



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 7 *TROUBLES IN THE WILDERNESS*

This story may be divided into several lessons. The story has four parts: the gift of manna, the Ten Commandments, the golden calf and the people in the wilderness.

### **SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY**

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After crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel head toward the Promised Land, going through the Middle Eastern wilderness. There is much grumbling among the people.

The people eventually stop at Mount Sinai, where Moses goes up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from the Lord God. When he descends from the mountain, he finds the people worshipping a golden calf, which they had made themselves. Angry, Moses breaks the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Though God punishes the people for their unfaithfulness, God still leads them to the Promised Land.

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

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- God's gifts
- Idols
- Spiritual wilderness

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

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#### **In the Bible**

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

**Exodus 16-20, 32**

**Numbers 9:15-23, 11:1-15**

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

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

Year A: Third Sunday in Lent and Proper 6 (Sunday closest to June 15)

Year B: Third Sunday in Lent, The Day of Pentecost, Proper 13 (Sunday closest to August 3) and Proper 21 (Sunday closest to September 28)

Year C: The Day of Pentecost

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## WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

The wilderness of the Middle East is a tough place to be. The people grumble and complain about the road conditions—not enough food, not enough variety of food, a shortage of water, constant walking. They begin to remember Egypt fondly and with nostalgia. Distance makes the heart grow fonder! The Hebrews have forgotten that they were slaves in Egypt and they have forgotten how oppressed they were. They begin longing to return!

The high and low points of this journey in the wilderness happen at the same time. While Moses goes up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God, the people fashion an idol made of gold to worship. Imagine how Moses must have felt as he came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, which would turn the Hebrew people from slaves into God's holy people, and saw those people dancing around a god made from old Egyptian jewelry!

This sin against God reminds us of the sin against God by Adam and Eve. In both instances, the punishment is exile—exile from God's land and self-imposed exile from God through our own actions.

For this sin, the people would spend another generation without a home—so the first generation of apostates would not see the Promised Land. But notice that God does not leave us! God stays with us even when we abandon God!

Then there are the Ten Commandments. The youth can and should learn them by heart. These laws are actually based on a commandment from God that is first expressed in Deuteronomy, but which we know from Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your

neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.”

An important theme that runs through the story of our salvation is the theme of rebelliousness against God. God calls the people “a stiff-necked people”—constantly resisting trusting in God or following God's way. And God still stays with them, as God always stays with us when we go astray.



## THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

On Sundays in Lent, we begin the service of Holy Eucharist with the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) on page 350 in the Prayer Book, followed by a Penitential Order on page 351. This is a reminder that what Jesus called the greatest commandments—to love God and to love our neighbor—do not in any way supersede or make obsolete the Ten Commandments. As Christians and as Anglicans, we are still bound by the commandments that God gave us as a gift in the wilderness.



## GATHERING

### Check-In

Invite the 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 the 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 that reading in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets. In Jesus' name we pray. *Amen.*

— Deuteronomy 6:5



## TELLING THE STORY

### Set the Scene:

Display a copy of the Ten Commandments prominently in the meeting space. Offer the group plain bread (with honey for dipping) to eat.

Read today's story aloud from a Bible or tell the story 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.

Today's story has several parts:

- God provides manna and water when the people complain (Exodus 16–17)
- Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19)
- the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)
- the Golden Calf (Exodus 21)
- the cloud leading the Israelites (Numbers 9:15-23)
- the people grumbling (Numbers 11:1-15)

It is tempting to focus on only one of these stories, for example, on the giving of the Ten Commandments. But our point in the context of our whole year's lessons—the story of our salvation—is not so much the giving of the Law as it is the experience and the process of becoming God's people and of being carried by God. The Ten Commandments, the Golden Calf and all the rest of these stories fit into this grand story as one of God's gifts of love to us.

This story 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 the 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:

- What are the idols we create?
- What is our own personal wilderness?
- How does God lead us?

Once the class 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 participant's own words.



## Weaving God's Beloved

### Community

While our hope is that we can live in a world where all are treated fairly and have what they need to live a good life, sometimes we need help to make that happen. That is where the Ten Commandments come in to help God's people live in community together. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, there are many many more commandments than the 10 that Moses brought the the Israelites, but the goal was to help guide people into living in community together.

When Jesus came into the world, he explained that everything we need to know about how to be in community can be understood better with just two, to Love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

In our society today, we understand that laws are another way that are supposed to help us live in community, but not all of our laws are just.

- Are there any laws you think do not go along with Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as ourself?
- What are ways we can love our neighbors that might not have everything they need?



### 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 and straightforward, like this one:

- Thank you, Lord, for being our guide in our lives, for the gift of your Ten Commandments, for loving us. Please stay with us as we return to our homes and our families and friends, loving you and loving our neighbors as ourselves. We ask this 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 Promises

## GIFTS FROM GOD

Group members think about and list gifts from the grace of God that are present in various aspects of their lives.

### Materials:

- copies of the "Gifts from God" worksheet (p. 6), 1 per group member
- pens and pencils
- 9" x 12" envelope labeled Gifts from God

### Preparation:

Make copies of the "Gifts from God" worksheet (p. 6), one for each group member.

### Directions:

1. Ask group members what gifts the Israelites received from God along their journey. Tell them to think not only of tangible, physical gifts but others such as freedom, hope and safety. Explain that, in today's activity, they will be thinking of gifts they've received in their lives.
2. Distribute the worksheet and pens or pencils. Invite participants to fill in a different gift in each box. This activity may be challenging, but it will get their minds working.
3. Some group members may choose to work alone; others may decide to work in pairs.

### Close:

- Take a few minutes to have group members share their answers with the larger group.
- Collect the sheets and place them in the labeled envelope for safekeeping.

# GIFTS FROM GOD WORKSHEET

Fill in each box in the grid below with a different “gift” from God that is a part of your life, your world. The gift must begin with the letter in the box at the top of the grid. Also, it must be a type of gift named by the category at the left. Some examples have been provided for you.

Remember: Some of them may be gifts you can see and touch. Others may be gifts of character that make you who you are or what you feel. Stretch your imagination and have fun!

	G	R	A	C	E
Nature	Giraffe				
Family					
Food			Avocados		
Talent					
Spirit					Easygoing
Fun					



# Weaving God's Promises

## MANNA MUNCHIES

The youth group prepares and serves snacks for the congregation at coffee hour. The snacks will be wholesome treats that provide sustenance and strength.

**Note:** Some of these snacks contain peanuts. Do not serve if anyone has a peanut allergy.

### General Materials:

- 3 mixing bowls
- mixing spoons
- measuring spoons
- small paper cups
- platter
- plastic knives for spreading
- napkins
- spinach dip with flat bread

### Bread and Dip

#### Materials:

- 1 packet dry vegetable soup mix
- 16 oz. sour cream
- 1 10 oz. pkg. frozen spinach, thawed and drained
- 1 can sliced water chestnuts, drained and diced
- 1 lb. round loaf of pumpernickel bread

#### Directions:

1. In a bowl, mix together the soup mix, sour cream, spinach and water chestnuts.
2. Slice off the top of the bread and hollow out. Cut the bread you've removed into pieces for dipping.
3. Fill the hollow with the dip.
4. Place loaf on a platter and surround it with the chunks of pumpernickel and flat bread or pita slices.



## **Trail Crumbs**

### *Materials:*

- 2 cups chopped peanuts or walnuts
- ½ cup chopped dates
- ½ cups shredded coconut
- 1 cup sunflower seeds
- ½ cup chocolate chips

### *Directions:*

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl and then divide into cups.

## **Fruit and Nut Mix**

### *Materials:*

- ½ cup each dried pitted prunes, apricots, tropical fruit and banana chips
- ½ cup each unsalted cashews, almonds and walnuts (peanuts if no allergies)
- ¾ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground cloves

### *Directions:*

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl and then divide into cups.



# Weaving God's Promises

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS...PLUS ONE

Group members poll the congregation about what they think the “11th commandment” should be.

### Materials:

- survey cards
- pens and pencils
- copies of “The Ten Commandments...Plus One” sheet (p. 11), 1 per group member, preferably printed on card stock or other heavy paper
- poster board
- marker

### Preparation:

Make arrangements for a member of your group to announce this activity to the congregation at some point during a worship service.

Cut apart “The Ten Commandments...Plus One” sheets.

### Directions:

1. As people come into the church for the day's service, have group members hand out the cards with pens or pencils to everyone in attendance.
2. Then, at the appointed time during the service, tell your volunteer to announce the survey to the congregation. Be sure that the speaker explains that this activity is based on the lesson you've been studying.
3. At the end of the service, have your group members collect the cards and pencils as people exit the church.

**Note:** Sometime after the lesson, list the suggested commandments on poster board for display and review during your next meeting.

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS...PLUS ONE

As we all know, there are 10 Commandments.  
If you could write just one more, what would it be?

As we all know, there are 10 Commandments.  
If you could write just one more, what would it be?

As we all know, there are 10 Commandments.  
If you could write just one more, what would it be?

As we all know, there are 10 Commandments.  
If you could write just one more, what would it be?

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As we all know, there are 10 Commandments.  
If you could write just one more, what would it be?



# Weaving God's Promises

## WILDERNESS BEADS

Group members make necklaces or bracelets out of natural materials as reminders of the beauty and the hardships the Israelites encountered in the wilderness.

### Materials:

natural beads (made of wood, clay, stone, shell, bone, bamboo, seeds, etc.) in assorted colors and sizes

natural cording (made of hemp, leather, cotton, bola cord, etc.) in assorted colors and thickness

*optional*: assorted clasps

scissors

small bowls, one for each type of bead

small envelopes labeled with group members' names

### Preparation:

Place each type of bead into a separate bowl. Set up 2 or more beading stations so that small groups can easily access the necessary supplies for their craft.

If you need to order supplies, allow at least 2 weeks for delivery. There are many sites on the Internet for such products; among them are [www.firemountaingems.com](http://www.firemountaingems.com) and [www.beadsandpieces.com](http://www.beadsandpieces.com).

### Directions:

1. Participants will choose to make a bracelet or necklace from the natural materials provided. Tell them to measure their wrist or neck and cut a length of cord at least 12" longer than the measurement. If they plan on tying knots in the design, the cord will need to be longer.
2. Start by tying a double knot about 6" in the length of cording. Then, simply string beads of different sizes and shapes into a desired design. The easiest involves tying knots before and after the beads. This helps the beads to stay in place and provides more texture to the piece.
3. Finish the piece with a clasp or by tying the ends together.

### Close:

- Participants may wear the jewelry as they leave or may place it in their envelopes to take home.



# Weaving God's Promises

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

Group members rewrite the Ten Commandments in more modern terms so they say the same...but sound different.

### Materials:

- the Ten Commandments copied onto a large sheet of poster board or flipchart paper (see p. 14)
- large, blank sheet of poster board or flipchart paper
- large markers
- adhesive-backed magnetic sheets, cut into 4" x 6" pieces, 2 per group member
- fine point permanent markers
- scissors

### Directions:

1. Explain that, though the Ten Commandments are certainly still relevant today, the wording could be updated. First, review all of the commandments to make sure the youth understand their meanings.
2. Then, ask for suggestions as to how to make them sound more modern.
3. Write the “new and improved” commandments on the blank poster board or sheet of flipchart paper.
4. Once the group has reworked all Ten commandments, distribute two magnetic sheets to each participant and invite each to write their new commandments on their two magnets, 5 on each magnet. If they choose, they could cut the top of the magnet to look like the tablets Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai.

### Close:

- Group members may take the magnets home.
- Publish the group's Ten Commandments in the next bulletin or newsletter or on the church's website.

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
3. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work
5. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

—*Exodus 20:1-17*



# Weaving God's Promises

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY: A TIMELINE

Group members continue the 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.

Directions for making the timeline can be found on pages 12-13 in the Activities section of Lesson 5.

### **Close:**

- If possible, post the timeline on the wall.
- Add to it each week until the Israelites reach the Promised Land.