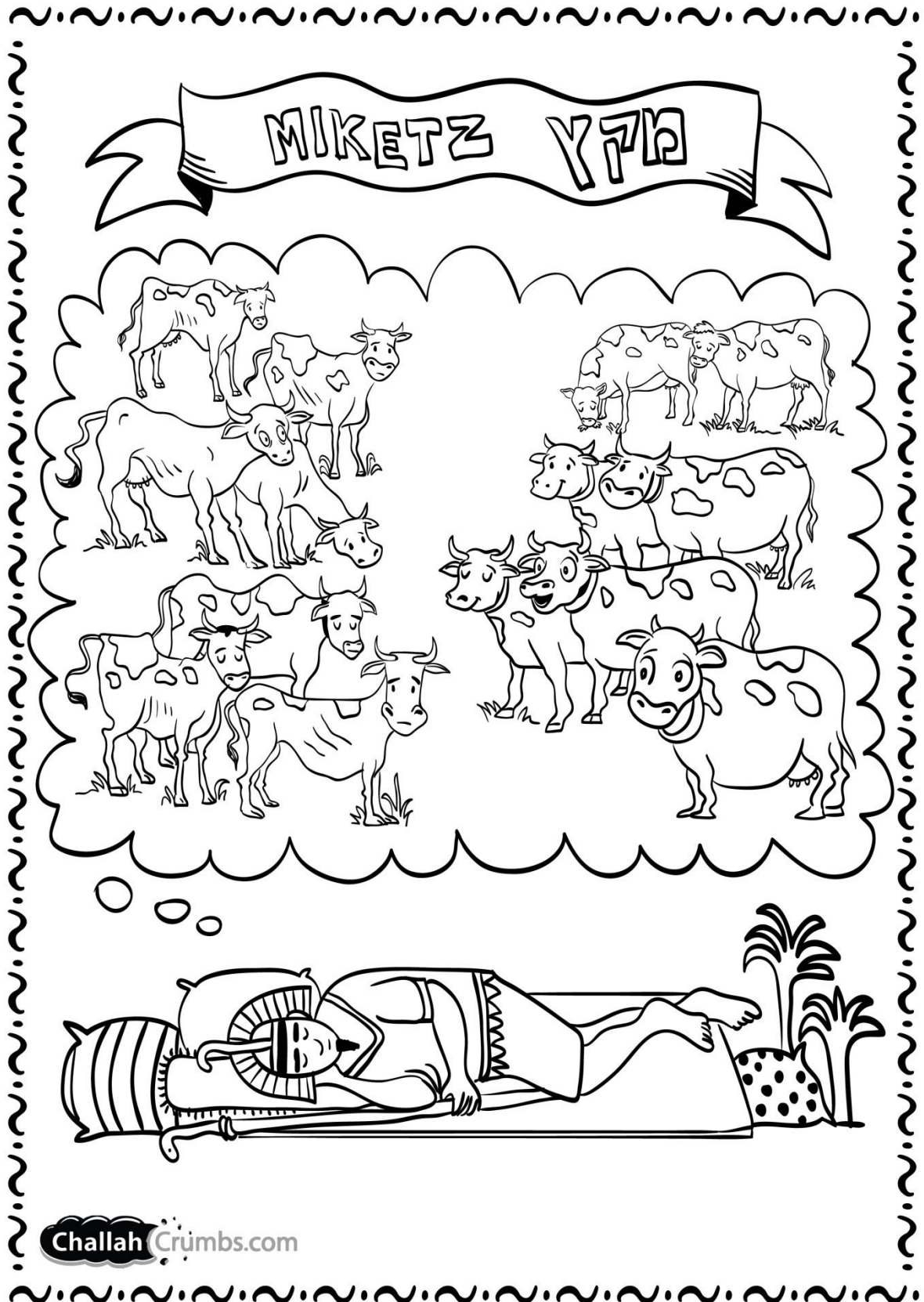


SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES 24 APRIL 2016

JUNIORS: JOSEPH IN EGYPT (Genesis 41)

Does this remind you of the story you heard today? Why not colour it in?



SENIORS: Discovering God's will (Acts 11:1-18)

How does God communicate with us?

The Bible shows us that God uses different methods at different times. Once He wrote on a block of stone what his people must do. On another occasion he made a donkey speak.

Remember how God spoke to Saul in a bright light which made him blind for 3 days? Perhaps God chose that method because He had to do something dramatic to make Saul stop and think about what he was doing.

What about Dorcas/Tabitha? The Bible doesn't tell us that she had a vision or dream telling her to make clothes. She didn't need one. She knew from the Jewish scriptures that God had told his people to care for widows and orphans so God just steered her thoughts in that direction. Those instructions, combined with her ability to sew and the fact that she must have had enough money to buy cloth, guided her.

In today's story we have some more examples of how God guides people.

Cornelius was a Roman army officer who had probably grown up worshipping the Roman gods. This meant that he didn't know much about the true God, although he tried to please Him. God saw this and knew that Cornelius was ready to listen to the news about Jesus.

One day as Cornelius was praying, an angel appeared to him. Cornelius was terrified! But he obeyed the angel's instructions and sent two servants and a soldier to ask Peter to come and visit him. He probably wondered if Peter would come because Jews like Peter weren't allowed to visit non-Jews like Cornelius.

But God took care of that problem. He knew that Peter would think it was terribly wrong to visit a non-Jew. The fact that God loved all people would take some getting used to for the Jews believed that only Jews were special to God. Peter needed a dramatic wake-up call. So God gave him a vision too.

While Peter was praying, he saw a tarpaulin filled with 'unclean' animals (the ones that Jewish people were not allowed to eat, like beavers, hares, pigs, octopi, fish without scales and fins, raptors). Next thing, a voice told him to "get up, kill and eat". Ugh! Peter was horrified and refused. But the voice told him that he must not think of this as 'unclean' for God had purified it. Peter saw the animals again and again. When the vision eventually disappeared, Peter couldn't stop thinking about it. What did it mean?

God gave him the answer almost immediately. At that very moment the 3 men from Cornelius arrived and asked Peter to go to Cornelius's home with them. Suddenly the vision made sense! God wanted him to go with them to a non-Jewish house. If it hadn't been for the vision, Peter would have refused to go, but the vision guided him and showed him that God didn't regard these non-Jews as untouchable.

Peter had learnt his lesson so well that he stayed with Cornelius for 3 days, telling Cornelius and other non-Jews about Jesus. To Peter's amazement they accepted his message, and he saw that God sent his Holy Spirit to them to fill them with joy and peace and power. Peter realised that God's message was meant for everyone.

But that wasn't the end of the story!

News got back to the leaders in Jerusalem that Peter had been with non-Jews and they were very upset. They didn't think God wanted non-Jews to hear about Jesus.

Clearly God had to get a message through to them too. This time he didn't use a vision. There was no need! Peter could tell them. And he did! When he told them the whole story about his vision and about Cornelius, the leaders realised this was God's will. So this time God had used Peter's words to show others what God wanted.

Later people wrote all these things down so that we can read about God's plans for his people. This means that we now have the Bible to guide us, too.

God promises that he will 'direct our paths', just as he directed his early disciples. What is more: he will choose the very best way to talk to us. All we have to do is listen!

PUZZLE

Who was God speaking to? Think carefully! God used:

1. A flaming sword (Gen 3)?
2. A storm and a ride in a fish's belly (Jonah 1)?
3. A dream about a ladder (Gen 28)?
4. An incredibly hot fire (Dan 3)?
5. A finger which wrote on a wall (Dan 5)?