

WHERE do the Bible's narratives take place?

Good stories are set in specific time-and-space locations. The historical circumstances and physical settings often influence the plot and shape the personalities of the characters in the story. In terms of their geographic locations, almost all of the Bible's narratives are set in that part of the globe we call the Middle East. While much of the Bible's action occurs in this distant region of the world, the Bible's stories usually unfold in two separate realities—one physical, the other a spiritual reality that Jesus called the *kingdom of God*.

Yes, long before science fiction and fantasy genres explored the possibilities of two dimensional realities, God told us the truth about our existence.

It is *physical* and it is *spiritual*. It is *now* and it is *eternal*.

A lot of the Bible's content serves as an invitation for sinners to enter this second reality—God's eternal kingdom of grace. The Bible acts like a roadmap to get us from our mortal reality of this life in a world of God's forever heavenly kingdom. As we read Scripture, it becomes clear that the leading character—God's Son, Jesus—is the only *Way* to accomplish this remarkable journey. The eternal destination is ours when we trust Jesus for finishing all that is necessary for sinful people like us to become perfect again in God's sight.

The following narrative introduces us to a rich, young man who had given a lot of thought and effort into finding his own way into God's heavenly kingdom. Sadly, the confidence he placed in his own good deeds failed to satisfy God's demands.

A man approached Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:16-26).

What to look for when you read the Bible

The question this rich young man asked Jesus was almost the right question. The man's problem was that he thought he had already done everything God expected of him. He didn't believe he needed Jesus' help. He was filled with pride when he really needed the humility to recognize that he was incapable of pleasing God because he was a sinner.

Hear, read, and study God's Word with a humble heart that seeks God's blessing.

For thought and discussion

To whom was Jesus referring when he said there was only One who was good? How did this man's heart need to change? Why was his unbelief such a tragic mistake?

Read John 3:5. What do you think Jesus meant when he said that we cannot enter God's kingdom unless we are born of water and the Spirit?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the only *Way* to eternal life with our heavenly Father. Give us the peace of knowing that you have fully satisfied God's demands for holiness by offering up your own life as a substitute for the punishment we deserve. Amen.

Helps

In addition to its narrative, the Bible also contains prophecies, prayers, and poetry. These writings are also inspired by God's Holy Spirit. They provide a treasure trove of encouragement, hope, peace, joy, and forgiveness. When you find a text that is especially meaningful, bookmark it or copy it into a notebook and keep it for a time when you will need it.

Suggested activity

The Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have more references to God's kingdom than any other book in Scripture. Choose one of them and list all the texts in which Jesus taught his followers about the *kingdom of God*. Older children and adults should wrestle with God to understand what each text adds to their knowledge of God's kingdom.