

Jimmy Goes to Sunday School

By Ward Ricker

Episode 3 – The Big Tower and Two Evil Cities

“So listen, Jimmy,” Aaron told him as they were entering the church building. “You ask a lot of questions when Mrs. Peabody is telling us her stories about god. It gets her upset when kids interrupt, so try to hold off on questioning her so much.”

“But I’m just trying to understand,” Jimmy responded.

“Well, try to understand without asking so many questions,” Aaron said.

“Maybe I just shouldn’t come in again,” Jimmy responded. “I should just go home so I don’t upset her anymore.”

“But then you wouldn’t get to learn about god,” Aaron protested.

“Well, maybe I shouldn’t learn about god. My dad says he doesn’t believe there is a god, anyway.”

“Oh, don’t listen to him. It’s important to learn about god.”

“Why?”

“Well, just because it is.”

“That isn’t much of a reason,” Jimmy protested.

“Look, god created us and everything else, and he wants us to do what is right.”

“You mean like he did when he drowned everyone in that big flood.”

“He had a good reason for doing that,” Aaron informed him.

“People were sinful, so that’s a reason to murder them all?” Jimmy asked.

“It’s not murder when god does it. God isn’t like us; it’s different with him. It’s like ... well ... you know ... just come back in and listen and you will see.”

By now they were at the doorway of the church, so Jimmy followed his friend inside and down to Mrs. Peabody’s Sunday School room.

“Jimmy, you’re back,” Mrs. Peabody almost screeched as he walked inside. “Full of more questions, I presume.”

“I told him not to ask so many questions, Mrs. Peabody,” Aaron spoke up.

“Well, good,” Mrs. Peabody responded. “It’s good if children listen closely and don’t ask too many questions when being taught about the things of god.”

Jimmy was going to say that it was because he was listening closely that he had all his questions, but he didn’t think that would help matters any, so he just followed Aaron and sat down in the same place in the front row where they had sat previously. A moment later the same two girls that had been there before came and sat in their usual place. Then Larry, the boy that had been in the back row the first time, came in and sat down.

“Well, welcome all of you back to god’s house again,” Mrs. Peabody proclaimed. “It’s great to see you all back ready to learn more about god and his special book, the Bible.”

Jimmy got the feeling she was speaking more to the other kids than to him, but he let her continue.

“Last week we learned how god sent a big flood over the earth because people were so sinful, and how he saved Noah and his family because, unlike the rest, Noah was a righteous man who didn’t sin, but did what god wanted. So now we are going to talk about what happened after that big flood. Just like Adam and his children, Noah’s children had children of their own, and they had children of their own, and so forth, until there was a large group of them. They all stayed together as one group, though, and travelled until they came to a place called Shinar.”

Jimmy was going to ask how come the place had a name if no one had been there before, but he didn't want to interrupt.

"When they got to Shinar," Mrs. Peabody continued, "they decided to settle there and build a big, tall tower that would reach all the way up to heaven."

Forgetting that he was supposed to avoid asking questions, Jimmy just blurted out, "How far up was heaven?"

When he saw Mrs. Peabody's frown he realized that he shouldn't have asked that, but he just kept quiet as she responded, "It's a long, long ways up, Jimmy. Too far for any tower to reach, but they didn't know that."

"Oh," he just said and let her continue.

"Well, they started building their tower layer by layer, and up and up it went, higher and higher, until one day god noticed how high it was getting to be. This made god unhappy that they were building such a tall tower, and he said, 'Look. All these people are together and speak the same language, and now they are building this great tower. If they can do this, there is nothing that they won't be able to do. So let's go down and confuse their language so that they can't understand each other. Then they won't be able to finish'."

Jimmy was, once again, confused. He just didn't understand how building a tower could be such a threat to a god. Why did god think that they could just do anything after they did that? So, unable to contain his curiosity, he asked Mrs. Peabody, "So why did god say that people would be able to do anything if they finished the tower. Would reaching heaven mean they would turn into gods and be just like him?"

Once again, he could see that Mrs. Peabody didn't like his question, but he just couldn't understand how people could become gods by building a tower.

"No, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody answered, "building a tower wouldn't turn them into gods. There is only one god, and no person can become god."

"But if they would be able to do anything, doesn't that make them like god?"

"Well, god didn't mean 'anything'. He was just saying that they were getting out of hand and would be doing lots of things that they shouldn't be doing."

"Like sinning?"

"Yes, Jimmy, like sinning?"

"So god sometimes says things that he doesn't really mean?"

"No, Jimmy. God always tells the truth," Mrs. Peabody answered and seemed to be grappling with her words. "It's just that ... that you have to understand what god is really saying. Sometimes his meaning is different from what you might think his words mean. You have to understand god's meaning, not men's meaning."

"Oh, so the Bible says something that you don't believe, then you just say that that wasn't god's meaning and that he really meant what you think he meant to say."

"No, Jimmy. That's not what I was saying, at least that's not what I meant to say, or, rather, don't think it was ... ahh ... well, listen, Jimmy, I know this is hard for you to understand, but, really, what you need to do is just keep listening and god will make it all clear to you if you really trust him to do so."

"Oh," Jimmy said and let her continue.

"So anyway, children, that's why we have lots of different languages on the earth today, like English and Spanish and Chinese and Russian and Swahili. It's because god mixed up the languages when they were trying to build the tower. Then, since the people couldn't understand each other anymore, they couldn't work together, and they stopped building the tower and spread out over the earth."

Jimmy looked out the small window that looked over to the east side of the city, where he could see the top of a 102-story skyscraper sticking up above the rest of the buildings. "There is a tall tower," he said to the teacher, pointing out the window. "Was their tower taller than that tower there?"

"I don't know, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody said.

Jimmy could hear the tension in her voice.

"Well, god didn't stop them from building that tall building out there, and no one turned into a god when they built it, so the tower must have been taller than that one if god stopped them."

"Well, perhaps so," Mrs. Peabody said, but Jimmy sense a lack of conviction in her voice.

Continuing, she said, "So god called the tower 'Babel', because he mixed up the people's languages there."

"Did you mean to say 'Babble'?" Jimmy asked.

"No, Jimmy. It's Babel, not Babble!" Mrs. Peabody answered sharply.

Babble would be a more appropriate name, Jimmy thought, but thought it best if he didn't say any more.

"So now," Mrs. Peabody continued, "I want to talk about a very special person in the Bible. He is someone you will hear a lot about because he is the father of a nation founded by god. His name was Abraham."

"Wow! Father of a whole nation!" Jimmy said to himself. "Mommy says just my sister and I are a lot of work. It must have been hard raising a whole nation!"

"Abraham lived in a place called Ur," Mrs. Peabody continued. "However, god came to Abraham one day and told him that he wanted him to go to a place called Canaan, so Abraham packed up everything he owned, and he and his wife and all his servants..." Mrs. Peabody was careful not to use the word "slaves". "... and travelled off to the land called Canaan. His nephew, named Lot, also went with them. When they got there, god told Abraham that this land would be the land where his descendants would live."

"Descendants?" one of the girls in the back asked.

"Oh," Mrs. Peabody explained, "that means his children, and grandchildren, and greatgrandchildren, and great-great grandchildren and so on. All the people that descended from him were called 'descendants'."

"Oh," the girl said, and Mrs. Peabody continued.

"However, shortly after Abraham and his wife got there, there was a famine in the land. That meant that their crops didn't grow and there wasn't enough food to eat, so they were all very hungry. So Abraham and his wife went down to Egypt to live for a while. While he was there, the men of Egypt saw his wife, Sarah, and Pharaoh, as the king of Egypt was called, had Sarah brought into his house because he liked her. When god saw that Pharaoh was after Abraham's wife, though, he was unhappy and sent plagues on Pharaoh's household until Pharaoh let her go back to her husband." Mrs. Peabody didn't bother to explain that this was brought about because Abraham asked his wife to lie and say that she was his sister, but that would just confuse the kids, she thought, so some things are better left unsaid.

"God was with Abraham while he was there," she said, still leaving out the part about Abraham and his wife lying and god punishing Pharaoh's folks for it, "and when he came back to Canaan again, he as very rich. His nephew Lot was also quite rich, but some of their servants..." Once again, she was careful not to use the word "slaves". "...started fighting, because the place where they stayed wasn't big enough for both of them and all that they owned, so they divided up, and Lot went one way, over to a city named Sodom, and Abraham went the other way.

"After he was there a little while a group of four kings, led by a king named Chedorlaomer of a place called Elam, went to war with five other kings, including the king of the city of Sodom, where Lot was living."

The girls in the back giggled, and the teacher asked them what they were giggling about. "Chedarlaomer," one of them said. "That's a funny sounding name. Was he full of cheese?"

"No, girls, he wasn't full of cheese. People had very different names back there from what we're used to, so they sometimes sound funny to us," Mrs. Peabody affirmed and continued the story. "King Chedarlaomer conquered the other kings and led the people of those places away as captives, including Abraham's nephew, Lot. When Abraham learned that his nephew had been taken captive, he was concerned, and he determined that he would rescue him. He took 318 servants who had been born in his own house, went after Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, chased them to a city called Dan, fought against them and recaptured his nephew Lot and all the people and goods that they had taken.

"318! That must have been a big house!" Jimmy thought.

"When he got back," Mrs. Peabody continued, "the king of Sodom came out to meet him and offered to let Abraham keep all the goods if he would just give him his people back, but Abraham said, 'No. I will not take even a thread or a shoelace of anything that I have recovered, or else you might tell people that you made me rich. You can have everything back that was yours.'" So Abraham kept nothing for himself and gave everything back that he had recovered.

"Abraham was a pretty incredible man," Mrs. Peabody said. "Don't you think so, children?"

"Yeah," Aaron shouted out. The other children just nodded.

"And why do you think Abraham was able to win a battle against four kings?"

"Because he trusted god," Aaron volunteered.

"Very good, Aaron," Mrs. Peabody said. "Abraham surely couldn't have prevailed against the armies of four different kings if god hadn't been with him."

Aaron and the girls smiled and nodded. Jimmy held his opinion in reservation.

"So Lot went back to live in Sodom," Mrs. Peabody said, and then her voice changed to an ominous tone, "but the people who lived in Sodom and in a nearby city called Gomorrah were very wicked people. They didn't live like god wanted, as Abraham and Lot did, but they were very bad sinners. So one day god came to Abraham and said to him, 'The sins of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are very great. I cannot bear their sin anymore, and I am going to destroy those two wicked cities.'

"Abraham was concerned for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, though, so he asked god, 'Well, what if there are fifty good, righteous people in the cities? Will you destroy the cities and kill all those righteous people along with the rest?'

"God then answered him and said that, no, he would not destroy the cities if there were fifty good people in them.

"But Abraham wasn't sure that god would be able to find fifty good people in the cities, and he was still concerned for the people, so he asked god again, 'Well, what if there aren't fifty, but there are forty-five good people? Will you destroy the cities and kill the forty-five good people?'

"God then answered Abraham and said that he would spare the cities if he could find forty-five good people.

"Abraham continued, though, and asked, 'Well, what if there are only forty good people?' and god said he would spare the cities if he found forty good people.

"But Abraham wasn't done and asked, 'Well, what if there are only thirty good people?' and god said that he would spare the cities if he could find thirty good people.

"But Abraham still wasn't done and asked, 'Well, what if there are only twenty good people?' and god said he wouldn't destroy the cities if he found twenty good people.

"But Abraham just had to ask one more time, 'Well, what if there are only ten good people?' and god said that he would not destroy the cities if he found ten good people in them.

Jimmy sat listening intently to see if Abraham would go down to five, but Mrs. Peabody then said, "So when evening came god sent two angels to the city of Sodom where, you remember, Abraham's nephew Lot was living. Lot invited them to his house to eat supper, but while the angels and Lot were eating, a bunch of evil men came from the city and knocked on Lot's door. When Lot asked them what they wanted, they said that they wanted Lot to bring the two men, that they didn't know were angels, out to them so that they could do something very evil to them, but Lot, being a good man, refused to do so. So when the angels..."

Jimmy saw that Mrs. Peabody was talking rapidly, as if she was trying to get past this part real fast, but he wanted to know what the evil thing was that the men wanted to do to the angels, so he asked, "Excuse me, Mrs. Peabody. I know you are in a hurry to get on with the story, but you didn't say what it was that the men wanted to do to the angels. What were they going to do?"

"Oh, Jimmy, that's not what is important. It's just that they were going to do something very sinful, and so Lot refused to let them do it because he was a righteous, god-fearing man."

"But I want to know what they were trying to do. Doesn't the Bible tell you?"

"Yes, the Bible tells us, Jimmy, but we don't need to know every little detail..."

"But if it's in the Bible then don't you think you should tell us? Don't you want us to know everything that god has told us?"

"Well, if you really need to know, Jimmy, the Bible says that the men wanted to have sex with the angels, but that isn't really the point..."

Jimmy noticed Mrs. Peabody blush slightly when she said the word "sex, and then he responded, "Wow! They wanted to have sex with an angel! I don't know what it's like yet to have sex, but I bet it would be really neat to do it with an angel!"

"Now, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody scolded him sharply, "That is not appropriate conversation to have in the house of the lord!" She wagged her finger at him, and he hung his head down apologetically.

Regaining her composure, Mrs. Peabody said to the class, "So anyway, the angels grabbed Lot and pulled him back into the house, and then the angels stuck the men of the city with blindness." Mrs. Peabody left out the part where righteous Lot offered his daughters to the men of the city for them to rape them. There was already too much sex talk going on for her liking.

"While the men were groping around in blindness outside the door," she continued, "the angels told everyone in Lot's house to leave the city and not look back, because god was going to burn it to the ground. Everyone then ran for their lives out of the city, and god threw down fire from heaven and burnt both of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to the ground, because of their great sin. Lot's wife, however, disobeyed the angels and looked back at the city while it was burning, and because of her sinfulness, god turned her into a pillar of salt."

"It was sinful to look at a city on fire?" Jimmy asked.

"It was sinful, Jimmy, because the angels had told them not to look back, and so she disobeyed the angels' command."

"Oh," responded Jimmy, "and that was enough to kill her for?"

"That's what can happen if you don't obey god's commands, Jimmy. Very terrible things can happen."

"So everybody in the city was burnt to death?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, everybody in the city was burnt to death because they were so sinful," Mrs. Peabody responded.

"Every woman and child?" Jimmy asked.

"Everyone, Jimmy. It was because they were so sinful," Mrs. Peabody responded.

"Every little baby?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes, Jimmy. Everyone," Mrs. Peabody almost screamed at him.

"Wow! God really doesn't like sinful babies!" Jimmy said.

Mrs. Peabody skipped the story of how Lot's two daughters, after he had tried to get them raped, got him drunk and then got pregnant by him. She let the kids go a little bit early while she tried to regain her composure.