

Creation to Forgiving Father

At the very beginning of time, God was already there! Nothing else existed, only God. God spoke and when He did, He created the whole world and everything in it. After creating everything else, He made man and woman, His special creation. He walked with them and talked with them, and took care of them in a beautiful garden. They had everything they needed. Until one day, the man and woman decided to disobey God, to go their own way. When they did, they were separated from God and from all the beauty and provision He had created for them.

The man and woman had children and their children had children, but they all had evil in their hearts and the separation from God continued. God chose a people to be his special tribe, but even they turned their backs on Him. One time, to call the people back to Himself, God sent a prophet, Elijah, to gather the people on a mountain top. The priests who followed the other gods came as well. Elijah challenged them to a contest. He said to the people, "Why do you waver between two gods? If the Most High God is God, then worship Him; if this other god is god, then follow Him." The priests that worshipped the other gods called on their gods to send fire to burn a sacrifice placed on an altar. No matter how much they called and shouted, nothing happened. Then Elijah prayed to the one true God and fire came from Heaven, burning up the sacrifice and even the altar. For a while the people followed the one true God. But it didn't last.

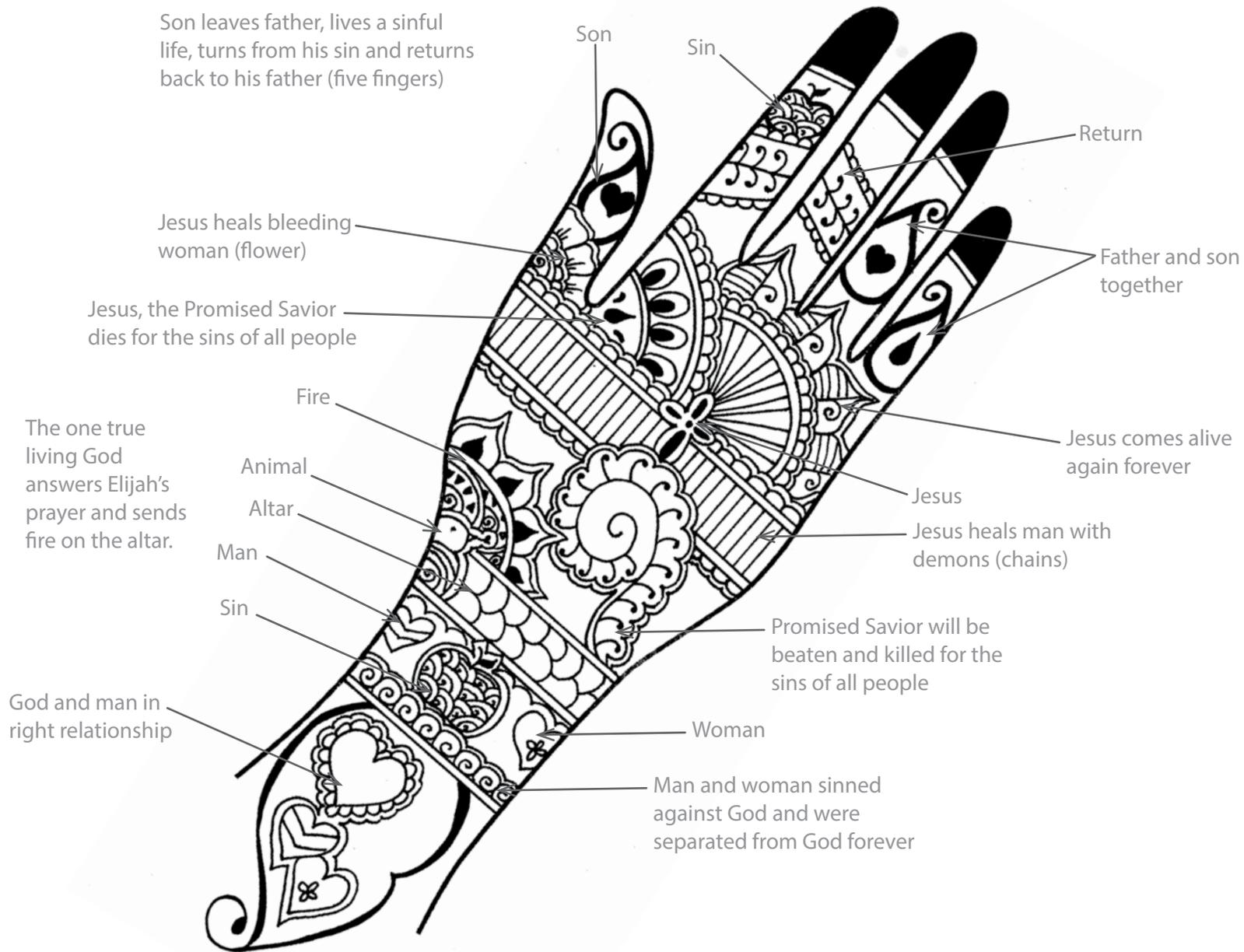
The problem was the sin and evil in man's hearts. So, God promised to send a Savior to release the people from their sin. This promised Savior would be beaten and even killed, taking the punishment for our sins, the sins of people. But He would not stay dead! No, He would rise from the dead and be honored as a Prince of Peace and people could be restored to God.

Many years passed and it happened. God himself came to earth. He was called Jesus. Scripture also calls Him "God with us." While on earth Jesus walked with people and taught them about God. He healed one man who had been possessed by evil spirits for years! Another woman had been bleeding for 12 years and as soon as she touched the edge of Jesus' clothes, she immediately became well! This happened over and over while Jesus was on earth. He taught and healed and many people began to follow Him.

Some religious leaders of the day were jealous and decided to have Him put to death. But even this was a part of God's plan, for the prophet said that Jesus would die in our place, as a punishment for our sins. They put him to death, but He didn't stay dead. Just as He foretold, He came back to life in three days and spent more time teaching and encouraging His followers before going to Heaven.

We can still learn from the teachings of Jesus. The stories and teachings are written in the Bible. One of Jesus' stories helps us understand how much God loves us. Jesus told a story of a father who had two sons. The younger son asked his father for his share of the inheritance (even though his father was still living!). The father gave the money to the son and the son took off to a far country. While there, he spent all his money, living a wild life. But, of course, that didn't last. When the money ran out and troubles came, the son decided to return to the father, ask forgiveness, and return as a servant. He headed home, and even before he could arrive at his house, his father ran out to meet him! He hugged him and received him, inviting all the neighbors to a big feast to celebrate his homecoming.

Jesus told that story so that we would understand that God's love is big enough to overcome any bad things we do and the evil we hold in our heart. Just like the son, we can return to the father and ask to come home. And God is ready to forgive us and return us to the relationship He prepared us for when He created that first man and woman so many years ago.



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