

JAPAN

Lessons for Mission Minded Kids

Lesson 2

The Land Without the Son



Japan

Lesson 2: The Land Without the Son

Goals for Lesson 2:

- Students will gain a basic understanding of the Buddhist and Shinto religions and how they shape the lives and culture of the Japanese people.
- Students will understand that religion without the Son of God is empty.
- Students will recognize that it is the One True Living God who made the world and He does not live in a temple and cannot be served by human hands.

Verse for Japan:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24-25 (NIV)

Before Class:

- Read through lesson and decide what you will use according to your age group and time allotted.
- Prepare picture of Torii Gate from cover as a power point slide or print and back it with cardstock for stability.
- Use real Japanese flag or flag picture from Lesson 1.
- Locate a small bell to use as a prop during the story.
- Print the sun/Son page and cut in half. Mount each half on card stock for stability.
- Read through the Picking Oranges Game sheet. Prepare oranges and tree as indicated. Read through the questions provided and decide if they are age appropriate for your group. Write down additional questions as needed.
- Make copies of the Torii Gate Verse page. Collect red crayons to color the gate.
- Collect a small beanbag to use with the prayer card activity.

Lesson Plan:

- Open your time together with a welcome, announcements and a brief prayer. (5 min.)
- Read or tell the story part of the lesson, using the flag, the Torii gate picture, the sun/Son cards and the bell where indicated. (15-20 min.)
- Play the Picking Oranges game as directed on the instruction sheet, using this time as a review of the first two lessons. (15-20 min.)
- Have children sit at a table where they can see the verse poster they painted in the first lesson. Read the verse out loud together. Talk about how this verse applies to the Japanese people and why the Living God does not want to live in a temple built by human hands. Talk about a church building and why Christians build buildings where we can gather together to worship the God who created us. This is not the same as building a shrine where an idol or a relic can be rubbed or worshipped by burning incense, bowing, saying prescribed prayers or bringing gifts. Pass out copies of the Torii Gate Verse. Have children copy the words from the verse poster onto their page. Assign older students to help the younger ones. When the verses are written correctly, students may color the gate red. (10-15 min.)
- Lay out all (12) of the red and green prayer cards randomly on the floor, face down. Have the students form a circle around the cards on the floor. Choose a volunteer to start and toss them the beanbag. That student will toss the beanbag onto one of the red or green cards, and go get the beanbag and the card it lands closest to. That student will pray a short prayer for what is printed on the card and then toss the beanbag to someone else in the circle. If a child is particularly shy and will not participate, you can allow them to toss the beanbag onto a card and then hand the card to an adult who will pray and then toss the bag to another student. Continue for several minutes, depending on your class. (8-10 min.)

Lesson 2 Story: The Land Without the Son

(Show picture or real flag of Japan) Do you remember what the red circle in the middle of the Japanese flag represents? (the sun) Everyone in the whole world gets to enjoy the sun that God created, don't they? **(Hold up the sun card.)** The sun is a gift God has given to the world to provide light and warmth and the ability for plants to grow. **(Hold up the Sun card.)** God has given the world another gift that we pronounce the same way. He has given His own Son, Jesus, to provide a way for the people of the world to find forgiveness and peace and to enter His presence in Heaven when they die. Everyone knows about God's gift of the sun. They have felt the warmth and eaten the good food the sun allows to grow. They don't have to search to experience the sun. **(Hold up both cards.)** Many people do not know about God's gift of His Son. They have not felt freedom from their guilt or the peace and comfort of God's presence. They are searching for Jesus, God's Son, but they are only finding fear and guilt and emptiness in the religious rules they follow.

The main religion of Japan is called Shinto, which means, "the way of the gods". For thousands of years, they have worshipped their emperor, the sun, Mount Fuji, the fox god, the snake god, spirits of water and fire, and many other things in nature. They think that natural things like trees and rocks and the wind all have spirits in them, so they worship things in nature instead of the One True Living God who was powerful enough to create all of nature.

The entrance to a Shinto shrine is marked by one or more gate-like structures called a Torii gate. **(Show picture of Torii gate from lesson cover.)** After passing under the Torii gates, visitors to the shrine will come to a stone trough full of water. Worshippers purify themselves by washing their face and hands with the water in the trough. As they continue walking to the shrine, they might write a prayer on a narrow strip of paper and tie it carefully to the low branches of a tree in hopes of gaining the favor of a god.

As the Shinto worshippers continue toward the shrine, they will come to a small stand where all kinds of good luck charms are sold. They can buy a charm that they think will help their prayer to be answered. This charm has no power to help them, but the people hope that because they are taking the time to worship, purifying themselves with the water from the trough, purchasing a charm and tying a prayer on a tree branch, that some god will be pleased and answer their request.

As a Shinto worshipper enters the worship hall of the shrine, they toss a coin into the collection box at the entrance. **(Have students stand and pantomime tossing a coin, and then go through the other actions with you.)** Then they will pull a rope to ring a bell **(ring your little bell)**, clap their hands twice, bow at the waist, say a short prayer, straighten up, clap twice again, and then leave the worship hall. The ringing of the bell and the clapping are supposed to attract the

god's attention so that the prayer might be answered. Do you think that doing all of these things is an effective way to get answers to prayers? Aren't you glad that the God who has the power to create you also gave you a way to talk directly to Him? Aren't you glad that the Living God has the power to hear what you say to Him without ringing a bell to get his attention? He also has the power to change your heart and your circumstances and give real answers to your prayers without you having to buy a charm or tie your prayer on the branches of a tree.

Since these beliefs have been part of Japanese life for thousands of years, they are just seen as part of their culture. School children visit Shinto shrines to learn more about their culture and beliefs. Shintoists don't see a problem with worshipping lots of gods, so they can't understand why Christians refuse to worship at Shinto shrines. Many Japanese people feel that if they became Christians and worshipped only Jesus, they would be disrespecting their family and their culture.

In Japan, many people combine the beliefs of Shinto and the beliefs of Buddhism. Do you remember that there are also many Buddhist people in India and Nepal? These people follow the teachings of Siddharta Gautama, who lived in India about 2,500 years ago. He left his family to wander around India, teaching the people who came to him. He became known as the Buddha, or "the enlightened one". He taught the people that they should be kind and do good things in order to gain merit. He taught them to meditate and pray, and that by their own efforts, they could reach "nirvana", which means "nothingness" so that they wouldn't have to be constantly reborn in the cycle of reincarnation. Traders brought the Buddhist teachings to Japan hundreds of years ago, and many people just added them into their Shinto practices.

The Japanese people who follow the teachings of Shinto and Buddha feel like they have to visit shrines and leave flowers and food for their many gods. They feel like they have to do good things and be kind and polite. They set up shrines in their houses and worship there as well as visiting Buddhist and Shinto shrines on their way to work or school. They think that if they rub the fat belly of the Buddha idol, they might have their prayers granted, or if they spin the prayer wheel at the Buddhist shrine or tie their prayer to a tree branch at the Shinto shrine, they might get the things they are asking for.

Even though they try very hard to please all of the nature gods and do the right things to gain merit, they don't find forgiveness for the wrong things they do, and they don't find the peace of having a deep relationship with the God who created them and knows all of their thoughts. They only find the empty feeling that they have to do more good things and go back to the shrine to try again to get the attention of a god who cannot hear their bell or read their prayer slips tied to the tree. That is a very sad and frustrating way to live.

Picking Oranges Game

Game Preparation: Copy the sheet of oranges onto orange cardstock or construction paper. Cut the oranges out. You may draw the stem area on the backs and cover the oranges with clear contact paper or laminate them if desired. Draw a simple tree outline on a blackboard, whiteboard or poster board. Use sticky tack or small tape rolls to attach all of the oranges randomly scattered over the tree with points and directions hidden on the back.

To Play the Game: Ask the children if they have ever eaten mandarin oranges. Explain that mandarin oranges are often grown in Japan in beautiful gardens and groves. Tell them that they will be picking mandarin oranges today to gain points for their team.

Divide the class into two teams that are as equal in ability as possible, and label the two teams “white” and “red”, for the two colors of the Japanese flag. Ask any of the following questions, or make some of your own. You will decide if the answer is appropriate to the age of the child being asked. If a player answers a question correctly, they will get to choose an orange from the tree and either gain the points on the back or follow the directions written there. If one player can’t answer the question, ask the same question of the next player on the other team. If neither player gets the answer, tell them the answer and review a bit. When all oranges have been picked from the tree, add the points each team earned. You may give a small prize or privilege to all of the players or to the winning team if you wish.

1. What does the red circle in the middle of the flag represent? (the sun or the sun goddess)
2. What does the word “Nippon” mean? (“Japan” in Japanese, or “source of the sun”)
3. What is Japanese money called? (Yen)
4. What is the capital city of Japan? (Tokyo)
5. Name one food that is very common to eat in Japan. (Rice; Fish; Vegetables; etc.)
6. What is the name of the most famous volcano in Japan? (Mt. Fuji)
7. What is the native ancient religion of Japan? (Shintoism)
8. What religion is often mixed with Shintoism in Japan? (Buddhism)
9. How many islands make up the country of Japan? (Four larger islands and thousands of smaller ones)
10. The country of Japan is about the same size as which of our United States? (California)
11. Name something a Shinto god might live in. (Water; Trees; Fire; Wind; a mountain; the sun; a rock; etc.)
12. What is the gate called that stands at the entrance to a Shinto shrine? (Torii Gate)
13. Why might a person buy a charm at a Shinto shrine? (In hopes that their prayer would be answered)
14. Name something Japan manufactures a lot of. (Cars; Electronics; etc.)
15. Who was Siddharta Gautama? (The founder of Buddhism)
16. What is the best way to get around in Japan? (Public Transportation; Walk; Bicycle.....NOT a car)



Gain
50
Points



Gain 50
Points



Gain 50
Points



Gain
100
Points



Gain
100
Points



Gain
100
Points



Shake 5
Hands



Clap
10
Times



Spin
3
Times



Jump
8
Times



Gain
200
Points



Gain
200
Points

Torii Gate:

The ___ who made the _____
and everything in it is the _____
of heaven and _____ and
does not live in _____
built by _____ hands. And he
is not _____ by human
hands, as if he _____
anything. Rather, he himself
gives everyone _____ and
_____ and everything else.”

_____ 17:24-25 (NIV)

sun

Son