

Rachel's Reward

Rabbi Deborah's Discussion Guide

Session 1: The Nativity – More than a Quaint Moment Frozen in Time

Session 2: Baby on a Mission

Session 3: Christmas 24/7

Story Synopsis:

The streets of Bethlehem have become packed with refugees and there's no room in the inn. It is 35 years after the birth of Jesus and two years after his death. Events have been set in motion which challenge the centers of power and cascade throughout the land.

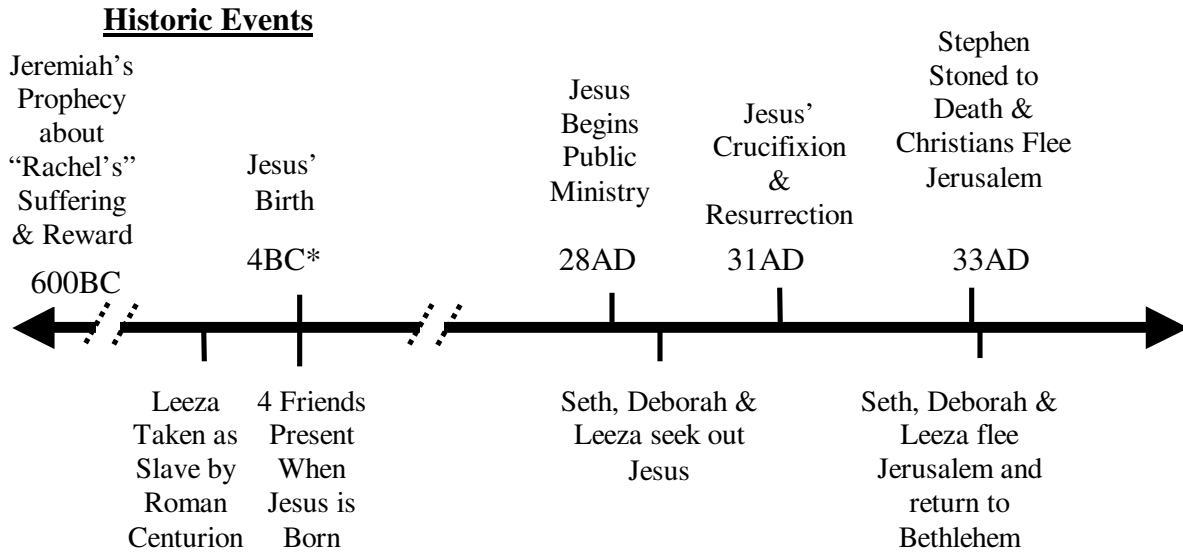
In the midst of the madness, four friends, now middle-aged, are reunited at the inn. Over three decades earlier, as teenagers, they had witnessed the most important event in human history. Together again, reliving those memories, they realize just how much their lives have been affected by that experience – for three it has been a blessing, for one a curse. For all of them, though, their lives are now at a crossroads.

The Nativity was far more than a quaint moment frozen in time. Through the eyes of four ordinary friends caught up in extraordinary events, we discover the dynamic story of Christmas. And as we witness how the sage continues to unfold through their lives, we discover the meaning of Rachel's Reward.

The Main Characters in Rachel's Reward (the four friends)

Benjamin	The son of the Bethlehem innkeeper who made room for Mary and Joseph in his stable. Benjamin, himself, later became the innkeeper.
Seth	A Bethlehem shepherd in his teens; later he married Deborah and moved to Jerusalem to shepherd the temple flocks.
Deborah	The gifted daughter of a Bethlehem Rabbi. Later she married Seth and moved to Jerusalem. Deborah became the leader of a small group of Jesus' followers who met in her and Seth's home.
Leeza	As a young teen, she was taken captive as a slave by a Roman Centurion. While staying in Bethlehem she escaped with the help of her new friends. Later in life she became a follower of Jesus.

Rachel's Reward Timeline



Rachel's Reward Story Line

** In the year 532 AD, our present calendar was established with the time of Jesus birth serving as the dividing point between BC and AD; later the calendar was adjusted with the result being that Jesus' birth was figured as occurring in 4 BC.*

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Session 1: The Nativity – More than a Quaint Moment Frozen in Time

A. **Warm-up:** Have each person in the group share a favorite Christmas memory

B. Read: Luke 2: 1-20 NIV (*have someone read out loud or take turns*)

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

C. Based on this Bible passage and the related story of Rachel's Reward, who were some of the people involved in the Christmas story besides Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus? Are there any others that you imagine might have been caught up in the saga?

D. What are some of the various reactions and responses that these characters might have had to the unfolding events?

If not mentioned:

How about Jesus' earthly grandparents – Mary and Joseph's parents?

Would Caesar Augustus have had a clue about what he had helped set in motion?

E. In the story of Rachel's Reward, when the four friends (Benjamin, Seth, Deborah & Leeza) reflected back on Jesus' birth much later in life, how did their perspectives differ from each other and why?

F. What are some ways that people today (both those that attend a church and those that don't) are exposed to or reminded of the story of Jesus' birth?

G. What are some of the different attitudes that people today might have towards the story of Jesus' birth?

H. Has your perspective on the story of Jesus' birth, or appreciation of it, changed by studying it today or by viewing Rachel's Reward? In what ways?

I. Close with prayer

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Session 2: Baby on a Mission

- A. **Warm-up:** Have each person in the group name some of the babies they've known in their life – could be their children, siblings, grandchildren, friends' children. Share a favorite memory associated with one of these babies – could be touching, funny, or even embarrassing.

- B. What kinds of behaviors do we usually expect from babies?

- C. Read: Matthew 1: 18-21 NIV (*have someone read out loud or take turns*)

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”

- D. According to this passage, what was expected of Jesus? Who had this expectation?

- E. Read: Luke 2: 8-13 NIV (*have someone read out loud or take turns*)

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’”

- F. In this passage, how was baby Jesus described (how he would physically look and what would his role be)? Who described him this way?

- G. Read Luke 4:14-21 NIV. Read this passage which describes events that occurred 30 years later in Jesus' life when he began his public ministry (*have someone read out loud*).

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

- H. According to this passage, Jesus, now an adult attending a synagogue meeting, chose to read a specific passage from Scripture, a prophecy written hundreds of years earlier. What did Jesus say after reading this passage? What did this mean? Based on this scripture passage what did Jesus declare his mission was?

- I. How does Jesus' declared mission compare to the expectations of the angels?

- J. Read John 3:16 NIV

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

- K. According to this scripture, what is the one condition that limits Jesus' ability to fulfill his mission?

- L. For reflection: Have you come to a point of personal belief in Jesus that has allowed him to fulfill his mission in your life? If not, consider doing so at this time.

- M. Close with prayer.

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Session 3: Christmas 24/7

- A. **Warm-up:** Have group members share any special memories they have of being filled with a sense of awe at Christmas time or being caught up in the wonder or magic of the season?
- B. People sometimes say they wish everyday could be Christmas, or at least they wish people would act like it was Christmas everyday. Are there any aspects of Christmas that you wished could be lived out every day of the year?

- C. Read the following scriptures that describe the lives of Jesus' early followers: (*have someone read out loud or take turns*)

Acts 2:42-47 NIV

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35 NIV

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

- D. According to the Acts chapter 2 passage, what four things did the early believers devote themselves to?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

E. What were some of the actions and activities that the early followers of Jesus were involved in?

F. Are there any ways in which the shared life of Jesus' early followers was similar to your list of "ways you wish Christmas could be lived out every day of the year"?

G. What are some specific ways that you and your fellowship group could live out the spirit of Christmas 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?
