

10 INTO EXILE

It seems strange, but often we get most angry at those we most love. That was true of Joan's mother. She loved her daughter Joan with her whole heart. Had she been asked to give up her life to save her daughter, she would have done it in an instant. Joan was everything to her.

But Joan's mother had her list of complaints. "Why can't you spend at least one night a week at home? I never see you anymore. All you do is ask for more, more, more—more money, more independence, more clothes. You never help out around the house."



Jim Whitmer

Joan had her own answers. "I don't want to hang around home. It's boring. It's dull. All I hear is nag, nag, nag. All my friends' parents give them a lot more than you give me. I guess that means they love their kids more than you love me."

The fights and arguments went on day after day. "Get out of my house!" Joan's mother yelled, pointing to the door. "You're an ungrateful brat. I don't want to see your face again until you've shaped up!" At those words, Joan turned and stormed out the front door.

Joan's mother felt her face flush with anger. But she also felt pain and grief so deep inside that she could hardly breathe. Had she lost her daughter now forever? That night she cried herself to sleep.

3 STATEMENTS

- God often chooses those whom others consider unlikely candidates to do God's work.
- The prophet Jeremiah called on the people of Judah and Jerusalem to change their sinful ways.
- God continued to love the people, just as a good parent continues to love a wayward child.

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Source

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the powerful Assyrian empire in 721 B.C. The Southern Kingdom of Judah remained an independent but weak little nation. It was controlled by Assyria. Its capital was Jerusalem, which contained the Temple. Just as God had sent the prophet Amos to condemn the kings and people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel centuries before, so God sent another prophet named Jeremiah to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Read Jeremiah 1:1-10. These opening verses describe God's call to Jeremiah. They also foreshadow a sad event in the life of the people.

1. The first three verses describe the three major persons or events in Jeremiah's life. They all begin with the letter "J."

- "the days of King _____, son of Amon of Judah"
- "the days of _____, the son of Josiah of Judah"
- "The captivity of _____"

2. When did God choose Jeremiah to be a "prophet to the nations"?

3. What was Jeremiah's objection to God's call that he should be a prophet?

4. What was God's response to Jeremiah's objection?

God often chooses those whom others consider unlikely candidates to do God's work. The young, the weak, the outcast, the poor, and the sinful often are chosen by God throughout the Bible for special tasks.



5. Name two or three other examples besides Jeremiah of people in the Bible who might have been considered unsuitable candidates for doing God's special work.

God often chooses those whom others consider unlikely candidates to do God's work.

Turn to a classmate. Share with him or her a time when you felt you could not do something or be something because you were too young. What does God's reply to Jeremiah say to you about your gifts and abilities as a young person?

THE TEMPLE SERMON: YOU CAN'T BOX GOD IN

The prophet Jeremiah called on the people of Judah and Jerusalem to change their sinful ways. King Josiah was the ruler in Jerusalem early in Jeremiah's career. He was a good king and worked hard to reform the government and religious life of the nation in order to bring the people back to God. Unfortunately, Josiah's reform movement never got very far. He was killed in battle at a young age. His son, Jehoiakim, took over as king. Jehoiakim was an evil king who worshiped other gods and who allowed the people to sin against God and one another without punishment.

For the people of Judah, it was a time of worrying about the future. People wondered what enemy would attack them next. To the north, the great empire of Assyria was losing power and

dying. To the southwest, Egypt was always a threat. To the east, the powerful empire of Babylon was just beginning to rise up and flex its muscles.

In this time of uncertainty, the temple in Jerusalem became very popular. People worshiped there in large numbers. The people believed that the presence of the temple in their city guaranteed their safety. They believed that God would never allow any nation to destroy the temple. As long as the people had the temple, they felt secure that God would always protect them, no matter what they did in their daily lives.

Into this setting Jeremiah the prophet stepped. He cleared his throat as he stood outside the temple. With a thunderous roar he shattered the people's cherished beliefs and false security. Read Jeremiah 7:1-11. It is an account of Jeremiah's most important speech, his sermon delivered at the Jerusalem temple.

The prophet Jeremiah called on the people of Judah and Jerusalem to change their sinful ways.

1. What did Jeremiah say the people must do if they wished God to let them continue living in Jerusalem?

2. In what words should the people not trust?

3. What specific things were the people expected to do if they wanted to keep living in the land?

Read Jeremiah 7:12-15. It is a description of the fate of a town called Shiloh in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. There had been a temple of worship at Shiloh that was destroyed by the Assyrians when they conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.

4. In your own words, write down the point that Jeremiah was trying to make in comparing Shiloh's temple and Jerusalem's temple.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Jeremiah 18:1-12 contains God's instructions to Jeremiah to go and watch a potter at work molding clay. The potter was like God, and the people were like the clay that the potter molded. Read Jeremiah 18:1-12. Imagine what a potter would do with clay. What point do you think God was trying to make with the image of the potter and the clay?

Read Jeremiah 19:1-3, 10-11, 15. What dramatic action did God tell Jeremiah to do? What did the action mean for the future of Judah?

GOD'S ANGER, GOD'S COMPASSION

Even with Jeremiah's many warnings, the people of Jerusalem and Judah did not change their sinful ways. They took God for granted. They worshiped other gods. They felt smug and safe as long as they had the temple where God dwelt. They thought what they did in their daily lives did not matter, as long as the temple was still in Jerusalem. The people showed no signs of real faith and love toward God or toward the poor and powerless among them.

Finally, after many years and after much agonizing, God exploded in anger and made a dramatic decision.

Read God's word concerning the people of Judah in Jeremiah 12:7-8. Close your eyes and imagine a time when you felt so angry at someone close to you that you could say, "I hate that person!" What feelings did you have?





Can you feel how God feels when we betray God's love, when we ignore God, when we hurt other people whom God loves?

God's decision meant that God allowed the empire of Babylon to conquer Jerusalem, to destroy the holy temple, and to take the people of Judah away from their land into exile in Babylon. But the results of God's anger did not last forever. *God continued to love the people, just as a good parent continues to love a wayward child.*

Read Jeremiah 12:15. This verse describes what God will do after the punishment described in verses 7-8.

If you had been living at that time, how would you have felt when you heard Jeremiah's prophecy of the coming punishment? How would you have

felt when you heard the prophecy of God's decision described in verse 15?

Imagine that you are a lawyer representing God. How would you argue that God was just in making the decision to punish? If you had been a lawyer for the people, what kind of argument would you have made on their behalf?

Now recall a time when you made up with someone with whom you had been angry. How did you move from being angry and hurt to again feeling love or friendship with that person? How long did this process take? What helped you move from anger to friendship?

God continued to love the people, just as a good parent continues to love a wayward child.

Shaping life

THE ULTIMATE DISASTER

Finally, God's people actually experienced the punishment and consequences of their sin. In 587 B.C. the powerful army of Babylon surrounded the city of Jerusalem. The end was near. To find out what happened, read 2 Kings 25:1-13.

1. What happened to the citizens of Jerusalem?

On a map of the ancient Middle East, locate Jerusalem and Babylon. Find the route the exiles had to travel to reach Babylon.

2. What other characters studied in this course followed a similar path?

Jeremiah reported that not all of the people were taken to Babylon. Some voluntarily left their homeland to seek safety elsewhere. One group took Jeremiah with them as they fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 42:1-43:7). Still others fled into Moab, Edom, and Ammon (Jeremiah 40:11). Locate these countries on a map of the ancient Middle East.

Israel was scattered across the face of the earth. The people of Israel would not be a unified political state until the formation of modern Israel following World War II.

It is hard for us to imagine the disaster the people of Judah eventually experienced. The people lost everything they believed in. They lost their holy city Jerusalem, the "city of David." They lost their temple where God was present. They lost the land God had promised to them. Their king was blinded and his sons killed. All their possessions were taken by the Babylonians. They became refugees far from their homes.

What questions do you think the exiles might have had about God, themselves, and about their future?

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to the session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
- Jeremiah 26:1-24
- Jeremiah 18:18-23
- Jeremiah 20:7-18
- Jeremiah 31:15-20

Memory

Memorize Jeremiah 1:7-8. God gave a young Jeremiah these special words of assurance as God called him to be a prophet. As an added challenge, memorize the whole call of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:4-10.

Activity 1

Investigate the ways in which young people are involved in the life of your congregation. What roles do

Discuss the following questions.

- How do you think refugees today feel when they are forced to leave their homes?
- What happens to their hopes and dreams?
- Have you ever had questions like these? When and where?
- Did you ever find any answers or helpful ways to deal with the questions?

FOCUS



young people play in the worship life of the congregation? Are youth included on committees and councils? Are youth members of visitation teams?

Make a list of all the possible ways you could be involved in your church. Choose an activity or position to which you feel you might contribute and do it. Remember God's words to Jeremiah, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy,' . . . for I am with you" (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

Activity 2

Interview a parent about the rules and limits of your household. Ask them questions such as, "What would it take for you to kick me out of the house? What would I have to do to make you so angry that you would want me to find another home?"

Activity 3

Read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis or any of the other books in his Narnia Series. Your school or community librarian will help you find them.

THE JUDGMENT OF EXILE: NOT THE LAST WORD

The exile to Babylon was not God's last word for the citizens of Judah. God sent a word of comfort and hope through the prophets, too. Their messages were not always of doom and gloom. The disaster of the exile did not separate God's love from the people. Even Jeremiah, whose message was filled with warning and doom, proclaimed words of hope.

Read Jeremiah 33:10-11. These verses contain a promise spoken at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah and the forced evacuation of the people.

IS HE— QUITE SAFE?

The British writer C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) wrote *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It tells a story that takes place between the real world and a fantasy land called Narnia.

In the story, four children walk through a wardrobe (a moveable closet) and find themselves in Narnia. The children, Lucy, Edmond, Susan, and Peter, meet Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. They ask the beavers about Aslan, about whom they have heard a great deal.

"But shall we see him?" asked Susan.

"Why, Daughter of Eve, that's what I brought you here for. I'm to lead you where you shall meet him," said Mr. Beaver.

"Is—is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ohh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

"I'm longing to see him," said Peter, "even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point."

From *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis. Copyright © 1950 Collins Publishers, London.