



And now for Part 2 of our Bible overview... In the September issue, we offered a range of activities to share with your Messy congregations. Now, here's a brave attempt to cram the broad sweep of the Bible narrative into a couple of pages or so, taken from *The Barnabas Family Bible* by Martyn Payne and Jane Butcher. How about giving this out as a take-home idea (go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessyjan19 to download copies) or using part of it during the celebration time?

In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. He began by saying, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. Next, he made the water and that was good. Then God made the land and he saw that that was good. Afterwards came the sun, moon and stars to give light for the day and the night. This too was good. Then he filled the waters with fish of all kinds and the air with birds and he said that that was good. Finally, he made the creatures and he also made people – you and me – and put them in charge of his world, to look after it. When God saw everything that he had made, he said that it was very good. When he had finished creating the world, God rested.

God made everything good but soon the world began to go bad. People chose not to care for God's world or even for each other. God was sad and decided to start all over again by sending a flood.

Only Noah's family truly believed in God, so they were kept safe in a boat called an ark. On board were representatives of all the animals that God had made, so that God could fill his cleaned-up world with life again after the flood.

When the flood was over, Noah and his family and the animals came out. They remembered to thank God for all that he had done. Then God gave them a sign that he would never stop loving his world and its people in future. He gave them a rainbow. God kept his promise. He never stopped loving people. He wanted to help them trust him, whatever happened. Once, he spoke to a man called Abraham and told him and his wife Sarah to set out on a dangerous journey across the desert to a new place to live, called Canaan. Abraham could not see God, but he believed that God was always close. God looked after them on their long journey. He gave them a safe place to live. He also promised them that he would give them a son and that from this son would come a family and a great nation. In that nation, one day, a very special person would be born, who would bring God's love to

Bible overview

the whole world. God's family would be world-big and contain as many people as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand in the desert. God kept his promise.

God's people didn't find it easy to trust God. They often made mistakes and often deliberately chose to go their own way, ending up in trouble. Many years after Abraham, they found themselves as slaves in Egypt. Their situation seemed hopeless, but God did not forget them. He sent Moses to bring them to freedom. The Pharaoh in Egypt let them go only when a terrible thing happened. All the eldest boy children of the Egyptians, including the Pharaoh's own child, died. God's people, however, were kept safe. They had put lambs' blood around the doors of their houses, so the angel of death had passed over them and they were saved. Moses led them across the Red Sea to freedom.

God's people had been in such a rush to leave, however, that there had been no time to bake proper bread for the journey. Their bread had no yeast or leaven in it, so it was flat. They called it unleavened bread. Whenever they ate this bread, they remembered how God had brought them from slavery to freedom.

God guided Moses and he led them through the desert to a new home. God gave them miraculous food to eat and water to drink; but even then, some of them began to doubt God's love. It was so easy to forget the best way to live. So God called Moses up a mountain and gave him the law, which included the ten commandments. These ten rules would help people to know how to come close to God. They told the people how to love God and to love other people. After a journey of 40 years, the people were finally ready to come to God's promised land. This was the place where they would be safe. In order to get into this land, they had one more thing to do. They needed to cross the River Jordan. It seemed impossible but Joshua, who had taken over from Moses as leader, trusted God to show them how. The priests went out into the water first, carrying the great golden chest that contained the ten commandments, and they stood in the middle of the river. As soon as the priests were there, the River Jordan began to dry up so that the people could cross safely. After many years of walking through the desert, they could walk into God's special home for them. Their feet were dusty from their desert journey but as they crossed the wet riverbed they were cleaned, ready for a new beginning.

The story of creation

"When the Lord God made the heavens and the earth, no grass or plants were growing anywhere. God had not yet sent any rain, and there was no one to work the land. But streams came up from the ground and watered the earth.

"The Lord God took a handful of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing. The Lord made a garden in a place called Eden, which was in the east, and he put the man there.

"The Lord God placed all kinds of beautiful trees and fruit trees in the garden. Two other trees were in the middle of the garden. One of the trees gave life—the other gave the power to know the difference between right and wrong.

"From Eden a river flowed out to water the garden, then it divided into four rivers. The first one is the Tigris River that flows through the land of Havilah, where pure gold, rare perfumes, and precious stones are found. The second is the Euphrates River that winds through Ethiopia. The Tigris River that flows east of Assyria is the third, and the fourth is the Euphrates River.

"The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it. But the Lord told him, 'You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden, except the one that has the power to let you know the difference between right and wrong.

If you eat any fruit from that tree, you will die before the day is over!"

"The Lord God said, 'It isn't good for the man to live alone. I need to make a suitable partner for him!'"

"So the Lord took some soil and made animals and birds. He brought them to the man to see what names he would give each of them. Then the man named the tame animals and the birds, and the wild animals. That's how they got their names.

"None of these was the right kind of partner for the man. So the Lord God made him fall into a deep sleep, and he took out one of the man's ribs. Then after closing the man's side, the Lord made a woman out of the rib.

"The Lord God brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:4b-22

Commentary

The Bible begins with two parallel stories of creation, of which this is the second. In this version the focus is on how special human beings are. Although formed from the raw material of the soil, the man is special because God breathes life into him. God gives him a special place to live—a beautiful garden called Eden—and a special role as caretaker of a world full of beauty with pure gold, rare perfumes, and precious stones. This specialness is also seen in the way God gives the man the freedom to make his own choices. The warning about the tree of knowledge of good and evil is clear, but God graciously leaves it up to the man to decide whether to listen to them or not. Finally, God gives him a special friend, because being alone is not in his plan for human beings. Togetherness is something we all need, and it also seems to be part of God's own character.

Questions

- ▶ If you could create your own perfect world, what would it be like?
- ▶ How can you play your part in caring for God's world?
- ▶ Why do you think God put such a dangerous tree in the garden?
- ▶ Why do you think human beings are so special to God?

Visual aid

Blow up a number of balloons with your own 'breath' of life and draw faces of people on them. Maybe you could also try some animal balloon modelling. Check the internet for instructions and the appropriate balloons to use.

Activity idea

Play an alphabet creation game, choosing words for different parts of creation—for example, **A**nadole, **B**utterfly, **C**arnival, **D**affodil, and so on. Talk about how you can best look after each part of God's world. This Bible story also underlines how special God thinks each one of us is. Play a second alphabet game celebrating people and places—for example, **A**dam, **B**razil, **C**anada, **D**iana, and so on.

Prayer idea

Using a blow-up globe, big picture atlas, nature calendar or images from the internet, look at the variety of this world—human, animal and plant life, as well as the colours and shapes of the mountains, valleys, rivers and oceans. Let each person choose his or her favourite part of creation and make it a special prayer to say 'thank you to God for it'.

Key verse

"The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it." (Genesis 2:15)

New Testament story link

Revelation 21:1-7: Here is a word picture of the new Eden that God will give us all one day, because of what Jesus Christ has done to mend our broken world.

God kept on looking after his people in the new land, but there were so many temptations for the people to forget him and go their own way. There were great leaders and kings, such as David and Solomon, but even they didn't always choose God's way. They built special places to worship God – even a golden temple in Jerusalem – but they began to forget that God was everywhere, not just in a building.

God sent special people to remind them of his love and warn them of the dangers of turning away from his love. These were called prophets, but not everyone listened to their messages. Finally, God decided that the only way to show his love to them was to come and live with them himself. God decided to wrap himself up very small, and he quietly entered his own world as a tiny baby.

God had planned this all along as the way that he was going to show people what he was really like and how he could keep them safe for ever. God was inside a human body, and we call him Jesus.

Jesus shone bright with God's light. When he was about 30 years old, he went to the River Jordan, where his cousin John was baptising people. He asked John to baptise him. John was surprised. He knew how special Jesus was. Jesus should baptise him! However, Jesus insisted and so he went down into the water and came out again. People nearby said they heard God's voice; others saw a dove coming close to Jesus. Jesus was showing everyone the way to start a new life with God. The washing of baptism became a picture of how people enter into the safe place of trusting God forever.

Jesus began teaching people about God and his ways. Crowds gathered to listen. Once, he was speaking to a great crowd of men, women and children on a mountainside in Galilee. He told them about what things are like when God is king. He described the sort of lives God's people should lead. He said that people would be happy if they knew that they needed God; happy if they were sad about being far from him; happy if they always put others first. They would be happy if they longed for what was good and right, and happy if they were kind and said 'no' to all that was bad; happy if they were people who made peace. Everyone else might think they were crazy and laugh at them, but this was the only way to be happy and make God happy too.

Jesus said and did amazing things. Everyone knew that he was special and that he was showing them what God was like. However, very few really knew who he was. He called himself by many names. Once he said he was the light; on other occasions he called himself the good shepherd and the way; and once he described himself as the bread. But Jesus knew that the only way for him to rescue people from the badness that keeps spoiling our lives was to go to Jerusalem and to die on a cross. Everyone now who comes to God through this door can be safe and rescued from all that is bad. The cross gave people the power to choose to do what is right.

After three days, Jesus was seen alive again in a new Easter way. He could now always be there for his people, to lead them into what was good and true. Although people could not see him, he was there in a new invisible way and people followed him. He wanted everyone to be filled with light as he was filled with light, and to take God's love out into the world so that more and more people would become part of God's new beginning. God's promise to Abraham was coming true. God's family was growing and growing and was becoming as many as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand in the desert.

Jesus wanted everyone to remember him so that they would not forget how to come close to God wherever they were. He had given them a way to do this – not a rainbow this time, but a simple meal to share together. It had first been part of the meal he had eaten with his friends the night before he died. There had been bread to eat and wine to drink. Every time Christians eat and drink in this way, they remember Jesus. They remember how he died and then came back to life to be with everyone everywhere forever.

The story ends with a new beginning. The first creation will be over and, because of Jesus, all that is bad and that spoils God's world will be washed away. Everyone will be able to choose to be safe in Jesus. The Bible promises that God will make a new heaven and a new earth, full of light. This is the light of God and of Jesus his Son. All that was broken will be mended and all that was painful will be healed. This is how the Bible ends, but really it is just the first page of a new book that will go on forever.