

DAY 4 – EXILE AND HOPE

Gathering Activity: Building (and Destroying) the City

If your program is only 4 days long, so that you skipped Day 3, this is an opportunity to build “the city” that is such an important image for our story. In that case, this should definitely be your gathering activity. If you did have a Day 3, this is a reinforcement opportunity.

NOTE: In order to incorporate the children’s work of building a city into the dramatization of the whole story that will occur on the final day, *before destroying the city* take photographs of their work. Later you will print them out and arrange them on a **trifold display board** for the last day.

Build a block city—carry it into opening worship, and demolish it.

Materials needed:

- **Wooden blocks**, or some other simple, abundant building material, such as corrugated-cardboard blocks, Duplo, etc., or a mixture of materials.
- **A large tray** or other means of making the block construction portable, so that it can be carried into the worship space.

If the children have already heard the story of Jerusalem, and built a large-scale City the day before, explain that this new project will be taken into opening worship, as we hear more stories about Jerusalem, its terrible destruction, and the hope that the prophets gave to the people. Remind them that the city had

protective walls, and held the king’s palace, the Temple, and the homes of many people. Talk about the differences between the people’s experience of desert wandering, of settling in the fruitful land, and of the city as the capital and a place of pilgrimage.

If you did not experience Day 3, introduce the City and invite the children to imagine it, as the heart of the land and the site of the Temple where the people came close to God, where they remembered all that God had done and all that God had promised, and offered gifts and renewed their promises to God.

NOTE: Physically demolishing this block city is a vivid punctuation of the story that imparts a great deal of emotional power. This is especially true if you are telling the story from a book rather than using BEULAH LAND.

Alternative Gathering Activity: Banner Project, continued

Continue with the banner project. If you have so far only done a “garden” banner, start a “city” banner to complement it. Or, as noted, if you have a large enrollment, “desert” and/or “mountain” banners can be made as well.



NOTE: Do not expect the children to display any concern for historical accuracy. Modern features such as airplanes and skyscrapers (as in the banner at LEFT) will likely turn up in their design, along with other features that you may not recognize but that the children will describe as “this is a swimming pool ... a park ... a trampoline.”

The “city” does not have to be ancient or Middle Eastern in order to evoke the spiritual power of people living together in an orderly and peaceful society.

On the other hand, if the word “city” evokes, for your children, congestion, pollution, and crime, then some conversation is in order about “how God wants us to live together in peace and take care of the land and water and air, whether we live close together in a city, or far apart and away from a city.”

Opening Story: BEULAH LAND Set 2, “Jerusalem” and The Dry Bones

Scriptural sources: 1 Kings 11 – 12; 2 Kings 24 – 25; Psalm 137; Ezekiel 37; Isaiah 40

This version of the “Jerusalem” story is adapted from the stand-alone “Jerusalem” script in Beulah Land Set 2.

The material in this script, drawn from the Psalms and the prophets, is at the heart of the salvation story and furnishes much of the imagery for the expression of our Christian hope in liturgy, hymnody, and the church’s year. The beauty of Jerusalem, the centrality of the Temple in the life of the people, the terrible shock of the city’s and the temple’s destruction, the bitterness of exile, the hope of renewal and return—all these images and themes provide for both Christians and Jews a crucial vocabulary for understanding our own life and journey and the ways of God in our story. This vocabulary overlays, deepens, and darkens the

Exodus vocabulary, and furnishes the primary framework of imagery for the season of Advent and the Christian understanding of the Messiah’s coming.
(BEULAH LAND manual)

The script (below, beginning on page 87,) provides alternate versions depending on whether Day 3 was included in your program.

Some suggested wondering questions

- I wonder why God did not give up on the people even after they kept doing what was wrong?
- I wonder whether the people believed the promises that the prophets made?
- I wonder if this story reminds you of any other stories?
- I wonder what was the “something new” that the people hoped for?

Song: “Come ye that love the Lord” [“Marching to Zion”] (LEVAS 2, #12)

Children love this robust marching song. The rather florid Victorian lyrics in the verses seem not to faze them at all. As they learn the verses, you can occasionally point out a “cool vocabulary word” and explain it. Start with just the chorus and the first stanza, and add more over the next two days, till by your closing celebration they are able to sing the whole hymn.




Contemplative Activity: Responding with Clay to Lament and Hope

Our society (even in church—indeed, *especially* in church) rarely gives children permission to lament. So much of what we write and do for children is all about insisting that they be happy and grateful. And yet, in their prayers, children often share sorrow and worry: “My grandfather who died.” “My grandmother who’s in the hospital.” “My baby cousin who never got born so we never got to meet him.” And lament is everywhere in scripture—where again and again it is followed by joy.

NOTE: If feasible, consider presenting this activity in the context of worship, at the point in your order of worship normally given to opportunities for intercessory prayer.

Work with clay as scripture texts of lament, hope, and joy are read aloud.

Materials needed:

- Modeling clay 
- Sturdy paper plates (plain white, or some other solid color) or squares of plain corrugated cardboard

Help the children to settle into a quiet state. Using the **sheets of scripture excerpts** beginning on page 100, read aloud while they work with clay. When most of them seem to have finished, invite any child who wishes to talk about their work, to do so.

NOTE: Two or more adult voices can share the reading—one for lament and one for hope.

Dramatic Play Activity: The Dry Bones

Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones simply begs to be acted out, either informally and improvisationally, or rehearsed with extra effects. This would be a good activity to capture on video.

You do not, of course, have to read the passage from an actual single-volume bound Bible, but this is a story that is clear and direct without any paraphrase or retelling, so the experience of hearing and seeing it read aloud from an actual ("grown-up") Bible is helpful for de-mystifying "the Bible" and connecting it to the story of God's people that the children have been experiencing all week via BEULAH LAND and/or a selection of children's Bibles.

Materials needed:

- **Bible**, preferably New Revised Standard Version, bookmarked at Ezekiel 37
- **Castanets** or a similar source of rattling, clattering noise

Choose an adult or teen with a good, clear reading voice, to read the passage (Ezekiel 37:1-14), and another leader or volunteer to model dramatic movements for the children to follow with their own improvised additions.

Begin with the leader and all the children lying on the floor or ground. All remain motionless, lying down, as the reader reads Ezekiel 37:1-6.

At the words in verse 7, "suddenly there was a noise, a rattling," an appointed person rattles the castanets, and the children begin getting up, slowly and jerkily, like animated skeletons.

At verse 8, "but there was no breath in them," they freeze in distorted positions.

At verse 9, "Come from the four winds, O breath," they straighten up, then wave their arms, bend and twist, then freeze in a graceful position, arms raised.

At verse 11, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely," they

drop their arms, stoop their shoulders, droop their heads in discouragement.



At the words in verse 12, "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel," all look up joyfully, run to the center of the space, and take each other's hands to circle in a ring.

This dramatization can be repeated as often as desired, with new readers taking over the reading and the castanets, and the children suggesting additional movements if they wish.

NOTE: You may also want to experiment with background music and/or lighting effects, or possibly with skull masks, dancers' scarves or ribbon streamers, or other props.

Indoor or Outdoor Activity: Prophets' Scrolls

Invite the children to "listen for God's plan for the people, and write it on a scroll."

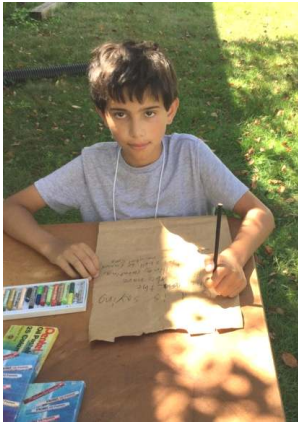
Materials needed

- **Brown paper grocery bags** (1/6 BL size)
- **¼" dowels** (wider if you can afford them)
- **Wood glue** or tacky glue
- **Crayons, markers, or oil pastels**

Ahead of time, prepare the grocery bags by cutting the bag down one side and trimming

off the bottom, to make a single long rectangle of brown paper, about 17 by 35 inches.

NOTE: If full-sized brown paper grocery bags are hard to find in your area, brown kraft paper is a good substitute and can be cut to any size. To get the "ancient" look, you can crumple it and then smooth it out.



After the children have recorded their prophecies on the paper, make them into scrolls. Cut lengths of dowel, about 14-16" long, and glue them to the top and bottom of the lengths of paper, to make scrolls. When the glue has dried (which may not be until the next day) roll them up around the dowels for an "authentic" look.

If you have time, encourage children to "prophesy" from their scrolls to each other!

NOTE: Non-readers can be encouraged to draw their "prophecies" and/or dictate words to an adult.

For additional suggested activities for this day, see below, page 99.

Closing Story: The Coming of Jesus (adapted from BEULAH LAND Set 1, "Christmas" and Set 2 "The Salvation Story")

Scriptural sources: Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-12

For many children, the coming of Jesus seems to have little connection with the heroic stories and adventures of the Hebrew scriptures. Hence the explicit connection, in this script, of the Messiah's coming with the repeated cycle of exile and return, of faithlessness and repentance; of God's faithful covenant promises.

Do not be afraid of repeating language and phrases—and indeed, whole episodes—from one story to another. Children positively enjoy this kind of repetition. It helps them to link stories, to place them in context, and to sift out the central, permanent structure and images from the multiplicity of story material.

(BEULAH LAND manual)

Some suggested wondering questions

- I wonder why the people kept waiting and hoping for God to do something new?
- I wonder what they thought God might do?
- I wonder what it feels like to see an angel?
- I wonder what would have happened if Mary had said "no" instead of "yes" to God?
- I wonder if this story reminds you of any other stories?

Song: "Come ye that love the Lord" ["Marching to Zion"] (LEVAS 2, #12)
OR "Soon and Very Soon" (LEVAS 2 #14)
OR "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (Hymnal 1982 #56)

If you have plenty of time for singing, and the children enjoy it, you may continue to add stanzas to "Marching to Zion" and also introduce one or the other of these hymns with more of an "Advent" flavor. If not, then stick to "Marching to Zion" so as to be able to sing it well at your closing celebration.

"Soon and Very Soon" is easily picked up by ear, and you may call out as many stanzas (from the book or improvised) as you like. As for "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," children readily learn the refrain; you can teach the first stanza (which mentions the Exile) and perhaps one more as well.

