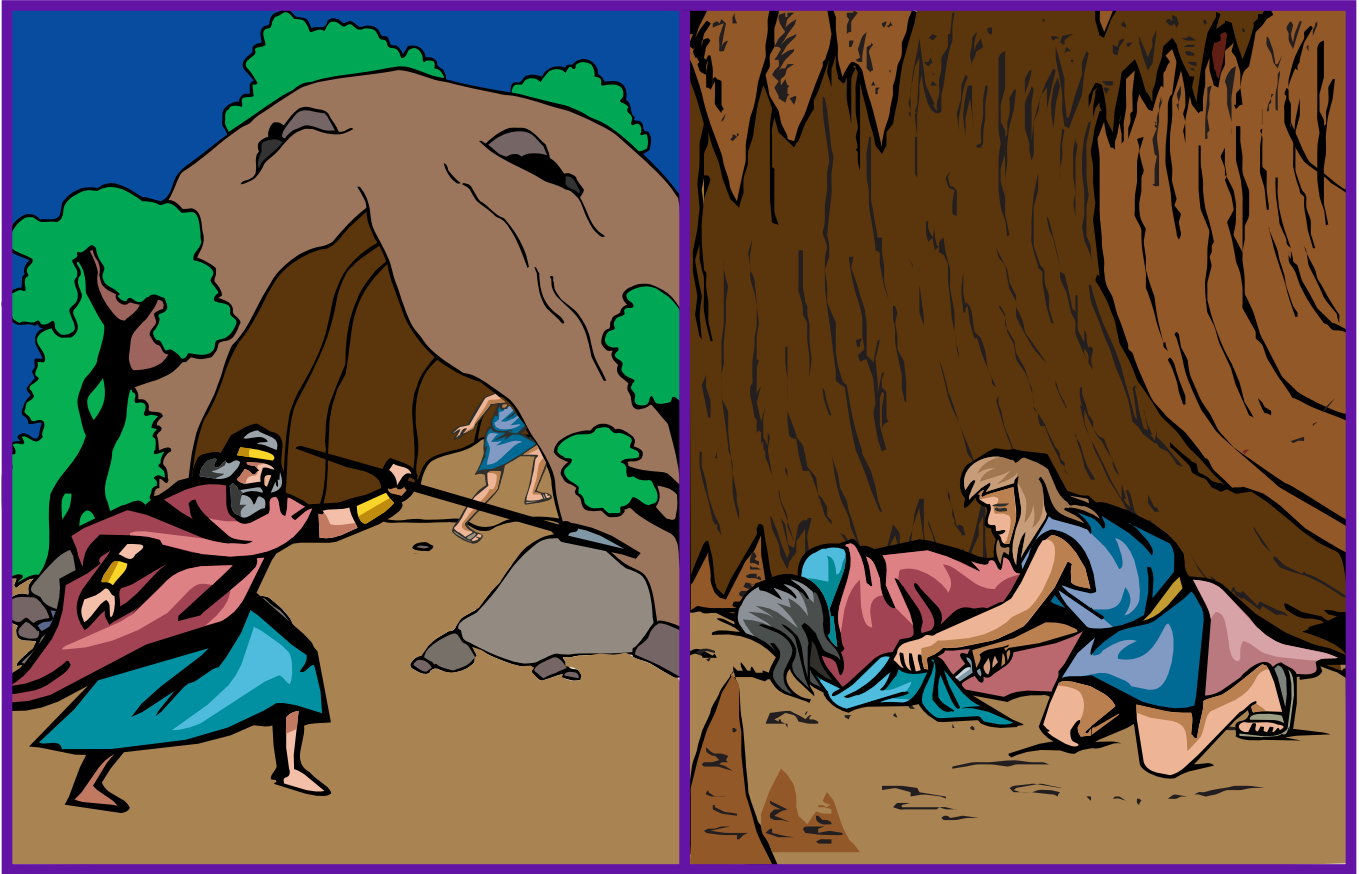


Tour of the Holy Lands - Jericho

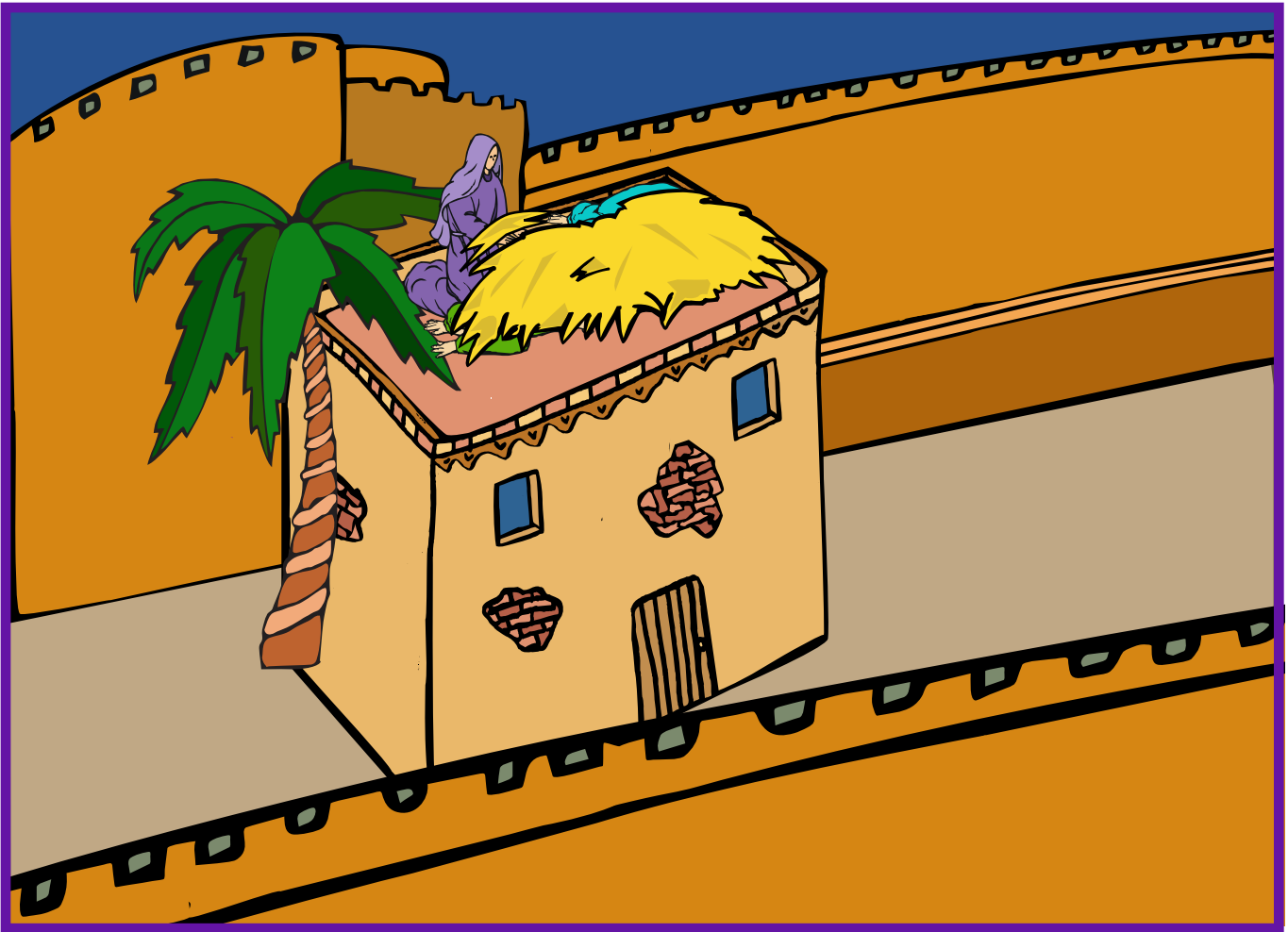


It's hard to believe it's our last day of touring. Before we leave the Dead Sea, let's visit Ein Gedi. Look, it's way up that craggy mountain over there. This is David's territory. He and his 600 men used to protect sheep from enemies close by. But David had an enemy, too. King Saul was jealous of him. He thought God liked David more than He liked Saul and so he set out to kill him. As is recorded in I Samuel 24:1-22, David was hunted here in Ein Gedi by Saul and 3,000 men. David hid in a dark cave. When Saul slipped into the cave, David's men whispered, "Kill him!" But he refused. Instead he cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Still, David felt bad. No one should touch God's chosen king. David called to Saul, "Look what I have. I could have killed you." Saul replied, "You're a better man than I! God will reward you!"



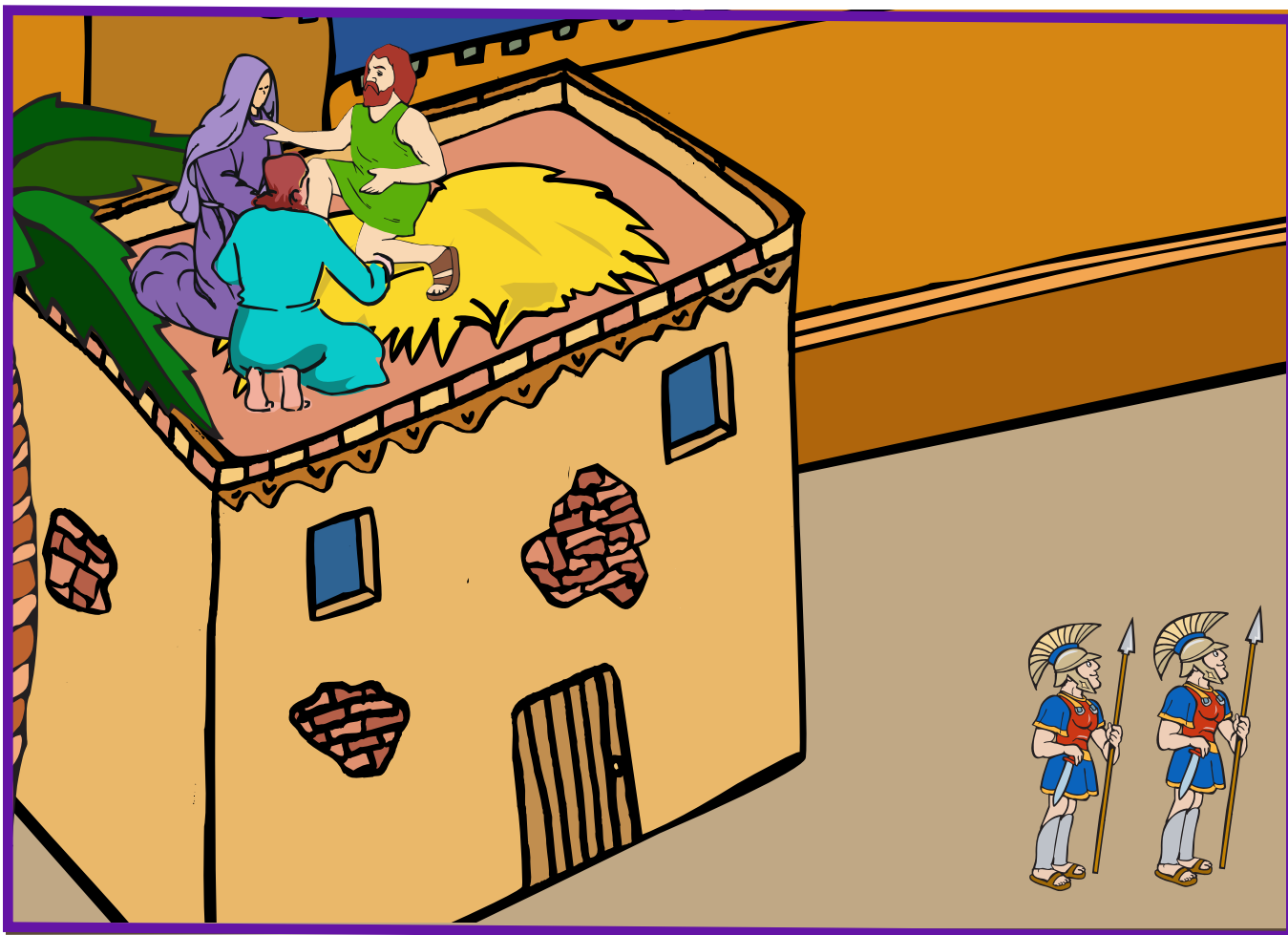
“Ein Gedi” means “spring of the wild goats.” Looking carefully, we can see large families of goats, called ibexes, leaping up those slopes. They blend right into the color of the rocks. Can you find one ibex in this picture? Those green trees up there show where the spring is. We see a cave, too. Now let’s go to the bus and drive to Jericho.



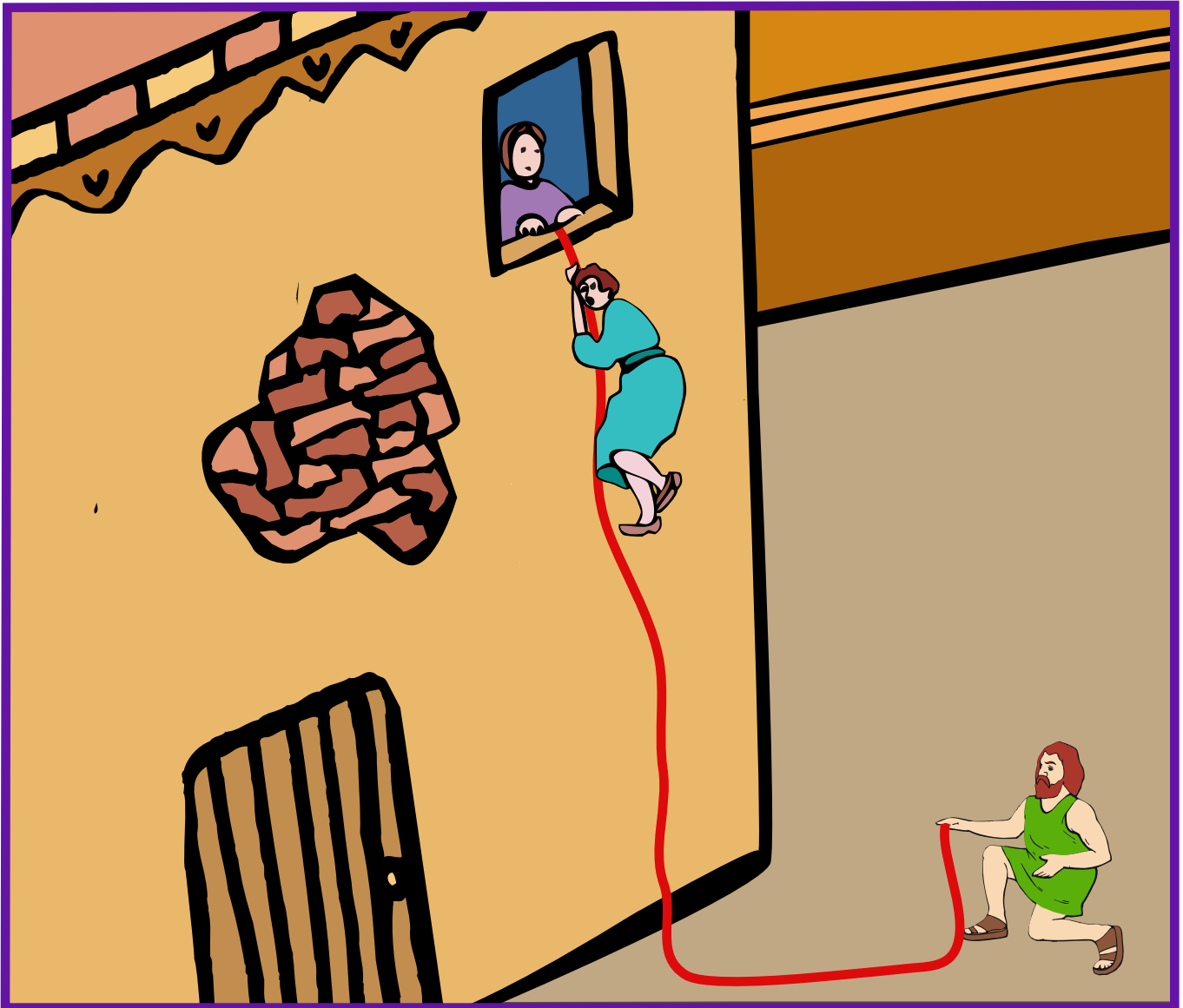


On last summer's tour we drove along the Jordan River and heard its stories. The first story was about the miraculous dry-land crossing by the children of Israel (Joshua 1:2-6). This morning, let's pretend to go back to Joshua's time.

As we pull into Jericho, we see two men getting out of the river. Joshua, their leader, had sent them early to spy out their first conquest, Jericho, known as "the city of palms." We watch as they examine the city walls. They don't want to get caught. They knock at the door of a local woman named Rahab, who hides them on her roof under piles of flax. Whew, it must be hot and steamy under there! The flax should make fine linen, though. The spies discover important information: Jericho is surrounded by two walls, not one, and Rahab's house is between the walls.



Oh, no! Jericho soldiers are at her door. We watch as clever Rahab sends them far away and returns to the roof. She says, “You’re safe now. They’ve gone. We know your God has given you our land. We’ve heard of His power and we’re scared. Since I saved *you*, will you save *me* and my family?” (Josh 2:1-13)



“Of course, we’ll save you” the spies say, gratefully.

Rahab says, “Then climb down from my window on this red rope and hide in the hills for three days. Then it’ll be safe to go back across the river.”

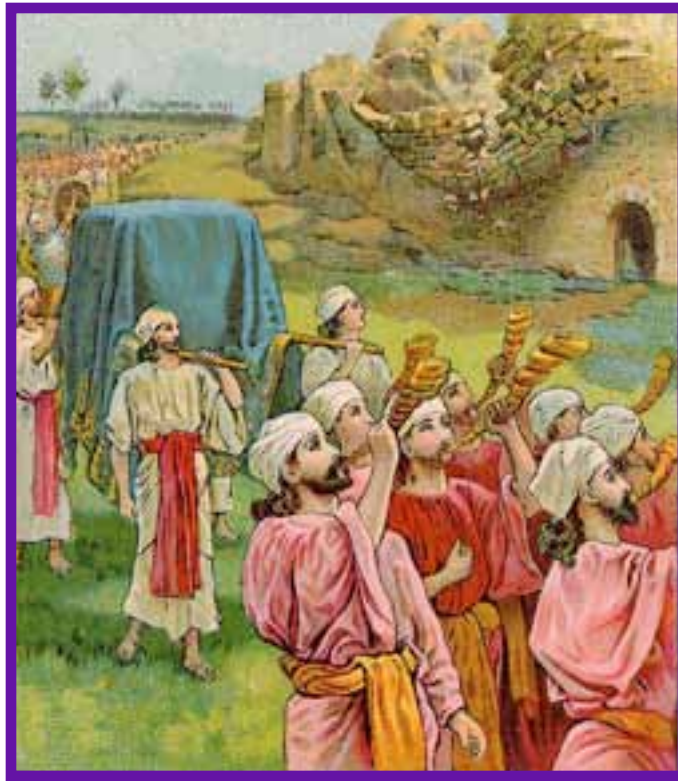
They say, “And you must leave the red rope hanging there so our men can find your house. Then gather your family and wait for us to save you. Tell no one.”

Rahab does her part and the spies do theirs and report back to Joshua (Joshua 2:14-24).



The people of Jericho are so afraid of the children of Israel, they lock up their city. We hear doors being slammed and barred. No one can go in or out. But it's no use. God told Joshua, "I have already given you the city" (Joshua 6:1,2).

We walk down to the Jordan River and watch thousands of people walk across on dry ground. Unbelievable! No wonder the people of Jericho fear these people. (Joshua 3:17). After three days, it's time. Joshua rises early and shouts God's orders.



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First in line to march around the city are armed guards. Behind them are 7 priests blowing 7 rams' horns. The sound is dull but loud. Next come 4 men carrying the ark - the golden chest with the Commandments. The carriers use 2 poles to lift it. They mustn't touch the box. Next come more soldiers. It takes about 20 minutes to march around the city. We hear nothing but horns and marching feet. God had warned, "Don't open your mouths!" The people of Jericho look over the walls and stare at this strange sight. The marchers return to camp and never use their weapons. The citizens must be annoyed to be wakened by horns every morning for 6 days. The 7th day is different. This time they march around the city 7 times - which is over 2 hours of solid marching and blowing of rams' horns. Just then Joshua yells, "SHOUT! FOR THE LORD HAS GIVEN YOU THE CITY!" The men let out such a yell that the city walls crack and crumble and fall down flat. The men walk straight in through the rubble and take Jericho, but Rahab and her family are saved. (Josh 6:12-16, 20,23)



450 years later Elisha arrives in the city of Jericho. His first kind deed is done right here. He has just taken over Elijah's place as teacher and prophet in the area.

Shall we peek in as a group of citizens ask for help? They tell him, "You can see our beautiful surroundings, but we have a problem. Our water is bad. It causes our women to lose their babies and our farms not to produce crops."

Elisha replies, "Bring me a new bowl filled with salt." Why a new bowl? (1) The bowl had to be new because he wanted nothing but salt in it – no flavor or smell of anything else. Why salt? (1) Since salt keeps food safe, it's a symbol of the power of God to keep safe. (2) Since salt cannot make water pure, Elisha chooses it to show that nothing but divine power makes pure.

Elisha went to the spring and threw in the salt, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters. There will be no more death." Sure enough, the water was clean from then on. His words showed that he never pretended to heal by his own power.

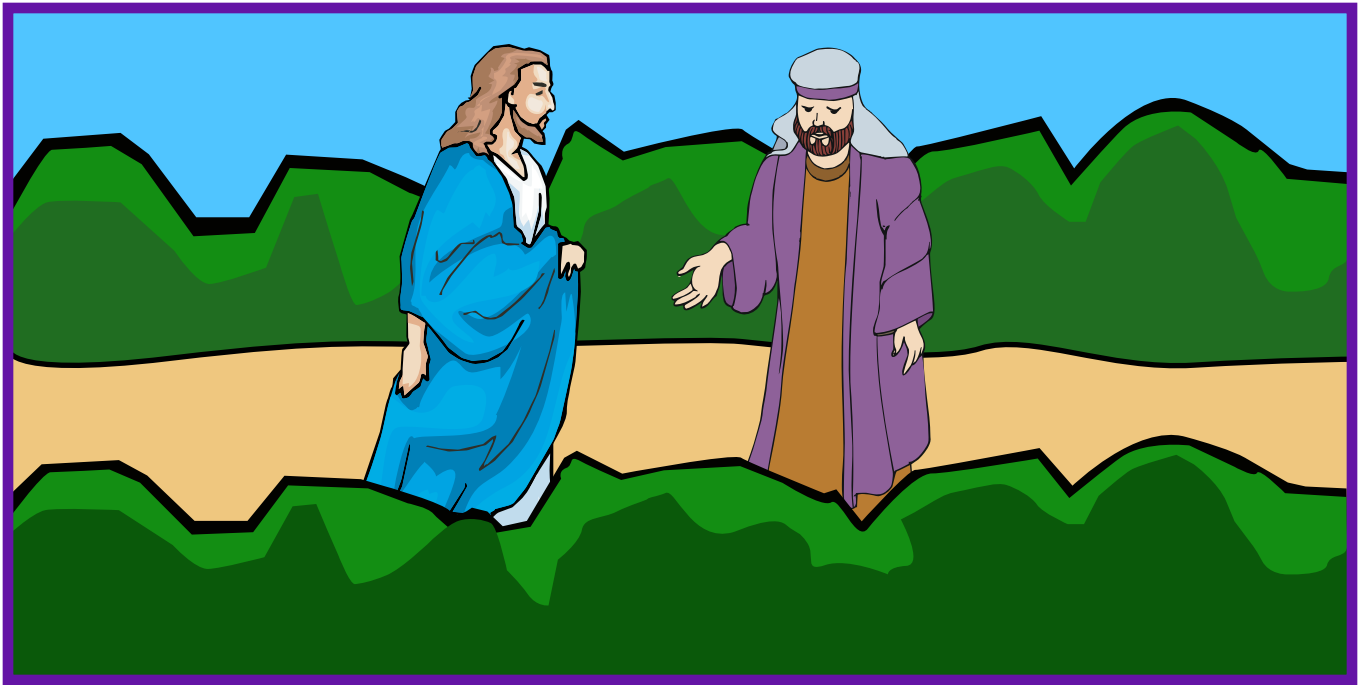


Look at the fruit for sale in Jericho. Those are dates hanging from the top.
(II Kings 2:19-22)

What excellent water Jericho still has!



Jesus passed through Jericho many times. If we wait on this road, he is likely to walk by. In fact, here he comes now with a large crowd around him, listening to his wise words. There's a man on the other side of the road. They call him "Blind Bartimaeus." He's begging near the city gates. His ears tell him that something special is happening. He's told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. He's heard of Jesus and his works. He shouts, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." How did he know to call him "Son of David?" The blind man sees what the crowd does not see. That's another name for the Messiah, the long-awaited Savior of the land, very much like King David a thousand years before. Bartimaeus knows he can be healed by this Savior. Jesus usually keeps that title, "Son of David," a secret, but this time he doesn't. It's time the world knows that he *is* the Messiah. (Mark 10:46-47; Luke 18:35-38)



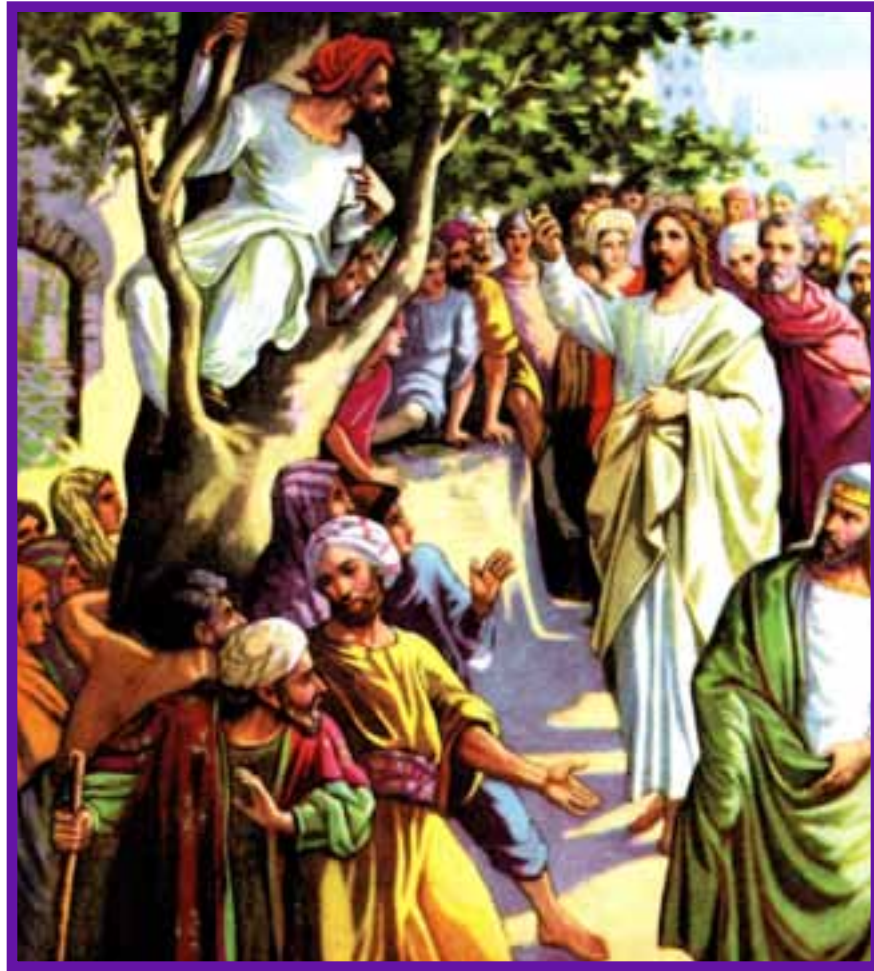
The crowd tells the bothersome beggar to be quiet, but he shouts even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus hears him and stops. “Tell him to come here,” he says. The blind man is so eager, he flings away his cloak. He knows he won’t need it anymore to collect coins as a beggar. Just look at his excitement! He jumps up and goes to Jesus.

Jesus says, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus knows, but he asks the question to hear the blind man’s response. The blind man says, “I want to see again.” Jesus says, “Go on your way. Your faith has healed you.” We didn’t see Jesus touch the man or put anything on his eyes. Bartimaeus’ belief in the power of God restores his sight. He had complete trust in God.

The moment he was healed, he began to follow Jesus. He could have gone home to his family, but he wanted to be a disciple and learn more of this power. He wanted to share his healing with others. He wanted to follow Jesus to Jerusalem. Even though the path will lead to Jesus’ crucifixion, it will also lead to his resurrection. What a privilege! Seeing all of that, Bartimaeus will be even stronger in his trust, become an apostle maybe, and share this truth with the world. (Mark 10:48-52; Luke 18:39-43)



Jesus healed someone else while he was in Jericho. His name was Zacchaeus and he was a Publican or tax collector, which meant his fellow Jews did not like him. Men who collected taxes for the Romans from fellow Jews were usually dishonest; and since Zacchaeus was a Chief Publican, he was more rich, more dishonest, and more disliked than all the others.



But Zacchaeus has become weary of a life of stealing. He hears that Jesus, a man who does not despise Publicans, will be coming along the main road. In fact, Jesus loves everyone. Zacchaeus wants to see him, but he's too short and the crowds are too tall. What will he do? Look, there's Jesus coming and there's Zacchaeus trying to push his way to the front. But nobody will let him through. So he runs way ahead of the parade. Aha! He's climbing a tree, a wild fig. Its branches are like giant arms making it easy to climb. People are giggling at him, but he's used to being made fun of.

And then, what a surprise! Jesus stops right under the tree and looks up. He says, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I am going to be a guest at your house today." (Luke 19:1-10)



Zacchaeus scrambles down the tree and runs past us. We look into his eyes. He probably hasn't been this happy in a long, long time. His cold, greedy heart has been melted by the love of Christ. We join the curious crowd to follow them. The crowd mutters and grumbles, "This religious man is going to share a meal with a sinner." An ordinary Jew would not go into a bad man's house and become unclean. But, Jesus brings honor to a man when entering his house.

Just then Zacchaeus and Jesus come out on the porch to speak to us. Zacchaeus says, "I promise to give half my belongings to feed the poor; and if I've stolen anything from you I'll pay you back four times as much."

Then it is Jesus' turn to speak, "Today health has come to this house. This man is a true son of Abraham. The Christ has come to search out those who have wandered away to bring them back home to their Father's family."



And now, sadly, here we are on our way to the airport. Each time we come, we learn more about the Holy Land and those who settled it. Last summer was spent in well-watered parts to the north. This summer we've seen the most barren sections to the south. But whether north or south, the sheep, goats, camels and donkeys have found something nourishing to eat.

We've put on our swim suits three times, in three seas - the Red Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. You can tell your friends you've been in "the Med, the Red, and the Dead." Next summer we can look forward to spending time in the city. We'll even walk around the tops of the city walls of Jerusalem.

When you get home you'll find that every time you open your Bibles, the sights and sounds of this land will be on each page. Your Bible will keep your memories alive. Come back and travel with us next year!

