MY FIRST HISTORY

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MY FIRST HISTORY

Exciting Stories of God's People

BY R.A. SHEATS & JOSHUA SCHWISOW

Generations
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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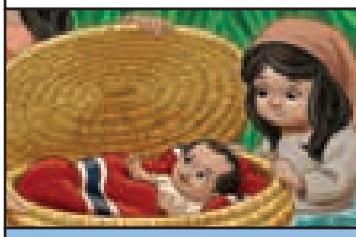
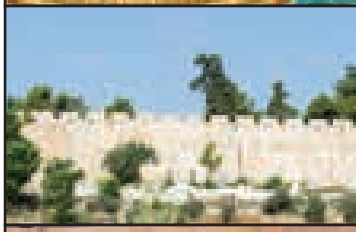
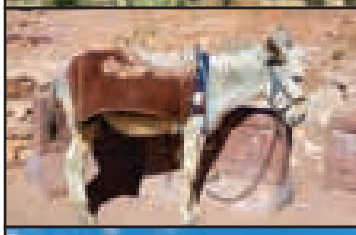
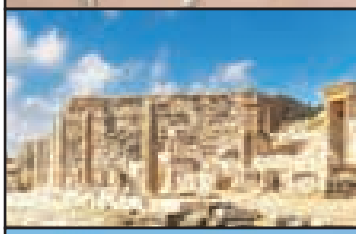
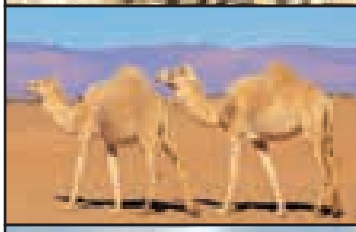

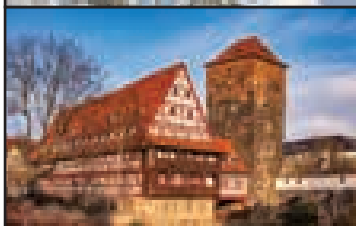

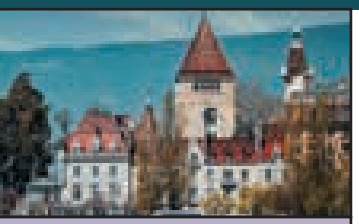
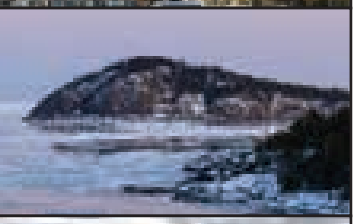
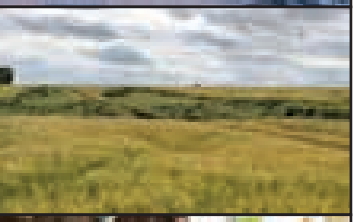

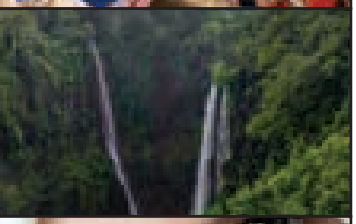
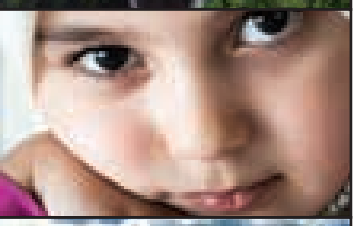

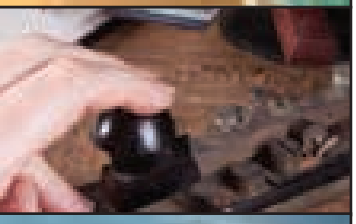
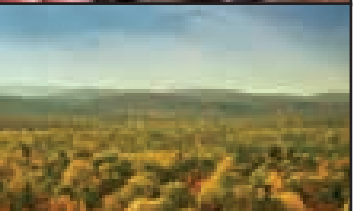

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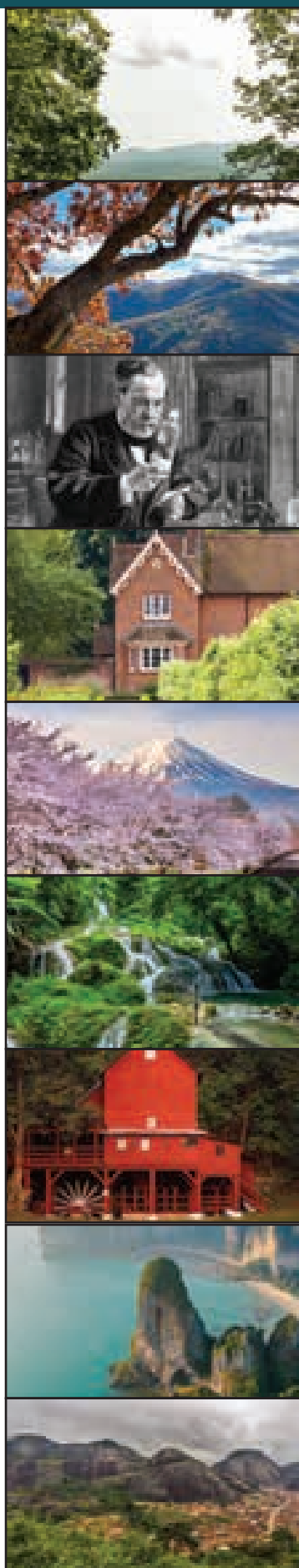

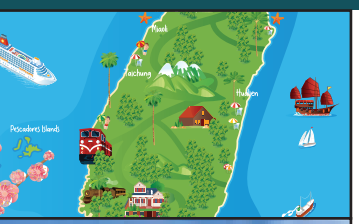

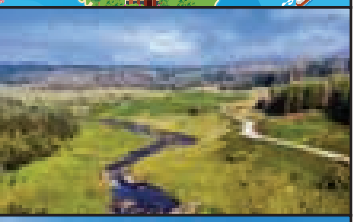
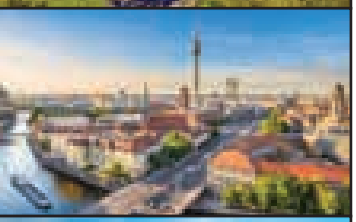
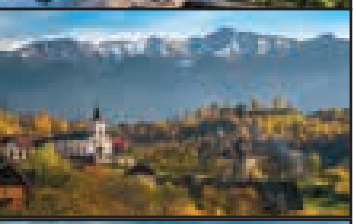

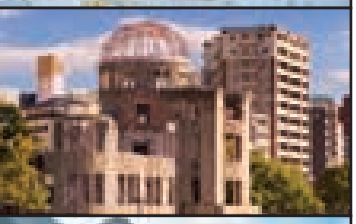

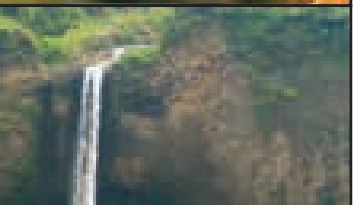

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INTRODUCTION

Studying the works of God in the past is always a fascinating and rewarding task. By studying history, we learn of God's mighty deeds upon the earth and how He uses faithful men and women in His kingdom work. Amazing stories of God's works inspire us to worship, honor, and praise our glorious King Jesus and to press forward in the work He has set before us.

My First History records some of the most remarkable and memorable stories of God's work in history. A special feature of this introductory history volume is the focus it gives to the role of children in God's kingdom purposes. Many of the stories in *My First History* showcase the childhood of real kids that God used and prepared for His purposes. It is our hope that these stories will encourage children to remember their Creator in the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1) and to serve the Lord Jesus from an early age.

My First History is designed to introduce children ages 5-7 to the joy and wonder of learning about history. To this end, it covers stories from many different centuries in many different places. There are names of people who are well-known in history, and names that are far less familiar to most. By including such a variety, we want children to understand that God has purposes for every single one of us.

As Psalm 139 says:

> Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
> in your book were written, every one of them,
> the days that were formed for me,
> when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:16 ESV)

God uses men and women of all walks of life to build His church and extend His kingdom on earth. Children will learn how children, queens, scientists, musicians, pastors, mothers, explorers, missionaries, fathers, soldiers, kings, and even samurai

warriors are used by God to glorify Himself. Old men and little children, housewives and noblemen are all a part of God's marvelous work of redemptive history.

THE SCOPE OF THIS VOLUME

My First History contains the following biographical accounts. Included on the table below are details about the approximate time period and location covered in each chapter.

Chapter	Name	Location	Time Period
1	Miriam and Moses	Egypt	1500s BC
2	King Josiah	Israel and Juda	600s BC
3	Rhoda and Peter	Israel	1st century
4	Nicholas of Myra	Turkey	3rd century
5	Augustine of Hippo	North Africa	4th century
6	Stephen of Perm	Russia	14th century
7	Hans Sachs	Germany	16th century
8	Marie Viret	Switzerland	16th century
9	Gustavus Adolphus	Sweden	17th century
10	Sir Isaac Newton	England	17th and 18th centuries
11	George Frederick Handel	England	18th century
12	Rajanaiken	India	18th century
13	Khanee	Persia	19th century
14	Puaaiki Bartimaeus	Hawaii	18th century
15	Samuel Morse	USA	19th century
16	Betty Schneider	USA	19th century
17	Elias Boudinot	Cherokee Tribe in USA	19th century
18	Cyrus McCormick	USA	19th century
19	Louis Pasteur	France	19th century
20	Charles Spurgeon	England	19th century

21	Joseph Hardy Neesima	Japan	19th century
22	Kahi and Ropu	Vanuatu	19th century
23	George Washington Carver	USA	19th century
24	Princess Fa-Ying	Thailand	19th century
25	Mary Slessor	Nigeria	19th century
26	Chi Wang	Taiwan	19th century
27	Alexander Fleming	Scotland	20th century
28	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Germany	20th century
29	Sabina Wurmbrand	Romania	20th century
30	William Gorgas	Panama	20th century
31	Jim Sledge	Philippines	20th century
32	Myeko Nakamura	Japan	20th century
33	Russell Blaisdell	Korea	20th century
34	Dayuma	Ecuador	20th century

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS IN EDUCATION

The study of history is paramount in a child's education. However, studying history is not an end in itself. Though children will learn much from this book, much more is required to truly instill in them an understanding of history and of their place in God's glorious work of redemptive history.

This book is merely a tool to be used. The primary means by which a young child will grow in the knowledge of himself, the world around him, and God is through meaningful conversations with his father and mother. This book has been produced with the intention of providing a suitable platform and opportunity to stimulate and foster such conversations. Parents are encouraged to discuss each chapter with their child using the included discussion questions, drawing out the principles contained in it and assisting their child in putting into practice the lessons they learn.

Studying the history of a fallen world will necessarily involve confronting challenging and sorrowful events such as death, war, violence, persecution, and various

other evils. In preparing this volume for young students, we have sought to present these stories at an age-appropriate level by not using graphic descriptions, and by not providing a level of detail that would be too frightening for a 5-7 year old child. However, we recognize that the needs of each child are different depending on their particular maturity level, as well as what they themselves may have already experienced in their lives. Parents/teachers are encouraged to review the content of each story ahead of time should they be concerned that any subject matter may be difficult for the student. If necessary, parents/teachers may adjust what details they read aloud accordingly. Chapters that contain somewhat more difficult subject matter include the following: Fa-Ying (death of a young child), Sabina Wurmbrand (persecution and imprisonment), Myeko Nakamura (a child experiencing wartime bombing), Russell Blaisdell (orphans experiencing wartime conditions), and Dayuma (growing up amidst tribal violence).

SOURCES FOR THE STORIES CONTAINED IN THIS BOOK

Below is a list of sources that were used in the retelling of the stories contained in *My First History*.

Material for the first three chapters cover biblical history and are taken from the inspired and infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Many variations of Nicholas of Myra's life exist. The version given in the chapter in this book is based on the account in Joe Wheeler, *Saint Nicholas* (Thomas Nelson, 2010).

The chapter on Augustine's life has been drawn from Augustine's autobiography contained in his *Confessions,* particularly Books 1, 2, and 8.

The history of Stephen of Perm has been taken from various histories of Russia, including *Some Links in the Chain of Russian Church History* by W. H. Frere (London: Faith Press, 1918) and *A Short History of the Church of Russia* by Rev. Reginald F. Bigg-Wither (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920).

Information for the chapter on Hans Sachs was drawn from Hans Sachs, *Merry Tales and Three Shrovetide Plays* (trans. William Leighton, London: David Nutt, 1910), and Annis S. Shaver et al., *Staging Luther: Four Plays by Hans Sachs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023).

Marie Viret's life was taken from information gathered from the letters of her father Pierre Viret as well as material in Jean Barnaud, *Pierre Viret, sa vie et son oeuvre: 1511-1571* (Saint-Amans: G. Carayol, 1911).

The account of Gustavus Adolphus' life has been taken from Harriet Earhart Monroe's *History of the Life of Gustavus Adolphus II: The Hero-General of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1910).

The account of Isaac Newton's life and work has been taken from Mitch Stokes, *Isaac Newton: Christian Encounters Series* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

The story of Handel's life was drawn from Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966).

Rajanaiken's story is taken from a letter he wrote in 1732 and published in J. Ferd. Fenger, *History of the Tranquebar Mission Worked out from the Original Papers* (Madras: M. E. Press, 1906).

Khanee's history is drawn from D. T. Fiske, *Faith Working by Love: As Exemplified in the Life of Fidelia Fiske* (Boston: Congregational Sabbath School and Publishing Society, 1868), Thomas Laurie, *Woman and Her Saviour in Persia* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1863), and William Guest, *Fidelia Fiske: The Story of a Consecrated Life* (London: Morgan & Chase, 1870).

The history of Puaaiki Bartimaeus is taken from Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1981) and J. S. Green, *Notices of the Life, Character, and Labors of the Late Bartimeus L. Puaaiki* (Lahainaluna: Press of the Mission Seminary, 1844).

The account of Samuel Morse's life and work has been taken from *Samuel F.B. Morse: His Letters and Journals* (1914).

The history of Elizabeth "Betty" Schneider and her family is taken from Ezra E. Eby, *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township and other Townships of the County,* 2 volumes (Ontario: 1895-1896). Some liberty has been taken in adding conversational content to the story.

Elias Boudinot's story has been drawn from Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

The account of Cyrus McCormick's life and his inventions has been taken from Herbert N. Casson's *Cyrus McCormick: His Life and Work* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1909).

Material for Louis Pasteur's chapter was taken from Patrice Debré, *Louis Pasteur* (trans. Elborg Forster, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) and Albert Keim, *Louis Pasteur: 1822-1895* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914).

The story of Charles Spurgeon at his grandfather's house is taken from Spurgeon's writings published in *Memories of Stambourne* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1975). The preaching scene is drawn from a sermon Spurgeon preached entitled "All of Grace."

Joseph Hardy Neesima's chapter was drawn from material in Jesse Page, *Japan: Its People and Missions* (Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.).

Kahi's story and details of life on Aniwa are taken from Margaret Paton's *Letters from the South Seas* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003) and John G. Paton's *Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965).

The details of the chapter on George Washington Carver have been taken from Carver's letters, papers, and speeches recorded in William J. Federer, *George Washington Carver: His Life and Faith in His Own Words* (Amerisearch, Inc., 2002). In Dr. Carver's letters, he does not include the name of the five-year-old patient mentioned in this book. A fictitious name (Teddy) has therefore been supplied.

Princess Fa-Ying's life was drawn from Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

The history of Mary Slessor was taken from W. P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor* (New Jersey: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1986).

The story of Chi Wang and her missionary work among the Sediq people is taken from Margaret L. Copland's booklet *Chi-Oang: Mother of the Taiwan Tribes Church* (Taipei, Taiwan: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Formosa, 1962).

Alexander Fleming's story was drawn from Kevin Brown, *Penicillin Man: Alexander Fleming and the Antibiotic Revolution* (Gloucestershire: History Press, 2013) and L. J. Ludovici, *Fleming: Discoverer of Penicillin* (London: Andrew Dakers Limited, 1952).

Details of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's childhood have been drawn from Eberhard Bethge's biography, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

The story of William Gorgas was drawn from Marie D. Gorgas and Burton J. Hendrick, *William Crawford Gorgas: His Life and Work* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2022).

The story of Sabina Wurmbrand is based upon the accounts provided in Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ: 50th Anniversary* Edition (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017) and Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife* (Living Sacrifice Book Co., 2013).

Material for the Jim Sledge chapter was taken from R. A. Sheats, *Just Jim: A Little Boy, a Time of Trouble, and a Faithful God* (Monticello: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2021) as well as personal interviews with Dr. Jim Sledge.

The details of Myeko Nakamura and her family's experiences were taken from John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946).

The story of Chaplain Russell L. Blaisdell was drawn from Blaisdell's reports of his time in Korea, news stories that appeared in the 1950s in *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, and material available from Koreanchildren.org.

The story of Dayuma of the Waorani is taken from Ethel Emily Wallis' *Dayuma: Life Under Waorani Spears* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1996).

SCHEDULE

Parents/teachers may complete this book with their student at their own pace. However, for a 36-week school year, parents/teachers may consider reading one chapter aloud each week and discussing the questions with their student. At this pace, the book can be completed in 34 weeks.

CONCLUSION

It is our prayer that these tales of the boys and girls, and men and women, of the past will inspire and encourage a new generation to stand strong in the good fight as they continually look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith!

R.A. Sheats and Joshua Schwisow
The Generations Curriculum Team
May 2024

1

MIRIAM AND THE BAD KING OF EGYPT

Miriam was a little girl. She lived with her mommy and daddy in a land called Egypt. It was hot in Egypt. The sun shone bright and strong. When Miriam went outside, the sand was hot on her feet.

Miriam and her family lived in Egypt, but they were not Egyptians. They were Israelites. They were part of the people of Israel. The Israelites lived in Egypt, but they wanted to leave Egypt. The Israelites wanted to live in their own land.

Why do you think they wanted to leave Egypt? They were sad there. The king of Egypt did not like the Israelites. He did bad things to them. The Israelites were sad, and they prayed to God. They said, "God, please rescue us from the king of Egypt. Please let us leave Egypt and live in our own land where we will be free."

Miriam listened as her mommy and daddy prayed. She wondered, "When will God answer our prayers? When will He rescue us?"

Miriam had a brother named Aaron. One day, Miriam's mother had another baby boy. Miriam was glad to have another brother. She liked to help take care of the baby. He was a beautiful little boy. But Miriam's mother knew the king of Egypt would be angry if he found the baby. "We have to hide your baby brother," she told Miriam. "We don't want the king to find out about our little baby boy."

Miriam's mother put the baby inside a special basket. She hid the basket beside the river. Miriam stayed by the river and kept watch to be sure her baby brother was safe. She wondered, "What will happen to him? Will he die?"

Suddenly, Miriam saw a woman coming down to the river. The woman was an Egyptian. The bad king of Egypt was her father. Do you think Miriam was afraid of her?

The Egyptian woman was a princess. She looked around at the river. Then she saw the basket in the reeds. Miriam watched while the princess opened the basket and looked inside. What did she see?

"A baby!" the princess said with surprise. The baby felt surprised as well. The baby began to cry. The Egyptian princess smiled. "Poor little baby!" she said. "He's hungry. I must find someone to take care of him."

Miriam heard what the princess said, so she walked up to her. "Do you want me to go find someone to feed the baby?" she asked. "My mommy can give the baby some milk to drink."

"Yes, go bring your mother," the princess said. Miriam ran back to her house and called her mother. The princess gave the baby to Miriam's mother. The princess didn't know the baby belonged to her. "Take this baby and feed him," the princess said. "I want to keep him safe, and he will be my own son."

The mother took good care of her baby boy. When he grew older, the princess took the little boy to live with her. They lived in her big Egyptian house. She called the baby Moses.

LEARNING TO BE PATIENT

Miriam was glad her brother was safe, but she didn't want him to live in Egypt. She didn't want to live in Egypt with the bad king, either!

The Egyptian princess found Moses beside the Nile River.

Every day, Miriam and the people of Israel prayed. They asked God to rescue them from the bad king of Egypt. Did God hear their prayer?

Miriam waited a long time. She wondered, "Will God answer our prayer today? Will He save us today?" No, God didn't save them that day. And on the next day, Miriam wondered, "Will God rescue us today?" But God didn't rescue them that day either.

It took a long, long time of waiting before God rescued them. Miriam knew she had to be patient, but it was hard to be patient. At last, God said, "My people, Israel, are in Egypt. I have heard them cry because the Egyptians hurt them. I have seen their pain. I will rescue them from the king of Egypt."

Miriam was so happy to leave Egypt. She was so happy that she sang a song to praise God. She held a tambourine in her hand and sang and danced. She sang: "Sing to the Lord, for He has done great things!" The rest of the Israelites joined Miriam. They sang, "The Lord is my strength and song. The Lord will reign forever and ever!"

WHAT HAPPENED LATER?

God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. He stopped the king of Egypt from hurting them. Then God gave the Israelites a new land. It was the land of Israel.

Miriam was so thankful God answered their prayers. She was thankful He set her people free. She was thankful He rescued them from the bad king. She had had to be patient, but God had been faithful. God had kept His promise and given them a new home in Israel.

I waited patiently for the Lord;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
(Psalm 40:1)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Miriam's mommy do when baby Moses was born?
2. Was the king of Egypt a good king or a bad king?
3. Why did Miriam have to be patient?
4. What does our Bible verse teach us?

Miriam lived in the land of Egypt. Egypt was a hot place to live.

Jerusalem, Israel

JOSIAH: A LITTLE BOY BECOMES A KING

2

After Miriam and the people of Israel left the land of Egypt, they moved to a land God gave them. This was the land of Israel. Do you see it on the map? Israel is close to Egypt.

A king ruled over the people in the land of Israel. One day, the king died, and it was time for a new king to rule over the people. Who do you think the new king was? He was a little boy named Josiah. Josiah was only eight years old when he became king.

Do you think Josiah was excited to be a king? Do you think he knew how to be a king? He may have needed some help from the surrounding adults. They could help him learn how to be a good king.

If you were a king or a queen, would you know what to do? Would you know what is right and what is wrong? Could you teach all the people to do good things and not bad things? That would be difficult! Josiah had a hard job. It is not easy to be a king.

FINDING A LOST BOOK

One day, King Josiah asked some men to clean up the temple. The temple was the place where people came to worship God. The men started cleaning each room in the temple. When they went into one room, they found an old book. This was a book Moses wrote. It had all the laws God gave His people. These laws told the people how they should live.

A man brought this book to the king. "King Josiah, we have found the Book of God's Law!" the man said.

Josiah was excited to see the book. He said, "We must read this book. It will tell us how God wants us to live."

The man read the book to Josiah. As he read, Josiah said, "God's Law is good, but we have not done what God told us to do. We have not obeyed God. We have done bad things." Josiah started to cry. He was sorry the people of Israel had done bad things. He wanted everyone to do good things just like God's perfect Law told them to.

What do you think King Josiah did? He called all the rulers of the people together. Then he called all the fathers and mothers and boys and girls. He told them to come to a big meeting. When all the people had arrived, King Josiah stood up and started to read. He read the Book of God's Law to the people. All the people listened as the king read the words of the book.

What would you do if you were a king or a queen?

When Josiah was king, books were written on long pieces of paper called scrolls.

When King Josiah finished reading all the book, he spoke to the people. He said, "We must obey what God wrote in this book. We must obey all the laws and commandments that God gave us. In His book, God told us how to live. We must obey Him."

The people said, "The king is right. We must obey God! We must do what His Law tells us to do."

DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

Is it good for you to fight with your brother or sister? Is it good for you to take something that does not belong to you? King Josiah told the people that these things were wrong. "God's Law tells us not to take things that are not ours," he told the people. "We must obey God's Law because it is a perfect Law."

Josiah tore his clothes in grief when he heard God's Law.

Josiah loved God with his whole heart and wanted to live exactly like God told him to. He wanted to be a good king and lead his people well. But at times, it was hard to know what to do. At times, he did not know what was right and what was wrong. Is there a way he could find out? Do you know?

If Josiah did not know what to do, he could look in God's Book. God's Book teaches what is right and what is wrong. Do you know what we call God's Book today? We call it the Bible.

Josiah loved to read God's Book and to think about it. Another word for thinking about something is *meditating*. If we *meditate* on God's Law, that means we think about it all the time. We think about how to love God and obey Him and how to do what is right.

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How old was Josiah when he became king?
2. What book did the men find when they were cleaning the temple?
3. How did Josiah know what was right and what was wrong?
4. What does our Bible verse say we should do if we love God's Law?

Some people in Jerusalem traveled on donkeys.
Would you like to ride a donkey?

3 RHODA HEARS A KNOCK

Jerusalem was a big city. Many people lived there. Many animals lived there as well. There were no cars or trucks or airplanes in Jerusalem in the past. But there were horses and donkeys. If you wanted to visit a friend, you would ride a donkey—or you would walk. But you could not ride in a car or on a bicycle. Jerusalem did not have cars or bicycles yet!

A long time ago, a bad king ruled over Jerusalem. His name was Herod. Herod was not a good man. He did many bad things. People did not like Herod because of the bad things he did.

Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem were God's people. They loved Jesus very much. Peter was one of these people. He loved Jesus and wanted to obey Him.

When Jesus was on earth, Peter followed Him and listened to Him talk. Peter learned many things as he listened. He learned that Jesus is God. He learned that God made all things, and God loves everything He made. He learned that Jesus loved His people so much He came to earth to save them! Peter's heart overflowed with love for his Savior Jesus.

With Jesus in heaven once more, Peter lived in Jerusalem. Peter told as many people as possible about God. These people gathered to pray, to sing, and to learn more about Jesus. One of them was a girl named Rhoda. Rhoda and Peter were friends.

But one day, a bad thing happened. King Herod sent his soldiers to arrest Peter. The soldiers put Peter in prison.

When Rhoda found out about

Peter, she was afraid. She did not want bad King Herod to hurt Peter or to lock him up in prison.

Many Christians lived in Jerusalem. The Christians heard that Peter was in prison. They gathered in a house. They began to pray and ask God for help. They asked God to rescue Peter from prison.

While they prayed, God did something. Can you guess what He did? He rescued Peter from the prison and set him free. With God's help, Peter escaped from King Herod! Peter was out of prison, but none of his friends, the Christians, knew this. They did not know God had set Peter free. The Christians remained in the house praying. Peter thought, "I need to tell my friends that I am free!"

Peter went to the house and tried to go in. But the Christians had locked the gate. They were afraid King Herod might send more soldiers to arrest them. Peter knocked on the door. *Knock, knock, knock.* "Let me in!" he said.

Rhoda heard someone knocking at the gate, so she went to see who was knocking. "Who is there?" she asked. Do you think Rhoda thought it was a soldier trying to arrest her? But Rhoda listened, and she did not hear a soldier's voice. She heard the voice of a friend!

"It is me. It is Peter."

"Peter?" thought Rhoda. She recognized his voice and knew that it *was* Peter! He was free! Rhoda was so happy. She ran back into the house to tell all the people the good news. Rhoda was so excited that she forgot to open the gate and let Peter in.

Rhoda raced into the room where all the Christians were praying. "Peter is at the door!" she cried out.

The people looked at Rhoda in surprise. "Peter cannot be at the door," they said. "He is locked up in prison."

"But I heard him!" Rhoda said.

The people shook their heads. "No, it cannot be Peter," they repeated.

Then they heard something. Peter was still standing outside the house, knocking. *Knock, knock, knock!*

"It *is* Peter!" Rhoda insisted. "He is at the door right now! Come and see!"

Finally, one of Peter's friends opened the gate to look. "It is Peter!" they cried, overjoyed. "God has answered our prayers! Peter is free!"

That was a big surprise. God heard His people pray, and He saved Peter from prison. Rhoda and all the Christians thanked God for answering their prayer.

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did people in Peter's city travel? Did they ride in a car?
2. What did King Herod do to Peter?
3. What did Rhoda and the other Christians do?
4. Did the people believe Rhoda when she said Peter was at the door?
5. What does our Bible verse teach us?

The ancient city of Patara

NICHOLAS OF MYRA AND A SURPRISE PRESENT

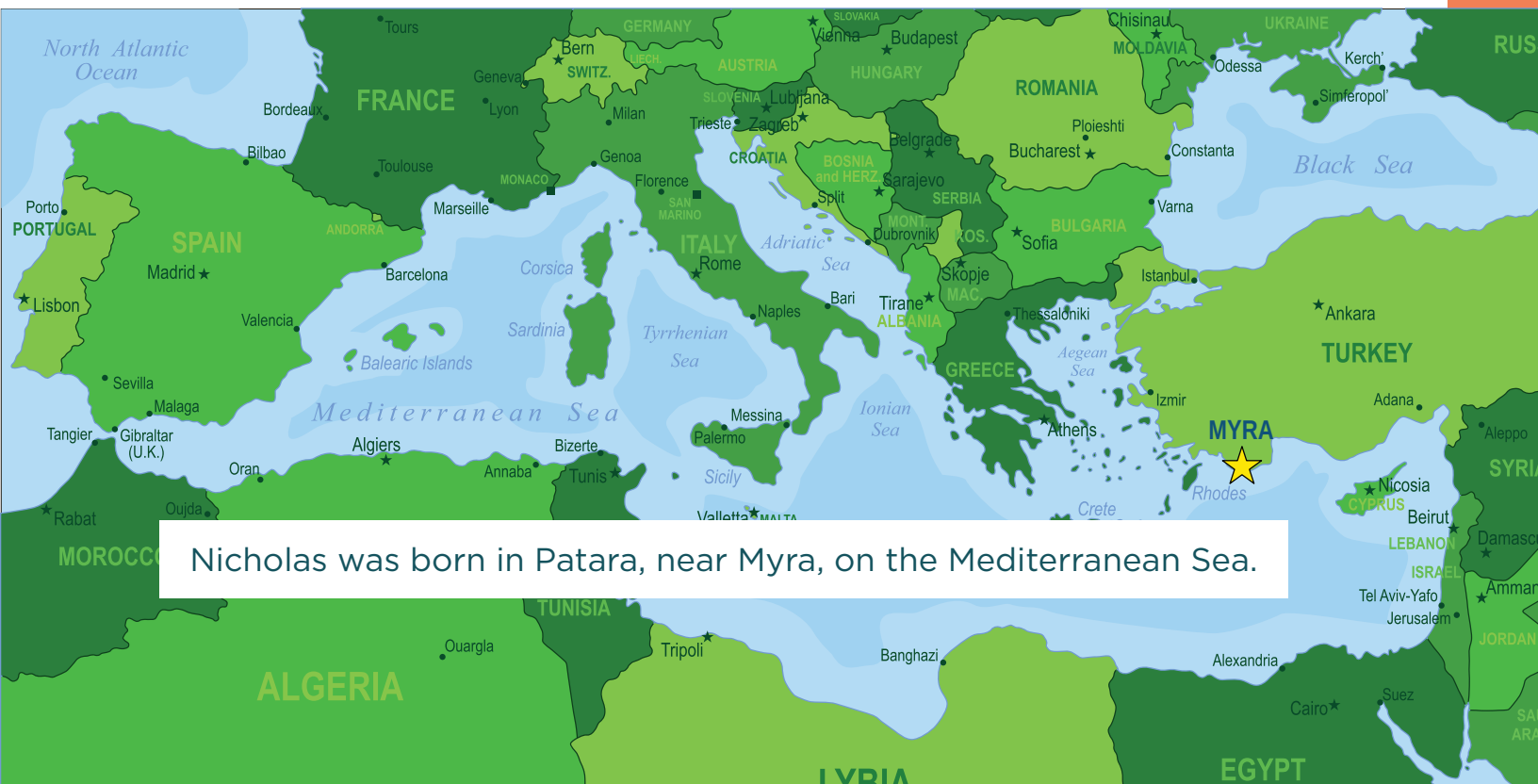
4

Do you remember Paul the Apostle? He lived a long, long time ago. He was a friend of Peter, the man we learned about in the last chapter. Paul traveled all over the Greek and Roman world. He wanted to tell everyone about Jesus. One of the places he traveled to was a region called Lycia.

The people in Lycia learned about God from Paul. Paul taught them that Jesus Christ had come to save them from their sins. The Lycians learned that if they trusted in the Lord Jesus, they would be saved. They began to love God and obey Him. One day, a little boy was born in Lycia. The little boy's mommy and daddy named him Nicholas. Nicholas was born about 270 years after Jesus' birth.

Nicholas grew up in a country we call Turkey. He lived near a part of the ocean called the Mediterranean Sea. You can see it on our map.

When Nicholas was a little boy, he liked to help people. When Nicholas grew up, he continued to help people. "God loves me and cares for me," Nicholas thought, "so



Nicholas was born in Patara, near Myra, on the Mediterranean Sea.

Boys and girls wore clothes like this when Nicholas was growing up.

I want to love and care for people." Nicholas became a pastor of a church. The church was in a city called Myra. In those days, pastors were called bishops. Everyone called Nicholas, "Bishop Nicholas."

GIVING A SURPRISE PRESENT

A poor man lived in Myra. He had three daughters, but he did not have any money. He was in trouble because he could not take care of his girls. What should he do?

Bishop Nicholas heard about the poor man. He wanted to help him. He decided to give the man a present of money. Then the man would be able to care for his daughters. But Nicholas thought, "If I give the man money, he will tell everyone about me.

He will tell people how nice I am." Nicholas said to himself, "I don't want that. God gave me this money. When I give this present, I do not want the man to think about me. I do not want the man to say I was kind. I want him to think about God and thank God for caring for him."

Nicholas thought, "I want this present to be a surprise. I do not want the man to know I gave it to him." Is there a way Nicholas could keep it a surprise? What do you think he did?

Nicholas waited until nighttime when it was pitch black outside. Everyone was asleep. Nobody was watching. Nicholas snuck up to the poor man's house. The man had left a window open. Nicholas crept up to the window. He tossed the bag of money inside. The bag landed beside the fireplace.

The next morning, the poor man woke up and found the money beside his fireplace. "Who put this here?" he wondered. "Some kind person has given this to us!" Then the man thanked God for sending money, so he could care for his daughters.

A BIG ARGUMENT ABOUT GOD

One day, Nicholas heard people in his city arguing about God. They asked, "Is Jesus *really* God? Do we *really* need to love and worship Him? What does the Bible actually say about Jesus?" People all over the Roman and Greek world started arguing like this.

A man named Constantine was ruler of the Roman and Greek world. Constantine wondered, "What should I do? People are arguing. They are saying false things about Jesus." Constantine planned a meeting. He invited hundreds of pastors to come to the meeting. Everyone gathered for the meeting in the city of Nicaea. (The meeting was called a *council*.)

Bishop Nicholas was one of the men who came to the meeting. Constantine

Constantine was emperor of the Roman and Greek world.

waited until all the pastors and guests had arrived. Then he said, "We must believe what the Bible says. Is Jesus God? Does the Bible say so?"

The pastors began to talk about this. They talked for a long time. "The Bible is true, and the Bible tells us that Jesus is God," they said. "We should love Him and worship Him." Then the bishops wrote down what they believed. We call this document they wrote the Nicene Creed. Have you heard of it before? Your mommy or daddy can read it to you.

WHAT HAPPENED LATER?

Nicholas was happy to help write the Nicene Creed. He wanted everyone to love Jesus as much as he did.

After the meeting was over, Nicholas went back to his home in Myra. He lived a long time, until he was an old man. Then he died. People loved Nicholas very much. People

wanted to be like Nicholas. After he died, they remembered all the things he had done. Some people remembered the gifts he had given to poor people. They started giving gifts too. If a poor child had no food, someone would wait until the child went to sleep at night. Then they would quietly put food and toys beside the fireplace in the child's house. When the child woke up in the morning, they would find the special presents waiting for them.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11)

Bishop Nicholas of Myra

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of clothes did boys and girls wear when Nicholas was a little boy?
2. What did Nicholas do to help the poor man take care of his daughters?
3. Why did Nicholas bring his present to the poor man's house at night?
4. Do you remember what the Nicene Creed is?
5. What does our Bible verse teach us?

Camels in the African desert

A VERY BAD LITTLE BOY: AUGUSTINE AND THE PEAR TREE

5

Long, long ago, a little boy lived in a country we call Algeria. Algeria is in Africa. It is a land full of deserts. Do you know what a desert is? It is a place where no trees grow. No grass grows either. A desert is full of hot, hot sand.

The little boy was born in AD 354. He lived near the desert, but he did not live in the desert. The air was very hot where he lived, but there were still trees and grass nearby. The boy's name was Augustine.

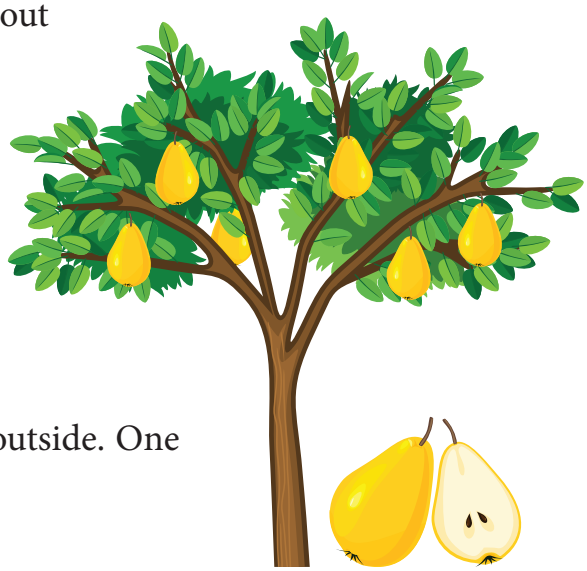
When Augustine was a tiny baby, his mother started praying for him. (His mother's name was Monica.) Monica wanted her son to grow up to be a good man. She wanted him to be a man who loved God. Every day, she prayed that Jesus would take care of her little boy. She prayed He would make him a godly man.

Augustine loved his mother, but he was a naughty child. He did not like to obey. When his mother told him it was time to study his letters, Augustine tried to run away and play. He did not like to do schoolwork.

"I do not want to learn the ABCs!" Augustine complained.

"You must learn them, even if you do not want to," his mother told him.

Augustine sat down and studied like his mother told him to. But he did not like to do his schoolwork. He frowned as he looked at the ABCs he had to learn. Inside, he was not thinking about ABCs. He was thinking about going outside and playing. He was thinking about skipping his schoolwork.



A PEAR TREE AND SOME PIGS

As Augustine got older, he kept doing bad things. One day, he and some other boys went outside to play. They played all day long. When they finished playing, it was getting dark outside. One of the boys said, "Look at that pear tree!"

Augustine saw the tree. It was a big tree near his house, and it was full of yummy pears. The pear tree did not belong to Augustine's family. It belonged to their neighbor. One of the boys said, "Let us steal the pears on that tree! It is dark outside, so no one will see us."

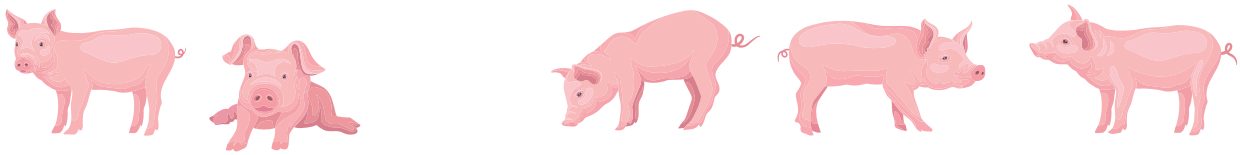
Augustine knew it was wrong to steal the pears. But Augustine wanted to do everything the other boys did. He smiled and said, "I will help." The boys snuck up to the pear tree. Then they picked the pears. Every boy carried as many pears as he could. They were not hungry, so they did not eat the pears. Instead, they took them to a pen where pigs were sleeping.

"We will give the pigs a treat," one of the boys said. Then Augustine and the other boys threw the pears into the pigpen. The pigs were excited and gobbled up all the pears.

When the owner of the pear tree woke up the next morning, he saw what had happened to his tree. "Someone stole my pears!" he exclaimed. He was very angry,

but he did not know who had stolen the pears. He tried to find out, but no one had seen the thieves.

Augustine knew who had stolen the pears. How could he forget? But he did not tell anyone. When he saw how angry the owner was, Augustine laughed. "He will never guess that we stole the pears and fed them to the pigs!" he thought.



Augustine was a very bad boy. He was glad the owner did not see him steal the pears. He was glad his mother did not see him steal either. Did anyone see Augustine steal the pears?

Someone did see him. Who was it? Do you know? It was God. God saw all the bad things Augustine did. Augustine did not know it, but God was watching him every single day.

"Pick Up and Read"

Soon Augustine grew up. Now he was no longer a bad boy. He was a bad man. Augustine knew he was bad, and he thought, "I must stop doing bad things." But he could not stop. No matter how hard he tried, Augustine kept doing bad things. He was a sad man.

One day, Augustine went out into his garden. He lay down on the ground under a tree and started crying. He wanted to be a good man, but he kept doing bad things. "Is it possible to stop doing bad things?" he asked. "I want to love God and be a good man, but I cannot." Augustine cried and cried.

Then—all of a sudden—Augustine heard something. Near the garden, a child was singing. Augustine sat up and listened. The child sang, "Pick up and read; pick up and read."

"Why is the child saying that?" Augustine wondered. Then he got up and walked back to his house. He said to himself, "Maybe I should read something. Maybe a book will help me." Augustine picked up a book to read. Can you guess what the book was?

Augustine crying in the garden

It was the Bible. The book did help Augustine. The Bible is God's Word. The Bible tells us all about Jesus. Augustine could not stop doing bad things, but God could make Augustine stop. Jesus gave Augustine a new heart. All of a sudden, Augustine loved God and wanted to be like Jesus. He stopped doing bad things. He started doing good things. He started to love God with his whole heart.

When Augustine's mother found out what had happened, she was so glad. "God has heard my prayers!" she said. "I prayed for Augustine every day, even when he was a little boy! Look how God has answered my prayers!"

WHAT HAPPENED LATER?

Augustine spent the rest of his life learning about God. He spent his life telling people about God. He wrote books to help people learn about Jesus. When you get older, you can read some of his books. But the most important book Augustine ever read was the Bible.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What hot place did Augustine live next to?
2. What did Augustine do with the pears he stole?
3. Why was Augustine crying in the garden?
4. What does our Bible verse teach us?