

Purpose

- To learn how young people lived in Bible times.

Materials

- Bibles
- Handouts

Background Information**CHILDREN DURING BIBLE TIMES****Education**

The Old and New Testament does not indicate that children went to school, but it does understand children as learners. The boy Jesus amazed teachers in the temple with his insight. The adult Jesus encouraged parents to bring their children to him for blessings. Paul discussed Timothy's faith, referring to the faith of his grandmother and mother, who, we assume, taught him.

These examples come from the Jewish world in which parents held the primary responsibility for the education of their children. Nonbiblical sources indicate that parents taught them at home before sending them to school. In communities with several Jewish families, five-year-old boys began attending synagogue school, learning the alphabet and beginning to memorize the Torah. Rote memorization was the way they learned. Around the age of ten boys began to study the interpretation of the Torah. The schools taught reading and religion. Unlike Greek schools, synagogue schools had little or no emphasis on physical training, mathematics, art, music, rhetoric and philosophy. We may safely assume that some Jewish schools did offer Greek-style courses. Some Jewish parents may have sent their sons to Greek schools.

Girls in Jewish homes almost never received formal schooling. Of course, they did learn the rules of the Torah related to running a home.

Learning a trade

Older children do not spend time considering their future occupations in a decision-orientated way. Still, they do imagine themselves working at different kinds of jobs when they are grown. When you visit a kindergarten classroom you may see little ones playing at being mothers, fathers, soldiers, mechanics, homemakers, carpenters, money managers, pop singers, police officers, athletes, teachers or artists. Often the work of favored adults is what interests the child.

Familiarity with the work world of the Bible may be helpful to young people. As they read stories in the Bible they will be able to imagine what it meant to be a carpenter, a rabbi, or a trader of purple cloth.

Women and men in Bible times often had prescribed jobs and occupations. This situation is both similar to and different what occurs in our world today. Adults may be surprised to learn that women held a great number of jobs in the ancient world. Of course, ancient experience will not become a model for our times, yet they need to see that in the earliest Christian communities women assumed leadership in a number of ways. We think that only now are we giving equal opportunities to women and men.

Preparation for work in ancient times did not require a college or trade school. Persons became apprentices to their parents or to a qualified craftsman. Children were sent to such teachers to learn a trade or craft. Work—"and adulthood"—started early in life

Seeing different cultures

A marketplace always presents one with people who are different than oneself. There one meets people representing a mixture of cultures, values, and practices. Older children are learning how to live together with different customs. In any marketplace one meets both honest persons and crooks. There one must be alert or chance being cheated. Older children, too, are learning how to deal with fair and unfair situations in life. The marketplace mirrors their experiences of life.

In New Testament times the marketplace was a mix of different cultures. Jews, Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Persians, Egyptians, and barbarians gathered there to barter, sell, and trade. One might observe a family in the market place then just as one can see a family in the mall today. In the ancient market one would expect to see tents, stalls and blankets displaying goods. Colonnades, statues, and buildings surrounded the market place in any Greek city. Exchange included coins, silks, watermelons, gold, incense, cattle, crops, sculpture, spices, precious stones, and metal. The market attracted entertainers, preachers, and debaters. Snake charmers, magicians, the town crier, and fortunetellers did their work, and poor people begged for alms. Roman soldiers and tax collectors were always present.

Changes in life

Children's lives today are similar to those of children living in ancient Antioch in that the decision of their parents directly affects their lives and lifestyles. They find themselves living in new families due to divorce and remarriage. Many children live in families where the parents are from different faiths. Some children's families have converted from another faith or for the first time have identified with a church. The feelings of young people today must be similar to the feeling of the young people in Bible times.

When families in Antioch were converted, other decisions had to be made. If they were Jewish, did they keep celebrating traditional Jewish festivals and feasts? Probably they did keep many traditions since the practices were related to the stories of the Bible. If they were Gentile, we assume they stopped attending sacrifices to the gods. They may have continued to attend the public events where these sacrifices were made. Young people were forced to adopt the changes and decisions that were made by the adults.

Playing

Children during Bible times had no or very few toys. They used their imagination and played with things they found in nature. I can see them playing hopscotch, tag or even trying to see who could throw rocks the farthest. I am sure they told stories and just like children today tried to out tell each other. We know from what the Bible tells us that the Jewish people loved to sing and dance. The children's' play must have reflected the songs and dances that they heard from the adults. Remember that Jesus wanted his people to be joyous and happy. He often told them to make a joyful sound unto the Lord.

As we can see there are many similarities and differences in the lifestyle of children, but we do know that they had to work hard and obey their parents.

Procedure

- Read the background information about how children lived in Bible times.
- Spend some time thinking about how your life would have been had you lived then. Thank God for what you have. Could you have made it back then.

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