

## **How to Lent with Kids Parent's Guide to Bible Readings**

**All of the people in the Bible covered below were teenagers or younger. God did not wait until they were adults to expect them to show wisdom and make their own choices.**

### **Day 1: Story of Ishmael (Genesis 21: 11-21)**

Many of the stories in the Hebrew Scriptures seem cruel by today's standards, but it must be remembered that these are cultural stories about why they were different from other people and why God had chosen the Hebrew people as special. The harsh reality is the Hebrew people were nomads and excluded from almost everywhere they lived, so telling themselves they were special, telling themselves God had chosen them to be God's people, helped them grow together and develop a culture of their own.

The early stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs like Abraham and Sarah were more legend than fact, telling how they came to be the Hebrew people and the heritage of the other nations around them. Ishmael is culturally seen as the father of the Arab peoples and eventually Muslims.

### **Day 2: Story of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-13)**

Again by modern standards how could a parent willingly sacrifice a child because God asked them to? It makes a lot more sense when we realize at one point in history, thousands of years before Jesus was born, child sacrifice was normal. Many alters have been found throughout the Middle East that were used for these rituals. The take away here is not that Isaac was yet another child who was to be killed, but that in a wider culture where this was accepted, God said No! The angels in this story shout to Abraham to stop him. Stopping child sacrifice was something new, and the Hebrew culture did not and would not sacrifice children.

### **Day 3: Story of Rebecca (Genesis 24:15-21)**

Rebecca was a teenager. There is an assumption that women in the Bible were quiet and submissive, and female children even more so, but that is false. Women in the Bible, regardless of age, acted and spoke in their own interests. Rebecca was a kind young woman who was interested in making sure the camels were cared for as well as the travellers. If you want to read further in the story, v. 57-58 shows that Rebecca was asked her opinion and her wishes were respected. Marriages for love are a modern phenomena. Marriages for wellbeing and politics were the norm in Bible times and throughout most of history.

### **Day 4: Story of Esau & Issac (Genesis 25:22-34)**

In ancient Hebrew culture, the first born son inherited everything. God told Rebecca that her younger son was the one who would be stronger and have more power. As they grew,

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Jacob, the younger son, showed he was more calculating and far-sighted than his brother. Esau was less interested in his right to inheritance and thought it was something he could easily trade away for one meal.

Many times this story and its continuation to the tricking Isaac, is treated as if Rebecca and Jacob were horrible to lie to Isaac, when in reality given the cultural restrictions of the day, they were merely using what they could to fulfil God's promise.

### **Day 5:** Story of Joseph (Genesis 37:1-11)

Dreams are often seen as God's message, so there are many times throughout the Bible where dream interpreters are called upon to explain God's messages.

The Land of Canaan is today the country of Jordan, and down into Palestine and Israel.

### **Day 6:** Story of Manasseh & Ephraim (Genesis 48:1-16)

When we talk about the 12 Tribes of Israel, we are talking about Jacob's sons and the lands they oversee, with two exceptions: the Tribe of Levi became the Hebrew priests and were not given land of their own, they spread out amongst the other twelve tribes. The other exception was Joseph, he was not give a territory. Instead his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim were give the territories. So there is no Tribe of Joseph, but there are tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim.

### **Day 7:** Story of Miriam & Moses (Exodus 2:1-10)

There is a baby, a child and a teenager in this story. The Pharaoh's daughter was a teenager when she decided to keep Moses for her own, knowing that her father had ordered all Hebrew boys killed. She defied her father and hid Moses' ethnic heritage.

Miriam was a smart little girl who watched her brother's basket and then when she knew he would be safe with the Pharaoh's daughter, offered their mother to take care of the baby, thus ensuring that her brother was able to stay in her home until he was three years old and wasn't in danger of being killed by the Pharaoh. Three is the age when children were weaned.

### **Day 8:** Daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-8)

Girls were highly valued in ancient Hebrew culture. It was often through the daughters that tribes were able to solve disputes amongst themselves and with their neighbours, often through marriage. Here is a story that says God pronounced that a man's inheritance went to the daughters if there were no sons.

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### **Day 9:** Story of Gideon (Judges 6:11-24)

By this time in the Bible, the name 'Israel' no longer means Jacob specifically, but all of the Hebrew people. The rhythm of Judges follows that Israel lives in peace for time, starts to make really bad choices that go against God's laws, bad things happen to them (usually invasion from foreigners), and they need righteous people to get the Israelites back on track. This rhythm is repeated throughout Judges.

Gideon was a teenager and youngest son in the family. He wanted the invasions by the Midians to stop (read back to Judges 6:1-10 for a description of the situation in Israel). He has a great career as a judge and warrior after he is called, successfully forcing the Midians out of Israel.

### **Day 10:** Story of Obed (Ruth 4:13-17)

There are five novels in the Bible: Ruth, Esther, Jonah, Daniel and Job. Ruth was written at a time when people returning from Exile in Babylon wanted all foreigners gone. The story of Ruth shows a foreign women who becomes great-grandmother of the great king David. She is also one of a few women mentioned in the Ancestry of Jesus, Matthew 1.

### **Day 11:** Story of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-18)

This story comes from the beginning of the time of the kings if Israel. Prior to this the Israelite nation saw God as their leader and they were still a culture of tribes that sometimes fought each other. With the new era of the kings, they started to come together as a nation.

### **Day 12:** Story of David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

David was the great King of Israel, so we read a lot of his story in the Bible. This story talks about his being anointed as a child. Anointing was a ritual performed on kings to mark them as chosen by God for the job.

### **Day 13:** David & Goliath (1 Samuel 17:12-54)

Until the period of the kings, the only history we have of the Hebrew people is found in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, once we encounter David we can confirm some of the events in 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles by what other cultures around them recorded and has survived. The Philistines were believed to be an invading force that sailed from Crete and landed in what would today be Israel just above the Gaza Strip, in order to conquer the land.

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### **Day 14:** Story of the widow's son (1 Kings 17:1-24)

Elijah was considered one of Israel's greatest prophets, and is the one to represent the prophets in the Transfiguration of Jesus. He did not die like everyone else in the Bible, but was raised up to heaven. Jewish tradition leaves an empty place at the table for Elijah on all of their feast days because they are expecting him to return. This is also the reasons when Jesus is questioned by the priests and elders, assumptions that he is Elijah are voiced.

### **Day 15:** Story of the rich woman's son (2 Kings 4:8-37)

Children will probably recognize this story sounds a lot like the story they read yesterday, and they would be correct. Often the Bible tells similar stories over and over with different Holy men involved (women were recorded as doing everything except performing miracles).

Elisha was a partner of Elijah, and stayed behind to continue the work of prophecy when Elijah was taken to heaven.

### **Day 16:** Story of the slave girl (2 Kings 5:1-4)

Both books of Kings are full of battles and slaying the enemy. This is the story of an Israeli girl who was captured and taken to Syria. The story continues to be about the healing of Naaman, the husband of the slave girl's mistress.

Leprosy in the Bible is not necessarily the Hansen's disease familiar today. Any skin condition was considered 'leprosy' in ancient times.

### **Day 17:** Story of Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:1-7)

Asherah was a goddess well know throughout the ancient world. Israelites in the northern kingdom (it had already split by this point in history with Israel in the north and Judah in the south) were accused by the south of worshipping her as well as Ba'al, another Mesopotamian god, instead of the true Hebrew God.

One of the more interesting things about the Israel vs. Judean conflict at this time is that the same story of Josiah as a child becoming king can be found in 2 Kings 22:1-2, but there is no reference to tearing down local shrines. First and Second Kings were written in Israel while First and Second Chronicles was written in Judah. There is considerable overlap in the stories, but by the second books in each combination, the resentment between the two become obvious.

### **Day 18:** Story of Esther (Esther 2:1-18)

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Esther is one of the novels in the Hebrew scriptures and is worth reading completely. In Jewish tradition, the festival of Purim is the celebration of the story of Esther.

Esther was written while the elites in Judah were exiled into Babylon, c. 600 - 538 BCE, and tells the story of the king's advisor, Haman, who wants to execute all the Hebrews in exile in Babylon, because they won't kneel down before him. Risking her own life because one did not approach the king without permission, Esther manages to charm the king and then tell how the advisor is trying to kill her, neither realizing Esther was Hebrew. While the story is fiction, King Xerxes was not.

### **Day 19:** Story of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

The book of Jeremiah is considered one of the Major Prophets (Minor Prophets are simply smaller books). This is the calling of Jeremiah who acknowledges that he is too young. He was called to prophesy, or speak on God's behalf, when the Babylonians had conquered the Assyrians and were marching towards Jerusalem, c. 598 BCE.

### **Day 20:** Story of Daniel (Daniel 1:1-21)

Daniel is another novel set within the historic context of the Babylonian exile. In this story he and three friends successfully impress the king with their knowledge and the king promotes them.

One of the erroneous assumptions about exile in Biblical times is that it was violent and horrible to the captives. They would have been upset to leave their homes and families of course, and probably lost people they knew and loved in the battles, but once they were brought to the new territory, many were incorporated into the conqueror's culture and lifestyle. When this happened with the Assyrian invasion of Israel, the inclusion was so extensive that the northern tribes forever became known as the Lost Tribes of Israel. During the Babylonian exile, only the priests and wealthy families were taken, leaving the poor behind to spread throughout the land of Judah. When the rich returned, they had to force their superiority onto the people who had remained. One of the ways they did this was developing a strict Temple culture.

### **Day 21:** Story of the furnace (Daniel 3:1-30)

The novel Daniel is partially biographical about Daniel and partially apocalyptic, meaning it was a book of hope in the face of devastation and tragedy. In this story, Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to worship anyone but God, and were sentenced to death. When a fourth figure joined them inside the furnace, those watching were amazed. Faith prevailed, and all three escaped without being hurt.

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### **Day 22:** Daniel & the lions (Daniel 6:1-28)

Much like the story yesterday about the furnace, Daniel's encounter with the lions is intended to show that the Hebrew culture will survive because God holds them in a special regard.

Although the text refers to Daniel being a 'Jew', that is a poor translation. The term Jewish was not coined until several centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. It is properly translated 'Judean'.

### **Day 23:** Story of Mary (Luke 1:26-56)

Mary was a teenager, and is often presented as quiet and accepting about being asked to be Jesus' mother. However the Mary we meet in the Bible wants answers before she says yes. She might be afraid, but she still questions the angel. Then when she has the answers she wanted, she commits to being pregnant and without a husband, something that was completely unacceptable at the time.

Mary doesn't stay home after this experience; she travels to distant family to seek shelter and support while her body changes with pregnancy, and a song of praise is recorded that is the greatest call for social justice in the entire Bible.

### **Day 24:** Story of the Wise Men (Matthew 2:1-12)

When children tell the Nativity play, the Wise Men always show up at the end while everyone is still at the stable. That's not how the Bible tells it. In this story we see Jesus as a toddler sitting on his mother's lap, in the house they were living in in Bethlehem.

The Wise Men is better translated in some versions of the Bible as Magi, short for 'magician', or people of science who did things and knew things that amazed others.

### **Day 25:** Story of the flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)

When children tell the Nativity they never include the part where Joseph is warned in a dream to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt and stay until it is safe. This story will probably be quite new to them, and tells of the time Jesus was a refugee. With so much upheaval in the world, this story is important to remind us to provide a safe place for foreigners because even Jesus had to run for this life as a child.

### **Day 26:** Jesus as a boy (Luke 2:41-52)

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In Jesus' day there were three pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Sukkot and Shavout, each was a harvest festival and each celebrated one of the stories from the Hebrew Scriptures. Passover, the most important, recognized the Israelites escape from Egypt, Sukkot was associated with the Israelites walking around the desert for 40 years, and Shavout includes reading of the book of Ruth.

In those days people walked as their primary means of travel, and did so in caravans for their own safety, men ahead and women behind with the children. Since Jesus was twelve, he was on the cusp of becoming an adult, and could technically travel with either the women and children or the men. Both parents thinking he was with the other was completely reasonable. They wouldn't have seen each other until they prepared for their evening meal as a family.

### **Day 27:** Story of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43)

In first century Palestine, as with all the centuries before, there were taboos about touching people who were sick and those who were bleeding. One of the significant parts of Jesus' ministry is that he touched people regardless of the social taboos and being considered ritually unclean.

### **Day 28:** Healing Roman Official's Son (John 4:46-54)

Jesus performed almost all of his miracles for other Hebrews, but this is an instance where the person asking and the one receiving were both Roman citizens. The first generations to hear this story would have been shocked that any compassion was given to Romans.

### **Day 29:** Story of the loaves & fishes (John 6:1-15)

Every Gospel has the story of the Feeding of the 5000, and all are slightly different. Matthew says it was 5000 not counting women and children, Luke places them close to Bethsaida, and Mark and Matthew have an additional story of the feeding of the 4000. Only John includes a boy in the story as the one who gives the loaves and fishes.

### **Day 30:** Phoenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28)

Another story of healing a Gentile's child, this time the daughter of a Greek woman. This story is interesting because she argues back with Jesus when he tells her his gifts came for the Hebrews alone. Jesus has to acknowledge he was wrong and is impressed with the woman's faith. Jesus' mother Mary is the only other person to challenge him like this. In that instance it was at the wedding in Cana when he said he wasn't ready to start his ministry. (John 2:1-12)

### **Day 31:** Ten girls (Matthew 25:1-13)

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Weddings in the Hebrew culture had two parts. First was the betrothal where everyone recognized the relationship was approved by both parents, plans were made for the couple to get to know each other and their families better, and the brideprice had been paid (this brideprice money was kept in trust for the bride by her father, and would be given to her if she was widowed or divorced). The second part of the wedding was the community celebration one year later, where the groom and his entourage would travel to the bride's home and collect her to return to his home where they would live. Family dynamics meant daughters went to live with their husbands' families, so a family with no sons meant no grandchildren to take care of them in their old age.

Here we have a group of girls waiting for the groom to come to the house of the bride, probably their friend and cousin/sister, so that they could join the parade going back.

### **Day 32:** Jesus blesses the children (Mark 10:13-16)

A blessing from a respected elder in the family or community was highly desired in the Hebrew culture. This could include the act of inheritance if the elder was dying, or identifying a special child who would then go on to apprentice in a trade outside the family home. In a time when infant and child mortality was high, this could also be seen as a form of protection against disease and death.

This story is the only time Jesus gets annoyed with his followers. He is often frustrated by them, but this time he is angry enough to tell his followers to stop resisting the children and their parents. Children did not have status in Jesus' day, so taking time to pay attention to them was countercultural.

### **Day 33:** Be like children (Matthew 18:1-5)

Often the disciples did not understand what Jesus was teaching them. Here they were vying for the position of most important in the new community, which would have been typical in that culture but completely against the community Jesus was trying to create. Taking a child - the most vulnerable in society - and telling his followers to become that vulnerable to each other, was a hard lesson to hear. Children must rely on those around them for all their needs, and Jesus is trying to show his disciples that they must rely on others, not try to rise in importance for themselves.

### **Day 34:** Children & parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Many of the letters in the Christian scriptures include instructions for how to live as Christians. These were brand new faith communities and existed before the Gospels were written, so everything was word of mouth from teachers and missionaries.



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Even though this letter claims to be written by Paul, it probably wasn't. Assigning a letter to someone important wasn't seen as plagiarism in the first centuries, but rather a sign of respect and privilege. This letter was written to Ephesus, a port town in modern day Turkey, probably around 62 CE.

### **Day 35:** Cleansing the temple, Mark 11:15-19

So often we are taught that Jesus was always happy, always gentle, and after a while that gets really hard to relate to. This story shows Jesus angry and acting aggressively to what he sees as injustice.

People came from all over the Mediterranean to worship at the temple, but the temple would only accept one kind of money, so travellers had to exchange their money to temple money (Shekels). There were no regulations so moneychangers could charge whatever exchange rate they wanted, and the travellers would be stuck. Jesus recognized this as exploitation, and in the Temple that was meant for everyone equally, this was wrong.

### **Day 36:** The greatest commandment, Mark 12:18-34

This story is the end of the priests and leaders in the Temple challenging Jesus so they could find his mistakes and a reason to encourage the people to turn on Jesus, but Jesus was smarter than they realized. The laws Jesus quotes are from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and are believed by all the Jews and Christians in the world today.

### **Day 37:** Trying to arrest Jesus, Mark 14:1-2, 10-11

It would be easy to say the priests, teachers in the Temple, and Judas were bad guys and call it a day, but that would leave the wrong impression. Yes they wanted Jesus stopped, but they wanted Jesus stopped because he was encouraging the people to resist the Roman government, and Judas along with those in the Temple were afraid what would happen if Jesus succeeded. They were not wrong.

Beginning in 66 CE there was a rebellion against the Romans, and in 70 CE the Romans destroyed the Temple and forced all the Hebrews in Jerusalem to leave their homes and never come back. If kids want to know more, google the 'Jewish- Roman Wars'.

### **Day 38:** The Last supper, Mark 14:12-26

The entire story of Jesus last meal, arrest, trial and death is very complicated and takes up the most time in every Gospel. Usually children never get to hear the story of the Last Supper because it's only talked about on Maundy Thursday, not on Sunday morning.

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There are different traditions on how to celebrate the Lord's Supper, but at the heart of every one is bread and wine. These were the most common foods in every family home, even the poorest who could only afford one meal a day. Wine was not what we think of today, it was fermented grapes but it was not processed or high in alcohol, and was the main source of vitamins outside of harvest season. Even children would have had a cup of wine with a meal. There is some conversation about the water not being safe enough to drink, but there is no consensus on that point for Jesus' time in history.

### **Day 39:** Story of Jesus' death (Mary 15:1-47)

Many people tend to shy away from the story of Jesus' death because we assume children can't handle it. The truth is children know about death and are better able to hear about it than adults realize. Children cannot understand how much of a celebration Easter should be if they do not understand the sadness of Good Friday (which means God's Friday or Great Friday because of its significance... English is a difficult language for translation sometimes).

Jesus died for politics. He took a stand against the Roman government, which was cruel and corrupt, and encouraged others to stand against it as well. He also told all the religious officials that were supporting the corrupt government that they were wrong. Jesus died because he stood up for the people. The heavy theological implications around sin and redemption are mostly beyond children's comprehension, but the politics of Jesus' death are not. Keep this story simple.

A deeper discussion on the theology and symbolism of Jesus' death will be on the How to Lent with Teens page.

### **Day 40:** Jesus is buried (Luke 23:50-56)

We are told that Jesus was dead and three days later he rose, but the counting of those days gets a little challenging when Friday to Sunday is only two days. Hebrews counted days beginning the evening before at sunset, so Jesus' death happened just before day two started at sunset on Friday. That was the Sabbath and no work of any kind could be done. If Jesus' body had been left on the cross after sunset, only the Romans could have taken him down on Saturday, and Jesus' followers would not have known where they put him nor could they prepare his body for proper burial, which was the women's job. So Saturday everyone had to sit and wait.