

THE PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM

Background: This 'drama' from the Psalms was devised by Clare Amos and has been used by her in a number of settings. We offer it as part of the Bible in the Life of the Church project resources as an excellent example of how Scripture can be brought alive and used in worship. We would be delighted if you want to use the material in worship or in Christian education. Please can you ensure that Clare Amos and The Bible in the Life of the Church project is credited.

Introduction

The Pilgrimage to Jerusalem is a presentation designed to encourage people to appreciate for themselves the original context and use of the biblical psalms. It has been used very successfully with a wide range of groups, in church and teaching settings. The material provided consists of two parts:

1. There is a 'story line' that is read by the leader - who needs to have worked through it previously in advance. It should be read with expression, enthusiasm and encouragement! The leader reads the narrative then pauses when he or she reaches one of the numbers in the scripts eg 1, 2, 3 etc.
2. There are a series of biblical references, numbered from 1-33, on a separate sheet. Different 'characters' are associated with each of the references eg Pilgrims, Priests etc. The group needs to be divided up in advance so that everybody has a part to play (see below). When the leader pauses at a number, the people concerned step in and read the appropriate passage from their Bibles eg when the leader pauses at (1) the 'Pilgrims' read Psalm 84.1-12.

The Bible references as given relate to and work for the Revised Standard Version. There may be small differences in verse numbering of the psalms in other versions - so the leader needs to check these in advance and adapt the references accordingly. It is quite possible and indeed fun for groups to have to 'hunt' in their Bibles for the Bible passages on the basis of the references given, while the story is being told. But if you do have a group who is less confident and not so nifty with their fingers you can copy out the relevant Bible passages for the group and label them 1, 2, etc so that people don't have to 'hunt' them out. This also has the advantage that you don't have to ensure that everybody has the identical version of the Bible in front of them!



Characters in the story: the absolute minimum number of participants the story/drama can work with is seven, although it works much better with a group of 20+. There is no upper limit to size.

The majority of your group should be 'Pilgrims'. Doorkeepers, Prophets, and Priests can be quite small in number, and you should ensure that there is at least one confident reader among each section. In addition there are four individual roles viz Pilgrim A, B, C, D. The people who play these - as well as contributing to the chorus of 'Pilgrims' have each an individual passage or two to read, so you should choose people who will not be phased by this. You also need to be sensitive as to who you ask to read the part of Pilgrim C (the reason is clear in the script).

Further tips:

- Read the story with gusto.
- Don't worry if people are slow to come in to begin with - but encourage them - they will pick up speed as they go along.
- The leader may need to be able to jump in and help pick up the threads.
- The story can be told with movement and actions as well - though this is not essential. But it certainly helps the atmosphere.

Historical note

The author of this 'story' is a teacher of the Old Testament. She cannot 'prove' that the precise psalms chosen were used in exactly the ways that have been suggested - but there is nothing in the story that is historically 'impossible'! The suggestions made fit with the understanding of the psalms that is offered by a wide range of modern scholars working from a form-critical perspective.

© Clare Amos



The story line - narrator

Take yourself back in your imagination almost 3000 years. It is the later years of the reign of King Solomon; all appears to be at peace with Israel, although under the surface there are rumblings of discontent which will eventually smoulder into open rebellion.

But on this fine, late September day in Beth-Horon all that seems far away. You have gathered in the main square of the town with a large crowd of other people - almost the whole population of the town is there milling excitedly around. For this is the beginning of the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem: as many as can are going to travel there to celebrate the great Feast of Tabernacles in the splendid new temple built by Solomon and finished only a few years ago. The rest of the people are there to see the travellers off, to wish them well, and bid them 'Peace' for their journey. Just before the procession of travellers moved off a song was struck up and all joined in singing it, both those who were about to make the journey, and those who this year had to remain behind:

Reading 1.

It was a beautiful song, expressing the longing for Jerusalem and the temple by those who were unable to make the pilgrimage this year. For those who were fortunate enough to be setting off it expressed something of their apprehension at the difficulties and dangers of the journey, but beyond that a quiet confidence and an affirmation that the journey to Jerusalem is worth whatever cost it required.

The pilgrimage caravan set off. It wove its way up the steep limestone hills, a mass of people and pack-animals laden with grain, olives, grapes and figs for the pilgrims to offer in sacrifice when they reach Jerusalem. It was a long day and the pilgrims grew weary as the hot sun of the late summer beat down upon them. They grew hungry - and even more thirsty. But then one of the travellers struck up the refrain:

Reading 2.

It was cheering to the pilgrims to remember that, physically thirsty though they might be, they were even more thirsty for the temple and the living God there, He who was so much more than living waters. They camped overnight near Bethel, glad in the remembrance that they had covered more than half the journey. Tomorrow, with luck, they should arrive in Jerusalem by late afternoon.



The following day the journey was rather different. No longer were there the steep hills to climb. Now they travelled along a level ridge. Then the ridge became a valley, and the hills towered above on either side, casting dark shadows on the pilgrim crowd. Instinctively the pilgrims huddled together more closely -they glanced up at the hills ahead of them, praying that there was no group of armed men up there, waiting to fall upon them in ambush. But no! Today it was alright, today the Pax Solomona reigned - no bandits dared to make their appearance. Finally, they were out of the valley. It was only a couple of miles now to Jerusalem - they strode on with renewed vigour. Suddenly they turned a corner and caught their first glimpse of Jerusalem, glowing golden in the afternoon sun. The younger members of the party raced on ahead - and now they all stood within the city, within the gates of Jerusalem, their destination. The pilgrims burst into song:

Reading 3.

They had just time that afternoon to pay their first visit to the temple - to join in the requests and petitions that were being presented before Yahweh, before 'the face of the Lord'. One of the pilgrims spoke of how worthwhile the journey had been - now that they were able to 'inquire of the Lord'.

Reading 4.

Another of the pilgrims, an older man, was praying particularly fervently. In recent months he had been feeling unwell - he hoped desperately that it was nothing serious, for he still had young children to support. So in the temple he made a special prayer of sacrifice:

Reading 5

After all, it was not just that he should die early. He was not one of the wicked, he had done good all his life. A young man who worked in the temple as a prophet heard his prayer. He went into the inner sanctum to stand before the Ark of Yahweh for a few moments and then reappeared to pronounce to the praying man a word he had heard from Yahweh. 'Fear not,'he said, 'fear not. You shall not die, but you shall live and have length of days. You shall see your children's children after you. This is the word of the Lord.'



The face of the suppliant changed immediately. His lament now changed into a hymn of praise:

Reading 6

That night the pilgrims from Beth-Horon and many other towns and villages, camped outside the city-walls, among the olive groves of the Kedron Valley. The next day the festival proper was due to begin. Very early that morning the Ark of Yahweh was removed from its place in the temple, and carried away by some of the temple servants out of the city. Now the temple was bare - Yahweh was no longer 'dwelling in it'. An aura of sadness came over the place. It was a time for lamentation. The king himself, King Solomon, stripped of all his fine garments, went to the temple and publicly confessed his short-comings and failings over the past year, his own and those of his people. He prayed that - in spite of these sins -Yahweh would remember the covenant he had made with David, and return once more to his city and his temple to protect his people during the coming year and give them his blessing. The pilgrims from Beth-Horon divided into two groups. Most of the company now went up to the top of the Mount of Olives, to join a procession that was beginning to form around the Ark. A few others, though, went and stood in the temple precincts.

Now it was time for the solemn procession to move off from the top of the Mount of Olives: priests and temple functionaries lifted the Holy Ark on to their shoulders, and, temple prophets in the lead, the people followed, waving the palm-branches they had gathered. As they came down the mountain-top, they sang a psalm that recalled the first time that the Ark had come to Jerusalem, when King David had brought it there from Kiriath-Jearim:

Reading 7

And the prophets rang out the assuring word of the Lord in reply

Reading 8

Yahweh had chosen Zion and David would indeed come back to his temple. Now the procession crossed the Kedron Valley and was climbing up the slope on the other side, towards the gates of the city and the temple. The song changed and became yet more joyful: the pilgrims sang together:



Reading 9

The priests carrying the Ark now took up the song:

Reading 10

And again the people repeated the refrain:

Reading 11

By now they had reached the outer gates of the temple-precinct: with a mighty shout the whole procession cried out:

Reading 12

And in reply the door-keepers of the temple shouted back:

Reading 13

Now the Ark and the people began to move inside, chanting as they went and waving their palm branches in joy:

Reading 14

And those inside responded:

Reading 15

Finally, the whole assembly, pilgrims, priests, prophets, door-keepers, acclaimed together:



Reading 16

Now the procession was inside the temple precincts. But before it went any further the people stood in the court-yard and remembered and gave thanks for all that Yahweh had done for them. The temple prophets and singers listed the mercies of God, and the people responded with the refrain 'for his steadfast love endures forever':

Reading 17

Then the procession started up again and began to make for its goal and climax: the temple-building itself. Here there were doorkeepers guarding the entry to the sanctuary, but these door-keepers were fully fledged priests themselves, for it was the holy place itself that they were guarding. The prophets at the head of the procession stopped and asked the question:

Reading 18

And the priests at the doors responded with a 'torah' - an instruction concerning who had the right to enter:

Reading 19

They could now enter! The whole pilgrim procession shouted out:

Reading 20

Then it was the turn of the priests inside to ask a question:

Reading 21

Answer and command came back again immediately:

Reading 22



Once again the question rang out boldly:

Reading 23

Yet more strongly the response:

Reading 24

The king, the King of glory, the invisible Yahweh enthroned upon the Ark had returned and entered his temple. The Ark was immediately carried by the priests straight into the inner sanctuary and placed on its pedestal above the outstretched wings of the cherubim. Now the great liturgy in the temple began - the introit psalm was sung by the pilgrims as they prostrated themselves on the ground, heads touching the floor:

Reading 25

But a note of solemnity was not absent even now from all the joy: the people were warned that to approach Yahweh was a dangerous business, and could even be fatal if the worshippers were not 'holy'. So the prophets replied:

Reading 26

The climax of the liturgy came as the priests reappeared from the inner sanctum and declaimed that Yahweh was king, that he had taken up his rule again:

Reading 27

Now things were secured, were safe, for the following year - things would prosper because Yahweh was King, he was in control.

Most of that day the great liturgy continued - joy and solemnity mingled together, incense rose above the heads of the worshippers. Those present felt that Yahweh's temple on earth was a microcosm of his temple in heaven.



Towards the close of the day it was time for individuals to make their own acts of worship and thanksgiving. One of the pilgrims, from Beth-Horon, went up to the altar outside the temple building with the grain, the oil and the wine he had brought from his fields and his orchards:

Reading 28

For several days the festivities lasted. Each day had its own special character. One day, for example, was especially associated with light and the lighting of lamps on the temple platform. Another day there was always a procession from the Gihon spring up on the hill to the temple. The people carried water from the spring to replenish the water in the great 'Bronze Sea', on the temple platform. It was a symbolic affirmation of the fact that the strength and stability of Jerusalem was closely bound up with the life-giving waters that came from that tiny spring. The priests led the procession and chanted:

Reading 29

The pilgrims affirmed in reply:

Reading 30

Again the priests proclaimed the greatness and strength of Yahweh:

Reading 31

Again the refrain echoed:

Reading 32

as the procession wended its way towards the temple.

All too soon the eight days of the feast had come to an end. It was time for our pilgrims to return to Beth-Horon. Early on their last morning in Jerusalem they went to the temple to receive one final blessing from the priests and to commit themselves to Yahweh as they began the journey home, with all its uncertainties and dangers:

Reading 33.



THE PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM

The readings

1	Pilgrims	Ps 84: 1-12
2	Pilgrim A	Ps 42: 1-2
3	Pilgrims	Ps 122: 1-9
4	Pilgrim B	Ps 27: 4&7
5	Pilgrim C	Ps 28: 1-5
6	Pilgrim C	Ps 28: 6-9
7	Pilgrims	Ps 132: 1-10
8	Prophets	Ps 132: 11-18
9	Pilgrims	Ps 118: 1-2
10	Priests	Ps 118: 3
11	Pilgrims	Ps 118: 4
12	All	Ps 118: 19
13	Doorkeepers	Ps 118: 20
14	Pilgrims & Priests	Ps 118: 21-25
15	Doorkeepers	Ps 118: 26-27
16	All	Ps 118: 28-29
17	Prophets Pilgrims refrain	Ps. 136: 1-3, 10 - 26 'for his steadfast love endures for ever ¹
18	Prophets	Ps 24: 3
19	Priests	Ps24: 4-6
20	Pilgrims	Ps 24: 7
21	Priest B	Ps 24: 8a
22	Pilgrims & Prophets	Ps 24: 8b-9
23	Priests	Ps 24: 10a
24	Pilgrims & Prophets	Ps 24: 10b
25	Pilgrims	Ps 95: 1-7a
26	Prophets	Ps 95: 7b-11
27	Priests	Ps 93: 1-5
28	Pilgrim D	Duet 26:5-10a
29	Priests	Ps 46: 1-6
30	Pilgrims	Ps 46: 7
31	Priests	Ps 46:8-10
32	Pilgrims	Ps 46: 11
33	Pilgrims	Ps 121

