Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature
Presents:

Children Of Promise

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Galatians 4:28

AGES 10 - 13

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"Children Of Promise"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for 10-13
Written by Sister Ashley Murphy

Table of Contents

ISAAC: Father of a Nation 4
JOSEPH: A Nation's Savior 7
SAMUEL: Restorer of a Nation. 10
JOHN the BAPTIST: Forerunner of Christ 13
JESUS: Savior of Mankind 15

Chairman:
Sister Ashley Murphy

Chairman Elect:
Brother Cory Glass

Contributing Editors:
Elder Jeff Elliott
Elder Danny Holland
Elder Jerry Miller
Elder Stephen Skinner

Proofreaders:
Sister Laura Beavers
Sister Jennifer Glass
Sister Ashley Murphy
Sister Sally Skinner

Booklet Design and Layout:
Brother Cory Glass

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Treasurer
Brother Randall Henson
10022 Woodburn-Allen Springs Rd.
Alvaton, KY 42122
270-842-4526

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LESSON ONE

ISAAC: Father of a Nation

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 17:19

WRITTEN BY
SISTER ASHLEY MURPHY

Genesis 17:19
And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him.

Introduction to the Series

How many children do you know of that were born in the past year? On this planet of over six billion people, there are over 300,000 children born each day! Although the birth of a healthy child is an amazing blessing, it is also very common.

In the Bible, there were a small number of children born because of specific promises from God. That is, God or His messengers communicated with parents to let them know these children would be born, and that they would be special. Other children were singled out later on, chosen by God to accomplish specific tasks. Out of all the children ever born, God gave these children special purpose, and their stories are recorded in the Bible. Christians today must take notice of these children and learn from their lives and experiences.

Isaac Is Promised to Abraham

Since the Creation, there have been men and women who love God and try to obey Him. Adam and Eve and Noah and his family are examples from early history. However, the first member of God's chosen group was Abraham. In Genesis 12:1-3, God instructed Abraham (whose name then was Abram) to leave his family and travel to a new land. God promised that Abraham's descendants would form a "great nation." At this time, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and he and his wife Sarah had no children. Do you know someone who is aged seventy-five or older? Even though people lived longer in Old Testament times, it was still hard for Abraham and Sarah to believe they could still have children at their ages.

God promised in Genesis 15:4 that his child would be his naturally, not adopted. In Genesis 17: 15-16, God even promised that Sarah would be the child's natural mother. God's ways are mysterious to humans, and even Abraham, a faithful follower of God, did not see how he could become a father. So Abraham tried to do things his own way, and create his own family by taking another wife: Hagar, Sarah's maidservant. (A man's marrying more than one wife, especially in order to have children, was common in the time in which the Old Testament was written.) Abra-

ham and Hagar did have a son, who was named Ishmael.

Even today, Christians may try to receive God's promises by doing things in their own ways, but just as Ishmael was not the child of promise, one's own solutions will never be equal to God's plans. Ishmael grew up to be a powerful person, but not a follower of God. He had many descendants, and even today they live on as the Arabic people, historical enemies of God's chosen people.

Despite Abraham's weak faith and obvious mistakes, God did not break the promise He had made to Abraham. Genesis 21 tells of the birth of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah's son. Abraham was one hundred years old at the time of Isaac's birth, and Sarah was ninety. They had doubted, and Sarah had even laughed mockingly at the idea of having a child, yet God, as always, faithfully kept His promise.

Isaac as a Sacrifice

Read Genesis 22:2. Not much is told of Isaac's youth in the Bible, until suddenly at this point, Abraham was asked to do something unthinkable for a parent: kill his own child as a "burnt offering" or sacrifice to God. Typically, animals were killed and sacrificed as offerings; their blood symbolically covered the sins of God's people. Now God was requiring the life of Abraham's only son. Imagine your parents' love for you, and you can begin to imagine how hard this would be for Abraham. No parent would do this for any other reason, but Abraham had faith in God. Continue to read in chapter 22 and notice that Abraham did not question God but began to carry out His will.

In what exactly did Abraham have faith? How could it make sense to him that God had promised that Isaac would have many children, yet God wanted Isaac to die? In the book of Hebrews, written much later in time, the author says that Abraham was "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19a). This shows how deep was Abraham's faith: taking his son's life was possible because he realized God would somehow keep his promise of Isaac's future, even if it meant Isaac would be brought back from the dead.

How did Isaac feel about this situation? Most people believe Isaac was a young man at this time, perhaps in his twenties. Although he had been wise enough to realize that the regular animal offering had not been brought, he may not have realized the plan for his own death until the moment Abraham tied him up and put a knife to his throat (Gen. 22:9-10). A twenty-year-old man could have easily overpowered his elderly father, but Isaac did not even fight. This obedience to his father shows that Isaac had just as much faith as Abraham that God was in control.

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is a picture of the future – a future event you know well from the New Testament. In those days, another loving Father was willing to sacrifice his only beloved Son. That

Son, like Isaac, was obedient even unto death, because He trusted His Father.

However, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was different from God's sacrifice of Jesus in two ways. First of all, Abraham did not have to go through with the killing of Isaac. God's angel stopped the sacrifice at the last minute, and provided a ram instead (Gen. 22:11-13). Second, both the ram and even a person like Isaac would have been imperfect sacrifices. Jesus Christ, the only sinless man ever to live, was a perfect sacrifice and His death for our sins gives all of humanity the hope of salvation.

God's Purpose for Isaac

Isaac, then, did not die soon, but lived a long life. He took a wife, Rebekah, and had two sons (see Gen. 24-25). From his family would come all of God's chosen people, known by many names: the Jewish nation, the Hebrews, the Jews, or the nation of Israel.

What was God's purpose for Isaac? Ask yourself what history would have been like, had he not been born:

1. His son Jacob would not have been born. Jacob fathered twelve sons who became patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Discuss with your class the meaning of the word patriarch.
2. King David would not have been born. One of Jacob's sons, Judah, was the head of the tribe of Judah, the ancestors of King David.
3. Jesus would not have been born. King David and his children were the ancestors of Jesus.

Can you imagine a world in which there was no chosen group of God's people? What if Ishmael had been Abraham's only descendant? Thanks to God, these "what-ifs" were never possible. He promised Abraham that there would be a "great nation," that He would be their God, and that they would be His people. The birth of Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise, and an early step in the coming of God's Son to earth.

LESSON TWO

Joseph: A Nation's Savior

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 45:7

WRITTEN BY
SISTER ASHLEY MURPHY

Genesis 45:7
And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

God Remembered Rachel

Isaac's son Jacob loved a woman named Rachel, and wanted to marry her. Rachel's father, Laban, wanted his oldest daughter, Leah, to be married first, and he tricked Jacob into marrying Leah (see Gen. 29). Jacob always loved Rachel, however, and eventually took Rachel as his wife as well. Jacob had many children, but Rachel was barren – that is, she was unable to have children. Years passed, and while Rachel had Jacob's love and preference, she had no children. In their culture, mothers were given the most honor and respect of all women. Rachel was so ashamed of her condition, she felt she would die (Gen. 30:1). Finally, "God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb" (Gen. 30:22). Since God "hearkened" or listened, that means Rachel must have been praying to God for what she wanted most. She was blessed with two sons, the first of whom was Joseph.

Joseph Is Favored

After waiting so long for a son from the wife he loved most, Jacob favored Joseph above all his children. Joseph was the son who received the famed "coat of many colors." What made a coat such a special gift? Today you may own many coats and clothing of all colors. In Bible times, colored dyes were very rare and expensive. Purples, reds, and blues were especially difficult to find, since those colors were only extracted from flowers of that color or even stranger sources – such as the crushed shells of snails! A coat of many colors, then, would be quite expensive, and, as stated in Genesis 37: 3, Jacob made the coat himself. So, this gift cost Jacob a great deal of time and money – and nowhere is it recorded that he did anything similar for any of Joseph's eleven brothers.

Throughout Joseph's life, he seems to have a knack for making good impressions and gaining people's favor. This is more than mere chance; it shows that God was helping him all along the way. God also sent direct messages to Joseph, indicating his special purpose, in the form of dreams.

Sheaves and Stars

Joseph had a God-given talent for interpreting the meanings of dreams, and several dreams shaped the events of Joseph's life, as recorded in Genesis, chapters 37 and 39-48. He dreamed two dreams early in life that foreshadowed his future. Both dreams (Gen. 37) indicated that his family members would someday bow down before him.

To a family of shepherds, this seemed ridiculous at best, and insulting at worst! Even Jacob had trouble believing he would bow to his own son (Gen. 37:10).

Was Joseph being proud or "bragging" about these dreams? In the Bible, he simply states what the dreams were about, and there is no record that he tried to insult his brothers. On the other hand, Joseph may have spared himself some trouble by speaking less about his dreams. Proverbs 11:2 says "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." Whether or not Joseph was too proud of his dreams, his time of "lowliness" or humility was soon to come.

Joseph's Trials and God's Providence

Joseph told his dreams to the one group of people on whom he had not made good impressions: his brothers. The message of the dreams drove them into anger and resentment. Though most of them were grown men by this time, like small children they wanted to punish Joseph for what they felt (Gen. 37:18-28). Some of them actually wanted to kill him. Because two of his brothers, Reuben and Judah, weren't willing to go that far, Joseph was "only" sold into slavery to a group of Ishmeelites. Joseph ended up as a servant to an Egyptian officer named Potiphar. This probably-pampered young man had been stripped of his coat and the love of his father, and was cast into a life where no one loved and worshiped the one true God as he did.

This is the first instance where a worst-case scenario "coincidentally" works in Joseph's favor. There are really no true coincidences; God was looking out for Joseph. Joseph worked hard for Potiphar and was promoted to become Potiphar's most trusted advisor (Gen. 39:5-6). Then came another apparent disaster.

Having power in Potiphar's house meant seeing a lot of Potiphar's wife, a sinful woman who wanted to be closer to Joseph than is proper for a married woman. Joseph saw this was wrong and refused to be alone with her. So Potiphar's wife, out of spite, turned and accused Joseph of the very thing he refused to do! Who would Potiphar believe – his own wife, or a slave? Joseph was unfairly cast into prison (Gen. 39:7-20).

In prison, God would show His care for Joseph again. Joseph's obedience in prison gained him almost the same position there as he had with Potiphar – the prison-keeper's assistant (Gen. 39:22). "Coincidentally," two servants of Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, were imprisoned with Joseph. Each one had dreams which Joseph correctly interpreted; he saw that the baker would lose his life while the butler would return to serving Pharaoh (Gen. 40).

Although the butler forgot about Joseph for a while, another seeming "coincidence" would work to help Joseph again. The Pharaoh himself had strange dreams and needed an interpreter; the butler was there to recommend just the right man. Not only was Joseph brought out of prison but his correct interpretations earned Pharaoh's respect, and Joseph, again, rose to second-in-command, this time to the most powerful man on earth.

God's Purpose for Joseph

What kind of dream would cause Pharaoh, who thought of himself not only as "king of the world," but even as a god, to be so worried as to call Joseph? What interpretation could be so impressive that it would earn Joseph freedom and a position of honor? Read Genesis 41:1-36. Joseph saw a famine coming – a food shortage. In the days before refrigerators and motorized farm equipment, a food shortage meant certain death for thousands of people. Because of Joseph's interpretation, Egypt prepared by saving up food while there was plenty. When the food shortage did come, Egypt remained a wealthy nation. People from other nations had to travel there for help, if they could.

In Canaan, Joseph's homeland, Jacob, his eleven sons, and all their wives and children were in danger of starvation. Think back to Lesson One: if Jacob's family had died, the family line of Judah, King David, and Jesus Christ Himself would have ended.

The grand "coincidence," or rather, the grandest part of God's plan for Joseph, was that when the Jewish people needed help the most, there was a blood-relative in the perfect position to provide help. Though they did not know it themselves (they assumed Joseph was still a slave), they traveled directly to him to ask for food.

Read Genesis 42-43 to learn of the family's reunion. There may have been some hard feelings; Joseph could easily have been angry with the brothers who had treated him so harshly. However, his brothers showed that they had changed their hate-filled ways, and so Joseph withheld nothing from them. Jacob and his family were invited to live in Egypt, where the twelve sons had children and grandchildren that would multiply through the years to form the twelve tribes of Israel.

From Joseph we can learn a lesson in human forgiveness; if Joseph could forgive his brothers for selling him, so should you forgive your siblings or friends when they hurt you. In addition, Joseph, like Isaac, serves as another picture of Jesus Christ. Think about ways in which their lives are similar. Jesus, too, has been wronged by sinful mankind, by every man, woman, and child who has disobeyed God and committed sin. Unlike Joseph (who, like every human, had sinned), Jesus never did anything to "deserve" this treatment at all. When humans face spiritual "starvation," that is, an eternity in Hell, they should run to Jesus for help. Because of His infinite love, He gives forgiveness unconditionally to those who will repent. Then, just as the Israelite nation continues to live on earth, those who are saved by faith in Jesus can have eternal life in heaven.

LESSON THREE

SAMUEL: Restorer of a Nation

LESSON TEXT
1 Samuel 11:14

WRITTEN BY
SISTER ASHLEY MURPHY

1 Samuel 11:14
Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.

Samuel is Promised to Hannah

Elkanah was a Jewish man, much less well-known than Jacob, but with similar family problems. One wife, named Peninnah, bore him many children. The other, Hannah, was barren – yet Elkanah loved her the most. Like Rachel, Hannah felt shame because she could not have children, and to make matters worse, Peninnah "provoked her sore," making fun of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1-6).

Hannah never complained to her husband or to God about Peninnah's cruel treatment. Instead, she devoted herself to prayer. 1 Samuel 1:12-15 shows the beautiful example of her prayers; though she did not pray aloud, she "poured out her soul" to God, making this request: "O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life..." (1 Sam. 1:11).

Eli, a priest, delivered the message to Hannah that her prayer would be answered. In 1 Samuel 1:20 it is recorded that Samuel was born; his very name means "asked of God." Hannah, true to her word, sent Samuel to live with Eli and serve God for all his life. After this, Hannah might only see her son if she traveled to the tabernacle to make offerings to God. Why would Hannah want a son, only to give him away? Hannah is truly an example of devotion to God; she prayed earnestly, kept her promise, prayed in thankfulness to God (see 1 Sam. 2:1-10), and showed that the purpose of any Godly gift is to offer that gift again to God in thanks.

Consider the gifts that have been given to you, whether talents for writing, speaking, or testifying, great wealth, possessions, friends, or loved ones – and consider how these gifts can best be returned to God.

Samuel's Calling

To serve God's great purpose, Samuel had to be saved. Salvation comes in the same way each time: a person realizes the need for forgiveness of sin, and if that person repents, putting total faith in Jesus, Jesus will forgive the person's sins and put a new, clean spirit within. Jesus grants His people a "know-so" assurance of salvation; He communicates with a saved person spiritually (Rom. 8:16)

so he or she can know that salvation is real.

One special part of Samuel's salvation experience was that he heard God's voice aloud (1 Sam. 3:4-10). Three times, Samuel actually thought it was Eli calling to him. After a while, Eli realized what must be happening and instructed Samuel to submit himself to God and listen to His instructions. After Samuel did just that, God made him a true servant and began to communicate many things, especially about the leadership of the Jewish people.

Help for the Nation of Israel

Since the time of Joseph (whom we studied in Lesson Two), many years passed until Samuel's lifetime began. The Israelites, or Jewish people, multiplied to the point that the Egyptians feared they would take over. The Egyptians forced the Jews into slavery. For four hundred years, the Jews waited for a deliverer. God sent Moses to lead them to the land that had been promised, long ago, to Abraham, the first Jew.

Although Moses led the Israelites for most of the way, it was Joshua who finally brought them to the promised land. After Joshua died, the Lord "raised up judges" (Jdg. 2:16) to lead His people. These were not courtroom "judges" as we use that term today, but leaders who made religious, social, and even military decisions. Many judges lived and died, some ruling the people well, and others leading them in the wrong direction. By the time Samuel became a judge, Israel's leadership had become corrupt, and a new form of government would soon be put in place.

God's Purpose for Samuel

The Israelites sought God's guidance through priestly judges, but they would not be of much help if they were not close to God. Eli served well as a priest, but his sons were dishonest. Samuel came along and was also a good priest, but his sons, too, did evil things, such as accepting bribes. Bribery is the act of paying someone to do or say what you want. Imagine if a church today were run, not by following God's will, but by listening to whatever wealthy person donated the most money to the church. This actually happens from time to time, sadly. It was a sad time for Israel, as well, and the people had an idea: they wanted a king.

Other nations around Israel had kings as leaders. By putting a king in power, Israel would become more like other nations, but God had warned Israel many times before not to take on the habits and customs of other nations. Back then, even as today, God's people are called to be "peculiar" (1 Pet. 2:9), making it obvious that there is something special about God's care and protection. But Israel had lost sight of its special status. Their priestly leaders had failed them; they wanted a king.

It was against God's will to put a king in power over Israel, but God never forces His people to follow Him; God's people choose to be obedient or not, and each choice carries con-

sequences. God allowed Israel a king. Samuel was not that king; he had been chosen by God in the role God wanted – the priest. But God would use Samuel to guide and advise the first kings of Israel, and restore order to the nation.

When God chose Saul as Israel's first king, Samuel received a message from God of this choice (1 Sam. 9:17), and later anointed Saul (1 Sam. 10:1). To anoint is to literally pour oil onto a person's head; in ancient times, this was a symbol of high honor, since oil was rare, expensive, and usually had a pleasant scent and a moisturizing, relieving sensation. Think of the oils of olives, flowers, and seeds that are today used as foods and in beauty products.

Samuel was the person who officially made Saul the king. Who do you believe has more power: a king, or an anointer of kings? As Saul continued in his kingship, he had some successes and made some mistakes. When Saul made the mistake of making a burnt offering to the Lord in Samuel's place, Samuel let him know that his actions were sinful and the cost would be the loss of the kingdom. Though Saul was not instantly removed from power, this was the beginning of the end.

Meanwhile, God let Samuel know that a young Israelite named David would be the next king. God led Samuel to David's home and Samuel anointed him there. David soon famously confronted Goliath, and afterward grew in popularity and power. Saul became envious of David, trying more than once to take his life. However, as Samuel had anointed him, God's plan became reality, and even after Samuel himself passed away, David became the next king.

Once during Saul's attempts to kill David and keep his kingdom, Saul went so far as to hire a witch to contact Samuel in the afterlife (1 Sam. 28:7-12). Witches practiced false religion and even had dealings with demons; this shows that Saul, himself a saved man, was so desperate for Samuel's advice that he would commit sin to try to get it. Samuel's spirit had no reassurance for Saul; he only repeated what Saul knew: he would lose his kingdom because of his sins.

Samuel was one of the last leaders of Israel who ruled in the role God intended. Later rulers – kings – followed the patterns and traditions set up by other nations whose religions were false. Even so, God used Samuel to guide the first kings in the right way, and to bestow God's blessings on them through symbolic anointment.

LESSON FOUR

JOHN THE BAPTIST: Forerunner of Christ

LESSON TEXT
Luke 1:17

WRITTEN BY
SISTER ASHLEY MURPHY

Luke 1:17
And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

John is promised to Zacharias

Read Luke 1:5-25 with your class. Compare the situation of Elizabeth and Zacharias to those of the parents you have studied all week. How are they alike? How are they different?

The angel Gabriel delivered the promise of John's birth soon before a similar message was delivered to another set of parents, Mary and Joseph. John's promised birth has some similarities to that of Jesus, but also some differences: John was born naturally to two parents; there were specific instructions given for John's lifestyle (no strong wine); and John's purpose was also different from that of Jesus: as our lesson text states, John was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. Jesus was the Lord Himself.

John's Life in the Wilderness

The Bible does not tell about John's childhood. As an adult, John was a preacher. The description of John given in Matthew 3:4 tells us he did not fit in, even in Bible times. Many preachers or teachers in the Jewish religion would live in towns, near synagogues, and eat and dress as townspeople did. John lived and preached in the wilderness. Although the modern idea of "wilderness" may be that of a jungle, in the land of Israel, the "wilderness" is any uninhabited land, and it more closely resembles a desert. John's clothing was not wool or cotton, but camel's hair and leather. His diet consisted of the raw foods of the desert. This would have seemed strange and different to people who listened to his preaching. Perhaps John's message was more forceful because it came from someone who obviously cared more about working for God than living in comfort or having plenty to eat.

John and Elijah

John was compared to a person who had lived on earth before: the prophet Elijah, who served God in Old Testament times.

Samuel, in Lesson Three, brought in the time of kings in Israel. It was during the time of kings that Elijah lived and delivered prophecies, or messages from God. Elijah also performed miracles, and much as Samuel did, he anointed kings. Elijah did not die a natural death, but was miraculously taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs. 2:11).

After Elijah's time, many more kings and prophets came and went. The kingdom of Israel was split up and its people scattered, due to the sinful ways of the Israelites and their leaders. The land still existed, of course, and some Jewish

people still lived there. But many other nations had taken over the land at one time or other. By the time John the Baptist was born, over a thousand years had passed. The Roman government ruled in the land of Israel. God still called men to deliver His messages, but they were spiritual leaders, not political rulers. John was one of these men.

Why does the lesson text compare John the Baptist to Elijah (in Greek, "Elias"), a man who lived a thousand years before? The answer is that some Jewish people believed that, since Elijah did not really die, that he would return to earth some day. John reminded people of Elijah in that he was a prophet and maybe even looked a little like Elijah (described as a "hairy man" with a leather girdle in 2 Kgs. 1:8). Many people asked Jesus if this could be true. Jesus, the all-knowing, answered in Matthew 11:14: "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come."

God's Purpose for John

Elijah had always been a prophet, so if there was a purpose for John the Baptist, it must have involved prophecy, or bringing messages from God. John's message could be summed up in one word: "Repent!" (see Mat. 3:2, Mk. 1:15). John encouraged people to turn away from sin and be saved. He told the Jews that it was not enough to be Jewish by birth, but that "fruit" or some spiritual evidence of repentance was required (Mat. 3:8-9).

By preaching this message, John prepared believers who would recognize Jesus when He came. Isaiah 40:3 states that there would be "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

John, the Baptist, earned this title by baptizing those who believed in Jesus and had repented of their sins. "Baptize" is a word that comes from a Greek word meaning "to immerse," or to place under water. Baptism is sometimes called "a watery grave"; it symbolizes that a believer has become dead to old sinful ways and is raised up as a new creature in Christ. Churches today who call themselves "Baptists" still practice the immersion of believers in water.

John's life had a special purpose even to its very end. Matthew 14:3-10 relates the story of John's martyrdom. To be martyred is to die for one's beliefs. John had been put in prison by Herod because John preached against Herod's sinful ways. Herod had illegally married his brother's wife, Herodias. Herodias, perhaps because of her own guilt and shame, plotted to have John killed in prison.

John lived a bold life and refused to back down from his beliefs, even when it meant death. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-25, "...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Jesus gave John the highest honor of any human in Matthew 11:11: "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...." Jesus then pointed out, "notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Jesus teaches us that the rewards that await His baptized believers are greater than anything on earth. John the Baptist taught the same lesson, and by pointing souls to Jesus, he served as one of God's greatest prophets.

LESSON FIVE

JESUS: Savior of Mankind

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 3:15

WRITTEN BY
SISTER ASHLEY MURPHY

Genesis 3:15
And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Jesus is Promised to Mary and Joseph

To learn about Jesus as a human, the Bible offers four recordings of His earthly life story, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each gospel writer recorded some of the different parts of Jesus' life, so each one is valuable for study. Luke writes about the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary in Luke 1:26-38. Today, Mary is known as the most blessed of all mothers, because she gave birth to the Son of God, but before Gabriel's visit, Mary's status was that of an ordinary young Jewish woman. Then she received some astounding news: she would have a baby before marriage, and that child would be "the Son of the Highest," and would have a kingdom that would never end. Like Hannah who lived over a thousand years before, Mary was an example of humility and submission to God, calling herself a handmaid (servant) of the Lord and accepting this news.

Mary's soon-to-be husband, Joseph, did not know about this visit. What Joseph heard at first was that Mary was going to have a baby – and that he was not the father. He thought about cancelling their marriage – after all, having a child out of wedlock was shameful, and punishable by death! Then Gabriel visited him as well, as recorded in Matthew 1:18-25. Joseph was also obedient to God's will, and although both parents must have had unending questions – why were they chosen as parents? How would God make their son into a king? Would their infant child already be wiser than them, as wise as God? – they submitted to God's plan, and Jesus was born in a place and manner that was foretold in many Old Testament prophecies. The story of the birth of Jesus is known as the Nativity, and it can be read in Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-15.

Jesus Was Fully Human

It is true that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has all the qualities that God has: He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. He loves humankind and hears and answers prayers. He now reigns in heaven with God the Father, sitting "on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55) or at his right side. When He returns to earth, He will be the righteous Judge who knows every human and will take the saved to heaven while condemning the lost to hell (2 Tim. 4:1).

However, Jesus is like no other being because, even while He lived on earth, He was both God and human. The people that surrounded Him could observe some special qualities of His, like His wisdom and His ability to perform miracles, but His physical appearance was like any other Jewish man's. There are no descriptions, written or drawn, of what Jesus looked like, and there probably would be if Jesus had been especially tall, strong, or nice-looking. Jesus probably worked as a carpenter, the trade of His father.

Jesus was tempted to sin, like every human being. Satan was able to tempt Jesus perhaps more strongly than anyone, because Jesus had the power to do whatever He desired! A "regular person" may avoid sins like murder, stealing, or lying to avoid going to prison. Jesus didn't have to avoid men's punishment – if He had not been perfect, He could have escaped any prison, or stopped any person who tried to stop Him. So Jesus' human temptations must have been great.

We know that Jesus felt sadness in His lifetime, like every person. There was sorrow when His friend Lazarus died (John 11:35-36), and sorrow because His disciples were sometimes weak in faith (Matt. 17:17). His greatest sorrow was that He would die in accordance with God's plan. He prayed to God that He could be spared from this plan in Matthew 26:39: "And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Jesus felt other emotions as humans do. When He saw that "moneychangers" and salesmen had set up shop in God's temple, He got angry and turned over their tables (Mark 11:15). Finally, Jesus had a great love for others. When multitudes of people came to hear Jesus preach, staying so long without food that they were faint, Jesus had compassion on them (Matt. 9:36). Jesus showed through His words and actions that He loved children (Matt. 19:14) as well as people of low status, like tax collectors, the poor, those with disabilities, and those who had led sinful lives. Jesus said of these people, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt. 9:12).

God's Purpose for Jesus

It was an important part of God's plan that Jesus was fully human, so He could serve a purpose as an **example** of how to live. In all the circumstances above, Jesus dealt with His earthly problems in strong and honorable ways. God knows that we are not able to behave exactly as Jesus did, because unlike Jesus, sin corrupts our actions. Yet there is no greater way for Christians to glorify God than to live as closely as possible to Jesus' standards. In this way we make ourselves "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1).

Jesus also had a purpose as the perfect **teacher**. In addition to showing humans how to live, He spoke about

how to treat one's neighbors, what Christians and churches should do in the world, and what things will be like at the end of time. Jesus' teachings were easy for the Jews, and are easy for people today, to understand. He used examples like two builders (one built on sand; the other, on rock), about a farmer who plants his seeds, about letting light shine on a candlestick, and many others. These teachings were easy to remember, and most importantly, each lesson was absolutely true, and its source was our all-wise God. Christians can spend their lives studying the teachings of Jesus and using them in life.

God's most important purpose for Jesus was as a **substitute** for mankind. With the first man, Adam, God's perfect plan was to be with His creation forever. However, Adam chose to disobey God and commit sin. All humans, who are only human, commit sin at some point. God is sinless, and heaven is a place where sin is forbidden. So Adam's choice led to a barrier between God and His creation. Furthermore, as God instructed Adam, death is the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23). Any sin requires death as a payment. The Jews killed animals because their blood represented a symbolic covering for the sins they committed. But animals are not humans, and their death is not sufficient for human sin. Even a human sacrifice would not be sufficient, because humans are sinful. Without another solution, humans would be separated from God eternally in hell.

Thank God that His plan includes our substitute, Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is both human and God, He was able to live a sinless life. Though He was not required to die, His death would be sufficient to cover the sins of all mankind. God required Jesus to sacrifice Himself so that humans, through faith in Jesus, could be reunited with God in heaven. Although Jesus could have refused this plan, He was obedient. Because of this, Jesus deserves everlasting praise: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:8-11)

Jesus' final purpose will be as a **victor over Satan**. A victor is one who achieves victory – one who wins. Although Satan may have success on earth in tempting people to sin, his power is limited. God created Satan as an angel, and allowed Satan to choose rebellion and expulsion from heaven; Satan never took power from God. When the time comes for Jesus to return to earth, He will defeat Satan and place him in eternal hell. Satan knows this. God pronounced our lesson text in the Garden of Eden: Satan is the enemy of humanity. Throughout history, humanity has been "bruised" or hurt by Satan's efforts. But the perfect human "seed" or child, Jesus Christ, will deliver the final defeat to Satan. Satan's attacks

are minor, a "bruising of the heel," compared to Jesus' attack on Satan, a death blow to the head. There is no question of who will win.

Galatians 4:28 says, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." That is, God has a purpose and a plan for each person who will follow Him. Each one has many choices to make, but the vital choice is this: will you submit your life to God? Refusal to do so means that you will be on the wrong side when Jesus returns. Sin separates each of us from an eternal life in heaven, unless we repent of sin and pray for God's forgiveness. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Once you have repented and Jesus has saved you, follow Jesus' example and boldly tell others about God's saving grace.