

Sorrow and Comfort

Lamentations 1:1-5, 3:31-36



Preparation

Sorrow and Comfort

1. INTRODUCTION TO THIS SUNDAY



Today, we will read two sections from the book of Lamentations. This text's poet feels miserable: he is sad and scared. And yet he says he trusts God, he trusts his love and faithfulness.

With the **4-8 year-olds**, we will focus on trusting: no matter how bad you feel, you can trust that God is faithful; he will not abandon you.

With the **8-12 year-olds**, we will focus on the poet's despair: the Bible is very open about such feelings.

2. ABOUT SORROW AND COMFORT

These passages from Lamentations 1 and 3 are very appropriate for the final Sunday of the church year: some churches commemorate the people who passed away in that year. But the passage also suits other Sundays when sorrow and comfort are discussed.

3. CONTEXT OF THE BIBLE PASSAGE



The book of Lamentations consists of five long poems. The city of Jerusalem has been destroyed by the Babylonians, and its inhabitants have been taken into exile. The book of Lamentations is about the events described in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36: the Babylonian captivity.

Lamentations' poet describes his sorrow. He writes about how difficult life is for the people who have remained in Jerusalem. He says that what happened is because of the mistakes of the people of Israel. At the same time, he is shocked that God has allowed this to happen.

The first four poems in the book of Lamentations are "alphabet poems" (acrostics): each verse starts with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. That is why the songs always have 22 verses, as many as there are letters in the Hebrew

alphabet. Chapter 3 has a new pattern: tree lines start with the same letter of the alphabet, so there are 66 verses. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, but it does have 22 verses. Poems 1 and 2 are mainly about the great sorrow and the pain in Jerusalem and Judah. Poems 4 and 5 are mainly about hunger, and about how nothing is the way it was. Poem 3 is the middle of the book. In it, you hear the poet's own despair and hope. In verses 21-39, the exact middle of the book, there is a passage about trust. It seems to contradict the rest of the book. Despair changes to hope, and it isn't really clear why. The feelings coexist. As a reader, at any given time, you might identify with the first chapters' despair, and just a moment later, with the trust shown in verses 21-39.

4. EXPLANATION OF THE BIBLE PASSAGE



This Sunday, we will read two Bible passages: from Lamentations 1 and 3.

Lamentations 1:1 is a sorrowful exclamation: "How lonely lies Jerusalem, once so full of people!" You can just feel the poet's pain.

Lamentations 1:1-5 says the city of Jerusalem is empty and abandoned. Once it was a beautiful and lively city, but now no-one lives there anymore.

The city is compared to a widow. The Bible sometimes compares cities like Jerusalem, Babylon or Rome to women. This way, the poet gives the reader an image they can relate to: you can imagine how a widow must feel, and that's the city of Jerusalem's situation, too. There are few people in the city, and those who remain, are lamenting; they are sad.

In Lamentations 3:31-36, the poet's words have a different tone: he turns out to have a little bit of hope after all. He knows that God has abandoned Jerusalem, but he also knows that God will comfort the inhabitants again. God sees people's difficulties.

Preparation

Sorrow and Comfort



5. FROM THE BIBLE

4-8 years

With the younger children, we will focus on Lamentations 3:31.

“The Lord is merciful and will not reject us forever.”

8-12 years

With the older children, we will focus on Lamentations 3:34.

“The Lord knows when our spirits are crushed.”

6. WHAT WILL YOU NEED?



4-12 years

During the church service

- a broken object (the pieces of a broken mug or plate, a torn piece of clothing, a picture that's torn into pieces ...)

4-8 years

Very Sad

- a tissue or handkerchief for each child

An Artwork of Hope

- for each child a sheet of thick paper (A4 or A5), black or another dark color. Penciled on it, the contours of an anchor, a candle, a flower, a rainbow or other symbols of hope
- sheets of thin paper in different colors
- glue

8-12 years

Counting Tears

- a transparent bottle of water – you should know precisely how much water

Bible passage

- a bible

How Does Sorrow Taste?

- for each group of two to four children a set of cups with different types of food: bitter, sweet, sharp et cetera. For example sugar, lemon juice (or chunks of lemon), mustard, chocolate paste, jam, porridge, dry crackers...
- for each group two sheets of paper, with the word “comfort” on the one, and the word “sorrow” on the other
- a few tea spoons
- pens

Say It With Your Hands

- the handout
- pens

Building blocks of the Sunday Sorrow and Comfort

During the Church Service



7. CHILDREN'S MOMENT IN THE SERVICE

Are you using this material for the final Sunday of the church year? Discuss this with the children. Perhaps there are candles in church, or stones. Ask the children whether they know what is happening in church today. Ask them what they see, and ask them whether they know why those candles are there.

Also show the broken object you have taken. Do the children recognize what it used to be? How do they think it was broken? Can it be fixed? Explain that today, the children's service will talk about someone who is so sad about the things he has seen: so much has been broken. And about the question where God is when you are so sad.



Tip

Sing a song about sorrow and comfort in church or during the children's service.

During the Children's Service



8. TO START OFF

4-8 years

Very Sad

What do you need?

- a tissue or handkerchief for each child

Give a tissue to each child. Explain that you are going to read a story about someone who is very sad.

8-12 years

Counting Tears

What do you need?

- a transparent bottle of water – you should know precisely how much water.

Start with a guessing game:

Today's story is about someone who is desperate and has a lot of sorrow. How many tears would there be in this bottle? Do the math in advance (1 milliliter of water contains 20 drops).

9. PRAYER AT THE START OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE



Good God,
Sometimes, sad things happen in our lives.
We sometimes lose the people we love.
Or important things break down.
Then we feel sad and alone.
Like the people in the book of Lamentations.
But you are with us, you will not abandon us.
We thank you for that.
Amen.



Tip

Sit down in a circle for this prayer. You could light a candle.

Building blocks of the Sunday

Sorrow and Comfort

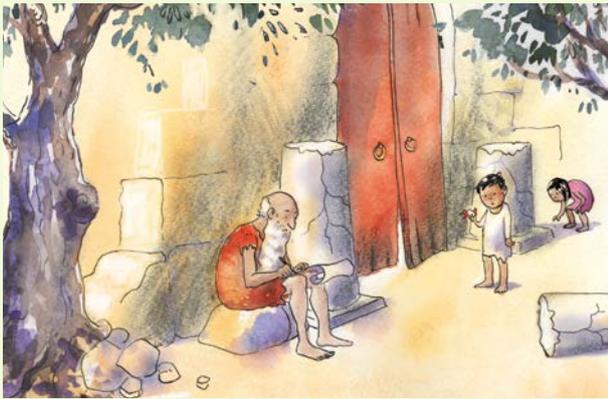


10. BIBLE STORY

4-8 years

Lamentations 1:1-5 en 3:31-36

Tell the story to the children. While you talk or after reading the story, look at the picture together. Ask the children to look carefully and say what they see. You could also use the older children's Fact File for more information..



A Song for Jerusalem

Here I am, sitting on a pile of rubble with an empty sheet of paper.

I am a poet. For years, I wrote songs about the city of Jerusalem, but now I don't know what to write anymore. The rubble I am sitting on, used to belong to the walls of the temple. But the temple is gone. It has collapsed ... And that is not all. The whole of Jerusalem is in ruins. The city walls have been torn down, the king's palace has been burnt down. The streets are almost empty.

It's all because of the Babylonian soldiers. They destroyed Jerusalem and took its inhabitants to their own country.

I look at the temple. Tears are burning in my eyes. The fire has destroyed nearly all of the roof. The pieces that are still standing, are black with soot. "Oh God," I whisper. "They have destroyed your house."

"Ha," an old woman who is passing by laughs. "Did you say: God? Are you still writing about him? Silly poet. Look around you. Jerusalem has been destroyed! God isn't going to help us. He has abandoned us."

I cringe. Is she right? Has God abandoned us? I look at the temple. Back in the days when Jerusalem was a beautiful city, people sang songs about God there. They sang about a God who sees when people are going through hard times. A God who is sad when people hurt each other.

Without meaning to, I get up. I run after the woman and put a hand on her shoulder. She looks at me with surprise in her eyes. A tear runs down my cheek. The words of a song come out of my mouth: "God sees when we are in difficulties. He will comfort us again. His love is great!"

The woman pulls free. She trudges on. "God will not abandon us forever!" I shout after her, but the woman is no longer listening. She doesn't believe me and I am left on my own.

I sink back onto the pile of temple rubble and look around me. Nothing has changed. The streets are still empty and the temple is still in ruins. And yet, I feel different. I suddenly know it is true. Although it looks like God has disappeared, he is still around. He sees the sorrow the people in Jerusalem feel. And one day, he will make them happy again. I wipe the tear from my cheek, and I finally know a line for my song. I write: "God will not reject us forever."

That's what I will tell people. Perhaps that will comfort them a little.

Building blocks of the Sunday

Sorrow and Comfort

8-12 years

Lamentations 1:1-5 and 3:31-36

The Sorrows of Jerusalem

How lonely lies Jerusalem, once so full of people!
Once honored by the world, she is now like a widow;
The noblest of cities has fallen into slavery.
All night long she cries; tears run down her cheeks.
Of all her former friends, not one is left to comfort her.
Her allies have betrayed her and are all against her now.
Judah's people are helpless slaves, forced away from home.
They live in other lands, with no place to call their own—
Surrounded by enemies, with no way to escape.
No one comes to the Temple now to worship on the holy days.

The young women who sang there suffer, and the priests can only groan.

The city gates stand empty, and Zion is in agony.
Her enemies succeeded; they hold her in their power.
The Lord has made her suffer for all her many sins;
Her children have been captured and taken away.

The Lord is merciful and will not reject us forever.
He may bring us sorrow, but his love for us is sure and strong.
He takes no pleasure in causing us grief or pain.
The Lord knows when our spirits are crushed in prison;
He knows when we are denied the rights he gave us;
When justice is perverted in court, he knows.

11. FACT FILE



Lamentations

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems. The poet laments and mourns the destruction of Jerusalem. The poems in the book of Lamentations are like the psalms of lament that were sung by groups, for example Psalm 74 and Psalm 137. Lamentations 3 is more like a psalm of lament that is sung by a single person, like Psalm 13, Psalm 22 and Psalm 77.

Exile

The book of Lamentations is about the time after the destruction of Jerusalem. The city and the temple are destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. That happened when the king of Juda and Jerusalem, Zedekiah, rebelled against him. At that time, the king of Babylonia forced many inhabitants to go to Babylonia. This is called the Babylonian exile.

4-8 years

- What sad things have happened in Jerusalem? What are the things that show what has happened?
- Are you ever sad? Can you say more about when that was?
- Who comforts you if you are alone or sad?
- Do you think God could comfort you? Can you give an example?

8-12 years

- The city of Jerusalem is empty and abandoned. How come?
- What are the people who are still in Jerusalem doing? And where are all the others?
- When you are sad, how do you show it? Who or what helps you feel better?
- We have just heard that God sees people's difficulties. What do you think: how can you tell?
- Can you do something when you notice someone is having a difficult time? Can you give examples of what you could do?

12. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Alongside, there are two kinds of questions you can discuss: "knowledge questions" and "thinking questions". You can look up the answers to the knowledge questions, for example in the story. But the thinking questions can keep your group thinking. There are no wrong answers in those!



Tip for 10-12 years

Is it possible to be desperate or sad and hopeful at the same time? Talk to each other about this.

Building blocks of the Sunday

Sorrow and Comfort

13. DOING

4-8 years

An Artwork of Hope

What do you need?

- for each child a sheet of thick paper (A4 or A5), black or another dark color. Penciled on it, the contours of an anchor, a candle, a flower, a rainbow or other symbols of hope
- sheets of thin paper in different colors
- glue



Have the children tear up the colored sheets, and remind them of the story of the torn-down city of Jerusalem. How small can they make their pieces?

Hand out the dark sheets of paper. Ask the children whether they can recognize what's drawn on their paper. Explain that all these things have something to do with hope. Just think of the man in the story, who hopes that God will comfort his people. Have the children "color in" the contours by gluing on the torn pieces of colored paper.



Tip

Of course, you can also create one big piece of art together, and show it in church after the children's service!

8-12 years

How Does Sorrow Taste?

Sorrow is something you feel throughout your body. You can even taste sorrow. Have children experience that in this experiment.

What do you need?

- for each group of two to four children a set of cups with different types of food: bitter, sweet, sharp et cetera. For example sugar, lemon juice (or chunks of lemon), mustard, chocolate paste, jam, porridge, dry crackers...
- for each group two sheets of paper, with the word "comfort" on the one, and the word "sorrow" on the other
- a few tea spoons
- pens

- 1 Divide the children into groups of two or four. Hand out the numbered cups, the tea spoons, the pens and the sheets of paper.
- 2 Explain that the children can taste a little bit of each of the cups (sometimes, it's more practical to use a tea spoon).
- 3 Have the children discuss after each cup. What have they just tasted?

- 4 Does that flavor go with "sorrow" or with "comfort"? Have the children place the cup with that word on the paper. Does everybody agree?
- 5 Can the food that goes with sorrow also taste different? For example by adding something from the cups that go with "comfort"?



Tip

You could also do this with a blindfold on.

Say It With Your Hands

We have just read that the people in Jerusalem are desperate. When people are sad or desperate, you can often tell by looking at their bodies. They might hide their face in their hands. Have each child place their hand in the free space on the handout and draw around it. Have them discover what people in Jerusalem would say to God. Are they just desperate, or do they have hope, too? Have them write this into the hand they've drawn.

14. BLESSING

In the Bible, there is a blessing for all people. It is a wish that we often hear at the end of a church service. And we say this blessing to each other:

"May the Lord bless you and take care of you; May the Lord be kind and gracious to you; May the Lord look on you with favor and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24-26



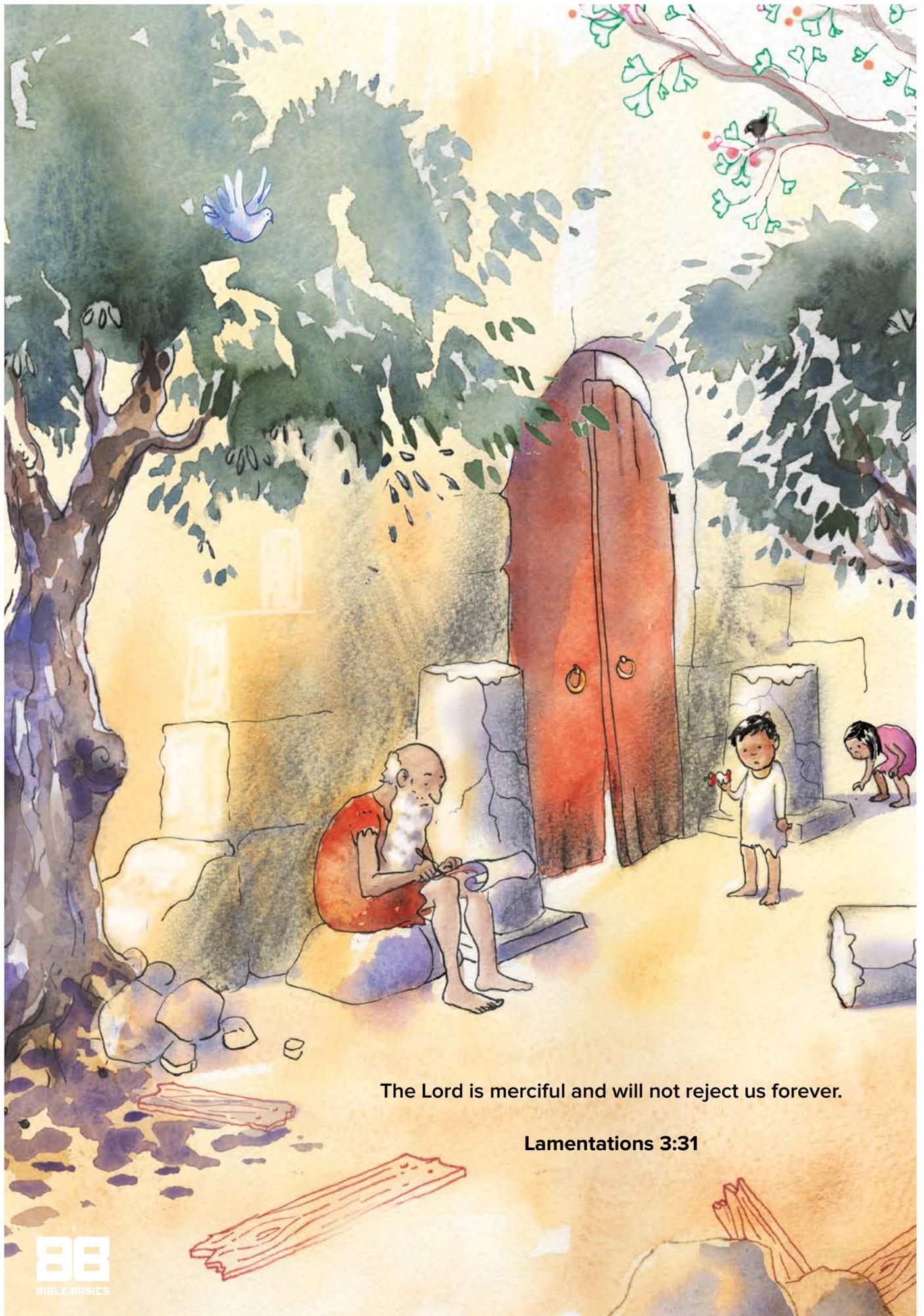
Tips

- Stand in a circle and hold hands.
- Let three children say one sentence each, or say the entire blessing together.



COLOFON

Text: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap
Bible passages: Good News Bible
Retelling Bible story: NBG/ Melanie van de Peut
Translation: NBG/Erica Kramer
Illustration: NBG/ Liza-Beth Valkema
Design: Frivista
DTP: Villa Grafica



The Lord is merciful and will not reject us forever.

Lamentations 3:31

Handout (8-12 years)

Sorrow and Comfort

The Lord knows when our spirits are crushed.

Lamentations 3:35

HOW DOES SORROW TASTE?

Sorrow is something you feel throughout your body. You can even taste sorrow. Find out with this experiment!



What do you need?

- a set of cups with different types of food: bitter, sweet, sharp et cetera. For example sugar, lemon juice (or chunks of lemon), mustard, chocolate paste, jam, porridge, dry crackers...
 - two sheets of paper, with the word “comfort” on the one, and the word “sorrow” on the other
 - a few tea spoons
 - pens
- 1 Put the numbered cups, the tea spoons, the pens and the sheets of paper on the table.
 - 2 Taste a little bit of each of the cups (sometimes, it's more practical to use a tea spoon).
 - 3 What have they just tasted? Does that flavor go with “sorrow” or with “comfort”? Place the cup with that word on the paper.
 - 4 Can the food that goes with sorrow also taste different? For example by adding something from the cups that go with “comfort”?

LAMENTATIONS

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems. The poet laments and mourns the destruction of Jerusalem. The poems in the book of Lamentations are like the psalms of lament that were sung by groups, for example Psalm 74 and Psalm 137. Lamentations 3 is more like a psalm of lament that is sung by a single person, like Psalm 13, Psalm 22 and Psalm 77.



EXILE

The book of Lamentations is about the time after the destruction of Jerusalem. The city and the temple are destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. That happened when the king of Juda and Jerusalem, Zedekiah, rebelled against him. At that time, the king of Babylonia forced many inhabitants to go to Babylonia. This is called the Babylonian exile.



SAY IT WITH YOUR HANDS

The people in Jerusalem are desperate. When people are sad or desperate, you can often tell by looking at their bodies. They might hide their face in their hands. Place your hand on the paper and draw around it with a pen. What might people in Jerusalem say to God? Are they just desperate, or do they have hope, too? Write this into the hand you have drawn. (See next page).



Handout (8-12 years)
Sorrow and Comfort

