

Beth Chai Family School Curriculum 2nd / 3rd Grades – Part I

Bible Stories - The Illustrated Jewish Bible For Children is the main text

The Family Stories of Genesis and Exodus

Goal: To make the stories and their characters an integral part of the students' consciousness as these stories have been for generations of Jews

Enduring Understandings:

1. “ Turn it and Turn It Again” - The Bible is the central writing of the Jewish people.
1. These books contain: the stories of our ancestors, the laws they lived by, and their understanding of the world.
2. They describe the lives of our ancestors and have shaped the development of Judaism.
3. This is still the place Jews start when they want to know what Judaism has to say about any given topic
4. We don't read these books literally, rather we look for clues and metaphor.

Essential Questions:

1. What do these stories tell us about the life of our ancestors?
2. Why do you think this story was written?

Ongoing, cumulative project:

Have the students create a Torah Scroll, using paper towel rolls, or dowels with enough plain paper in between for the stories they will learn this year. As they cover each story, have them add a symbol or illustration of the story to their scroll.

Learning activities:

For each story listed (please note: Not all the stories of Genesis and Exodus will be covered) The teacher should either read the story or tell the story, pausing to explain and ask questions along the way. Be sure to include showing the students the pictures in the book, which depict many aspects of the life described. Students may read along if they wish, but should not be asked to read out loud. Students at this age do not read loudly, slowly or clearly enough for the other students to understand the story well enough. Often, students reading out loud will also not actually retain what they have just read.

Have your Essential questions ready to go, as either the introduction to the story, to be posed as you read or tell the story or for a follow up discussion.

Plan a craft, drama or other hands on, engaging activity to go with each story. Each story should normally take one week, unless the students get very caught up in either the story or the project that they are doing.

Abram's Journey

Enduring Understandings:

1. How people think about the world and understand how the world works changes over time.
2. In ancient times, many people believed that there was a god for each aspect of nature.
3. Judaism may have been the first religion to think that there was an underlying wholeness to the universe. Our ancestors called this "God", and many Jews today also have a belief in one God.
4. You do not have to believe in God to be Jewish.
5. Often people get confused about what is really important and begin to "worship" "stuff".

Essential Questions:

1. Have you believed something about that world that was totally different from what others around you believe? What was that like?
 - a. Why was Abram so revolutionary in his belief in one G-d?
 - b. Do you think it was hard for Abram to defend his beliefs when no one else felt the same way he did?
2. How do you think it felt to Abram and Sarai to leave their homes and everything they had known? Have you ever moved? What was that like?
3. What are some things today that you think people, or even children your age place too much importance on? Do you think that we also struggle with the idea of one G-d in modern times? Do we have modern day idols (like Pokemon and videogames and money)?
4. What are some things that were different about how our ancestors lived that how we live?
5. Ask for music teacher to sing Debbie Friedman's "Lechi Lach" that day

Students Need to Know:

The Torah is the oldest Jewish writing. The rabbis who came later had lots of questions about things that were mentioned in the Torah. They told stories to help answer these questions. These stories are midrashim. The rabbis really wondered why the character of God in the story of Abram's Journey told Abram to leave where he was living.

Learning Activities:

Tell the Midrashic story of Abram and the idols, discuss tension between monotheism and idolatry. Discuss modern day idols in terms of things we misplace great importance upon and grant power in our lives (Pokemon, TV, etc.)

Call on kids to do mini-skits of the most important parts (For example, read the paragraph about Abram destroying the idols, and then call on one kid to pretend to be Abram and give him props (like a broom and some Barbie dolls) and have him

“destroy the idols.” Have another two kids come up to act out the fight between Abram and his father after we read that paragraph, etc).

Discuss our ancestors as a nomadic people. Please consult the Sholem School Curriculum, pg. 39 - Our Earliest Ancestors.

Through this unit students can be creating a mural or other representation of nomadic life, adding features as they discover them in the stories, i.e. tents, (* accuracy alert – camels were not domesticated at the time we think that the early Israelites were nomads ,i.e. the Bronze Age, but they appear in some of the stories. This is kind of like if years from now, someone was making a movie that took place in 1960 and had people using cell phones), sheep, goats, a well, etc.

Abram, Sarai and Hagar

1. Discuss patriarchal culture, why an heir is important
2. What is significant about a name change? Do the students know anyone that has changed their name? Why? See if they catch that the Hebrew letter “hay” is added in each case (write on board in Hebrew). This is also a letter in the unpronounceable name of God, Yud, hay, vav, hay. symbolizes Abraham and Sarah’s connection with God, change in their lives.
3. Teach or get music teacher to teach, or bring in recording of Debbie Freidman’s song, “Lechi Lach”. Talk about this parsha as a metaphor for our life journeys, i.e. our the future is a “land we do not know”, we all more or less eventually leave our families

Isaac and Rebecca

1. Why did Abraham think it was important to find a wife for Isaac from his own people? (Canaanites are idol worshipers)
2. What test did Rebecca pass with flying colors to become the next matriarch? (Offering water to both the servant and to the camels)
3. What values do these actions embody? Hospitality to strangers and kindness to animals.
4. Discuss our mainstream attitudes to strangers vs. the Biblical attitude. What are safe ways we can be hospitable to strangers, today? (A new family in the neighborhood, in the congregation?)
5. What ways can we show kindness to animals today? Do they have pets? The Talmud mandates feeding our animals before ourselves. Do they do this? Did they know this was a Jewish tradition?
6. Please note that their text does not include the crucial question to Rebekah regarding her agreement to go with Eliezer as it is written in the Torah. She was given a choice and had the final say.

Esau and Jacob

1. Discuss sibling rivalry and parental favoritism, What do they experience in their own life?

2. What are the behavioral differences between Jacob and Esau? Esau is a hunter, Jacob “stayed in the tent”, (Jewish tradition says he stayed in the tent studying)
3. Esau thinks only of the moment and only of the physical.
4. Possible lessons - Judaism values learning and spirituality
5. Begin to discuss the whole issue of lying and deception, which will be played out in the Jacob cycle. At this juncture it appears to work in Jacob’s favor, but in the end “The Deceiver is deceived”.
6. What are possible explanations for Rebekah’s behavior?
7. Rebekah knew Jacob was the more suitable son to carry on the beginnings of the Jewish people (in traditional language- Rebekah knew God’s will) Isaac was seduced by his love of (addiction for? meat) Important to note that the Rabbis nonetheless condemn Rebekah’s actions, stating the God would have found another way to accomplish the same end.

Jacob’s Ladder

1. “God was here and I did not know it”. A good place for a “God” discussion.- How or do they define God - include the understanding that goodness is one understanding or definition of God. Do they overlook goodness in their own lives? Examples.
2. Consult “Being Torah” for traditional Rabbinic discussion on why the angels are going up rather than down the ladder.
3. Jacob and Rachel
4. Jacob’s Wedding
5. Jacob’s Return

Esther Saves her People (read for Purim)

Joseph’s Dream

The three themes here are: parental favoritism, youthful boasting and the meaning of dreams believed in ancient times to predict the future. Discussion questions should include: times the students have or have not felt that their parents favored one child in the family above an other and their reaction to this. Times they have had a special article of clothing given to them by someone who loves them very much. How did they feel? (You might want to bring in Dolly Parton’s song, ‘Coat of Many Colors’ as an example of a positive use of this story in the modern age).

Times when “telling the truth” (Joseph really did have those dreams!) might cause envy, perhaps a modern example - the bumper stickers that say “My kid is on the honor roll at Pine School”, (have they seen the bumper sticker that says, ‘My kid beat up your honor roll student’ ?) and a discussion about dreams. What other Biblical characters had important dreams? (they should remember Jacob).

Possible project - have students make a model of Joseph wearing his coat using strips of tissue paper or construction paper. Consult with the textbook as to the most realistic colors used in those times.

Joseph The Slave

The plot of the Joseph stories hinges on the attempt of Potiphar's wife to seduce him. However, this may be a difficult concept to discuss with this age group. The key point is the wife wanted Joseph to do something wrong and he wouldn't agree. Interestingly, the textbook leaves out the key Biblical concept of God being with Joseph throughout the narrative and instead attributes Joseph's success to his own qualities such as hard work. Although this may be more compatible with a Humanistic interpretation, it might be better to open a discussion about why the ancient text would attribute all of Joseph's good fortune to God (even his interpretation of dreams is ascribed to God) and why we are more likely to attribute it to his human qualities.

Other discussion questions might include: When have students chosen to do the right thing even if it is difficult? What does this story teach us? How can we create a good situation for ourselves in under difficult conditions? Compare and contrast the life of a privileged Egyptian to that of a nomadic shepherd such as Joseph's family.

Pharaoh's Dream

Once again, Joseph (with God's help) interprets an important dream. Questions for discussion might include modern day famines and modern day solutions, especially Ethiopia and the situation of Ethiopian Jews.

Joseph the Governor and Benjamin and the Silver Cup

The story of Joseph continues. The sibling issues reassert themselves. Questions for discussion: How do the students feel about the way Joseph treats his brothers when he first sees them? What do they think he is feeling? How do they feel about the ending? The Torah text itself reads, "With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him". When have the students found tears to be helpful? or seen people cry from relief or happiness? Why could the brothers only talk to Joseph after he had cried? What can we learn from this story about justice and reconciliation? (You might want to address the Truth and Reconciliation work that took place in South Africa with Nelson Mandela after the fall of apartheid) The ending of the Joseph story answers the question, "How did the Israelites come to settle in Egypt?". It is the prologue to the whole Exodus experience, the birth of the Jewish people and eventually the giving of the Ten Commandments.

Moses in the Bulrushes

This line from the Torah that is not included in the text is vital to understanding the story, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph".

There are many, many midrashim about Miriam that surround this story of the saving of Moses' life. But even in the text it is very clear that women played a major role in this story. From Moses' mother - Yochevet who refused to kill him, to Miriam his sister who hid in the Bulrushes and brought him back to his mother to be nursed (no formula back then), to Pharaoh's daughter, who knew he was a Hebrew and decided to save him anyway, Moses owes his life to women. This is also an adoption story that deals with Moses' eventual identification with the people of his birth, his decision to give up the privileged life of an Egyptian prince and cast his lot with his oppressed people. Moses becomes a role model for all future Jews to identify not only with other Jews, but also

with all oppressed people.

Possible project: Have the students construct a visual model of the scene of Moses in the Bulrushes (this would be a good project to get an arts expert in to help with. Ask the principal for possible people).

Questions for discussion: Have the students ever witnessed an injustice? What did they do? Do they wish they had done something different? What are ways we can deal with injustice?

Moses is Called by God

Moses Warns Pharaoh

The Tenth Plague

The Crossing of the Red Sea

God Watches Over the Israelites

Moses Receives God's Laws

Ruth and Naomi (tie into Shavuot)

Daniel in the Lion's Den

The Jewish Calendar

The Hebrew Calendar - Introduction

1. Why is the Hebrew Calendar different from our everyday calendar? The Hebrew calendar is based on the cycles of the moon going around our earth. Our everyday calendar is based on the earth going around the sun.
2. The Jewish holidays are based on the Hebrew calendar. The months have Hebrew names. These Hebrew names come from the Babylonian names of the months from the time when the Jews were exiled in Babylonia. They admired the Babylonian astronomers and adapted their names for the months. We will be learning these names of the month.
3. The week in the Jewish calendar always begins with Sunday and ends with Shabbat. We will be marking all the Shabbats on our calendars.
4. The Jewish calendar is arranged so the holidays come during the same season every year. We will be marking the seasons on our calendars. But because the lunar cycle is shorter than the solar cycle, the holidays do not come on the same day of the solar calendar every year. However, they are never “late” or “early” by the Hebrew calendar - they are always right on time! Rosh Hashanah always comes on the first day of Tishrei. And Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of Shevat) always comes on the 15th of Shevat! We will be marking the holidays on our calendars.
5. The first of the month is when the new crescent moon can be seen. This is called Rosh Chodesh. This is a little holiday in the Jewish calendar. It is sometimes celebrated by special thanks being given and by the women not doing any work! We will be marking the new moons on our calendars and looking for the new moon in the sky.
6. Many Jewish holidays fall on the full moon. We will be looking for the full moons on: Sukkot (and?)
7. We will also be putting other special days like birthdays on our calendars.
8. We will start with the month of Tishrei, which is an important month. The holidays of Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish new year), Yom Kippur (the day of Atonement), Sukkot (the Jewish Harvest festival) and Simchat Torah (rejoicing in the Torah) are all in this month. Tishrei is the Jewish month with the most holidays in it. What other things start at this time of year? Does this feel like a new year to you?
9. Next comes Cheshvan. After all the holidays in Tishrei it is nice to have a break and have time for our regular routines.
10. Chanukah always comes on the 25 on Kislev. What other winter holiday do you know of that comes on the 25th of a winter month? Chanukah comes at a time when the days are very short and the moon is very small and the nights are very dark. It feels good to light so many candles. Because Chanukah is eight days long it continues into the month of Tevet.
11. What is the holiday that has the word Shevat in it? Tu B'Shevat simply means the 15th of Shevat. This is the time of the year in Israel when the sap of the trees begins to flow again. By Tu B'Shevat, wildflowers are blooming on the hillsides in Israel and the almond tree is also blooming. Tu B'Shevat is another New Year -

- the New Year of the Trees.
12. In our regular calendar we have leap years, which add a day in February to catch up to the cycle of the sun. In the Hebrew calendar we have leap months to catch up with the cycle of the moon. If there is a leap month it is Adar. Sometimes we have only one month of Adar and sometimes we have two months of Adar, which we call Adar I and can you guess? Adar II. There is a famous Jewish saying: “BE HAPPY - ITS ADAR”. Can you guess why? Hint: What happy holiday happens in the early spring, when we dress up in costumes...(and tell the story of Esther and Mordechai) Yes! Purim comes in Adar.
 13. And then in Nissan comes one of the best holidays of all. We have a seder and tell about being slaves in Egypt and celebrate leaving Egypt. Nissan is the first month of the Jewish calendar and the 1st of Nissan is called the New Year of months and of Kings. (It was from Nissan that the date was determined of how many years a king had ruled) Aren't there a lot of New Years in the Hebrew calendar?