

Companion Guide to the video

Adventures from the Bible: Creation to Moses

In *Adventures from the Bible*, we meet the BibleMouse,[™] the animated mouse of a computer owned by a boy named Jon.

Jon has been given a homework assignment on the Bible as the greatest love story ever told. As he struggles with this, his computer mouse takes him on a journey back in time to the home of the Scribe.

The BibleMouse[™] and the Scribe set off with Jon on a colorful, exciting and entertaining journey: the engaging Biblical story from Genesis to Israel's arrival in the Promised Land.

Adventures from the Bible aims at helping young people appreciate God's Covenant relationship with humankind as the greatest love story ever known.

THE ACCOMPANYING BOOKLET

This booklet is designed for adults who view *Adventures from the Bible* with children and young people. The booklet provides background information to the Scriptures, including the meaning of Covenant and Shema. It also provides theological reflections on Biblical themes relevant to catechesis.

In addition, the booklet offers focus questions and specific activities to guide children in the viewing of the video, plus reflections on the Bible's relevance to their lives.

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPTURES

(a) *The History of Salvation*

By means of colorful and exciting stories, the Bible brings to life for us the relationship of love that has existed between God and human beings since the dawn of creation. The Bible tells us that from "the beginning" God wished to establish a caring relationship with humanity, a bond of love arising from the gift of human freedom, a "communion." But man and woman, at first innocent and in harmony with their Creator, disobeyed God, thus separating themselves from God. Selfishness proved self-destructive, but God bridged the chasm, drawing humanity back to him. This process took a long time. For his part, God chose a people to show to them his love and established his Covenant with them. The story of how this relationship developed is called the "History of Salvation." Salvation history tells that God promised to save his people, and that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

(b) *The Covenant*

The concept of Covenant in the Bible implies an agreement, a pact between two parties. In this case, it is a pact between God and his people. From generation to generation God renews the Covenant with special people, from Noah to Abraham and his descendants, from Jacob and his children to Moses. On Mount Sinai, Israel's Covenant obligations are spelled out in the Ten Commandments. Moses tells the people that their Covenant loyalty will be shown by their acceptance of God's commandments. "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you." (Deuteronomy 6:3):

(c) *The Shema*

"Shema" is a Hebrew word meaning "Hear!" or "Listen!" "Shema" is the opening word of the instructions given through Moses by God in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

These verses have become part of a great Jewish prayer, recited daily by observant Jews. Jesus would have prayed with these words. Some Jews interpret these verses to the letter and wear on their left arm and forehead little boxes (phylacteries, tefillin) containing scrolls. But the Covenant relationship extended beyond the recitation of prayer. It governed every aspect of life, and in time the Ten Commandments became 613 commandments covering family life, diet, clothing, business, etc.

Seen in the context of the Covenant, the concept of "Shema" goes beyond simple listening, for it is linked with "remembering." This does not mean the remembrance of something dead and gone, but rather the reawakened awareness of something that is living. For today's believer, the Covenant is as alive as it was for Moses. For the people

of Israel, keeping the Covenant was linked first of all with the promise of a homeland of their own and thereafter with the possession of that land or its loss, whether by exile or occupation. For Christians it is linked with the hope of entering into a heavenly homeland.

The “Covenant” and the “Shema” form the blueprint of this love story between God and humanity. On one side we have God continuously speaking and inviting us to listen (“Shema, Israel”); on the other hand we have people sometimes responding to God’s love and sometimes resisting it. But in spite of human frailty, God remains faithful to his Covenant.

THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE VIDEO

(a) Overview

In this video, *Adventures from the Bible*, God’s call to listen is renewed in the Scribe’s invitation to Jon. Jon sees how God repeatedly takes the initiative: creating, calling, saving. Though God has the major role in the pact he makes with the people he chooses, they are expected to play their part as well. God respects the dignity of those he has created by asking them to act in a responsible manner and to be accountable for their actions. Jon hears the voice of God speaking and comes to understand that it is not just addressed to the characters in the stories but to him as well.

Jon is present when Moses is given his mission and later when he receives the Law. This relationship is a privilege that God wishes to extend to all, but which is not appreciated by many to whom it is offered. The horrendous betrayal of God by those who worshipped the golden calf is redeemed only by a renewal of the Covenant by God with the whole people of Israel. At the end, Jon looks out over the Jordan toward the “land of milk and honey,” the homeland promised by God to his people. At that moment he grasps the meaning of the love story he will write about for homework: “God’s love for his people.”

(b) The Biblical Stories within “Shema”

Adventures from the Bible can be a useful resource to teach key doctrines of the faith.

1) Freedom to Choose—The Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-3)

Related Themes

- Freedom and responsibility
- The effects of our actions on others and on our relationship with God
- The fall and its consequences
- Human nature and sin

God created human beings, giving them everything they could possibly need. However, he created them with the ability to make choices. Viewing the video, we can see that things really began to go wrong when Adam and Eve stopped listening to God. The story can be used to develop an understanding of the sort of relationship God wants to establish with us. God is faithful to his promise and looks for faithfulness on our part. However, we are as free to refuse God’s love as we are to accept it. The focal point is Jon’s disappointment at the refusal of God’s love by Adam and Eve.

2) The Best for God—Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)

Related Themes

- The effects of our failure to love others
- Evil and the effects of sin
- Expression of love or lack of love
- Influence of motives and emotions

In the Bible no explanation is given for why God looked with favor on Abel’s offering but not on Cain’s. This video version of the story takes the traditional view that Cain was trying to cheat God and that Abel showed him up. Here we have two different attitudes toward the God who provided humankind with all that was necessary for life. This story also shows how our relationship with God is intertwined with our relationship with our neighbor. Cain’s attitude impeded his communication with God. As the Biblical account clearly shows, he too had a choice.

3) Noah and the flood—Creation is cleansed (Genesis 6:5, 9:17)

Related Themes

- Scripture imagery which speaks of God’s love and forgiveness (cf. Genesis 6:14, 9:12-17)
- God’s call to individuals and the whole people
- The Torah, the first five books of the Bible
- Baptism (cf. I Peter 4:19-21)

Visually the story is characterized by the presence of all the animals, but the focal point is Noah’s relationship with God. What was so special about Noah that God should speak to him? Perhaps God had tried speaking to others; the story doesn’t tell us. The point is that Noah listened, and because he listened he knew what to do. Once again God had humankind’s best interests at heart. His love was ready to save those who could hear what he had to say. Jon sees that God can work through what seems to be a disaster to bring about good. Jon is helped to see how faithful God is, even when people go astray.

4) The Promise Begins—Abraham (Genesis 12:1-5a, 22:1-18)

Related Themes

- Love of God implies trust
- The concept of liturgy and sacrifice
- The celebration of the Eucharist as thanksgiving

The story of Abraham begins when God chooses him to journey with his family to find a new homeland. Abraham hears God and obeys him. However, this story focuses on the sacrifice Abraham is asked to make. Jon is shocked to see a father preparing to kill his own son! The drama is increased by Isaac's trusting compliance with his father's will. The son who carries the wood on which he is supposed to die in obedience to his father is seen by Christians as a prototype of Jesus and his sacrifice. In the end Abraham hears God's voice again. He has proven his love for God, and God provides the sacrifice. For both Isaac and Jesus, God wants the final outcome to be life, not death.

5) Becoming a People—Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 37-46)

Related Themes

- Scripture stories with a message about life
- Giving and receiving love
- Forgiveness
- Relationship in the family, in the community
- Sin as a failure to love
- Opportunities to love others

The story of sibling rivalry begins with jealous brothers trying to rid themselves of the least popular member of the family. Why was Joseph unpopular? God spoke to him in dreams, and he relayed to his brothers the messages he had received. Joseph found that the truth is not always welcome. In time the brothers came to understand that Joseph had been right all along. It took famine and exile to help them see their error. By being open to what God was saying to him, Joseph was instrumental in saving not only his family but also the people of Egypt. It is worth noting the sort of person God chooses as his messenger—not an adult, not a government official, but a boy, a slave. God tends to choose those who are willing to listen.

6) The Chosen—Moses (Exodus 2-10)

Related Themes

- Obedience to God's commandments as a guide for loving God and neighbor
- Social and moral life
- The universal call to holiness
- The Jewish roots of Christianity

The visual impact of the burning bush is strong. It marks the meeting when Moses is chosen by God to lead his people. From that moment Moses' life moves in a new direction. The fact that God has chosen him enables him to overcome his fear. He rejoins the Jewish people, who are slaves of the Egyptians.

Jon witnesses the plagues, and the Scribe explains them as God's warning to the Egyptians. The Egyptians don't listen. The disasters that befall the country serve to emphasize the contrast between Moses, who listens to God, and Pharaoh, who does not.

7) The Passover—The Exodus (Exodus 11-14)

Related Themes

- Scripture stories with messages about life
- Celebration, signs and symbols
- Experience of faith
- Commitment and communion
- The mystery of redemption

Before escaping from slavery, the Israelites celebrate a special meal, which thereafter they will remember every year at Passover. They listen to what God has asked them to do and are obedient in every detail. One thing they are told is to mark their houses with the blood of the lamb. This serves to distinguish their homes from those of their oppressors. Thus God saves Israel, his "first-born son" (Exodus 4:22). Once again we see how listening to God and trusting him leads to life.

In his time, Jesus too celebrates Passover with his disciples and, on the night before he dies, he gives it a new meaning. By associating his death with the Passover ritual, Jesus presents himself as the sacrificial lamb who brings salvation.

8) The Covenant—Moses on Sinai/The Desert (Exodus 19-20, 32; Deuteronomy 29-30)

Related Themes

- Love and faithfulness
- Worship and obedience in response to God's love
- Covenant between God and the people of Israel
- Church's use of scripture
- Influence of values in society
- Role of law

Moses and the Israelites escape from Egypt, only to find themselves wandering in the desert. It is not long before there are murmurings. The people are not content with what God is giving them, so they complain about Moses. What a contrast between Moses, who listens to God, and the people, who quickly turn their attention elsewhere! When the

moment comes for the people to decide, Jon is quite clear about which option they should take. The people promise to be faithful, and God promises to remain with them and lead them into the promised land. But before that happens there is a period of forty years, during which the people learn how to listen to God and to live according to his law. Thus they became the people of the Covenant.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO

1. How would you describe the BibleMouse™ character?
2. What is the role of BibleMouse™ in the story?
3. Where is Jon taken by BibleMouse™?
4. How do you think Jon feels when he discovers where BibleMouse™ has taken him?
5. What does the word “Scribe” mean?
6. Who is the Scribe in this story?
7. What is the role of the Scribe in the story?
8. How would you feel about the Scribe if you were Jon?
9. What do you think is happening in Jon as BibleMouse™ and the Scribe lead him through the Bible stories? What is he feeling? What is he thinking?

Name a time when Jon is confused, when he is frightened, when he understands what is happening and when he is touched by what he has experienced.
10. How does God’s voice in the story make you feel?
11. What is God like in the story?
12. How does God relate to the following people in the story?
 - Adam and Eve
 - Cain and Abel
 - Noah
 - Abraham
 - Jacob and Joseph
 - Moses
13. How do these people respond to God?
14. What do you think Jon learns from the story about how

God relates to us?

15. What do you think Jon learns from the story about how we relate to God?
16. Imagine you are Jon. How would you explain in your homework the meaning of the greatest love story ever told?
17. Using your own Bible, read about one of the events you saw on the video. Imagine you are the Scribe and explain what happens.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Covenant

- a) Discuss the meaning of Covenant and “Shema” with the children in the light of their viewing of the video. Talk about the rules and agreements they have at home, at school, in class, in sports, etc. Discuss why we have such rules and agreements.

Research with the children the importance of the Torah in the daily lives of the Jewish people, the way they listen to the Scriptures and their understanding of the Covenant. Have the children reflect on this and write in their own words what God’s Covenant and “Shema” mean.

- b) Reflect with the children on the meaning of the “New Covenant” in Jesus. Look at the rites of Baptism and The Lord’s Supper and how they express God’s Covenant with us.
- c) Have the children reflect on how the rainbow was presented in the story of Noah as a sign of God’s Covenant with us. Encourage the children to draw rainbows and write in the different colors the values that enable us to honor and remain faithful to God’s Covenant in our own lives, for example, trust, listening, forgiveness, hope, love.

2. Shema

- a) Discuss with the children the importance in their lives of listening, hearing and remembering.
- b) Create a reflective, meditative atmosphere. Have the children close their eyes and relax their bodies. Play some quiet music. Gradually lead the children to remember a time when they heard something beautiful and affirming spoken to them. Help focus their memories by asking questions that they can reflect upon silently. Stress that they do not have to share their reflections—that this time

is just for them individually. Asking what was said, who said it, where they were and how old they were when they heard the words may help them remember.

When the children have had enough time, encourage them to write down what they remember. (This will be only for themselves, unless they choose to share it.)

Conclude the exercise by inviting anyone to share how this memory can help him or her. For example: "When I'm sad and I remember what was said to me, I feel good inside."

Sing an appropriate song.

A special note: When talking about the notion of "Shema" and especially in doing this kind of exercise, be aware of children with hearing disabilities. Provide for them in some special way. Also be aware that some children may have no memory of an affirmative experience. They may never have received an encouraging word. Support them by talking with them and affirming them yourself.

3. God's Personal Covenant

- a) Establish a sacred and prayerful atmosphere for the children. Music, silence and symbols may be helpful. A suitable song may be used to help the children reflect on their own lives and become aware of God.

Guide the children into a still, meditative silence and have them become aware of their own experience of "Shema," listening to God in their own hearts. Have them listen silently and deeply to what God might be saying to them now and promising them as part of his Covenant with them in their own life. Give them time to reflect on this. Gently focus them with quietly spoken questions, such as, "What does God promise to do for you?" "What does God ask you to do for Him?" Stress that their answers are not for sharing.

When it is appropriate, gather the children from their silent reflection by leading them in prayer.

Conclude with an appropriate song.

- b) As a follow up to this prayer experience, invite the children to draw a symbol or image that speaks to them of their personal Covenant with God.