

JEREMIAH: A NEW HOPE FLOATS

by Dan Baker

KEY VERSE:

Jeremiah 32:37-38

“See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety. They shall be my people and I will be their God.”

FAITH STORY:

Jeremiah 32-34:7

FAITH FOCUS:

During this time period the Babylonian army, under the rule of king Nebuchadnezzar, is laying siege to the Israelite’s capitol city of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah is imprisoned in Jerusalem under the orders of king Zedekiah of Judah because he prophesied that Jerusalem would be handed over to the Babylonians and that king Zedekiah would be taken. While imprisoned in the courtyard of the royal palace of Judah, Jeremiah receives the word of the Lord, and God instructs him to buy a field from his cousin. This is a message of hope from God to Jeremiah, telling him that though the Israelites had done evil and had been thrown into exile because of their sin, he will one day restore them and return to them the land of Canaan. The theme of this lesson is redemption and hope found in God.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand the meaning and power of hope found in God.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session students will know the main characters and what is happening to the Israelites during this time.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Star Wars: A New Hope, cued up to where the group gets stuck in a garbage compactor
- 2 VCR or DVD player and TV
- 3 container for Apply activity
- 4 water, stones small enough to put into a balloon
- 5 balloons—one for each student plus several extra
- 6 small slips of paper and pens
- 7 Practice the Apply activity at home so you know how it will work in class
- 8 Bring a CD with a song about hope in God, and a CD player, OR enough Hymnals for your students if they will sing a hymn together.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5 minutes)

Welcome students to class and begin with the video clip from **Star Wars: A New Hope**. The clip is from the scene where the group gets stuck in a garbage compactor while trying to rescue Princess Leia.

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Discuss the Star Wars clip.

Ask: "Where does the group get stuck in this clip?" (In a garbage masher.)

Ask: "How do they get there?" (Princess Leia leads them there because they have no other choice. They come to a demise of their own making.)

Ask: "How do they stop the garbage masher?" (C3PO contacts Luke and R2D2 stops the garbage masher. They have to call on an outside force.)

Ask: "When does Luke discover hope in this clip?" (When he remembers the "com-link" and when C3PO calls him.)

Transition Statement:

"Today we will be studying a story in the Bible about when the Israelites got into a mess of their own making. And, kind of like C3PO and R2D2 give the group in Star Wars "a new hope," God intervenes with the fate of the Israelites and promises them deliverance."

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Have students read:

Student #1 - Jeremiah 32:1-5

Ask: "Who is Zedekiah?" (The king of Judah.)

Ask: "Who is attacking the city of Jerusalem?" (The Babylonians.)

Ask: "Who is Nebuchadnezzar?" (The king of the Babylonians.)

Ask: "Who is Jeremiah?" (A prophet of the Lord in Judah.)

Ask: "Why does Zedekiah imprison Jeremiah?" (Most likely because Jeremiah's prophecies frighten him, or because they frighten his troops and threaten the war effort.)

Student #2 - Jeremiah 32:6-8

Student #3 - Jeremiah 32:9-15

Discuss: "Why was it Jeremiah's duty to buy the land from his cousin?"

In Leviticus 25:25, among the laws of the year of Jubilee, God states that If a man becomes

poor and has to sell his land, then it is the duty of his nearest relative to redeem him by purchasing the land.

“Why did the Lord have Jeremiah buy this land from his cousin? What is symbolic about the purchase?”

Prophets had many ways to convey their messages in biblical stories. This message is a prophecy acted out. The Lord is having Jeremiah buy the land of his relatives in the same way that the Lord will one day return the land of Canaan to the Israelites (This answer is not one that is evident in the story, even to Jeremiah, until later. So if the students do not know the answer then continue on with the story until it is revealed. It is a question meant to make the students think.)

Student #4 - Jeremiah 32:16-25

Ask: *“What is Jeremiah getting at in this section? What is he asking God?”*

Jeremiah is asking why God is having him buy the land from his cousin when Jerusalem will soon fall and all of the Israelites will soon be in exile. He doesn't even understand the act of prophecy that he just acted out, but it is all in the Lord's plan.

Student #5 - Jeremiah 32:26-35

Ask: *“What is the message that God conveys in this section?”*

The Lord declares all of the great things that he has done for the Israelites and then tells of how sinful they have been in return. Here the Lord reveals his struggle with the Israelites.

Student #6 - Jeremiah 32:36-44

Ask: *“What does the Lord promise in this scripture?”*

God promises that he will one day restore the Israelites and return their homes and their land to them. He gives the people a word of hope in their most desperate hour.

Ask: *“God makes a covenant to his people in this passage. How long does he say that the covenant will last?”*

God says that the covenant is everlasting and that he will never stop doing well to his people.

Now ask again: *Why did Jeremiah have to buy the land? Why was this absurd politically speaking? And why did it make sense if you understand what God was doing?*

He had to buy it because it was his prophecy from God being acted out. It showed that one day, the Lord would restore the people of Israel to their land of Canaan. It made no sense politically because the Babylonians were going to invade the land and force the Israelites out, so there would be no point in buying land he would soon lose.

APPLY: (5–7 minutes)

Bring a large clear container to class—a fish tank or a big clear plastic or glass jar. Fill the container approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Put stones in one balloon and blow it up. Blow up the second balloon. Explain to the class that the balloon with the stones could represent a person who fills their life with hope based on what the world has to offer. Ask students what some of those hopes might be. Place the balloon in the container and watch as it sinks to the bottom. Then place the air-filled balloon in the container, saying that it represents people whose hope is in God and in what God has to offer to their lives.

Ask: *Which balloon would you rather be?*

RESPOND: (5–7 minutes)

Hand out slips of paper, pens and balloons and ask students to write down a problem or worry that they have in their lives at this time; then put it into the balloon and blow it up. Go outside with the balloons. Ask students to say a silent prayer about their concern, and then turn it over to God as they release their balloon. Play the CD or sing “My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less” in the hymnal—do this either outside or back in the classroom.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

The story takes place during a time of exile for the Israelites. Most of Canaan has already been conquered by the invading Babylonians under the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar, and only Jerusalem and several other fortified cities remain in Judah. The Babylonians have a war policy in which they export all of the peoples they conquer and import peoples from distant lands to inhabit the area. This was a way for them to keep the peace and prevent rebellions from starting since it separated groups who were close and possibly organized. Many of the Israelites were already in exile due to this policy and the ones left in Jerusalem would soon be also.

The king in Judah at this time is king Zedekiah. Jeremiah, a prophet of the Lord, is with Zedekiah in Jerusalem. When Jeremiah prophesies to Zedekiah that Jerusalem will be overtaken and that the Babylonians will take Zedekiah, Israel’s king has Jeremiah locked up in the courtyard of the palace. This is most likely either because Zedekiah feared for his own well-being or because Jeremiah’s prophesies were damaging the war effort in Judah.

In this story God has Jeremiah buy a piece of land from his cousin. This is scripturally Jeremiah’s duty because of the law found in Leviticus 25:25 which states that if a man becomes poor and has to sell his land, his nearest relative will redeem him and purchase the land. The reason God has Jeremiah buy the land, however, is completely different. In biblical times, prophets prophesized in many different ways: they sometimes preached their message, sometimes told stories to get it across, and sometimes they even acted out their prophesies as a way to bring them forth. Jeremiah buying his cousin’s land was a prophecy acted out. In doing so Jeremiah showed how, one day, the Lord would restore the people of Israel and return to them the land of Canaan.