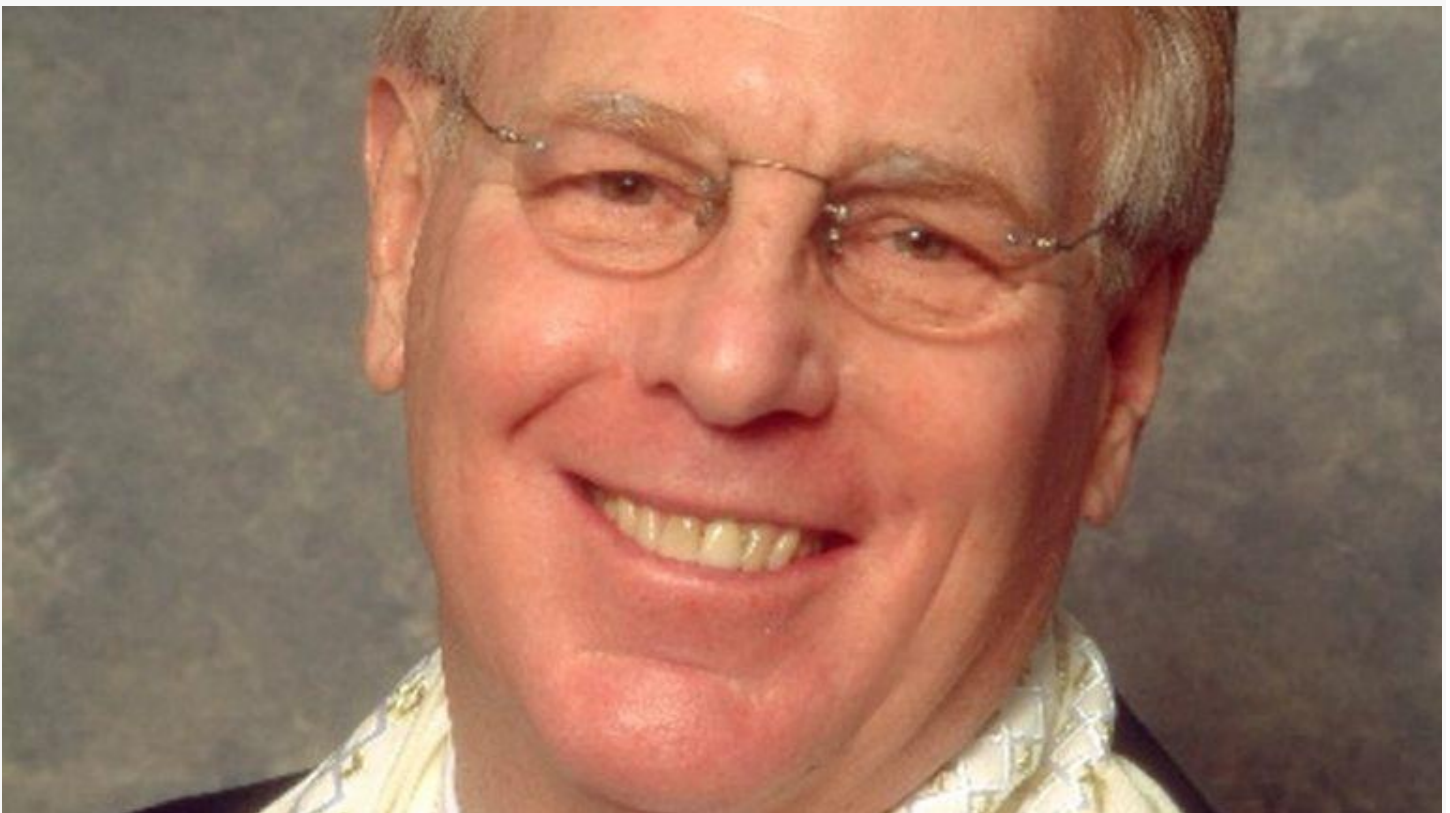


## Asking the clergy: What are the best Bible stories for children?



Stuart A. Paris Credit: The New Synagogue of Long Island

**By Jim Merritt**

Special to Newsday

June 1, 2016 11:10 AM

Summer vacation provides plenty of free time for children — not only to play but also to stray from their best behavior. This week's clergy discuss stories from the Old and New Testaments, which not only instruct and enlighten, but also help children make good decisions during those long days of sunshine and leisure.

## **The Rev. Wendy C. Modeste**

Pastor, United Methodist Church of Bay Shore

As a child, the creation story truly spoke to me — how God created not just the heavens and the earth, but humanity, in God’s own image and likeness. Although I did not quite conceive the concept of God in spirit form, I was fascinated with the idea that God had the ability to hold the whole world in his hands. I was taught in Catechism that confessions are made to the priest; but whenever I sinned, I felt such a sense of conviction that I went into my bedroom, got on my knees and cried out to God for forgiveness. My yearning was toward God, not knowing that one day I would be called to shepherd the people of God. God had a plan and purpose, and, at a young age, my life was being shaped for that reason. Today, children are confronted with so many types of adversity that some of them succumb to suicide, cutting, drinking, drugs and other destructive behaviors to help them cope. Bible stories involving children — such as Rachael and her son Joseph; Baby Moses and his mother; Hannah and her son, Samuel; Mary and her son, Jesus — show how precious children are to God. None of them is a mistake or here by chance. God has a plan and purpose for each of their lives for they are “fearfully and wonderfully created by God.” (Psalm 139:14)

## **Rabbi Stuart A. Paris**

The New Synagogue of Long Island, Brookville

One of my favorite Bible stories for children is the one about Joseph the Dreamer. Joseph was the son of Jacob, one of the patriarchs of Judaism. He had 11 brothers. We all know the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors, how his brothers were very jealous of him and how they sold him into slavery. But do you remember that Joseph was a dreamer? From the time he was a teenager, he dreamed that he would be someone great. He always believed in himself despite his troubles. He never gave up on his dream. Whatever lot he was given in life, he made sure to excel. When he became a slave, he became the best slave; when he became a prisoner, he became a model prisoner and supervisor of the other prisoners. No matter what the circumstances, he never lost faith that the vision he had in his dreams would be fulfilled. Be a dreamer. Don’t let your failures or your troubles get you down. Joseph didn’t. Hold tight to your beliefs. Believe in yourself. Pursue your dreams, like the dreamers who invented the computer (Charles Babbage), the computer mouse (Douglas Engelbart), email (VA Shiva Ayyadurai), and the World Wide

Web (Tim Berners-Lee). Who knows what our children can accomplish if they continue to dream?

### **The Rev. Lee Hamblen**

Children's pastor, Island Christian Church, Northport

God is the master storyteller. However, biblical stories are not fairy tales, they are God's divine revelation to all who would believe. With that said, I believe that there are a number of key stories that are essential in helping children understand God's perspective on the world they've been born into, and will be stewards of. The first story is Adam and Eve. Everyone eventually must answer the question, "How did I get here?" The great thing about this story is that it also provides God's explanation of what went wrong with the perfect world he created. The second one is Noah and the flood. This story teaches that God, the creator, is a righteous judge who holds his creations responsible for their actions. He punishes evil, but at the same time makes a way for salvation for anyone who will humble himself and turn to him. And then, of course, there is the story of Jesus. This one is by far the most important, and the climax of the biblical narrative. Jesus, God incarnate, is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all the world would be blessed through him. I'm taking a little liberty here as I'm referring to the whole story of Jesus which includes: his virgin birth, all the prophecies he fulfilled, his sinless life and three years of public ministry, his triumph of love on the cross, his victorious resurrection where he conquered sin and death. There is so much more that God has for us to learn through the biblical narrative, but I believe these are among the stories that give children God's explanation of the world they live in.