

# *Making the Bible* **User-Friendly**

What is the full name of Mrs. Noah? How many times does God create the world? How do the Hebrews celebrate their victory over the people of Jericho? The answers to these questions demonstrate why an uninformed reading of the Bible is worse than no reading at all. In this first chapter we'll begin focusing on the basic tools you need to clear away the obstacles that might prevent your students from fully experiencing the Word of God in all of its liveliness and relevance.

We never do get the name of Noah's wife, or Lot's wife for that matter. Although King David and Solomon are reputed to have had many wives, almost none of them are mentioned by name. Even when women do rate that small dignity, they generally remain in the margins of the biblical narrative. Try and find Sarah's reaction to Abraham's near sacrifice of their son Isaac, for example (Genesis 22).

## Four Keys

While the second question—How many times does God create the world?—might seem like a trick, it isn't. Read Genesis 1, and you'll be taken beyond the boundaries of space and time as God goes about creating the universe according to a careful six-day plan. Human beings—both male and female—are the final masterpiece of God's labors.

Read Genesis 2 and creation begins all over again. This time, however, God makes "the man" (*Adam*, in Hebrew) first and then goes about furnishing the Garden over an indeterminate amount of time. Only then does God put the man to sleep to create the woman. Contradictions within the stories themselves and between these stories and our modern understanding of the universe abound throughout the stories of Genesis 1—11.

When the Hebrew army overruns the city of Jericho (Joshua 6), God's chosen people observe "the ban"—an order from God to kill all human beings who worship pagan gods (Leviticus 27:29). Every man, woman, child, and animal in the town is slaughtered. This famous account immortalized in the hymn "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho," therefore, is a story of genocide sanctioned by God. It is not the first or the last time God is portrayed this way in the Old Testament.

The good news is that these stories and many others can be read, studied, and taught in a sensible, engaging, and faith-filled way. All that is required is a thoughtful and prayerful understanding of the Bible as God's Word mediated through faithful but fractured human beings. Future chapters will present four "keys"—basic principles that are essential to a proper Catholic understanding of Scripture. In light of those principles, we'll also take a brief overview of both the Old and New Testaments.

## For Thought and Discussion

1. What are some particular stories or passages in the Bible that inspire you? make you think? trouble you?
2. How comfortable are you teaching about the Bible? If you are uncomfortable, why? If you are comfortable, what is it that you find most meaningful in your teaching?
3. Do you ever read the Bible on your own? Why or why not?
4. Does the idea that every word in the Bible may not be literally true bother you? Do you see it as a challenge to your faith? If yes, why? If no, how does it help you appreciate the Bible more? (Read Raymond Brown's *101 Questions About the Bible* for a good introduction to the modern Catholic approach to Bible study.)
5. Begin the year by asking your students to share their favorite stories or characters from the Bible. Ask them what they like about the stories and ask them to explain what they think the stories mean. Look for common insights and misunderstandings that you can address in this and future lessons.
6. Read a particularly vivid story from the Bible and ask each student to draw a picture of a key scene as he or she imagines it. (Luke offers some wonderful stories to get you started—the story of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26–38) or the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11–32), for example. If it's a group in which boys predominate, try the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17:12–50). Best to leave out verse 51!

7. Read your favorite children's book to your class. Ask your students to explain the lesson the story teaches and to comment on images or characters that they really like. Try and make some connections to specific characters, stories, and lessons in the Bible.
8. *Veggie Tales* are a series of videotapes that use humor—and vegetables!—to tell the stories of the Bible. With older children, you might have the students read the biblical story the tape is based on (e.g., “David and the Giant Pickle”/David and Goliath) and compare and contrast the two.