

Welcome Letter to BJC 7th Grade Parents – September 2006

An enthusiastic welcome to you and your children to our BJC 7th grade Judaics class! This class has two different components: Torah (led by Gary Ratner) and Biblical History (led by Mitch Kraus). After the introductory class, September 9th, which we will teach together, we will teach individually, usually in three week cycles, periodically interspersed with classes taught jointly. We try to enrich class discussions with other forms of learning and fun, including charades, quiz games, debates and Biblio-drama, as well as use historical maps and contemporary newspaper articles, all related to the topics that we are studying.

The Torah course focuses on having the children do close textual analysis of a small number of seminal stories, including Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Tower of Babel, Abraham and Sarah, Lot, Issac and Ishmael. We ask what the writers may have been trying to teach by writing the Torah the way they did, explore inconsistencies and repetitions, and try to figure out how the stories and concepts may be helpful to us in figuring out what choices to make in living our lives today. We look at concepts key to Judaism such as one God, man being made in the image of God, covenant and the Ten Commandments, as well as concepts key to all humanity, such as truth and falsehood, life and death, good and evil, the brotherhood of mankind, and the denial and acceptance of responsibility.

The Bible course deals with the Bible as history comparing the text with what is known from archeology and other ancient sources. For example, Abraham and Jacob's family fleeing to Egypt during famine was a normal reaction because Egypt had a steady water supply from the Nile. Where there is more than one theory about events, each is described. We will examine various theories about the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan, and look at tribal identity, national identity, the divided kingdom, exile and the confrontation with Greece. The course will stress the uniqueness of monotheism and why ethical monotheism was so significant to the development of civilization.

In our joint sessions, we will explore a single topic from our different perspectives. This will include, for example, looking at the historical context in which Christianity emerged during the Roman period and Torah sources of certain important Christian beliefs and practices.

Please stop by and say hello, ask any questions and share any concerns, this Saturday morning, or thereafter, if that is not feasible. We would like to get to know you and your children.

Gary and Mitch