

A Good Shepherd Sacred Story

The People of God in Exile

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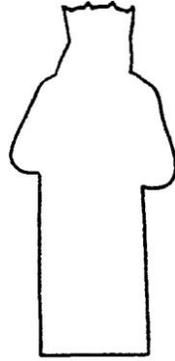
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THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN EXILE MATERIALS

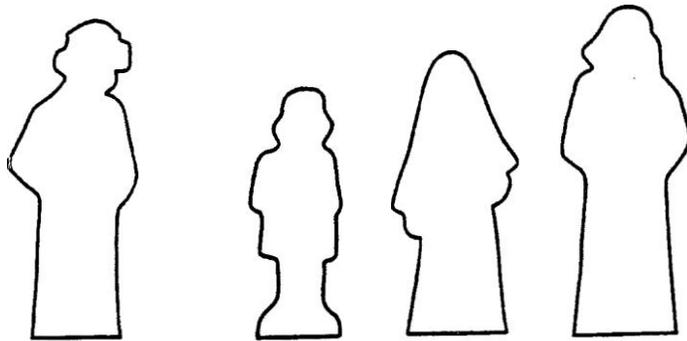
- medium wicker basket to hold:
 - wooden Jeremiah figure
 - wooden King Nebuchadrezzar figure
 - 4 wooden people of God figures



Jeremiah



King Nebuchadnezzar



People of God

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN EXILE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from its shelf. Return to the circle and place basket in front of you as you sit down.

After speaking, allow 10-15 seconds of silence while you reverently touch one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Shake your head slowly and sadly.

Nod two or three times.

Place the four people of God in front center.

Place the Jeremiah figure to the left of the people of God.

With one hand pretend to sweep away all in front of you.

Shake your head resolutely.

Fold your hands as though praying.

WORD S

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All of the words to this story are inside of me. Will you make silence with me so I can find all the words to the story?

After King David died there were many other kings in the land of Israel.

Many of the kings were cruel and forgot to worship Yahweh.

Yahweh still loved the people of God. So Yahweh sent many prophets to go to the people.

Prophets are people who speak God's words, often in hard times.

One prophet was called Jeremiah.

He went to the people of God and told them that if they did not change the way they were living, God would destroy their city and temple.

The people of God did not believe Jeremiah. They believed that God would always bless their city, Jerusalem.

For in Jerusalem was the temple.

And the people of God believed that God lived in the temple.

Touch the people of God and shake your head sadly.

Hold both hands out with palms up.

Shake your head slowly.

Remove King Nebuchadrezzar from basket and move him from the top center down to the people of God.

With palms down move both hands quickly out from center.

Take all except two of the people of God and move them with Nebuchadrezzar toward the top center area.

Place all the people of God together in an area toward the top.

Speak very softly and shake your head slowly.

So they kept cheating, worshiping other gods, and disobeying the ten best ways to live.

Jeremiah said again and again, "Repent, change, there is still time if you will do as God asks."

But the people did not listen.

Then Yahweh let King Nebuchadrezzar, from the country of Babylon, come with his army to Jerusalem.

Nebuchadrezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem, the houses and the temple. He burnt them to the ground.

Then Nebuchadrezzar took almost all of the people of God and made them leave their land.

He took them to the strange land of Babylon. They didn't have their homes, their city or their temple.

And many of them felt they didn't even have Yahweh anymore.

The people of God were very sad and so was God.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if Jeremiah got angry at the people of God?

I wonder if the people of God remembered Jeremiah's words when their city was burned down?

I wonder if God was with King Nebuchadrezzar?

Place all the wooden figures in the story basket.

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

After speaking, carry the basket back to its shelf, using two hands. Return to the circle.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

Dismiss the children ONLY after each has had a chance to choose his/her work.

It's time for you to choose your work. I wonder what you will do today? Will you paint or draw? Will you work with a story? Let's go around the circle and decide.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN EXILE •... TEACHER HELPS

After the Exodus, it is the exile that is the most formative experience for the people of God. Here it appears that all the promises, indeed the covenant that God made with God's people, has been nullified. The people of Israel had come to believe that God would protect them no matter how they lived. At this point the only part of the land that's left is Judah, or the southern part of the once United Kingdom of Israel. In 722 BCE the Assyrians had captured the north, Israel. But they had been unable to overthrow Judah. By 587 BCE, however, the southern part of the land was weakened and ripe for takeover.

In this setting we find many important prophets, including Jeremiah. I've used the Jeremiah story simply because I feel it is the easiest to tell. The role of the prophets, particularly Jeremiah, was to say to God's people, "You are not living righteous lives. You are not being just and fair in your dealings with other people. You are following after other gods. If you continue to live like this, God will allow you to be destroyed." Jeremiah's words went unheeded by the people of Judah. They never believed that God would allow God's city, complete with the temple built by Solomon, David's son, to be destroyed. But they were wrong.

In 587 a new and powerful force, the Babylonians, swept into Judah. Though their land was to the east and north of Judah they did not move west to their destination, but took a longer, though probably easier, route coming down from the north. That's why the author of the book of Jeremiah calls the Babylonians the enemy from the north.

King Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, took the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judah. He commanded that the city walls, the buildings and the temple be burned to the ground. All but the poorest and sickest people were carried away into exile in Babylon. This is called the exilic period of the history of the people of God. During this time many of the scriptures were edited and written down in much the form we have them.

The wondering questions begin with our wondering about Jeremiah and his feelings when the people of God wouldn't listen to him. We talk about the possibility of anger. Most of the children will agree that Jeremiah did get angry with the people who couldn't hear his words. I've included this wonderment as a subtle way of showing that sometimes anger is a product of love. Jeremiah didn't want to see the people of God, their city and temple destroyed. He cared for all of them. So Jeremiah's anger would have been directed at their stubbornness to hear the words of God.

The second question is about what may have gone through the minds of the people of God when they finally were confronted with the reality of their situation. Most children will agree that the people of God remembered the words of Jeremiah when destruction was upon them. They may be remembering when they didn't heed an adult's advice. It may be as simple as ignoring the advice to wear a warm coat or being told that if they keep throwing things in the house, something or someone is going to get hurt.

The final question is one that adults continue to discuss. Was Nebuchadrezzar really a tool of Yahweh, as Jeremiah said. Or did Yahweh simply sit back and allow the Babylonians to have their way? This is a question that will come back again and again to help the children grow in their understanding that God can be part of their lives in difficult times, too.

Note: The Book of Jeremiah (Revised Standard Version) speaks of King Nebuchadrezzar (Ne-be-kad-re-zer), He is the same person, although the spelling is different, as King Nebuchadrezzar (Ne-be-kad-ge-zer) referred to in the Book of Daniel (Revised Standard Version).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

Our country has many people who come here every year from other countries. Many of them never go home again. Imagine you are one of them. How would you feel? Why would it be important to you to eat the kind of food you did at home or to wear the same clothes you did at home?

This story told us that if a country doesn't follow God's laws that country will be punished. Is there anything our country does that might not be God's will?

To be in exile means to be away from the place that is familiar to you. If you've moved, even in the same town, you may have felt like that. If you can, think of a time you felt like you were in exile.