

Chapter 2

Parish Religious Education Adaptation

Student Preparation

- Students were asked to complete the Chapter 1 Review and Reflection Questions on pages 21, 26, and 29.
- Students were assigned to read Chapter 2, “Maps for the Journey: Geographical, Historical and Literary Context,” pages 34–57

Warm-up (about 20 minutes)

- Open discussion of the term **context** with several sets of photos. Two or three pairs of photos should illustrate the same subject but in different—even contrasting—settings or contexts. (*Perhaps an Eskimo in a seal-skin parka ice-fishing in Anchorage, and the same Eskimo on a sunny Florida beach. Another set might show a child with a tiny American flag, and the now famous photo of a Marine tossing an American flag over the head of Saddam Hussein’s statue in conquered Baghdad in April, 2003.*) How does the Eskimo or the flag have a different meaning or message in each photo? Compare the contexts.
- Bring comments about context back to Old Testament study. Understanding the cultural, political, and historical realities surrounding the time the Old Testament was written helps us to understand the books of the Old Testament. Elaborate on this point, offering examples.
- Ask students to react to the text’s archaeological challenge on page 40. What if their houses were buried and rediscovered by teenagers hundreds of years from now. What items in their rooms would help describe the context of their lives? (*Remind students that many things would deteriorate or decay.*)
- Collect the Review and Reflection questions from Chapter 1 and ask students how they might answer Christians who say: “The Old Testament isn’t important; reading about Jesus in the New Testament is all we need.”

Part 1: Lesson (about 30 minutes)

Text Reference: Introduction, Archaeology and Biblical Studies, The Land of Canaan: At the Center of Civilization (pages 34–45)

- Display a large regional map of the Middle East that shows the locations of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel. Distribute Handout 2B, “Archaeological Time Periods and the Old Testament.” (*Students should keep this handout for the semester.*) Point out the Fertile Crescent or the “corridor of conflict” and discuss the big picture—historical movements and cultural developments.
- Divide the class into small groups of four or five. Give the groups fifteen minutes to write eight Quiz Bowl style multiple choice questions based on the text, pages 34–45. Questions should be a mix: identification of terms, dating of events, etc. but also with some asking the significance of events like the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. When the groups are done, collect the Quiz Bowl questions and give them to three students to screen out duplicates or confusing ones. The screening group could hand back questions that need to be rewritten.
- Ask students to describe how and what scholars have learned about the early Israelites. What was the weather like? How did people make a living? What about their houses? pottery? weapons? the Canaanite influence? Israel’s geographical position on the “land bridge” from Egypt to Mesopotamia?
- Challenge students to use the regional map and the facts they’ve learned to show how vulnerable the Israelites were to foreign influences and conquest. (*Revisit the issue of geography as a major **context** factor.*)
- Summarize discussion on the Canaanites, a major influence shaping Israelite development. On the board or overhead projector, write and annotate the following bullet points:
 - There was a civilization in Canaan long before the Israelites.
 - From 2000 to 1300 B.C. Egypt claimed Canaan, using seaports and overland routes in the region.
 - Hostilities or war between the Canaanites and Egyptians were common. The Canaanites invaded and ruled Egypt for 100 years from 1650–1550 B.C.
 - When the Israelites inhabited Canaan (ca 1300 B.C.) they “inherited” the conflict with Egypt
 - Canaanite civilization and cities compared favorably with Egypt’s.
 - Canaanites worshipped many gods, including the main god El, Asherah, El’s consort and the favorite, Baal, the god of rain.
 - Canaanite culture and religion influenced Israel. The Israelites often lapsed into worship of Baal. Even the Jewish temple was a Canaanite design.

Break/Writing Exercise (about 15 minutes)

- Join students for a break with refreshments.
- Ask students to use the “One, True, Living God” exercise on page 45 as a journal project. They are to record the similarities and differences in the Canaanite writing and Psalm 29 about God in their journals and comment on them. Provide watercolor paints, paper, and basic instruction about techniques. Encourage students to try a water color impression of God as described in Psalm 29. Artwork can be added to the journal when its dry.

Part 2: Lesson (about 30 minutes)

Text Reference: Tracing the History of the Israelites from the Old Testament, Background on Literature Styles of the Bible, Further Reflections (46–57).

- Write the words **primeval history**, **syncretism** and **Diaspora** on the board. Ask students to spend approximately five minutes re-reading the text about any one of these three terms and its meaning in Israelite history. Call on students to explain: 1) what the term means and 2) its historical and cultural context.
- Flesh out the Israelite history presented in this section of the chapter around these three terms. Clarify the religious differences between the Israelites and their pagan neighbors—from the Exodus period through the monarchy, exiles, and post-exilic society. For the Jews, Yahweh was the one and only God. Yahweh was also the God who championed the powerless and the separated.
- Assign the Review and Reflection questions on page 56 to be done now to review literature styles in the Bible. (*Allow 10 minutes.*)
- Conclude the session with “Bible Quiz Bowl” using the multiple choice questions developed earlier. Divide the class into two teams. Alternate questions for the teams.

Prayer Experience (about 20 minutes):

- Place a potted tree or a large picture of a tree in the midst of the prayer circle. Light vigil candles on the floor around it.
- As a group, listen quietly to appropriate instrumental music, establishing a space for meditation.
- Begin spoken prayer by noting that all Christians are like tiny branches on a very ancient tree of faith planted hundreds and thousands of years ago. It would be wonderful if we could trace our family tree of faith. We would see that it is rooted in Jewish history and faith in the one true God.
- Invite students to offer petitions or prayers of thanks for those in their families. Add prayers for those in the Church family—parish, diocese, and global Church. Pray for those who have recently died, especially those known to the students. Pray for the strength and growth of this “tree of faith.”
- Conclude prayer by listening to and then singing “On Holy Ground” by Donna Penna in *Gather* (GIA).

Conclusion (5 minutes):

- Pass out Handout 2E, “Chapter 2 Review Puzzle,” and have students complete the puzzle as a chapter review.
- Have students read Chapter 3, “Stories for the Journey: Creation and the Founding of A People” (pages 60–85).