

On your marks

There are so many ways in which to explore the big story of the Bible by following a particular recurring symbol or key concept. So often we share Bible stories in an all too random way, particularly with children, and it is hard for them (and also most adults!) to gain any sense of the coherence and the internal development of God's revelation through its pages.

The following reflective piece uses the theme of important tree stories to explore the whole Bible in one go.

Get set

You will need pictures of trees or small 3-D wooden models to help tell this story, which should be presented slowly and reverently on a green cloth starting from your right, moving to your left so that it can be 'read' as a visual story by the audience in front of the storyteller.

Here are two pictures from [the middle](#) and [the end](#) of the story

The objects or pictures needed are:

- Two similar looking trees for the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)
- A group of trees as the oaks of Mamre near Hebron (Genesis 13:18 and 18:1)
- A small tree 'on fire' as the burning bush (Exodus 3)
- A tree like a willow that grows by the waterside (Psalm 1)
- A tree stump with one single sprouting branch (Isaiah 11)
- A crib scene, preferably in wood (Luke 2)
- A wooden cross
- A big tree that has grown from the tree stump earlier (Matthew 13 - the mustard tree)
- Some leaves (possibly golden decorative leaves or wooden ones) (Revelation 22)

Other references to trees that are included are:

The trees that 'clap their hands' (Isaiah 44:23 and 55:12)

The Messiah, who is called the branch (Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 23; Zechariah 3 and 6)

Further biblical references to trees that you could explore following this story include:

- The wood that turned the water sweet at Marah (Exodus 15:25)
- Aaron's stick that budded (Numbers 17)
- The parable of the trees that argued (Judges 9)
- The cedars of Lebanon (used in making Solomon's temple and also symbolically - Psalm 92:12)
- The almond branch (Jeremiah 1:11)
- Nathaniel sitting beneath the fig tree in John 1

- Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree in Luke 19
- The fig tree that is cursed in Luke 13
- Men walking like trees in Mark 8
- The true vine in John 15

Go!

- God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.
- *Lay out a plain green cloth/piece of felt.*
- In the beginning there was a garden.
- God planted a beautiful garden.
- It was a perfect garden, where God could walk with his people in the cool of the day.
- *Place the two Eden trees on the right-hand side of the green cloth.*
- And in the middle of that garden were two trees: a Tree of Life and a Tree of Choosing.
- One offered everything that was good; the other offered everything that was good and all that was bad. The second tree came with a warning.
- God's people could not resist the temptation and chose to know both the good and the bad - and everything changed.
- They now hid from God among the trees of the garden and the garden became a confusion and they could no longer find their way to the Tree of Life.
- *Remove one of the two Eden trees.*
- God always knew that this had to happen and God had already planned another way to make the perfect garden.
- God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.
- So God stirred up his people to look for a new garden in a land of promise.
- *Place two or three trees to the left of the Eden tree.*
- God called Abram, who travelled across the desert and finally settled near the great trees at Hebron. Once God even appeared to him by these trees and it became a place like the new garden in the land of promise.
- *Place a single small tree to the left of Abram's trees.*
- God called Moses who turned aside to see a small tree that burned with God's presence.
- God told him to rescue his people from slavery and lead them out to a place that was like the new garden in the land of promise.
- God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.
- *Place a single waterside tree to the left of Moses' small tree.*
- God called David and inspired him to sing of a tree planted by the water, whose leaves were always fresh and whose fruit never failed. It would be just like the new garden in the land of promise.
- *Place the stump of a tree with a single branch to the left of David's tree.*
- God called Isaiah who wrote of a branch that would shoot from a dead tree stump; a special branch that was to be the tree for a new garden in the land of promise.
- God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.
- And this branch would have God's spirit on it.



- This branch would do what is right.
- This branch would be all that is faithful and godly.
- This branch would be for the whole world.
- This branch would bring in the glorious rule of God.
- And Isaiah dimly knew how that branch would grow and how the new garden would be planted.
- He saw what we now know:
- *Place a small wooden crib set to the left of the branching tree stump.*
- How this branch was born as a child to a carpenter's family.
- How this branch would grow up like a tender young plant; like a root out of dry ground.
- *Place a wooden cross to left of the crib scene.*
- How this branch one day had to be cut off from the land of the living and become a different sort of tree.
- God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.
- *Place a big blossoming tree with many branches that has grown from the branch on the tree stump to the left of the cross.*
- And how this Tree of Death would become the Tree of Life again and grow into the greatest tree of all; a tree in whose branches the birds of the air would come and find rest.
- *Place down the golden leaves in a circle symbolising the nations of the world to the left of the mustard tree.*
- A tree whose leaves would be for the healing of the nations.
- *Place back on the cloth the Tree of Eden removed at the beginning, but this time to the left of the leaves.*
- Now everyone can come to the Tree of Life that God had planted at the very beginning, as a gift for us all.
- *Sweep your hand joyfully over all the trees of the story.*
- And Isaiah did know that on that day all the trees of the fields would sing and clap their hands, when the new garden in a new heaven and earth would be our home for ever and always.
- Because God's best plan for you and me began long, long ago.