



# Our Great Big World

We appreciate your interest in *Our Great Big World* from Notgrass History!

This PDF includes the Table of Contents and a sample unit from the curriculum. We are still finalizing the content and layout, so this is subject to change before publication; but it will give you a good idea of what to expect. Enjoy!

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# Unit 13

# Europe



Tallinn, Estonia

## Lesson 37

# Lithuanian Crosses



Lithuanian cross

Along the coast of the Baltic Sea in northeastern Europe lie three countries known as the Baltic nations: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

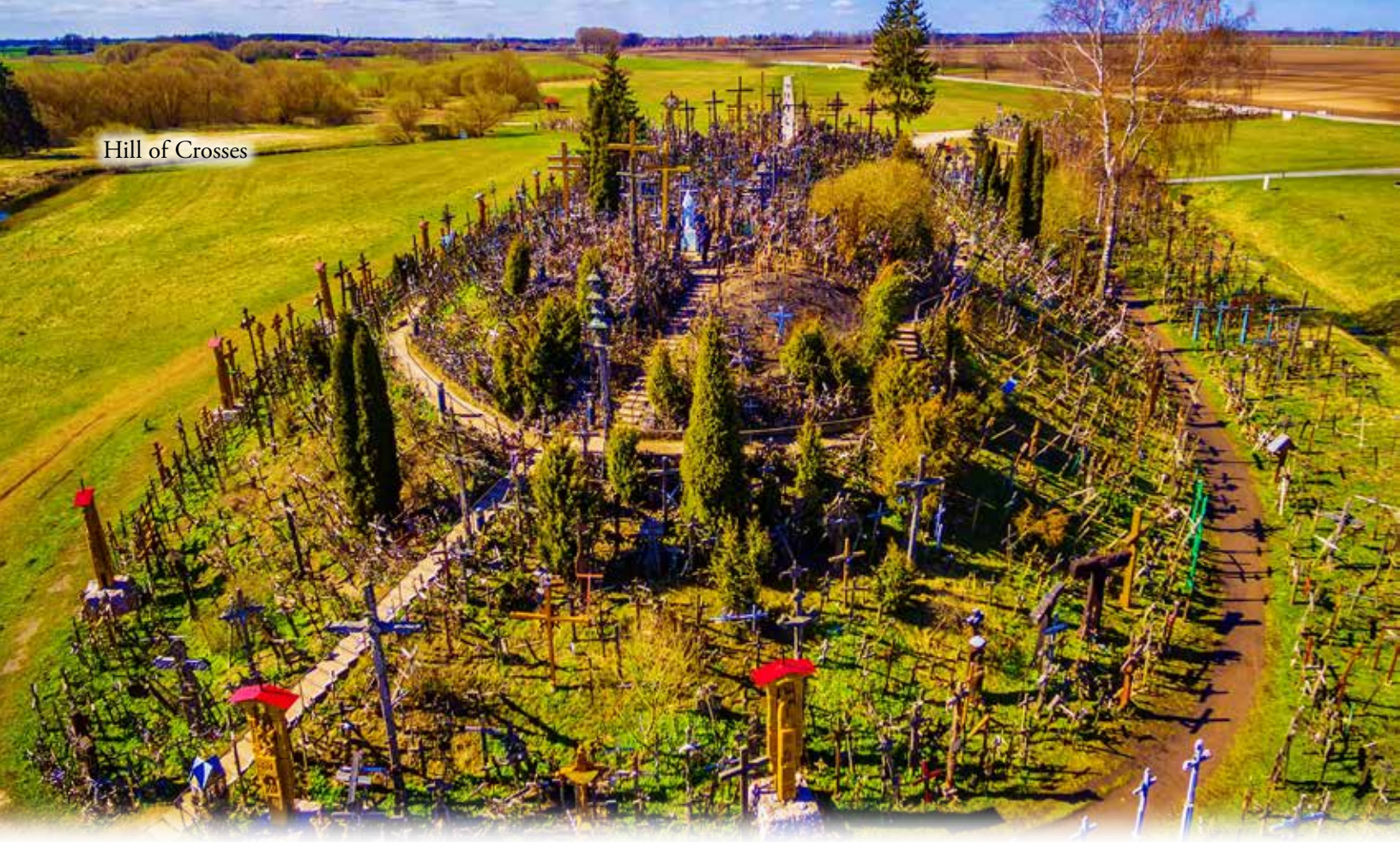
For hundreds of years, Lithuanian cross-makers have carved beautiful wooden crosses as symbols of their faith in Jesus. These crosses have become a very special art form for the people of Lithuania. Lithuanians have put up fancy crosses beside roads, in cemeteries, and in other special places. Village crosses became important meeting places for communities. Cross-makers once traveled from village to village offering to make crosses for local farmers. The cross-makers carved detailed shapes and patterns into the crosses to tell stories. They even had a secret code they used among themselves. They carved special features in the crosses to let other cross-makers know whether the people of a village were friendly or not. Lithuanian cross-makers have continued to pass on their skills for generations.



## Lithuanian crosses



Hill of Crosses



Crosses are on display all over Lithuania, but one particular place has far more than any other. Thousands and thousands of people have traveled to a place in the northern part of the country to put a cross on a special hill. Some bring a cross with detailed carving, while others bring a cross that is simple and plain. People aren't quite sure how this Hill of Crosses got started, but it has become an important place to the people of Lithuania.

While the people of Lithuania have long cherished their crosses, their government has not always approved of them. During the 1900s, Communists began to rule the country. As you learned earlier, Communists often persecute people who follow Christianity. In 1961 the Communist government destroyed the Hill of Crosses. That didn't stop the Lithuanians. They put up crosses on the hill again. The government destroyed the site four more times, bulldozing the crosses, burning the wooden ones, and taking those made of stone and metal so they could use the materials to build other things. Every time the Communists destroyed the site, determined Lithuanians secretly and peacefully rebuilt it. Some people who were caught bringing a cross to the hill had to pay a fine. Others had to spend time in jail.



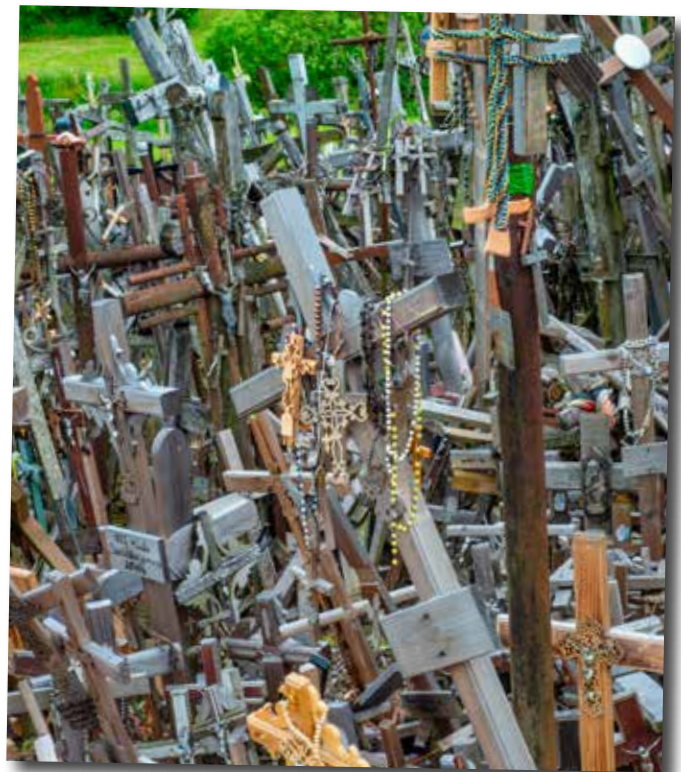
Lithuanians resisted the Communist government with peaceful protests. In 1989 around two million people from Lithuania and the neighboring countries of Estonia and Latvia formed a human chain over 350 miles long. They stood hand-in-hand and arm-in-arm, calmly protesting Communist rule. Many people in the line of protesters sang folk songs and patriotic songs that the Communists had declared to be illegal.

Finally in 1991, the Communist government lost control of Lithuania. Today Lithuanians worship God freely. The government doesn't try to stop them from putting up crosses anymore. Over 100,000 crosses now stand on the Hill of Crosses. Lithuanians see this place as a symbol of their faith in God and a reminder of the peaceful strength of their people.

**Finally, be strong in the Lord  
and in the strength of His might.  
Put on the full armor of God,  
so that you will be able to stand firm  
against the schemes of the devil.  
Ephesians 6:10-11**



Human chain in Lithuania in 1989



Hill of Crosses

## Activities

- *Activity assignments are not available for this preview, but will include instructions for completing the Atlas Workbook, Coloring Book, and Lesson Review; instructions for listening to the folk songs and reading the recommended literature and folk tales; and family activity ideas.*

## Lesson 38

# Norwegian Fjords



Cruise ship in Norway's Geiranger Fjord

A fjord (pronounced *fjord*) is a long, deep arm of the sea that juts inland. Steep mountainsides tower up on both sides of a fjord. The country of Norway has over 1,000 fjords. Many have waterfalls that tumble down their sides to the waters below. Farmers build brightly colored farmhouses along the fjords, some perched high on the mountains and others nestled in villages beside the water's edge. In springtime, fruit trees bring fresh color to the fjords when they burst into bloom. In summer, kayakers paddle along on the blue-green water. Cruise ships zigzag through the fjords in the fall when the trees are ablaze in red, orange, and yellow. In winter, brave skiers whiz down the snowy slopes and hikers explore Norway's icy glaciers. A glacier is a large mass of ice that moves along the ground very slowly.



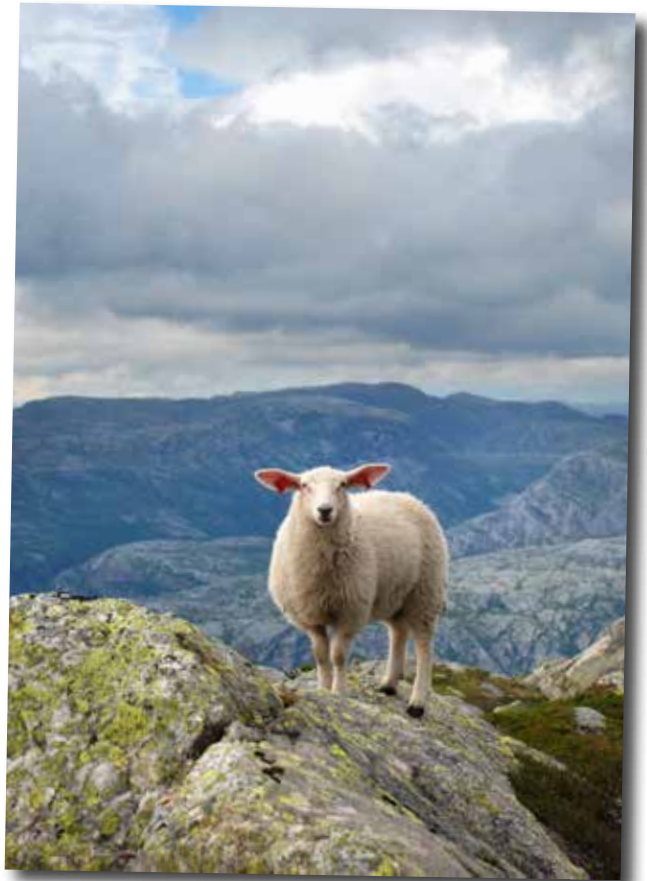
Skier in Norway

Norway is in the far north of Europe in a region known as Scandinavia. Only a very small portion of Norway's land is good for growing crops. Though corn and soybeans don't grow well on the country's rocky mountains, sheep do! Farmers take their sheep up into the mountains for the summer. The sheep can munch grass wherever they like, no matter who owns the land. In the fall, farmers gather their sheep and lead them back down the mountains to their winter homes.

The steep mountainsides of the fjords make traveling difficult. Some Norwegians once used rowboats to get to church, as seen in the painting below from 1907.



Rowing to church in 1907



Sheep among the fjords of Norway



It isn't easy to build a road along a fjord, but people have done it. The most popular road for tourists who visit the Norwegian fjords is *Trollstigen*. The name means "Troll's Road" in Norwegian. Workers began building this road in 1916. They weren't able to work on the road during the winter because of the weather, so it took them 20 years to finish it! The narrow, twisty road might be scary to drive, but the views are spectacular.

So why did people name the road Troll's Road? Norwegian folk tales are full of stories about ugly and dangerous mythical creatures called trolls. When you look down on the Trollstigen from above, you can imagine it being the perfect pathway for an enormous troll stomping up the mountain.



Troll Tongue



Troll crossing sign

According to Norwegian folk tales, trolls live among caves and rocks and only come out at night. Legend says a troll's biggest fear is the sun because the light of the sun turns a troll into stone. Just for fun, people have even put up troll crossing signs along the Trollstigen.

Even though the stories are fun, we know that the rock formations along the fjords of Norway aren't really trolls that turned into stone. Instead they are more of God's awesome creations that show His power and might.

**More than the sounds of many waters,  
than the mighty breakers of the sea,  
the Lord on high is mighty.**

**Psalm 93:4**



Troll Face

## Activities

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## Lesson 39

# Reindeer Farm

Some people think of reindeer as Christmas decorations or fun flying animals in books. For Katja Alajärvi, reindeer are a part of everyday life. Katja grew up in a reindeer-herding family, and the animals are almost like pets to her. She is a fourth-generation reindeer herder. Her children join in the work on the family's reindeer farm, just as Katja did when she was a child.

The Alajärvi family lives in Lapland. Lapland is a region that includes land in the countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Russia. The Alajärvis live in Finnish Lapland in Finland.

Katja feeding a reindeer





Birch trees in Finland

Each year in June, Katja; her husband, Jukka; and their children work together to mark the ears of the newborn reindeer calves. Each reindeer herding family has their own special earmark they use to identify their animals.

In the summer, the Alajärvi family's reindeer live in the forest and can mostly take care of themselves. The family stays busy during the summer months getting ready for winter. Winter in Lapland is long and cold. The reindeer need a lot of nourishment to make it through. During the summer, the Alajärvi family cuts hay and collects birch branches so the reindeer will have enough to eat during the snowy months. They also gather lichen. Lichen is a combination of fungus and algae that reindeer find quite delicious.



Lichen growing in Finland



The reindeer continue to live in the forest until December when they come back to the farm. On the coldest winter mornings, even if it is 38 degrees (Fahrenheit) below zero, the Alajärvis must go outside and take care of their animals. They can't decide that it's just too cold! They use snowmobiles to get around on their farm and to feed their herd of about 300 reindeer. They make sure the fences are in good condition and make any repairs that are needed. Many nights the family can see the northern lights dancing in the sky above their farm.

It takes a lot of hard work to be a reindeer herder, but Katja loves it. She said, "For me the best moments are when the reindeer start to trust us again after coming home from the forest in December. They wait for us by the gate every morning, and it feels almost like they say good morning. Some of the reindeer will become very friendly, and they let me touch them, and they like it. Springtime in May is a very exciting time when the babies are born. There are always hundreds of babies, and they are so sweet and small, and I could just watch them the whole day. Reindeer are half-wild animals, so winning their trust is really something."



The Alajärvi family invites people from all over the world to visit their farm in the wintertime. Guests to Reindeer Farm Porohaka enjoy snowmobile rides and helping to feed the reindeer. Sometimes they get to hop on a sleigh pulled by reindeer. They enjoy a traditional Finnish meal in the family's home. If the weather is right, they can try some ice fishing, which is fishing through a hole in the ice. Some guests enjoy sledding, cross-country skiing through the woods, or learning how to walk with snowshoes.

“Reindeer herding is a very old tradition here in Lapland,” Katja said. “We have learned everything from our ancestors, and we really are very thankful that we have this opportunity to continue their work.”

**Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.  
Praise the Lord!  
Psalm 150:6**



Northern lights over Finland

## Activities

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# Family Activity: Make Wooden Crosses

Thousands of crosses stand on the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania. Have everyone in your family make a small wooden cross and display them together at your house.

## Supplies:

- twigs or large craft sticks
- twine
- acrylic paint or kids washable craft paint (if you are using craft sticks)
- paintbrushes (if you are using craft sticks)
- scissors

## Directions:

1. If you are using craft sticks, paint them the colors of your choice. Use acrylic paint if you will be putting your cross outside. Let the paint dry completely.
2. Cut a length of twine about 12”.
3. Arrange two sticks in the shape of a cross. Hold the sticks firmly together while you use the twine to wrap them securely in an X shape where they meet. Tie the ends of the twine together tightly and trim.
4. Place the crosses together in a potted plant, in a flower bed, or around a tree.
5. Talk about what the crosses mean to you.

