

*All the
stories
of the* **Bible**

as crafted and told by John Walsh

All the stories of the Bible in five books:

Beginnings

Stories 1-52

Building a Nation

Stories 53-113

Path Down to Captivity

Stories 114-161

Beauty from Ashes

Stories 162-219

Work of the Holy Spirit

Stories 220-255

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Beauty from Ashes

List of stories

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 162. Valley of Dry Bones | 191. Calming Two Storms |
| 163. Daniel's Decision | 192. Twelve Years |
| 164. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream | 193. Pool of Bethesda |
| 165. Furnace Full of Fire | 194. John Beheaded |
| 166. Becoming a Wild Animal | 195. Meal & a Walk |
| 167. Handwriting on the Wall | 196. Bread of Life |
| 168. Den of Lions | 197. Feeding 4,000 |
| 169. Rebuilding the Temple | 198. Caught in Immorality |
| 170. Ezra | 199. Man Born Blind |
| 171. Rebuilding the Walls | 200. Transfiguration |
| 172. Esther Becomes Queen | 201. Paying Temple Tax |
| 173. Esther Saves Her People | 202. Rich Man and Lazarus |
| 174. Gabriel's Announcement | 203. Seventy Times Seven |
| 175. The Birth of Jesus | 204. Good Samaritan |
| 176. Gifts for the King | 205. Lost Sheep, Coin, & Son |
| 177. Twelve Years Old | 206. Lepers, Judge, & Pride |
| 178. Baptism & Temptation | 207. Raising Lazarus |
| 179. Water to Wine | 208. The Great, the Rich, & the Poor |
| 180. New Birth | 209. Triumphal Entry |
| 181. Woman at the Well | 210. Last Week of Ministry |
| 182. Rejected in Nazareth | 211. The Last Supper |
| 183. Fishing for People | 212. Gethsemane |
| 184. Sermon on the Mount | 213. Trial Before Jews |
| 185. Forgiving Sins | 214. Trial before Romans |
| 186. Calling the Twelve | 215. Crucifixion |
| 187. A Roman and a Funeral | 216. Resurrection |
| 188. Forgiven and Grateful | 217. Road to Emmaus |
| 189. Four Soils | 218. Winning Back Two Disciples |
| 190. Teaching with Stories | 219. Commission, Ascension & Waiting |



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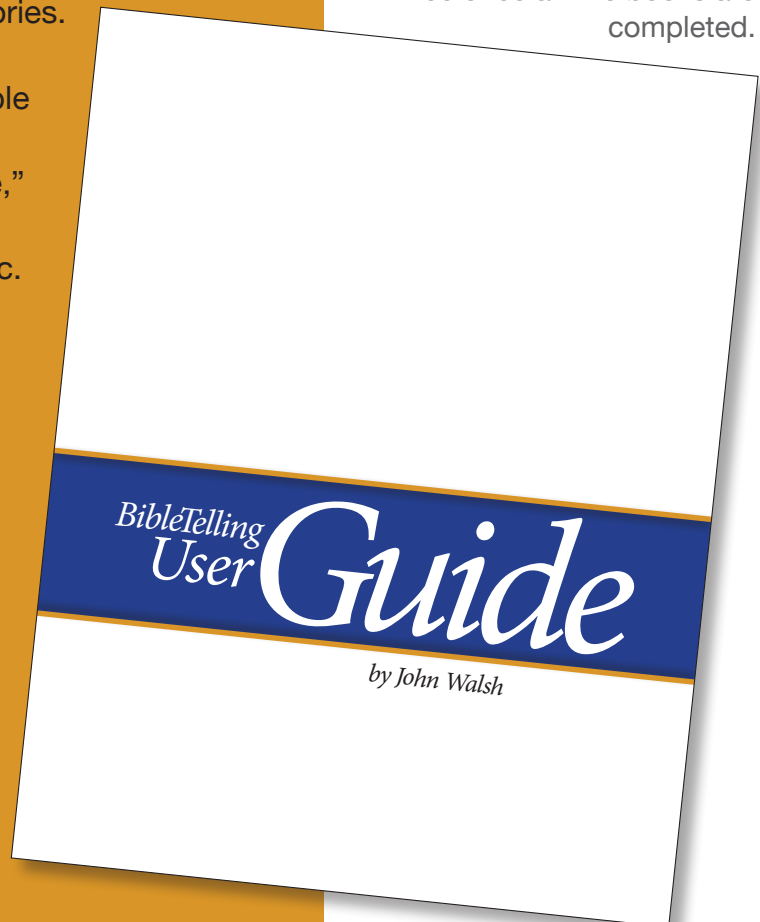
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The BibleTelling User Guide provides principles of learning and using Bible stories.

In addition, it contains ...

- **Alphabetical listing** of all the stories found throughout the Bible, including those hidden in other stories.
- **50 Groupings** - All the Bible stories grouped together under such titles as “Water stories,” “Women of the Bible,” “Lies of the Bible,” etc.
- **Overview Stories** - the whole Bible in 10 stories, 20 stories, 30 stories, and 40 stories.
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The BibleTelling User Guide greatly increases the value of All the Stories of the Bible. It will be updated free once all five books are completed.



162 Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel was taken into captivity, along with many other Jews. He became a prophet of God.

One day the Lord took his spirit to a valley. He saw that it was filled with bones. They were so dry, they would turn to powder if you touched them.

The Lord said, "Son of man, can these bones become alive again?"

"Oh Lord, only you can give the answer to that."

God said, "Stand among them and say, 'Dry bones, hear what God says to you. Yes, the Lord is talking to you. He's telling you he's going to put breath back into you, and you'll once again be alive. You'll have flesh, and muscle, and skin ... and life. Then, you'll know he's the Lord.' "

So Ezekiel stood and told this to the bones. Suddenly he heard the sound of rattling all across the valley. The bones had become solid, and were reconnecting themselves. Soon there were complete skeletons lying all over the ground.

As the prophet watched, tendons and muscles formed on the skeletons. And then skin stretched over the flesh. They were like dead bodies lying on the ground, all across the valley. But even with all of this, they didn't have life.

The Lord said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, preach to breath. Say, 'Hear what God says to you. Yes, the Lord is talking to you. He's telling you to ride on the four winds and come and enter into these dead bodies.' "

Beauty from Ashes

So Ezekiel said this to breath. Suddenly the wind blew and breath entered into all the dead bodies, and they became alive! They sat up ... and then got up. It was then Ezekiel realized they were a vast army.

The Lord said, "Son of man, these bones represent all twelve tribes of Israel. Right now they're saying, 'We're no longer a nation. There's no hope for us. Our bones are dried up.'

"Preach to them! Say, 'Hear what God says to you. Yes, the Lord is talking to you. He is telling you that he's going to open your graves of exile and bring you back to the land of Israel. He'll put his Spirit in you, and you'll live again. Then you'll know that he is the Lord.' "

The Lord spoke to Ezekiel again. "Son of man, find a small piece of wood. Carve the word 'Judah' on it. Find another piece of wood and carve the word 'Israel' on it."

Ezekiel did this. Then the Lord said, "Hold them together as if they are one piece of wood. Carry them around until people ask you what it means.

"Tell them the Lord God is saying, 'There'll come a time when I'll bring both nations together again. They'll no longer be two nations, but one. I'll give them their own land, the land I gave Jacob. They'll have one king. David will rule over them. They'll no longer corrupt themselves with idols. I'll make them clean and they'll be my people, and I'll be their God.' "

163 Daniel's Decision

Daniel 1:1-16

Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. He conquered Jerusalem and took the people captive. He then ordered his officials to select the best young men and train them to serve in the royal court. They were to be given the best instruction in language, literature, and wisdom. This training would last three years, and during that time, the king would provide them the best food and wine.

Four of the young men selected were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men determined before the Lord that they wouldn't defile themselves by eating and drinking those things that were against God's Law. Daniel asked the overseer to leave those things out of their daily diet.

"Oh no. I couldn't let you do that! A day is coming when you'll stand before the king. He'll see that you're more skinny than the others, and then he'll have me killed!"

At this point, Daniel chose his words carefully. "Please, before you decide, do a test. Allow the four of us to eat vegetables and drink water for 10 days. Then see how we look

Beauty from Ashes

in comparison to the others."

The overseer highly respected Daniel, so he agreed to this test. At the end of 10 days, Daniel and his friends looked better and healthier than all those who had been eating the king's food and wine. So the overseer allowed the four of them to continue eating only vegetables and drinking water.

God was with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave them knowledge, and allowed them to understand wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams.

At the end of three years, Nebuchadnezzar interviewed all of the young men who had gone through his training program. None of the others ranked as high as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So they began serving in the king's court. He consulted them in every matter concerning wisdom and understanding.

In time, the king valued their counsel ten times higher than his other counselors. Daniel continued to serve in the court through the reign of many kings.

164 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Beauty from Ashes

Daniel 2

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. He called his counselors and told them they were to interpret his dream. They said, "Tell us the dream and we'll tell you what it means."

The king said, "Listen carefully to what I'm about to say. You're to tell me my dream as well as its interpretation. If you can do this, I'll give you great rewards and honor you before everyone. But if you can't do this, you'll die a slow death, and all of your property will be destroyed. Now, tell me my dream!"

His counselors were shocked. They asked a second time, "Please, tell us your dream and we'll give you the meaning."

Nebuchadnezzar grew impatient. "You're stalling for time. You heard what I said. If I tell you my dream, you'll simply make up something just to humor me. The only way I'll know your interpretation is correct, is if you can tell me the dream."

At this point, the counselors begged him. "No king has ever asked their counselors to do this. Only the gods know what people dream when they're asleep."

Nebuchadnezzar became angry. He made a declaration that all the counselors were to be killed. So the guards started gathering them up. Daniel heard of this and immediately sent a message to the king, "Give me some time and I'll tell you your dream, as well as the interpretation."

God showed Daniel the king's dream and gave him the interpretation. Then Daniel went to meet with the king. Nebuchadnezzar looked at him and said, "Is it true you can tell me my dream and its interpretation?"

Daniel was careful with his answer. "No man is able to do what you're asking, but there's a God

in heaven who has shown me what you dreamed when you were asleep."

"He gave you a vision of what's going to happen in the future of the world. You saw a massive statue in your dream. It had a head of gold. Its arms and chest were silver, and its belly and hips were bronze. It had legs of iron, and its feet were a mixture of iron and clay. Suddenly a stone was cut out of a mountain, but you couldn't see the hands that did it. This stone hit the feet and the entire statue was destroyed."

"The pieces crashed to the ground and the wind blew it away as if it had no weight at all. As you watched, the stone got larger until it filled the entire earth."

"That was your dream. Now here is the interpretation. God has made you the head of gold. After you, will arise another kingdom that's not as good as yours."

Then a third kingdom of bronze will rule the world. The fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron and will crush everything in its way. This kingdom will divide into two parts like the legs of the statue. The last kingdom will also be divided into two feet with ten toes. It'll have the strength of iron, but be as brittle as common clay."

"The stone carved out of the mountain is God's kingdom, which will be formed without human hands. God will destroy all the kingdoms of this world, but His kingdom will never end."

"Oh king, God has shown you the future with a dream, and it'll happen just as the dream has said."

Nebuchadnezzar fell down with his face to the ground. He said, "Your God, he is God! He's the Lord!" Nebuchadnezzar then made Daniel a great ruler in his kingdom.

165 A Furnace Filled with Fire

Daniel 3

Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue. It was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. He then gathered together all the officials of his kingdom. They came and stood before the statue.

One of the officials made a declaration. "When you hear the orchestra play, fall to the ground and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. If you don't do this immediately, you'll be thrown into a furnace filled with fire." The orchestra started playing and the crowd fell to the ground in front of the gold statue.

This occasion gave some of the officials an idea. They thought this was their chance to get rid of some of the Jews that were among them.

They said to the king, "Your command was clear. When the orchestra played, everyone was to drop to the ground and worship the statue. You said if anyone didn't do it, they'd be thrown into a furnace filled with fire. There are three Jews who ignored you, and they're in high positions in the kingdom. Their names are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They don't serve your god, and they didn't worship the gold statue."

Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He sent for the three Jews and had them stand before him. "I've been told you don't serve my god, and you didn't worship the gold statue. I want to see if this is true. The orchestra will play, and when it does you're to drop to the ground and worship the gold statue. If you don't, you'll be thrown into the furnace filled with fire. There's no god that can rescue you from my power."

The three men didn't hesitate to answer the king. They said, "We would never argue with you, but please understand. Our God is able to rescue us from the furnace filled with fire. He can easily rescue us from your power, but if he doesn't, let it be known, we still won't worship the gold statue you've set up."

Nebuchadnezzar became so mad his face

Beauty from Ashes

was twisted with rage. He shouted to his guards, "Make the furnace seven times hotter! Tie up these men and throw them into it!"

The furnace was made hotter, and the three Jews were tied up and thrown into the fire. Since the furnace was so hot and the king wanted the execution to be done quickly, the flames killed the guards as they threw the men in.

The furnace was made hotter, and the three Jews were tied up and carried away. Since the king wanted them to be thrown in immediately, the guards weren't careful enough. They took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and threw them into the fire, but the guards were killed because the furnace was so hot.

Suddenly the king was shocked at what he saw. He got up and shouted, "Didn't we throw three men into the fire?"

"Of course Your Majesty. We threw in three men."

"But look! I see four men in there. The fire's not hurting them, and they aren't tied up. They're freely walking around. And look! The fourth man is like a god."

Nebuchadnezzar got closer to the furnace and yelled in. "Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, servants of the Most High God. Please, come out."

The three men came out of the fire. Everyone gathered around and saw that the men and their clothes were totally unaffected by the fire. They didn't even have the smell of smoke on them.

Nebuchadnezzar made a proclamation. "I give praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They chose to die rather than worship any god but their God. So he sent his angel to rescue them. No one is to say anything offensive about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. If anyone does, that person will be torn to pieces and their house made into a garbage dump."

166 Becoming a Wild Animal

Daniel 4

One night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that terrified him. He immediately called in all of his counselors and fortune-tellers. He told them the dream, but they couldn't make sense of it.

Finally he called for Daniel and said, "I know you have the spirit of the gods in you. You have the answers to all mysteries. I had a terrible dream last night, and no one can interpret it for me. I'll tell it to you, so you can tell me what it means.

"I saw a tree in the middle of the earth. It was tall and strong. Everyone on earth could see it. Even heaven looked at it. It had beautiful leaves and enough fruit for everyone to have as much as they wanted. It provided shelter for the animals, and birds lived in its branches.

I was admiring the tree, when a messenger came from heaven. This holy one yelled so all could hear, 'Cut down this tree! Chop off its branches, strip off its leaves, and scatter the fruit. Chase away the animals and birds. But be careful. Leave the stump with its roots still in the ground. Secure it with bands of iron and bronze.

'Now leave him alone for seven years. He'll have the mind of an animal and eat grass in the field. Each morning he'll be covered with the dew of heaven. He'll stay this way until he realizes the Most High is the supreme ruler over all kingdoms of the earth. He gives them to whomever He wants. He could even give a kingdom to the lowly slave.'

"Daniel, this is what I dreamed. You're the only one who can tell me what it means."

Daniel was shocked! He didn't say a thing, but just stared at the king.

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Daniel, don't be afraid. Simply tell me what it means."

"Oh my king. I wish the meaning was for your enemies. But it's not. You are the tree, tall and strong. You benefit people far and wide. The holy one, coming down from heaven, passed a judgment on you.

Beauty from Ashes

"You'll be driven away from people and live like a wild animal. You'll eat grass and sleep under the dew of night. You'll stay that way for seven years until you realize the Most High is the supreme ruler over all kingdoms. He gives them to whomever He wants.

"Still, the holy one said to leave the tree's stump with its roots. This means your kingdom will be waiting for you once you acknowledge that heaven rules.

"Here is my advice. Remove sin from your life. Be just. Show mercy. Perhaps God will show mercy on you."

A year later, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace in Babylon. Suddenly he stopped and said, "Look at this! It's Babylon the great, and I've built it. I've done it because I'm powerful. This kingdom shows my great glory!"

While he was still saying these words, a voice from heaven said to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, I'm taking this kingdom from you. People will chase you away, and you'll live among the animals. You'll graze on grass for seven years. You'll stay there until you learn the Most High is in control over all kingdoms. He can give them to whomever he chooses."

Instantly the king went insane. People finally forced him from the palace and he went out into the fields. He ate grass for food. His hair grew long and his fingernails were like claws. The dew covered him each night.

At the end of seven years, he looked up into the sky and his sanity returned to him. He said, "I praise the Most High. He lives forever and there is no end to his kingdom. He does what he wants, and no one can hold him back."

God sent nobles and advisers looking for him. When they saw that he was back in his right mind, they reinstated him to his old position. He had his kingdom back, but from that day on he always said, "I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven. His works are true and just."

167 Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5 & 9

King Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. He decided to have a feast with a thousand Babylonian nobles. He sent for the golden cups the Babylon army had taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem. They were used to drink in honor of their many gods.

Suddenly ... the fingers of a man's hand appeared near a wall that was well lit by lamps. As Belshazzar watched, the fingers started writing on the wall. This made the king so terrified that he shook with fear.

When the hand was done writing, it disappeared. Belshazzar read the words on the wall, but didn't know what they meant. He sent for his counselors and said, "If you can interpret what these words mean, I'll give you great riches and make you the third ruler over Babylon!"

They looked at the writing but weren't able to understand what it meant. This made Belshazzar even more terrified.

The queen mother said, "Don't be afraid. There's one counselor you haven't called. His name is Daniel, and he's a man filled with the spirit of the holy gods. Your grandfather always called on him whenever he had a problem he couldn't solve. He'll tell you what this means."

Belshazzar called for Daniel and said, "I know you have the spirit of the gods in you. If you can tell me what this means, I'll give you great riches and make you the third highest ruler in Babylon."

Daniel didn't hesitate. "You may keep your gifts and titles. I'll read the writing and tell you what it means.

"The Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar this empire and made him the most powerful man on earth. Yet he humbled himself before God and acknowledged that he was Lord of all.

"You know this, yet you're proud and defy the Lord God. You used the golden cups from

Beauty from Ashes

the Temple of God to praise false gods. You mock the God who holds your life in His hands. Therefore He has sent you this message."

"NUMBERED, NUMBERED, WEIGHED, AND DIVIDED."

"Here is the interpretation:

NUMBERED – God has numbered the days of your kingdom. Your time is up!

WEIGHED – You were weighed on a scale to determine your worth. You're worth very little!

DIVIDED – Your kingdom is no longer yours. It's been divided between the Medes and Persians."

Immediately, Belshazzar called his servants and told them to put fine clothes on Daniel and expensive jewelry around his neck. He proclaimed Daniel to be the third highest ruler in Babylon.

That very night, the army of the Medes and Persians came into the city, killed Belshazzar, and took over the kingdom. Daniel became a respected counselor in the Persian court.

Years later, Daniel was reading how Jeremiah said the city of Jerusalem would lie in ruins for seventy years. Daniel prayed and asked God what was going to happen after that. God sent him an angel to explain what would happen.

The angel said, "An order will be given to rebuild Jerusalem. That order will begin a special 490-year period for your people. After the first 483 years, Messiah will come. He'll be killed, and Jerusalem will be destroyed again. The last seven years will begin when an evil ruler makes a seven-year peace agreement with Israel."

By telling Daniel this, God showed Israel what would happen before he set up his kingdom on earth.

168 Den of Lions

Daniel 6

Darius became the king of the Persian Empire. He appointed an official over each of his 120 provinces. He then selected three administrators to supervise the 120 officials.

Daniel was one of the three administrators, and was the most capable. The king was about to give him authority over the entire empire.

The officials and the other two administrators didn't want this to happen. They decided to make Daniel look bad to the king. They searched for a flaw in his life or some kind of corruption in what he did for the government. They couldn't find anything. Finally they said, "There's only one way we can do this. We must find something in the laws of his God."

Finally they found it, so they created a plan. They went to the king and said, "Our King Darius, live forever. The officials and administrators have agreed on a way we can honor you. With your permission, we want everyone to worship you for 30 days. We'll craft a law that says no one can worship any other god during that time. We want you to sign it as a law of the Medes and Persians that can't be changed. If anyone disobeys this law, they'll be thrown into the den of lions." Darius was pleased with this honor, so he signed the law.

Daniel heard about this after it was done. Still he followed his normal routine of worship. Three times a day, he went into his house and opened the upper windows that faced Jerusalem. There, he knelt down and prayed, giving thanks to God. It was exactly what the men knew he would do.

They went to the king and said, "Is it true that you signed a law that said for 30 days no one may worship any other god besides you? And didn't it say that anyone who violated this would be thrown into a den of lions?"

He said, "Of course. I made it a law of the Medes and Persians, which can't be changed."

"Oh king, we're sad to tell you that Daniel, a

Beauty from Ashes

Jewish exile, is breaking that law. He bows down and worships his God three times a day."

Darius was shocked! He knew he had to find a way to rescue Daniel. He worked on it all day. Finally the men came and said, "You know that the law of the Medes and Persians can't be changed."

So the king gave the order to go get Daniel. Darius talked to him just before he was thrown into the den. "Oh, may the God you serve rescue you from these lions."

Daniel was lowered into the den, and then a stone was placed over the opening. The king put his seal on it so that no one could interfere with this judgment. He went back to his palace and cancelled the evening entertainment. He refused to eat, and couldn't sleep all night.

When it was finally morning, he rushed back to the den of lions. Once the stone was removed, he yelled, "Oh Daniel, servant of the living God. Was your God able to rescue you from the lions?"

Daniel yelled back, "My king, God sent his angel, who shut the mouths of these lions. I haven't been hurt in any way. God knows I'm innocent. Your Majesty, I haven't wronged you in any way."

The king gave the order to have Daniel pulled out of the den. Darius then told the guards. "Go get those men who plotted against Daniel. Get their wives and children. Throw them all into the den of lions."

All the men and their families were brought and pushed down into the den of lions. The lions were waiting at the bottom and tore them apart before they reached the floor.

King Darius sent a decree throughout his empire. It said, "Everyone is to be afraid of Daniel's God because he's the living God. His kingdom will last forever. He's able to rescue those who serve him."

169 Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 1-6 & Haggai 1-2

Jeremiah had said Judah would be in captivity for 70 years. At the end of that time, the king of Persia said, “The Lord has told me to send his people back to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. Therefore, they’re free to go and build the house of God.”

The king gave gold and silver for the project, and he gave back the temple vessels taken when Jerusalem was destroyed. He donated money to buy cedar from Lebanon to panel the inside of the temple. He even provided livestock so the people could make sacrifices to God. The Lord stirred the hearts of his people. Many accepted the challenge to go back to Judah to do the work of God. Those, who couldn’t go, gave money and supplies.

When the people arrived, they made sacrifices to God on the temple site. The people shouted for joy, and then began building the temple.

The people living there were upset that the Jews had come back. They tried to stop the project, but nothing worked. Finally, a new king ruled over Persia. They sent him a message, and slanted the news about the new temple. They convinced him to stop the construction.

The Jewish builders had no choice but to stop and wait for the situation to change. This gave them a chance to build their own houses. Before long, one family after another had cedar paneling in their homes. Eventually the stockpile of cedar from Lebanon was gone! They knew that it couldn’t be replaced. So, whenever someone talked about building the temple, the people said, “This isn’t a good time to build.”

The prophet Haggai said to the people, “I have a message from the Lord! ‘Consider your ways! You say it isn’t time to build the house of God. Yet you live in paneled houses while my house lies in ruins. Consider your ways!’ ”

Haggai told them that God had removed his blessing from their lives. “You plant a large amount of grain, yet you harvest very little. You eat, but you’re still hungry. You drink, but you’re still thirsty.

Beauty from Ashes

You wear clothes, yet you’re not warm. You earn money and put it into bags, not knowing that the bags have holes. Consider your ways!”

The people listened, but they knew there was no cedar to finish the temple. Haggai said, “God says go into the hills and get common wood and use that in the temple. He says he’ll be pleased with what you build, and he’ll be glorified.” So the people obeyed and went into the hills and got wood to replace the missing cedar. Then they made preparations to restart the project.

In time, another king came to power in Persia. This one gave the order, “Anyone who opposes the building of the temple will be put to death!” With this decree, the people living around Jerusalem weren’t allowed to hinder the construction of the temple. Instead, they were commanded to give supplies for its completion.

The people worked with enthusiasm. Haggai came with another message from the Lord. “I’m pleased you’re obeying me! Look, I’m providing for you. You haven’t planted your seed, your vines haven’t yet brought forth grapes, and your trees haven’t bloomed. Yet you’re harvesting my blessings and provisions.”

Most of the people were happy when they saw that the building was nearly done, but some of the older men said, “We remember Solomon’s temple. It was beautiful! This temple is small and not beautiful at all.” The builders became discouraged.

Haggai came with another message from God. “Who remembers the temple built by Solomon? How does this one compare? Don’t be discouraged. The glory of this temple is going to be greater than you can imagine. I’m going to shake the nations and the whole world will focus on this very spot. The ‘Desire of all Nations’ will come and I’ll fill this temple with glory. Be strong and keep your eyes focused on the present work. I’m with you as I’ve always been.”

So the people were encouraged ... and worked ... and they finished the temple.

170 Ezra

Ezra 7 – 10

Ezra was an expert in the laws of God. Therefore, it was decided he should go to the new Temple in Jerusalem and teach the people.

The king of Persia gave him letters authorizing him and his helpers to go to Jerusalem. The king sent along a large amount of gold and silver.

Ezra was also authorized to appoint judges who knew the laws of God. He was told the kingdom of Persia would punish anyone who disobeyed those laws.

Men volunteered to go with Ezra and move their families to Judah. They suddenly realized there were no Levites in the group. So Ezra sent out a plea, and several Levites volunteered to go.

Everyone knew going from Persia to Jerusalem was a dangerous trip. They had families, their possessions, and a large amount of gold and silver. Yet they didn't have soldiers to protect them. Ezra didn't ask the king for armed guards because he had said, "God is our protector. His strong hand is upon people who serve him."

So the group prayed and fasted, asking God for his protection. They set out on their journey, and God protected them as they traveled. No one tried to ambush them along the way. They arrived safely in Jerusalem, and took all gold and silver to the Temple.

Several leaders went to Ezra as he made preparations for his instructions about the laws of God. They said, "Many of our people have not

Beauty from Ashes

separated themselves from the non-Jews that live in the area. They have married their women, and these wives have brought their pagan ways with them.

Ezra was shocked when he heard this. He ripped his clothes and went to the Temple and fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord. He prayed "Oh God. We're doing it again – just like our forefathers. You sent them into captivity because they took foreign wives and started worshiping idols.

"Now you've given us a brief moment, allowing us to come back here. And what did we do? We married foreign wives. Oh, God we're not worthy of your blessing. You have the right to totally destroy this small group of people who live here."

Ezra continued to cry, and pray, and confess sin. As he did, people came and sat and prayed with him. More and more came until there was a large crowd gathered around. They all cried and confessed their sins.

Finally the people said, "We know we've done wrong, but there's still hope. We'll make a promise before God. We'll send away our foreign wives and their children. But you must help us if we're to do this properly. Get up! Take action! Show us what to do and we'll do it."

So Ezra agreed to oversee this and make sure it was done properly. All the people sent their foreign wives away and turned from idols. They then totally committed themselves to the Lord.

171 Rebuilding the Walls

Nehemiah 1-13

Nehemiah was a Jewish man who served the king of Persia. One day he got news that the people in Judah were suffering. He was shocked to hear the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins. He started crying, and was depressed for days. He prayed and asked God to help his people.

The king saw he was sad, so Nehemiah told him about the situation in Jerusalem. The king said, "How can I help?"

"Please, send me to Jerusalem and give me permission to rebuild the walls."

"Go. I'll give you letters for safe travel."

When he arrived at Jerusalem, he didn't tell the people why he had come. Instead, he spent three days looking over the situation. Finally he brought the leaders together and explained how the king of Persia had given him permission to rebuild the city walls. He said, "We can't live with this disgrace any longer. It's time to rebuild the walls!"

The leaders agreed and committed themselves to the project. It was decided that each leader would choose a section of the wall as his personal responsibility. They immediately organized their families to start building.

The non-Jewish people of the area were shocked when they saw what was happening. They laughed and told jokes. "These people are too weak to rebuild their city. Ha! I can see it now. They build a section of wall, and it falls down when a little fox jumps on it."

Still, the builders were determined and worked faster. Soon the wall was halfway up, and they started joining the various sections. This made their enemies furious. They realized they had to stop this construction. They threatened to sneak up and kill the workers. They said, "We'll do

Beauty from Ashes

whatever it takes to stop this wall!"

Fear gripped the hearts of the builders, so they set up guards to watch day and night. Nehemiah said, "Don't be afraid. God is stronger than your enemies. Be prepared to fight! Fight for your fellow Jews. Fight for your sons and daughters. Fight for your wives and your homes."

The workers set up a warning system in case there was an attack on any section of the wall. Men were prepared to rush to that area and fight.

Everyone worked together and soon the walls were done, except for the gates. The enemy decided their only hope of stopping the project was to kill Nehemiah. To do this, they had to get him out of the city. So they sent a message asking him to meet them in a nearby village.

Nehemiah said, "I'm doing a great work here. Why should it stop so we can talk?"

They begged him to meet with them. Finally they sent a message, "People are saying you're building the wall so you can rebel against the empire and make yourself king. Unless you meet with us, we're going to tell the king of Persia about your rebellion."

Nehemiah ignored their threats and continued working until the wall and the gates were finished. It only took fifty-two days to complete the project. At last the city was protected.

The people rejoiced and sang praise to God. Ezra stood before them and read the Law of Moses so all could hear. The people dedicated themselves to follow God's commandments. The Jews who lived in the surrounding towns decided that one out of every ten families would move into the city. God had done great things for Israel, and even their enemies were amazed!

172 Esther Becomes Queen

Esther 1 – 5:8

One day the queen of Persia embarrassed the king in front of the lords of the court. They all agreed the king should replace her. So an order went out saying all the beautiful virgins were to come to the palace. From them, the king would choose a new queen.

Esther was a beautiful Jewish woman who had been raised by her uncle Mordecai. She went to the palace because of her beauty and virtue. Her uncle told her not to tell anyone she was Jewish.

In the course of time, she was selected to be the new queen. Soon after this, two events happened about the same time. The first was that Mordecai heard a plot to kill the king. He reported it, and the plot was stopped. His good deed was recorded in the official records.

The second was making a man named Haman the highest-ranking official in the government. From then on, people bowed when he walked by – everyone except Mordecai.

When Haman saw this, he became angry and wanted Mordecai killed. But he wanted more than that. He wanted to totally destroy the man's race.

So he went to the king and said, "There are people in the empire who are different than everyone else. They don't obey your laws because they have their own. It's not good to let them live. Allow me to serve you by organizing their destruction. It would be my honor to personally pay for the cost of doing this."

The king was pleased at Haman's willingness to serve the kingdom, so he gave him the authority to destroy the Jewish people. Haman set a date and then sent out a proclamation. It said all the Jews were to be killed on that date. This would include the men, women and children. Their possessions were to be given to those who did the killing.

Once the proclamation was translated into many languages, it was sent out to all the nations in the empire. Fear and panic gripped all the Jews of the land.

Beauty from Ashes

Esther was in the palace and didn't know about this decree. Soon she heard that Mordecai was mourning in a public place. She sent a servant to ask him what was wrong. Mordecai told the servant everything and gave him a copy of the decree. He said, "Tell the queen she must talk to the king and beg him to have mercy upon her people."

She sent a message back to him. "No one is allowed to go before the king without an invitation. Those who do are put to death unless he points the golden scepter toward them. It's been 30 days since he has last sent for me.

Mordecai sent a message back to her. "Don't assume you'll escape, just because you live in the palace. Listen, if you don't help, your people will be delivered by some other means. Still, you will die! I believe you were brought to the kingdom for such a time as this."

She sent back a note. "Tell our people to fast for three days. They're not to eat or drink anything. My servants and I will do the same. Then I'll go and stand before the king, even though it is against the law. If I die, I die."

After three days, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court so the king could see her from his throne. When he looked up, he was pleased to see her and immediately pointed the golden scepter towards her. She walked up and touched the top of it.

He said, "Tell me what you want and I'll give it to you."

She said, "If it pleases you, I want you and Haman to come to a banquet I have prepared."

"Done!" said the king. "Guard, run get Haman and bring him here. We're going to Queen Esther's banquet."

After the banquet, the king said, "Now tell me your request so I can give it to you."

"Oh king, if it's true you want to grant my request, please bring Haman and come to my banquet tomorrow. I'll tell you my request at that time."

173 Esther Saves Her People

Esther 5:9 – 10:3

— *continued from the previous story* —

Haman was proud as he left the court that day. He had been invited to the queen's banquet two days in a row! Suddenly his joy turned to anger as he noticed Mordecai once again not bowing before him. He was with friends that evening and told them how this Jew had ruined his joy.

They said, "Build a 75-foot gallows. Go to the king early in the morning and ask him to order Mordecai's death. Hang him on the gallows right away so you can enjoy the queen's banquet." Haman sent for a servant and ordered the gallows to be built.

The king couldn't sleep that night. So he had someone come to his bedroom and read official records. The servant read how Mordecai saved the king's life by revealing a plot to kill him. The king said, "How was this man rewarded?"

The servant looked back at the records, then said, "He wasn't, my king."

"Nothing was done to reward this man?! Go into the court and see if anyone is there."

The servant found Haman waiting to see the king. The king said, "Bring him in." Before Haman could talk, the king said, "What should I do for a man I want to honor in a special way?"

Haman immediately thought of himself. He said, "Oh, my king. You should honor this man by putting your royal robe and crown on him. Place him on your horse and have your most noble official lead him through the streets yelling, 'This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor!'"

The king was pleased. "Excellent. Go and find Mordecai and do everything you've said. Be careful not to leave anything out."

Haman stood there in shock, but he had to fulfill everything he had suggested to the king.

Beauty from Ashes

He put the royal robe and crown on Mordecai, placed him on the royal horse, and led him through the city yelling, "This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor."

When it was all over, Haman went home in humiliation, but his summons to the queen's banquet was waiting for him. So he had to rush to get there.

After they had eaten, the king asked Esther, "Tell me what you want so I can give it to you."

"Oh king, if it pleases you to grant my request, spare my life and the lives of my people. A man has plotted to have my entire race destroyed."

The king was shocked, "Who is this man and where is he?"

Esther pointed at Haman. "Our enemy is this wicked man."

Haman was terrified. He couldn't even speak. The king looked at him and became angry. He got up and walked into the garden so he could think.

Haman ran over and fell down next to Esther to beg for his life. The king walked back into the room and saw Haman lying next to the queen. He said, "Are you going to rape the queen with me standing right here?"

As soon as he said this, servants rushed over and put a hood over Haman's head. One of them turned to the king. "Haman has built a gallows to hang the man who saved your life."

This angered the king even more. He pointed to Haman, "Hang him on it!"

Haman was immediately taken out and hanged on the gallows he had built. After this, the king replaced him with Mordecai. So the Jewish people were saved from the disaster Haman had planned for them, and Mordecai became the highest-ranking official in the government.

174 Gabriel's Announcements

Luke 1:5-80

Zechariah was a priest who followed God. He and his wife Elizabeth didn't have children, and they were past the childbearing years.

One day, Zechariah was chosen to go to the temple and burn incense at the altar. The people waited outside in prayer. Suddenly an angel appeared to the priest and said, "Zechariah, your prayers have been answered. Elizabeth will give birth to a son, and you're to call his name John. He'll be a joy to your heart. He'll be great before the Lord and will prepare the way for Messiah."

Zechariah was afraid and said, "How is that possible? We're too old to have children."

The angel said, "My name is Gabriel, and I stand in the presence of God. He sent me to give you this good news, and you don't believe me. Therefore, you won't be able to speak until what I've said comes true."

The people outside were wondering what was taking the priest so long. After the angel left, Zechariah went out and stood before them. He tried to say something but found that he couldn't talk. So the people knew he had seen a vision.

The priest went home, and soon Elizabeth was expecting a child. With joy, she secluded herself.

When she had been pregnant for six months, that same angel went to a town called Nazareth. He appeared to a young woman named Mary. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph. Both were descendants of David.

Gabriel said to her, "Mary, you're blessed by God." The young woman was startled and didn't know what to say.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid. You've found favor with God. You'll give birth to a son, and you're to call him Jesus. He'll be great, and

Beauty from Ashes

there'll be no end to his kingdom."

Mary said, "How can this be true? I'm a virgin."

"You'll conceive when the Holy Spirit hovers over you. Therefore, the child will be called the Son of God! Mary, all things are possible with God. Even your cousin Elizabeth is about to have a baby in her old age."

With that, Mary bowed her head and said, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen just as you have said."

After the angel left, Mary went to visit her cousin. As soon as Elizabeth heard her voice, her baby jumped inside her, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She said, "Oh Mary, you're blessed above all women, and that child you're carrying is blessed. How am I worthy to have the mother of my Lord visit me?"

Mary stayed with this wise older woman for three months, learning from her and receiving encouragement. Afterwards, she went home to face her family.

After Mary left, Elizabeth gave birth to a baby boy. Neighbors and family came to rejoice with the old couple. They said, "We'll call the child Zechariah, after his father."

Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John."

"John! There is no one in your family named John. We'll talk to Zechariah about this." The priest wrote on a tablet, "His name is John!"

Immediately he could talk. "Oh bless the Lord. He is sending the Promised One who will bring us back to God."

He picked up his son. "You'll be a prophet of God and prepare the way for Messiah. He'll bring us salvation and forgiveness of sin. He will bring us peace."

175 The Birth of Jesus

Beauty from Ashes

Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 2:1-39

Joseph found out Mary was pregnant soon after she got home from her visit with Elizabeth. He knew he wasn't the father. Still, since he was a righteous man, he didn't want to make a public example of her. No, he decided to simply break off the engagement and put her away quietly.

He was deep in thought about this when an angel appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary and make her your wife. The child she's carrying is from the Holy Spirit. When he's born, you're to name him Jesus. He's the Savior. He will save his people from their sins." Joseph didn't hesitate. He immediately made Mary his wife, but he wasn't intimate with her until after the child was born.

They lived in Nazareth, which was in the northern part of Israel. Yet the Scripture said that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, which is near Jerusalem. At that time the empire of Rome sent out an order requiring everyone to register in the city of their ancestry. Therefore, Joseph and his wife had to go to Bethlehem.

Soon after they got there, it came time for Mary to deliver her child. As soon as the baby was born, she wrapped him in strips of cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough because there was no room in the sleeping area. Messiah was born.

That same night, shepherds were watching their flock in a nearby field. Suddenly an angel stood with them, and the area was flooded with the glory of the Lord. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to bring you great news!"

He then pointed toward the nearby town.

"Tonight, the Savior was born in Bethlehem. He is Messiah. Go there, and look for a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly the whole area was filled with angels who were praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace and goodwill to the earth." Then, they disappeared.

The shepherds immediately did as they were told. They went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, just as the angel had said. They told them what happened that night, and everyone was amazed. Afterwards, they went back to the field, praising God for what they had seen.

Forty-one days later, it was time for Joseph and Mary to take Jesus to the temple, and offer sacrifice to the Lord. So the three of them went to Jerusalem.

There was a man at the temple named Simeon. God had told him that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Promised One. The Spirit of God had prompted him to go to the temple that day. He saw Joseph and Mary and asked if he could hold the baby. Looking into the face of Jesus, he said, "Oh, praise be to God!" Looking toward heaven, he said, "Lord, you can now let me die. My eyes have seen your salvation."

An eighty-four year old woman named Anna walked up to them. She had served God in the temple ever since her husband died after seven years of marriage. She asked to see the child. Afterwards, she said to everyone, "The Promised One has arrived! The Promised One has arrived!"

Joseph then took his little family back to their home in Bethlehem.

176 Gifts for the King

Matthew 2

While Jesus was still a young child, some men came from the east. Their research revealed that a royal redeemer would one day come to Israel. They studied the stars, and saw signs that indicated this king had finally been born.

They went to Jerusalem and talked to Herod, the king who was appointed by the Romans to rule over Israel. They said, "Where's the child who has been born King of the Jews? We see his star, and have come to worship him."

Herod was evil and cruel. He became angry when he heard the news of a different king born in his domain. Still, he controlled himself and told the men he'd look into the matter. He called for the priests and teachers and asked, "Where does your Scripture say Messiah is to be born?"

They were quick to answer. "He's to be born in Bethlehem."

Herod went back to his visitors and asked to hear more about the heavenly signs and exactly when the royal star first appeared. He then told them, "Go to Bethlehem. Once you have found the child, report back to me. I'd like to go ... (uh)

Beauty from Ashes

worship him as well."

The men traveled the few miles to Bethlehem and went right to the house where Joseph, Mary, and the young child lived. They bowed down before Jesus and worshiped him. They gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

God warned these men that they were not to return to Herod, so they avoided Jerusalem and traveled home a different way. That night, an angel appeared to Joseph. "Get up! Herod will send soldiers to kill the child. Go to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to return." So Joseph got up in the night and took his family to Egypt.

Herod was angry when he realized the men from the east had disobeyed him. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem and had all the young boys killed – those under the age of two.

In time, Herod died, and the angel told Joseph it was safe to return to Israel. Still, he decided to move his family to Nazareth instead of going back to Bethlehem.

Jesus grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

177 Twelve Years Old

Luke 2:40-52

When Jesus was twelve, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When it was time to return home, Jesus stayed behind at the temple, without his parents knowing. They traveled a whole day, thinking he was among the crowd.

That evening they realized he was missing. They went back to Jerusalem and searched for him for three days. Finally they found him in the court of the temple, sitting among the teachers. He was listening to them and asking questions. Everyone who heard him were amazed at

Beauty from Ashes

his understanding and his ability to answer questions.

His mother ran up and said, "Son, how could you do this to us? We've been searching for you."

He said, "Surely you knew I'd be here in my Father's house – doing his business." They didn't understand what he was talking about.

Jesus went back to Nazareth, and lived in submission to his parents. He grew, and matured, and was respected by all that knew him. God's blessing was on his life.

178 Baptism and Temptation

*Matt 3:1-17, Matt 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-13,
Luke 3:21-22, Luke 4:1-13, John 1:19-34*

When John became a man, God led him into the wilderness. He wore clothes made of camels' hair, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He preached that people should repent from their sins and turn from their wicked acts. He told them, "Don't rely on being children of Abraham. God can make children of Abraham from rocks." He then baptized those who wanted to live for God.

Some religious leaders asked him, "Are you the Messiah?"

He said, "No, I'm not the Christ. I was sent to prepare the way for him. He'll come after me. I'm not even worthy to untie his shoes."

The next day, John was baptizing at the Jordan River, when he saw Jesus coming toward him. John shouted to the crowd, "Behold, here comes the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! This is the Son of God."

Jesus walked into the water and asked John to baptize him. John said, "No, I should be baptized by you."

Jesus said, "Allow this to be. It's God's will."

So John baptized Jesus in front of all the people. When he came up out of the water, the sky suddenly opened and the Spirit of God, like a dove, came down on him. Then a voice said, "You're my Son! I'm pleased with you."

After the baptism, the Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

He fasted for forty days and forty nights. After that, hunger gripped his entire body.

Suddenly the tempter was by his side. "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread so you can have something to eat."

Jesus said, "God's word says 'Man is not to live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of mouth of God.' "

The devil took him to Jerusalem – onto the highest point of the temple wall. Jesus looked down at the rocks far below. The devil said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down off of this wall. God's word says there are angels taking care of you. They'll keep you from hitting those rocks below. You won't even stub a toe on them."

Jesus said, "Yes, but God's word also says, 'You're not to tempt God and put him to the test!'"

The devil then took Jesus to a very high mountain. He caused the kingdoms of the earth in all their glory, to appear before them. He turned to Jesus and said, "I'll give you everything you see. All you have to do is bow down and worship me."

Jesus turned and looked at him. "Leave me Satan! God's word says, 'He's the only one to be worshiped. God is the only one to be served.'"

With that, the devil left him. Soon angels came to Jesus and cared for his needs.

Beauty from Ashes

179 Water to Wine

John 1:35-51, John 2:1-11

One day, John saw Jesus walking past. He turned to his own disciples and said, "Look, there's the Lamb of God." Two of John's disciples immediately started following Jesus and spent the entire day with him. One of them was a man named Andrew. He went to his brother and said, "Simon, we have found the Messiah!"

His brother was curious, so he went to see for himself. As soon as Jesus saw him, he said, "Your name is Simon, but from now on you'll be known as Peter."

The next day, Jesus found a man by the name of Phillip, and said to him, "Follow me!"

Phillip went and found his friend Nathanael. "We've found the one that Moses and all the prophets talked about. His name is Jesus, who is from Nazareth."

Nathanael was surprised. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

"Come and see for yourself."

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said, "Here comes a true Israelite – an honest man – one who has no pretense."

Again Nathanael was surprised. "How do you know me?"

"Ah, I saw you before Phillip talked to you – when you were still under the fig tree."

For the third time, Nathanael was surprised. Then he said, "You are the Son of God, the true King of Israel."

Jesus said. "Nathanael, you believe because I said I saw you under the fig tree. You're going to

Beauty from Ashes

see greater things than this!"

It was during this time that Jesus and his disciples were invited to join his mother and attend a wedding at Cana. Later in the day, Mary came to Jesus and said, "They've run out of wine."

He looked at her and said, "Why are you bringing this situation to me? You know it isn't my time yet."

She turned to the servants. "Do whatever he tells you to do."

They looked at him waiting for his instructions. He saw six large stone water pots standing nearby. Each could hold about 20 gallons of water.

He said to the servants, "Fill those pots with water."

They quickly filled all six pots full of water, right to the brim. Once that was done, they looked at Jesus. He said, "Now draw some out and take it to the manager of the feast."

The servants did as they were told. The manager of the feast didn't know where this wine had come from, so he tasted it. To his surprise, it was better than any they had served that day! He went to the bridegroom and said, "Where have you been hiding this? Usually the best wine is served at the beginning of the feast. Then, as the day goes by, the lesser quality is served. You have saved the best until now."

This was the first miracle that Jesus performed.

180 The New Birth

*John 2:13-23, John 3: 1-21,
Numbers 21:4-9*

Jesus took his disciples to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. When he got there, he saw people in the temple exchanging foreign money and selling animals for sacrifice.

He made a whip out of strips of leather and drove the animals out of the temple. He also turned over the money tables, scattering coins everywhere. He said to the owners of the doves, "Take these things out of here! You've made my Father's house into a market place."

Some of the leaders challenged him and said, "Who gave you the authority to do this? Give us a sign."

He said, "Tear down this temple and I'll build it again in three days." They were amazed! They didn't realize he was talking about his own body.

Others gathered around Jesus during the Passover and listened to his teaching. They believed in him when they saw his miracles.

Nicodemus was a Jewish ruler and a Pharisee. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Teacher, we know you're from God because we see your miracles."

Jesus got right to the point, "Listen to me carefully. Unless a person is born again, he can't see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was shocked. "That's impossible! How can a man get back in his mother's womb and be born a second time?"

Jesus explained, "To get to heaven, a person

Beauty from Ashes

has to experience physical birth and spiritual birth. If you're only born once, you'll focus on the things of this earth. Those who are born spiritually, focus on the things of the Spirit. You must be born a second time.

"Don't be so amazed. There are many things you can't see with your eyes. You hear and feel the wind, but you can't see it. So it is with the Spirit of God."

Nicodemus shook his head, "I just don't understand."

Jesus sat back and looked at him. "You are a teacher of Israel, and you don't understand these things?"

In the wilderness, the people of Israel complained against God. He sent snakes among them, and many died. He then told Moses to make a brass snake and put it on a pole. Those who looked at it were healed. Others died because they refused to look.

So it'll be with the Son of Man. He'll be lifted up, and those who believe on him will have eternal life.

God loved the world so much that he sent his Son to save the world and bring eternal life to those who believe.

Let me explain it carefully so you can understand. If you believe on the Son of God, you will have eternal life. If you don't believe on him, you must suffer God's judgment."

181 Woman at the Well

Beauty from Ashes

John 4:1-42

One time Jesus took his disciples through Samaria as he traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee. This was unusual since Jews avoided any contact with Samaritans.

Around noon, they came to a well near one of the Samaritan villages. Jesus was tired, so he sat down while his disciples went into the town to buy food.

A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Please give me some water to drink."

The woman was surprised. "Jews usually don't talk to Samaritans. So, why did you ask me for a drink, since I'm a Samaritan woman?"

Jesus said, "If you knew who I am, you would ask me to give you living water."

She said, "Sir, the well is deep, and you have no bucket. How can you get 'living water'? Are you greater than Jacob who dug this well?"

Jesus said, "Those who drink from this well will get thirsty again. But those who drink my water will have a living well inside them that continually springs up to eternal life."

The woman was amazed. "Oh please, give me this water so I'll never get thirsty again. Then I won't have to come back to this well."

"Go get your husband and bring him here."

She looked away. "I don't have a husband."

"I know you don't. You've had five husbands, and the one you are living with now is not your husband."

Her eyes snapped back. "Uh, sir, I can tell you're a prophet. Please settle this age-old argument. We Samaritans say that this mountain is the place to worship God. The Jews say a person has to go to Jerusalem to

worship. Who's right?"

"Woman, listen carefully. The time has now come when God is looking for those who will worship him in spirit and truth."

She was almost speechless! "I know that some day the Messiah is coming, and he'll explain all these things."

Jesus smiled. "The person speaking to you is the Messiah."

The woman left her water jug, and rushed back to the village just as the disciples were returning with the food. They were amazed that Jesus had been talking with her, but no one said anything about it.

When the woman got to the town, she told everyone about the man she had met at the well. "Come and see someone who told me everything I've ever done in my life. Surely he's the Christ." The men were curious, so they went out to see what she was talking about.

Meanwhile, the disciples were trying to get Jesus to eat the food they had brought from town. He said, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

They looked at one another. "Did someone bring him something to eat?"

Jesus shook his head. "No, my food is to do the will of God."

"You think we still have four months until harvest." He pointed to the men coming out from the town. "Look over there. It's time to harvest right now."

The men came and talked with Jesus, and finally asked him to stay with them for a while. He stayed for two days, and many believed on him as their Lord and Savior.

182 Rejected in Nazareth

*Matthew 4:13-17, Matthew 13:54-58,
Luke 4:14-32, John 4:43-54*

A royal official from Capernaum went to see Jesus. He said, "My son is sick and about to die. Please come to Capernaum and heal him."

Jesus tested him by saying, "You're like everyone else. You won't believe if you don't see miracles."

The man pleaded, "Sir, please come and heal my son. He'll die if you don't come quickly."

Jesus had compassion on him and said, "Go in peace. Your son will live."

The father looked at Jesus, and suddenly believed him. On his way home, his servants met him and said, "Your son lives!"

The official asked them, "What time did he get better?"

They said, "The fever left him about one in the afternoon."

The father knew it was the exact hour Jesus said his son was healed. The man's entire family put their trust in Jesus as the Christ.

After that Jesus went to Nazareth (where he had grown up as a child). He went to the synagogue as he normally did. He stood, and the book of Isaiah was handed to him. He read:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor;
to heal the brokenhearted,
to announce pardon to prisoners,
to recover sight to the blind,
to give liberty to the oppressed,
to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."*

Beauty from Ashes

Once he had read this, he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant. He then sat down. Everyone in the synagogue looked at him. Finally he said, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled."

Everyone was amazed. They said, "Isn't this Joseph's son who grew up in our town?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "I know what you are thinking. You're saying, 'We heard about his miracles in other cities. We want to see some here.'"

"Oh, the saying is true, 'A prophet will be honored, except in his own town.' In the great famine during the time of Elijah, there were many widows in Israel, but God provided for a Gentile widow. During the time of Elisha, there were many people in Israel with the disease of leprosy, but God healed a Gentile from Syria."

The people in the synagogue were furious. They grabbed him and led him out of the city. They headed to the place where they executed people by throwing them off a cliff. When they got there, they realized he wasn't with them. He had turned, walked through the crowd, and left.

After that time, Jesus no longer lived in Nazareth, but settled in Capernaum.

183 Fishing for People

*Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 1:22-38,
Luke 4:31-44, Luke 5:1-11*

Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum. A demon-possessed man yelled at him, "Go away! Leave me alone! I know who you are! You're the Holy One of God."

Jesus said, "Don't talk! Come out of him."

The demon threw the man onto the floor.

He screamed as the demon left his body. The crowd was shocked. They had never seen such authority and power.

Afterwards, Jesus went to the home of Peter and Andrew. Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. The family asked Jesus to heal her. So he touched her hand and said to the fever, "Leave this woman!"

Taking her hand he said, "Please, get up." Immediately the fever left her and she got up. She was totally recovered, so she started serving the guests in her house.

By evening, almost the entire town was at the house. Jesus taught the people, healed the sick, and cast out demons.

The next morning, he got up before sunrise and went to a place where he could be alone. There he prayed and talked to his Father.

When the people of the town woke up, they started searching for Jesus, and finally found him. He told them he was going to visit the other towns in the area. They begged him to stay with them, but he said, "No, I need to preach the kingdom of God in other cities as well." He then traveled throughout Galilee, teaching the people,

healing the sick and casting out demons.

One day he went to the shores of the Sea of Galilee to teach the people. They crowded around him to hear the word of God.

There were two fishing boats on the shore, and the fishermen were washing their nets nearby. Jesus got into the boat that was owned by Simon Peter, and asked him to push off a little from shore. Once this was done, he sat down and taught the people.

After he finished, he said to Peter, "Go into deeper water and let out the nets."

Peter said, "Lord, we fished all night and didn't caught anything. Still, if that's what you want, I'll cast out a net."

He then took the boat into deeper water. When he cast out his net, he immediately caught a large school of fish – so many fish that the net started to rip apart. Peter yelled to his partners, "James, John!" They rushed out and helped gather in the fish. They filled both boats ... until they were in danger of sinking.

Peter was totally overcome by this miracle. He fell to his knees and said to Jesus, "Go away! I'm a sinful man!"

Jesus said, "Simon, don't be afraid. In the past you caught fish. From now on, you'll catch people."

The fishermen brought their boats to shore, where they left everything and followed Jesus.

Beauty from Ashes

184 Sermon on the Mount

Beauty from Ashes

Matt 5 – 7 & Luke 6:37-42

Jesus went up a mountain to teach his followers. He explained what it meant to be a disciple of Messiah and how to live a life that is pleasing to God. He started with:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

Blessed are those who mourn, because they'll be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, because they'll inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they'll be filled.

Blessed are those who give mercy to others, because mercy shall be given to them.

Blessed are the pure in heart, because they'll see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, because they'll be known as the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you because of Me.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because great is your reward in heaven. That's how they treated the prophets who came before you.

If you do these things, you'll be the salt of the earth. You'll be the light of the world. Many will see it and glorify God.

Don't think that I've come to do away with the Law of God – just the opposite! My disciples are to live by a higher standard.

For example, the Law says you're not to murder. You're to live by a higher standard. You're not to hate anyone. When you hate a person, it's as bad as killing them.

The Law says you're not to commit adultery. You're to live by a higher standard. You're not to have lust in your heart. Uncontrolled thinking is the basis for misery, unfaithfulness, and divorce.

The Law makes provision for equal justice – 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' You're to live at a higher standard. Love those who

mistreat you and take advantage of you. If someone does something bad to you, do something good for them.

The disciples became uneasy as they heard about this "higher standard." It was a different way of living. It didn't seem possible. Jesus continued by saying:

There are three big areas that will keep you from serving God – pride, money and worries.

Watch out for pride in your spiritual life. God wants you to give to the poor, but not as a display of your generosity. He wants you to pray, but not for the purpose of impressing others. God wants you to fast, but not as a show for others to enjoy. He wants you to do these things privately. They aren't hid from God, and he will reward you.

Money is another area that will keep you from serving God. Money and God are both masters that demand your total dedication. You can't serve them both. Dedicate yourself to God and use money to glorify Him. If you don't, you'll be controlled by money and what it can buy you. Focus your life on heavenly treasure.

Watch out for common worries, like food and clothes. These things are not to fill your lives with fear. Keep your eyes on God, and accept what He gives you. Look around you. He takes care of the birds and flowers. Don't you think He cares more for you? He knows what you need. Focus on him, and let him worry about you.

The entire crowd became restless at such radical teaching, but they once again grew quiet when Jesus continued. He talked about their attitude toward others. He said:

Don't set yourselves up as a judge of why other people do what they do. Remember. You'll be judged by the same standards you set for others.

Judging others is as silly as a man with a piece of lumber sticking out of his eye. He ignores it because he is focused on the speck of

Continued on next page

sawdust in someone else's eye. It's as silly as a blind man trying to help another blind person down the street. Both will fall into a ditch.

Instead of judging others, give to them. No, not just a little. Give to them in a big way. It's like a shopkeeper who says, 'For a certain price, you can have one bucket full.' As you fill that bucket, you shake it and press it down so you can get more in. Then you use your body to fill the bucket above the rim. That is how you're to give to others! And if you do, that is how it will be given to you!

The crowd was quiet as they thought about what they were hearing. Jesus held out his hand to them and said:

If you're going to be my disciples, do what I say. There are two roads before you. One is wide and well traveled. It's the natural way, and most

people use it. You're to go a different way. It's narrow, and less traveled. It's your choice.

It's like two men who decided to build a house. The first built upon a solid foundational rock. The other man built his house on sand. When the houses were done, they looked very much alike. But then the storms came and beat on both houses. The house built on the rock stood firm, while the other one fell.

Build your life upon the firm foundation of what I'm teaching you. If you do, you'll be strong when the storms of life blow against you. Ignore what I say, and your life will crumble.

When Jesus was done teaching the people, they were amazed. They realized that he taught like one with great authority.

185 Forgiving Sins

Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus went into a house to teach. As soon as word got around, the house filled up with people. Among them were Pharisees and teachers of the Law. The crowd went out through the doorway, with people standing outside.

Four men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a cot. They quickly realized they had no way of getting close to Jesus. So they carried the man and his cot up the outside stairs onto the roof. There, they made an opening by removing the tiles. When it was big enough, they lowered the man into the middle of the crowd and in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw the faith of the four men, he turned to the man on the cot, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The religious rulers were shocked when they heard this. They thought, "How dare he say that! This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins."

Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said, "Why are you so troubled? It would've been easy for me to say, 'Get up and walk.' But you needed to know that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins."

He then said to the man, "Get up! Pick up

Beauty from Ashes

your cot, and go home."

Immediately the man got up, picked up his cot, and walked out in front of everyone. People were amazed and glorified God. They said, "We've never seen anything like this before."

After that, Jesus left the house and walked toward the seashore. Along the way, he saw a tax collector named Matthew sitting at a tax booth. The Jewish people hated tax collectors and said they were traitors to Israel.

Jesus stopped and said to him, "Matthew, follow me." Immediately, the man left everything and followed Jesus.

Soon afterwards, he hosted a reception for Jesus in his house. He invited many other tax collectors. They came as well as other people of low reputation.

The religious leaders were appalled! They said to his disciples, "Why is your Master eating with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus heard this, so he answered them. "Doctors are for sick people, not for those who are well. I haven't come to work with people who think they are righteous. I've come to bring repentance to sinners."

186 Calling the Twelve

Matt 10: 1-4, 16, 28-32, 37-39;

Matt 12:9-15; Mark 3:14-19;

Luke 6:6-16

One evening, Jesus left the crowd and went up a mountain. He wanted to be alone so he could talk with the Father. He prayed the entire night.

At daybreak, he came down and called a select group of disciples to himself. These were to stay with him so he could teach them and prepare them to preach. He gave them power to heal the sick and cast out demons.

He selected Simon, who was renamed Peter, and his brother Andrew.

The next two were James and his brother John, who were called “sons of thunder.”

There was Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas, who was a twin, and Matthew, who had been a tax collector.

Within this group was another James, so history calls him “James the Less.”

Thaddaeus was also called Judas, but he wasn’t the one who betrayed Jesus.

There was another Simon, and he was known as “the Zealot”.

Finally there was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

He said to these men, “I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as wise as serpents, yet harmless as doves.

People will hate you just like they hate me. But don’t be afraid. The Father is watching over you. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground, and you’re more valuable than a sparrow. He even knows how many hairs are on your head.

Members of your family will want you to be loyal to them instead of me. If you choose their

Beauty from Ashes

approval, you’re not worthy of me. If you follow me, you’re to take up your cross and bear my shame.”

If you find a life without me, you’ll lose it, and if you lose your life because of me, you’ll find it.”

Jesus went to a synagogue to teach. In the crowd there was a man with a crippled hand. Some of the religious leaders saw this as their opportunity to catch Jesus breaking God’s Law. The Law said a person wasn’t to work on the Sabbath, and they considered it work when Jesus healed someone. So they asked him, “Is it legal to heal on the Sabbath?”

Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he turned to the man with a crippled hand. “Get up and stand here.” So the man got up and stood before them all.

Jesus then said to his accusers, “I have a question for you. Is it legal to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? Is it better to save life or destroy it?” They didn’t answer.

“If you had a sheep who fell into a pit on the Sabbath, you wouldn’t hesitate to pull him out. People are better than a sheep! Therefore I’ll answer your question. Yes, it’s absolutely legal to do good on the Sabbath.”

He then turned to the crippled man. “Stretch out your hand!”

The man stretched out his hand, and when he did, it was healed and as strong as his other one.

This infuriated the religious rulers, and they immediately started discussing how they could kill Jesus.

187 A Roman and a Funeral

Luke 7:1-17

A Roman officer lived in Capernaum. He was a good man and did wonderful things for the people of Israel. One day his servant got sick and was about to die. He asked some of the Jewish leaders if they would go talk to Jesus on his behalf. He said, "Beg him to come heal my servant."

They went to Jesus and said, "He is a good man and loves our nation. He has even built a synagogue for us." Jesus agreed to go with them to the man's house.

As they got near, the Roman officer sent friends to Jesus with this message. "Please, I'm not worthy to have you come into my house. I understand authority. When I say things, others have to obey. So I know if you said the word, my servant will be healed."

Jesus was amazed and said, "I haven't seen this kind of faith in all of Israel!" The friends of the man went back to his house, and found that the servant was healed.

Beauty from Ashes

Jesus took his disciples to another town, and a large crowd followed them. As they approached the gates, they saw a funeral procession. It was for a young man who was the only son of a woman who had also lost her husband.

Jesus saw her desperate situation and went to her. He said, "Don't cry."

He then walked over to the open coffin and put his hand on it. Immediately the pallbearers stopped. Jesus said, "Young man, listen to me. Get up!"

The man opened his eyes and then sat up. He looked around and asked what was happening. Jesus helped him down and took him to his mother.

The crowd was stunned, and then afraid. Finally, they started to praise God. The news of this went throughout all of Israel, and into the surrounding countries.

188 Forgiven and Grateful

Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus into his house for a meal. People ate their meals while leaning on a cushion next to the table, with their feet behind them.

While they were eating, a woman came who was known to be a great sinner. She stood behind Jesus and started to cry. She then knelt down and washed his feet with her tears. She let down her hair and used it to dry his feet. She then kissed them and anointed them with expensive oil.

Simon thought to himself, "Well, this proves that Jesus isn't a prophet. If he were, he'd know what kind of woman this is and he wouldn't let her touch him."

Jesus knew what he was thinking. He said, "Simon, I have a question for you. Two men owed a debt to the same banker. One owed \$2,500, while the other owed \$25,000. Both were unable to pay it back, which meant they would be sold into slavery. Instead, the banker decided to forgive their debts and set them free. Which of

Beauty from Ashes

these men will be the most grateful and the loyal to the banker?"

Simon was quick to answer. "Of course, the one who owed \$25,000."

Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. I came into your house and you didn't provide me water to wash my feet. Look at this woman. She didn't say a word, but simply washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair."

"You didn't welcome me with a kiss. But this woman hasn't stopped kissing my feet."

"You didn't offer me oil to freshen up. Look, she has anointed my feet with a generous amount of expensive oil."

"Why is she doing this? It's because her sins are many, and she's grateful to be forgiven. Those who feel they've been good all their lives don't experience such deep gratitude."

He turned to the woman. "Your sins are forgiven." This shocked those sitting around the table, but Jesus continued on. "Go in peace. Your faith has saved you."

189 Four Soils

Mark 4:1-32 Matt 13:1-23, 31-32

Jesus told the crowds a story about a farmer who went out to plant his field. He threw the seeds around him as he walked along.

Some seed fell upon the path. It lay on top of the hard soil and never sprouted, so birds came and ate it. Some seed fell among the rocks, where there was very little soil. It sprouted, but didn't have strong roots. So it shriveled up because of the hot sun.

Some of the seed fell in a patch of weeds. It sprouted, but the weeds used up all the moisture and sunlight. The new sprouts couldn't mature and bear fruit.

But some of the seed fell on good soil that was made ready for it. There, it was cared for, nourished, and grew to become mature plants. The harvest was great!

Jesus didn't explain the meaning of this parable to the crowd, so the disciples asked, "What does it mean?"

Jesus said, "The seed is the Word of God. The various soils are how people receive it. Some people receive the Word of God like the seed that fell on the path. They hear it, but they don't

Beauty from Ashes

understand it – and like the birds – the Devil comes and takes the seed away from them so that they won't believe.

Some receive the Word like the seed that fell among the rocks. They gladly receive it, but don't take the time to establish roots. They don't endure because of trials and persecutions.

Some people receive the Word like the seed that fell in the weed patch. They receive it, but their priorities keep them from maturing and producing a harvest. Worries, money, and pleasure capture all their time and attention.

But some people receive the Word of God like the seed that fell upon good ground. They hear the Word with an open heart, and understand it. Therefore, they mature and the harvest is great.

Jesus went on to say, "The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a mustard seed. A man saw it was a very small seed. Still, he planted it in the ground to see what would happen. That small seed produced a tree. It had branches that spread out, so that birds came and made their nests there."

190 Teaching with Stories

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-50

Large crowds gathered around Jesus, and he taught them with stories. One time he told them about a farmer who planted wheat in his field. After a long day, he returned home and went to bed.

During the night, a man who hated him went into the fields and planted weeds. Those particular weeds look exactly like wheat while they're growing. So at first, no one knew what had happened. It became obvious when the plants began to mature. The farmhands said, "What should we do? Should we go into the fields and pull up the weeds?"

The farmer said, "No, if you do that, you'll destroy the wheat. Let's wait until harvest."

When harvest came, the farmer sent his workers into the field. They gathered the wheat and put it into barns. They then pulled up the weeds, tied them in bundles, and burned them.

The disciples came to Jesus and asked what this meant. He said, "The farmer is the Son of Man, the field is this world, and the wheat is the children of God. The enemy is the Devil and the weeds are those who follow him.

"At the end of time, the Son of Man will send his angels to gather in the children of God. After that, they will gather in the wicked, and throw them in a blazing furnace."

Jesus told a story about a wealthy man who decided to invite his friends to a large banquet. They agreed, so he and his staff made

Beauty from Ashes

all the preparations. When the day arrived and everything was ready, he send his servants to tell his guest, "Come, everything is now ready for you."

Without exception, his guest gave excuses on why they couldn't come. One said, "I just bought a field and I have to go look it over. Please have me excused." Another said, "I just bought five yoke of oxen, and I need to try them out." Yet another said, "There is no way I can come. I just got married."

The host of the banquet was furious when he heard all of this. He said to his servants, "Quick, go throughout the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, and the blind."

After doing this, the servants said, "There is still room."

The master said, "Go to every street and alleyway and insist that more come in. I want the banquet to be absolutely full. But understand this. None of those original guest can have anything we prepared."

Jesus told another story about a traveler who walked through a field. He suddenly saw a valuable treasure! He knew he couldn't take it off the property. So he sold everything he had and bought the field.

Jesus continued to tell the people stories. In fact, he didn't say anything to the crowds without using stories.

191 Calming Two Storms

Beauty from Ashes

*Mark 4:35 – 5:20 & Matthew 8:23-33 &
Luke 8:22-39*

Jesus taught the crowd all day. In the evening, he said to his disciples, “Let’s go to the other side of the lake.” So they took several boats, and started on their journey to the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee.

Being tired, Jesus went to the back of the boat and lay on a large cushion. Soon he fell into a sound sleep. During the night, a fierce storm hit the lake. Large waves crashed over the boat and threatened to capsize it. Jesus slept through it all.

The disciples woke him up and said, “Master, wake up. Don’t you care that we are about to die?”

Jesus woke up and faced the storm. He said, “Stop! Be still!” Immediately the wind stopped and the sea became calm.

He then turned to the disciples and said, “Why did you fear? Where’s your faith?” Then he lay down and went back to sleep.

The men looked at the sky and the calm sea. They said, “What kind of man is this, that even the wind and sea obey his voice!”

Their boat came to shore near a place where a wild man lived in the tombs. No one was able to control him. Many times they tried to put chains on him, but he easily snapped them off. He roamed the hills naked, and lived in tombs. He cried and yelled, and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus and his disciples get out of their boat, he ran and knelt down before him. He shouted, “I know who you are. You’re Jesus,

the Son of the Most High God! Leave me alone. Don’t torture me.”

Jesus said, “What’s your name?”

“We’re called Legion because we’re many. Please, don’t send us into the abyss. Look, there are pigs over on that hill. Send us there.”

Jesus looked at the pigs, and said, “Yes, you may go there.”

With that, the demons left the man and entered the pigs. All 2,000 of them went wild and rushed down the hill and off the steep bank. They plunged into the sea and were drowned.

The men who were tending the pigs ran into the town and told the people what happened. A crowd came out to see for themselves. When they got to Jesus, they saw the man who had been demon possessed. He was sitting quietly, fully clothed, and listening to Jesus.

Again, the men told what happened. Everyone was afraid, so they asked Jesus to leave.

As he got into the boat, the man who was healed said, “Please, may I go with you?” Jesus turned to him and said, “Go back to your people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you. Tell them about God’s mercy on your life.”

So Jesus and his disciples left the shore and returned to the Jewish side of the lake. The man went to his hometown and started telling everyone what Jesus had done for him. The people who heard this were amazed.

192 Twelve Years

Beauty from Ashes

*Mark 5:21-43 & Matthew 9:18-26 &
Luke 8:40-56*

Jesus and his disciples left the Gentile side of the lake, and went back to the Jewish side. A large crowd was waiting for him.

A man named Jairus ran up and fell down before Jesus. He was a ruler of the synagogue. He said, "My daughter is dying! She's only twelve years old. I beg you, please come and heal her."

Jesus agreed, so he and his disciples followed Jairus. A large crowd also followed.

As they walked down the road, they passed the home of a certain woman. She had suffered a bleeding disorder for twelve years. Many doctors tried to help her, but her condition only got worse. This continued until her money was gone.

When she heard that Jesus was passing by, she thought, "I'd be healed if I could get close enough to touch the edge of his clothes. No one would need to know anything about it."

So she made her way through the crowd and reached out and touched the edge of his clothes. Instantly she knew she had been healed. Jesus felt the power go out from his body, so he stopped and said, "Who touched me?"

Peter looked at the crowd and said, "What do you mean who touched you? Look at all the people around you."

Jesus ignored him and continued to look for the person who had touched him. When the

woman realized she couldn't hide what she had done, she knelt down before him, trembling.

Jesus said to her, "Don't be afraid. Your faith has healed you. Go back home. That disease won't return."

As they talked, some people came and said to Jairus, "You don't need to bother the Master any longer. Your daughter has died."

Jesus heard them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just believe in me." They continued on to his house.

When they got there, they saw that the mourners had already arrived. It was their job to play flutes and cry very loud. Jesus said, "Why are you making all this noise? The girl is only asleep."

They laughed at him because they knew she was dead. So he had them put out of the house. He then took Jairus and his wife, as well as Peter, James, and John, and went to where the girl was lying. He reached out and took her hand. "Child, get up."

Instantly, the girl opened her eyes and got up. The parents watched in amazement. Finally Jesus said, "Get her something to eat."

Then he told them, "Don't tell anyone about this." Still, the news of this event spread throughout the entire area.

193 Pool of Bethesda

John 5

Jesus went to Jerusalem for a Jewish festival. There was a pool near the Sheep Gate called Bethesda. Local people believed that occasionally an angel would stir the waters of the pool. They felt a sick person would be healed if he or she were the first to get into the water after it was stirred. Therefore a large group stayed near the pool, waiting for the angel.

Jesus went there and saw a man who had been sick for 38 years. The Lord said, "Do you want to be healed?"

The man said, "Yes, but when I see the stirring of the waters, someone always gets into the pool before me."

Jesus said, "Stand up! Pick up your bedroll and walk." Immediately the man was healed and got up. Jesus slipped away into the crowd as the man was picking up his bedroll.

Some of the Jewish leaders saw the man carrying his bedroll. They said, "How dare you! This is the Sabbath. It's not legal to carry bedrolls on the Sabbath."

The man said, "But...but...a man healed me and then told me to pick up my bedroll and go home."

"Who told you to do this work on a Sabbath?"

"I don't know. He healed me and then disappeared into the crowd."

Later, Jesus saw this man in the Temple. The Lord said, "You've been healed, but you must stop sinning. If you don't, something worse will happen to you." The man now knew who had healed him. So he rushed to the Jewish leaders

Beauty from Ashes

and told them that it was Jesus.

Hearing this made them more determine to end the influence Jesus had with the people. They felt his actions on the Sabbath were totally unacceptable.

Jesus said to them, "My Father works on the Sabbath, so I will too."

Hearing this, the leaders started talking about killing him. They said, "He breaks the rules about the Sabbath. Now he calls God his father. He thinks he's equal with God!"

Jesus said, "The Son only does what the Father tells him to do. The Father loves the Son, and gives him power so he can give life to anyone he wants. The Father has made the Son the judge of people. If you don't honor the Son, you're not honoring the Father who sent him.

"I'll give eternal life to those who hear me and believe on Him who sent me. Those who believe will not be judged, but have passed from death into life.

"How do you know if I'm telling you the true? I've told you but that's not good enough because I'm talking about myself. You heard John the Baptist talk about me, but you didn't believe him. The Father spoke about me, but you closed your ears to him. My miracles show that I'm telling the truth, but you don't accept them as proof.

"You study the Scriptures constantly. They talk about me, but you turn your eyes away from those Scriptures. The truth is, you're just not willing to come to me and have life."

194 Beheading of John the Baptist

Mark 6:12-29, Luke 9:6-9

To make his wife happy, King Herod had John the Baptist arrested. John had preached against their marriage, saying, "It is a sin to marry your brother's wife."

She wanted him dead! But Herod knew that John was a righteous man. The king also feared the people, knowing they thought he was a prophet. Besides, he enjoyed hearing John preach. So, he decided to keep the prophet in prison, instead of killing him.

Herod hosted a big banquet to celebrate his birthday. He invited a large crowd of important people. During the party, he sent for his wife's daughter, and had her dance for the crowd. Herod was pleased with her performance. So he said to the girl, "Ask me for something and I'll give it to you."

He could tell that this impressed the people at his banquet, so he added, "Ask me anything. I swear I'll give it to you, up to half my kingdom."

The daughter knew she should ask advice about this. So, she talked to her mother. "What

Beauty from Ashes

should I ask for?"

This was exactly what her mother wanted. "Ask for the head of John the Baptist."

The girl rushed back to the party and said, "I want the head of John the Baptist on a platter. And I want it now."

Herod was shocked. Still, he had made his promise in front of his guests. So, he told the guard to go and behead John, and give the head to the girl.

The guard did as he was told. He went to the prison and beheaded John. He then brought the head back and gave it to the young woman on a platter. She took it to her mother.

John's disciples went to the prison and got his body. After they buried it, they went and told Jesus.

Some time later, Herod heard about the things Jesus was doing. It struck him with conviction. He said, "I killed John, and now he's risen from the dead. He has come back with great powers."

From that day on, Herod wanted to meet and talk with Jesus.

195 A Meal and A Walk

John 6:1-10, Matthew 14:14-33

Jesus went up a mountain where he taught his disciples. A large crowd went with them so they could hear him teach.

Soon it became apparent that they were hungry, and there was no food. Jesus knew what he was going to do, but still he asked Philip, "Where can we get food for these people?"

"Lord, even eight months' salary couldn't buy enough food for all these people." The other disciples said, "Send them into the villages so they can buy food for themselves."

Jesus said, "No, I want you to feed them."

"Lord, we have enough money to feed such a large crowd."

Jesus said, "Go and see how much food we have."

Andrew came back with a young boy. "Lord, this lad has five barley loaves and two small fish. But how can that help us with such a large crowd?"

Jesus said, "Give them to me."

He took the bread and fish, and blessed them. He then divided them among the disciples and said, "Give this to the people and tell them they can have as much as they want."

They served the food to the people, who ate until they were satisfied. There were over 5,000 people there. Then Jesus said, "Go and pick up the remains." When they did, they had twelve baskets full of bread and fish.

The people said, "This is the one the

Beauty from Ashes

Scripture talks about – 'the great prophet like Moses.' " They started talking among themselves about making him king.

Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he sent them away and told his disciples to go back by way of the sea. And he went up the mountain and prayed.

While Jesus was praying, a storm moved over the sea. Huge waves pushed the ship out toward the middle. The men rowed hard to get back to shore, but the wind was too strong for them.

At three o'clock in the morning, Jesus walked across the sea on top of the water. The men looked out and saw someone walking among the waves. They screamed because they thought it was a spirit.

Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. It's me."

Peter said, "Lord if it's you, ask me to come to you."

"Come."

So Peter got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. Suddenly he looked at the waves and the wind. He became afraid, and started to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me."

The Lord reached out and grabbed him. He said, "Oh Peter, where's your faith?"

The two of them walked back, and got into the boat. Suddenly the storm stopped. The disciples knelt down and worshiped Jesus. They said, "It is true. You are the Son of God."

196 Bread of Life

*John 6:22-71 & Matthew 15:21-28 &
Mark 7:24-30*

The day after Jesus fed the 5,000, the people found him on the other shore and knew that he had arrived by a particular boat. They also knew that same boat had left the day before without him. They said, “How did you get there?”

Jesus ignored their question and got right to the real issue. He said, “You’re here because you filled your stomachs with the bread I gave you. You should be looking for living bread that gives you eternal life.”

They said, “What does God require of us?”

Jesus said, “This is what God requires.

Believe on the One He has sent you.”

They said, “Give us a sign so we can believe. You could feed us from now on. That would be like Moses who gave us manna in the wilderness.”

He said, “Your fathers got manna in the wilderness, but eventually died. I am the Bread of Life that God sent down from heaven. The bread I offer is my body, and the drink I give is my blood. My flesh and my blood will bring you eternal life.”

The people were shocked! They said to one another, “How can this man say he came down from God? We know his parents. And how can he give his flesh for us to eat, and his blood for us to drink?”

From that day, many of his listeners stopped following him. They said, “This is too hard to believe.”

Jesus turned to the twelve and said, “Do you

Beauty from Ashes

want to leave as well?”

Peter said, “Lord, where can we go? You’re the one who gives us eternal life. We’ve seen, and now believe. You are the Holy One of God.”

Jesus said, “I’ve chosen you twelve, yet one of you will turn against me.”

After that, Jesus took his disciples to Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile area north of Israel. While he was there, a Gentile woman came and begged him. “Son of David, Have mercy on me. A demon has taken control of my daughter and tortures her constantly.”

Jesus totally ignored her and didn’t say a word. She kept begging until his disciples said, “Lord, send her away. Her crying is starting to annoy us.”

Jesus looked at her and said, “God sent me to help His lost sheep, the people of Israel.”

With that, she knelt down in front of him and said, “Lord, help me.”

He said, “It’s not right to take the food that belongs to the children and feed it to wild dogs.”

She said, “Yes, Lord, that’s true. But the puppy dogs are allowed to sit under the table and eat the crumbs that fall down to them.”

He said, “Woman, great is your faith! You can go home now. The demon has left your daughter.”

She got up and went home. There she found her daughter lying on her bed. The demon was gone.

197 Feeding 4,000

*Matthew 15:29-16:16 & Mark 8:1-21,
27-30*

Jesus left the region of Tyre and Sidon and went to the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. As he taught the people, a great crowd brought those with various physical problems. They brought the lame, the blind, the crippled, and those with many diseases. Jesus healed them all, and the crowd was amazed.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I'm concerned for the crowd. They've been with us for three days, and their food has run out. I don't want to send them away without feeding them because they'll collapse with hunger as they go."

The disciples said, "Lord, we don't have enough food to feed this large of a crowd."

"How much do you have?"

"We have seven loaves of bread and a few small fish."

"Tell the crowd to sit down."

He took the bread and fish and blessed it. He then broke it into pieces and gave it to his disciples. They turned and gave it to the crowd. 4,000 people were there. Everyone ate until they were full. The disciples then collected the leftovers and found they had seven baskets full.

Afterwards, they sent the crowd home. Jesus and his disciples got in the boat and went to the Jewish side of the lake.

The Jewish leaders were there, and started arguing with him. They wanted him to give them signs from heaven. He refused and got back into the boat.

As they were going back to the Gentile side of the lake, the disciples realized they forgot to

Beauty from Ashes

bring enough food for the trip. They only had one small loaf of bread.

Jesus said to them, "Watch out for the yeast of the religious leaders." The disciples assumed he was scolding them for forgetting the bread.

He said, "Your faith is still so small! Why would you think I'm concerned about the bread situation? You were there. You saw how 5,000 people were fed with just five loaves of bread and two fish. How many baskets did we collect afterwards?"

"Twelve."

You saw how 4,000 people were fed with just seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. How many baskets did we collect afterwards?"

"Seven."

"So listen carefully and understand what I'm saying. Watch out for the yeast of religious leaders." Finally the men understood what he was talking about.

Once they got to the other side, Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi. There, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

"Some say you're John the Baptist. Others say you're Elijah or Jeremiah."

"Who do you say I am?"

Peter said, "You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said, "Peter, you're blessed! You didn't learn this from human sources, but the Father has revealed it to you."

He then told all of his disciples "For now, don't tell anyone I am the Messiah."

198 Woman Caught in Immorality

John 7:1-8:12

It was time for a festival in Jerusalem. Jesus pretended he wasn't going, but went without anyone knowing. The religious leaders were looking for him, but couldn't find him.

Still, everyone was talking about him. Some said Jesus was a good man, while others said he deceived people with his teaching. No one wanted to say too much because they feared the religious leaders.

Half way through the festival, Jesus went to the temple and started teaching the crowd. Everyone was amazed at what he said.

The religious leaders sent guards to get him. They went, but weren't able to grab him because it wasn't time for him to die. Soon, the guards were spellbound by his teaching. They finally returned to the religious leaders. The leaders said, "Where is he? Why didn't you bring him?"

The guards said, "We've never heard anyone talk like this man."

The next morning, Jesus was once again teaching at the temple. The religious leaders went to him with a woman they had caught in immorality. They thought they could use her to trap Jesus and get evidence against him.

They said, "Teacher, this woman was caught

Beauty from Ashes

in the very act of adultery. The law of Moses says we should stone her. But we want you to tell us what we should do."

He acted like he didn't hear them. He stooped down and used his finger to write in the dust. They didn't allow him to ignore them. They kept asking about this situation. Finally he stood up and faced them. "Go ahead and stone her. But have the one without sin throw the first stone." He then stooped down and started writing on the ground again.

The men stood there without saying anything. Finally they started leaving one by one, starting with the older men. Then Jesus stood up and looked around. He and the woman were the only ones standing in the middle of the crowd. He said to her, "Woman, where are those who were accusing you? Didn't they condemn you to death?"

She said, "No they didn't, Lord."

He said, "Well, I won't condemn you to death either. Go, and don't sin anymore."

He then turned to the crowd and said, "I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will never walk in darkness because they'll have the light of life."

199 A Man Born Blind

John 9:1-38

Jesus and his disciples passed a man who had been blind since birth. His disciples said, "Teacher, whose sin caused this man to be blind? Was it his sin, or his parents?"

Jesus said, "His blindness isn't the result of a particular sin. It was given to him so he could display God's power. Don't forget, I am the light of the world."

Jesus then spit on the ground and made wet clay. He placed it on the man's eyes and said, "Go to the pool and wash this off."

The man went to the pool, washed his eyes, and suddenly he could see. He went home, and his neighbors were shocked that he could see. They thought maybe he wasn't the same man. He said, "It's true, I'm the man who was born blind!"

"How did you get your sight?"

"A man called Jesus spit on the ground and made wet clay. He put some on my eyes and told me to go wash it off. As soon as I did, I could see."

They said, "Where is this man?"

"I don't know."

They took him to the Pharisees, and he explained the whole thing to them. He ended his story by saying, "So I went to the pool and washed it off just like he told me. Now I see."

This started an argument among the religious leaders. Some didn't think this miracle was from God, because it was done on the Sabbath. Others pointed out that evil men can't do miracles.

So they asked the man. "What do you say? What kind of man healed your blindness?"

Without hesitation he said, "He's a prophet!"

They didn't want to hear that. So some questioned whether the man had ever been blind in the first place.

Beauty from Ashes

They called for his parents. "Is this your blind son? If so, how is it he can see?"

The parents were afraid to answer because they knew the religious leaders could have them expelled from the synagogue. They said, "He's our son, and yes, he was born blind. That's all we know. We have no idea why he can now see. He's an adult, ask him."

So they once again turned to the man. "Don't praise this man Jesus, who is evil. Give your praise to God."

The man said, "I don't know about theology. All I know is, I used to be blind, but now I can see."

Again, they didn't like his answer. So they once again asked him how it happened.

He said, "I've already told you what happened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you planning to become his disciples?"

They were stunned at his boldness. "No! We are disciples of Moses who talked with God. This man? We don't know what authority he has."

The man was surprised. He said, "You don't know where he gets his authority? Look at me! I was blind and he healed me! God doesn't give that kind of power to evil people!"

This made the Pharisees mad. "How dare you try to teach us!" They immediately threw him out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard about what happened, so he went and found the man. He said, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"

"Lord, who is he that I may believe?"

Jesus smiled, "You have seen him with your own eyes. He is the one talking to you."

The man fell down and said, "Lord, I believe."

200 The Transfiguration

Beauty from Ashes

*Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:9-10, 14-29 &
Luke 9:30-32*

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up on a mountain to pray. As the Lord prayed, the three disciples fell asleep. Suddenly they woke up and saw the face of Jesus becoming brighter and brighter. His clothes were a brilliant white and shone like light.

Then they realized that two men were with him, and they knew it was Moses and Elijah. They also shone like the sun. Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about his death.

Peter spoke up when the two men started to leave. He said, "Lord, it's good that we are here. Please allow us to build three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

As he was talking, a bright cloud covered them. This made the disciples afraid. A voice said, "This is my Son. Listen to him!"

The disciples fell down in terror. Jesus walked over and touched them. "Don't be afraid. Get up." They looked around and everything was back to normal. The only person with them was Jesus.

As they went down the mountain, Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone about what you saw today, until after I've risen from the dead." They wondered what he meant by 'risen from the dead,' but no one said anything about it.

Instead, they said, "Lord, why do the scribes tell us that Elijah must come first?"

He said, "It's true. Elijah will come in the last days before everything is made right. But listen carefully. Elijah did come, and people did not recognize him. They caused him to suffer in the

same way I'll also suffer at their hands." The disciples then understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist.

A large crowd was waiting for them at the bottom of the mountain. A man ran up and knelt before Jesus. "Lord, have mercy on my son, my only child. A spirit takes him and throws him down, sometimes in the fire, sometimes in the water. He can't talk. He foams at the mouth and goes into convulsions.

I came to your disciples, but they weren't able to help him. If you can do anything for him, please help us."

Jesus noticed that the father had said, "If you can do anything..." so he said, "Everything is possible to a person who believes."

The father started to panic. "Lord, I believe. ... Oh, Lord, help my unbelief!"

Jesus said, "Bring the child to me."

When the spirit saw Jesus, he threw the boy to the ground. He rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus said to the spirit, "Come out of this boy, and never enter him again."

The spirit came out of the boy violently. The child screamed, and fell down to the ground. People gasped and said, "He's dead." Jesus walked over and took the boy by the hand and helped him up.

Later the disciples asked the Lord, "Why couldn't we drive the spirit out of him?"

Jesus said, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."

201 Paying Temple Tax

*Matthew 17:24-27; Mark 9:33-41 &
Luke 9:49-50; 17:1-2*

Jesus headed back to Capernaum with his disciples. Along the way he said, “They’ll give the Son of Man to people who will kill him. But in three days, he’ll rise from the dead.”

The disciples were confused about what he was talking about. Still, they didn’t ask him about it because they were in the middle of their own discussion. They were arguing about which one of them was the greatest.

When they got to the house in Capernaum, Jesus had all twelve men gather around. He then motioned for a child to come stand next to him. He said, “If you want to be the greatest of everyone, you must become the servant of everyone.”

He then put his arm around the child. “When you welcome a little child like this in my name, you are welcoming me. But it’s much more than that. You’re welcoming God.

John spoke up. “Lord, we found a man casting out demons in your name. But he wasn’t a part of our group. So we told him to stop.”

“No, no! Don’t stop him. A man isn’t working against me if he’s doing miracles in my name. If

Beauty from Ashes

he’s not against us, he’s for us. Listen, if a man gives even a cup of water in my name, that man will be rewarded.”

He once again put his arm around the child. “Listen very carefully to me. If one of these little ones believes in me, and someone causes him to sin, it would be better if that man were tied to a large rock and thrown into the sea.”

The next day, a man who collects temple tax walked up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher pay the temple tax?”

“Uh, yes, he does.” But Peter wasn’t sure.

Back in Capernaum, Jesus saw him deep in thought. He said, “Simon, give me your opinion. When a king issues a tax, does he make his family pay it?”

“Oh no. Others have to pay, but not his family.”

Jesus said, “That’s true. The sons of the king don’t have to pay. But we don’t want to offend others on this issue. So go to the sea and catch a fish. When you have it, open its mouth. There you’ll find a coin. It’ll be enough for you to pay the tax – for you and me.”

202 Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said, “There was a rich man who dressed in fabulous cloths, lived in a luxurious house, and ate the best food.

“Lazarus was a poor man who lay at the gate. He was sick and full of sores. He longed to eat crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs often came and licked his sores.

“In time, Lazarus died, and angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and found himself in the place of the dead, a place full of fire and suffering.

“He looked up and saw Lazarus next to Abraham. The rich man yelled, ‘Father, please send Lazarus with a drop of water on his finger to cool my tongue. I’m in constant torture.’

“Abraham said, ‘Son, remember how you enjoyed all the good things of life, while Lazarus lived in misery? Now he lives in comfort while you live in agony. Besides, going there is impossible. A large chasm has been placed between us.’

“The rich man said, ‘Oh Father Abraham, I beg you. Send Lazarus to my brothers. He can tell them about this place of torment. I don’t want them to come here.’

“‘Son, they already have warnings. They have the writings of Moses and the prophets.’

“The man yelled, ‘That’s not enough! They will listen if someone comes back from the dead.

Then they will repent.’

“Abraham said, ‘No, that’s not true. If they ignore the writings, they won’t listen, even if someone comes back from the dead.’”

Sometime later, Jesus told this parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like this.

“Ten bridesmaids went out to meet the bridegroom before the wedding. Five of them were wise and five were foolish. The bridegroom was late coming, so the ten young ladies fell asleep and their lamps burned out.

“In the middle of the night, they heard the shout, ‘The bridegroom is coming.’

“The women woke up and tried to relight their lamps, but the oil had burned out. The five wise bridesmaids had brought extra oil, but the other five hadn’t.

“The five foolish girls said, ‘Please, give us some of your oil.’

“The others said, ‘No, there isn’t enough to share. Hurry, run and buy some more.’

“So the foolish girls ran to get some more oil. While they were away, the bridegroom came. Everyone went into the house and the doors were closed and locked.

“When the foolish girls came back, they knocked on the door. ‘Please, let us in. Open the door.’

“Then, from inside the door they hear, ‘No! I don’t know you.’”

203 Seventy Times Seven

Matthew 18:21-35 & Luke 10:25-37

Peter asked Jesus a question. “Lord, what if someone wrongs me and I forgive him, but he wrongs me again? How many times should I continue to forgive him – seven times?”

Jesus said, “Peter, listen carefully. You’re to forgive him seventy times seven!

“Think of it this way. A king decided to settle the accounts with those who owed him money. So he brought in a man who owed him a million dollars. The king realized there was no way this man could pay him back. So he said to his accountant, ‘Take this man, his wife, and his children, and sell them. And then sell everything he owns. Get as much as you can, and apply it to his debt.

“The man fell to the ground and yelled, ‘Oh king, please be patient with me and I’ll pay you everything I owe.’

“The king knew this was an empty promise, but he was sympathetic. He said, ‘Release this man. I’ll forgive his entire debt.’ The man could hardly believe his ears. His entire debt

Beauty from Ashes

was gone, and he was free.

“A few days later, this same man found a friend who owed him 16 dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. ‘You owe me 16 dollars, and I want it now.’

“The friend fell down and yelled, ‘Oh please, be patient with me and I’ll pay you everything I owe.’

“No, I’ve lost my patience with you! I’m going to throw you into a work prison, and you’ll stay there until I get all my money.’

“The king was shocked when he heard what happened. He had the man brought before him. ‘You ungrateful wretch! I forgave your debt of one million dollars because I had pity on you. How could you treat your friend like this, and for 16 dollars!? Guard, take this man and throw him into prison.’”

Jesus then said to Peter. “My heavenly Father has been generous with you when he forgave all of your sins. Therefore, you are to be generous in forgiving others.”

204 Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

There was a man who was an expert of the law of Moses. He asked Jesus, "How can a person earn the right to go to heaven?"

Jesus said, "Tell me what is written in the law."

He said, "Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

"Ah," said Jesus. "Go and do that, and you'll live."

The man realized how impossible that was.

"Uh, well, exactly who is my neighbor?"

Jesus said ...

"A man was traveling down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers grabbed him and beat him until he was almost dead. They then took his money and clothes, and left him on the side of the road.

"The man desperately needed help, and soon a priest came along. He saw the man, but moved to the other side of the road and hurried on his way. After that, a Levite passed by, but he also avoided the situation and ignored the man.

"A third man traveled down the road, but unfortunately he was a Samaritan, a group of people hated by the Jews. Still, he had pity on the Jewish man. He stopped and treated his wounds. He placed him on his donkey and took

Beauty from Ashes

him to an inn. There he made him comfortable and treated his wounds again.

"The next day, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper money and told him to take care of the wounded man. He said, 'If it costs more, I'll pay you when I come back.'

"So," said Jesus, "three people saw the man lying on the side of the road. Which one was a neighbor to him?"

The answer was simple, the one who showed mercy.

"Yes," said Jesus., "go and follow his example."

After this, Jesus went to a village. He had friends that lived there, and they invited him and his disciples into their home for a meal.

While they were talking, one of the sisters named Mary sat at the Lord's feet, listening to everything he said. Martha, her sister, was busy preparing the meal for their guest. In her frustration, she went to Jesus. "Lord, have you noticed that my sister has left all the work for me to do? Please, tell her to come help me."

The Lord said, "Oh Martha, Martha. You have too many worries. You have forgotten there is only one thing that is absolutely necessary. Mary has chosen that one thing, and it won't be taken away from her."

205 Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son

Luke 15:1-32 & Matthew 18:12-14

The religious crowd was upset when they saw common sinners flocking around Jesus. They said, “He allows tax collectors and sinners to be around him. He even eats meals with them.”

Jesus responded by telling them these three stories. He said,

“A shepherd owned 100 sheep. During the evening count, he realized that one of them was missing. So he left the ninety-nine and started searching for his lost sheep. When he found it, he put it on his shoulders and carried it home. He then called his friends and neighbors and said, ‘Come celebrate with me. I found the sheep that was lost!’

“So it is in heaven. There is rejoicing when a sinner repents and turns his life over to God.”

“A woman suddenly realized that one of her ten wedding coins was missing. She lit a lamp and carefully swept the entire house until she found it. She was so relieved that she called her friends and neighbors and said, ‘Come and rejoice with me. I lost one of my coins, but now I have found it.’

“So it is in heaven. When one sinner turns back to God, there is rejoicing among the angels.”

“A man had two sons. The younger one came to him and said, ‘I want my inheritance, and I want it now. Divide up your estate and give me my share.’ This made the father sad, but he divided his estate and gave each son his portion.

“The younger son left home and traveled to a far off place. He had wild parties and spent his money freely until it was all gone. Suddenly a severe famine hit the land, and he had no place to live and nothing to eat.

“He took a job watching over pigs. His hunger became so great he started to envy what the pigs were eating. He was totally destitute, and no one gave him anything.

“One day he said, ‘I’m about to die of starvation, yet those who work for my father have enough to eat. I’ll go back and humble myself before my father. I’ll ask him to hire me as one of

Beauty from Ashes

his servants. I’ll say, ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God and against you. I know I can’t be a family member again, but please hire me as a field hand.’

“He started walking home. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. With joy, the man ran to his son and threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. The son pulled back, bowed his head, and started giving his speech. ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God and against you. I know I can’t be a family member again...’

“The father called out to his servants, ‘Quick, go get the best clothes and shoes, and put them on my son. Get a family ring for his finger.’ He turned to some other servants. ‘Go to the field and get the choice calf. We’re going to have a feast tonight! My son was dead, but now he’s alive. He was lost, but now he’s found. We’re going to celebrate!’

“That evening, the older son finished working in the field, and walked toward the house. He suddenly heard music and saw people dancing. He asked one of the servants. ‘What’s going on?’

“ ‘It’s your brother. He has come home, so your father killed the choice calf and is celebrating. He wants you to join him.’

“The older son became angry and wouldn’t go to the party. The father went out to him and said, ‘Son, please come and rejoice with me.’

“The son was angry and said, ‘I’ve been faithful to you all these years, and have done everything you asked. Not once did you kill even a small goat to honor my faithfulness.’

‘But now, this scoundrel takes family property and gives it to prostitutes, and you reward him with a fatted calf.’

“The father looked at him and said, ‘Oh my son – you’ve always been here, close to me. All that I have is yours. But your brother – he was dead! Now he’s alive! He was lost! Now he’s found! Come celebrate with me. Let’s rejoice together.’ ”

206 Lepers, Judge, & Pride

Luke 17:11-19; 18:1-14

As Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem, he went through a certain village. Ten men with leprosy walked toward him. They were required to maintain a space between themselves and other people. So they yelled to him from a distance. “Master, have mercy on us.”

Jesus turned to them and yelled back. “Go show yourselves to the priest.”

They looked at one another and decided to do as he said. Along the way, they suddenly realized they were all healed.

One of the ten men was from Samaria. He immediately turned around and ran back to Jesus. He shouted praises to God as he went. He fell down in front of the Lord and thanked him.

Jesus looked around and said, “Weren’t all ten of you healed? Where are the other nine? You’re from Samaria, yet you’re the only one to come back and thank God.”

Then Jesus helped the man get up. “Go, your faith has healed you.”

Later, Jesus was teaching the crowd about the importance of never getting discouraged when they pray. He said, “There was a judge who didn’t fear God, and was totally unconcerned about people.

“In his town, there was a widow who kept going to him saying, ‘I want the court to give me justice against the man who wronged me.’ At first the judge refused to help her. Finally he said, ‘I don’t care what happens to this

Beauty from Ashes

woman, but I’m going to help her anyway because I’m tired of her bothering me.’”

The Lord said, “You should go to God with that same determination. But you have an advantage over that widow. Her judge didn’t care for her, but you have the heavenly Father who loves you and wants to help you.”

Jesus told another story to a crowd when he noticed that some thought they were better than others. He said, “Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, who was honored by everyone. The other was a tax collector, who everyone hated, thinking he was a traitor to the nation.

“The Pharisee stood in a prominent spot and prayed. ‘God, I’m glad I’m not like other people – like those who are greedy or dishonest – or like those who are unfaithful to their wives. I’m especially glad I’m not like that wretched tax collector over there. Lord, as you know, I fast twice a week and give you a tenth of everything I earn.’

“The tax collector stood off to the side, away from everyone. He didn’t even look up, but kept hitting his chest in shame. He said, ‘God, I know I’m a sinner. Please have pity on me.’

Jesus said, “Both men went home, but only one was justified before God. It was the tax collector, not the Pharisee. God will exalt those who humble themselves, but he will humble those who exalt themselves.”

207 Raising Lazarus

Beauty from Ashes

John 11:1-53 & 12:9-11

Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, lived about two miles from Jerusalem in a town called Bethany. Lazarus became extremely sick, so his sisters sent for Jesus. He was a friend of their family. They said, "Lord, your friend is sick."

Jesus waited two days after getting this message. He then said to his disciples, "We're going to Judea."

They said, "Lord, it's not safe to go there. The Jews are looking for you so they can kill you."

He said, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, and I need to go wake him up."

"Lord, it's good that he's asleep. It'll help him get better."

Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead! And it was for you that I didn't go sooner. What I'm about to do will help you believe in me. Now, let's go to Bethany"

Thomas said, "Well, we might as well go and die with him."

When they were almost there, they learned that Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha heard that he was coming, so she went to meet him. "Lord, you could've healed my brother. He'd be alive today if you would've been here. I know all things are possible with you."

Jesus said, "Martha, your brother will rise again."

"I know Lord. He'll be a part of the resurrection in the last day."

Jesus said, "I'm the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even if they die. They will always be alive – forever. Martha, do you believe this?"

"Yes Lord. I believe you're the Messiah, the Son of God."

She then went back to their house and whispered to her sister. "Mary, the Teacher is here and is asking for you."

Mary got up and ran to Jesus, and others followed her. When she got to him, she fell at his feet. "Lord, my brother would still be alive if you had come sooner." She then started to cry.

Jesus was greatly moved when he saw Mary and the others crying. He said, "Where did you put him?" She got up to take him there. With that, Jesus started crying.

They took him to the place where they had laid the body, which was a cave with a stone across the entrance. When Jesus saw it, he said, "Take away the stone."

Martha stepped forward. "Lord, he's been dead for four days. By now, the smell will be great."

He turned to her, "Remember what I said? If you believe, you'll see the glory of God."

So, she stepped back, and men removed the stone. Jesus looked up and prayed, "Father, I thank you that you always hear me. Take this miracle and use it to help people believe that you sent me."

He then looked at the entrance to the tomb and shouted, "Lazarus, come out!"

All eyes turned to the tomb. Suddenly the dead man came out, still bound with linen cloth from head to foot. Jesus said, "Unwrap him and let him go."

Many of the Jews believed on Jesus that day. But when the religious rulers heard about it, they called a council. It was decided that Jesus must die before everyone believed in him. They also made plans to kill Lazarus, because his resurrection was causing so many people to turn to Jesus.

208 The Great, the Rich & the Poor

*Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 19:1-10 &
Mark 10:46-52*

The trip to Jerusalem took Jesus through Jericho. Along the way, the mother of James and John knelt before him and said, “Lord, I want my sons to sit next to you when you’re in your kingdom – one on your right side, and the other on the left.”

He said, “You don’t know what you’re asking.” Turning to the men he said, “Are you able to suffer like I’m about to suffer?”

They answered with confidence. “Yes, Lord. We’re ready to suffer.”

Jesus looked at them for a moment. “It’s true. You’ll suffer for me, but what you’re asking is not within my control. The Father will choose who will sit on the right side of me and on the left.”

The other ten became angry with the brothers when they heard this conversation. Jesus called them together and said, “In this world, people of authority become lords over others. They expect to be praised and served. This isn’t to be true of you. If you want to be great, start serving others. If you want to become the greatest one of all, start serving everyone.”

“Follow my example. I didn’t come so others would serve me. I’m giving my life so others can live.”

A chief tax collector lived in Jericho, whose name was Zacchaeus. He wanted to see Jesus as he passed through town, but he was a short man and couldn’t see over the crowd.

So he ran down the path ahead of the people, and climbed up in a sycamore tree. He knew he’d be able to see Jesus when he passed under the tree.

When the Lord got to that spot, he stopped!

Beauty from Ashes

He looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. I’m staying at your house today.”

Zacchaeus quickly got down from the tree and welcomed Jesus into his house. People started to murmur, “How could he even think about staying in the house of that great sinner?”

But Zacchaeus said to the Lord, “I’m going to give half of everything I own to the poor. And where I’ve cheated people, I’ll pay them back four times the amount I took from them.”

Jesus said, “Today, salvation has come to this house. I came to seek and to save those who are lost.”

As Jesus left Jericho, he passed a blind man named Bartimaeus. He was begging on the side of the road. He heard the crowd and said, “What’s going on?”

“Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

When he heard this, he yelled, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

People nearby told him to be quiet. But he yelled even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stopped and looked in his direction, “Go bring him to me.”

They went to Bartimaeus and said, “Jesus is calling for you. Hurry, get up and go to him.”

Bartimaeus got up, threw down his beggar’s coat, and went to Jesus. The Lord said, “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Teacher, I want to see!”

The Lord said, “Go. Your faith has healed you.”

Immediately, Bartimaeus could see, and he started following Jesus

209 Triumphal Entry

*John 12:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11 &
Luke 19:39-40*

Jesus and his disciples were invited into a home for a meal. Lazarus was also invited and Martha helped serve. While they were eating, their sister Mary poured expensive oil on the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the smell of the perfumed oil.

Judas Iscariot said, "Lord, that oil was wasted! It could've been sold, and the money given to the poor." He didn't really care for the poor, but was in charge of the disciples' money and was stealing from it.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. You'll always be able to help the poor, but you won't always have me. Mary has anointed me for my burial. And as the gospel spreads throughout the world, people will hear of what she did."

The next day, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. He told two of his disciples, "Go into the village, and there you'll find a donkey with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, tell them 'the Lord has need of them'."

The two went into the village and found the donkey and colt. They untied them and started walking away. The owners said, "What are you doing?" They replied, "The Lord has need of them," so he allowed them to go. They brought them to Jesus.

No one had ever ridden the colt before that

Beauty from Ashes

day, yet they put their robes on it and helped Jesus get on. As he rode along the path, people spread their robes in front of him. The crowds grew as he rode down the Mount of Olives. They got palm branches and laid them on the path.

People shouted for joy, and praised God for all the miracles they had seen. "Blessed is the King who is coming in the name of the Lord!" As Jesus continued on, they shouted, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David."

Some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Do you hear what your followers are saying? Make them stop!"

Jesus said, "If they stop, the stones will start shouting."

As he was about to enter the city, he stopped and started to cry. He said, "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! If you had only known! This was a special day for you, a day that would bring you peace. But now your eyes will be covered so you won't be able to see. A mighty army will destroy you. All because you didn't recognize the time of God's coming to you."

He and the crowd continued into Jerusalem. The entire city was shaken by the event. Visitors from other countries asked, "Who is this?" The people said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth."

210 Last Week of Ministry

Beauty from Ashes

Mark 11:12-25; 12:1-12

During the last week before Passover, Jesus spent each day in Jerusalem while staying overnight in a town nearby. As he and his disciples walked toward the city on the second morning, Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance. He walked up to it but there was no fruit on the tree, just leaves. So he said to the tree, "You'll never produce fruit again."

When they arrived at the temple, Jesus saw people selling animals for sacrifice and exchanging foreign money. He threw them out, and turned over their tables.

He then sat down and said to the people, "The Scriptures say, 'My house is to be known as a house of prayer.' You've made it a den of thieves." This made the religious leaders angry. They talked of killing him because he was becoming so popular.

The next morning, the disciples noticed the fig tree. "Teacher, look! The tree is all shriveled up!"

Jesus said, "Have faith in God, and you'll do more than this. You can say to a mountain, 'Throw yourself into the sea,' and it'll happen. But you must believe it will, without doubt in your heart. Also, you can't hold a grudge against someone else."

Jesus continued to teach the people in the

temple. One day he said, "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it. He then went on a long trip, but before he left, he hired some men to care for his vineyard.

"When it was time for harvest, he sent a servant to collect his fruit. The men beat the servant and sent him away empty. The owner sent other servants, but they were all treated the same way. They even killed a few.

"Finally the owner said, 'I need to send someone with authority so they'll listen to him. Therefore, I'll send my only son.'

"When the men saw the son, they said, 'If we kill him, we'll inherit everything!' So they grabbed him, killed him, and threw him outside the vineyard."

Jesus said, "What do you think the owner will do to these men?"

The people were quick to answer. "He'll kill those men! He'll then give the vineyard to people he can trust."

The religious leaders knew this story was about them. They agreed that Jesus had to be arrested soon, but they didn't know when and where. It had to be done carefully because they were afraid of the crowd.

211 The Last Supper

Beauty from Ashes

*Matthew 26:1-2, 21-30; Luke 22:1-13 &
John 13:3-17, 26-30*

The religious leaders met together to decide how they were going to kill Jesus. As they were talking, Judas Iscariot came and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" They were delighted, and agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver.

At the same time, Jesus was making plans for he and his disciples to celebrate Passover together. He said to Peter and John, "Go into the city and look for a man carrying a water jug. Follow him until he enters a house. Tell the owner of the house, 'The Lord says his time has come. He'll eat Passover in your guest room.' He'll take you to his upper room. Prepare the meal there. Get everything ready for us."

The two men found everything just as Jesus had said. So they prepared the meal. That evening, Jesus and his disciples met there to celebrate Passover.

During the meal, Jesus got up and took off his coat. He wrapped a towel around his waist and poured water into a basin. He then started washing the feet of his disciples.

Peter was shocked. He said, "Lord, are you about to wash my feet?"

"Peter, you don't understand what I'm doing now, but some day you will."

"No Lord, I won't let you wash my feet. I should be washing yours."

Jesus looked at him. "If I don't wash your feet, you can't be a part of what I'm doing."

"Oh master, if that is the case, then wash me all over, my feet, hands, and head."

"No, Peter. When a person takes regular baths, only his feet need washing."

Once he had finished, he sat back down at

the table and said, "You've seen what I've done. A servant isn't better than his master. If I've humbled myself before you, you're to humble yourselves before each other."

Soon, Jesus became very sad. He said, "One of you will betray me. It has to be – because it was foretold from ages past. Still, it would be better for that person if he'd never been born."

The disciples were shocked and started asking "Lord, is it me? Am I the one?"

Jesus said, "During this meal, I'll dip bread in the broth and hand it to the person who will do this."

Judas leaned over and whispered, "Am I the one, Lord?"

Jesus looked at him and said quietly, "You know you are," and handed him the bread dipped in broth. As Judas took it, Satan entered his heart and he stood up.

Jesus looked up at him and said, "Go and do it quickly." Judas then walked out of the room. The others thought he was simply going on an errand.

As they were eating, Jesus took the bread and blessed it. He then broke it and said, "Take this and eat it. It's my body, which I give for you. Remember me as you eat."

After the supper, he took the cup and blessed it. He gave it to them and said, "All of you drink from this. It's my blood, which will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. I'll not drink wine again until I sit with you in God's kingdom."

Jesus talked with them for a long time, and then prayed for them. Afterwards they sang a hymn, and went out to the Mount of Olives.

212 Gethsemane

Beauty from Ashes

Matthew 26:30-39, 52-57;

Luke 22:42-51 & John 18:3-10

As Jesus and his disciples walked out of the gates of Jerusalem, he said, "All of you will abandon me tonight, ... but after I rise from the dead, I'll meet you in Galilee."

Peter spoke up, "Lord, I'll never desert you, even if everyone else does."

Jesus stopped and looked at him. "Oh Peter, this very night you'll deny you even know me – and not just once. Before the rooster crows in the morning, three times you'll tell people you don't know me."

Peter was shocked, "Lord! Even if it means death, I'll never deny you." All the other disciples said the same thing.

They came to a grove of olive trees called the Garden of Gethsemane. At the entrance Jesus told his disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray." He then took Peter, James, and John into the garden. Once there, he started to agonize. He said, "I'm overcome with grief. Stay awake and pray with me."

He then went a little farther and fell down. "Father, this cup of agony – do I have to drink it? You can do anything. Take it away from me! But if not, I'll follow your plan for me."

He went back to the three men and found them sleeping. He woke them up and said, "Peter, stay awake and pray with me. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went back and once again he prayed in deep agony. "Oh Father, take this cup from me! Still I'll drink it if it's your will."

Once again he saw that the three men were sleeping. He said, "Why are you sleeping?" They looked at him and didn't know what to say.

When he prayed the third time, he started to sweat, but it was like drops of blood that fell to

the ground. An angel appeared and gave him strength.

He went back to where his disciples were once again sleeping. Looked at them, he said, "Go ahead and sleep because the time is close."

About then, Judas led a band of guards into the garden. He knew it was a place Jesus often went with his disciples. He said, "Watch me carefully. Jesus is the one I'll kiss."

They went into the garden carrying torches, swords, and clubs. Jesus turned to his disciples. "Get up! My betrayer is here."

Judas walked up to him and said, "Hello Master." And then gave him a kiss.

Jesus said, "Oh Judas, do you betray me with a kiss?" He then turned to the guards, "Who are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth!"

"I am he!"

Instantly, they were knocked back and fell to the ground. As they got up, Jesus said again, "Who are you looking for?"

They looked at one another and said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

"Well, I told you I am he. Now let these others go their way."

Peter suddenly realized what was happening. He pulled out his sword and attacked a servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Jesus stopped him and said, "Put your sword away. Don't you understand? I could pray right now and my Father would send thousands of angels to protect me." He then turned and touched the servant's ear and healed it.

With that, all the disciples ran away. Then the guards took Jesus, tied him up, and led him out of the garden.

213 Trial before Jews

Beauty from Ashes

*Luke 22:54-62; John 18:19-24;
Mark 14:55-65 & Matthew 27:1-5*

Guards took Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane and led him to the home of the former high priest. Peter followed at a distance. Once there, he sat by a charcoal fire in the middle of the courtyard. A servant girl looked at him and said, "Aren't you one of his disciples?"

"No, ... no, I'm not." He then moved to a different part of the courtyard.

The old priest questioned Jesus concerning his teachings. Jesus said, "I taught in public places, and I didn't hide anything. If you want to know what I taught, ask these who heard me."

One of the guards slapped him. "You're to be respectful when you talk to this man of God!"

Jesus turned to him, "Why did you hit someone who spoke the truth?"

They then took Jesus to a balcony that overlooked the courtyard so he could stand before the high priest. Several people testified against him, but couldn't agree about what he said. Others were called to clear up the confusion, but simply made it worse.

Finally, in frustration, the high priest said, "Tell me plainly. Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?"

Jesus said, "Yes, I am."

The priest was shocked and ripped his clothes. He shouted, "We don't need anything else! You heard him. He blasphemes God."

Everyone yelled, "Kill him!" They beat him and spit on him.

Peter was watching this from the courtyard. One of the men looked at him and said, "Here's one of them! He was with Jesus!"

Peter saw everyone looking at him. "No, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know him."

About an hour later, a man spoke up. "I saw you in the garden. You're one of them." Turning to the others he said, "Listen to his speech. He's from Galilee."

With that, Peter started to swear. Then he said, "Leave me alone! I tell you, I don't know this man!"

As soon as those words left his mouth, a rooster crowed. Peter looked up and saw Jesus looking at him.

He remembered the words; "You'll deny me three times before the rooster crows in the morning." He left the courtyard and cried bitterly.

When the sun came up, the Jewish court was brought together and Jesus was condemned to die. They then took him to the Romans for execution.

When Judas saw all that had happened, he went to the religious leaders. "I've sinned! I've betrayed an innocent man."

They laughed, "Why should we care. You deal with it."

Judas then threw the silver coins on the floor and left. He found a tree and hung himself.

214 Trial before Romans

Beauty from Ashes

*Matthew 27:12-26; Mark 15:2-5;
Luke 23:2-25 & John 18:28-32; 19:12-15*

Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asked the religious leaders, "What's this man guilty of?"

They said, "He says he's a king. He should die because he's a rebel against Caesar. We would execute him, but we're not allowed to do that. Therefore we've brought him to you."

Pilate turned to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am."

Pilate then found out that Jesus was from Galilee, which was under Herod's rule. Herod happened to be in Jerusalem so Pilate sent Jesus to him.

Herod was glad because he wanted to see some miracles. But Jesus wouldn't even talk to him. Finally Herod and his guards mocked Jesus by putting kingly robes on him and sending him back to Pilate.

The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of many crimes, but he stood there and didn't defend himself. Pilate said, "Don't you hear what they're saying? What's your defense?" Still, Jesus said nothing.

Pilate finally concluded there was no proof that Jesus was guilty of any crime worthy of death. He then thought of a way he could set the man free. Every Passover, he released a prisoner to the people. He thought he could simply beat Jesus, and then release him.

Pilate was about to present this to the people,

when his wife sent him a message. "I've had nightmares about the man you have on trial. Don't do anything to him. He's innocent."

Pilate stood before the people. "Which one shall I release to you – Jesus called Messiah, or Barabbas a thief and a murderer?"

The religious leaders knew that Pilate might do this, so they had prepared the people. "Barabbas, give us Barabbas!"

Pilate was shocked. "What should I do with Jesus, who is called Christ?"

"Crucify him!"

Pilate turned away because he didn't want to kill an innocent man. Finally the Jewish leaders threatened him, "If you release this man, we'll tell Caesar you helped a man who was in rebellion against the empire."

Pilate went back to reason with the people, "Do you want me to crucify your King?"

They shouted louder and louder. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! We have no King but Caesar!"

Pilate realized the people were on the verge of a riot. He finally gave in to their wishes, and called for a basin of water. He washed his hands in front of them and said, "You're witness that I'm innocent. This man's blood isn't on my hands."

They shouted, "Let his blood be upon us and our children!"

With that, Pilate had Jesus whipped and then handed him over to the guards to be crucified.

215 Crucifixion and Burial

Beauty from Ashes

*Matthew 27:27-60; Luke 23:26-43 &
John 19:16-42*

Jesus was condemned to die by crucifixion. Pilate turned him over to Roman soldiers, who put a crown of thorns on his head. They laughed at him and said, "Look, the King of the Jews." They beat him and spit on him.

They then led him away to be crucified. Along the way, they grabbed a man and made him carry the cross. A large crowd followed, mourning and crying.

They took Jesus and two criminals outside the city walls to a place called "The Skull." All three were nailed to crosses, with Jesus in the middle.

Pilate put a sign on his cross, which read, THE KING OF THE JEWS. The chief priest said, "Don't write 'The King of the Jews!'" But Pilate said, "I've written what I've written."

After the crosses were put into place, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them! They don't know what they're doing." It was nine o'clock in the morning.

Some of the people shouted, "If you're the Son of God, come down from that cross."

Religious leaders laughed, "Oh, he can save others, but He can't save Himself! He said he was the Son of God. Why isn't God helping Him?"

One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus yelled, "If you're the Messiah, save yourself and us."

The other criminal yelled back, "Don't you fear God? We deserve to be crucified, but this man is innocent!" Then he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus said, "Today, you'll be with me in Paradise."

The soldiers took the clothes of Jesus and divided them among themselves. His robe was seamless, so they threw dice to see who would get it.

Jesus saw his mother standing near the cross, and John nearby. He said, "Mother, look to John as your son. John, take care of my mother."

Around noon, darkness covered the entire area and lasted for three hours.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then he said, "It's finished," and bowed his head and died.

At that moment, there was an earthquake. Huge boulders split in two. The veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom. The soldiers standing near the cross were afraid when they saw all of this. They looked up at Jesus and said, "It's true! This was the Son of God!"

Later in the afternoon, other soldiers came to break the legs of those on the crosses. They did this to speed up their death. First they broke the legs of the two criminals. When they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead. To make sure, a soldier thrust a spear into his side.

A rich man named Joseph went to Pilate and got permission to bury the body of Jesus. The religious leaders also met with Pilate and said, "This deceiver told his disciples that after his death he would rise from the dead on the third day. We're afraid that they may come and steal the body and then tell everyone that he rose from the dead." Pilate agreed to put a Roman seal on the stone, and he assigned guards to watch the grave.

Joseph and his friend Nicodemus helped take the body down from the cross. They wrapped it in strips of linen cloth, with a mixture of spices. Joseph then laid it in his own tomb and rolled a large stone across the entrance. A Roman seal was put on the stone. Then soldiers stood in front of the grave to guard the body of Jesus.

216 The Resurrection

Beauty from Ashes

*Matthew 27:62-28:15; Mark 16:1-13 &
John 20:1-18*

All was quiet at the tomb of Jesus until early Sunday morning while it was still dark. Suddenly there was an earthquake and an angel appeared at the gravesite. He rolled back the huge stone and sat on it! The guards were terrified and fainted. And then ... all was quiet once again.

As the sun came up, Mary Magdalene and some other women walked into the garden so they could put spices on the body of Jesus. They were wondering how they were going to get someone to roll back the stone from the tomb.

When they came to the tomb, they realized the soldiers were gone and the stone was rolled back. They looked, and saw that the tomb was empty!

Mary turned and ran to tell the disciples about the empty tomb. The other women stayed in the garden. Finally they went inside the tomb. They saw two angels. One of them said, "Don't be afraid! You're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He's not here, because he has risen. Go tell his disciples and Peter." So the women went to do as they were told.

Meanwhile, Mary found the disciples and told them, "They've taken the body of Jesus and we don't know where it is!"

When Peter and John heard this, they ran to the tomb. John got there first, but didn't go in. Peter rushed in, and John followed. They saw the strips of cloth that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus, but the body was missing. They left the tomb and walked home, confused about what had happened.

After they were gone, Mary Magdalene arrived

back at the garden, weeping as she walked.

When she got to the tomb, she saw the angels.

One of them said, "Why are you crying?"

"Because they have taken away my Lord and I don't know where he is."

She turned and saw a man standing near her. She didn't realize it was Jesus. She thought it was the gardener. "Sir, if you have taken him away, please tell me where he is so I can go get him."

Jesus said, "Mary!"

Instantly, she knew who it was! She fell down and grabbed his feet, "My Master!"

He said, "Don't hold me, but go tell my disciples that you have seen me." Immediately she got up and ran to find the disciples.

Jesus then appeared to the other women as they were walking back into the city. They fell down and worshiped him. He said, "Go find my brothers and tell them that I'll meet them in Galilee."

All the women found the disciples and said, "Jesus is alive! We have seen him and talked to him. He's alive!" The men were overcome, and could not believe it was really true.

The guards who were at the tomb were terrified by the events of that morning. They went and told the religious leaders exactly what happened. After some discussion, the high priest gave the guards a large amount of money and said, "Tell people that the disciples of Jesus came and stole his body while you were sleeping. We will make sure you don't get in trouble with Pilate." The guards took the money and did as they were told.

217 Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-45

In the afternoon of the day Jesus rose from the dead, two disciples left Jerusalem and started walking to Emmaus. They were discussing the events of the previous few days. Suddenly they noticed someone walking near them. They didn't realize it was Jesus.

He said, "What are you talking about?"

They turned and looked at him. "Are you a stranger here? Don't you know about the things that happened in the last few days?"

"What things?"

"We're talking about Jesus of Nazareth, the one who spoke the words of God. Our leaders had him crucified three days ago."

"This morning, some women went to the tomb. They came and told us that the body was missing. A couple of men went, and sure enough, it was missing. Now the women are saying they saw angels and have actually seen the Lord alive."

Jesus spoke up. "Why are you so slow to understand? The prophets clearly said Messiah had to suffer these things." Then he started at the beginning of Scripture and explained the parts that were about him.

As they came near Emmaus, they said to him. "It's too dark to continue on. Please, stay with us." So, he went into the house with them.

At the evening meal, Jesus took bread and

Beauty from Ashes

blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Immediately they knew who he was. And then – he disappeared!

They looked at one another in amazement. Finally one of them said, "Our hearts were on fire as he explained the Scripture to us!"

They quickly returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what happened. They were in a room that was securely locked because they feared the Jewish leaders.

When the two men arrived, they said, "It's true! The Lord has risen. He walked with us explaining the Scripture. We didn't recognize him until he broke bread with us." The disciples couldn't believe it.

Suddenly the Lord stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Still, the disciples couldn't believe what they saw was really Jesus. They thought it was a spirit.

He said, "Look at the scars in my hands and feet. Here, touch them. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bone like this."

They still couldn't believe because of their joy. He said, "Do you have something to eat?" They gave him some fish and honeycomb, and he ate it.

Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

218 Winning Back Two Disciples

John 20:24 – 21:19

Thomas wasn't with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. So they found him and said, "Thomas, we've seen the Lord! He's alive!"

"That's impossible! To believe that, I'd have to feel the nail scars in his hands, and touch his side where he was stabbed."

Eight days later, Jesus suddenly appeared to the disciples, and Thomas was with them. The Lord said, "Peace be with you!"

He turned to Thomas and said, "Come and touch the scars on my hands, and in my side. Stop questioning whether or not I'm alive."

Thomas fell to his knees. "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said, "Thomas, you believe because you see me. Blessed are those who don't see me, still they will believe."

Sometime later, a few of the disciples were at the Sea of Galilee. Peter said to the others, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We'll go too."

They went out in a boat and fished all night, but didn't catch anything. In the dim of early morning, a man stood on shore and asked, "Have you caught any fish?"

"No."

"Cast your net on the right side of the boat."

They did, and suddenly the net was full of fish. John said to Peter, "It's the Lord."

When Peter heard this, he wrapped his clothes around him, jumped into the water, and

Beauty from Ashes

swam for shore. The others came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

Once they got there, they saw Jesus cooking bread and fish over a fire. He turned and said, "Bring me some more fish." Peter helped the others haul in the net, which had 153 large fish.

Once everything was ready, Jesus said, "Come and eat." They gathered around and he gave them bread and fish.

When they were done eating, Jesus said, "Simon, do you love me more than these?"

Peter was surprised by the question, "Yes, Lord. I love you."

"Then feed my lambs."

He asked a second time, "Simon, do you love me?"

"Yes Lord, you know I love you."

"Then feed my sheep."

A third time Jesus asked the question. "Simon, do you love me?"

Peter was grieved by this question. He said, "Lord you know all things. You know I love you."

"Then you're to feed my sheep. When you were young, you went wherever you wanted. But when you get old, someone else will take you where you don't want to go." This referred to how Peter's death would bring glory to God.

Then Jesus said, "Follow me!"

219 Commission, Ascension, & Waiting

*Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:47-53;
John 20:30-3; Acts 1 & I Corinthians 15:6*

The disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had first selected them to be his disciples. He suddenly appeared and they worshiped Him. He said, "I give you authority to preach. Go to all the nations and make disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them what I have taught you. Remember, I'm always with you."

For 40 days after He rose from the dead, Jesus spent time with his disciples teaching them things about the kingdom of God. He also appeared to many others, once to a crowd of over 500 people.

He then led his disciples to the Mount of Olives. He said, "Don't leave Jerusalem until you receive the promise from the Father. John baptized with water, but now you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

They said, "Lord, is now the time you're going to make Israel into a kingdom again?"

Jesus said, "Only the Father knows when that will happen. Meanwhile, you're to spread the good news that people can receive forgiveness of sins."

"Wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon you. He'll give you power to spread this good news. Start in Jerusalem and then take it to the entire nation. Include Samaria. Finally, go to the entire world."

Jesus then blessed them. As he did, he

Beauty from Ashes

suddenly moved upward and disappeared in a cloud. The disciples stood there looking up.

Two men, dressed in white, appeared next to them. They said, "Why are you standing there looking into the sky? You saw Jesus go up. He'll come back in the same way."

So the disciples went back into Jerusalem. Their hearts overflowed with joy! They met in an upper room with other believers, both men and women. Mary, the mother of Jesus was there, as well as his brothers. All of the believers were of one mind and spent this time in prayer.

At one point, Peter stood and talked to the group. He said, "Judas fulfilled Scripture when he led the mob into the garden and betrayed Jesus. Judas was one of us, and had all the privileges of this ministry. Yet he sold it all for a price. With that money he bought a field, and today it is called 'Field of Blood.' "

"Still, we need someone to take his place among the apostles. Let's choose a man, but make sure he has been with us since Jesus was baptized by John. The person we choose must have seen all the miracles until the Lord was taken from us into heaven. With us, he will testify to the resurrection of Christ."

Two men were selected for final consideration. The people prayed and then threw lots to make the final decision. Matthias was chosen.