**Grade 4 Lesson 8 Story**

**Historical Episodes**

*In this lesson you will speak to the children about the period of Baha’u’llah’s life spent in Akka and its vicinity. In whatever way you choose to narrate this part of His life to your students, you should strive to convey a sense of His majesty and grandeur and the power of His Cause to achieve its purpose.*

Pictures for the highlighted words in the story are available at [www.supportingthecoreactivities.org](http://www.supportingthecoreactivities.org) under this lesson*.*

You know that Baha’u’llah’s suffering in the fortress-town of Akka was so immense that He designated it the **“Most Great Prison”**. Under strict confinement in the army barracks by order of the Sultan, He and the small band of exiles that accompanied Him were subjected to the severest hardship. **“None”**, He Himself has written, **“knoweth what befell Us, except God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing…From the foundation of the world until the present day a cruelty such as this hath neither been seen nor heard of.”**

Some two years after His arrival there, the loss of His beloved son Mirza Mihdi, the Purest Branch, was added to His tribulations. His cup of sorrow seemed to be filled to overflowing. But four months later, He and His companions were asked to leave the army barracks to make way for troops. They were moved from house to house, staying only a few months in each and kept watch over by guards. Baha’u’llah and His family finally settled in what is now known as the House of Abbud. They remained there for several years, and it was in that house that He revealed His Most Holy Book, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, (can have the Kitab-i-Aqdas to hold up) which you will learn more about in the next lesson. Gradually the restrictions on them were relaxed, as the inhabitants of the city began to recognize their innocence and to admire and revere Baha’u’llah. An increasing number of pilgrims from Persia were able to attain His presence during this period, and thus the wish of the Purest Branch that the gates of the city would be opened wide to his Father’s followers was fulfilled.

People of influence and authority, too, eventually grew friendly towards the Faith and came to respect Baha’u’llah. There was even a governor of Akka who seemed to have caught a glimpse of His Station. He was so deeply moved by Baha’u’llah’s majesty that he begged Him to be given the privilege of serving Him in some way. Baha’u’llah refused, not wanting anything for Himself, but instead suggested that he restore a disused water canal. The water in Akka at that time was foul beyond description and the restoration of the canal allowed the people of the city to have fresh water.

Although Baha’u’llah and the believers enjoyed much freedom in Akka, He remained confined within the city walls, for the order of the Sultan was still in force. But this situations was not to last. One day, Baha’u’llah mentioned that He had not seen greenery for nine years. The country, He commented, was the world of the soul and the city the world of the body. When Abdu’l-Baha heard these words, He realized that His Father longed to pass time in the countryside and surround Himself by the beauty of nature He so loved.

There lived a prominent man in Akka at the time who owned a lovely place in the country called Mazra’ih. Unfortunately the man was no friendly to the Faith. Abdu’l-Baha went to his home and asked to rent Mazra’ih from him. The owner was taken aback by this bold offer, but surprisingly agreed. Abdu’l-Baha acquired the place at a low rent, repaired it, and beautified the garden. (can show a picture of Mazra’ih) He then went to the presence of Baha’u’llah and informed Him that Mazra’ih was ready for Him and that there was a carriage waiting for Him outside. But Baha’u’llah refused to go saying that He was still a prisoner. There was a highly respected religious leader in Akka who loved Baha’u’llah and was greatly favored by Him. Abdu’l-Baha explained the situation to the man and asked him to go to the presence of Baha’u’llah, fall on his knees, take hold of Baha’u’llah’s hands and not let go until He promised to leave the city. The man did exactly as Abdu’l-Baha had asked him to do. But Baha’u’llah refused again, repeating that He was a prisoner. “God forbid! Who has the power to make You a prisoner?” insisted the man. “You have kept Yourself in prison. It was Your Own Will to be imprisoned…” He begged Baha’u’llah to leave the confines of the prison-city and go to Mazra’ih. “It is beautiful and verdant,” he told Him. “The trees are lovely, and the oranges like balls of fire!” For a whole hour the man pleaded until finally his patience and persistence were rewarded, and Baha’u’llah agreed to move to Mazra’ih. The next day, Abdu’l-Baha brought the carriage and drove Baha’u’llah to His new residence. While everyone knew that Baha’u’llah was still a prisoner by the order of the Sultan, no one dared raise any objections. He was, in reality, as loved and respected as a king.

Two years after Baha’u’llah went to live in Mazra’ih, a beautiful mansion not too far distant fell vacant. It had been built as a country home for a wealthy man and his family. The mansion was called “Bahji” which means delight. When an epidemic broke out in the area, killing many, people panicked and abandoned their homes. Abdu’l-Baha was thus able to rent Bahji for His Father, and in the tranquility of its surroundings Baha’u’llah would pass the remaining thirteen years of His life on this earth. (you can show a picture of Bahji) He was now held in esteem and veneration by people of all backgrounds, and the prestige of the community of His followers was well established. Leaders and local officials would often request the honor of attaining His presence. And although His Faith had not yet spread to the Western world, there were some who were aware of the Prisoner of Akka and the great influence He had on all those with whom He came into contact. One of these, Edward Granville Browne, a well-known British scholar, visited Bahji in 1890 and was granted four interviews with Baha’u’llah. Here is what he has recorded of his historic first meeting:

“…my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs. Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where he divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called ‘taj’ by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one’s very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!”

Professor Browne recorded some of the words spoken to him by Baha’u’llah during his interviews, and there is one passage, in particular, that is now well known among Baha’is everywhere:

“A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued:- **‘Praise be to God that thou hast attained! Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile…We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment…That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled- what harm is there in this?...Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come…Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? … Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on the means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind…These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family…Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”**

During this period of His life, Baha’u’llah visited the nearby town of Haifa four times. It was during His last visit, while standing on the slopes of Mount Carmel, that He pointed out to Abdu’l-Baha the spot where the Shrine of the Bab was to be built. You know that, later, in the vicinity of the Holy Shrine of the Bab the Seat of the Universal House of Justice was established. Today the twin cities of Haifa and Akka have become the administrative and spiritual world center of the Bahai Faith, which has spread to countries throughout the globe.

Baha’u’llah raised the banner of universal peace and brotherhood, and revealed the Word of God to humanity. Although the powers of the earth combined their forces against Him, He was victorious over them as God had promised Him when under chains in the Siyah-Chal. During His own lifetime, His Message revived the hearts of thousands of people, and today His Cause continues its onward march. The forces of the entire world are not capable of preventing it from achieving its ultimate goal, which is to unify humankind in one universal Cause and in one common Faith.

*Can have the quote: “The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage…” on a poster in the room to refer to if you wish.*