

Two Jewish Stories

Story One

The story of Creation is a story many of you will know. How the world was made in 6 days and how God rested on the 7th. The story is about keeping rules and caring for the environment. Humans are responsible for looking after the planet; this is called 'stewardship'. Please read the story below and complete all the activities or choose one or two.

Adam and Eve take the forbidden fruit. Eve and Adam looked around them at the beautiful world that God had created. God was right; it really was very good. There was just one thing they had to remember. God had told them that they could eat the fruit from any of the trees in the Garden of Eden except for the tree in the middle, which God called 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil'. God had warned them that if they took fruit from that tree, it would make them very unhappy and they would have to leave the beautiful garden that God had created. At the time, Adam and Eve thought there were so many other wonderful fruits to eat, they would never need to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. One day, however, the crafty serpent came to visit Eve. He asked her what God had really said about which trees they could eat fruit from. When Eve told him that they were not allowed to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the serpent told her that God had said that because God didn't want her to become as wise as God was. The serpent said that if she ate from that tree she would learn all about good and evil and become like God. Eve had a look at the fruit on the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It certainly looked very tasty. She had sometimes wondered what it might taste like. She didn't think it was fair that God was keeping things from her and Adam, so she reached out and picked one of the fruits. She had a bite, and gave some to Adam as well. As soon as they had eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve realised what it meant to do something bad. They were embarrassed, and the next time God came to see them in the garden, they ran away and hid so God wouldn't see them. God knew what was wrong, and asked them if they had eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil that they had been told not to eat from. Even though he had eaten some himself, Adam blamed Eve, who had given him the fruit to eat, then Eve blamed the deceitful serpent who had tempted her to take the forbidden fruit. God told the serpent that because of what it had done in tempting Eve to eat the fruit, it would always be cursed, and would have to crawl along the ground, and be the lowest of all animals. God sadly told Adam and Eve that because of what they had done, they would have to leave the beautiful Garden of Eden. God told Eve that women's lives would be hard because they would find it painful to have children. God told Adam that men would always have to work very hard to feed themselves and their families and earn a living. God also told Adam and Eve that they would not live forever, but would die when they got old, and would go back to the ground from which they were made. God made Adam and Eve some clothes to wear, made of skin, and banished them, sent them out of the Garden of Eden so they would not take anything else that they shouldn't touch. They sadly left the garden, for they had learned what it means to be bad, and they had changed God's world forever.

Story One Activities (remember you can do as many as you like)

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden starts at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis. The story told here, often called 'The Fall', because Adam and Eve fall short of Gods standards. Their world was perfect and now it is no longer the same. They have let themselves and God down.

Task 1. Questions for discussion and writing

1. Why do you think God made the one rule for Eve and Adam?
2. What did Eve do in the story that was wrong? Why was it wrong? How was the serpent involved? How was Adam involved?
3. What was the result of Eve's action? What was the result of Adam's action? What was the result of the serpent's action? What suffering resulted from each of these peoples' actions?
4. In what ways have you been tempted to do things you knew to be wrong? In what ways have you tempted others to do things you knew to be wrong?
5. Why did you do wrong?
6. When have you successfully resisted temptation to do wrong?
7. What have been the consequences of your wrongdoing? In what ways have you been punished?
8. Have you or others suffered as a consequence of your wrongdoing? In what ways?
9. Can you work out what the writer of the story believes about God?
10. What did you learn from this story?

Task 2. Story making

You take key words like 'falling', 'temptation', 'forbidden fruit' or 'one rule' to write a story of your own, for the twenty first century. Will you include in your story a divine character ~ why, or why not? (a divine character is a God or gods and Angels)

Task 3. Using Creative Arts

Research carefully at some of the great art works inspired by the Garden of Eden story, if you google this there are a great many to look at. How do the artists show their ideas and beliefs about God? Why is it difficult to picture God? You can then create a work of art about the Garden of Eden story yourself: how will you show your beliefs about God through the arts?

Story Two

And Man said...

This is a story about humankind's treatment of the earth since the industrial revolution. It involves destruction and desolation, things that are opposite of creation. It is adapted from an unknown source. We can compare it with the story of God creating the world in Genesis 1. It includes some Jewish insights into human responsibility.

On the seventh day before the end of the earth, man created all kinds of machines, which meant that one person could do what hundreds of people were needed to do before, and as well as that, they could do it much faster than before. And man said: "Now we can really start to improve this pathetic creation that God has given us." On the sixth day before the end of the earth, man discovered oil, and made petrol, diesel and jet engines, and rushed about all over the earth for holidays and business trips, and poured thousands of tonnes of pollution into the air. And man said: "Everybody has the right to travel wherever they like, as often as they like, and as fast as they like - except those people who can't afford it - and even if it pollutes the earth, we'll find a better way of running the engines before the pollution gets too bad. On the fifth day before the end of the earth, man decided that the way nature had done things ever since the beginning of creation wasn't good enough, and the land needed soaking with chemical fertilisers, and the crops spraying regularly with pesticides to stop weeds growing. And man said: "From now on these crops will be bigger and better, and they will all be ours to eat. We won't share the crops with the birds and the wild animals, and if some wildlife disappears for ever it won't matter because God made far too many types of wildlife in the first place." On the fourth day before the end of the earth, man invented nuclear weapons to kill people and nuclear power stations to make energy. And man said: "Now that we can destroy the whole of the earth with nuclear weapons by pressing just one button, we will have peace. Now that we can make so much power from a little bit of uranium we will be able to do so many more things. By the time we have to work out what to do with all the nuclear waste we leave behind, it will be our grandchildren's problem, or maybe we'll have thought of something by then. Anyway, we didn't get where we are today by thinking too much about the future." On the third day before the end of the earth, man invented biological weapons that made people's enemies get sick and die. And man said: "It's terrible that we should even have to think of hurting people in this way, but we have to invent them because if we don't do it, some of our enemies are bound to invent them, and we can't allow them to use the weapons against us. Of course, they will never get used on purpose, and we hope there will never be an accident which makes the weapons get out." On the second day before the end of the earth, man discovered how to make genetically modified food. And man said: "This is the best thing we have done so far. Now we know all about making life itself, and we will be able to create anything. We will be just like God." On the last day before the end of the earth, man finally realised that he had completely destroyed the way plants, animals and people could live on the earth. He also had no idea how he was going to get himself out of the fix he was in. And man said: "Oh God!" And God said...

Story Two Activities (remember you can do as many as you like)

Task 1. Questions for discussion and writing

1. Do you think 'man' in the story includes women? Why or why not?
2. What did people invent in the story?
3. Does everything that humans invent spoil the world? What inventions do you think are good, and why? In what ways do you think each of the things that humans invented in the story helps or spoils the world?
4. This story is similar and different to the creation story you read before. Make two lists: all the similarities and all the differences.
5. God is the lead character in the first story, but only comes in at the end of the second story. Why? What difference would it make if God was in the second story? What would God say at the end of each of the last seven days? Work out seven sentences for this.
6. Do you think the story gives the right impression of what humanity is doing to the world?
7. What is the message of this story?
8. Why do you think the world has problems with the environment? How do you think they are caused?
9. What do you think you can do to stop some things spoiling the earth?
10. Is God to blame for the way the world is? What would Jewish people say about this ~ and what do you think?

Task 2. 'Brainstorm'

Make a word wall poster or mind map of all the things that seem to threaten the world as we know it. You could start with pandemics, pollution, war, all the things which are a threat to the world, which might lead to 'the end of the world as we know it'.



Task 3. Creative Writing

Write a 'countdown to the end of the world' story of your own. Include the 'voice of God' to comment on what happens in your story.