



Stories on the Way: Lesson Plans for Small Sunday Schools

New Heavens and a New Earth Isaiah 65:17-25

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New Heavens and a New Earth

The Lord told Isaiah to tell the people about the future.

I am going to create new heavens and a new earth.

The old things will not be remembered – people will not even think about them any more.

Be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating;

I am going to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people will be a pleasure.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be happy with my people;

No one will hear the sound of crying; there will be no more cries of distress.

There will be no more babies dying after just a few days of life.

Everyone will live very long lives - one hundred year olds will be called young.

Anyone who dies before they're a hundred will be called unlucky.

People will build their own houses and enjoy living in them;

they shall plant their own crops and eat the food they grow.

No one will build a house only to have someone else live in it;

no one will plant crops only for someone else to eat.

My people will live for as long as the trees

they will be happy in their work and enjoy what they make.

Good things will come from their work, and their children will never get sick or hurt or lost.

They will be blessed by God and their children and their children's children will be blessed by God.

Before they even call me I will answer them,

before they stop speaking, I will have heard them.

The wolf and the lamb shall eat together.

The lion shall eat straw like the ox but the serpent – the serpent will have to eat dust.

No one will hurt or kill anyone or anything on my holy mountain, says the Lord.

(Isaiah 65:17-25)

New Heavens and a New Earth

(New Heavens and a New Earth Lesson 1)

Although these lessons are actually scheduled for the two weeks before Advent, they deal with the Advent theme of waiting for the promised reign/kingdom of God and coming of Jesus. They are before Advent in recognition of the need to use Advent itself for Christmas.

The first lesson on Isaiah 65:17-25 focuses less on the waiting and more on the content of the promises made by God, especially on the vision of a world of peace and safety. Keeping in mind the rather involved craft to come, this lesson offers a no-prep, simple, high energy game to illustrate the difference between living with anxiety and living in the context of cooperation.

I was tempted to build a lesson out of trust games but I'm guessing that most of our Sunday School students are too young for trust games to be effective (or safe). If you have older students – or exceptional younger ones – I won't be hurt if you swap out my activity for some trust games. Let me know if you'd like some instructions -storiesontheway@gmail.com.

Things to know about this lesson:

- You need enough space to allow some moving around and the possibility that a balloon could get away on you but not so much space that people can simply take their balloon off to a corner by themselves.

Materials

- balloons (at least one per student, more is better)

Open with prayer

Introduce the Story

Today we are going to read about a promise God made that is written in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet who lived a very long time ago – long before Jesus was born. (If appropriate, tell the class that Isaiah lived after Moses.)

Does anyone know what a prophet is? (students may well be familiar with the idea of a prophet as someone who predicts the future – explain that a prophet does more than that)

A prophet is someone who speaks for God – someone who God chooses to tell the rest of us what God wants us to hear. Often, prophets talk about the future but they can also talk about the present – telling us what God thinks about the way the world is going.

God gave Isaiah many, many things to say. Sometimes, God gave Isaiah warnings about what would happen if people continued to live badly and if the government continued to make bad choices. Sometimes, God gave Isaiah good news about how God would change the world and make it a perfectly happy place.

What are some sad things in the world? (sickness, death, hunger, pollution, war – the kids will come of with plenty of examples)

What would a perfectly happy world be like?

Let's read the message that Isaiah gave us about the perfect world God has planned.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What are the good things that are going to happen in the new world God will make?

Near the end of the story, God says that the wolf and the lamb will eat together. What does that mean? What do wolves usually eat?

How do you think it would feel to live in a world where there was no sickness or violence – where no one hurt anyone else? Would there be any reason to be afraid?

Introduce the Activity

We are going to play a game to help us imagine what it might feel like to live in such a peaceful world. Everyone will get a balloon. Your job is to keep your balloon in the air. The game begins with a wolf (appoint a wolf or play the part yourself) who wants to knock your balloon away from you so that it will land on the floor. No one except you and the wolf can touch your balloon. The second part of the game is played in God's new world. Everyone, including the wolf, has to work together to keep all the balloons in the air for as long as possible.

Play the Game

Give everyone (except the wolf) a balloon. Allow play to go on for a while, making sure the wolf has some success. After a while, call a time out and give the wolf a balloon. Keep an eye on the clock or set a timer to see how long the group can keep the balloons in the air. Add more balloons for a greater challenge.

Regrouping

How did it feel to have the wolf steal your balloon?

How did it feel to work together without having to be scared of anyone? (if kids insist the competition against the wolf was more fun – which it may well have been – point out that it wouldn't have been so fun if the wolf was actually trying to eat them.)

Was it difficult to cooperate? How was it difficult? Why was it difficult?

Jesus also talked about the new world God promised – he called it the reign/kingdom of God – and he told us that we had to get ready for this new world. He told us some of the things we needed to do, too – things like love our neighbours and take care of people who need help and trust God. We might not be able to stop the wolf from eating lambs but we can practice doing the things Jesus told us to do.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, help us live peaceful, loving, brave lives today while we wait for the perfect world you have promised. Amen.

Worth Waiting For

(New Heavens and a New Earth Lesson 2)

This lesson, obviously, addresses the waiting we are called on to do and uses an advent calendar to link waiting for Christmas with waiting for the Kingdom.

Things to know about this lesson:

- Making the Advent Calendar as offered here is more involved than most Stories on the Way activities but it is not actually very complicated. I think it's worth it as it will hopefully be something the students will enjoy all through Advent.
- You will need to print out and photocopy templates in advance (all templates, etc. can be found at the end of the lesson).

Materials

- large sheets of drawing paper, cut in half (one half/student)
- copies of the advent calendar template (two/student)
- blank sheets of 8.5×11 paper (cardstock would be a nice touch) or copies of colouring sheets (one template/student would, ideally, be printed on the back of these sheets of paper)
- envelopes
- scissors
- glue sticks
- Advent prayer (optional)

Open with prayer.

Introduce the Story

Have you ever had to wait for something you were really excited about? (e.g. Christmas, birthday, a vacation, a visitor)

How does it feel when you are waiting for something like that? Is it fun? Exciting? Frustrating? Hard?

If this is your first lesson on Isaiah, you may wish to consult the introduction to the oracles of the prophet Isaiah in New Heavens and a New Earth.

We are waiting for the perfectly happy world that Isaiah tells us God has promised. Sometimes it is frustrating and hard to wait. Sometimes it is exciting and fun. Sometimes we forget we are waiting for anything and we think about other things. But this new world is worth waiting for.

Let's read the message that Isaiah gave us about the perfect world God has planned.

Read the Story (see page 1)

Discussion

What are the good things that God promised in this oracle?

When is it going to happen? (we don't know)

This is not the only place in the Bible where we can hear about God's promises for a world where there is no sadness or unfairness or sickness or violence. Sometimes, people think that these promises are about the way our world will be in the future. Sometimes, people think that they are about another world that we will be given – kind of like heaven.

No one really knows exactly what these promises mean or how they will be fulfilled. We do know that Jesus is part of these promises, though, and that when God creates new heavens and a new earth, Jesus will be there.

We read some of these stories in the church season of Advent. Advent comes before Christmas and is a time for us to think about Jesus coming and bringing this new world with him. It is a time to remember that we are waiting. Advent begins next Sunday (November, 28, 2010).

What things do we do while we wait in Advent? (wreath, calendar, prayer, Christmas prep)

Introduce the Activity

Today we are going to make special Advent calendars that will help us to count down to Christmas AND remind us that we are not only waiting for Christmas morning but also for the new world that God has promised.

Our calendars are going to be sort of like puzzles. Each day, you will add another piece until you have the whole picture of the peace and happiness we are waiting for.

Make the Advent Calendars

You can either invite students to draw their own pictures of a peaceful, happy world or hand out colouring sheets (such as those found at the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA - http://peace.mennolink.org/clipart.html#coloring_pages).

When the pictures are drawn/coloured, cut the pictures up, following the template lines on the back. (If necessary, have the students glue their picture onto the back of a puzzle template before cutting them up and then double check to make sure each piece is firmly glued to its backing.) Put the pieces in an envelope.

Glue a second template sheet onto a half-sheet of large drawing paper and attach the envelope below it (so that you can still open it). Tape may work best for this.

Distribute the Advent prayers and ask students to glue them onto their calendars or help students copy the prayer out.

Regrouping

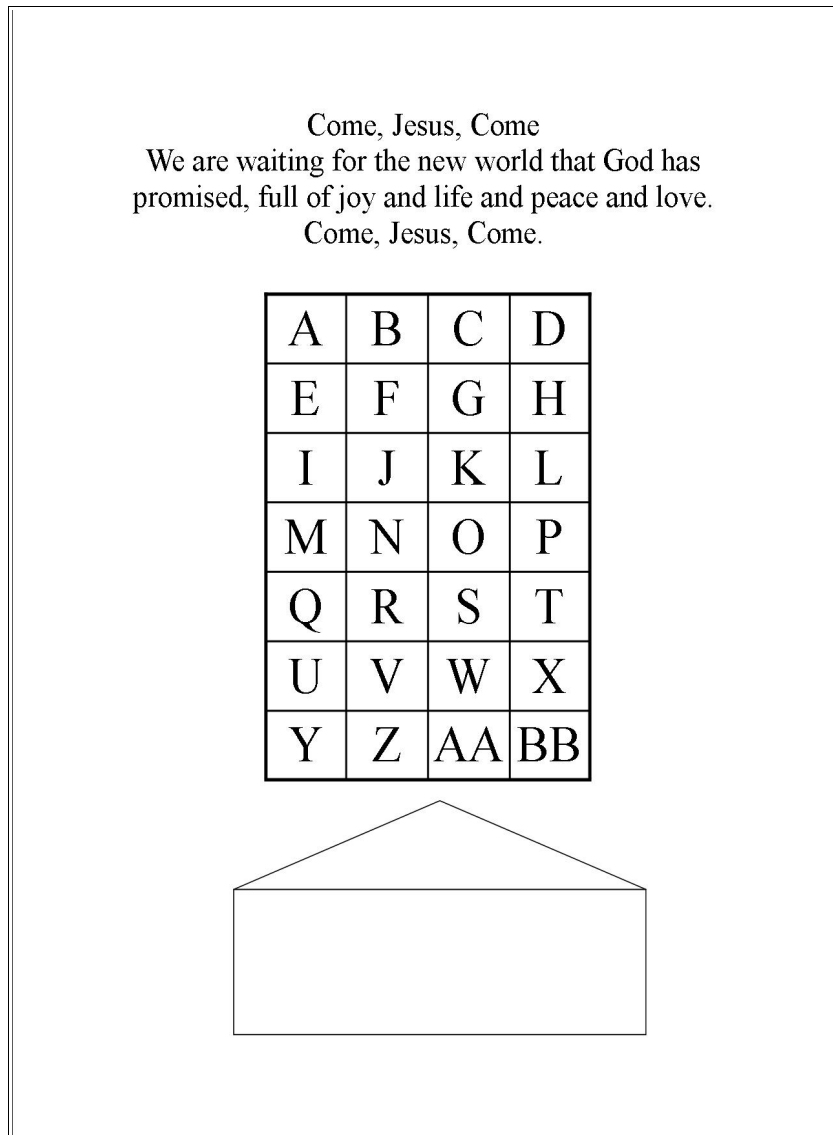
Consider sending kids home with small glue sticks to facilitate their use of their calendars. Make sure everyone understands how the calendar works:

On every day of Advent, take one picture piece out of the envelope. Check the letter on the back and glue it into the calendar space with the matching letter.

Encourage everyone to say the prayer every day when they add another piece to their calendar. Remind everyone that Advent doesn't actually start until next Sunday (November 28, 2010)

Closing Prayer

Come, Jesus, Come. We are waiting for the new world that God has promised, full of joy and life and peace and love. Come, Jesus, Come.



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

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