

LESSON 9

THE EXILE AND RETURN

LESSON NOTES

FOCUS: GOD'S PRESENCE WITH THE PEOPLE IN EXILE (2 KINGS 25; 2 CHRONICLES 36:13-23; EZRA; NEHEMIAH)

- **SACRED STORY**
- **CORE PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: SACRED STORY SHELVES**
- **PIECES: DESERT BOX, PEOPLE OF GOD, CHAIN, BLUE YARN, BLOCKS**
- **UNDERLAY: NONE**

BACKGROUND

Abraham and Sarah traveled away from their home, a land where people thought that gods were in each thing—such as in the sky, in a river or in a tree. The understanding that all of God might be everywhere sustained Abraham and Sarah as they finally made their way to Canaan, where Laughter (Isaac) was born. And God was there.

In this lesson, nearly the same arcing journey is taken by God's People, but this time in the opposite direction. Even though this journey is forced onto God's People, the same astounding discovery is made. God was not just in one place, in the temple in Jerusalem. God was also in a foreign and strange land. God's presence is not here or there, but everywhere, waiting. To be found. To find us.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

Use the desert box for this lesson. Locate the tray with material for this lesson on the top shelf of the sacred story shelves, to the right of the Ark and the Temple as you face the shelves. The most important item is a large chain, long enough to stretch from one side of the desert box to the other. Keep the chain in its own basket on the tray so the children can see it and wonder about it as they look along the shelves.

The tray also holds two pieces of blue yarn for the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, a block of wood to represent Haran and a larger block of wood to represent the city

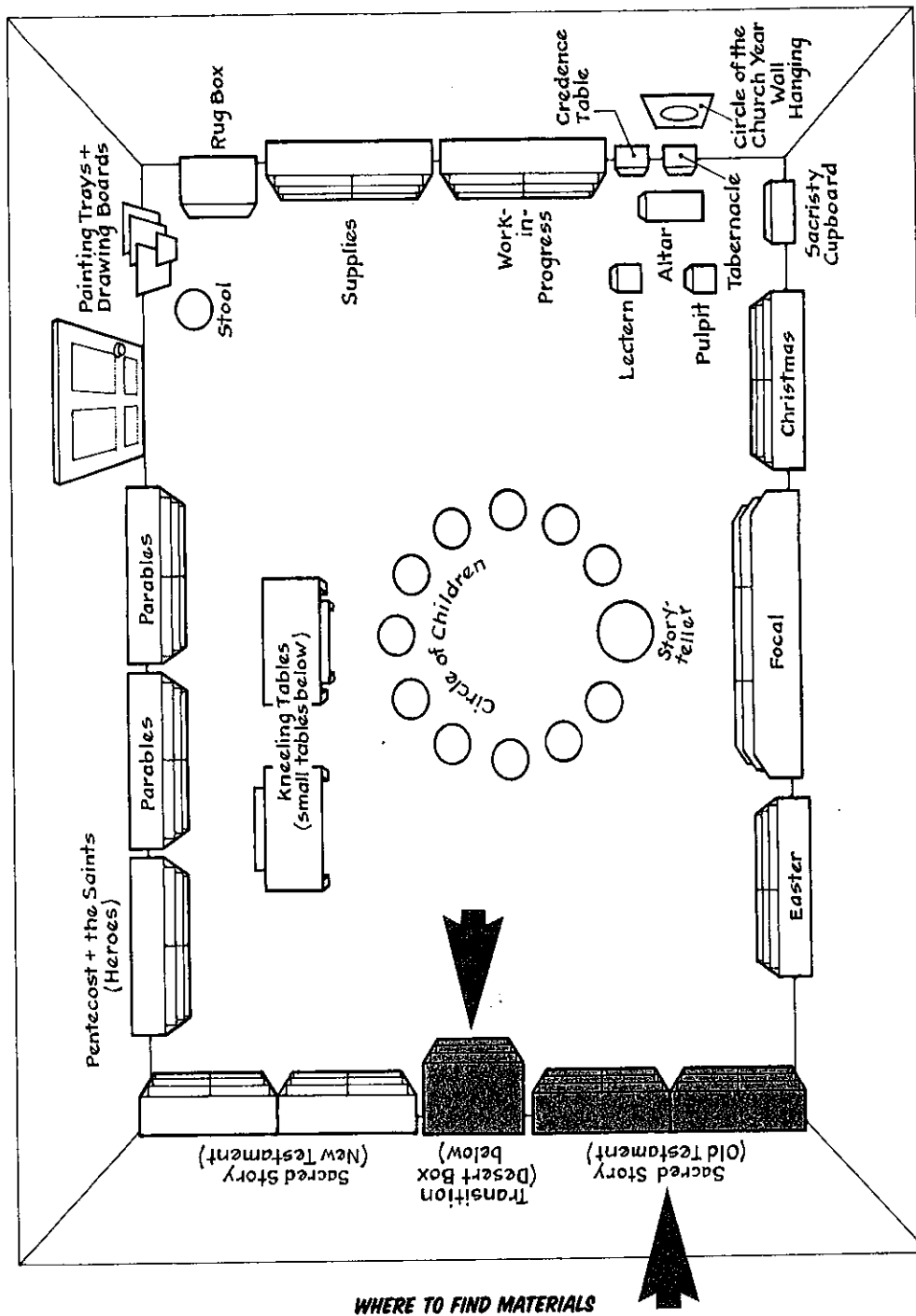
of Babylon, which was in fact contained within a square system of walls. You will also need several People of God figures.

SPECIAL NOTES

Storytelling tip: The People of God figures are in the basket with the Exodus material. For many of these sacred stories for Fall, you have used some of these figures. Using the same figures emphasizes that the “same people,” that is, the People of God, have made this journey together, seeking the elusive presence of God.

The children also have to work out among themselves how they will share the People of God.

In this lesson, we return to using the desert box. Remember to begin the lesson by first introducing the desert box. When children are settled, you can remove the lid from the desert box. Find guidelines for helping children get ready in a circle—or helping them get ready again, after an interruption—on page 69 in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 1: How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*.



MOVEMENTS

When the children are settled, bring the desert box to the circle. Leave the lid on it. Go to the shelves and return with the tray for the Exile and Return. You will also need some People of God figures from the Exodus basket.

If the children are ready, remove the lid to the desert box and begin to tell about the desert. If they are not quite ready, leave the lid on and begin to tell about the desert before removing it.

As you begin to introduce the story, mark in the sand a square about five inches on each side in the corner of the desert box on your far right, closest to the children. Put several of God's People inside the square. This represents Jerusalem. Also mark in the sand a similar rectangle inside "Jerusalem" to represent the temple.

Place a block of wood in the center of the box, close to you, to represent Haran. Place a larger block at your far left to represent Babylon. Place two pieces of blue yarn at the left to represent the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

WORDS

Watch where I go to get this lesson.

This is the desert. The desert is a dangerous place. There is no food or water there. People can die in the desert.

When the wind blows, the shape of the desert changes. You can lose your way.

The sun is so hot that people wear many clothes to keep the sun from burning their skin. When the wind blows, the sand stings your face and hands. People need protection from the blowing sand. At night, it is cold, and you need many clothes to keep warm.

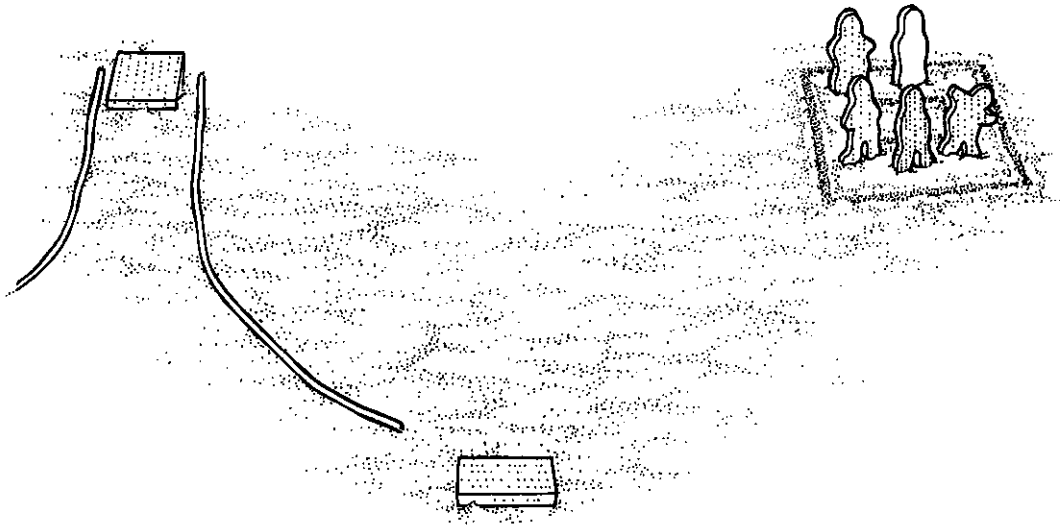
The desert is a dangerous place. People do not go there unless they have to.

This is Jerusalem. Here is the wall. Inside is the temple built for God. Here are the People of God. They knew that God was in the temple, but they also thought that it was the only place where you could pray to God.

People thought that the wall of the city would protect them from everything.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN JERUSALEM (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

- Move your hand from your left to right across the desert, since the Assyrians came from the East.* ➤ Then came the Assyrians, and they attacked the city. It was a terrible time. People fought, and some starved to death. Finally, the Assyrians went away.
- When the Babylonians take the city, brush the sand to erase parts of the lines to show destruction.* ➤ Then the Babylonians came, and they did not go away. Their king wanted the city of Jerusalem for himself. They broke down the walls and burned the temple.
- Leave a few people in the city and begin to move the other figures away.* ➤ They took many of the people away. Only a few were left in the land.
- Move the people from your right towards you and then down to your far left along the Euphrates river to Babylon. Move the figures slowly, only a few steps at a time for each figure.* ➤ The soldiers marched God's people away from Jerusalem. They looked back at the smoke of the burning city and wondered if they would ever see it again. As they walked through the desert, they had to get up when the soldiers said. They had to eat what the soldiers said. They had to go where the soldiers said. They had to go to bed when the soldiers said. They grew weary, and some died. It took a long time.
- When the people pass Haran, pick up the large chain and drop it across the middle of the desert box between the people and Jerusalem. Listen to the terrible sound of the metal chain striking the sand.* ➤ They were in exile. They could not go home.

MOVEMENTS

As the people approach Babylon you tell of their sadness.

Turn the figures to face toward Jerusalem.

When the people begin to return to Jerusalem, march them back the way they came and have them climb slowly over the chain, one at a time. When they "rebuild" the temple, make the mark in the sand distinct again.

Move two or three people back the way they came and have these figures, too, climb over the chain.

Pick up the chain and place it on the tray.

Move your hand over the whole desert.

Enjoy the story for a moment in silence. It is then time to begin the wondering.

WORDS

They hung their harps on the weeping willow trees and sang sad songs. They dreamed of Jerusalem and the temple, but they could not go back.

They even faced towards Jerusalem when they said their prayers.

Slowly, God's people began to understand that God was in this place, too. God's presence came to them as they gathered to read the scriptures, to tell the old stories and to pray

The king of Babylon allowed many of God's People to work. They set up little stores, and some worked for the king. It was a shock when the king of Persia came with his army and took Babylon for himself.

This new king began to let some of the people go back to Jerusalem. Some went with Ezra. They began to rebuild the temple.

More were allowed to go back. They went with Nehemiah. They rebuilt the walls around the city.

Then the People of God were no longer in exile. They could go home again. Do you know what happened? Not all of them went home.

Now they knew God was in the strange and foreign land. Some stayed, because God was there, too.

Now I wonder what part of this story you like best?

I wonder what part is most important?

I wonder where you are in the story or what part of the story is about you?

I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need?

MOVEMENTS

WORDS

When the wondering is finished, put the lesson back on the shelf. Put the desert box back in its place. Re-turn to the circle and begin to help the children decide what work they are going to get out that day in response to the lessons and issues they need to work on.