaved his head, and cried out, “Blessed be the name of the Lord!” Satan still wasn't done with Job. He struck Job with a disease and his whole body was covered with big sores that itched and hurt Job. Then to add insult to Job's misery, Job's wife advised Job to “just curse God and die!” No one defended or pitied Job. Even Job's close friends thought he must have done something very bad and was being punished, but the story tells us that God considered Job. Job was not being punished. He was being strengthened. Job faithfully endured this great trial.

It is difficult for us to understand why bad things happen sometimes. We do know that through all Job's troubles he did not lose his faith in God. Perhaps it is when we experience difficult things that we learn the most. Job learned that there are things we, as humans, don't understand. He learned patience and had faith that things would get better. He learned not to make God the bad guy. We don't have all the answers, but we can live our lives showing kindness and respect to others, trusting God to help us when we are troubled and struggling.

It is easy to become discouraged when difficult things happen to us. Sometimes we think our troubles will never end. As we struggle through our difficulties, we learn patience and that makes us strong. We learn that it is possible to be thankful, even though difficult things may happen. Have patience, look forward to better times, and find your joy in God and his promises.

Job's story has a happy ending. Job got well and he prospered. Job received many blessings from God. The Bible says that God gave Job two times as much as he had before. He now had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 pairs of oxen and 1,000 donkeys. He had seven sons and three daughters. When he died, the Bible tells us, he was “old and full of days.” In spite of all of his troubles, Job was blessed and had a good, long life.

But this is not the end of the story of Job. There's more. Eventually all Job's friends and relatives came to realize that Job was right in his praise and faithfulness to God. All came to Job and begged his forgiveness for their accusations against him. God used Job's suffering, not only to strengthen Job's faith, but to also lead others to see Job's example of faithfulness and lead them to trust God too.

Close with prayer

Wednesday  
**Acts 12:1–19**

Peter loved to tell people how Jesus came from heaven to save us from our sins. The Holy Spirit helped Peter to be a powerful preacher. Many people who listened to Peter believed in Jesus and became part of God's family. Peter was a leader in God's church, just as Jesus had told him he would be.

But there were many people who did not believe in Jesus. The Jewish leaders especially wanted Peter to stop telling others about Jesus. One day, King Herod had his Roman soldiers take Peter to jail. They put chains on Peter and stood guard over him night and day.

Peter's friends in the church were sad and worried about him. They did not know what would happen to their friend. They were especially afraid that some violent men might kill Peter, just as they had killed another disciple, James. The believers prayed earnestly that God would keep Peter safe and set him free.

God heard the prayers of his people and sent an angel to help Peter. The angel woke Peter up in the middle of the night, saying, "Get up quickly." Miraculously, the chains fell off of Peter's hands and his feet. The angel told Peter, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

Quickly Peter did what the angel said. But it all happened so quickly that he thought he must be dreaming. The angel led Peter past the soldiers to the iron gate that led into the city. When they got to the gate, it opened by itself – and the angel and Peter walked right through the open gate.

When Peter was safely outside the prison, the angel disappeared. Now Peter knew he wasn't dreaming – it was real! He hurried to the house where his friends were praying for him. Peter knocked at the door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she heard Peter's voice, Rhoda was so happy that she ran back to tell everyone, but she forgot to open the door and let Peter in!

At first, Peter's friends did not believe Rhoda. But when Peter kept on knocking, his friends finally opened the door and were astonished! God had miraculously answered their prayers and kept Peter safe.

Our God can do anything. He is all-powerful, and all his plans are always for our good. We can trust God's power and plans. God has rescued us, too, from the "prison" of sin by sending his Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. God always hears our prayers, and he sends his angels to watch over and help us.

- **What did the Roman soldiers do to Peter to keep him in prison?**
- **What miracles happened so Peter could get out of heaven?**

The work that God wanted Peter to do was impeded and limited by Peter being in prison. God removed the obstacles. What obstacles does God continue to overcome today as he uses us to spread the gospel.

Thursday  
**Philemon**

Philemon was a wealthy Christian man who opened his home in the city of Colossae as a place for believers to worship and be together. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus, but Onesimus was not a believer and he ran away from Philemon and stole something that belonged to him.

Onesimus went all the way to Rome. When he got to Rome, Onesimus found the apostle Paul. He had met Paul before at Philemon's house. Now Paul was in prison in Rome. When Onesimus had a chance to talk with Paul in Rome, he became a Christian. Even though Paul was being held as a prisoner, nothing could stop Paul from sharing the good news about the Savior. Onesimus joined the group of Christians there in Rome. As a follower of Jesus, Onesimus' life was completely changed, and he became a kind and helpful friend to Paul.

Paul would have liked his new friend Onesimus to stay with him in Rome. But Paul knew Onesimus should go back to the city of Colossae and make things right with Philemon after he had run away and stolen from him. So Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a personal letter that Paul had written.

In the letter, Paul told Philemon about the change in Onesimus. Paul encouraged Philemon to forgive Onesimus. Paul knew that both Onesimus and Philemon were Christians now. That meant they now had a new relationship - they were brothers in God's family. Paul wanted the two men to be restored in their relationship with each other. Paul even offered to pay any debt that Onesimus owed to Philemon.

Paul reminded Philemon that every person who trusts in Jesus has been forgiven for all his sins. Jesus paid the debt for our sins through his perfect life and his death on the cross. Paul hoped that Philemon would want to forgive Onesimus, because God had already forgiven both of them!

God loves us and forgives our sins because of Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, God gives us power to love and forgive others, too.

- **Why did Paul send Onesimus back to Philemon?**
- **Who in your life can you welcome back and forgive?**

Close with prayer

Friday  
**John 3:1-21**

Nicodemus was a teacher and a Jewish religious leader. Many of his friends didn't believe that Jesus was the promised Savior, and his friends didn't like Jesus either. But Nicodemus believed Jesus. Nicodemus had seen Jesus do miracles and teach with truth and authority. Now Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus. He had many questions.

Nicodemus went out at night to find Jesus, because he didn't want his friends to know about it. When he found Jesus at night, Jesus taught him, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus didn't understand. He asked, "How can someone be born a second time?" Jesus told him that you are born again when the Holy Spirit uses the gospel to lead you to believe. This surprised Nicodemus. He thought people could get into heaven by being good.

Jesus told Nicodemus that no one could ever be good enough on their own for that. He said that faith and forgiveness were undeserved gifts from God.

Nicodemus listened as Jesus talked. He was the first person to hear these famous words of Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Jesus said that he was God's Son, the promised Savior of the world.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to be in God's kingdom. He wanted Nicodemus to know and believe the good news. The words "gospel" means "good news." The good news for us and all people is that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to earn salvation for all people.

Later, after Jesus died, Nicodemus was one of the two men who took Jesus' body and buried him in the tomb. Nicodemus wasn't afraid what his friends would think anymore. Jesus was and is more important.

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for being very clear about how people can be saved.

Thank you for sending Jesus. Amen.