



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

LESSON 5 GOD FREES GOD'S PEOPLE

Summary of Today's Story

The finger of God “passes over” the specially marked doors of the Israelites while sending the tenth plague into the houses of the Egyptians, killing their firstborn sons. As a result, the Israelites are freed from slavery.

Under the leadership of Moses, whom God called to free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, the Israelites find themselves at the shores of the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army behind them. As they cry out in despair and panic, God commands Moses to lift his arms, and the sea parts on both sides.

The whole camp of the Israelites—hundreds of thousands of men, women and children—walk on dry land to the other side of the sea.

The Egyptian army thunders behind them, ready to overtake the people and to kill them. When the last person has crossed the Red Sea, Moses turns around and again lifts his arms. The sea closes in on the army and drowns them. The people are free.

Where You'll Find Today's Story

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Exodus 1 and 2

(The beginning of the story)

Exodus 12:1-42; 13:17-15:21

(The Passover and Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea)

In Children's Bibles

If you plan to use a children's Bible for storytelling, write the page numbers of today's story in the space below.

In Our Sunday Lectionary

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

Years A, B and C: Maundy Thursday

Year A: Easter Day (*BCP*), Proper 16

(*RCL*), Proper 18, Proper 19



Weaving Our Story with the Biblical Story

In this story of the exodus, the meaning of creation is seen in the light of redemption: *God's love is liberating.*

We see this liberating love in our own lives. Resentment and grudges enslave us; we know that what God calls us to—what God is—is compassionate love, mercy, forgiveness, humility.

And then let us expand the idea of liberating love into the social realm. The story of the Israelites' liberation from oppression has obvious resonance in our world today. Although there is no longer any legalized slavery, there is still enslavement and bondage—sometimes in the form of institutionalized support for such oppressions as poverty and racism. Such injustice is against God's will. A beloved community of God is a community of free persons.

But from this story of the exodus, we learn two things. First, we learn that God forges us through hardship. The Israelites in their long journey become a people, the People of God. They become strong and faithful and moral. And those qualities have lasted even to this day.

Second, we learn that in hardship, we can gain the gift of empathy with others. God reminds the Israelites—more than two dozen times in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus alone!—"You were slaves in the land of Egypt" and "I brought you out of bondage in Egypt." Eleven times, God in the Bible tells us, "You shall love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

God uses our hard times to help us understand the hard times of others, so that we can minister to them as God ministers to us.

The Passover

God says, "Remember, remember, remember!"

This command is embodied in the law "Remember to love the sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." And it is embodied in the Jewish calendar, in the observance of the Passover (Pesach). This festival, observed in March or April, commemorates the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, their liberation from slavery by God's hand.

The people sought to celebrate the meal as if they themselves had come out of Egypt—"out of bondage to freedom, from sorrows to gladness, and from mourning to festival day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption" (Pesach 10:5). Thus the Passover meal is eaten in haste, with participants dressed for flight—sandals on and staff in hand. Unleavened bread is eaten because of the haste with which the Israelites had to flee. There was no time for bread to rise.

Why is this Jewish feast important to us? What is its significance to Christians? The Passover is important because Christianity has a Jewish heritage that we must not forget. After all, Jesus himself was a faithful Palestinian Jew who lived and preached and ministered in that context.

Today we associate Passover with Holy Week because Jesus' last supper took place on that day or the day before. But today we will see the celebration on its own terms and with its own integrity. For the remembrance, story and celebration of liberation is for all of us. When the oppressed are liberated, all are free. When some are enslaved or oppressed, all are. So in this meal, the Jews shed tears for the Egyptians. Can we be so compassionate as to shed tears for the bondage of oppressors even as we work for liberation for the oppressed?



The Episcopal Thread

Today's story is such an important part of God's Story and our story as God's people, that we find references and echoes of the Exodus throughout our *Book of Common Prayer* and our Anglican tradition in general.

As Episcopalians, we affirm our connection to and our dependence on our Jewish heritage and the Hebrew Scripture, which we refer to as the Old Testament. We affirm the importance of the Hebrew tradition and the part that it played in the life and ministry of Jesus, a first-century Palestinian Jew. Thus the story of the Exodus, the definitive event in the life and identity of the Jewish people, is also essential to our faith. The New Testament does not supersede the Old Testament; the presence of the Son of God fulfills the covenant made between God and us in the Old Testament; it does not replace it. Therefore, we happily turn to Old Testament readings to give us insights into the love of God for the people of God.

We also take our essential communal spirituality and sense of identity as people of God from the forging of Israel to be God's people, through this searing experience of the Exodus and the subsequent giving of the Law by God at Mount Sinai.

This story, under the title "Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea," is the only reading at the Great Vigil of Easter that is a *required* reading. Of the lessons, the rubrics on page 288 of the *Book Common Prayer* say, "At least two of the...Lessons are read, of which one is always the Lesson from Exodus."

Look also in the Thanksgiving over the Water in our Rite of Holy Baptism, on page 306. As we give thanks to God for the gift of water, we note that "through it you led the children of Israel out of the bondage in Egypt into the land of promise."

In Morning Prayer, the Song of Moses (Canticle 8, p. 85), which Moses sings after the deliverance by God at the Red Sea, is one of the canticles which can be said between the biblical lessons. We say these canticles daily as part of our praise to God.

Our hymns also celebrate the deliverance at the Red Sea, especially in connection with our deliverance from death through Jesus' resurrection. We also sing of the paschal bloodshed, with Jesus as the Paschal Lamb in place of the paschal lamb of the Passover. See, for example, #174, "At the Lamb's high feast we sing," #187, "Through the Red Sea brought at last, Alleluia!" and #199, "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain." Can you find others?

Although we, as Christians, do not observe Passover, we share with the Jews the heritage that is contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament. Thus we share with the Jewish tradition the stories, the liturgical and sacramental orientation, and the themes of faithfulness, liberation, justice and God's power. All of these themes are contained in the celebration of the Passover.

Look for references to Passover in the Rite of Holy Eucharist, and especially in the Great Vigil of Easter, beginning on page 285: "For this is the Passover of the Lord...in which...we share in his victory over death."

On page 286, the deacon prays to God, "This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land," the Passover being the beginning of that great night of liberation.



Gathering

As the children enter the room, engage them in a simple activity that relates

to today's lesson. On pages 15-16, you'll find two Gathering activity handouts to use if you wish. Below are other suggestions.

Younger children may enjoy making finger puppets to use to help dramatize the story. See pages 21-22 in the Activity section at the end of this lesson.

For a simple craft item that can be made and then used during the storytelling time, have children make a blue ribbon stick that will serve as the waters of the Red Sea. Or have them make stick banners that illustrate different parts of the Exodus story. Instructions for ribbon sticks are found on page 24 at the end of this lesson.

Older children may visit with each other to renew their acquaintances and friendships.

After all the children have arrived and had a few minutes of activity or fellowship time, gather and say a simple opening prayer. You may use any prayer from the *Prayer Book* or from any book of prayers, make one up yourself, or use this one:

- Our heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come together today to worship you, to praise you, and to learn about your love for us. Guide us today as we learn from your word, let us see your light in each other, and bring us the joy of your life and love. We pray to you in the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. *Amen.*



Telling the Story

Read aloud today's story from a children's Bible, showing the pictures, tell the story in your own words, or

read from the version of the story we provide, found on pages 9-12.

There are many ways to tell this exciting story. Here are some suggestions:

Relating the Story

Read the story from a children's Bible, showing the pictures, or tell the story in your own words. Do not be afraid or embarrassed to use hand gestures, an expressive voice and facial expressions to bring out the excitement of the exodus. From the perspective of the average Israelite, it must have been a frightening time—and then a jubilant time.

First-Person Story

Try telling the story from the perspective of an Israelite child. Your words can be simple, the emotions will be very powerful for your children. Small children can easily enter into the story and also play-act the scenes as you tell them.

Interactive Story

If children made blue-ribbon sticks during Gathering time, have them hold the ribbons down, swaying gently, as you begin the story of the Israelites waiting at the Red Sea. When you begin telling about the parting of the sea, have half the children swirl their sticks to one side and the other half swirl their sticks to the other side. Then they can close their sticks in on the Egyptians at the end. If you wish, have a few children play the *Red Sea* with the sticks, while other children play the *Israelites* and the *Egyptians*.

If the children made "Praise the Lord!" Finger Puppets (see pp. 21-22), invite them to move their puppets as the story is told.

Campfire

Darken the room, set up a pretend “campfire” in the center, and gather the children around the campfire for an old-fashioned “Dark and Stormy Night” story as the Israelites might have heard the Exodus told and retold to them. Remember that these stories were told orally for many, many years before they were put to writing, so you are following an old tradition of storytelling.

We also suggest that you use a contemporary book about Passover, or use the information about this special day that is written for you at the end of this lesson.

After you have finished telling the story, pause for a few seconds, then begin your worship time. Do not try to analyze the story at this time. Let the power of the story itself—and God’s awesome presence in that story—become a part of the hearts of the children. Allow time for children to absorb the experience emotionally and spiritually before trying to help them explain what it means intellectually.

Alternative or Additional Readings:

Here are some books for children about the celebration of Passover:

- *The Four Questions*, Lynne Sharon Schwarz (NY: Puffin, 1994)
- *A Night of Questions* by Joy Levitt (ed.) (Jenkintown PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1994)
- *Why on This Night?* By Rahel Musleah (NY: Simon Pulse, 2000)
- *Sammy Spider’s First Passover* by Sylvia A. Rouss (Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben Pub, 1995)
- *My First Passover Board Book* by Clare Lister (ed.) (NY: DK Preschool, 2002)
- *On Passover* by Cathy Goldberg Fishman (Fullerton, CA: Aladdin, 2000)
- *Ask Another Question: The Story and Meaning of Passover*, by Mariam Chaikin (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1986)



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your room.

Materials:

- small table with a cloth to cover it
- 2 candles or 1 large Christ candle
- matches
- Bible
- cross
- optional:* flowers (real, artificial or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles.

Read a verse or two of today’s scripture from a Bible so that the children connect the story they heard with the Bible, which is the word of God. If working mainly with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses.

Suggestions for the reading:

For younger children: Exodus 14:21-22

For older children: Exodus 14:21-22, 26-29

Help the children become familiar with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the book of Exodus:
(*read the selected passage*).

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Invite prayers of thanks for God's work in our lives during the past week. Encourage them to see even in the smallest things how God is at work.
- Welcome any prayers of concern or petition for themselves or for others in need. At this time, also include a prayer for all those in our community, nation and world who are burdened by oppression and hatred and unjust treatment. Pray for the poor and for the rejected in our society.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special times.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

This is a lesson about Passover, which includes the *seder*, the meal that contains the story in the foods that are served. If you can, use this time to share a meal like the seder, or recreate the seder. See the Activities section for recipes and additional information on the seder.

As you begin your sharing time, say a simple grace, such as this traditional Jewish prayer:

- Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.
Amen.

Or pray this one to “the God who comes to us,” as God came to Moses and the Israelites:

- May God, who is always with us, now bless our meal and help us to see God's coming in every single moment of our lives. *Amen.*

Or:

- Lord God, bless this food we are about to receive. We pray that you will give food to those who are hungry for food, and give hunger for justice to those of us who have food. *Amen.*

Or share a favorite table grace from church camp or from home. If everybody knows the prayer, have all say it aloud together.

While sharing a snack, begin talking about the story that the children have just heard. Encourage children to share their reactions to the story of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery:

- How does it feel to be enslaved, and then to be liberated?
- What does it tell us about *God* that God frees and liberates God's people?

With older children, think about slavery and emancipation in this country. There are many people in the nineteenth century that worked tirelessly to free African-American slaves.

- One woman, Harriet Ross Tubman, who worked on the Underground Railroad, is called “Moses of her people.”
- More recently, we can look at people such as Martin Luther King Jr., who gave his life to bring true freedom and liberation to African Americans today, who still struggle under the bondage of institutional racism.

Also invite children's thinking about the Passover today. The Jewish Passover observance not only remembers the past but also relives it in the present, thus celebrating their continual liberation and the love of God in every Passover meal.

- Why do you think it is so important to remember this event?
- As Christians, what meal do we share during our worship services that both remembers a past meal and reenacts it in the present, that gives us life and union with God in its sharing?



Activities: Arts, Crafts, Games, Drama, etc.

After Sharing, begin an activity to supplement and enhance today's story. While the children are doing an activity, talk about the story so that they make the connection.

Suggested story-related activities are provided at the end of this lesson on pages 13-36.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 3-6 in the Appendix (also downloadable) 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.



THREADS Take-Home Paper

At the end of this lesson you will find a two-page take-home paper for families called *Threads*. *Threads* provides parents with a briefer version of the information on scripture and Episcopal faith found in the introduction to the lesson, as well as multiple suggestions for household activities and prayer. Parents can use *Threads* to continue each child's classroom experience at home throughout the week. We suggest duplicating and distributing these two pages to children and/or their parents at the end of each lesson.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK'S SESSION



Memorization

If you know the first question and the first sentence of the response

that is given at the Seder, you can invite children to learn it. Though not a Christian ritual, it is part of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Those words also impart well, in very few words, the theology of our relationship to and dependence on God.

Continue to encourage older intermediate children to learn the words of the Baptismal Covenant, pages 304-305 of the *Book of Common Prayer*, including the five questions and responses.

Suggestions for ways to help the children with their memorization can be found on page 15 in the Appendix (also downloadable).



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, 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:

- Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the love that you showed to your people as you set them free from slavery and gave them freedom to be your children as you intended for them to be. We pray that you will stay with us this week and guide us in all of our daily work and play, and help us to love and serve you better each day of our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

End with a dismissal used in church, such as:

- Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The children respond:

- Thanks be to God!



Weaving God's Beloved Community

Help children to weave our faith together as the community of God by telling the Bible story in their own words. Then they will be able

to incorporate the story and its lessons into their own lives. Give a brief summary of the story of the Exodus and what God taught us, or draw out the children's recall of the story by asking questions, such as:

- What happened today in our Bible story?
- What did God do for the Israelites?
- Where is God's love in this story?
- What feast is celebrated every year in remembrance of this event, and when?
- What do the Jews remember when they celebrate the Passover?