



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 11 GOD'S PEOPLE IN EXILE

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army destroys Jerusalem and captures Judah. Its people are carried away in exile to Babylon, the capital of Babylonia.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Alienation
- Faithlessness
- Repentance

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

2 Kings 24–25

In Our Sunday Lectionary

These stories are not told in church on any Sunday.



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Around Elijah's time, the nation of Israel, consisting of the 12 tribes of Jacob (the sons of Jacob and their descendants), fell apart. Shattered by inner conflicts and threats from outside aggressors, the nation was divided in 924 B.C. into two parts: Israel, made up of the 10 northern tribes (the Northern Kingdom), and Judah, made up of the two southern tribes (Southern Kingdom). Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judah fell in 587/586 B.C.

After the conquest, Assyria led away most of the Israelites (the Northern Kingdom). Those inhabitants were never heard from again. Popular tradition calls them the Lost Tribes of Israel.

By 625 B.C., the Assyrian star had faded and another star begins its rise to power: Babylonia. Under Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian army marches into Jerusalem and destroys it. Their capital city of Jerusalem and their Temple—the one place of worship—are destroyed. The people are scattered.

Only a remnant of Jerusalem remained. The land was laid to waste and became desolate. Not until 522 B.C., under Cyrus the Great of Persia, would the people be allowed to return to their homeland and to the home of their God. God's chosen people had lost their homeland.

The Exile (also called the Babylonian Captivity) was a time of some of the greatest writings of the Old Testament, especially the writings of the prophets. Amos, Hosea and Micah—whom we will learn about next year in Weaving Together the Family of God—called the people to worship God—not only externally but also in their hearts—by holding true to the justice and righteousness, compassion and mercy that are the essence of God's character.

Jeremiah foretold the exile and explained how Israel's people, themselves, were responsible through their sinful ways. But he also promised an end to the Exile and a new spirit for the people of God, admonishing them to remain faithful to God.

Ezekiel lived among the exiles and prepared them for their eventual return to Israel.

Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55) welcomed the arrival of King Cyrus; his arrival paved the way for the return of the exiles to Israel.

The Exile was a pivotal time in Israel's spiritual journey as a people and an important chapter in their—and our—story of salvation. People have wondered, where did we go wrong? How is God here with us? Why did God let this happen? You can read some of the Psalms of lamentations and sorrow—Psalms 44, 79 and especially 137—as songs of exile.

This exile reminds us of the other exiles that we have learned about: Adam and Eve, Cain. This is part of our story—the stories of exile in the Bible are really about our separation from God. Here it is good to remember that these separations are caused by us. God never abandons us. The physical separation—like the Israelites' forced separation from their Promised Land—is, for the biblical writer, only an outward expression of their inward separation from God. The people have abandoned God by worshipping other idols or failing to keep God's commandments or doing injustice to the poor.

The writers explain that Israel and Judah were guilty of infidelities to God so numerous and so terrible that destruction was the natural consequence. Therefore, it is we who separate from God, yet God still calls us to return to God. It is the role of the prophet to confront the people who have wandered away from God and to bring them back to God's ways.

Let us remember and be thankful for God's faithfulness to us. We often stray from faithful living—not always “loving God with all our hearts” or “loving our neighbor as ourselves.” We often let other values or things get in the way of our relationship with God. It may be when we decide to sleep late rather than go to church, or when we are too busy to pray regularly, or when we let our anger seethe rather than seek reconciliation. But God still waits for us and still seeks us.

Later, in Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep, we learn that God seeks us even when we wander away and lose track of God.

Again, God stays with us, no matter what.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

The story of exile is the story of sorrow, repentance and alienation from God. It may be that Episcopalians do not often see their relationship with exile

because, in general, the Anglican or Episcopal tradition is one that is comfortable with regular repentance and return to the Lord. It is recognized that exile from God's presence is a self-imposed exile caused by sinfulness, blindness or willfulness that keep us from doing God's will.

So the theme of repentance and return is pervasive in Anglican thought and worship life. For example, the Eucharistic Prayers all acknowledge that our sins alienate us from God and “again and again, you called us to return” (Eucharistic Prayer C, *BCP*, p. 370). The Church takes for granted that, even when we try, we will sin, so one promise asked of us in the Baptismal Covenant is: “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” (*BCP*, p. 304).



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:

- Thank you, Lord, for bringing us together to learn about your love for us. It is a blessing for us to know that, even when we stray from your word and Commandments, you are here with us, ready to welcome us back. Make us ever mindful of your divine presence and mercy. We pray this in Jesus' name. *Amen.*



Carefully extinguish the candle.

TELLING THE STORY

The readings in the Bible, 2 Kings 24-25, are an account of the end of the state of Judah, of the capture of Jerusalem and of the fall and captivity of Judah. Read this story from a Bible, or, tell the story in your own words.

Here is a summary of the events as told in 2 Kings:

- 2 Kings 24:1-7: The king of Judah, Jehoiakim, rebels against King Nebuchadnezzar after being his servant for three years. “The Lord sent against him” bands of enemies (other tribes) “to destroy it.” So Judah is overrun by enemies.
- 2 Kings 24:8-12: After Jehoiakim comes Jehoiachin, who is, according to the writer of 2 Kings, as evil as his father. That means that he does not worship God as God commanded. Nebuchadnezzar’s army besieges Jerusalem and takes Jehoiachin prisoner.
- 2 Kings 24:13-17: Jerusalem is captured. Nebuchadnezzar’s army destroys the Temple and all of the treasures in it. And he “carries away” all of the people and sends them to Babylon. He leaves the poorest people behind. (They later settle in Samaria, intermarry with foreigners and become known as Samaritans.)
- 2 Kings 24:18–25:21: Zedekiah follows Jehoiachin as king over Judah. Zedekiah is also evil. When he rebels against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar brings his army and besieges Jerusalem. The king Zedekiah flees by night, but is captured and taken to Babylon. Judah falls to Babylon and the people are taken away. (This passage repeats some of the earlier passage in 2 Kings 24:13-17.)

You may want to end this story with “Where is God in all of this?” However, you do not need to discuss the stories at this time. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.

Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today’s story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day’s lesson.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-3 in the Appendix where we’ve provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK’S SESSION

A large blue rectangular area containing 20 horizontal lines for writing activities for the week's session.



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 class scribe. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- Why were the people of Israel punished so harshly—with exile?
- Is it enough to just say, "I'm sorry?" Why or why not?

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.

etc.)? What if you couldn't use words to welcome them?



CLOSING PRAYER

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

back to their homes in the knowledge of God's love and protection. The prayer can be very simple and straightforward, such as this one:

- O merciful and loving God, you love us even when we stray away from you. Help us to keep your commandments to love you and to serve you, so that we may stay with you as you stay with us. We ask this in the name of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The participants respond:

- And also with you.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

War and conquest has sent the Israelites into exile, into a foreign nation. Mass migrations still

happen around the world. Some people flee from the violence; others are deported forcibly. War is devastating to lives.

A fundamental characteristic of God's Beloved Community would be welcoming a stranger as a friend, and above all respect for the dignity of all people.

- Have you ever been somewhere new where you didn't know anyone? How did it feel? Did anyone welcome you?
- How do you greet someone new in a space where you are really comfortable (home, school, church,



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A LONG WAY FROM HOME

Participants imagine being taken away from their homes and will write “postcards” to their loved ones who were left behind.

Materials:

- 4" x 6" index cards
- pens and pencils
- markers
- colored pencils

Preparation:

Read over psalms 44, 79 and 137 for possible use as references for this activity.

Directions:

1. After reading the stories, have a discussion about what it must have felt like to be taken away from the only home you ever knew and forced to live in another country.
2. Ask such questions as:
 - What would you miss most?
 - What would you take with you (other than basic necessities)?
 - How would you keep the memory of your home alive?
 - Which one prayer would give you strength?
3. Distribute cards and tell the group to imagine that they have only one chance to write a brief message about their new life. The note must include a message of hope.
4. Group members are encouraged to draw pictures of their new “home” on the front of the card.

Close:

- Collect the postcards and display them in the meeting space or let the youth take them home.



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SEARCHING FOR GOD'S PEOPLE IN EXILE

Group members search for the names of the 12 tribes of Israel as well as other important terms in a word-search puzzle.

Materials:

copies of the “The Lost Tribes of Israel” word search puzzle (p. 9), 1 per participant
pens or pencils

Preparation:

Make copies of the puzzle (p. 9), enough for the entire group.

Directions to participants:

1. Find all of the names and terms listed in the puzzle.
2. When you have finished, the remaining letters (in the first 8½ rows) spell out a question.

THE LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL

D	H	Z	S	N	W	H	E	R	N	E	H	A	R	R
O	E	E	I	O	J	U	D	A	H	P	R	A	E	E
G	S	B	M	L	T	E	P	H	E	E	Z	V	A	T
F	S	U	E	Y	Z	H	R	S	W	Z	I	E	S	B
O	A	L	O	B	T	E	O	U	E	R	L	E	S	E
E	N	U	N	A	D	J	D	N	S	I	L	A	Y	N
L	A	N	L	B	V	E	D	E	J	A	T	S	R	J
P	M	I	R	I	B	A	T	A	K	E	L	H	I	A
M	E	L	I	S	H	A	H	S	K	I	O	E	A	M
E	L	R	F	C	R	E	U	B	E	N	A	R	M	I
T	I	L	U	H	S	N	A	E	D	L	A	H	C	N
Y	X	B	P	M	I	K	A	I	O	H	E	J	B	G
K	E	U	I	S	S	A	C	H	A	R	E	J	G	A
N	E	T	M	L	I	P	A	S	S	O	V	E	R	D
T	W	E	L	V	E	V	E	P	H	R	A	I	M	M

ASHER

EUPHRATES RIVER

MANASSEH

ASSYRIA

EXILE

NAPHTALI

BABYLON

GAD

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

BENJAMIN

ISSACHAR

PASSOVER

CHALDEANS

ZEDEKIAH

REUBEN

DAN

JEHOIAKIM

SIMEON

ELIJAH

JERUSALEM

TEMPLE OF GOD

ELISHA

JOSEPH

TWELVE

EPHRAIM

JUDAH

ZEBULUN

Question: _____



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WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN? WEAVING GOD'S STORY INTO OURS

For groups that would rather have discussions than activities, these questions are great for going deeper and helping to weave God's story into their lives, in a way they can see. You can choose to do this out loud or through journals that are kept in the classroom.

Optional Materials:

- journals, 1 per participant (or, if not available, 5" x 8" index cards, 1 per participant)
- pens or pencils
- white board, poster board or large sheet of paper

Preparation:

In large letters, copy onto the board or paper the following Ask/Answer Statements:

- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- Is our life path planned, or do we have a say in what happens to us?
- Why is asking for forgiveness—or saying “I’m sorry”—sometimes so difficult?

Jumpstart group members' thinking for the upcoming activity by asking them how they felt about the tragedy that befell the people of Israel:

- Was God's punishment too severe?
- Shouldn't God have done more to protect God's “chosen people?”

Note: Group members might need help locating the day's reading or lesson in the Bible.

Directions:

1. *Optional:* distribute journals (or cards) and pens or pencils to group members.
2. Direct them to the questions/statements on the board.
3. *Optional:* Ask them to copy and respond to the statement in their journals.
4. Invite participants to share their answers.

Close:

- Collect the journals and store them for safekeeping.



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GOD'S EYES TO WATCH OVER US

Participants make this traditional Hispanic craft, a reminder that God is watching over us. As the Psalm says, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away... Your eyes beheld my unformed substance" (Psalm 139:1-2, 16a).

Materials:

various colors of yarn
craft sticks or natural sticks 6" long, 2 per participant
glue
scissors

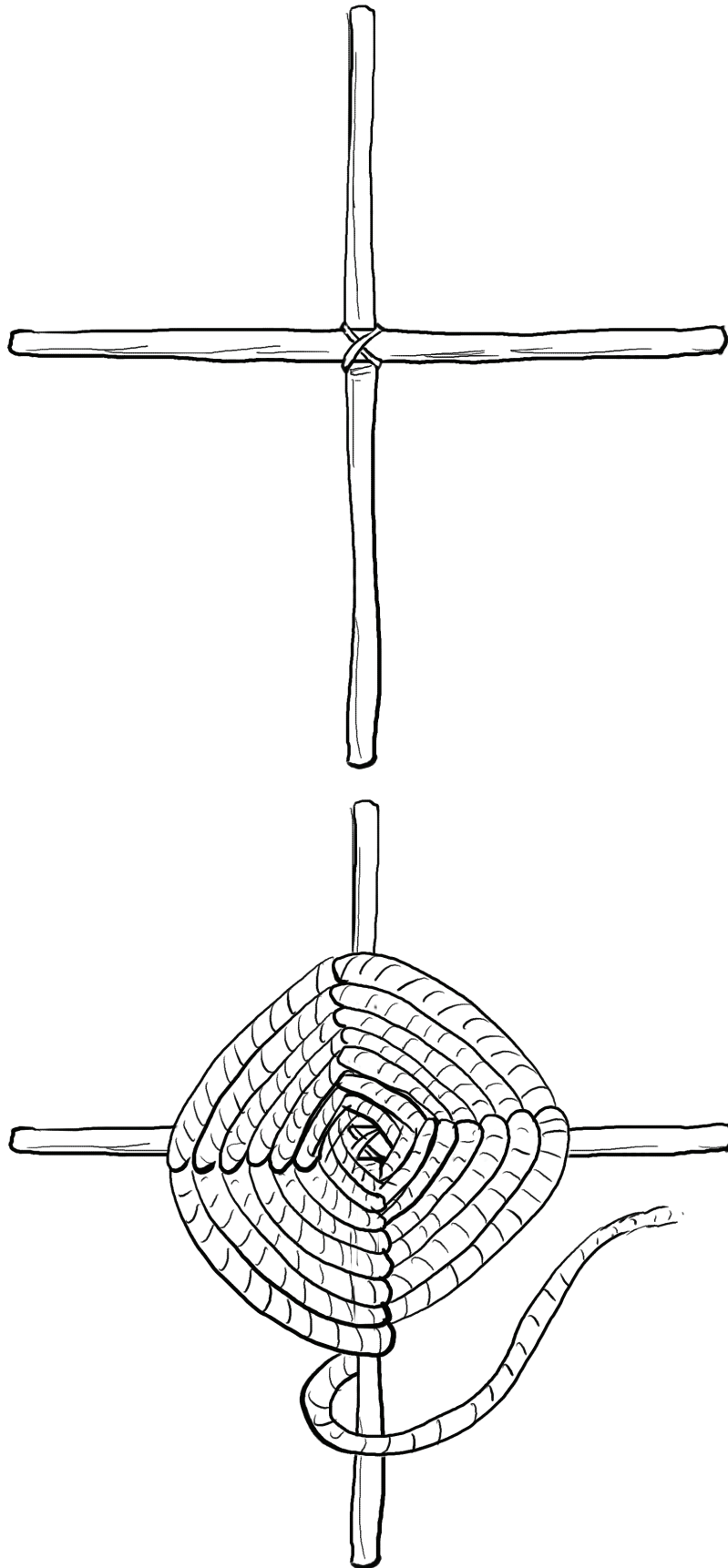
Directions:

Invite each of the youth to make a God's eye. Offer these Directions:

1. Hold two sticks together in a cross shape.
2. Wind the yarn diagonally around the intersection of the sticks, first one direction then the other, until you have the center of the sticks covered.
3. Then begin weaving. Wind the yarn around a stick with the yarn going behind the stick and back over the top, then behind the next stick and back over the top of that stick, all the way around the intersection.
4. When you have wound the yarn all the way around the sticks, push the yarn toward the center and tighten.
5. When you have done $\frac{1}{2}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " of weaving, you can cut the yarn and begin a new color. Tie the second piece of yarn to the end of the first to prevent unwinding.
6. When you have reached the end of the sticks, wrap the end of the yarn around the last stick an extra time, then cut and glue.

Variation:

Use three sticks for a different shape.





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A SAINT IS . . .

Robert Louis Stevenson is credited as having said, “A saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.” Today’s stories focused not only on the people’s exile to foreign lands, but also of their “inner separation” from God because of their faithlessness. Their sins, in part, led to their demise.

In this activity, the youth will define the words *saint* and *sinner* and share their definitions with the rest of the congregation.

Materials:

- 2 large sheets of poster board or other stiff paper
- large markers
- masking tape or poster putty

Directions:

1. Post the sheets of poster board on the wall. Write the word *Saint* at the top of one and the word *Sinner* at the top of the other.
2. Give each participant a marker (a different color for each, if possible).
3. Invite participants to write their own thoughts about what a saint is and what a sinner is on the respective posters. The definitions do not have to be based in religion but may be secular in orientation.
4. If you need to jumpstart group members’ thinking, ask such questions as:
 - Have you ever said to someone, “You’re a saint!” Why?
 - Is it possible to go through life without sinning?
 - Does being a saint mean having to perform a heroic act?
 - Does God forgive all sinners?
5. Once all participants have written their answers, take a few minutes to review them. Then, hang the posters in the church’s meeting room for the rest of the congregation to see.
6. During coffee hour, ask the youth to invite other members of the congregation to add their thoughts.

Close:

- Leave the posters up for another week; then, take them down and store them safely.
- At a later date, ask one of the group members to write a summary of the activity for the Lesson Box.