

# THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIBLE

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# THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIBLE

This Celebration of the Bible is based on a festival that our Jewish brothers and sisters hold each year called Simchat Torah, or Rejoicing with the Torah. The Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) in our Bible. It is a celebration marking the end of the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah. The last chapter of Deuteronomy and the first chapter of Genesis are read in the synagogue. The worshipers stand and dance and sing around the synagogue in celebration of the completion of another year of worshiping God with the Torah.

While we have different customs in worship, we do read Scriptures from the

Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures). The Torah holds many of our most cherished stories—God’s Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Esau, the Joseph saga, Moses, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, Joshua, to name a few.

We are called to celebrate our BIBLE—our gift of God’s word for us over many centuries and for our lives today.

We invite you to celebrate. To rejoice. To give thanks for the special book that shapes our lives.

Come and join the CELEBRATION!

## **In this Celebration, you will find:**

- † Timeline for preparing for the Celebration
- † Ideas to incorporate the Celebration into a worship service
- † Ideas for presenting new Bibles
- † Suggestions for a “tribe” Celebration (Tribes will not be biological families.)
- † Recipes for biblical foods to be shared as part of the Celebration
- † Closing meditation

# PREPARATION

Once you have decided to do a Celebration of the Bible, you will need to gather a team to plan and to make sure all parts of the event run smoothly.

## **Include the following teams in your planning:**

- † Worship Leaders (*pastors, musicians, other leaders in your worship service*)
- † Bible Preparation Team (*purchase and inscribe Bibles for children, invite people special to the children to add notes to their Bibles*)
- † Event Logistics Team (*prepare space, provide nametags if necessary, arrange Bible display, put announcements in church newsletters and bulletins, coordinate donations of supplies*)
- † Bible Discovery Station Teams (*Take one of the Bible Discovery Stations and prepare it. Request donations of supplies from Event Logistics Team, and decorate your station.*)
- † Bible Cooks (*provide a simple meal as part of the Celebration*)

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# TIMELINE

**Eight weeks out:** Obtain a list of children the correct age to be receiving Bibles. Recruit team members, and copy appropriate pages in this resource for each team. Have the Bible Preparation Team order Bibles to be presented so the Bibles can be signed and favorite Scriptures marked.

**Six weeks out:** Meet with Event Logistics Team and Bible Discovery Station Teams to begin planning the Celebration. Decide on timing and location for the event. Will it be immediately following a worship service? during Sunday school time? from 4:00 to 6:00 on a Sunday afternoon?

**Four weeks out:** Check on the progress of the teams. Meet with the Bible Cooks to begin planning for the simple meal. Have the Event Logistics Team create and display posters of the coming Celebration and write an article/invitation for the church newsletter.

**Three weeks out:** Check on the progress of the teams. In announcements, include an invitation for families to bring their favorite and/or family Bibles to church for a Bible Display to be up the week prior to and during the Celebration. Announce that prizes will be awarded for the oldest, largest, smallest, most used, thinnest, and fattest Bibles.

**Two weeks out:** Check the progress of the teams. Continue putting information in the church bulletin and make an announcement in church. Ask for an RSVP so you can plan for amounts of food.

**One week out:** Check the progress of the teams. Wrap the Bibles (make sure the child's name is on a small gift card on the

outside of each Bible). Check with the people preparing the meal.

**The day prior to the event:** Make sure all teams have done what they said they would do. Set up the room for the meal and activities. Keep the doors to this room closed so that folks can't peek!

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## IDEAS FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE BIBLE WORSHIP SERVICE

(copy for Worship Leaders)

You may use these ideas for a worship service preceding the Celebration or for a service to close the Celebration.

**Announcements:** Invite EVERYONE to attend the Celebration of the Bible following the worship service (OR this afternoon from 4:00 to 6:30 with a meal OR whenever you have planned your event).

### **Hymns that connect us to our Bible:**

*(All hymn numbers refer to The United Methodist Hymnal.)*

- † Thy Word Is a Lamp (#601)—SCRIPTURE THEME
- † Be Thou My Vision (#451)
- † Faith of Our Fathers (#710)
- † Here I Am, Lord (#593)
- † How Firm a Foundation (#529)
- † Standing on the Promises (#374)
- † This Little Light of Mine (#585)
- † Trust and Obey (#467)
- † We've a Story to Tell to the Nations (#569)

### Possible Scriptures:

† Deuteronomy 6:4-9

† Psalm 119 (selected verses)

### Message: We Are a People of the Book:

The Bible is our book, and we will carry it into the future with us.

**Quote to use:** “Christians are a people of the Book. That book, the Bible, is the church’s book.... The Bible is our book because of what we believe that book reveals, a living God whom we know in Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and we must know the Bible if we are to know that living Word.” (Dick Murray, *Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth*, © 1993 Abingdon Press, p. 17)

**Benediction:** Go into your world as people of the Book. Let the Bible shape your life today and always. Amen.

**To move from the Worship center to the Celebration center:** Someone (a child or an adult) removes the Bible from the altar and carries it out of the sanctuary and into the fellowship hall, where the doors are now open, music is playing and the Celebration begins.

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## IDEAS FOR PRESENTING NEW BIBLES

(copy for Bible Preparation Team)

Presenting Bibles to children as a gift from the church needs to be a special event. It needs to be part of a service of worship, with the congregation adding their blessings. Bibles need to be wrapped. They are a gift and should be treated as such. The Bibles need to be presented during the worship service. Parents may be invited to come up with their children to receive the Bible, as it is a way for families to study and pray together.

Order Bibles well in advance of this day. Inscribe the child’s name in the Bible. Give the Bibles to parents, grandparents, pastor(s), church school teacher(s). Invite each person to write their name next to their favorite scripture passage. If they do not wish to write in a Bible, invite them to write their names on small “sticky notes” and place them at the scripture site. This simple act will help children know that the Bible is important to people who are important to them.

### Some ideas for wrapping the Bibles:

Wrap Bibles in three layers. First, wrap the Bible in gold paper to signify that it is a precious gift. Next, wrap the package in newspaper to signify that the Bible is a book about the good news of God interacting with God's people. The third (outer) layer is wrapped in gift wrapping paper and signifies that the Bible is a gift from this church family. Explain the significance as the child unwraps each layer. The gold paper is always the first layer on and the last layer to be unwrapped.

- OR** Wrap the Bible in maps (ask for donations), since the Bible is a map with directions of how we can live our lives.
- OR** Wrap the Bibles in large blueprint paper (ask for donations) since the Bible is a blueprint to follow for how we can live our lives.
- OR** Come up with your own creative ways of wrapping this special book as a gift from the church.

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## CREATING TRIBES

(teams to enjoy the event together)

Invite all people attending the Celebration to divide into seven different groups or “tribes.” Ask them to number off from one to seven. Invite the “ones” to form a tribe, the “twos” to form the next tribe, and so on so that you have seven groups with as equal a number in each as possible. This process will vary according to numbers. The important thing is to have all age groups represented in each tribe, with a minimum of four to five people in each tribe. Family members should not, as a rule, be in the same tribe. Invite the members of each tribe to sit together.

Tell each tribe to select a person from the Bible to be their namesake. No one should name their tribe “Jesus.” They could be “Tribe of Ruth” or “Tribe of David.” Invite each tribe member, starting with the

youngest member, to introduce themselves with the answers to the following questions:

- † name
- † grade and school or job and where you work
- † how long you have been attending this church
- † your favorite pizza topping

When each tribe member has introduced him or herself, you are ready to begin your adventure of learning about the Bible. Experience the Bible Discovery Stations around the room. One person in each tribe will have a checklist to mark each activity and a place to record the score, if there is one for the activity. (See page 6.)

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Produce a checklist for each group based on the following. You may choose to add or subtract from this list. It will be customized for your Celebration.

The Bible Display is always available if an activity is not open.

### BIBLE EXPERIENCE STATIONS

Name of Tribe: \_\_\_\_\_

We visited these stations:

- Bible Sword Drill (score: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Bible Bookmarks
- Telling Our Story
- Drawing the Scriptures
- Scripture Puzzle
- Create a Scroll
- Learn to Sign
- Bible Jeopardy (score: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Bible Dig

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# BIBLE EXPERIENCE STATIONS

## BIBLE SWORD DRILL

This is an old fashioned game that was played in Sunday school classes many years ago. It is fun, and the competitive spirit of the teams makes it exciting.

Have enough Bibles so that everyone playing will have his or her own Bible. Explain that the two teams (two tribes or two teams within one tribe, depending on numbers) will compete against each other to see who on the team can locate a particular scripture first. A point is scored for each first-place find.

All Bibles are closed and resting on each person's lap. The leader calls out the book, chapter, and verse (example: Mark 4:1). The teams race to see who can locate the scripture first. The first person who finds it raises her or his hand. The leader calls, "STOP." The person who found the verse stands and reads it aloud. A point is scored for that team. The leader calls out another scripture, and the game continues as time allows (no more than seven minutes.) The teams move on to another activity.

## BIBLE BOOKMARKS

Cut brightly colored thin ribbon into 12-inch pieces. Invite tribe members to select their favorite color and create a bookmark for their Bible. They may take three pieces of ribbon and braid them; they may tie the ribbon to a small cross or charm; or your tribe may have other suggestions for creative bookmarks.

## TELLING OUR STORY

Invite someone (who loves to do this and has a gift of storytelling) to put on a simple costume and tell a biblical story. Place a large blanket on the floor. (You may choose to add pots, silk plants, a clay jar etc.) Have this storyteller welcome the tribe and invite them to sit. The storyteller will relate how the Bible came to be. (The stories were first told around campfires and were taught to all the children.) He or she can then tell a Bible story that will intrigue the audience.

## DRAWING THE SCRIPTURES

Provide fingerprint paper and a variety of fingerprint colors. Have several short verses of scripture typed out and available. Quotations from the Psalms are especially good for this activity. Invite the tribe to sit around the table. Explain that you will read several short scripture verses aloud. Read each slowly and with drama. Pause between each reading. Invite each tribe member to select one Scripture verse that draws her or his attention. Then ask them to write their name on a piece of paper. They may then choose a color (or two) and paint with their fingers how that scripture makes them feel. Explain that there are no wrong ways to feel about Scripture. Whatever works for you is perfect. Provide a basin of water and towels to wash hands. Place the feeling pictures in a safe place to dry. Lay the scripture verse under the painting (to be attached later).

### SCRIPTURE PUZZLE

Cut a piece of colored posterboard into four equal pieces, or purchase four pieces of 11-by-14 posterboard. On one of the quarters, print the words “Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey. Psalm 119:105, CEB” in bold marker so that it fills the whole board. On the back of the posterboard, draw a design for a jigsaw puzzle. Carefully cut out the puzzle, and place all of the pieces in a manila envelope. Make four of these puzzles. Have four card tables set up, and divide the tribe into four groups. Give each group an envelope, and ask them to put the puzzle together.

### CREATE A SCROLL

At least one week ahead of time, create “parchment” paper. Take sheets of 8½-by-11 paper and cut them in half. Dip them into some cold, strong black coffee until they are completely covered. Gently remove the papers and set them out to dry.

Give each person a piece of the “parchment” paper, and tell them to carefully print the words “Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey. Psalm 119:105, CEB” on the paper. When you have completed this Scripture, roll the scroll up and secure it with a piece of cord. Invite them to take their scroll home as a remembrance of the Celebration.

### LEARN TO SIGN

Use the directions and illustrations here to sign Psalm 119:105, CEB: “Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.” Practice until you can do it smoothly and without looking at the pictures. Then teach the signs to the children.

**God’s (Your)**—The phrase *Your Word* means literally “God’s Word,” so let’s make the sign for *God*. Hold the right hand in the position shown in the illustration, with the index finger pointing up. Bring the hand down.

**Word**—Hold the index finger of the left hand up. Bring the index finger of the right hand over until it and the thumb touch the left index finger, as shown.

**Light (Lamp)**—Hold the right hand overhead, with the wrist bent and the fingers together. Spread the fingers to indicate that the light is on.

**Feet**—Hold the right hand as shown, with the index finger pointing down. Point first to the left foot and then to the right foot.

**Journey (Travel)**—Hold the right hand in a “bent” V shape. Have the hand travel forward and to the left in one big arching movement.

God's (Your)



Word



Light (Lamp)



Feet



Light



Journey (Travel)



## BIBLE JEOPARDY GAME

Design a board with five columns labeled B, I, B, L, and E. Or make up five names such as Bible Knowledge, Bible Trivia, Bible Scholar, Things You Should Have Learned in Sunday School, and Things You Should Have Learned in Worship. The names really do not matter; they only provide a way for tribe members to indicate which question they would like to answer.

There are four rows for each column labeled 100, 200, 300, BONUS. For ease of asking and answering, the questioner should have all of the questions and answers on a sheet of paper. You will ask four questions in each category (column).

Tribes will select categories and decide as a group on the correct answer (quickly). They may begin at any category. The BONUS question (for 500 points) will be asked if all of the questions have been answered in the allotted time.

### 100-Point Questions

† How many books are there in the Bible?  
(66)

† What is the first book in the Bible?  
(Genesis)

† What is the last book in the Bible?  
(Revelation)

† How many books are in the Torah? (5)

† How many commandments did God give to Moses? (10)

† How many Gospels are there? (4)

† What is the name of the man who betrayed Jesus? (*Judas Iscariot*)

† What are the names of the four Gospels?  
(*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*)

† What was Paul's other name?  
(*Saul of Tarsus*)

† Name three of the Ten Commandments.  
(*do not worship other gods, do not make idols, keep God's name holy, remember the Sabbath day, honor your parents, do not kill, honor your wedding vows, do not steal, do not lie, do not want things that are not yours*)

† Name three of Jesus' 12 disciples.  
(*Matthew 10:2-4—Simon Peter, Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, Judas Iscariot*)

### 200-Point Questions

† What is the name of the book in which the story of Creation is found? (*Genesis*)

† To whom did God give the Ten Commandments? (*Moses*)

† How many disciples of Jesus are listed in the Gospels? (12)

### 300-Point Questions

† In which story did God create a covenant and promise never to destroy the earth again with a flood? (*Noah*)

† In which biblical story was a brother sold into slavery by his older brothers?  
(*Joseph*)

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- † In which biblical story did a woman save the people of Israel? (*Esther*)
- † Name a healing miracle that Jesus performed. (*many*)
- † What was the name of the tax collector who climbed a tree to see Jesus? (*Zacchaeus*)
- † Who were the sons of Zebedee Jesus called to be his disciples? (*James and John*)
- † What did the crowds yell that sentenced Jesus to death? (*Crucify him!*)

#### **BONUS Questions (500 Points)**

- † There are only two books in the Bible with women's names. What are they? (*Ruth and Esther*)
- † Who answered Jesus' question, "Do you love me?" (*Simon Peter*)
- † What are the two greatest commandments that Jesus talks about? In order, please. (*Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; love your neighbor as yourself.*)
- † Who was the first king of Israel? (*Saul*)
- † What were the names of the tentmakers with whom Paul worked? (*Priscilla and Aquila*)
- † For what crime was Daniel thrown into the lions' den? (*praying to God*)
- † What was the name of the young disciple to whom Paul wrote two letters? (*Timothy*)

#### **BIBLE DIG**

Ahead of time, visit thrift stores and yard sales to find old leather sandals. Get a pair and cut them into pieces to bury. Also find a bracelet or necklace that may be taken apart as pieces of jewelry to bury. Look for straw mats or old baskets that can be broken up and buried. Get creative. Just remember, items must be something that most likely would have been present in biblical times.

Purchase a clay flower pot. In permanent marker, print "Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey." Place the pot in a sturdy bag, and hit it gently on the floor so that it breaks into several large pieces. Store the pieces in a bag to keep them from damage until you bury them.

You may also ask the team to save bones from a chicken dinner. Ask them to save, clean, and dry the bones.

Provide a "sand table" filled with play sand. You may make a sand table with an under-bed plastic storage box. Or, use a large plastic tablecloth or plastic tarp on the floor of your gathering area. Build a "box" with four lengths of 2 X 6 boards. Fill the box with sand and bury your thrift store finds in the sand. With string create grids of about ten inches square. Assign one grid to each tribe member. (They may have to share.) Provide old toothbrushes, soft paintbrushes, small trowels, baskets, strainers, and paper and pencils to record what they find.

Explain that many things we know about the people of the Bible and how they lived come from "digs." Archeologists from

around the world have been digging in ancient Israel and surrounding areas to find relics and pieces of items that help give them clues about what life was like thousands of years ago.

Have each small group dig very gently into their grid to find any artifacts that

may be buried there. When they uncover an object, have them remove it carefully and with a brush dust off as much sand as possible without damaging the object. When items have been cleaned and recorded, ask what they think each object can tell us about life in biblical times.

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## A SIMPLE MEAL

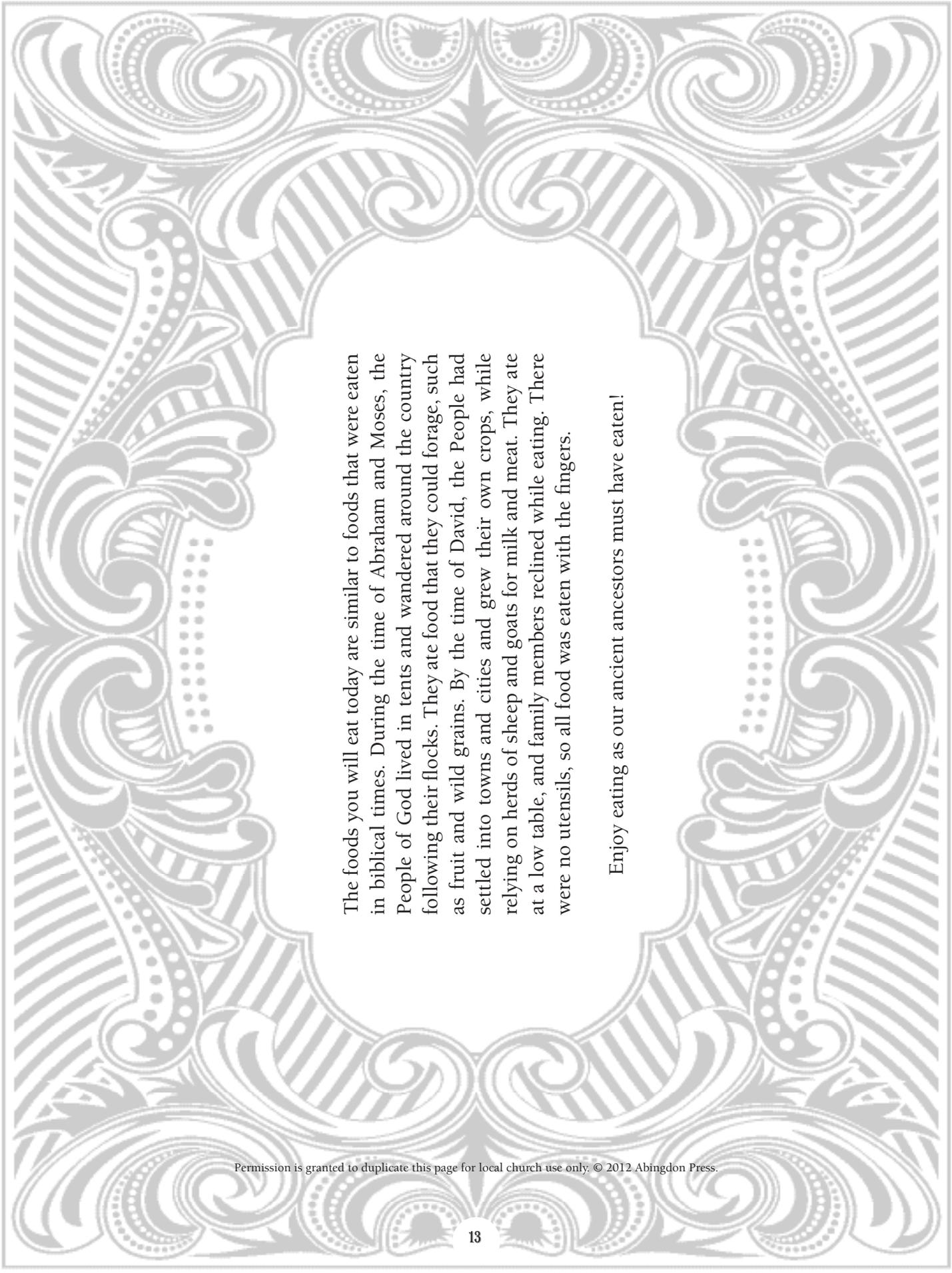
Tribes may sit together to eat. Invite a tribe member to bless the food. Invite one person to read the information on each place mat. This tells about the meal you will share and how each dish was a part of the normal foods served in biblical times. Talk around the table about your favorite and least favorite foods on the table. Everyone is invited to taste a little bit of each food.

These foods should be prepared ahead of time and be ready to sample as one of the activities. Recipes can be found on the following pages.

- † Unleavened Bread
- † Goat Cheese Dip
- † Easu's Pottage (to be scooped into the mouth with unleavened bread)
- † Date Nut Halvah Balls
- † Roman Bread Pudding
- † Haroset
- † Hummus (use a commercial brand)
- † Fresh Fruit
- † Grape or Pomegranate Juice

### Information to Place on Each Table

- † Copy the place mats for each participant (p. 13). Glue each one to a 12-by-18 sheet of construction paper. Then cover with clear adhesive paper.
- † Copy each recipe so that participants with food allergies can check the ingredients.



The foods you will eat today are similar to foods that were eaten in biblical times. During the time of Abraham and Moses, the People of God lived in tents and wandered around the country following their flocks. They ate food that they could forage, such as fruit and wild grains. By the time of David, the People had settled into towns and cities and grew their own crops, while relying on herds of sheep and goats for milk and meat. They ate at a low table, and family members reclined while eating. There were no utensils, so all food was eaten with the fingers.

Enjoy eating as our ancient ancestors must have eaten!

# RECIPES

## UNLEAVENED BREAD

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup cold water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt

Combine flour, water, olive oil, salt. Form a dough. Knead for three minutes. Divide into eight balls, and then divide each ball into five smaller balls. Flatten each ball into thin rounds. Prick each with a fork. Cook on a griddle at 500 degrees for ten minutes. Makes 40 circles of bread.

Helpful Hint: Don't forget to double the recipe for use with Esau's Pottage.

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## GOAT CHEESE DIP

- 6 ounces of feta cheese
- 2 cups Greek-style yogurt
- 2 tablespoons chopped dill
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped mint
- 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts (optional)

Cream together the feta cheese and the yogurt. Add the dill, parsley, and chopped mint. Serve on the Unleavened Bread. Serves approximately 25 people.

## ESAU'S POTTAGE

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup red lentils
- ½ pound spinach (optional)
- salt

Sauté onion in olive oil with cumin and coriander. Add the garlic at the last moment and brown. Add lentils and stock. Stir well and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer forty-five minutes until lentils are tender. Cook ten minutes longer if necessary. Add spinach fifteen minutes before serving. Salt to taste. Feeds six generously.

Helpful Hint: Red lentils are difficult to find unless you have a Middle Eastern specialty grocer in your neighborhood. They aren't very red anyway, so substituting the regular lentils will hardly be noticed.

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*These recipes come from* Milk and Honey Cooking School: Learning the History of God's People Through Cooking and Eating, © 2006 Abingdon Press.

### DATE NUT HALVAH BALLS

- ¼ cup walnuts
- ⅓ cup almonds
- 4 ounces dates, pitted
- 4 ounces dried apricots
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1–2 tablespoons orange or lemon juice
- 1–2 teaspoons lemon zest

Chop the nuts in the food processor. Use short bursts with the food processor so that you get chopped nuts rather than pulverized ones. Cut the dates and apricots in half. Add the dates, apricots, raisins, and cinnamon to the nut mixture. Add juice so that it sticks together. Add the lemon zest. Roll into small balls and serve. Makes forty small balls.

Helpful Hint: This is one recipe that seems to be a hit with everyone. Make enough to have “seconds” and maybe even “thirds.”

### ROMAN BREAD PUDDING

- 2 cups milk
- 1 loaf unsliced ciabatta bread
- 1 cup olive oil
- honey

Pour milk into a large mixing bowl. Cut the bread into bite-size pieces and soak them in the milk. Move them around to make sure each piece has the same amount of milk soaked into it. In a frying pan, heat the olive oil over medium high heat. Put the milk-soaked bread into the frying pan and fry until golden brown on each side. Drizzle with honey and serve. This makes enough for twenty people to have a taste. For a bigger serving, double the recipe.

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### HAROSET

- 6 apples, peeled and coarsely chopped
- ⅔ cup chopped almonds
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- grated rind of 1 lemon
- 4 tablespoons grape juice

Mix all the ingredients together thoroughly. Blend in a food processor until you reach the desired consistency. Chill. Serve with matzo crackers. This is enough for a large group.

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*These recipes come from* Milk and Honey Cooking School: Learning the History of God's People Through Cooking and Eating, © 2006 Abingdon Press.

# CLOSING MEDITATION

Amazing and Loving God, we come to your presence with an open mind and heart. Help us know that your word is indeed a light to our path, a map to show us the ways you would have us live. Help us hold this precious Book in honor and glory for your words given to us this day and always.

## **About the Writer**

Barbara Bruce has worked as a Christian educator for more than twenty years. She is the owner of Process: CREATIVITY, a consulting firm offering workshops in creative and critical thinking. She is the author of *Teaching Children Bible Basics; 7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children; Standing Up Against the Odds; Start Here: Teaching and Learning With Adults; 7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults; Our Spiritual Brain;* and *Bible Brain Breaks: Zapping Boredom, Frustration, and Total Disinterest.*

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