

The Exile and Return

2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:13–23; Ezra; Nehemiah

In today's story, the Babylonians capture Jerusalem and take God's People into exile. Even though this journey is forced upon them, they make an astonishing discovery: God is not just in one place, in the temple in Jerusalem, but also in a foreign and strange land. God's presence is not here or there, but everywhere, waiting. To be found. To find us.

How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way. You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today's lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

The Presentation

Around the city of Jerusalem stood a high wall. Inside the city rose the temple built for God. The People of God 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. Then the Babylonians came. Their king wanted the city of Jerusalem for himself. They broke down the walls and burned the temple.

They took many of the people away. Only a few were left in the land.

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 grew weary, and some died. It took a long time.

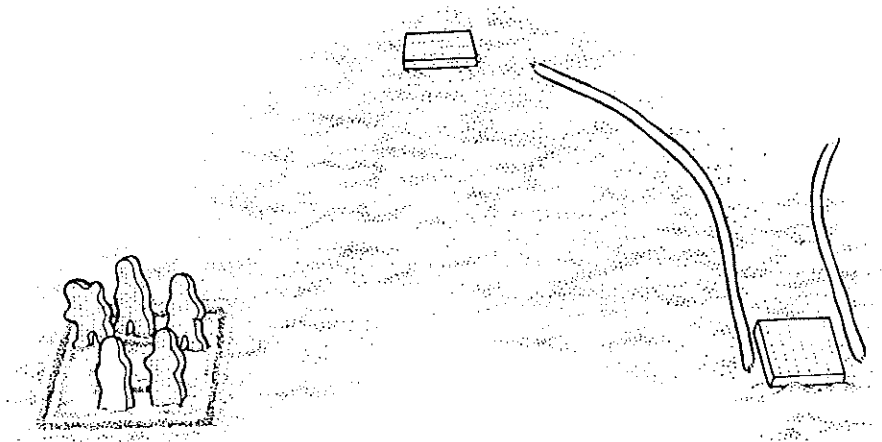
They were in exile. They could not go home.

Wondering

- **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? What part of the story is about you?

They hung their harps on the weeping willow trees and sang sad songs. They dreamed of home, but could not go back. They even faced toward 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, tell the old stories and pray.

The king of Babylon allowed many of God's People to work. They set up stores. Some worked for the king. What 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 to rebuild the temple. Others went with Nehemiah to rebuild 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.

Godly Play Parables

In every Parent Page, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. A number of Godly Play lessons explore parables. Parables stimulate our sense of creativity. In parables, we enter with wonder to live the question.

Parables question our everyday view of life. They wake us up to see in life what we have not seen before. Parables question the status

quo, the order imposed by tradition, power or class. That is why Jesus' parables often got him into trouble, and why Christians ever since have sometimes redefined parables in ways that only comfort us rather than challenge us by disrupting our comfortable worldviews. We can sum up the startling quality of parables with a laugh: "Ha, ha!" Jesus' parables can make us laugh aloud as they turn our accepted worldviews upside down.