

June 2024 – So what is ‘The Big Story’?

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

This month we are looking at the Bible as one big story. We want children to understand that these 66 books – by multiple authors, written across centuries, tracking events and people across great distances – form one overarching big story. As we visit the Old and New Testaments, prophets, letters, poetry and history, we will discover that there is great harmony within this varied library. We hope that children will begin to see themselves within this story too, learning from its characters and building up a picture of the God who is eventually revealed in Jesus. This is ‘The Big Story’.

Session 1 June 1/2

Session Aim: To understand the role of a prophet
Bible Ref: Jeremiah 1:4-19

Today's fruit

Faithfulness is shown by God to an uncertain Jeremiah. This young man wasn't sure if he was up to the job of being a prophet, but God reassures him and promises to give Jeremiah the right words to say.

‘Big Story’ prophecy

Around 20 per cent of The Big Story is helped along by people chosen by God to speak up for him about the present and the future; they are known as prophets. It's not fortune-telling, but more about demonstrating what will happen as a consequence of not following God's ways. We need reminding because we all do things we know are wrong.

In the Old Testament we find Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah, writing around 700 BC, told the nation of Judah to turn back to God. He also told about someone who would suffer one day so that everyone could know God's forgiveness.

A century later, Jeremiah was another prophet who was speaking out and warning the people of Judah. As a boy he was chosen by God, and God had promised to give him the words to say and to protect him. God used images of a wooden stick and boiling water to describe what would happen to people who worshipped other gods. Jeremiah had to interpret these visions and trust that God would help him to speak boldly.

Think about

The Bible has 66 books in two groups – the Old and New Testaments. Just because today's prophets are in the Old Testament, it doesn't make them out of date. Try to think of ‘old’ as ‘first’ and ‘new’ as ‘second’.

Did you know that prophets were talking about Jesus hundreds of years before he even came?

How do you sense right from wrong? Who guides you, your teachers, family, friends? How would you react to a prophet telling you to change your behaviour?

What is it about being young that makes us doubt our ability to change things? Has God ever asked you to stop following other 'gods'?

Have you ever asked God for a vision or had a picture/dream which you think might be important to share with others?

1 June: International Children's Day

Why is it good to have a day like this and where does it come from?

Session 2 June 8/9

Session Aim: To know the impact Daniel had on King Darius

Bible Ref: Daniel 6:5-28

Today's fruit

Joy is seen when King Darius knows he can trust in Daniel's God. Can we know joy even when God doesn't seem to answer our prayers?

A 'Big Story' escape

Around two per cent of The Big Story is helped along by people who had visions. We heard about one last week, with Jeremiah. Another Old Testament prophet called Daniel used to have visions too.

In today's session we see that Daniel is in danger. He was a young Israelite taken as a prisoner from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. King Darius took over as king, but his supervisors grew jealous of Daniel. They persuaded the king to make a law that everyone should pray only to King Darius for 30 days. Daniel refused because he trusted God and continued to pray to him three times a day.

Darius ordered Daniel to be thrown into a den of hungry lions and he blocked the entrance with a huge stone and prayed, 'May your God save you.' The king could not sleep that night. But Daniel survived the night and Darius was delighted, ordering his kingdom to follow the God of Daniel instead.

Think about

Describe parts of the world that inspire you to have thoughts about God. If you like looking at nature or taking photos, perhaps God speaks to you in this way? That's like today's character Daniel.

What are some of the ways people show jealousy in your school? Do they ever get others into trouble?

Is prayer about how many times we pray in a day, or is it more about a relationship connection with God for you? Daniel had an impact upon King Darius - has your life ever impacted somebody else's?

I wonder why King Darius could not sleep when Daniel was in the den? Has a thought ever kept you awake for long?

Session 3 June 15/16

Session Aim: To think about what faith means to you

Bible Ref: Hebrews 10:13-16, 11:1-4

Today's fruit

This New Testament letter describes the faithfulness of God's people in the Old Testament.

'Big Story' letters

Around seven per cent of The Big Story is helped along by people who wrote letters. In the days before telephone or emails, writing letters was the only way to share information with people who lived far away.

The author of the letter to Hebrews writes to Jews who had recently become Christians. It is uncertain who wrote this letter, but it does not change the fact that, just as in Paul's letters, they were encouraging and wanted to guide these new followers of Jesus.

This letter is all about faith, the only way to please God. The writer takes a tour around Old Testament parts of the Bible referring to how the world was made, the sacrifices of Cain and his brother Abel, and the lives of Noah and Abraham.

These people put their faith into action and made it visible even though God is invisible. The letter writer says that this is because they trusted in the future God had in store, the 'better country - a heavenly country'.

Think about

Did you spot The Big Story coming together? Notice how the writer of Hebrews brings in other parts of the Bible that demonstrate faith.

Have you ever written a letter, and why are they so useful? Is there anything about them that is better than getting an email or text?

Have you ever made your faith visible? Do you know someone who does this?

The writer of the letter to Hebrews wanted to encourage these new Christians to keep going in their faith and not give up.

There are two events this week where you might want to stand up for something which matters to you:

20 June: World Refugee Day

A day to celebrate and honour those who have had to flee their homes for safety - this links to our sessions in January.

21 June: Show Your Stripes Day

A campaign about highlighting global warming and caring for the planet.

Session 4 June 22/23

Session Aim: To realise that David shared his honest feelings in songs and poems

Bible Ref: Psalm 27:1-14

Today's fruit

Gentleness is seen in the way David trusts God to help him overcome his enemies.

'Big Story' poetry

Around five per cent of The Big Story is helped along by poetry. One poetic book is the Song of Solomon which describes the feelings of love between King Solomon and his bride. Some readers believe this book is actually about God's love for his Church.

But poetry is about a lot more than rhyme and romance, and today's focus is upon another Old Testament book of poetry called Psalms. It is thought that David wrote at least 73 of the psalms, all centuries before Jesus came. Many of them are public songs of praise – recognising God's greatness, appreciating it, then expressing it. Not all the psalms are full of praise. Some cry out to God, wondering where he is, while others are poems of private grief and even protest.

Psalm 27 is about trusting God. David doesn't want his life ruled by fear. He wants to know that God hears him, and although he has enemies in his life, he wants God's help to cope with them and will wait for it.

Think about

Why is it sometimes useful to write a poem or describe something in a new way? Perhaps we like the feel of words in rhythm, or like using 'metaphors' or 'similes' at school?

Do you say thank you when you are given a gift? There's a good three-step process you could try: first recognise God's greatness, then appreciate it (be thankful for it), and then express how you feel about it. Perhaps even write a song or poem?

Is David like us? Do we sometimes experience fear or feel we have enemies or worry about the future? Could you bring your feelings to God and wait for some help?

June 22/23: Design For Life

This weekend in The Salvation Army, some people will make time to ask and wait for God to direct their next steps. Perhaps you might like to attend one day?

Session 5 June 29/30

Session Aim: To know the importance of Israel entering into the Promised Land

Bible Ref: Joshua 1:5-11,16-18

Today's fruit

Peace is seen in the way God assures Joshua to not be afraid.

'Big Story' history

Around 60 per cent of The Big Story is helped along by history. Some history is found in the four New Testament books known as the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Some of these are written by people who actually saw Jesus – we call them eyewitnesses.

Today our history book is called Joshua. Joshua was an eyewitness to a moment in the history of Israel when the Israelites finally arrived at the Promised Land – also known as Canaan. This is where the modern nation of Israel stands on our map today.

This was not straightforward, and in one of the more difficult parts of the Bible, we learn that many people died in this takeover led by the warrior Joshua. Joshua became the leader of the Israelites and led the people of Israel into Canaan, taking over when Moses died, and crossing the Jordan river on their way there. He believed that God was giving them this land.

It feels very different from last week where David showed gentleness, because during their journey Joshua's army moved from city to city destroying all idols.

We learn from the book of Joshua that the Israelites had come a long way in their story from leaving Egypt to entering the Promised Land.

Think about

Some of the Bible's history describes violence and wars. It can be hard for us to make sense of these difficult parts, particularly when Jesus modelled fruit including kindness, goodness and gentleness; but Joshua is doing the opposite. How do you make decisions about what is right or wrong?

Have you noticed how many times God has said, 'Don't be afraid' in this month's *Explore It*? It happens in verse nine and in verse six, when God tells Joshua to 'be strong and brave'. Are there parts of your life where you might use this advice?

The fruit of the Spirit does not suggest that we take things from others by force. Jesus came a long time after Joshua, but how would Jesus want a leader to behave towards other people today?

We may have lots of questions caused by parts of the Bible that seem to work against one another. If you could be an eyewitness to Joshua's history or to Jesus walking the earth, what might you say or ask them?