

Lesson 5 -The Life and Times of God's People

Objectives

By the end of this lesson the student should know that:

- Show a beginning acquaintance with the world of the ancient Middle East
- Show some familiarity with the map of the region
- Explain why this region is called the Holy Land
- Explain the difference between the monotheism of the Israelites and the polytheism of their neighbors

For the Catechist

Young people are often struck by the differences in things they see every day; they rarely see the similarities in different cultures. The catechist should highlight both differences and similarities in Middle-Eastern culture. To show that this part of the world is different from our own and yet it is the cradle of our civilization: the place where cities, writing, and written laws were first developed.

Searching the internet for "cradle of civilization" will connect you with a number of sites providing information on this region. Emory University's Carlos Museum has posted an interesting web page for teachers and students at www.carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/NearEast on the daily life, people, archaeology and other features of the area. For a more immediate experience, check your local market for pita bread and other Middle Eastern foods and, if possible, hold a "tasting" in this class. If you have parishioners or neighbors whose origin is from the Holy Land you may invite them to show some artifacts, dances, etc. from the area.

During the Christmas season many churches all over the country sponsor an event called the "Bethlehem Marketplace," "Marketplace 29 AD" or "Walk through Bethlehem." A small "village" is set up on church grounds and parishioners dressed as Bethlehem natives demonstrate or sell Middle-Eastern crafts and foods. Others invite people into their home, stable, synagogue or inn. If there is such a program in your area, plan to take the class on a "field trip" to the Middle East. Group Publishing, P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO. 80539 (1-800-447-1070; Fax 970-292-4373) distributes a similar program, *Jerusalem Marketplace*, designed for vacation programs. A starter kit is currently available at \$69.99.

As useful for engaging students' interest in aspects of this lesson as this material may be, the catechist must stress the religious importance of monotheism as the key to why the Middle East became the place where the Son of God became incarnate for us.

Materials Needed:

Opening Prayer: Icon corner, student text

Introduction: New American Bible

Guided Reading: Abingdon's Bible Maps for Children; Time Travel through the Bible DVD

Activity B: Worksheet A, pencils

1. Opening Prayer

Remind the students that we are learning about Salvation History and how it has been passed down to us. Refer to Psalm 78: 1-8 on page 21 of their text and how it is about passing on the story of Salvation History. Read the psalm alternating between a leader and the whole group.

2. Review

Review the main points of the previous lesson using the pages from your wall or easel pad.

Alternate: Give the students a few moments to review the Table of Contents from the *New American Bible*. Then ask which of the following books is from the Law (Torah), the Prophets or the Other Writings: Deuteronomy (*Law*), Jeremiah (*Prophets*), Wisdom (*Other Writings*).

3. Introduction

Ask the students to form four groups. Have each group decide what they might be doing on January 25 if they lived in the following parts of the country: Alaska, Hawaii, Colorado or New York. (If you cannot form groups, ask the questions of the whole class).

Note that all these places are in the same country. Repeat the exercise using different countries: Australia, Brazil, India, Switzerland. Note that January is a summer month in Australia and Brazil.

Geography and climate influence the way of life of people all over the world. So does the food they eat, whether they live bordering an ocean or inland, their history and the customs of their ancestors.

Point out that today we will study something of the people in Bible lands.

Background Reading (The Middle East):

"The Old Testament, as arranged today, begins with the story of creation, even though Genesis (the Book of Beginnings) is not the oldest written book of the Bible. These narratives, along with the entire first eleven chapters of Genesis, form a special unit in the Bible ? an inspired perspective on the 'pre-history' of humanity up to the arrival of Abraham as a historical figure. This section uses elements from certain popular tales about the origins of humanity prevalent in the Middle East. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors retell these stories to reveal the religious truths of the fall and eventual salvation of the human race" (LLI 19).

"The week of seven days goes back to very ancient times in the Middle East. Its origin may be found in nature, in the necessity for rest and the phases of the moon. In Genesis it was given a holy meaning by connecting it with the story of creation. In observing the seven day week we imitate God who both worked and rested" (LLII 28).

4. Guided Reading, Page 22, 23, 24

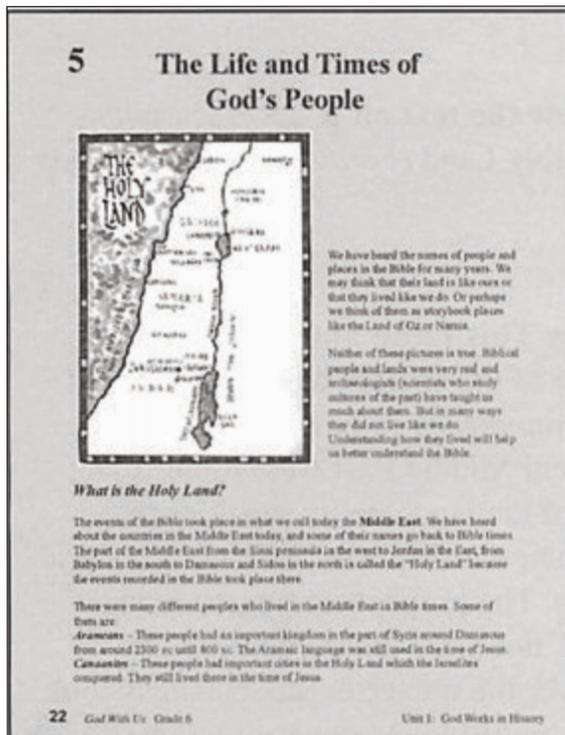
Write the objectives of the lesson on a wall pad or easel pad so that the page can be preserved and used for review next week.

Have the students **read the first section** of the text, pages 22 and 23. Divide reading styles (aloud/silent; by one/all together).

Before the reading, direct the students to **note the term *Middle East*** in the second paragraph. Mention that this term (like Near East and Far East) was coined by Europeans to distinguish parts of Eastern Europe and Asia. The term *Near East* refers to the countries of the Middle East plus Greece and the Balkan states. The term *Far East* refers to the countries east of India. These terms are still used today.

After reading the second paragraph **direct the students' attention to the Abingdon's wall map of the world** that you have displayed. Locate the countries of the Middle East referred to in the Bible. Point out that some countries are still called by the names used in the Bible (e.g. Egypt, Italy, Sicily, Cyprus, Syria). Others have changed. Achaia, Epirus, and Thrace are modern Greece; many areas in Asia Minor are part of Turkey.

Direct the student's attention to the map indicating the area described in the text as **the "Holy Land,"** from the Sinai Peninsula north along the Mediterranean coast to Syria (modern Syria and Lebanon), Assyria, Babylonia (Iraq today), and Persia (Iran).



Background Reading (Israel's Relationship with God):

"The story of the Old Testament tells of the relationship entered into between God and His people. This relationship was called a 'covenant' or solemn agreement, rather like a formal treaty. Of the various covenants in the Old Testament, the greatest one is the covenant made with the Israelites through the prophet Moses. On this occasion the people were liberated by God from slavery in Egypt and were led to a promised land. In return they were to worship the one, true God and they were given the Ten Commandments and the Law, as recorded in the first five books of the Bible" (LLI 36).

"Worship is an act which signifies our complete openness to God and our desire for union with Him. It is an offering of self- a sacrifice - expressed in words, in gestures, in deeds. ... In the Old Testament era the spirit of sacrifice was expressed in the temple sacrifices of animals or food. Making these offerings expressed the worshipper's desire for union with God, but they could not achieve it. This unity could only be accomplished in Christ." (LLII 6)



Philistines - They lived around Gaza and were powerful from about 1200-600 BC. The words Philistine and Philistines used in Jesus' time were their true name.

Phoenicians - They lived on the Mediterranean coast around Tyre and Sidon in present-day Lebanon. In Mark 7:26, St. Paul said they were called Sidonians and Tyrians.

Phoenicians - They were traders who had many cities and colonies in other parts of the world. When Jesus visited Tyre and Sidon, he was in a Phoenician city.

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From the time of Jesus until they were captured and deported to Babylon (586 BC) in 587 BC, they were called Israelites. From then they were known as Jews, from the name of the province around Jerusalem, Judah.

The Holy Land today includes an area that is much smaller than the area that was the Holy Land in Jesus' time. The most important cities for Christians are Bethlehem (where Jesus was born), Nazareth (where he was raised) and Jerusalem (where he died and rose from the dead).

Throughout the Holy Land there are places mentioned in the Bible which have been given their names. The most important cities for Christians are Bethlehem (where Jesus was born), Nazareth (where he was raised) and Jerusalem (where he died and rose from the dead).

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Have the students **review the text on p. 23** to learn why this area is called the Holy Land (*because the Bible events took place there*).

Stress the section **"Why This Land and This People?"** Contrast the *polytheism* of the ancient world (worship of many gods) with the *monotheism* of Israel. Gods worshipped in the ancient Middle East were often connected to fertility (of the land, the livestock or the family) and climate. Their worship was often connected to the cycle of the seasons. The prophets struggled to show that it was the one God, not these nature deities, who created and presided over the universe. Students may look up *Astarte* and *Baal* in the Bible Dictionary section of their Bibles.

Why This Land and This People?

Of all the peoples in the world God chose the Hebrews and the Israelites in particular to be the people and the people to which Christ would belong. There were many great civilizations all over the world. Why was Jesus born in Judea or Christ to among the Jews?

Most of the first great civilizations in the world believed in many gods and goddesses. During their early years as a nation, the Israelites had come to believe in one God (monotheism). For many years, from about 1200 BC to about 600 BC, their rulers and prophets struggled to keep them from worshipping other gods. It was not until the Israelites were free in their land in 539 BC that God would prepare them to receive His Son.

How Did the Israelites Live?

All over the land there did not have a kind of their own. They were semi-nomads who set up camp in one place or another. Living in tents. From their description of worship was a tent. They would sleep and gather and moved to wherever they could find food and water for their flocks. As they grew in number and were able to buy land or acquire the people of nearby towns, the Israelites began to settle in small communities and began to farm the land.

Life came as a new look when the Israelites began taking over the cities in the Holy Land. Farmers would grow larger crops and sell them in the towns nearby. They did not have their own land because a big part of their life.

Merchants would buy things like cloth and spices from other countries and sell the goods to other people they had made to people of other nations.

Worship of the one true God was an important part of the culture of the Israelites. They had a book through to Jerusalem and organized their lives around it. Books and stories. It was their life.

Facts about the Holy Land

Climate - Like southern California, but in the desert and with no mountains.

Food - Like Middle Eastern food today, but prepared following religious laws.

Entertainment - Story-telling, singing, dancing, horse games (the Israelites), but no sports.

Schooling - In the Bible, but usually not the girls or the workers.

Language - Hebrew, in which most of the Old Testament books were written. Aramaic, spoken by the Jews in the time of Jesus and Greek, the most popular language in about 300 AD.

Calendar - Based on the phases of the moon, so each month starts at a different time each year. Also known as the King who was reigning (see Luke 3:1 and 9:1).

Alphabet - The Hebrew alphabet looks like this **אבג** and is written from right to left. The Greek alphabet looks like this **αβγ** and is written from left to right.

Travel - On foot, animal back (camels or donkeys) or on carts.

Some people traveled to Jerusalem from the surrounding towns and villages to worship their God in the temple.

The **roads** were the center of activity, learning and religion. Respect for people was an important part of the culture and strict discipline was required of the children. Offerings to the God Temple were

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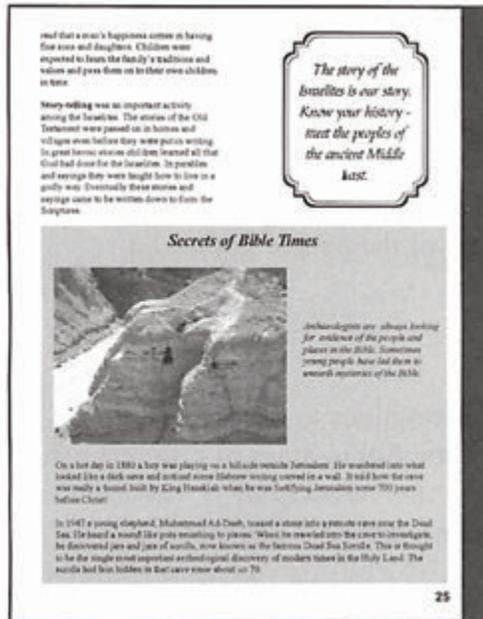
The religions of Israel's neighbors often believed in families and dynasties of divinities that warred with one another, in national gods or planetary gods; but Israel came to believe in one God, the ruler of all. As their faith deepened they became ready to receive His Son, Jesus Christ

Background Reading (Worship):

"According to the specifications of the Torah, the proper place for worship is the Temple in Jerusalem. However, local synagogues had multiplied and grown in popularity by the first century AD, creating a new order of Jewish worship which emphasized a liturgy of the word-psalms, prayers, readings, hymns and preaching. Selections from the Torah as well as from the prophets and Psalms were probably read every Sabbath" (OTB 5).

"The first Christians were Jews who retained and transmitted their Jewish religious heritage, and so generally followed the daily Jewish cycle of prayer three times per day. . . . The basic structure of the most ancient Christian prayers themselves is based upon the Jewish way of addressing God: a remembrance of the wondrous deeds He has worked for us, a petition that He act in our behalf now and finally a glorification of His Name." (LLII 20)

5. Pages 24-25



During the reading of the section "**How Did the Israelites Live?**" you may play Middle Eastern music in the background, display artifacts and/or serve some distinctive Middle Eastern foods.

Emphasize the paragraph on worship. Note that there was only one temple where sacrifices of animals, grain, wine or incense would be offered. Stress that Christians believe that Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice. After that none of these others were needed.

Draw attention to the section on story-telling. Note that much of the Bible was passed on verbally as stories or sermons before being written down. Refer to the paragraph on the alphabet in the sidebar and note that most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and all of the New Testament was written in Greek.

Refer to some of the illustrations in the text and in the students' Bibles to as examples.

Alternate: View the first 10 minutes of the DVD *Time Travel through the Bible* (Part One, Section One). The summary on pages 5-6 on the Leader's Guide accompanying the video offers information and comprehension question you may wish to use. A bit of this first section may be shown again in the review time of the next lesson. You may choose to let interested students borrow the video for one week

6. Activity A

Have the students **study the "Physical Map of the Middle East"** on page 167 of their text and compare it with your wall map. Point out some of the places you have already discussed (e.g. Sinai, Damascus). Note that this part of the world has been peopled for over 5000 years (contrast this with the time your local area has been populated). Names of peoples and places have changed. This is why there are many maps in this atlas.

Have the students **compare the maps** on pages 168, 169 and 174 of their text to determine how different peoples ruled the Holy Land during the 2000 years before Christ: e.g. the Egyptians (page 168), the Babylonians (page 169) and the Romans (page 174). Ask what the students know about Athens, Beirut, Jerusalem and Damascus from today's news.

Have the students look at the maps on pages 171-173. They show how the places we call Israel and Palestine today developed in the thousand years before Christ. The Kingdom of David and Solomon was divided in two (Israel and Judah), then conquered by others. By the time of Christ all this

area was part of the Roman province of Syria (page 174). Draw the students' attention to the bodies of water: the Mediterranean, Sea, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee (called by the Romans the Lake of Tiberias).

Finally direct their attention to the maps on pages 175 to 177 that show the place of Christianity in later history. Point out that you will be using these maps later in the year. Over the next lessons you will be looking at the earlier maps as you learn about some of the people in the Old Testament.

7. Activity B

Have the students work together in twos or threes to fill out the Bible Times Worksheet, then share their answers. Fill in areas of difference they may overlook such as:

- Money (*rings and coins, no paper money because there was no printing*)
- Refrigeration (*none -people ate mostly bread and whatever was in season*)
- Housing (*nomads use tents, stable people used stone buildings, usually of one room*)

8. Time Line

Direct attention to "The Lands of the Bible," pages 29 to 41 in the *New American Bible* (St Joseph Edition) to show how much is known about the lands of the ancient world. Pay special attention to Section II (The Hebrew People), beginning on page 34. This is the period we will learn about this year.

9. Summary

End the lesson by summarizing the lesson from the aims on page 111, from the elements in the student text on which you focused and/or any other points raised in the lesson.

10. Closing Prayer

Conclude by chanting rather than reading the "musical" Psalm 150 on page 26 of the text.

Abraham's World and Ours

Abraham lived around 1850 BC (almost 4000 years ago). He was born in Ur, Mesopotamia (Atlas map, p. 1) and died in Hebron, south of Jerusalem. Think about what you have learned about this time and place; then answer these questions:

1. If Abraham were living now, name some things that you would have to explain to him.

2. What do you think Abraham would miss from his world if he came to live here now?

3. What would you miss if you left our times to live in the time of Abraham?

4. What would you say are the biggest differences between Abraham's world and our own?

5. What would you say are the greatest similarities between Abraham's world and our own?
