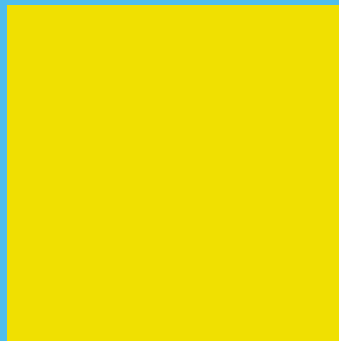


1



ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JESUS AND THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN: VIDEO CLIP



Figure 1.1
The Video Clip

The video clip is set in the context of a class in which two students, Ahmed and Pieter-Jan, have missed the necessary material for a test due to illness. Another student, Sarah, lends her notes to Pieter-Jan. Ahmed wants to borrow these notes from Sarah too, but it turns out Sarah has suddenly 'lost them'. In fact, she has not lost her notes. Rather, she does not want to lend them to Ahmed because of her attitude towards Muslims. In defense of her attitude, Sarah refers to a Bible story about Jesus and his attitude towards 'the other'. The classmates go in search of the Biblical story and its meaning.

1.2 TIME TRAVEL: JESUS IN HISTORY

1.2.1 JESUS' ENVIRONMENT: WHERE DID HE LIVE?

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text below and answer the corresponding questions.

The Bible is a centuries-old book, written in a world that is very different from ours. In order to understand a story from the Bible properly, it is important to have knowledge of the world of that era. The world in which you live always influences your thoughts and actions. Even Jesus is not an exception. We can never understand the stories about him if we don't know what the world he lived in was like. So, it is important to always keep the cultural context of a story in mind. **The context counts!**

Jesus was born around the year six BCE in Bethlehem during the reign of King Herod, and grew up in **Nazareth**. Back then, this was a small village in **Galilee**. Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then **Palestine** (region in The Middle East).

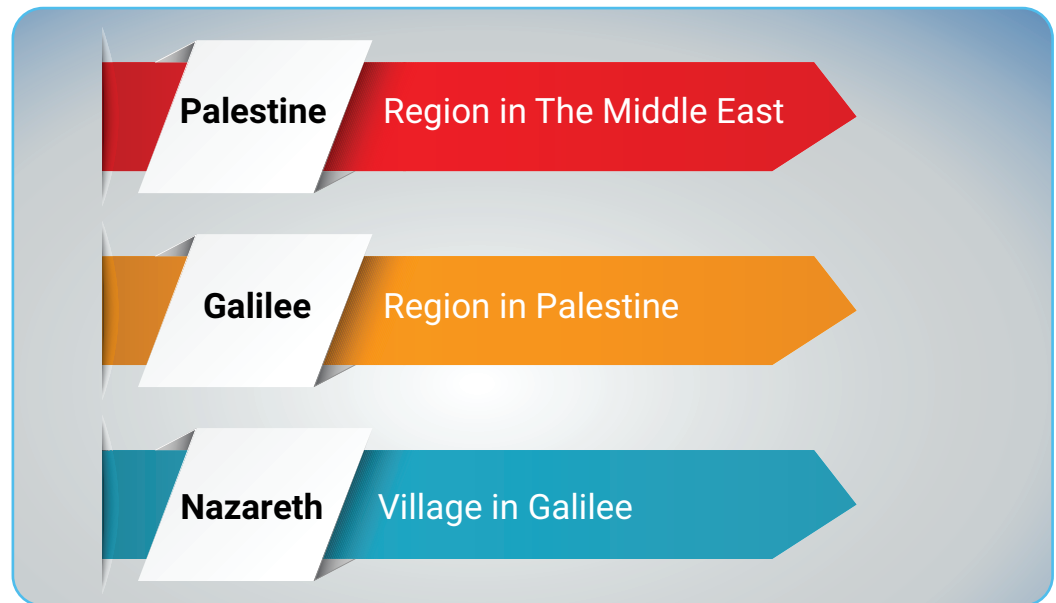


Figure 1.2
Jesus' Environment

In the story of 'Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman' we read that Jesus stayed in the area of the city of **Tyre**. At that time, Tyre was a harbour town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The city was outside the borders of Palestine. It was one of the most important cities of the small coastal state of **Phoenicia**.

Religious life in Tyre was mainly characterized by polytheism. The term 'polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one god, but in multiple gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods.

At the time of Jesus, this was unacceptable for the Jewish people. That's why they called Tyre "*the land of the pagans*". People who did not believe

in the God of the Jews were considered unclean. Jews themselves are not polytheists, but monotheists because they believe in one god (and that is Yahweh). Thus, the term 'monotheism' refers to a religion with one god.



Figure 1.3
First century Judaea
province

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text on the previous pages and fill in the correct places.

WHAT	WHERE
1. Jesus was born in ...	A.
2. Jesus grew up in ...	B.
3. Galilee is a region in ...	C.

1.2.2 THE SOCIETY OF GALILEE

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text about the society of Galilee, and fill in the missing words.

Jesus – religion – Jewish – monotheism – polytheism

In Galilee there were many different communities. All these communities had their own ideas about religion and the world around them. Yet the majority of the population throughout Palestine (and therefore also Galilee) was However, there were also many people who were not Jewish. Their faith deviated from Jewish tradition, and therefore they were generally shunned by Jews and seen as ‘pagans’. They did not believe in the Jewish God, but sometimes worshipped different gods and were therefore polytheists. The term ‘.....’ refers to a religion with several gods. Jews are not polytheists, but monotheists because they believe in one God (and that is Yahweh). So, the term ‘.....’ refers to a religion with only one god.

In order to have a better understanding of the Bible and the life of Jesus, it is important to know that Jesus grew up, lived and preached in this Jewish context. was very important in Palestine, and therefore also in Galilee. and his environment were strongly influenced by Jewish Scripture and tradition. So, Jesus himself was Jewish. Every event, from the cradle to the grave, was dominated by the Jewish tradition.

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the questions below.

1. What is the difference between monotheism and polytheism?

2. Right or wrong: all the inhabitants of Galilee were Jews.



Figure 1.4
Footprints
Image: © Christopher
Sardegna | Unsplash

1.3 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JESUS AND A SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

1.3.1 A REMARKABLE STORY FROM THE BIBLE

The writings of the New Testament in the Bible tell us more about the life of Jesus, and about his words and deeds. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels: the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These gospels are written based on their faith and serve to demonstrate their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They bear witness to the evangelists' personal faith in Jesus. The words and stories of Jesus are brought together in these writings.



Did you know that 'gospel' comes from the Greek word 'euangelion'? This means 'good news' and refers to the good message brought by Jesus Christ.

The evangelist Mark tells in his gospel about an encounter between Jesus and a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). In this story Jesus meets a Syrophenician woman, who comes to Jesus to ask for his help. Her daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit, and she hopes that Jesus can grant her daughter salvation and deliverance. Here you will find the first part of this Biblical story:

[24] From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

[25] but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.


[26] Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.



The evangelist Mark emphasises that Jesus and his followers left Galilee and travelled to the region of Tyre. Jesus lived and preached mainly in Galilee. In Tyre, they are no longer surrounded by fellow Jews. Rather, when they leave for the areas of Tyre and Sidon, they become 'foreigners'.




The story shows that the woman is Greek and of Syrophenician descent. So she wasn't Jewish. The name 'Syrophenician' is a combination of 'Syrian' and 'Phoenician', and probably comes from the fact that Phoenicia was then part of the Roman province of Syria. So for Jesus and his followers she was **a stranger, a 'pagan'**.

 In the gospels, one often speaks of 'demons' or 'unclean spirits'. The medical knowledge we have today was unknown at the time of Jesus. Therefore, diseases were often associated with the existence of demons or unclean spirits. Today we no longer speak of demons or unclean or impure spirits, but of tumours, viruses and bacteria. Also, in the culture of that time, psychological problems were attributed to negative forces or evil spirits.

[27] He said to her, *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

[28] But she answered him, *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

 In Jesus' time, a dog was an unclean and inferior animal.

ASSIGNMENT. What does Jesus mean by the answer: *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"* (Mark 7:27)?

ASSIGNMENT. How does the woman react? What does the woman mean by her answer: *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"* (Mark 7:28)?

[29] Then he said to her, *“For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.”*

[30] So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

ASSIGNMENT. What attitude does Jesus take after the woman’s response? Doesn’t he want to help ‘other believers’ in need? How can this be seen as a story of depolarization?





Figure 1.5
Image: © Priscilla Du
Preez | Unsplash

1.3.2 SUMMARIZED INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL STORY

Jesus' first answer


The Syrophoenician woman asks Jesus to expel the unclean spirit from the body of her daughter. Jesus' reaction is striking, his answer sounds rather strange and dismissive: *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"* (Mark 7:27). What does Jesus mean by this?

 Jesus refers to the woman as a **'dog'**, and strongly insults her in this way. With this reference to 'the dogs' Jesus seems to emphasise that everyone who does not belong to the Jewish people is labelled as a pagan. A pagan is differently believing, and therefore a non-believer. This explains why Jesus initially rejects this woman and her request for help.

 In addition, Jesus refers in his answer to **'the bread'**. The bread here symbolises the power Jesus gives to his followers. Jesus indicates that this bread is primarily meant for the Jewish people. **What if there is not enough 'bread'? Surely it cannot be shared with other believers?** Jesus wants to be there for the Jewish people in the first place. The bread that is meant for 'the children' (the Jewish people) should not be fed to 'the dogs' (other believers).


The woman's answer


The woman doesn't give up. She confronts Jesus with the following answer: *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"* (Mark 7:28).

 What does the woman mean by saying this? She wants to point out to Jesus that even now there's something for 'the dogs' under the table, there's enough 'bread' for everyone. In fact, the woman means that the hope and salvation that Jesus brings is not only for the Jewish people. Despite the differences between the Jewish people and the pagans, the 'bread' is not meant only for the children of Israel.

How does Jesus react?

After the reaction of the woman, Jesus gives her the following answer: *"For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter"* (Mark 7:29).

 Jesus understands the woman. The woman's strong faith in Jesus makes a great impression on Him. Even though the woman and her daughter are of pagan descent, Jesus helps the woman and her daughter. The daughter is freed from the unclean spirit thanks to the power of Jesus.

 Through the encounter and the conversation with the woman, Jesus changes his mind. This is remarkable! In most gospel stories, it is Jesus who changes the perspective of the other. But in this story, it is **Jesus**

himself who changes his mind because of the other. From that moment on, Jesus doesn't want to be there just for the Jewish people, the children of Israel. On the contrary, **the proclamation of the Kingdom of God has a universal scope** and therefore applies to everyone.



It is important to frame this story in the context of that time. The gospel of Mark was written at a time when most Christians were in fact Jews, who thought that Jesus' message was only for Jews. However, over the years, other people, 'pagans', also felt drawn to the faith in Jesus' message. This caused a discussion among the first Christians. Was Jesus' message also meant for other people, for pagans? The Jewish Christians asked themselves the following question: **Was the extension of Christianity to non-Jews clean?** Or was it unclean? This question seemed to be an important discussion at the time Mark was writing his gospel. The encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman, a pagan, should be read in this context. **The evangelist Mark makes it clear that non-Jews also belong to the Kingdom of God.**

Here you can read the complete Biblical story.

'The Syrophenician Woman's Faith'

[24] From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

[25] but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

[26] Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

[27] He said to her, "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*"

[28] But she answered him, "*Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.*"

[29] Then he said to her, "*For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.*"

[30] So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Source: NRSV, Mark 7:24-30.

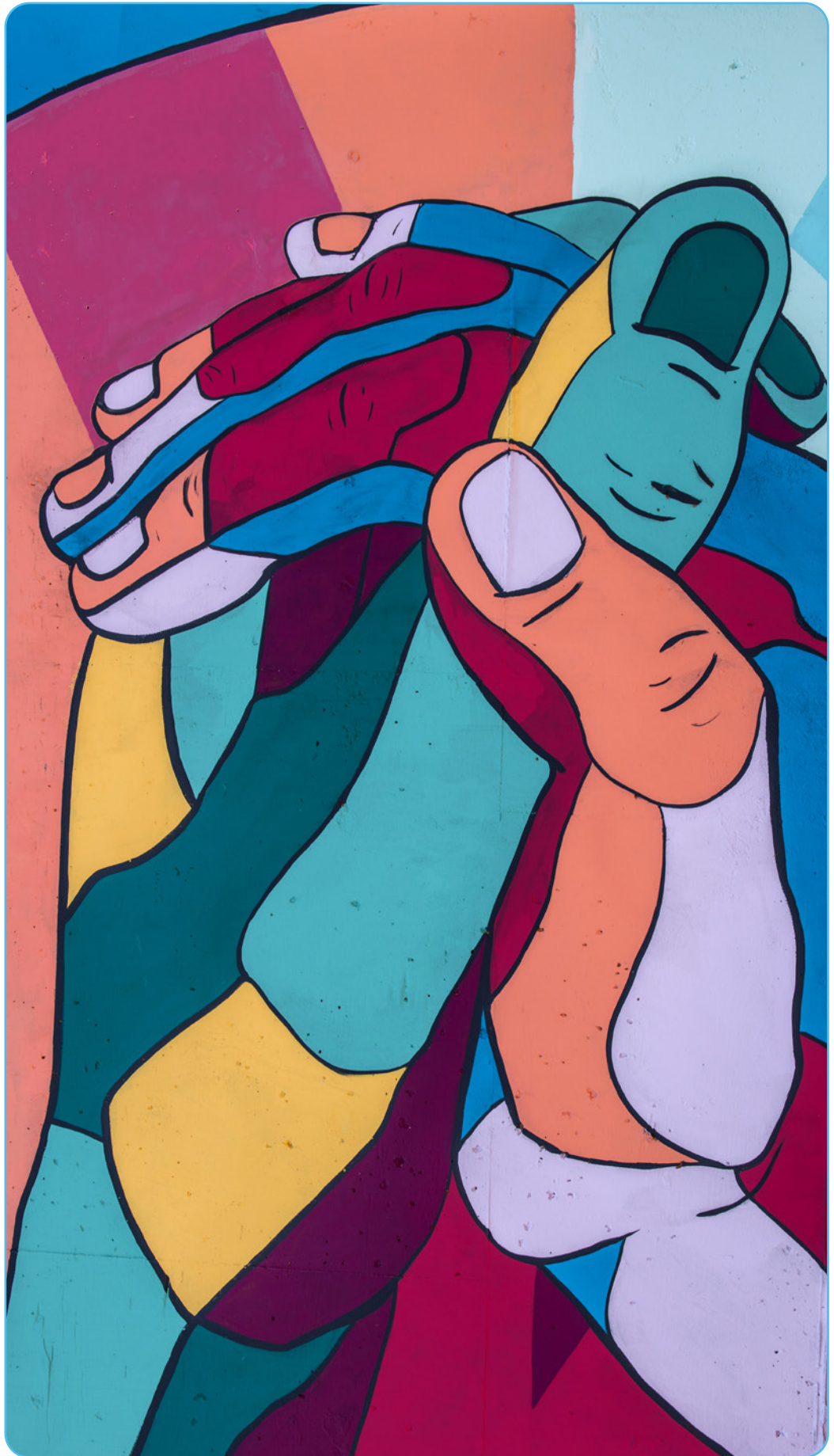


Figure 1.6
Image: © Tim Mossholder
Unsplash

1.4 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information and an explanation of certain concepts.

Children of Israel

The term 'children of Israel' or the 'lost sheep' of Israel refers to the 'Israelites', to the Jewish people.

Devout

When the term 'devout' is used to refer to a person in a religious context, this means that it is a very religious and dedicated person. This person also demonstrates this in his thinking and acting.

Galilee

At the time of Jesus, Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then Palestine. This area was slightly smaller than Belgium today. Jesus spent most of his life in the region of Galilee.

Gospel

The writings of the New Testament in the Bible tell us more about the life of Jesus, about His words and deeds. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels: the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These gospels are written based on their faith and serve to demonstrate faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They bear witness to the evangelists' personal faith in Jesus. The words and stories of Jesus are brought together in these writings.

'Gospel' comes from the Greek word 'euangelion', this literally means 'good news'. It refers to the good message brought by Jesus Christ.

Kingdom of God

Jesus speaks in the gospels about the 'Kingdom of God', or the 'proclamation of the Kingdom of God'. It is a concept by which one refers to the rule of God over all things. His Kingdom transcends earthly rule. The gospel writers want to announce the rule of God with this proclamation. There are different views on the meaning of the Kingdom of God: is the Kingdom already established on earth, or is it in the (near) future? Is it already here in part? Or is the Church an expression of this Kingdom?

Middle East

Jesus lived in the Middle East. That is why Christianity has its origins in this region. The term 'Middle East' refers to the countries of Southwest Asia and some parts of North Africa, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and so on.

Monotheism

The term 'monotheism' refers to the belief in one god. A monotheistic religion proclaims belief in the existence of one god. Examples of monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These are the three largest monotheistic religions.

Nazareth

Nazareth was in ancient times a small village in Galilee. Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then Palestine (region in the Middle East). Jesus was born around the year six BCE in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth.

Pagans

The devout Jews in Jesus' time labelled all people who did not believe in the Jewish God (Yahweh) as 'pagans'. These people were condemned by the Jews. To the devout Jews, a pagan person was someone who did not believe in Yahweh. By rejecting the God of the Jews, they were thus considered as 'unclean'.

Palestine

At the time of Jesus, Palestine was a place in the Middle East. Jesus lived here as Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee are all in Palestine, and therefore also in the Middle East.

Phoenicia

At the time of Jesus, Phoenicia was a small coastal state in the Old Near East on the Mediterranean Sea.

Polytheism

The term 'Polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one, but in several gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods.

The Greeks and the Romans of antiquity, for example, were polytheists as they believed in different gods.

Syrophoenician

The name 'Syrophoenician' is a combination of 'Syrian' and 'Phoenician', and probably comes from the fact that Phoenicia was then part of the Roman province of Syria.

Tyre

In the story of 'The Syrophenician Woman's Faith', we read that Jesus stayed near the city of Tyre. At that time, Tyre was a harbour town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The city was outside the borders of Palestine at that time. It was one of the most important cities of the small coastal state of Phoenicia.

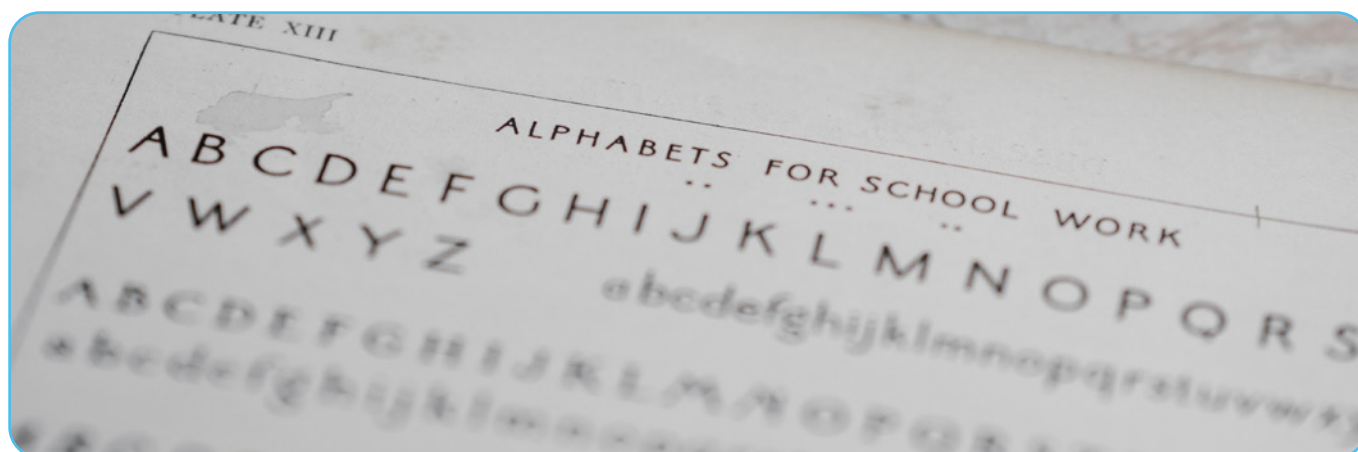


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

1.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT CLASSROOM DAY

We see a classroom filled with students and a teacher who enters. We see 2 students surrounded by others and they seem excited.

Teacher (exhausted and cynical):

I hope you guys are back in good form because end of this week we will be having.... a math test!

The class boos to the teacher.

Teacher: I know, I know... it's your favorite subject...

The class boos even louder...

Ahmed and Pieter-Jan look at each other and are clearly nervous about this news. Ahmed raises his hand.

Ahmed: How are we supposed to study if we don't even have notes on those classes?

Pieter-Jan: Yeah?!

Teacher: Pieter-Jan, raise your hand when you want to say something!

Pieter-Jan raises his hand and speaks to the teacher.

Pieter-Jan: Mr. Roberts, how can we study what we haven't seen yet? I mean: we weren't there the last days?

Teacher (a bit annoyed, not looking at the students): Sighs.....Can anybody give these poor, poor students, his or her notes?

2 INT SCHOOL DAY

We see Ahmed going towards Sarah.

Ahmed: Hey Sarah, I heard Pieter-Jan returned your notes,... Could I have them during the lunchbreak so I could copy them as well?

Sarah hesitates

Sarah: Oh... euhm... Let me get 'em...

She starts to look into her bag.

Sarah: Oh no, I lost my notes!

All other kids look at Sarah.

Sarah: I guess I will not be able to lend you my notes then, sorry...

Ahmed (disappointed): oh... ok then...

A bit further up we see Sarah putting away some book when Lindsay walks over to her.

Lindsay: Hey Sarah, I heard you lost your notes, you can have mine if you want.

Sarah: Well, I didn't actually lose my notes. I just didn't want to give my notes to Ahmed.

Lindsay: "What do you mean?"

Sarah: I just don't want to give my notes to him.

Lindsay: But why? What's the problem? Did something happen?

Sarah: Not really. I just don't want to give my notes to a Muslim...

Lindsay (confused): What?

Sarah (a bit louder): They shouldn't be here, in our country, in our school. My dad tells me they take our jobs and our money. And now they even want to take my notes. We are always expected to help them, just like that. As if we don't have enough of our own worries. It is not my problem that he was sick.

This last answer was definitely heard by Ahmed.

Ahmed (shocked): I'm so sorry you feel this way. I don't really know what to say, but I don't want to do anything wrong, I just wanted to ask for some help with the lessons I've missed the last few days because I was sick."

Sarah: Well, that's not my fault and certainly not my responsibility to help you.

Ahmed: (shocked, confused): oh... ok then...

Sarah: Now you don't have much more to say, do you? Now that you hear the truth? And it is the truth, because even Jesus once said that we should not pay attention to strangers or take care of them.

Lindsay: Hey, calm down. You shouldn't be so hard. And what do you suddenly say about Jesus?"

Sarah: My dad showed me: in the bible, there's a story about Jesus and he says something about dogs: 'We shouldn't give food to the dogs', so people like you (pointing towards Ahmed), shouldn't get food from us.

Lindsay: "What? What are you saying? It seems unlikely to me that Jesus would say something like that."

Ahmed: Yes, are you sure? Because Jesus is also a prophet in the Islamic tradition. And for us, Jesus symbolises love and giving, which is the exactly opposite of what you're saying.

Sarah: Well it is! I'll show you!

3 INT LIBRARY –DESK DAY

The kids enter the library and look for someone who can help them and go to the counter where a geeky looking librarian is working on his computer.

Librarian: Yeeeeeeeeesss? What are you young adventurers doing in this temple of knowledge? Can I help you finding your destiny?

Sarah: We are looking for the story where Jezus is talking about dogs...

Librarian (thinking): Hmmmm... That sounds like a job for iChrist!

The kids look to each other in confusion..

Librarian: iChrist is the new artificial AI for all questions concerning the Catholic religion! It was developed by the best developers the Vatican could find! Filled with great features and they even tried to integrate 'the voice of Jesus' based on the real testimonials!

Sarah: Ok that sounds exciting!! Just tell us where it is please?

Librarian (becomes a bit mysterious, talking more heavily): Oh sure, you can find iChrist... His presence is actually everywhere but it is mostly felt in the 'interactive part'... Just walk through that door, passed the 'Children section' and 'war stories' you'll find a place which lacks books and paper. That's where you can find iChrist's personal space.

3 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

The children walk into a room without books and only 1 screen in the middle of the room. The Children go stand before the screen and it flips on! A Digital looking figure in a robe appears.

iChrist: Welcome young and bright minds! Let your minds be enlightened with my infinite wisdom!

Sarah: Can you tell us about the story where Jesus doesn't want to give food for dogs?

iChrist: ah yes, the story of the Syrophoenician woman?

Ahmed: The what? woman?

iChrist: The Syrophoenician woman... that means she's Greek! And indeed in that story Jesus Christ, my real live counterpart (winks) says 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'.

All kids are looking in disbelief towards iChrist!

Everyone: whaaat?

Sarah seems proud to be able to proof she is right.

Sarah: There you go! Jesus is against strangers and only wants to take care of the people who are part of his religious tradition.

The other 3 kids seem a bit disappointed by Jezus' reaction. Sarah is happy being right on this.

Ahmed: I am shocked! I didn't know Jezus could be so cruel. My dad always said to me that Jesus represents love in our religion! So,... I guess that is a lie....

iChrist: Now now, let's get our facts straight, shall we? I'll tell you the story the way it was meant to be told... So, let me tell you what this story is really about!

TRANSITION TOWARDS BIBLICAL TIME

4 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

VOICE OVER iChrist: From there Jesus sets out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

TEXT IN IMAGE: TYRE 28 AC

We see a hooded Jesus hiding behind pillars and rocks entering a house where a group people are having a market.

5 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

We see a woman, recognizing Jesus and with a small crowd they approach Jesus. She falls to her knees begging Jesus to help her.

VOICE OVER iChrist: but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

We see Jesus looking at the woman and then we see Jesus saying something in sync with the voice of the priest.

iChrist: He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

6 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

Sarah (intervenes): see, it is literally in the bible!

iChrist (annoyed): Yes, you think are so right, but actually you could not be more wrong... Don't intervene,... let me finish!

7 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

We see Jezus in conversation with the woman. Again we see Jezus in sync with the voice of the iChrist.

iChrist: He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

But she answers, again in sync with the Priests voice.

Syrophoenician woman: Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

We see the woman answering Jezus. And Jezus is considering her words carefully and we see him actually changing his mind.

iChrist: Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go-- the demon has left your daughter."

8 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN ROAD

We see the woman returning home finding her child in good health.

9 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE OF WOMAN

She finds her child in good health and they hug intensely.

10 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

We see the iChrist finishing his story.

iChrist: So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Sarah: Huh? What does that mean??-

Ahmed: I don't understand it either!

iChrist: Let me explain... When Jezus is speaking about his children he is indeed speaking of the people that are part of his group and religion, so the Jewish people of Israël. The woman is actually Greek and a stranger to him and he compares her with a dog.

Sarah: Indeed, you see, foreigners are dogs!

iChrist (irritated)...: God da... please child, let me finish!

11 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

We see Jezus speaking in front of a crowd, giving bread to his followers. Giving it to everyone. People rejoice.

VOICE OVER iChrist: The woman then contradicts Jezus. She replies: 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'."

Sarah (a bit sassy): Yeah... and what does that mean? Why is this woman speaking in riddles? And what does Jezus reply?"

iChrist: She's telling him that Jezus should listen to her too. And now, by saying this, the woman changes Jezus his mind, and he helps her. He tells her to go home, and her daughter is cured. In this moment, in this encounter, Jezus changes his perspective.

Children: wow, ok...

iChrist: The woman makes him realise that salvation, the bread, is for everyone and not only for the Jewish people. Even more, this biblical story is known as the only story in which Jezus changes his mind, because most of the time, Jezus will change the minds of someone else.

12 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

Sarah: ...

Ahmed: ...

Priest: So, don't you think it is time to put aside our differences and change our minds as well?

Sarah:... I am sorry Ahmed, it's my dad that is the douchebag.

Ahmed: Don't worry Sarah, I didn't know this story either.

13 EXT SCHOOL DAY

We see everyone entering the schoolgates.

TEXT IN IMAGE: Next week

14 INT CLASSROOM DAY

We see the teacher hanging a score sheet on the wall.

Teacher: Here are the results of the Math test! I am VERY disappointed in one person in particular...

We see Ahmed closing his eyes in fear of it being him.

Teacher: Geoffrey, you are the only one who didn't pass this test... again... Come on man, pull yourself together.

We see a kid sniffing and being a bit sad by the news... Then we turn to Ahmed:

Ahmed (relieved): Phew I passed!

We see Ahmed looking at Sarah. Sarah notices and smiles! Ahmed winks back to her.

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