

Lesson One

Festivals and celebrations

Teacher's Bible : Leviticus 23, Exodus 23:14-19

Children's Bible : p. 53-54

Aim

To introduce children to the reason for marking the year with festivals and to familiarise them with the names and dates of the main festivals in the Bible.

Development

1. Introduction:

All of us celebrate different events and moments during the year. Our birthdays, weddings or anniversaries are celebrated in the family. As a nation we also celebrate our independence and as people who belong to different races and religions we have different festivals.

This year we are going to learn about all the ways the Jewish people celebrated the different events in their lives and how, many of these festivals have become a part of the Christian tradition.

Jesus was a Jew and belonged to this culture. He saw things through the eyes of the Jewish people. In order to know Jesus better and understand the festivals in our Christian tradition, we need to know something about the festivals of the Jewish people.

Festivals can often be divided into three types:

Seasonal festivals for example the Lunar New Year which is a spring festival or Ponggal which is the New Year for South Indians and celebrates the harvest.

Historical or Mythical festivals for example the Moon-cake festival (mid-Autumn festival) or the Dragon Boat festival or our National Day Celebration.

Religious festivals for example Aidilfitri (Hari Raya Puasa) for the Muslims, Deepavali for the Hindus and the Hungry Ghost Festival for the Taoists.

For the Jewish people, all their festivals include a religious dimension because their whole way of looking at life was God-centred. Even harvest festivals included a pilgrimage to the temple to offer the first fruits to God and make a thanksgiving sacrifice.

2. Teacher can ask the children:

a. 'What festivals do you celebrate during the year?' (*Children may name the following festivals: Christmas, Easter, Thaipusam, Lunar New Year, Hari Raya Puasa, Deepavali, Vesak (Buddha's birthday), etc.*) Accept 'Valentine's Day' if mentioned or 'Mother's Day' as days to remember and appreciate someone or something.

b. What do we celebrate in our families? (*birthdays, anniversaries, passing exams etc*)

3. Ask children to do worksheet 1.1, 'My family celebrates'. Give an example of how to do this: (*eg. Many of us celebrate January 1st as New Year. Why? To thank God for the past year and ask him to bless the year ahead.*)

4. Children can share a festival or celebration that they put into their calendar (worksheet 1.1) and say why they celebrate it. Try to help them see which festivals belong to their religion, which one to the season and which ones have some historic reasons behind them. If they don't know perhaps they can ask their parents or grandparents.

5. Introduce the story going to be read, by explaining that Jesus lived in Israel and was Jewish. He celebrated many festivals in his culture and religion. Ask children to look at worksheet 1.2, 'The Jewish calendar of festivals', and identify the Hebrew names for the months and festivals.

Note: 1. You may find it helpful to familiarise yourself beforehand with the Hebrew names of the months and the festivals using the Teacher's Resource 1.1.
2. There are many websites with excellent information on Jewish festivals. E.g. www.everythingjewish.com Search by Hebrew name of the festival for good search results.

6. Read the story from the Children's Bible p. 53-54. Give the children time to identify the festivals on their worksheet, as you read them. If they ask about the festivals, say they will have to wait to find out about them during the year. The emphasis in this lesson is on remembering the names and the sequence of the festivals.

Review and Reflect

1. Go over worksheet 1.2 and have some fun with the Hebrew names for the months. Take note of the fact that the 'year' begins in September. Focus only on the main festivals (highlighted in the teacher's resource 1.1). Remind pupils that very often festivals are linked to the seasons. For example, the lunar new year is a spring festival which is why we have all the new blooms. In the same way, the Jewish people celebrated festivals that were connected with their planting and harvesting seasons, their historical events, famous battles and deep religious experiences of the saving power of God.

2. For homework, you can ask the children to cut out the calendar and pointer and paste it on a harder card to hang up at home. There is a calendar for reference on the inside back cover of the workbook.

Conclusion

Lead the children in prayer:

"Thank you God, our Father, for all the days we have, to remember you and praise you. Dear God we want to celebrate your love for us always. Thank you God for the Jewish people who gave us many festivals in our church. Thank you God for the things we have to eat and drink, and the family we have to celebrate with. Amen".

Link to Home:

Ask the parents to read the next story, P164 'His name is John', to the children or simplify it from their Bibles: **Luke 1:5-25, 39-80**.

Prepare for the next lesson:

Make sure the children have some drawing and colouring pencils or crayons, small cards or post-its for writing down a plan of action.