

Ideas to Enhance Learning and Make Each Group Meeting More Fun

INTRODUCTORY MEETING:

Make a contest out of the biblical tree quiz. Give participants a few minutes to complete the ten questions. Read and discuss the correct answers. Present a gift to the individual who has the most right responses—perhaps a small acacia palm tree purchased from a local home store. If there is a tie, ask those who are involved to pick a number or flip a coin to determine the winner.

LESSON ONE: The Trees of the Garden

In religious artwork, the fruit of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* is often depicted as an apple. However, some scholars believe it was more likely an apricot (see <http://www.newstatesman.com/200106180040>). Bring an assortment of these two fruits to the meeting to cut up and share. Note: Other Bible scholars believe the forbidden fruit is no longer available on earth; if this is true, then neither the apple nor the apricot is the correct fruit. Present all three views to group members and have them discuss which view they think is more valid.

LESSON TWO: The Acacia Tree and the Tabernacle

Bring an object made of acacia wood to the meeting—some cutting boards and salad bowls are made from this rich brown-colored wood. If this is not possible, before the meeting, search the Internet for photos of *acacia trees* and/or colorful depictions of *God's tabernacle*. Show these photos, paintings, or drawings to the group. **Be sure to honor all copyright laws.**

LESSON THREE: Sin in the Meadow of Acacias

Before the meeting, you may want to research *Ba'al*, the fertility God of Moab, and/or search the Internet for photos of the desert region of *Moab*, which is now part of *Jordan*. Share your discoveries with the group.

LESSON FOUR: Conquering the City of Palms

Since the most prevalent type of palm tree in Arabian desert areas is the date palm, find a recipe for *date cookies* or *bars* (recipes are often printed on the back of boxes of dates), and bake them. Share them with participants at the meeting. You may also want to bring pictures of the *Jordan River* and/or *Jericho, The City of Palms*.

LESSON FIVE: The Palm and the Harvest Festival

Bring in a palm frond for students to examine. If this is not possible, use the Internet to research *Arba Minim* and download images of this unusual festival bouquet.

LESSON SIX: The Trees of the Temple

Search the Internet for pictures of the *cedar of Lebanon* and/or drawings of *Solomon's temple*. Bring what you find to the meeting and show the group. Be sure to include a picture of the *Lebanese flag*, which, even today, is emblazoned with an image of one of these historical trees.

LESSON SEVEN: The Cedar of Cleansing

Bring a cedar wood disc (the type you can put in a closet to ward-off insects) to the group meeting. Roughen the surface with sandpaper and allow the participants to smell the musky fragrance of this aromatic wood. You may also want to research and share with the group the modern-day efforts of Jews to genetically reproduce a *red heifer* like the one described in the Book of Numbers.

LESSON EIGHT: Another Cedar in Lebanon

Do an image search on the web using the key word *Assyria* and download pictures of some of the archeological finds scientists have made from the Assyrian empire.

General Questions to Help Stimulate Discussion in Your Group

Q: Did you learn anything new this week?

Q: What was the most memorable part of the lesson for you personally?

Q: How can we apply what we have learned to our daily lives?

Q: Was there anything presented in the lesson that you did not understand?

Q: Out of all the Bible verses you read this week, which one was your favorite and why?

How To Be An Effective Discussion Leader

As leader of the group, it is your job to facilitate the discussion between participants each week. To accomplish this lofty task, you must:

- (1) Make a concerted effort to not allow yourself or another person to dominate the conversation. Graciously give all members of the group an opportunity to share their insights. Be sure to encourage others to do the same.
- (2) Do not be alarmed if you experience lulls in the discussion, for it is often during these quiet moments that participants who are more hesitant to share find the courage to speak up.
- (3) If you sense that the discussion is losing focus and going off on a tangent that is inappropriate, do not be afraid to step in and say something like "Wow! How did we get off on that subject?" This will help you bring the group back to the task at hand.
- (4) If an individual at the meeting is obviously struggling with a personal issue and in need of prayer, comfort, and/or counsel, seek the Lord's guidance. You may want to forfeit the discussion in favor of ministering to the needs of this precious individual, or you may find it more appropriate to lovingly tell the person that you will gladly stay after the meeting to pray and discuss the situation privately.
- (5) Always be sensitive and open to God's leading. The Lord may ask you to set aside your plans and goals in order to take the group in a different direction. Do not fret over this, but rejoice! Nothing is more satisfying than participating in what God is doing in the lives of people. Remember, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (*Proverbs 3:5-6*, NIV). Amen!