

A Good Shepherd  
Sacred Story

God's Ark is Taken

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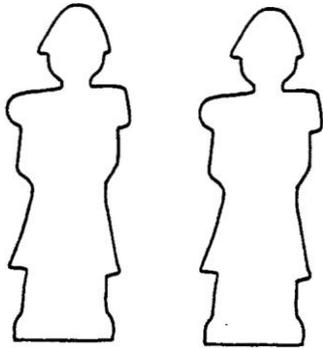
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## **GOD'S ARK IS TAKEN .... MATERIALS**

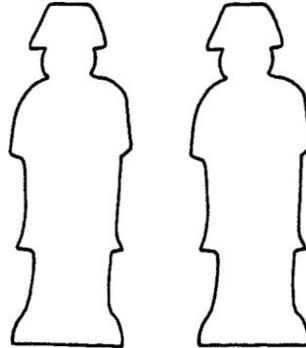
- large wicker basket to hold:
  - wooden ark of the covenant figure
  - 2 wooden Israelite soldier figures
  - 2 wooden Philistine soldier figures
  - wooden city of Ashdod
  - wooden city of Gath
  - wooden city of Ekron
  - wooden city of Bethshemesh
  - wooden priest figure
  - wooden altar



Priest



Philistine Soldiers



Israelite Soldiers

## GOD'S ARK IS TAKEN .... I SAMUEL 4,5,6

### ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from its shelf. Return to the circle and sit down, placing the basket next to you.

During the silence, reverently stroke one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Lean forward and speak softly, but intensely.

Nod your head as you speak, using a sad VOIce.

Place the ark of the covenant at the center of the right half of the storytelling area. Place the two Israelite soldiers to the right of the ark.

Reverently touch the ark of the covenant as you speak.

Place the two Philistine soldiers In the center of the storytelling area.

Move the ark of the covenant to the left, next to the Philistines.

Place the city of Ashdod slightly in front of the Philistine soldiers and move the ark of the covenant just to the right of Ashdod.

Nod your head.

### WORDS

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

All the words to this story are inside of me. If you will make silence with me I will find all the words to this story of God's people.

In the days when Samuel was a prophet of the Lord in the land of Israel, the people of God went to war with the Philistines.

In the first battle many of the people of God were killed.

The leaders of the people said, "We must take the ark of the covenant into battle with us. Then Yahweh will protect us."

The people of God believed that the ark of the covenant was the throne of God and that God stayed there on the ark.

The Philistines fought very hard and won the victory over the people of God.

They captured the ark of the covenant and took it with them from the land of Israel.

The Philistines took the ark of the covenant to a city of theirs called Ashdod.

But as long as the ark was in Ashdod, the people of the city became very sick and had large sores growing on them.

Touch the city of Ashdod.

The people of Ashdod talked together and said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not stay here, it is making us very sick."

Place the city of Gath at the center of the left half of the storytelling area. Move the ark just to the right of Gath.

Then, the people decided to take the ark to another Philistine city, Gath.

Touch the city of Gath.

Soon the people of Gath also had growths and sores on them.

Place the city of Ekron at the left side of the storytelling area. Move the ark just to the right of Ekron.

Then, the people of Gath sent the ark to the city of Ekron.

Touch the city of Ekron as you speak.

But the people of Ekron had heard what happened with the ark of the God of Israel and they said, "You must want to kill us, because they sent of ark of the God of Israel here. "

Move the two Philistine soldiers to the right of the ark.

So they called together all the leaders of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the God of Israel back to its own place, so we will all be safe and well again."

Hold up seven fingers.

The ark had now been in the country of the Philistines for seven months.

Place the priest figure to the left of the city of Ekron.

The priests of the Philistines were called and asked, "How shall we send this ark back to the land of Israel?"

Touch the priest figure as you speak.

The priests told them, "You must send it with an offering so they will know you were wrong to take the ark. If you do that, all of you will be healed from your sores. "

Pantomime forming objects with your hands.

So the Philistines made golden objects to send back with the ark of the covenant.

With one hand, place the ark in an imaginary cart. With your other hand, pantomime placing the golden objects in it.

While moving the ark, place the city of Bethshemesh to the left of the two Israelite soldiers. Stop the ark just to the left of the city of Bethshemesh.

Lift both hands upward, with palms open and facing outward. Smile as you speak.

Place the altar to the left of the ark of the covenant.

Carefully place each of the wooden pieces back into the basket.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to the shelf. Then return to the circle and sit down.

Then they put the ark in a new cart pulled by two cows and sent it, along with the golden objects, back to the people of God.

The cows pulled the cart to the city of Bethshemesh.

When the people saw it coming they were very happy and shouted in joy.

There the cart was broken apart and a fire was built with it. The people of God offered a sacrifice of the cows on the altar, to thank God for the return of the ark of the Lord.

#### WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder why the ark of the covenant didn't protect the people of God in battle?

I wonder why the ark of the covenant hurt the people who took it?

I wonder what God was thinking as the ark of the covenant moved from city to city?

I wonder how we can be sure God is with us today?

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

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.

Go around the circle, having each child choose their work before dismissing them all together.

Let's choose our work now. Maybe there is something special in this story that you would like to paint or draw. Let's decide and begin.

## GOD'S ARK IS TAKEN .... TEACHER HELPS

To best understand these stories of the ark of the covenant, it's helpful to understand that the stories were probably merged together by the Deuteronomic editor. The Deuteronomist, hereafter called "D", was an editor or group of editors who took old sources and edited them during the time of the exile, about 560 BC. The Deuteronomist is named after the book of Deuteronomy. This is because most scholars believe the scrolls that were found by temple workmen restoring the temple, according to the orders of King Josiah, were the words of Deuteronomy. Josiah built his entire reform movement on the precepts found in the laws of Deuteronomy. There are three principles that are very important to the D source. One is the importance of a single sanctuary. Yahweh was to be worshipped only in Jerusalem, after the temple had been built there by Solomon. Although this story was written before the time of Solomon, the D editor would have noted the problems with the ark of the covenant when it was away from the city of Jerusalem and drawn his conclusions from those events. The second principle of the D source is that of divine retribution: God blesses those who obey him and punishes those who do not. Obviously bringing the ark of the covenant into the temples and presence of other gods, as the Philistines did, was displeasing to Yahweh. Third is the principle that God fulfills God's word. God does as God promises. That warning is usually given through a prophet. (The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, edited by Charles Layman, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p. 1092) I have not included all of the events that happened in the stories surrounding the capture of the ark of the covenant simply because there would be too much material. But if you read all three chapters, you will notice the words of prophecy here are put in the mouth of a woman who has just given birth. In I Samuel 4: 19-22 we have the words of prophecy from the daughter-in-law of Eli who named her son Ichabod, noting that its meaning, "the glory has departed from Israel", is in keeping with the capture of the ark of the covenant.

This story is almost a magical one for children. I have included it because I want the children to understand the importance of the ark of the covenant in the lives of the people of God. This was the closest the people of God came to a throne for their king, Yahweh. By taking the ark of the covenant into battle they were having their king ride with them, just as the enemy's king rode with the enemy. The children will also begin to understand, on some level, that the people of God at this time did not understand that God could be with them if the ark of the covenant was not with them. They believed the ark of the covenant was the glory seat of Yahweh and that was where Yahweh's presence dwelt. Being a very literal people, who were accustomed to seeing other gods depicted concretely by statues and carvings, it was natural for the Israelites to make a place for their God, also, and to view him/her as concrete and limited by bounds of time and space.

In addition, the children will begin to understand the Israelite belief that there was only one God and that God, demanded very complete loyalty from the people who worshiped Yahweh. Any movement away from that worship of one God to a belief in any of the foreign gods would result in very dangerous happenings, i.e. incidents like the ark of the covenant being taken. Notice that there is no consideration given in the story about the possibility that the Israelites did not fight well, employed poor strategy or that the Philistine gods were more powerful. Those ideas are not even considered. Rather we are led to understand that for whatever reason this must be the will of Yahweh.

It is difficult to teach children about these inconsistencies. We want and need to teach the children that God loves them, even if they make a mistake. Sharing stories like this one make it difficult to do that. But when you get right down to it, even very young children learn that life is not fair and that everything doesn't always make sense. It is better in the long run for the children to understand that God is present with us through the inconsistencies as well as through the easier times.

The first two wondering questions deal with why the ark of the covenant didn't protect the people of God and why it hurt the other people. The children's answers to these first two questions will probably be put very simply, but carry a lot of weight. Again, resist the temptation to agree with one answer and disagree with another. None of us were there, we don't know.

Next, we deal with what God thought about the events of the ark of the covenant being moved from city to city. Some of my favorite wondering questions deal with children telling me how God felt about one thing or another. So many possibilities!

Finally we will wonder about how to know God is with us today. It is a wonderful thing to hear the children express how they know God is close by with each of them.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

This is a very difficult story because we can't give a good explanation of how it might have happened. Do you wish all the stories of the Bible were easier to explain or would you rather keep the "mystery" in some of them. Why?

In this story no one ever says, "Wow, we must be doing something wrong in battle and that's why we're losing." Instead, they believe this must be God's will. Do you think God takes sides during war? Do you think God takes sides during any fight you have with a brother, sister, parent or friend? Explain your answer.

The text for our story today is I Samuel 4,5,6. There are many stories within this text that we did not talk about. Divide into groups of two or more people and divide the text up among the groups. Have each group read their portion of the text and tell about some things that happened that were not in our story today.