

billboard

module

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Consider

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions.

Continuing the Story...

What will God do now that the nations have turned their backs on him? Will God wash his hands and have nothing more to do with them? In this module, we will find that God will reach out for the nations and, to do this, he will call one man, Abraham (also known as Abram)...

Day One: Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe

Back in the early 1820s they invented a rhyme to help children decide who would be on their team (and who would be left out!). Lining themselves up, the captain of the team would begin the process of random selection. With each word, he counted off one child...

*Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a tiger by the toe.
If he squeals let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.*

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... and the child on whom the last word of the rhyme fell was selected. Surprisingly, the rhyme has come back as a song! Justin Bieber hit the charts worldwide in 2010 with Eenie Meenie. And yes... it's all about an indecisive lover!

*Eenie, meenie, miney mo, catch a bad chick by the toe.
If she holla (if, if, if she holla) let her go!
She's indecisive, she can't decide.
She keeps on looking from left to right...*

Ever wondered why and how God chose the Jews? Did he line up every nation and go “eeny, meeny, miny, moe” and end up with Israel? Israel wasn't even around then to be chosen. It simply didn't exist. It was only after every nation had rejected God at Babel that God intervened and specially created Israel. He reached down into ancient Mesopotamia and called Abraham to leave his idol-worshipping family and his homeland to start a completely new nation – Israel (Genesis 12:1–3; Acts 7:2).

Does this mean that God would now forget the nations and focus only on his chosen people? No! The very reason God created Israel was to have a nation through whom he would bless “all the peoples on earth” (Genesis 12:3). So, from this point on, Israel would be God's headquarters on the planet!

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 12:1–3.

What happened to Abraham?

Day Two: The Apple of His...

What's the answer? "I spoil my grandson because he is the apple of my..."

(a) Orchard; (b) Heart; (c) Tree; (d) Eye.

It's (d) – "he is the apple of my eye". It's a very old saying. Shakespeare used it and so did King Alfred the Great! But the saying is much older still. In fact, it's from the Bible. Not once, but twice, God uses it of his relationship with Israel! It says God "guarded [Israel] as the apple of his eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10) and, then, "whoever touches [Israel] touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

But what do apples have to do with eyes? Because the pupil of the eye was round and looked like an apple, it came to be called 'the apple' of the eye.

We all know how important our sight is. That's why our Creator protected the eye with seven very strong bones! There's an eyelid to protect the eye, eyelashes to keep out the dust and tear-ducts to flush out any irritants. So when God said Israel is "the apple" of his eye, he meant Israel is very important to him. Touch Israel and it is like poking God in the eye with a stick!

God takes Israel very seriously because Israel was created to be God's 'specialist' in matters of religion. Ever since the time of Babel, the ancient world was bursting with gods. They had fertility, war, moon, sun and agricultural gods – gods for every aspect of life. But not for Israel. God told her: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3–6). Why?

Because God called Israel to be a light in religious darkness.

Explore the Bible

Read Isaiah 43:10–12.

What was Israel to tell all the other nations?

Day Three: Location, Location, Location!

“Location! Location! Location!” It’s the number one rule in real estate. Location makes all the difference between a good and a bad investment. That’s true whether we are buying a house or starting up a business. There’s no point opening a shop if customers can’t find it.

When God told Abraham, “go... to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1–3), that land was Canaan. From then on, Canaan became central in the life of the nation. Why this particular land? Well, it’s all about location! Canaan was the best piece of real estate in the ancient world because it was strategically placed. Take a look!

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This little stretch of land was like a corridor. When traders wanted to go from the northern regions of Euro-Asia down to Africa (and vice versa), they had to go through Canaan. The rest of the Middle East area was an unwelcoming, barren desert. So Canaan became the main route of the ancient world. God gave Israel this influential piece of land because she was to be his billboard.

The Old Testament story shows how God displayed himself to the world through Israel: every miracle God worked for Israel showed his power; every blessing showed his goodness; every prayer God answered in Israel showed his supreme authority; every judgement showed his justice; every promise kept showed his faithfulness. Everything God did in Israel showed he is generous in love, huge in mercy, uncompromising in holiness and wonderfully gracious. When God gave Israel the land, he ‘opened up shop’ in Canaan, where every nation could find him.

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 12:1–3; 13:12, 14–17.

Why could Abraham be certain that God would give him the land of Canaan?

Day Four: Let's Go to the Show!

As ancient travellers passed through Canaan, they couldn't help but get an eyeful of a very different culture... with a very distinctive religion. Their home countries had developed their own gods and religious rituals. But entering Canaan, they found a very different religion with a very different God.

Israel's God appeared in a different form. Back home, these traders worshipped the sun, moon, stars, animals, fellow human beings or even gods that were half animal and half human – represented by idols carved from wood or stone. But Israel's God made his presence obvious in a bright, burning, self-existing light – the same light Moses saw in the burning bush. No one lit this light or fed it fuel. It had a presence and personality all of its own. It could come and go at will. This light was Yahweh, the Creator. The God of heaven was to become the God of Israel!

Israel had only one God. The traders were used to multiple gods and multiple altars. But Israel had only one God... and only one official residence – the temple motto was: “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Israel's God was holy. God's 'official residences' (a tent-like structure called the tabernacle and, later, the temple) had special rooms, furniture and equipment – there was the Most Holy Place, where God lived, the Holy Place, where the priests offered prayers and worship, and the great bronze altar where animal sacrifices were offered. Without those blood sacrifices, God could not live with the Israelites.

The Israelites, like the rest of us, were broken, flawed and sinful. But God had found a way to be with them because he loves them (and the nations of the world)!

Explore the Bible

Read Exodus 40:33–35, 38.

What is significant here?

Day Five: Even Crazy Dreams Come True...

There's an old Beatles' song made famous by John Lennon...

*You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.*

Everyone dreams and hopes that someday, somehow, the world will be a better place. But the world gets steadily worse. The dreams and the hopes become more urgent. Hope is still the pressing issue of our time. Is there hope for the planet – or is it just a crazy dream?

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The religion of Israel was one bursting with hope. It was a radical, expectant faith. Israel looked forward to a time when God would drastically intervene and change things, right here on planet earth! A promised Messiah would come – an anointed deliverer from God. He would break the tight grip evil has over the human race and give us a whole new world. There would be no more wrongs, heartaches or tears... a world where goodness and gladness would be present forever. A world so fabulous, it makes John Lennon's dream look shabby.

Remember what God promised? The moment Adam and Eve sinned, God promised the brokenness would not last forever. One day, someone would come from the human race and crush Satan's head and destroy evil completely (Genesis 3:15). The Old Testament says that this deliverer would come from Israel – through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3), through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). The world's deliverer would be Jewish!

Israel was a nation standing on tiptoes, eagerly looking for the promised deliverer and telling the world that a far better world was on its way!

Explore the Bible

Read Isaiah 9:6–7.

How will the Messiah make the world a better place?

Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What's the 'apple of your eye' – the one thing that's really important to you? Why is that important?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 12:1–9.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q – What did God promise Abraham (Abram)?

Q – Why is this important?

View

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Three things God tells us about Israel:

1. Israel is God's special
 2. Israel was given a special
 3. Israel was given a special
 - Israel's witness – one
 - Israel's sacrifices – one
 - Israel's Messiah – one
-

Discuss

Questions I have

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