



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 8 **INTO THE PROMISED LAND**

This story is long but best told all at one time. If necessary, however, it may be divided into two lessons.

After the death of Moses at the edge of the Promised Land, Joshua becomes the new leader of the Israelites. They cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land and proceed to occupy the land. As their leader, Joshua sends spies to see how difficult this will be.

Rahab, a harlot living in the wall-fortified city of Jericho, aids the spies by hiding them and misdirecting those who are pursuing them. In the coming Battle of Jericho, Rahab is spared as the walls of the city come falling down.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Obedience
- Discernment
- Covenant

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Joshua 1-6, especially:

Joshua 2 (Rahab and the spies)

Joshua 6 (the Battle of Jericho)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

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

Year C: Fourth Sunday in Lent



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Finally, the Israelites cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land—Canaan, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” the land promised to Abraham, Sarah and their descendants.

Compared with the wilderness, it is indeed a paradise, full of grapes and other fruit along with lots of good land for harvesting food. But it is also already occupied—by the Canaanites and other tribes. The land of Canaan is not an empty land, free for the taking. The Israelites must take it by force and drive the other peoples out.

So begins the long dispute about who really owns this piece of land, a dispute which still goes on today. It is in today’s Bible passage that it says that God has given this land to the Israelites. The other people worship other gods, gods whose names you sometimes read or hear about in other Bible readings: Baal, Molech (the god of a religion that practiced child sacrifice) and others.

Joshua is Moses’ successor. Moses had angrily lashed out at God once in the wilderness and so would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. When the people get to the Jordan River, the edge of the Promised Land, Moses is shown the land on the other side; then he dies.

Joshua takes over and proves to be a loyal and worthy successor to Moses, faithful to the Lord and following God’s commandments. Notice how, in the story of the Battle of Jericho, Joshua obeys God’s strange commands for taking over and destroying the city. Would we obey—or scoff?

Note: If you are disturbed by the story of the mass destruction of peoples in the book of Joshua, here is another way to look at the actual circumstances of the conquest of Canaan. The Hebrews who settled

in Canaan were a free association of serfs fleeing from the stifling environment of the Canaanite city-states. United in rejecting the ancient system of human overlords, they insisted that no one was inherently better than any other—thus starting a democracy under God alone. Far from building their nation on the extermination of those outside their group, they welcomed into their confederation any people who shared their longing for a new society. Thus their society was inclusive, not exclusive (from *The Interpreter’s Commentary on the Bible*).



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Since their release from Egyptian slavery, God’s people have longed for the Promised Land, a land of abundance and plenty, where there is no more want or hunger and no more wandering in the vast wilderness of fear and uncertainty. They will be a people with an identity, God’s chosen people. In Deuteronomy, God says, “It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you . . . It was because the Lord loved you” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). In the Thanksgiving over the Water in the rite of Holy Baptism (*BCP*, p. 306), we give thanks to God for the gift of water and remember that God led the people through water out of bondage into “the land of promise.”

In these stories, the Israelites take the land by force. In today’s time, the Episcopal Church would not look so kindly at such free use of war. General Convention has repeatedly approved resolutions that state “war . . . is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.” There are no prayers in the Prayer Book that extol war, although thanksgiving and prayers are offered for those people who have chosen to fight for their country and its liberties, for example, the Prayer for Heroic Service on p. 839.

Episcopalians can relate more to Joshua's wars which lead toward prayers for peace. In the Prayer Book, the Prayers for the World (pp. 814-816) are prayers for peace and for justice, without which there is no peace.

Episcopalians can also relate to Joshua's openness to God's strange methods of guidance. Episcopalian ethos teaches that Christians do not know all the answers to tough theological questions, nor do they always have the right insights into God's plan for them. So Episcopalians tend to focus not so much on getting the right answers but on prayerfully discerning what path to take, accepting that many situations are ambiguous and unclear, and offering (and receiving) forgiveness when wrong. Thus after a person is baptized, the officiant prays that God give him or her "an inquiring and discerning heart" (BCP, p. 308) that is open to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit.



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 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 this prayer:

- As God said to Joshua, now let us pray, "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). *Amen.*

Carefully extinguish the candle.

TELLING THE STORY



Set the Scene:

As group members settle in to hear the story, ask them to remove their shoes, explaining that, as you read the story, they will hear this line from Joshua 5:11, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy."

Read today's story aloud from a Bible or tell the story in your own words. The story of the taking of Jericho is an exciting story. Youth enjoy hearing about Rahab, the Jericho woman who helped the Israelite spies, and how her life was then spared. They will also enjoy the way that the Israelites, circling the city, blowing horns and yelling, sent the walls of Jericho tumbling down.

Today's story is an important part of this year's story, the story of our salvation. It deserves a good telling. Even after we sinned and rebelled against God in the wilderness, God still gives us the Promised Land and still makes us God's people.



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:

- God commands Joshua to lead his people into battle. What do you think...would you obey or go against God's command?
- What does it mean to discern God's message?
- God keeps God's covenant with the Israelites by giving them the Promised Land. What is a covenant?

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 participants' own words.

- What are ways you can talk with your parents or teachers when you do not agree with a decision they have made?



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:

- Lord God, you told the Israelites that you are with them wherever they go. We know that you will be with us, too, wherever we go. Keep us ever mindful of your love and your presence so that we may see your works in every part of our lives and give you praise forever and ever. We ask this in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

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

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The youth respond:

- Thanks be to God!



Weaving God's Beloved Community

God's Beloved Community has no place for war or conquest of other people. In a world where war

happens, we can pray and work for peace. And we can promote the values of listening empathetically, working together, being open to compromises, and addressing inequity. We can also promote the values of respecting the dignity of every human being, as we promise in our Baptismal Covenant. These are ways of promoting peace by building the foundation for mutual respect with one another.

- How do show someone that you respect them even if you don't agree with them?



Weaving God's Promises

YOURS, MINE AND OURS: THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT

Participants hear and learn about the Middle-East conflict, one that has been going on since the time of the Israelites entering the Promised Land.

Materials:

- thank-you or other blank cards, with envelopes
- pens and pencils
- addresses of guests
- postage stamps

Preparation:

Part 1: Well before this session takes place, invite a knowledgeable speaker (or two) to visit your group to explain the origins of the conflict in the Middle East, the efforts that have been made to bring peace, and the outlook for the region in the future.

Part 2: Talk to the group about the conflict between the Israelites and the Canaanites. Some suggested questions are:

- How did the Israelites justify their actions against the Canaanites?
- The Hebrews who settled in Canaan were a free association of serfs fleeing from the stifling environment of the Canaanite city-states. United in rejecting the ancient system of human overlords, they insisted that no one was inherently better than any other—thus starting a democracy under God alone. Far from building their nation on the extermination of those outside their group, they welcomed into their confederation any people who shared their longing for a new society. Thus their society was inclusive, not exclusive (adapted from *The Interpreter's Commentary on the Bible*). What do you think of this interpretation?
- Was there room for negotiation or consensus so that both peoples could live together?

Directions:

1. Invite group members to write questions they'd like to ask the guest speaker(s).
2. After the speaker has given some background and history, tell the youth to ask their questions of the guest. Encourage them also to participate in the discussion and share their own feelings and opinions.

Close:

- Once the guest has left, tell the group to write brief thank you notes on index cards so that you may send them to your guest.

Note: For more information, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli%E2%80%93Palestinian_conflict



Weaving God's Promises

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN...

Participants play a game of Jenga to remind them of the wall of Jericho falling and to talk about the Israelites' and the Canaanites' claims to the city.

Materials:

Jenga® game(s)

Preparation:

If your education coordinator does not have a Jenga game in stock, ask them to purchase one at a local department or toy store, or order one online. The game is easily available and inexpensive.

You might also ask friends or neighbors if they have the game that you could borrow.

Directions:

1. Divide the group into two teams. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to use more than one game at the same time. Participants may play in pairs or as teams.
2. Designate one team the Israelites and the other the Canaanites.
3. One team member builds the form according to the game instructions. Then, once the tower is standing, each player takes a turn removing one piece—any piece—from the structure without it falling. (Follow the game directions).
4. For the purposes of this lesson, however, each time a piece is removed, the team member must give a reason why their people deserve of the land in question.
5. Invite the teams themselves to decide how to determine the game “winner.”

Close:

- Acknowledge that this lesson is sometimes hard to accept, especially considering God's calling people to war on others. Remind them, as it says earlier in today's lesson:

Episcopalian ethos teaches that Christians do not know all the answers to tough theological questions, nor do they always have the right insights into God's plan for them. So Episcopalians tend to focus not so much on getting the right answers but on prayerfully discerning what path to take, accepting that many situations are ambiguous and unclear, and offering (and receiving) forgiveness when wrong. Thus after a person is baptized, the officiant prays that God give him or her “an inquiring and discerning heart” (*BCP*, p. 308) that is open to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit.



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WHAT MAKES A GREAT TOWN?

God sent the Israelites on a long journey to the Promised Land, a place they were told was flowing with milk and honey. There, they would finally be free from want and exploitation and live their lives in peace. In this exercise, participants think about their hometown and will create their own “Top Ten List” of things that make it special.

Materials:

- paper
- pens and pencils
- poster board
- tape
- optional:* digital cameras and photos printers

Directions:

1. Pair up participants.
2. Invite each pair to come up with at least 10 things that make their hometown special. Keep in mind that some of the participants may come from other towns.
3. Give pairs 10-15 minutes for this task.
4. Once all pairs have finished their lists, ask them to share their answers with the entire group.
5. As pairs share, create a master Top Ten List of items pairs share in common.
6. Explain to the group that next week they will complete a similar exercise about their church.

Close:

- Collect the individual lists and the master list and store away for safekeeping.

Note: If possible, take the group for a ride around town (you may need additional drivers) to take photos of the town's special features. Then, they could make an “Our Town” bulletin board for all to enjoy.



Weaving God's Promises

WHERE IN THE WORLD: MAPPING THE JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Group members mark the significant places and events on the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, beginning with Abraham's leaving Ur for Haran and ending with the fall of Jericho.

Materials:

- large map showing Abraham's journey and the route of the Exodus (search online to either download or purchase, or check your local church-supply store; it's also possible your church already owns such a map)
- tape or tacks
- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- PostIts® or other adhesive note pads

Preparation:

Post the map of Abraham's journey and the route of the Exodus on a wall of the classroom.

Directions:

1. Remind group members that they have heard about the stories of Abraham, Sarah and his son Isaac; of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt; of the birth and leadership of Moses; of the Passover and Exodus. With this activity, they will be able to see where all of those important events occurred.
2. Distribute Bibles and make available the pens or pencils and adhesive notes.
3. Explain that you will together be looking up important place names in the Bible and mapping the crucial events that occurred in those places on the map posted on the wall.
5. One by one, share the events listed below. Supply the passages but not the event (in parentheses). See how many they can find on their own, then share the event/place as necessary. As each event is identified and verified, invite a volunteer to jot down a summary of the event on an adhesive note and place it in the correct spot on the map. *Event list, by biblical passage:*
 - Genesis 12:1-8 (Abraham from Ur to Haran to Shechem)
 - Genesis 15:2 (Damascus)
 - Genesis 15:7-17 (boundaries of the Promised Land)
 - Genesis 21:25-34 (Beer-sheba)
 - Exodus 1:22 (Moses is born)

- Exodus 7:8-13 (Moses and Aaron go to the Pharaoh)
- Exodus 7:14-12:29 (the 10 plagues)
- Exodus 12:37, 13:1-22 (pillar of fire)
- Exodus 14:15-30 (Crossing the Red Sea)
- Exodus 16:13-27 (manna)
- Exodus 20:1-17 (The 10 commandments)
- Exodus 32:1-6 (The Golden idol)
- Joshua 3:14-17 (Crossing the River Jordan)
- Joshua 6 (The Battle of Jericho)

Close:

- Leave the map posted in the meeting space or store it for future use.



Weaving God's Promises

PRAYERS AND BLESSINGS FOR THE TROOPS

Participants remember those who have battled for their lives and for their lands by making Blessing Books for troops currently serving in harm's way.

Materials:

heavy paper in assorted colors, such as index cards or card stock, cut into 3" x 6" strips
notepaper
markers, pens
stickers and other accessories for decorating
copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1 per group member
scissors
clasps, yarn, rings or other materials for binding the books
glue sticks, tape
hole punch

Preparation:

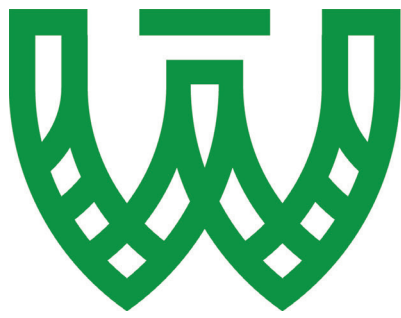
Contact an organization that regularly sends packages to overseas troops. Local veterans' groups will be able to help with this.

Directions:

1. Distribute copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*.
2. Explain to group members that they will be copying a few prayers of their own choosing to send to military troops (in the Prayer Book, refer to pages 69-71, 85-96, 199-210, etc).
3. In addition to prayers and blessings from the book, group members can write a prayer of their own and a personal message for the soldier.
4. Group members may write the prayers on the individual cards or type them on a computer, print them out, and glue them to the cards.
5. Create a cover, with a short title, for the book. Make sure the group members include their own names.
6. Punch a hole on the left end of each card.
7. Clasp or tie the cards together to form a small book.

Close:

- Gather the books and deliver or mail them to the appropriate organization for shipping.



Weaving God's Promises

“I’M TEMPTED” PICTONARY

Participants act out and draw common temptations and, as a group, classify them as “good” or “bad” temptations.

Materials:

- large easel
- large pad of paper with removable sheets
- markers
- “I’m Tempted Slips” (p. 13) cut apart or make up or add your own envelope or other container for slips

Preparation:

Divide the group into two teams.

Review basic Pictionary rules (drawings only; no words, spoken or written; no help from fellow team members; length of time for guessing).

Tell each team to decide who on the team will draw first. The team that guesses the most temptations correctly will be declared the winners.

Directions:

1. The first artist selects a slip of paper at random from an envelope or other container.
2. They have to draw a picture of the item on the board and entertain guesses from their team until the item is correctly identified.
3. Each team member takes a turn until all of the cards have been used or until each team member has drawn a picture.

Note: the more specific the item, the more challenging the task will be. (Suggestions for Temptations can be found on p. 13.)

Close:

- Ask students to classify the temptations drawn as “good” or “bad.” Ask them to explain their thinking.

I'M TEMPTED SLIPS

eating a hot fudge sundae	shoplifting
buying an expensive watch	reading your friend's diary
skipping school	bungee jumping
bringing home a free kitten/puppy	getting a tattoo
cheating on a test	tripping someone
dyeing your hair	