

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

FAITH FORMATION FOR CHILDREN | YOUTH | FAMILY | ADULT

Talking with God - God's Voice through the Prophets Week 4 - Talking with God- God's Voice Through Jeremiah

KEY POINT

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God makes a promise that someday all people will know God and God will forget all sin. The prophet helps us see the world as it is, but also the future as it will be. God's love and forgiveness will always have the final word in this world.

KEY VERSE

Jeremiah 31:33-34
But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

OPENING PRAYER

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of Jeremiah, your word endures even when we do not want to hear it. Be with us as we study together, and open our hearts to your prompting. In your name. Amen.

READ

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Luke 22:19-20)

ABOUT THE STORY

Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem in the final years before the defeat and destruction of the city at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. His years of ministry are thought to span from 626 BCE to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The first king during this period was Josiah (640-609 BCE), a reformer who tried to bring the kingdom back into line with God's will. He recommitted his people to the covenant, reinstated the observance of Passover, and purged the kingdom of idols (2 Kings 23).

After the death of Josiah in 609 BCE, the subsequent kings were less devout and less successful at keeping their enemies at bay. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin were the next three kings, and all three were apparently less than committed to the reforms that Josiah had instituted. Prophets during this time, including Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel, condemn the kings for their idolatry and failure to protect the less fortunate in society.

Today's passage in chapter 36 takes place in the fourth and fifth years of King Jehoiakim, probably in 605 and 604 BCE. By this time, the threat of the Babylonian Empire had become quite tangible for the people of Jerusalem. Much of the land of Judah would have been occupied, including cities as near as 50 miles away. Within just a few years, the king of Israel was removed from the throne and forced to watch as his sons were executed. He was then blinded and sent into exile along with Judah's elite. Zedekiah was placed on the throne as a puppet of the Babylonians. He attempted his own revolt ten years later, resulting in the razing of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the entire population.

Throughout this period, Jeremiah and others preached to the kings and the people of Judah, urging them to turn back to God. At first, the oracles convey hope that if the people repent, Jerusalem might be spared. But as the book goes

on and it becomes apparent that no change will come, the tone shifts to one of impending judgment. Still, throughout the prophetic books of the period, God's commitment to the people of Israel endures.

No matter what we do, God promises a renewed relationship with us. The king has rejected God's word in the clearest way possible, burning the scrolls that contain Jeremiah's prophecies. Yet God continues to reach out to the people of Israel, reiterating the word and promising that it will some day be written on their hearts. God continues reaching out to people today, and we too have the promise that it will be written on our hearts!

SHARE

- Each person takes a piece of paper and draws or cuts out a heart shape. On the heart, write a sentence or a list of your most closely held values. These should be the principles or ideals that are most central to how you live your life. Share your values with the group. Discuss the following questions: Where did these values come from? How did you learn them? Which ones do you share with others? Which ones are different?
- What is the promise God that is making in verses 31-34? What is God's grievance? How does God say this covenant will be different from the previous one?

PRAY

Take turns going back and forth or from person to person, saying, "God is great, God is good, thank you God for _____." See how long you can keep it going.

BLESS

Share this verbal blessing with one another: The God who makes all things new is with you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Tape several pieces of paper together and write out the entirety of chapter 31 on it to be rolled up in a scroll. As you write, reflect on the words you are writing.
- Write the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) on a large paper in the shape of a heart. Tape it to your refrigerator, mirror, or somewhere else you will see it every day. Whenever you see it, take a moment to read through them and reflect.
- Make a list of those who have been your teachers in the faith. How have they shaped your understanding of God's covenant? Why are teachers still necessary?