

THE BIBLE – episode summaries – Jan 2013

Ep 1 – IN THE BEGINNING

As Noah endures God's wrath in his lonely ark, he recounts man's descent from Adam into wickedness. God has sent a flood to cleanse humanity, to offer a new beginning. Years later, Noah's descendant Abraham is given a message by God. He is promised a land of his own, and starts out on the long and arduous journey to reach it. Abraham's only descendant, his nephew Lot, chooses his own path and leaves his uncle to start again in Sodom, where he will escape death when the sinful city is destroyed by God. Meanwhile, Abraham reaches the Promised Land but his covenant with God is still not complete – he has been promised offspring as numerous as the stars. But his wife, Sarah, is barren. Much to her pain she encourages Abraham to sleep with servant girl Hagar to father a child. Ishmael is born. But years later three angels from God arrive with exciting news – Sarah will indeed bear a child, Isaac. Abraham is now forced to choose between his two sons. He casts Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. God then exacts on Abraham one final, terrible test. Calling for the sacrifice of his one remaining son Isaac, Abraham is forced to prove his faith in his new God. He passes the test and Isaac is allowed to live. The faith of the Israelites begins here, with the family of Abraham. Isaac has a son called Jacob who God re-names Israel...

Ep 2 – EXODUS

The Israelites are slaves in a foreign land, Egypt, ruled harshly by the Pharaoh, and forced to construct his new cities. But one member of the Egyptian Royal household, Moses, does not belong there. In a fight with Pharaoh's son, Moses' true origins are humiliatingly revealed to him – he is not of royal blood, but an Israelite slave. He leaves Egypt, spending years in the wilderness, until God visits him and tells him to free his people. But the new Pharaoh will not give up the slaves so God sends plague after devastating plague to persuade him otherwise. The final plague – death to all firstborn sons – is shocking. By marking their doors, the Israelites are saved, but the Pharaoh has no such reprieve. Mourning his child, he releases the Israelites. But soon questions his choice and follows them with hundreds of chariots, reaching them just as they arrive at the edge of the Red Sea. Trapped by the Egyptian army, Moses puts his faith in God and is rewarded with an awesome miracle: the Red Sea parts, allowing the Israelites to escape. Now on their way to the Promised Land and freedom, Moses delivers his final message from God – the Ten Commandments. The Israelite people have a nation, a society with rules. They just need their land. Moses asks Joshua to lead them to it.

Ep 3 – HOMELAND

Joshua, continuing Moses' quest to secure the Promised Land, takes the city of Jericho. God's promise to Abraham is finally being fulfilled. But after many years in their homeland, the Israelites find other invaders also want the land. Of all their opponents, the Philistines are the fiercest and to confront them, the Israelites need a new kind of leader. God sends them Judges, like Samson who is blessed with immense strength but who is tested when his strength is removed at the

hands of his betraying lover Delilah, and he has to rely on faith alone to defeat the Philistines. The Israelites' grip on their homeland remains precarious, and so the people ask the prophet, Samuel, to appoint a king to transform the homeland into a powerful kingdom. Reluctantly, Samuel chooses the charismatic warrior Saul. The ensuing power struggle between Samuel and Saul ends bitterly over a misplaced sacrifice, and Samuel abandons the new king, and searches for another. Finding young shepherd boy David, Samuel is told by God that this will be the next king of Israel, and Samuel duly anoints him. But anointing a new king whilst the current one still reigns is a dangerous move which threatens to throw the new nation into civil war...

Ep 4 – KINGDOM

Saul, the king of Israel, is slowly sinking into paranoia. Bitterly regretting his dispute with the prophet Samuel, he is convinced that he has lost the chance to establish his own dynasty, and the kingdom he has fought so hard to secure will at any moment be snatched from him. When David's popularity explodes after he proves himself by brilliantly defeating the Philistine warrior Goliath, Saul's mistrust grows. Convinced that David is after his crown, he exiles him from his court and then doggedly pursues him, consumed with jealousy. It is a decision which proves fatal: the Philistines trounce the divided Israelites. Saul and his son Jonathan are both killed in battle – leaving the throne open for David. A golden age for Israel follows, as David conquers the city of Jerusalem and settles the Ark of the Covenant. They have a nation, a homeland, a capital. But David is but an earthly king, seduced by power and lust. He falls for Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal friend and officer, Uriah, and takes her as his own. When Bathsheba falls pregnant, he orders the death of his friend. David is duly punished by God – his son dies. But God forgives him, and his second son by Bathsheba, Solomon. It is Solomon who will build God's temple in Jerusalem.

Ep 5 – SURVIVAL

400 years later, and the Jewish Kingdom has fallen. Under the leadership of the lowly King Zedekiah, who has refused to listen to the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, the city of Jerusalem is taken by the ruthless and powerful leader of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews lose their city and are led on a forced exile back to Babylon where they are enslaved. Here their faith is tested when they are forced to worship an enormous statue of the Babylonian king – to them an act of idolatry. And when Daniel's three friends refuse to bow down they are thrown into the fire, but are saved by the Angel of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar at first comes to faith, but his arrogance later leads to a time of insanity, leaving the empire vulnerable to defeat by the great Cyrus of Persia. But Cyrus will again test the Jews' faith by ordering them not to worship God for a whole month. Nobleman and Jewish leader Daniel, a man of tenable faith, cannot abide, and when he is thrown into the lions' den as punishment he has nothing but his belief to save him. But his faith endures, and God spares him. Cyrus, now understanding the power of Daniel's God, allows the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. They have survived the Babylonian exile, and learned the importance of keeping God in their hearts.

Ep 6 REVOLUTION

The Romans dominate the Mediterranean through fear and oppression, and the Jews crave a new messiah. Instead they have Herod the Great, put on the throne by the Romans. When pious Jews rebel, Herod executes them. In Galilee, Mary and Joseph watch helplessly as tax collectors ransack their village. Then Angel Gabriel's words to Mary change everything – she will bear a child, the Son of God. Bravely, Joseph takes Mary as his wife and on to Bethlehem for the census. Others are also traveling... Balthazar and other astrologers are tracking a new star. They enquire of Herod whether he knows where the prophesied King of the Jews will be born. As baby Jesus enters the world, these strangers are the first to pay their respects. But the next will be terrible – jealous Herod orders the death of all Bethlehem's male babies. But the Holy family escapes. When they return years later, they find an even more divided land – Judea is now under direct Roman rule, headed by the ruthless Governor Pilate. Out in the wilderness, prophet John the Baptist shouts wildly that the Jews must repent, prepare, be baptized. Jesus appears, ready to take on his mission, and John baptizes him. Almost ready, he takes on Satan in the desert and emerges stronger, more certain. Now he just needs followers. He finds Peter, his first disciple, and now he is ready... the revolution can begin.

Ep7 – MISSION

Brutal Roman occupation has divided the Jews, but Jesus is drawing in crowds in rural Galilee with his miraculous powers, and his inspirational words. But some do not want it – Pharisees like Simon believe the Jews will survive only by staying close to God through the traditions of Moses. When Jesus continues to break the rules of Judaism, Simon takes his ire to the top – to the High Priest Caiaphas in Jerusalem. Caiaphas, however, has bigger concerns – brutal governor Pilate is killing the Jewish people. Crowds continue to flock to Jesus and, when he miraculously feeds them all, they call for him to be their King. Jesus retreats from their aggressive demand and the disciples are thrown in to confusion about their master and their mission. What kind of messiah is he? Whilst Peter is sure of Jesus' divinity, he is less certain about his own faith – he plunges into stormy water when he tries to walk out to Jesus, as he walks on water. The faith of all the disciples is fully confirmed when Jesus shows that he has power even over life itself by bringing a dead man, Lazarus, back to life. They will all need the greatest reserves of strength and faith as they move ever closer toward the point of their mission, to Jerusalem, and into direct conflict with the religious and political authorities there. The most almighty storm is brewing.

Ep 8 – BETRAYAL

In the week before Passover, Jerusalem is full of pilgrims, celebrating the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt. The desire for freedom from their oppressors, the Romans, burns strong. Now, Jesus makes his entrance riding on a donkey – a declaration that he is the Messiah. The crowd rejoices. But High Priest Caiaphas recoils in horror – any unrest and Pilate will shut down the Temple. Now, Jesus confounds all in a protest against hypocrisy by turning on the money-changers in the Temple. Enraged Caiaphas finds a way to get to Jesus – through disciple Judas who is coaxed into betrayal. The disciples are thrown into turmoil

by Jesus' announcement that their shared supper together will be their last. Not only will Jesus be killed, but one of their own will betray him. Judas runs from the scene and Peter receives his own devastating prediction – he too will fall away. Jesus and the disciples withdraw in prayer to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas and the arresting Temple guards rush in. Jesus allows himself to be led away and the disciples scatter. He is tied up and faces trial by the Jewish elders, despite Nicodemus' protestations. The accusation: blasphemy. The punishment: death. Caiaphas finds Jesus guilty and the crowd outside is told the verdict. Everyone feels betrayed.

EP 9 – PASSION

Dawn on the day of Passover. Peter, fearful and disillusioned, denies that he knows Jesus and realizes Jesus' terrible prediction has come true. Judas faces his own guilt and hangs himself. Pilate's wife is also troubled – she dreams that her husband is about to execute an innocent man. But Pilate has little choice. Caiaphas leans on Pilate, warning him that Jesus' execution is necessary to keep the peace. Neither can afford for the teeming Passover crowds to riot. Pilate sentences Jesus to a beating – he does not want this man's life on his hands. At a public trial, he gives the crowd an option to free Jesus, or to free murderer Barrabas. But the crowd clamour for Jesus' death and Pilate grants them their wish. Jesus, mocked and beaten, carries his cross through the crowds to Golgotha, the hill overlooking Jerusalem. Here he is nailed to the cross, watched by his tormented mother, and left to die a torturous death. When he breathes his last breath, the city quakes and the skies blacken. The days following Jesus' death are dark, especially for Peter who feels he failed Jesus. But when Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus' tomb, the world is yet again turned on its head. The stone is broken, the tomb empty. A figure walks towards her... He's back.

Ep 10 – COURAGE

Peter finally understands Jesus' message, and his faith is rewarded– Jesus returns from death, commissioning the disciples to 'go and preach to all creation'. Days later, in Jerusalem during Pentecost and with wavering faith, the disciples pray fervently and the Holy Spirit empowers them. Their godly mission begins, but it will entail a constant battle of hatred and violence from non-believers. When new follower Stephen speaks out against Paul of Tarsus he is stoned to death. Paul, whose belief in Jewish law has led him to despise the teachings of Jesus, is enlisted by Caiaphas to remove this new group. He starts beating them into silence. But on a journey to Damascus where he believes they have gone, he is met by a vision: he sees Jesus, and is instantly blinded. In an extraordinary change of faith, Paul is baptized and begins to preach passionately about what he has received – love and forgiveness for all. He meets a young Greek called Luke, and between them they go on to write most of the New Testament. But persecution still persists– disciple James is beheaded in Jerusalem and the disciples have no choice but to scatter. The word spreads with them, far and wide – Peter reaches Rome, Matthew and Thomas further still, but are all killed for their courage. Only their written word survives. But one last miracle remains – disciple John survives death and is instead exiled to solitary confinement on Patmos where he receives a

revelation of hope – Jesus is coming back. And all who have the courage to keep the faith will be rewarded.