



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 5 SLAVES IN EGYPT

### SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

The Israelites, after settling in Egypt during a famine in Palestine (in Joseph's time), thrive and become numerous in population. Fearful of the growing numbers of these people, the Pharaoh enslaves them and treats them harshly, then orders the Hebrew newborn babies to be killed in order to reduce their population.

Moses is born under these conditions but is spared. He grows up in the Pharaoh's household as an Egyptian, then is called by God—who appears in a burning bush—to save the Israelites and lead them to freedom.

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Oppression
- Empathy
- Justice

### WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

#### **In the Bible**

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

**Exodus 1:1–7:13**

#### **In Our Sunday Lectionary**

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year B: Trinity Sunday

Year C: Third Sunday in Lent

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## WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Today's story, Slaves in Egypt, is a difficult story to fit into one lesson, but if possible, it should be told all at one time in order for the full power of the story to be felt. This story is actually only half of the Moses story. The second part will be told in the next lesson.

Today's story begins when the people are forced into slave labor by Ramses II for his vast building projects. Moses is born during this period. The story ends when Pharaoh utterly refuses to listen to Moses and his brother Aaron. "Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them" (Exodus 7:13). Without God's intervention, through Moses, the situation is hopeless. Pharaoh has all of the power; the Israelites are slaves and are helpless.

But God prepares to redeem Israel, through Moses. Here God fights Israel's enemy—the Pharaoh of Egypt—to save the people of Israel and eventually to bring them to their own land. In the process, the people become a nation, God's people, a "holy people," with their own identity. Their lives will become focused on worshiping God. This experience of being slaves in Egypt is the beginning of that process.

We can draw much solace in a story of how God comes to help us even in our darkest times and hardest struggles. When things seem hopeless, God is still watching over us. God will save us, as God saved the Israelites. But as with the Israelites, God saves us in God's way, in God's time, not in ours. It is through constant prayer that we can grow in faith and trust in God during these tough times. And so, sometimes, our times of greatest difficulties are those times when God is forging us into "God's people."

These times may also be times of great spiritual growth. The Israelites learned the meaning of

empathy from their experience as aliens in Egypt. They learned what it is like to be an alien and thus how to have compassion for aliens that may someday come among them. As we will hear over a dozen times in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, God uses this hardship in Egypt to remind the people, "Remember to love the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

So in today's story, we learn again that God stays with us, no matter what.



## THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

We also can say that we are slaves to sin, as the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians.

But, as Anglicans, we are a practical people. We recognize that slavery and bondage is not just spiritual and symbolic, though it is that. We know that real slavery and bondage is still around, that people are still suffering its pain. The African-American experience in the United States, too recent a memory to be forgotten, is an example. Though no longer literally slaves, African-Americans still suffer from oppression and prejudice that offends the righteousness of God.

The Episcopal Church has always been committed to the ideals of social justice as a natural outgrowth of faith in God through Jesus Christ. Therefore we see this story of Slaves in Egypt not only as a story of the past, but a memory of the recent past and a reminder of oppression in the present.

In our Baptismal Covenant, we are asked, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" And we respond with a loud, "I will, with God's help."

Our prayers for justice, for the social order, for the human family and for peace for all remind us that we are to side with the oppressed of this world, as God sides with the poor and the oppressed. Look at our Prayer Book prayers on pages 814-835 to see how

integral to our faith is the injunction to free all who are enslaved.



## GATHERING

### Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



## PRAYER

### Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- large pillar candle or large Christ candle
- matches
- cross

After all group members have had a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. Ask one of the members to light a pillar candle while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read a brief prayer, such as:

- Almighty God, who has created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our

communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

—*Book of Common Prayer, p. 209*



## TELLING THE STORY

### Set the Scene:

As group members enter the room, have the hymn, “Go Down Moses” (#648 in *The Hymnal 1982*, New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1985) playing in the background. Once they’ve had a chance to settle in, ask if anyone has ever heard this hymn and what story it tells.

Read today’s story aloud from a Bible or tell it in your own words.

You’ll find ideas for bringing the story to life for the group on pages 2-3 under Storytelling Enhancements in the Appendix, also found on the website.

This is a very important story in our history of salvation and God’s presence with us. It needs to be told slowly and clearly, but at this time you do not need to explain or discuss it. Let the group hear the story without analyzing it for them or asking them to explore its meaning. For now, we just want them to absorb the story in their heads and hearts and to remember its power. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.





## WEAVING OUR FAITH

### Lesson Box

#### Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's scribe
- pen or pencil
- file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as scribe. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- How do you feel about the way the Israelites were treated?
- What would justice "look" like for these people?
- How can we know that a message is from God?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the scribe to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the group members' own words.

- What are some ways (big or small) that we can stand up to injustice?



### CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or

back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Dear Lord, Thank you for your gifts of redemption, mercy, and compassion. Be with us as we share these gifts with those we love that they may, too, know of your glory. This we ask in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

End the lesson with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The youth respond:

- And also with you.



## Weaving God's Beloved

### Community

Enslavement has no part in God's Beloved Community.

Unfortunately, our slave past still haunts and harms our society, and there are many examples: big and little forms of discrimination and prejudice, unjust laws, unequal funding for mostly Black communities, even environmental racism.

How we respond to the injustice is what is important. Just as God called Moses to free to Israelites, God calls us to stand up against injustice and bring about community where all are heard and loved and cared for.

- What are some examples of discrimination in the world?



# Weaving God's Promises

## A PRAYER FOR JUSTICE

Group members write a prayer for peace and justice, using three prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer* as guides.

### Materials:

copies of the following prayers:

- *For the Human Family*, BCP p. 815, #3
- *For Social Justice*, BCP p. 823, #27
- *For the Oppressed*, BCP p. 826, #36

pads or sheets of paper

pens and pencils

easel

sheet of poster board

large marker

### Preparation:

Make enough copies of the three prayers listed above so that each group member has one. Set up the easel with a large pad of paper or stiff poster board or tape the poster board to the wall.

### Directions:

1. Ask volunteers to read each of the prayers aloud, preferably more than once. Ask the group:
  - What are these prayers about?
  - What words or ideas do they have in common?
  - Look at the way each prayer is written. How is it organized?
2. Record participants' answers on the poster board. Then, tell them that, as a group, they will write their own prayer for peace and justice using the suggested format below:
  - First address God: O Lord, Almighty God, Heavenly Father, etc.
  - Second, mention one of God's roles: "...who has filled the world with beauty;" "...who stands by our side through all trouble;" etc.
  - Third, ask God to do or help with something: oppression, unrest, war, injustice, etc.
  - Fourth, add the result you hope for, in other words, what will the world be like if God answers the prayer?: "...that all may know the joys of freedom and compassion...;" "...that we and our descendants may ever be protected by your love;" etc.
  - Fifth, add a closing: Offer praise and thanks to God at the end of the prayer.

### Close:

- Copy the final prayer neatly and ask that it be read at the next service for the entire congregation. Make sure to save a copy in the Lesson Box.



# Weaving God's Promises

## A WORLD OF HURT: A CLOSE LOOK AT OPPRESSED PEOPLES AROUND THE WORLD

Participants search for and learn about examples of oppression around the world and of the humanitarian efforts to relieve it.

### Materials:

computer with access to the Internet

recent copies of major newspapers or magazines such as: *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Week*, etc.

### Preparation:

Before the day of your lesson, log on to <http://www.witness.org>. This site archives films of human rights abuses across the world. For most, there is a small download fee. Some of the films are quite short (5 minutes); others are a bit longer. View your film of choice to make sure it is appropriate for the group.

Scan the magazine(s) or newspaper(s) for articles about oppressed populations. Make copies of the articles for the group.

### Directions:

1. Ask the group the following:
  - What does it mean to be oppressed?
  - How were the Israelites oppressed?
  - Are there people in our world today who face oppression? How so?
  - How does such treatment make you feel?
  - What is empathy?
2. Show a short film or two from the Witness website. Ask for feedback from the group. In all likelihood, you will not need to prompt their reactions.
3. Or distribute the copies of the articles and have group members scan them and read them aloud. Once again, ask for feedback/reactions.

### Close:

- Ask the group one final question:
  - If you could do one thing to help the oppressed group, what would you do?



# Weaving God's Promises

## A MEETING OF THE MINDS: RAMSES II AND MOSES

Participants produce a talk show, complete with moderator, for the purpose of asking questions of Moses and Ramses II.

### Materials:

- talk show “set”
- microphone (or reasonable facsimile)
- pads of paper
- pens and pencils
- optional:* costumes for *Moses* and *Ramses II*
- optional:* cell phone camera and monitor/TV for playback

### Preparation:

Provide a brief outline of the day's story, including key words or phrases. The following are suggestions:

- Moses is born, then hidden in a basket.
- Pharaoh's daughter rescues Moses.
- Israelites are forced to labor.
- Moses is a shepherd in the wilderness.
- Moses meets with God at the burning bush.
- God says, “I AM has sent me to you.”
- Moses' staff turns into a snake.
- Pharaoh refuses Moses' request.

### Directions:

1. Ask volunteers to take the roles of *Moses*, *Ramses II*, and the *moderator*.
2. As a group, decide on five to 10 questions you'd like to ask *Moses* and *Ramses II*.
3. Have the actors prepare for their roles, donning costumes if desired.
4. Explain that the purpose of this activity is not only to have some fun but also to explore the minds of Moses and Ramses II.
5. Take some time to have a short rehearsal, and remind the actors that they must answer questions in character.



6. When ready, start the show, recording it if desired. The *moderator* asks the first few questions; members of the audience (other group members) ask the remaining questions.

**Close:**

- Play back the recording and ask for feedback. Make sure to ask such questions as:
  - What did we learn about Moses and Ramses II from this interview?
- What else would you like to ask them?

**Note:** You may wish to spread this activity over two or more sessions.



# Weaving God's Promises

## BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE: SCULPTURE AND PAINTING—PART 1

Group members sculpt replicas of some of structures built during the reign of Ramses II.

*and/or*

Group members begin a large mural depicting the story of the Israelites in Egypt.

### **Materials:**

clay  
plastic mats (for working with the clay)  
sturdy plastic knives  
rulers  
large sheets of art paper  
large sheets of plastic  
tempera paints, assorted colors  
markers, assorted colors  
paint brushes and pencils  
erasers  
containers with water for cleaning brushes  
masking tape  
glue  
sand, dried grasses, tissue paper and miscellaneous items to add interest and depth  
photos of structures from the reign of Ramses II (These can be found in books on Egyptian history as well as online.)

### **Preparation:**

Place a large sheet or art paper on a table or on the floor. Be sure to place it on the plastic to avoid damage to the surface below.

### **Directions:**

1. Ask group members to choose an art activity. Let them know that they will continue working on the activity into the next week (and perhaps beyond, depending on the scope of the projects they start in this lesson).
2. Sculptors will select one ancient structure to replicate.

3. Artists need to first decide which events will be depicted in the mural. Before they begin the mural, tell them to sketch the event outlines in pencil on the art paper, making sure they are in chronological order. Once the sketches are done, they may begin painting.

**Close:**

- Clean brushes and put all art materials away.
- Do not roll up the mural. Carefully store the artwork in a safe location.
- Be sure to include a label with the artist's name with each piece.



# Weaving God's Promises

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY: A TIMELINE

Group members create a timeline of important events spanning the Israelites' time as slaves in Egypt to their arrival in the Promised Land. If they choose, they may continue to add events as the year progresses.

### Materials:

- roll of heavy white paper, 10"-12" wide
- masking tape or poster putty
- scissors
- markers, assorted colors and thickness
- pens and pencils
- optional:* computer with internet access
- optional:* step stool or small ladder
- optional:* copies of the Sample Timeline (p. 13)

### Preparation:

Keeping in mind that Ramses II ruled from 1279–1212 B.C., make a list of important events that took place in the day's lesson. Post this list on the wall in the meeting space. If possible, include approximate dates with the events.

Or follow the directions below.

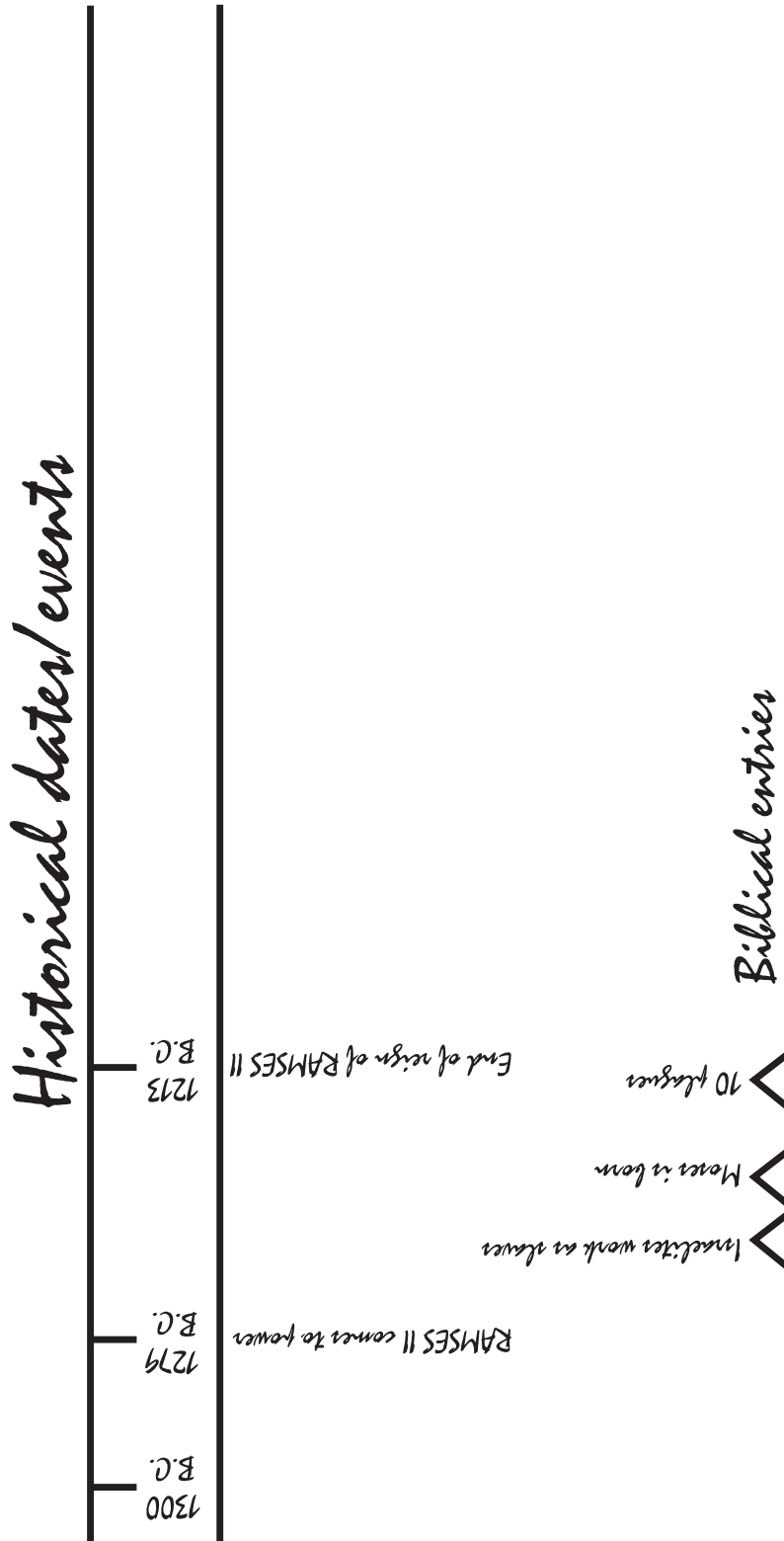
### Directions:

1. As you read the day's story, pause for the most important events (the Israelites settle in Egypt; their numbers increase; they are enslaved by the Pharaoh; the Pharaoh orders the newborns killed; Moses is born; he is rescued; etc.).
2. Ask one or more of the participants to jot down each of these events on a sheet of paper.
3. At the end of the story, explain that they will be putting together a timeline of events from this and the next story.
4. Tell the group members to cut strips of the white paper 12" x 2" each. Each event will be written on a separate slip of paper. If they choose, the group members may include a small drawing to illustrate the event.
5. Use one color for an event that refers to the Pharaoh, one color for the Israelites, one for Moses, one for God, etc.

### Close:

- Carefully roll up the timeline and store it in a safe location for the following week.

# Sample Timeline





# Weaving God's Promises

## THE PRINCE OF EGYPT: AN ANIMATED TELLING OF THE STORY OF MOSES

In lieu of the other activities outlined after this lesson, you might consider showing the first half of the animated movie, *The Prince of Egypt* (Glendale, CA: DreamWorks Animation SKG, 1998).

Plan on completing the movie after the next lesson.

Once you've finished, ask the group members how well the movie did in representing the stories they've heard.