

Great Bible Escapes

BREAK

A Teaching Outline

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Great Escapes in the Bible

Who escaped and what happened And what the escape accomplished

Jacob escapes from Laban.

Genesis 31:1-55

But Jacob soon learned that Laban's sons were beginning to grumble. "Jacob has robbed our father!" they said. "All his wealth has been gained at our father's expense." [2] And Jacob began to notice a considerable cooling in Laban's attitude toward him.

[3] Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you."

[4] Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field where he was watching the flocks, [5] so he could talk things over with them. "Your father has turned against me and is not treating me like he used to," he told them. "But the God of my father has been with me. [6] You know how hard I have worked for your father,

[7] But he has tricked me, breaking his wage agreement with me again and again. But God has not allowed him to do me any harm. [8] For if he said the speckled animals were mine, the whole flock began to produce speckled lambs. And when he changed his mind and said I could have the streaked ones, then all the lambs were born streaked.

[9] In this way, God has made me wealthy at your father's expense. [10] During the mating season, I had a dream and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and spotted.

[11] Then in my dream, the angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' And I replied, 'Yes, I'm listening!' [12] The angel said, 'Look, and you will see that only the streaked, speckled, and spotted males are mating with the females of your flock. For I have seen all that Laban has done to you.'

[13] I am the God you met at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made a vow to serve me. Now leave this country and return to the land you came from.' "

[14] Rachel and Leah said, "That's fine with us! There's nothing for us here—none of our father's wealth will come to us anyway. [15] He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. He sold us, and what he received for us has disappeared. [16] The riches God has given you from our father are legally ours and our children's to begin with. So go ahead and do whatever God has told you."

[17] So Jacob put his wives and children on camels. [18] He drove the flocks in front of him—all the livestock he had acquired at Paddan-aram—and set out on his journey to the land of Canaan, where his father, Isaac, lived. [19] At the time they left, Laban was some distance away, shearing his sheep. Rachel stole her father's household gods and took them with her.

[20] They set out secretly and never told Laban they were leaving. [21] Jacob took all his possessions with him and crossed the Euphrates River, heading for the territory of Gilead.

[22] Laban didn't learn of their flight for three days. [23] But when he did, he gathered a group of his relatives and set out in hot pursuit. He caught up with them seven days later in the hill country of Gilead. [24] But the previous night God had appeared to Laban in a dream. "Be careful about what you say to Jacob!" he was told.

[25] So when Laban caught up with Jacob as he was camped in the hill country of Gilead, he set up his camp not far from Jacob's. [26] "What do you mean by sneaking off like this?" Laban demanded. "Are my daughters prisoners, the plunder of war, that you have stolen them away like this?

[27] Why did you slip away secretly? I would have given you a farewell party, with joyful singing accompanied by tambourines and harps. [28] Why didn't you let me kiss my daughters and grandchildren and tell them good-bye? You have acted very foolishly!

[29] I could destroy you, but the God of your father appeared to me last night and told me, 'Be careful about what you say to Jacob!' [30] I know you feel you must go, and you long intensely for your childhood home, but why have you stolen my household gods?"

[31] "I rushed away because I was afraid," Jacob answered. "I said to myself, 'He'll take his daughters from me by force.' [32] But as for your household gods, let the person who has taken them die! If you find anything that belongs to you, I swear before all these relatives of ours, I will give it back without question." But Jacob didn't know that Rachel had taken them.

[33] Laban went first into Jacob's tent to search there, then into Leah's, and then he searched the tents of the two concubines, but he didn't find the gods. Finally, he went into Rachel's tent.

[34] Rachel had taken the household gods and had stuffed them into her camel saddle, and now she was sitting on them. So although Laban searched all the tents, he couldn't find them. [35] "Forgive my not getting up, Father," Rachel explained. "I'm having my monthly period." So despite his thorough search, Laban didn't find them.

[36] Then Jacob became very angry. "What did you find?" he demanded of Laban. "What is my crime? You have chased me as though I were a criminal. [37] You have searched through everything I own. Now show me what you have found that belongs to you! Set it out here in front of us, before our relatives, for all to see. Let them decide who the real owner is!

[38] "Twenty years I have been with you, and all that time I cared for your sheep and goats so they produced healthy offspring. In all those years I never touched a single ram of yours for food.

[39] If any were attacked and killed by wild animals, did I show them to you and ask you to reduce the count of your flock? No, I took the loss! You made me pay for every animal stolen from the flocks, whether the loss was my fault or not.

[40] I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. [41] Yes, twenty years—fourteen of them earning your two daughters, and six years to get the flock. And you have reduced my wages ten times!

[42] In fact, except for the grace of God—the God of my grandfather Abraham, the awe-inspiring God of my father, Isaac—you would have sent me off without a penny to my name. But God has seen your cruelty and my hard work. That is why he appeared to you last night and vindicated me."

[43] Then Laban replied to Jacob, "These women are my daughters, and these children are my grandchildren, and these flocks and all that you have—all are mine. But what can I do now to my own daughters and grandchildren? [44] Come now, and we will make a peace treaty, you and I, and we will live by its terms."

[45] So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a monument. [46] He also told his men to gather stones and pile them up in a heap. Jacob and Laban then sat down beside the pile of stones to share a meal. [47] They named it "Witness Pile," which is Jegar-sahadutha in Laban's language and Galeed in Jacob's.

[48] "This pile of stones will stand as a witness to remind us of our agreement," Laban said. [49] This place was also called Mizpah, for Laban said, "May the Lord Keep watch between us to make sure that we keep this treaty when we are out of each other's sight.

[50] I won't know about it if you are harsh to my daughters or if you take other wives, but God will see it. [51] This heap of stones and this pillar [52] stand between us as a witness of our vows. I will not cross this line to harm you, and you will not cross it to harm me.

[53] I call on the God of our ancestors—the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of my grandfather Nahor—to punish either one of us who harms the other."

Jacob's wealth made Laban's sons jealous. It is sometimes difficult to be happy when others are doing better than we are. To compare our success with that of others is a dangerous way to judge the quality of our lives. By comparing ourselves to others, we may be giving jealousy a foothold. We can avoid jealousy by rejoicing in others' successes (see Romans 12:15).

Although Laban treated Jacob unfairly, God still increased Jacob's prosperity. God's power is not limited by lack of fair play. He has the ability to meet our needs and make us thrive even though others mistreat us. To give in and respond unfairly is to be no different from your enemies.

Leaving home was not difficult for Rachel and Leah because their father had treated them as poorly as he had Jacob. According to custom, they were supposed to receive the benefits of the dowry Jacob paid for them, which was 14 years of hard work. When Laban did not give them what was rightfully theirs, they knew they would never inherit anything from their father. Thus, they wholeheartedly approved of Jacob's plan to take the wealth he had gained and leave.

Many people kept small wooden or metal idols ("household idols") in their homes. These idols were called *teraphim*, and they were thought to protect the home and offer advice in times of need. They had legal significance as well, for when they were passed on to an heir, the person who received them could rightfully claim the greatest part of the family inheritance.

No wonder Laban was concerned when he realized his idols were missing. Most likely Rachel stole her father's idols because she was afraid Laban would consult them and learn where she and Jacob had gone, or perhaps she wanted to claim the family inheritance.

God told Jacob to leave Haran and return to his homeland. Jacob took his family, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed first for the hill country of Gilead. Laban caught up with him there.

Do you remember feeling absolutely sure about something? Jacob was so sure that no one had stolen Laban's idols that he vowed to kill the offender. Because Rachel took them, this statement put her safety in serious jeopardy. Even when you are absolutely sure about a matter, avoid rash statements. Someone may hold you to them.

Jacob made it a habit to do more than was expected of him. When his flocks were attacked, he took the losses rather than splitting them with Laban. He worked hard even after several pay cuts. His diligence eventually paid off; his flocks began to multiply.

Making a habit of doing more than expected can pay off. It

- (1) Pleases God,
- (2) Earns recognition and advancement,
- (3) Enhances your reputation,
- (4) Builds others' confidence in you,
- (5) Gives you more experience and knowledge, and
- (6) Develops your spiritual maturity.

To be binding, an agreement had to be witnessed by a third party. In this case, Jacob and Laban used God as their witness that they would keep their word.

So Jacob took an oath before the awesome God of his father, Isaac, to respect the boundary line. Then Jacob presented a sacrifice to God and invited everyone to a feast. Afterward they spent the night there in the hills. Laban got up early the next morning, and he kissed his daughters and grandchildren and blessed them. Then he returned home.

Moses escapes from Egypt.

Exodus 2:11-15

Many years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his people, the Israelites, and he saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew slaves. [12] After looking around to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.

[13] The next day, as Moses was out visiting his people again, he saw two Hebrew men fighting. "What are you doing, hitting your neighbor like that?" Moses said to the one in the wrong.

[14] "Who do you think you are?" the man replied. "Who appointed you to be our prince and judge? Do you plan to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?"

Moses was badly frightened because he realized that everyone knew what he had done. [15] And sure enough, when Pharaoh heard about it, he gave orders to have Moses arrested and killed. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and escaped to the land of Midian.

Moses tried to make sure no one was watching before he killed the Egyptian. But as it turned out, someone did see, and Moses had to flee the country. Sometimes we mistakenly think we can get away with doing wrong if no one sees or catches us. Sooner or later, however, doing wrong will catch up with us as it did with Moses. Even if we are not caught in this life, we will still have to face God and his evaluation of our actions.

To escape punishment for killing the Egyptian, Moses ran away to Midian. He became a stranger in a strange land, separated from his home and family.

It took many years after this incident for Moses to be ready to serve God. But he trusted God instead of fearing the king (Hebrews 11:27). We may feel abandoned or isolated because of something we have done. But though we feel afraid and separated, we should not give up. Moses didn't. He trusted God to deliver him, no matter how dark his past or bleak his future.

Moses fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian in defense of a fellow Israelite. He saved his own life and began another part of God's training.

God fits even our mistakes into his plan.

The Israelites escape from Egypt

Exodus 12:28-42

So the people of Israel did just as the Lord had commanded through Moses and Aaron. [29] And at midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn son of the captive in the dungeon. Even the firstborn of their livestock were killed. [30] Pharaoh and his officials and all the people of Egypt woke up during the night, and loud wailing was heard throughout the land of Egypt. There was not a single house where someone had not died.

[31] Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron during the night. "Leave us!" he cried. "Go away, all of you! Go and serve the Lord as you have requested. [32] Take your flocks and herds, and be gone. Go, but give me a blessing as you leave." [33] All the Egyptians urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible, for they thought, "We will all die!"

[34] The Israelites took with them their bread dough made without yeast. They wrapped their kneading bowls in their spare clothing and carried them on their shoulders.

[35] And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. [36] The Lord caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So, like a victorious army, they plundered the Egyptians!

[37] That night the people of Israel left Rameses and started for Succoth. There were about 600,000 men, plus all the women and children. And they were all traveling on foot. [38] Many people who were not Israelites went with them, along with the many flocks and herds.

[39] Whenever they stopped to eat, they baked bread from the yeastless dough they had brought from Egypt. It was made without yeast because the people were rushed out of Egypt and had no time to wait for bread to rise.

[40] The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. [41] In fact, it was on the last day of the 430th year that all the Lord's forces left the land. [42] This night had been reserved by the Lord to bring his people out from the land of Egypt, so this same night now belongs to him. It must be celebrated every year, from generation to generation, to remember the Lord's deliverance.

Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread became an annual remembrance of how God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt. Each year the people would pause to remember the day when the death angel passed over their homes.

They gave thanks to God for saving them from death and bringing them out of a land of slavery and sin. Believers today have experienced a day of deliverance as well—the day we were delivered from spiritual death and slavery to sin. The Lord's Supper is our Passover remembrance of our new life and freedom from sin.

The next time struggles and trials come, remember how God has delivered you in the past and focus on his promise of new life with him.

Every firstborn child of the Egyptians died, but the Israelite children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been smeared on their doorframes. So begins the story of redemption, the central theme of the Bible.

Redemption means "to buy back" or "to save from captivity by paying a ransom." One way to buy back a slave was to offer an equivalent or superior slave in exchange. That is the way God chose to buy us back—he offered his Son in exchange for us.

In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner. When Jesus came, he substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve.

Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and restored us to God. Jesus' sacrifice made animal sacrifice no longer necessary.

We must recognize that if we want to be freed from the deadly consequences of our sins, a tremendous price must be paid. But we don't have to pay it. Jesus Christ, our substitute, has already redeemed us by his death on the cross. Our part is to trust him and accept his gift of eternal life.

Our sins have been paid for, and the way has been cleared for us to begin a relationship with God (Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:13-15, 23-26).

A kneading board was made of wood, bronze, or pottery and used for kneading dough. Bread was made by mixing water and flour with a small piece of leavened dough saved from the previous day's batch. Bread was the primary food in the Hebrews' diet, and thus it was vital to bring the board along. It could be easily carried on the shoulder.

The total number of people leaving Egypt is estimated to have been about two million. The "rabble of non-Israelites" may have been Egyptians and others who were drawn to the Hebrews by God's mighty works and who decided to leave Egypt with them.

The Israelites escaped Egypt after 430 years, most of that time in slavery. God confirmed his choice of Abraham's descendants.

The spies escape from Jericho.

Joshua 2:1-24

Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia. He instructed them, "Spy out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho." So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.

[2] But someone told the king of Jericho, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." [3] So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come into your house. They are spies sent here to discover the best way to attack us."

[4] Rahab, who had hidden the two men, replied, "The men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from. [5] They left the city at dusk, as the city gates were about to close, and I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them."

[6] (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath piles of flax.) [7] So the king's men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossing places of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king's men had left, the city gate was shut.

[8] Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. [9] "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone is living in terror.

[10] For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed.

[11] No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.

[12] Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that [13] when Jericho is

conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families."

[14] "We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety," the men agreed. "If you don't betray us, we will keep our promise when the Lord gives us the land."

[15] Then, since Rahab's house was built into the city wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. [16] "Escape to the hill country," she told them. "Hide there for three days until the men who are searching for you have returned; then go on your way."

[17] Before they left, the men told her, "We can guarantee your safety [18] only if you leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house.

[19] If they go out into the street, they will be killed, and we cannot be held to our oath. But we swear that no one inside this house will be killed—not a hand will be laid on any of them. [20] If you betray us, however, we are not bound by this oath in any way."

[21] "I accept your terms," she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.

[22] The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them had searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned to the city without success.

[23] Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them. [24] "The Lord will certainly give us the whole land," they said, "for all the people in the land are terrified of us."

The escaped searchers in Jericho by hiding in Rahab's house prepared the destruction of Jericho and preserved Rahab, who would become one of David's ancestors—as well as an ancestor of Jesus God's plan weaves lives together in a pattern beyond our understanding

Why did Joshua send the spies secretly? As far as he knew, he would be attacking a heavily fortified city using conventional warfare tactics. He needed strategic information about the city for the upcoming battle.

But he also knew that this might draw criticism from the other leaders. After all, the last time spies were sent, the report they brought back caused disastrous problems (see Numbers 13:1-14:4). While he did not want to move ahead without information, he also did not want to cause the people to stumble and question his wisdom and ability to lead the nation.

Why would the spies stop at the house of Rahab, a prostitute? (1) It was a good place to gather information and have no questions asked in return. (2) Rahab's house was in an ideal location for a quick escape because it was built into the city wall (2:15).

(3) God directed the spies to Rahab's house because he knew her heart was open to him and that she would be instrumental in the Israelite victory over Jericho. God often uses people with simple faith to accomplish his great purposes, no matter what kind of past they have had or how insignificant they seem to be. Rahab didn't allow her past to keep her from the new role God had for her.

Was Rahab justified in lying to save the lives of the spies? Although the Bible does not speak negatively about her lie, it is clear that lying is sin.

In Hebrews 11:31, however, Rahab is commended for her faith in God. Her lie is not mentioned. Several explanations have been offered: (1) God forgave Rahab's lie because of her faith; (2) Rahab was simply deceiving the enemy, a normal and acceptable practice in wartime; (3) because Rahab was not a Jew, she could not be held responsible for keeping the moral standards set forth in God's law; (4) Rahab broke a lesser principle—telling the truth—to uphold a higher principle—protecting God's people.

There may have been another way to save the lives of the Israelite spies. But under the pressure of the moment, Rahab had to make a choice. Most of us will face dilemmas at one time or another. We may feel that there is no perfect solution to our problem. Fortunately, God does not demand that our judgment be perfect in all situations. He simply asks us to put our trust in him and to do the best we know how. Rahab did that and was commended for her faith

Two spies left the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove, crossed the Jordan River, and slipped into Jericho. The city was built around an oasis in the midst of a hot and desolate valley 840 feet below sea level. Jericho was the first major city the Israelites set out to conquer.

Flax was harvested in the fields and piled high on the rooftops to dry. It was then made into yarn, which was used to make linen cloth. Flax grows to a height of three or four feet. Stacked on the roof, it made an excellent hiding place for the spies.

Many would assume that Rahab—a pagan, a Canaanite, and a prostitute—would never be interested in God. Yet Rahab was willing to risk everything she had for a God she barely knew. We must not gauge a person's interest in God by his or her background, lifestyle, or appearance

Rahab recognized something that many of the Israelites did not—the God of heaven is not an ordinary god! He is all powerful. The people of Jericho were afraid because they had heard the news of God's extraordinary power in defeating the armies across the Jordan River.

Today we can worship this same powerful, miracle-working God. He is powerful enough to destroy mighty, wicked armies, as he did in Jericho. He is also powerful enough to save us from certain death, as he did with Rahab.

In Joshua's day it was common to build houses on city walls. Many cities had two walls about 12 to 15 feet apart. Houses were built on wooden logs laid across the tops of the two walls. Rahab may have lived in such a house with a window that looked out over the outside wall.

Ehud escaped after killing the Moabite King

Judges 3:15-30

But when Israel cried out to the Lord for help, the Lord raised up a man to rescue them. His name was Ehud son of Gera, of the tribe of Benjamin, who was left-handed. The Israelites sent Ehud to deliver their tax money to King Eglon of Moab.

[16] So Ehud made himself a double-edged dagger that was eighteen inches long, and he strapped it to his right thigh, keeping it hidden under his clothing. [17] He brought the tax money to Eglon, who was very fat. [18] After delivering the payment, Ehud sent home those who had carried the tax money.

[19] But when Ehud reached the stone carvings near Gilgal, he turned back. He came to Eglon and said, "I have a secret message for you." So the king commanded his servants to be silent and sent them all out of the room.

[20] Ehud walked over to Eglon as he was sitting alone in a cool upstairs room and said, "I have a message for you from God!" As King Eglon rose from his seat, [21] Ehud reached with his left hand, pulled out the dagger strapped to his right thigh, and plunged it into the king's belly.

[22] The dagger went so deep that the handle disappeared beneath the king's fat. So Ehud left the dagger in, and the king's bowels emptied. [23] Then Ehud closed and locked the doors and climbed down the latrine and escaped through the sewage access.

[24] After Ehud was gone, the king's servants returned and found the doors to the upstairs room locked. They thought he might be using the latrine, [25] so they waited. But when the king didn't come out after a long delay, they became concerned and got a key. And when they opened the door, they found their master dead on the floor.

[26] While the servants were waiting, Ehud escaped, passing the idols on his way to Seirah. [27] When he arrived in the hill country of Ephraim, Ehud sounded a call to arms. Then he led a band of Israelites down from the hills.

[28] "Follow me," he said, "for the Lord has given you victory over Moab your enemy." So they followed him. And the Israelites took control of the shallows of the Jordan River across from Moab, preventing anyone from crossing. [29] They attacked the Moabites and killed about ten thousand of their strongest and bravest warriors. Not one of them escaped. [30] So Moab was conquered by Israel that day, and the land was at peace for eighty years.

This unusual story demonstrates how God can use us just the way he made us. Being left-handed in Ehad's day was considered an exceptional ability. Many Benjaminites were left-handed (see [20:16](#)), making them highly specialized troops, able to use a sling or bow with tactics designed to repel right-handed warriors.

Eglon's bodyguard never checked Israel's messengers for left-handed weapons. But God used Ehad's overlooked ability to give Israel victory. Let God use you the way you are to accomplish his work.

Ehad escaped undetected after assassinating the Moabite king Eglon
Broke the control of Moab over Israel and began 80 years of peace
Punishments by God are often swift and deadly

Samson escaped a locked city by ripping the gates from their hinges.

Judges 16:1-3

One day Samson went to the Philistine city of Gaza and spent the night with a prostitute. [2] Word soon spread that Samson was there, so the men of Gaza gathered together and waited all night at the city gates. They kept quiet during the night, saying to themselves, "When the light of morning comes, we will kill him."

But Samson stayed in bed only until midnight. Then he got up, took hold of the city gates with its two posts, and lifted them, bar and all, right out of the ground. He put them on his shoulders and carried them all the way to the top of the hill across from Hebron.

Samson escaped a locked city by ripping the gates from their hinges This Merely postponed Samson's self-destruction because of his lack of self-control without dependence on God and his guidance, even great ability is wasted

Elijah Escapes into the wilderness from Queen Jezebel.

1 Kings 19:1-18

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. [2] So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed."

[3] Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. [4] Then he went on alone into the desert, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

[5] Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" [6] He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

[7] Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, for there is a long journey ahead of you."

[8] So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. [9] There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

[10] Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

[11] "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

[12] And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. [13] When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

[14] He replied again, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

[15] Then the Lord told him, "Go back the way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. [16] Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet.

[17] Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! [18] Yet I will preserve seven thousand others in Israel who have never bowed to Baal or kissed him!"

Jezebel was enraged about the death of her prophets because they had told her everything *she* wanted to hear, prophesying her future power and glory. Their job was to deify the king and queen and help perpetuate their kingdom.

Jezebel was also angry because her supporters had been eliminated and her pride and authority damaged. The money she had invested in these prophets was now lost.

Elijah, who caused the prophets' deaths, was a constant thorn in Jezebel's side because he was always predicting gloom and doom. Since she could not control his actions, Jezebel vowed to kill him. As long as God's prophet was around, she could not carry out all the evil she wanted.

Elijah experienced the depths of fatigue and discouragement just after his two great spiritual victories: the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the answered prayer for rain. Often discouragement sets in after great spiritual experiences, especially those requiring physical effort or involving great emotion.

To lead him out of depression, God first let Elijah rest and eat. Then God confronted him with the need to return to his mission—to speak God's words in Israel. Elijah's battles were not over; he still had work to do. When you feel let down after a great spiritual experience, remember that God's purpose for your life is not yet over.

When Elijah fled to Mount Sinai, he was returning to the sacred place where God had met Moses and had given his laws to the people. Obviously, God gave Elijah special strength to travel this great distance—over 200 miles—without additional food. Like Moses before him and Jesus after him, Elijah fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Deuteronomy 9:9; Matthew 4:1, 2).

Centuries later, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus would meet together on a mountaintop (Luke 9:28-36).

Elijah thought he was the only person left who was still true to God. He had seen both the king's court and the priesthood become corrupt. After experiencing great victory at Mount Carmel, he had to run for his life.

Lonely and discouraged, he forgot that others had remained faithful during the nation's wickedness. When you are tempted to think that you are the only one remaining faithful to a task, don't stop to feel sorry for yourself. Self-pity will dilute the good you are doing. Be assured that even if you don't know who they are, others are faithfully obeying God and fulfilling their duties.

Elijah knew that the sound of a gentle whisper was God's voice. He realized that God doesn't reveal himself only in powerful, miraculous ways. To look for God only in something big (rallies, churches, conferences, highly visible leaders) may be to miss him because he is often found gently whispering in the quietness of a humbled heart. Are you listening for God? Step back from the noise and activity of your busy life and listen humbly and quietly for his guidance. It may come when you least expect it.

God asked Elijah to anoint three different people. The first was Hazael, as king of Aram. Elijah was told to anoint an enemy king because God was going to use Aram as his instrument to punish Israel for its sin. Aram brought Israel's *external* punishment.

Israel's internal punishment came from Jehu, the next man Elijah was to anoint. As king of Israel, Jehu would destroy those who worshiped the false god Baal (2 Kings 9-10).

The third person Elijah was told to anoint was Elisha, the prophet who would succeed him. Elisha's job was to work in Israel, the northern kingdom, to help point the people back to God. At this time, the southern kingdom was ruled by Jehoshaphat, a king devoted to God.

Elisha fled into the wilderness out of fear of Queen Jezebel Preserved Elijah's life but also displayed his human weakness even at moments of real success, our personal weaknesses are our greatest challenges

Saul (Paul) flees from Damascus

Acts 9:23-25

After a while the Jewish leaders decided to kill him. [24] But Saul was told about their plot, and that they were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him. [25] So during the night, some of the other believers let him down in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

According to Galatians 1:17, 18, Paul left Damascus and traveled to Arabia, the desert region just southeast of Damascus, where he lived for three years.

It is unclear whether his three-year stay occurred between verses 22 and 23 or between verses 25 and 26. Some commentators say that "after a while" could mean a long period of time.

They suggest that when Paul returned to Damascus, the governor under Aretas ordered his arrest (2 Corinthians 11:32) in an effort to keep peace with influential Jews.

The other possibility is that Paul's night escape occurred during his first stay in Damascus, just after his conversion, when the Pharisees were especially upset over his defection from their ranks.

He would have fled to Arabia to spend time alone with God and to let the Jewish religious leaders cool down. Regardless of which theory is correct, there was a period of at least three years between Paul's conversion (9:3-6) and his trip to Jerusalem (9:26).

Lowered over the wall in a basket to get out of Damascus Saved this new Christian for great service to God. God has a purpose for every life, which leads to a real adventure for those willing to cooperate.

Peter is freed from prison by an angel.

Acts 12:1-11

About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. [2] He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. [3] When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish leaders, he arrested Peter during the Passover celebration [4] and imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod's intention was to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. [5] But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

[6] The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, chained between two soldiers, with others standing guard at the prison gate.

[7] Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel tapped him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. [8] Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

[9] So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was really happening. [10] They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate to the street, and this opened to them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

[11] Peter finally realized what had happened. "It's really true!" he said to himself. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jews were hoping to do to me!"

King Herod Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who had been responsible for the death of John the Baptist (see Mark 6:17-28).

Herod Agrippa I was part Jewish. The Romans had appointed him to rule over most of Palestine, including the territories of Galilee, Perea, Judea, and Samaria. He persecuted the Christians in order to please the Jewish leaders who opposed them, hoping that would solidify his position. Agrippa I died suddenly in A.D. 44 (see 12:20-23). His death was also recorded by the historian Josephus.

James and John were two of Jesus' original 12 disciples. They had asked Jesus for special recognition in his Kingdom (Mark 10:35-40). Jesus had said that to be a part of his Kingdom would mean suffering with him (drink from the same cup—Mark 10:38, 39). James and John did indeed suffer—Herod executed James, and later John was exiled (see Revelation 1:9).

Why did God allow James to die and yet miraculously save Peter? Life is full of difficult questions like this. Why is one child physically disabled and another child athletically gifted?

Why do people die before realizing their potential? Questions like these we cannot possibly answer in this life because we do not see all that God sees. He has chosen to allow evil in this world for a time.

But we can trust God's leading because he has promised to destroy all evil eventually. In the meantime, we know that God will help us use our suffering to strengthen us and glorify him.

Freed from prison by an angel Saved Peter for God's further plans for his life God can use extraordinary means to carry out his plan—often when we least expect it

Paul and Silas were freed from prison.

Acts 16:22-40

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. [23] They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. [24] So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

[25] Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. [26] Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!

[27] The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. [28] But Paul shouted to him, "Don't do it! We are all here!"

[29] Trembling with fear, the jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

[31] They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with your entire household." [32] Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and all who lived in his household. [33] That same hour the jailer washed their wounds, and he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. [34] Then he brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

[35] The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" [36] So the jailer told Paul, "You and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."

[37] But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without trial and jailed us—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!"

[38] When the police made their report, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. [39] They came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. [40] Paul and Silas then returned to the home of Lydia, where they met with the believers and encouraged them once more before leaving town.

Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and placed in stocks in the inner cell. Stocks were made of two boards joined with iron clamps, leaving holes just big enough for the ankles.

The prisoner's legs were placed across the lower board, and then the upper board was closed over them. Sometimes both wrists and ankles were placed in stocks. Paul and Silas, who had committed no crime and who were peaceful men, were put in stocks designed for holding the most dangerous prisoners in absolute security.

Despite this dismal situation, they praised God, praying and singing as the other prisoners listened. No matter what our circumstances, we should praise God. Others may come to Christ because of our example.

Luke stayed in Philippi while Paul, Silas, and Timothy continued on the Egnatian Way to Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica. But trouble arose in Thessalonica, and they fled to Berea. When their enemies from Thessalonica pursued them, Paul set out by sea to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy to encourage the believers.

The jailer drew his sword to kill himself because jailers were responsible for their prisoners and would be held accountable for their escape.

Paul and Silas's reputation in Philippi was well known. When the jailer realized his own condition and need, he risked everything to find the answer. The Good News of salvation is simply expressed: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (see Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Philipians 2:11).

When we recognize Jesus as Lord and trust in him with our entire life, salvation is assured to us. If you have never trusted in Jesus to save you, do so quickly.

Your life can be filled with joy, just as the jailer's was (16:34).

So the offer of salvation was made to the jailer's entire household—family and servants. Yet it was not the jailer's faith that saved them; they all needed to come to Jesus in faith and believe in him in the same way the jailer had. His entire family did believe and all were saved. Pray that God will use you to introduce Jesus to your family and that they will come to believe in him.

Paul refused to take his freedom and run. He wanted to teach the city officials in Philippi a lesson and to protect the other believers from the treatment he and Silas had received.

The word would spread that Paul and Silas had been found innocent and freed by the leaders, expressing the truth that believers should not be persecuted—especially if they were Roman citizens. Roman citizenship carried with it certain privileges. These Philippian authorities were alarmed because it was illegal to whip a Roman citizen. In addition, every citizen had the right to a fair trial, which Paul and Silas had not been given.

Chains loosened and doors opened by an earthquake, but they chose not to leave the prison. Pointed out the powerlessness of humans before God. When our dependence and attention are focused on God rather than our problems, he is able to offer help in unexpected ways.

If you feel imprisoned or looking for an escape, remember that Jesus has come to set the captives free.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door to Jesus

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print