

Youth Teaching Resources

October 28, 2018



Doing, and Being (September 2-November 25)

Genesis 2:18-24 – “Being Equal”

Psalm 90 (RCL 90:12-17) – “Gaining Perspective”

Isaiah 53:4-12 – “Redeeming Love”

Jeremiah 31:7-9 – “Saving Grace”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Saving Grace

Jeremiah 31:7-9

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

PARENT PREP

Our students have the opportunity to be more connected now than ever. The devices that we carry allow us to contact anyone, at any time, at almost any place. They can not only hear someone else's voice, but they can see them as they talk with them. Distances can be shrunk down to how close you want to hold your phone to your face. But, our students can also feel very alone. They can feel isolated because they don't have real friends, or that their friends only care about them so they can be "followed back." Be aware of your students slipping off into isolation. Be present.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip "Furnace Scene" and then "Kevin and Mom 'Hug'" both from *Home Alone*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How does Kevin first react when he can't find anyone?
- 2) How does Kevin's attitude change as he realizes he's alone?
- 3) Throughout the movie Kevin begins to realize that he doesn't want to be alone. Have you ever had a time when you haven't wanted to be alone? How did you overcome this?
- 4) Can your faith help you to not feel alone?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Jeremiah 31:7-9. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How do we know that Jeremiah thought these words were coming straight from God? How would this have influenced the listeners?
- 2) Why are they singing aloud to Jacob?
- 3) Why was verse 8 such good news for the people of Israel?
- 4) How does Jeremiah offer hope to those who feel distant from God?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) Who was Jeremiah the prophet?
- 2) How was Jeremiah the prophet different than Jeremiah the author?
- 3) What was Jeremiah trying to preach to the people?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Has Jeremiah's prophesy been fulfilled?

Transformation

Conclude your session by distributing note cards and writing instruments to the group. As you distribute the cards, list off some of the different groups of people in your church that feel isolated or alone (Homebound, rehab facilities, military members...) and have individuals group one group, or person, to write a note to. When everyone has written their card, collect them, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Who are other groups of people that you know are isolated?
- 2) How can you help them not feel as isolated?
- 3) Which of your friends feel isolated? How can you help them feel like they are part of a group?

Close with a prayer thanking God for relationships.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Jeremiah the prophet—Jeremiah lived and ministered during a difficult time in Israel’s history. His ministry involved not only spiritual matters, but also included pronouncements related to politics and foreign policy.

The international context played an important role in Judah’s internal uncertainty. The strong nation of Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom and led Israel into exile in 722 BCE, then dominated the international scene for the next 80 years. Judah had been forced to pay tribute to Assyria, but the overlord’s strength weakened during the last half of the seventh century. Nabopolassar led Babylonia to independence from Assyria and sought to dethrone Assyria as ruler of the roost. Caught up in its conflicts with the Babylonians, Assyria had fewer resources to spare in keeping Judah and other vassal countries in line. Egypt continued to be a major power that wanted to dominate Palestine, and Judah found itself caught in the middle of these struggles between larger nations. Its leaders sometimes sought to ally themselves with one against the other in hopes of regaining more independence.

Jeremiah was active during the reigns of five Judean kings: Josiah (640-609), Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609-598), Jehoiakin (598-597), and Zedekiah (597-587). He remained active after Nebuchadnezzar disbanded the monarchy and appointed a prominent citizen named Gedaliah to govern the province from the city of Mizpah. Jeremiah had not been taken captive with the exiles, perhaps because it was known that he had counseled submission to Babylon. He actively advised those who remained in the land, while also sending letters to those who were in exile, encouraging them to put down roots and get on with their lives.

Within a few years, a group of zealots assassinated Gedaliah in hopes of throwing off the Babylonian yoke. This led to another influx of Babylonian troops, and in 582 even more Judeans were carried into exile. Others escaped the Babylonians by fleeing to Egypt and reportedly forcing Jeremiah to accompany them (40:7-44:30).

Thus, Jeremiah ministered during a period of great upheaval. Well-schooled in the teachings of Deuteronomy and probably familiar with the ministries of eighth century prophets like Micah, Hosea, and Amos, he steadfastly proclaimed true Yahwism and denounced all religious deviations. Often, he interpreted Judah’s political troubles and impending wars as punishment for the nation’s sin in turning away from Yahweh; yet, he also offered glimpses of hope for the future.

Jeremiah the author—Jeremiah is one of the few prophets whose actual writing ministry is explicitly mentioned. While the oracles of other prophets have been preserved, we rarely read of them taking quill to parchment (or papyrus).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Jeremiah 36:1-5, however, describes how God instructed Jeremiah to record all of his prophecies against Judah. He dictated the prophecies to his companion/scribe Baruch, who wrote them down. Some have suggested that the oracles mentioned in 36:1-5 may refer to most of what is now Jeremiah 1-25. The same chapter also makes clear what happened to one of the “original autographs” – King Jehoiakim cut it up and burned it as it was read to him. Afterward, Jeremiah had Baruch write the oracles again, and added many other choice words.

The book of Jeremiah is often confusing because it includes both first person accounts in which Jeremiah speaks, along with third person accounts that describe Jeremiah’s activities. God also speaks in the Book of Jeremiah, and sometimes it is difficult to determine whether the author intends for us to understand that that God is speaking or that Jeremiah is speaking. Jeremiah also speaks in behalf of the people or its kings, often as a sarcastic means of criticizing their actions – but not always with clear attribution.

Jeremiah often speaks in poetry: the first half of the book is dominated by poetic oracles, though some narrative exists to put them in context. The latter half of the book is primarily in the form of narrative, more frequently describing the prophet’s actions. Many scholars assume that Baruch, who is specifically described as the scribe who wrote at Jeremiah’s dictation, is responsible for much of the narrative that describes Jeremiah and his various activities.

There is a strong likelihood that the Jeremiah materials continued to grow in the hands of later editors and religious leaders who expanded on the prophet’s work, emphasizing his prophetic role and applying many of his sayings to the needs of their particular context. This may explain some of the many doublets in Jeremiah, places in which the same speech or content is repeated, but in different contexts. More than 50 doublets have been identified in the book of Jeremiah. Some samples are 6:13-15=8:10-12; 10:12-16=51:15-19; 11:20=20:12; 16:14-16=23:7-8; 23:5-6=33:14-16; 30:10-11=46:27-28; 49:19-21=50:44-46.

Evidence for the continued growth of the Jeremiah traditions is seen most clearly in a study of the differences between the text of Jeremiah as preserved in the traditionally accepted Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text, or MT), and in the ancient Greek translation of Jeremiah, as preserved in the Septuagint (LXX). The LXX version is about one-seventh shorter than the Hebrew form. Omissions range from single words to longer sections of several verses, such as 33:14-26. The LXX also preserves a different order: the “foreign prophecies” of Jer. 46-51 (MT) are inserted between Jer. 25:13 and 25:15 in the LXX, with 25:14 being omitted.

As a rule, the LXX tends to amplify the text it is translating, rather than abbreviating it. Thus, the shorter LXX text of Jeremiah suggests that the Greek translation was made from an early version of the book, when the corpus of the Jeremiah materials was still growing in the hands of later editors and theologians. Some have suggested that it was translated from an early Hebrew version that was preserved in Egypt, and thus does not reflect the editorial expansions presumed to have occurred in Babylon.

Digging Deeper *continued*

As further evidence for the expansion of the Jeremiah scroll, note that Jeremiah is called a prophet only four times in the (older?) LXX. The MT, perhaps reflecting a development in the tradents' appreciation for Jeremiah, calls him a prophet 30 times. Similarly, expressions such as "oracle of the Lord," designed to emphasize that a word came from God, occur much more often in the MT.

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumram, Hebrew text fragments representing both textual traditions were found. This suggests that, as late as the first century B.C., there was no universally accepted text of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's message—Jeremiah's preaching, writing, and activity were all predicated on the belief that God is alive and at work in the world, relating directly and purposefully with His people.

God is a *primary actor* in Jeremiah, though not always easy to understand. God appears as both intensely angry and mournfully compassionate, as a God of both wrath and weal, a God of both judgment and of salvation.

Jeremiah has much to say about *creation*, declaring that God made the earth (33:2) sustains it (31:35-36), and fills it with His presence (23:23-24). Nevertheless, human behavior can bring harm to God's creation (12:1-4), so that human choice has a wide-ranging impact.

It is Jeremiah's understanding of this connection between God's activity among all peoples and throughout creation that leads him to speak as a prophet, not only to Israel, but to other nations (1:5, 10).

Jeremiah, who is sometimes described as the "weeping prophet," often speaks of God's deep pathos, as God feels deeply the pain of the Israelites and the groanings of creation. God also expresses anger, heartache, and regret, even hate. These emotions are often displayed in the words or the actions of the prophet, as Jeremiah resonates with the heart of God that hurts for the people but also resents their rebellion. The picture of an angry God is not an attractive one for contemporary believers, but it is helpful to remember that God's anger is not a perpetual divine attribute so much as a temporal response. God's anger is always provoked by human sin, and it is always accompanied by grief; God takes no joy in anger, and mourns when punishing.

The sin that most frequently caught Jeremiah's eye was Israel's persistent penchant of going after other gods and failing to trust in Yahweh. Like Hosea, Jeremiah often described this rebellion through the metaphor of marital infidelity. The people of God are depicted as a wife who has been unfaithful to her husband, as an animal in heat that becomes a slave to its passion.

Jeremiah echoes the basic theme of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History in asserting that sin inevitably leads to judgment. Because the people have chosen evil, evil is visited upon them. That evil often comes through the medium of earthly powers. Thus,

Digging Deeper *continued*

Nebuchadnezzar and the conquering Babylonians could be seen as God's unwitting agents of judgment, even as Cyrus the Persian would later become a medium of salvation.

Despite his focus on judgment for Israel's sin, Jeremiah also saw a new day coming when God would forgive recalcitrant Israel and return them from exile. Most of the hopeful prophecies are found in Jeremiah 30-31 (some include chapter 33), often called the "Book of Consolation."

The text—Jeremiah 31 is a popular chapter in the lectionary. Jeremiah 31:1-6 is used for Easter Day in Year A; 31:7-9 for "Proper 25" in Year B (this Sunday); 31:7-14 for the second Sunday of Christmas in all three years; 31:15-17 for "Holy Innocents" day; 31:27-34 for "Proper 24" in Year C; and 31:31-34 for the fifth Sunday of Lent in Year B.

We'll focus on the three verses of the assigned text (31:7-9), but with some reference to the oracles on each side. Verses 1-6, 7-9, and 10-14 probably originated as separate oracles, but were fit together since they speak to the same theme: a promise that God will forgive Israel and bring them back from exile.

The blind and the lame—Leviticus 21:16-20 excluded priests who were blind and lame, among other things, from entering the temple and drawing near to the presence of God. Women were categorically excluded from the temple. Jeremiah, however, saw a day when God would reach out to and restore all people, even those one might not expect to be included. Later, Jesus would make a point of showing similar concern for all people.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Has Jeremiah's prophecy been fulfilled?

The hopeful words of Jeremiah's prophecy continue to inspire, but were they actually fulfilled? In one sense, we can answer in the affirmative, because the exiles in Babylon were allowed to return to Jerusalem after the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. Cyrus' philosophy, different from that of the Assyrians or the Babylonians, was that people are more likely to be loyal to the empire if they are allowed to live in their homelands and worship their own gods.

So, the Hebrews, like other conquered nations, were allowed to return home. Several waves of Hebrews made the long and arduous journey to Jerusalem and the small area of "Jehud" Cyrus had granted them, but many others chose to remain in Babylon, the only home they had ever known. There was no great migration of Israelite exiles from other parts of the world, and certainly no easy journey along brooks of water.

Some people today might argue that the formation of the secular State of Israel in 1948 fulfilled the promise, because Jews from all over the world have returned to inhabit parts of the land, though they remain a small minority of Jews the world over. God's presence is not limited to the former lands of Judea and Samaria, however, but extends to wherever people are. The modern State of Israel is a human creation in response to the holocaust – and one that often violates the inclusive spirit of Jeremiah's promise – not a fulfillment of divine prophecy.

One may suggest that the ultimate fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy is found, not in a return of a Hebrew remnant to Jerusalem, but in the opportunity for all people to come to God through Jesus Christ, who reached out to all people, whatever their gender or physical capabilities or nationality.

In Christ, God's reconciling love and abundant forgiveness is available "from the farthest parts of the earth, calling all people to "come home" to the land of communion with God – and with all of God's children.