


A Strong People

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WE GATHER

 **Leader:** The wise walk in the ways of the Lord. They listen to the messages that God sends them.

Let us listen to these words of wisdom from Scripture.

Reader 1: "He who walks honestly walks securely,
but he whose ways are crooked
will fare badly."

(Proverbs 10:9)

All: Lord, give us wisdom to speak
and act with honesty.

Reader 2: "Hatred stirs up disputes,
but love covers all offenses."

(Proverbs 10:12)

All: Lord, give us wisdom to grow
in love for all people.

Reader 3: "Better a little with virtue,
than a large income with injustice."

(Proverbs 16:8)

All: Lord, give us wisdom to act
justly and with compassion.

Reader 4: "He sins who despises the hungry;
but happy is he who is kind
to the poor!"

(Proverbs 14:21)

All: Lord, give us wisdom to find and serve
you in all our brothers and sisters.

Reader 5: "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter;
he who finds one finds a
treasure."

(Sirach 6:14)


All: Lord, give us wisdom to be
faithful and true friends to others.

Reader 6: "A cheerful glance brings joy to
the heart;
good news invigorates the bones."

(Proverbs 15:30)

All: Lord, give us wisdom to
understand the Good News that you
send to us. Let it fill us with joy!

All: Lord, teach us your ways.
Help us grow in grace and truth. Amen.

 Think of a book, television show, or
movie that contains an important
message for people. What is the
message? How is it communicated?



WE BELIEVE

The Jews lived and worshiped together.

As we have seen, each of the prophets had a message for God's people. One of these prophets was known as Isaiah of Judah. His message, the third prophetic message in the Book of Isaiah, can still be read in Chapters 56—66 of that book. Isaiah not only focused on true worship, but also made a connection between worship and the fair and just treatment of others. He linked praising God and social justice. Worship, he said, must lead people to act with justice, especially toward those who suffer.

In the Book of Malachi we find another call to worship God and to be just. Malachi foresaw a day when God would come to judge his people. Malachi, meaning "my messenger," tells of a messenger who would prepare the way for repentance and true worship. We read about such a messenger in the Gospel of Matthew when John the Baptist appears in Judea:

"A voice of one crying out in the desert,
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.'"
(Matthew 3:3)

The Book of Obadiah was written at a time when the Jewish People were having problems with the people in Edom. During the Jewish return from Babylon, the Edomites started to settle in southern Judah. The Book of Obadiah reminds us that God is just.

It presents the hope for the survival of the Jewish People and the return of the kingdom begun by David.

The Book of Joel uses images to show the people the need for true repentance.

"Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God"
(Joel 2:13), the prophet insists. He tells the people that only in this way will Israel be restored to God's favor.

The Book of Daniel gives insight into the long years of Babylonian exile and Persian domination. Stories about Daniel and his companions express hope and tell of the importance of behavior that is acceptable to the Lord. They show that God's people are able to be faithful to their religious traditions even in a foreign land.

The Book of Esther, like the Book of Daniel, is a kind of historical romance. It is a mixture of fact and fiction designed to offer hope and instruction to a defeated people. Esther was a virtuous Jewish girl married to the king of Persia. She stopped a terrible plot in which the king agreed that the Jews should be killed. The day of this terrible event would be decided by casting lots, or in Hebrew, *purim*. Jews everywhere still mark this day when through God's help Esther saved God's people. They celebrate it as the feast of Purim.



Esther appeals to the king of Persia. A page from the Megillat—
The Book of Esther, 18th century.

Throughout history God has worked through his people. What are some ways that God works through people

in your family?

in your parish?

in your city or town?

in your state or country?

in the world?

God continued to work through his people.

Storytelling is an important way that the biblical writers help people to understand their relationship with God. The stories in the Bible are sometimes a part of historical or prophetic books. Other times the story is recorded in a specific book of the Bible—often bearing the name of a character in the story. Either way the stories contain symbolic, interesting characters who deal with the issue of God's providence. Providence is God's constant care for and protection of his people.

The Story of Tobit The Book of Tobit is about a wealthy Jew living in Nineveh, Assyria. When he became blind, Tobit sent his son Tobiah to Persia where he met a woman named Sarah. There God sent the angel Raphael in disguise to help Tobit, Tobiah, and Sarah solve all their problems.

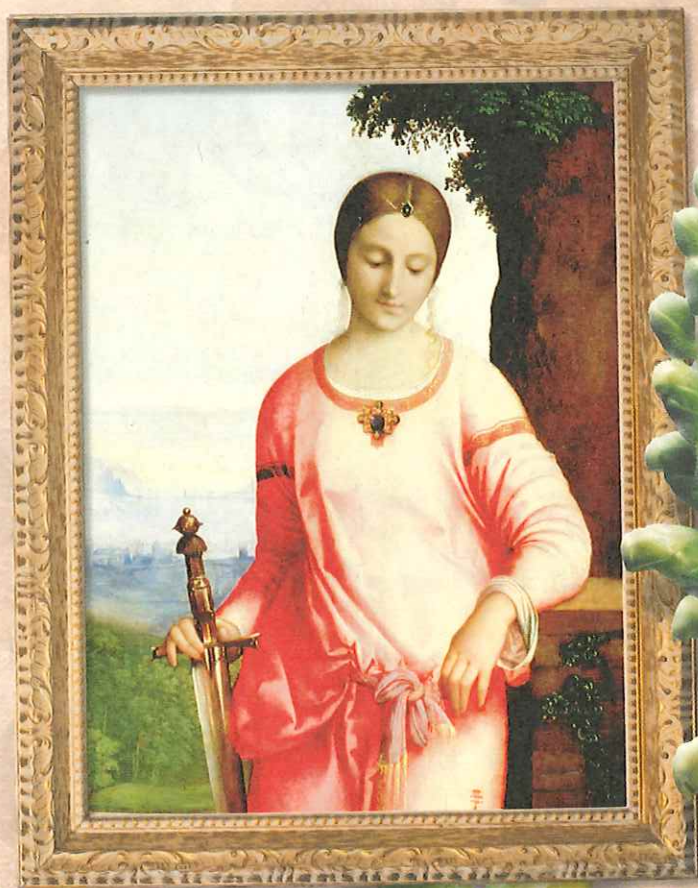
Tobit then sang a beautiful hymn praising God for his providence. It began,
“Blessed be God who lives forever,
because his kingdom lasts for all ages”
(Tobit 13:1).

The Story of Judith Providence is also the principal theme of the Book of Judith. As her story opens, the Jews had refused to help Assyria fight against its enemies. Thus, Assyria was about to punish the Jewish People.

The story goes on to portray Judith as a great heroine whose brave actions rescued the Jews. Through her courage, God saved his people from their enemies.

The Story of Jonah One of the most interesting writings of the time is the short story that makes up the Book of Jonah. It is also known as a *parable*. A **parable** is a short story that has a message. A parable is usually about something familiar, but it is told to make a point about something else.

In the story, Jonah was called to be one of God's prophets. But he refused to carry God's message of doom to the sinful city of Nineveh. Instead Jonah sailed off on a ship, was thrown overboard, was swallowed by a huge fish, and after three days, was thrown safe and sound onto dry land. Then he was sent back to Nineveh by God to complete his mission.




Detail of *Judith*, by Giorgione
(1476–1510)

As Christians, this symbolic story reminds us of the Resurrection. Just as God wanted Jonah to deliver a message, God sent Jesus Christ to bring his life and love to all people. And just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish, Jesus Christ rose from the dead after three days in the tomb.

When Jonah went to Nineveh the people listened, repented, and were spared. Jonah complained to God that these wicked people should have been punished. God reminded Jonah that these people were also God's creation.

This story conveys a message: God extends his mercy to all who truly repent. It reminds us not to be narrow-minded but to have a tolerant attitude toward all people.

 Make a mural that illustrates the meaning of one of the stories from the Books of Tobit, Judith, and Jonah. Write a caption to explain the importance of the story today.

As Catholics...

Jesus often used parables in his teaching. Jesus used examples from nature, farming, feasts, and everyday work to describe the Kingdom of God—the power of God's love coming into the world and into our lives. Jesus also told parables to help his disciples understand God's mercy and God's justice.

With your family read and discuss one parable from Chapter 13 of the Gospel of Matthew.

Key Word

parable (p. 331)



The Maccabees defended the Jewish faith.

In 323 B.C. Judah, which was part of Palestine, came under Syrian-Mesopotamian rule. However, none of Judah's traditional political and religious arrangements changed.

In 175 B.C. the king of Syria-Mesopotamia was warned about the Roman empire trying to take over his land. He decided that his kingdom should be more united. So he required everyone to accept the Greek culture and religion.

This policy split the Jewish community in Palestine. Some Jews favored the introduction of Greek culture; they were called Hellenists, or the Greek party. Others disagreed; they were the Hasidim, or the Pious party. When the king saw that his policy was being resisted, he began to persecute the Hasidim. He also captured Jerusalem, removed the high priest, and damaged the Temple.

This caused a rebellion in 167 B.C. The events of this rebellion were recorded in the First and Second Books of Maccabees. In 166 B.C. Judas Maccabeus took charge of the revolt. The Hasidim joined Judas in rebellion and won many battles. Judas and his followers recaptured Jerusalem.

In 164 B.C. Judas cleansed the Temple and rededicated it to the worship of God. The Temple menorah, or lamp stand, was lit once again. Judas asked the people to remember this event with a festival. The festival was called the "the feast of lights" because a one-day's supply of oil in the menorah lasted for eight days. This was the origin of the festival of Hanukkah, which Jews still celebrate today. They celebrate the deeds of the people of God who refused to give up their faith.

When Judas died in battle in 160 B.C., his brother Jonathan led the people. For seventeen years they were successful in their struggle against Syria. Then Jonathan died, and his brother Simon took his place.

Simon took advantage of Syrian weakness and negotiated independence for Judah. Simon became the country's first Jewish king since 587 B.C. Simon was also the high priest. Judah was strengthened because Simon had both civil and religious authority.

The writers of the Books of Maccabees have shown us that God's providence and the heroism and diplomacy of many men and women helped save God's people and allowed them to again follow their faith.



During the time of the Maccabees how did God provide for his people?
Illustrate ways God provides for people today.

Judea lost its independence to Roman rule.

In 134 B.C. Simon Maccabeus was killed and his son, John Hyrcanus, became king. John acquired a great deal of land in the south. Because he was also the high priest, he insisted that the people living there worship the one true God and give up their false religious practices.

During John's reign there was disunity and fighting among the Pious party, the Hasidim.

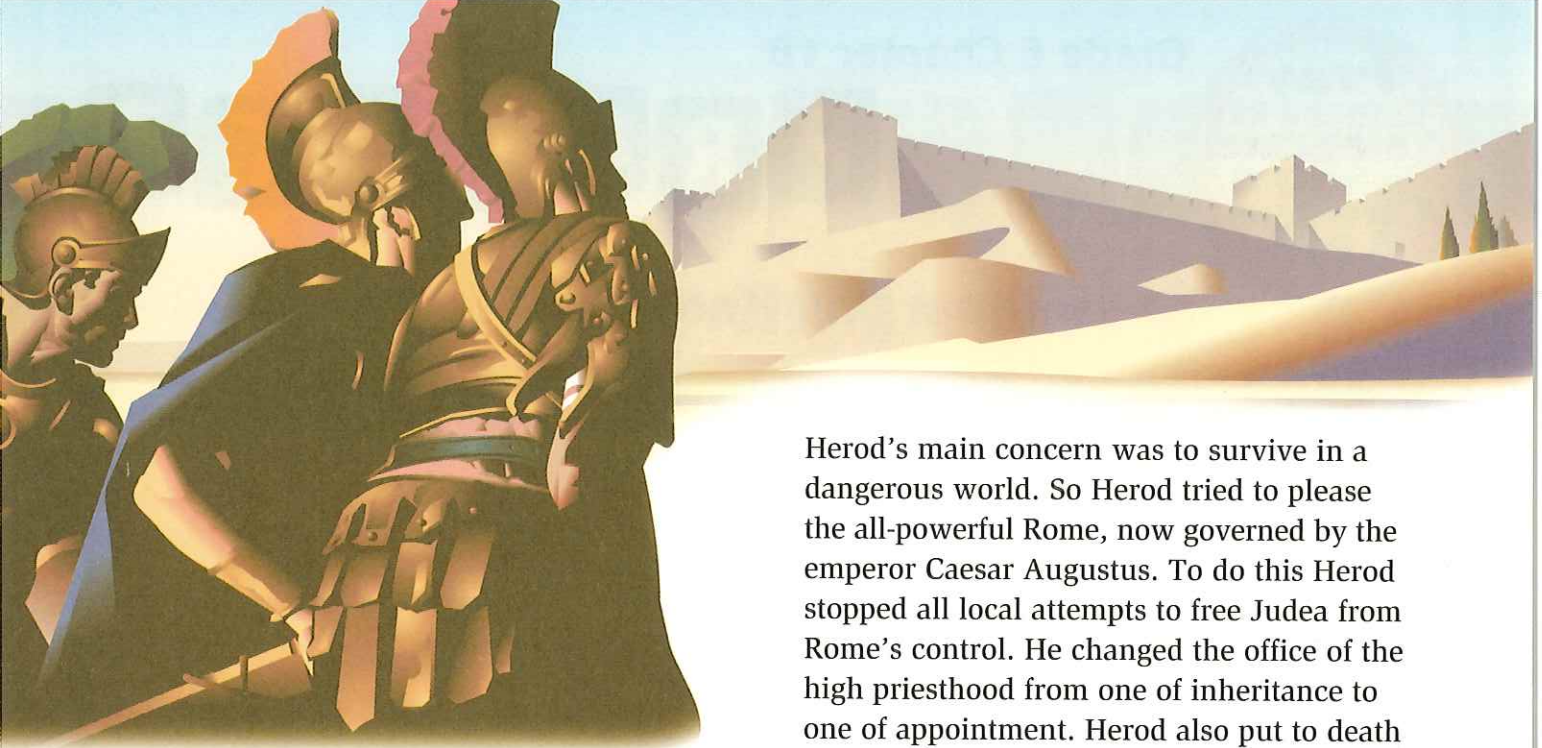
They questioned whether John had the right to the office of high priest. So different groups within the Hasidim formed. These groups were the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Only the Sadducees recognized John's title and worked closely with him. Yet the Pharisees and the Sadducees joined with the community of Jews and continued to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Groups within the Hasidim

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They refused to have anything to do with John, and were persecuted by John.• They no longer worshiped in Jerusalem, where John was high priest.• They were believed to have set up a community at Qumran on the Dead Sea.• They became known as the Essenes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They rejected most of John's policies. John distanced himself from this group.• They did not accept John's right to the office of high priest.• They continued to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.• They became known as the Pharisees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They worked closely with John to achieve his goals, and were supported by him.• They recognized John's title as high priest.• They continued to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.• They became known as the Sadducees. |
|--|--|--|

When John died, his younger son, Alexander Jannaeus, became king. He expanded his kingdom acquiring Galilee and Samaria. Alexander began to persecute the Pharisees because they opposed his policies. Still, when he died, he left behind him a much stronger Judea. Judea was a translation for Judah, the land where the Jews had resettled.

After Alexander Jannaeus died, a civil war broke out because of problems between his two sons. Rome sensed the trouble in Judea and decided to get involved.



In 63 B.C. the Senate, the governing body in Rome, sent Pompey the Great to settle matters in the East. Pompey made what remained of Syria-Mesopotamia a Roman province. He filled it with Roman troops. Pompey invaded Judea, captured Jerusalem, and brought the kingdom of Judea under Roman rule. This marked the end of the kingdom, as well as the end of Jewish independence for over two thousand years. The next thirty-three years or so saw a confused struggle for power, not only in Judea but also in Rome. During these conflicts, many Jews and many Romans, including Pompey himself, were killed.

When peace returned in 30 B.C., Judea found itself under Roman rule. Power in Judea was given to a complete outsider, Herod the Great. Herod was a descendant of one of the families from the southern lands that had been forced by John Hyrcanus to accept the one true God. For that reason many Jews doubted whether Herod was a Jew at all.

Herod's main concern was to survive in a dangerous world. So Herod tried to please the all-powerful Rome, now governed by the emperor Caesar Augustus. To do this Herod stopped all local attempts to free Judea from Rome's control. He changed the office of the high priesthood from one of inheritance to one of appointment. Herod also put to death all who challenged his authority. Thus he was hated by many Jews and admired by most Romans. In fact, the Romans were so happy with the way Herod was ruling that they made him king of Judea.

WE RESPOND



What can leaders do to show respect for the religious beliefs of their citizens? Write ways you can show respect for the religious beliefs of others.



PROJECT

Show What *you* Know Use the clues to complete the chart.

Clue	Your Answer
Jewish feast recalling that through God's help Esther saved God's people	
the country defeated by the actions of Judith	
the angel that helped Tobit, Tobiah, and Sarah	
he became king of Judah (Judea) when his father, John Hyrcanus, died	
the place of exile that is the setting of the Book of Daniel	
Hanukkah is "the feast of _____"	
Hasidim group that was persecuted by John Hyrcanus, and believed to have set up a community at Qumran on the Dead Sea	

DISCIPLE CHALLENGE Look over your answers.

- Then, circle the first letter of each answer.
- Use the circled letters to write the **Key Word**:

The story of Jonah is a parable. What is its message?



You may have heard the saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" What helps you get "going" when the "going is tough"? Check all that apply.

- ☐ determination
- ☐ family and friends
- ☐ faith in God
- ☐ _____



The phrase, "the whole megillah," comes from the Jewish feast of Purim. *Megillah* is the Hebrew word for "scroll." The scroll containing the Book of Esther is read in its entirety in the synagogue on Purim. So the phrase "the whole megillah" has come to mean a long, complicated story.



Saint Stories

Saint Genevieve was born in the fifth century in a small village near Paris. When she was fifteen she dedicated her life to God. After the death of her parents, she lived with her godmother in Paris. There she prayed every day and worked hard to care for those in need. Genevieve grew closer to Jesus and wanted to share his goodness with others. She became well known for her courage, faith, and just ways. Once she convinced the people of Paris to trust in God and remain in the city when an enemy attack was feared. She had them fast and pray to show their faith. Paris was spared! She is the patron saint of Paris. Her feast day is January 3.



DISCIPLE CHALLENGE

- Underline the phrase that describes the characteristics for which Genevieve became well known.
- Circle the name of the city for which Genevieve is patron saint.

Visit *Lives of the Saints* on www.webelieveweb.com to find out more about other saints and holy people.

What Would *you* do?

Daniel, Esther, and Tobit remained faithful to God in lands where people did not know God. What if you lived among people that did not share your faith? How would you continue to live your faith and remember your relationship with God?

Take Home

Within a home, everyone's schedule may be so full that it can be difficult to find enough time to eat a meal together, let alone sit down to talk.

This week, plan some "family time" to do something together. Attend Mass together and share a meal afterward. Make time to really "connect" with one another.

CHAPTER TEST

Underline the correct answer.

1. The prophet (**Isaiah/Malachi**) foresaw a day when God would come to judge his people, and mentioned a messenger who would prepare the way for repentance and true worship.
2. The Book of (**Obadiah/Daniel**) contains stories that express hope and tell of the importance of behavior that is acceptable to the Lord.
3. The Book of (**Tobit/Judith**) describes how on one occasion God rescued the Jews from their enemies through one person's courage.
4. The writers of the Books of the (**Maccabees/Romans**) show us that God's providence saved his people, and allowed them to again follow their faith.

Short Answers

5. What does the Jewish feast of Purim celebrate?

6. What is God's providence?

7. How did Judea lose its independence to Roman rule?

8. What does the Jewish feast of Hanukkah celebrate?

Write a paragraph to answer this question.

- 9–10. Why is the story of Jonah considered to be a parable? How is it symbolic of the Resurrection of Christ?
