

A Good Shepherd  
Sacred Story

**Tower of Babel**

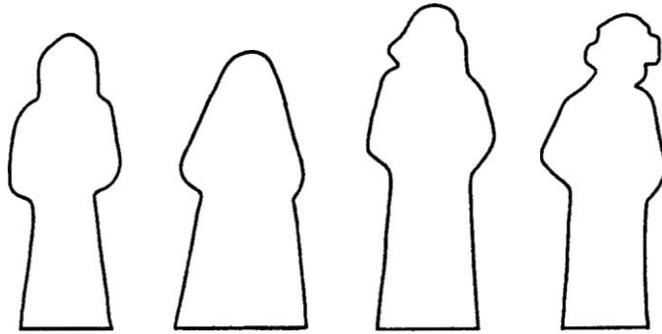
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## **TOWER OF BABEL .... MA TERIALS**

- small wicker basket to hold:
  - 4 wooden figures of people



People

## TOWER OF BABEL. ... GENESIS 11:1-9

### ACTIONS

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

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

Place all four wooden figures close together in the center of the storytelling area. Hold up one finger as you indicate "one language" .

Touch first one figure and then another.

Stack imaginary blocks with one hand, moving in an upward direction as if building a tower.

Nod and smile as you touch one or more figures.

Move the figures slightly to one side.

Touch each of the figures, one at a time.

Put one finger to your ear and shake your head, looking puzzled.

### 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 of the words to this story are inside of me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to this story of God's people?

When the world was still quite young all the people lived in one place and spoke one language.

The people said to each other, "Let's make bricks and build a city. "

"Then let's build a tower that will go all the way to heaven."

"That will make us famous and we will not be scattered all over the earth. "

Then Yahweh came down to see what the people had built.

And Yahweh thought, "They are all working together on this. This will be only the beginning. I can only imagine what else they will be able to do."

So Yahweh decided to confuse the speech of the people so they would not understand each other.

Gently move the four figures in four different directions, to the edges of the storytelling area.

Outline the imaginary tower and speak the name very clearly.

Carefully place each of the wooden figures back in the basket.

After speaking, stand and carry the story back to its shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Be certain every child has had an opportunity to choose their work before dismissing the children to their chosen activity.

When the people could no longer understand each other they moved away to different places and never finished building the city or the tower.

The tower was named Babel, which means "confusing", because that's where God confused the language of all the people.

### **WONDERING QUESTIONS:**

I wonder why the people didn't want to move away from each other?

I wonder what the people thought they would find if they built the tower?

I wonder why God wanted the people to be apart?

I wonder if you can talk to people who speak a different language?

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

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around the circle and choose what each of us would like to do.

## **TOWER OF BABEL. ... TEACHER HELPS**

This story, brings us again in contact with the Yahweh of the J source. \* There is a good possibility that The Tower of Babel story is a combination of two different stories. The first story is the building of a city to preserve the unity of humankind, while the second is the building of the tower to gain fame. Yahweh comes to visit to see how things are going.

After Yahweh visits, Yahweh seems concerned that the people will become too powerful. In Genesis 11: 6-7, Yahweh states that once the people complete their task they will never be able to be stopped. And that is not Yahweh's choice. Rather, Yahweh decides, in conversation with whomever, to scatter the people by confusing their language. The people do scatter and Yahweh has succeeded.

There are some theological messages that may be drawn from the story, though they are not spoken in the text. Number one is that Yahweh reminds the people that their strength is not going to come from fortified cities and large groups of people, but from Yahweh. For us today we may need to consider the ever increasing budget for military and war machines. Do we trust God? Not an easy question, but a great adult wondering question.

The second message is that any attempt of God's people to find fame or glory for their own sake will only push or drive people out of relationship with God.

A very important element in the story is the role of communication. Let me take a moment to remind you of the intentional use of language in the Good Shepherd stories. Words are powerful tools, as the J source seems to know and as Yahweh obviously knew. Yahweh did not really limit the people of God by pushing them into other languages, but rather expanded their understandings as they moved out away from the familiar language to explore a new way to communicate with God. We do that in the Good Shepherd program with wooden figures, felt pieces, lights, songs and prayers; as well as with stories.

The wondering questions begin with a specific one about why the people didn't want to move apart. A little one in your class who has recently moved can probably tell you the best reason. This is a "hook" question, because more and more children can share the experience of moving; even if it is just moving from one grade or school to another. The second question wonders about what the people thought they would find. Allow the most unusual and wonderful thoughts here. No answer is wrong. The third question wonders why God wanted the people to move. You will probably hear some wonderful responses about having to move for other work or because where they lived was too crowded. What you will hear is children trying to make sense out of a world where they too have to move, even if they would choose not to do so. The final question is a concrete one about how people can communicate if they don't share a language. The children may respond with comments about smiling or pointing or making signs. They may also remember a time in their lives when they didn't understand what someone asked of them and share that frustration.

This story is a very old one about people seeking power and security. It is a very simple tale on the outside and a very complex one inside. In telling it simply and directly you will introduce the children to the story. But it is important to realize that the children may be almost grown before they deal with all the ramifications of trying to trust in military might, our own power and attempts to become God-like that The Tower of Babel story presents.

### **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

Why, according to the story, does God want the people to be scattered around the world?

When you were really little, or even later, did you wonder how high up you'd have to go to get to God? Do you still wonder about that? (As a child I always believed if I could get on top of a rainbow I'd find God.)

Share a time when you were trying to talk with someone and couldn't understand what they were saying. How did it make you feel? (This may be a toddler, an older person or someone who speaks a different language.)

\* The Old Testament is made of several different sources. They have marked differences, while also containing some similarities. The J source (standing for Jahwhist as in Y[J]ahweh) brings us a God who seems very human. This God talks with others; comes down from heaven to check things out; has worries and concerns about power; intervenes with personality, though not always logic; and remains always bound to God's people. The J source never explains away this everyday God, but rather accepts that it's God's choice to be however God chooses to be. (The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible; edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) (The Book of J; translated by David Rosenberg and interpreted by Harold Bloom, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990)