

Day 3: Exile/Prophets

Key scriptures (disobedience, fall and exile):

- Psalm 137
- Isaiah 1:1-20; 2:5-22; 5:8-30; 24:1-13; 30:8-14; 37:21-29; 58:1-5; 59:1-15; 64:1-65:12
- Jeremiah 2:1-13; 4:11-31; 5:20-6:30; 8:18-9:22; 10:11-11:17; 14:13-18; 22:1-19; 25:1-14; 39:1-10
- Lamentations 1
- Amos 2:4-16; 5:1-24; 6:1-8; 8:4-14
- Micah 2:1-5; 3:5-12
- And so many more!!

Key scriptures (Prophets and return):

- Isaiah 40:1-11; 41:17-20; 49:8-23; 51:3-6, 9-11; 52:1-12; 54:1-14; 55:1-56:8; 58:6-12; 60-62 (all); 65:17-25; 66:10-13, 22-23
- Jeremiah 30:18-22; 31:1-14, 23-39, 36-44; 33:6-16
- Ezekiel 1-3 (all); 11:14-21; 36:22-37:14
- Amos 9:11-15
- Micah 4:1-8

Welcome: The fall of the city

Do you remember how the people stopped listening to God, and their beautiful city was attacked and destroyed?

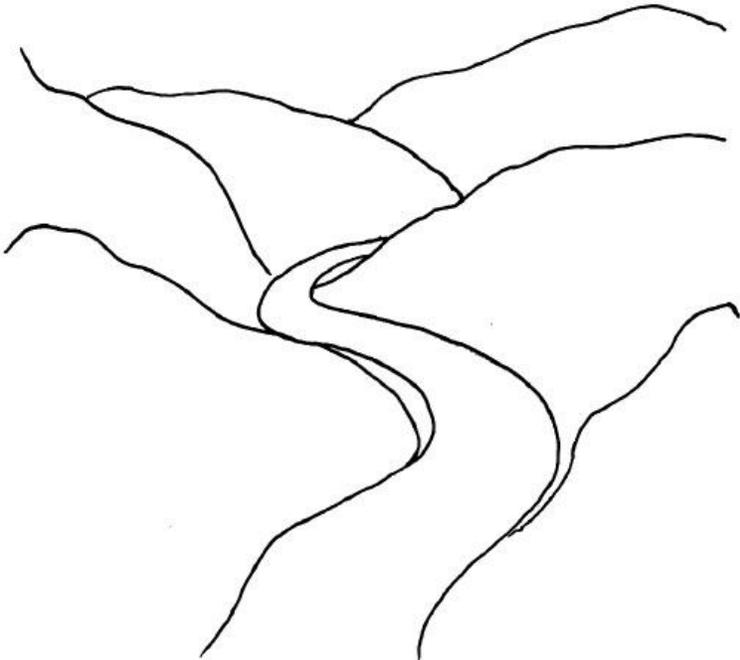
The enemies laid siege to the city, and the people had no food to eat.

Their enemies broke down the city's walls. They burned the King's beautiful palace, and they burned the Temple, the beautiful house of God. They killed some of the people, and the rest of them they put in chains and took away as slaves to a far country called Babylon.

In Babylon, the people sat down beside the river and cried out to God. "How can we sing the song of God in a strange land?" they cried. They thought of Jerusalem as a lovely young woman, who had been happy and healthy and clean, and now was lying in the dust, hungry and sick, with torn, dirty clothes, and crying.

They promised never to forget Jerusalem, the beautiful city. And they grew angry and wanted to do bad things to the people who had hurt them and destroyed their city.

But instead, God sent them prophets to give them a new message.



Story: The prophets

This is another story that is likely to be unfamiliar. If the children have a concept of prophets and prophecy at all, they probably think of prophets as people who can predict the future. You will want to be alert for opportunities to explain that prophets are those who tell the people God's plans, hopes, and desires for them.

If you have time remaining after going through the story script, open the Bible to some of the passages from Isaiah listed in the "Prophets and return" section of the key scriptures for the day, and just luxuriate in the glorious language. Prophetic language depends on repetition and reinforcement, so read some of the verses aloud and have the children repeat them back to you in a call-and-response.

Script: The prophets

As the people lived in exile, prophets arose among them. These were true prophets, who listened for God's voice and spoke God's word to the people. They had names like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

The prophets comforted the people. They reminded them that God had not forgotten them. They helped the people to understand why God had been angry for their disobedience, but they told them that God still loved them and would bring them back to their beautiful city.

They called on the people to care for each other, to help the poor and hungry, to welcome the stranger, and to care for God's creation.

They told the people that the beautiful daughter Zion, who was lying on the ground crying, would be lifted up and clothed in new, clean garments, and brought home to the city with joy and celebration.

They told the people that God would make a smooth road through the high mountains, and springs of water in the burning desert.

They told the people that Jerusalem would be built with gold and precious stones, and planted with gardens full of beautiful flowers and fragrant trees.

They told the people that when they returned to God's beautiful city, they would all be prophets, who would hear and speak the words of the Lord, and would love to spend time learning and teaching each other about God's laws.

They promised that the return to God's city would be so full of joy that it would be like a great wedding feast that goes on for ever, and they would all live happily ever after.

THE SCROLL OF THE PROPHET _____

Active time: Dry bones

Have the kids begin by lying on the floor. One volunteer reads Ezekiel 37:1-14 while another coaches the kids through the movements in response to it.

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: 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.

Lie on the floor and listen

Shake a noisemaker as the signal for the kids to begin getting up, slowly and jerkily, like animated skeletons.

Kids "freeze" because they have no breath!

Sway, wave their arms, imitate wind/breath

Come to a standing position with arms raised

Kneel, fold hands and extend them in supplication

Songs: “By the Waters” and “Come from the Four Winds”

These songs are particularly short and simple compared to the others the group is learning during this program, and so we offer not only the songs themselves but an activity to go with them. (This is not just to take up time, however; it is designed to allow the children to process and assimilate some of the feelings that the unfamiliar and challenging material on this day may bring up.)

Teach both “By the Waters” and “Come from the Four Winds” to the group. Unless your group is quite proficient at learning and singing by ear, teach “By the Waters” for one voice only, not as a round/canon.

Once the children have learned both songs, invite them to sit on the floor and quiet their bodies. Ask them to contribute the names of or words for things they have lost, are mourning for, or are worried for – “my grandma who died,” “my pet dog,” “my friend who’s sick”, and so on. (Try to boil each one down to a single word or name, for ease of fitting them to the music.) If you need to write the names down to keep track, do so.

Once you have a list, sing “By the Waters” as many times as you have names/words, substituting the names/words for the word “Zion” in the text. For example, if you are praying for a person or pet named Molly, you would sing:

By the waters, the waters of Babylon,

We lay down and wept, and wept, for thee, Molly;

We remember, we remember, we remember thee, Molly.

Once you have sung all the names on the list, repeat “By the Waters” one more time and at the line “We lay down”, have them physically lie down on the floor. Allow a moment of quiet. Then start singing “Come From the Four Winds” and get them up and dancing!

Yes, this activity partially recapitulates today’s game/active time – but that’s intentional. Kids thrive on repetition and reinforcement, and keeping things consistent helps to drive the message home.

Expansion suggestions

- Film about refugees or migrants
- Trip to a refugee facility
- Writing letters to political prisoners
- Collecting supplies for refugee/homeless ministry
- Film or lesson about modern-day prophets (e.g. Martin Luther King)
- Exploring music based on the prophetic texts (Handel, Messiah; Brahms, Requiem)