

Lesson 11 - Jeremiah: God's Prophet

Objectives

By the end of this lesson the student should know that:

- Identify the names and capitals of the two kingdoms into which Israel was divided.
- Explain the chief quality of a prophet in the Old Testament.
- Identify the two main violations of the covenant which the prophets condemned.
- Explain how the promises of David's eternal kingdom and Jeremiah's New Covenant would be fulfilled.

For the Catechist

With the end of Solomon's kingdom, the Israelites (now divided in two kingdoms as Jews and Samaritans) became increasingly weaker. Their commitment to the covenant faltered as well. Called to remain faithful to God alone, they were frequently tempted to join their neighbors in worshiping local deities. Fidelity to an unseen God of all was foreign to the people among whom they dwelt; as the Israelites mingled with them, they were drawn to at least tolerate their pagan ways.

With the growing tolerance to idolatry in the two kingdoms, God called forth prophets to stand in the midst of the people and publicly announce their infidelity to the covenant. The prophets saw that their laxity in the things of God would lead to the increasing weakness and ultimate destruction of their nation. The prophets were not fortune-tellers but did point to the inevitable consequences of behavior so contradictory to the very purpose of the Chosen People: to be the people of the one God.

Several aspects of the prophets' place in Salvation History touched upon in this lesson correspond to experiences in the students' lives as well. The prophets' stand for God and His ways despite the tide of popular or official sentiment has much to say about the resistance of a confident student to peer pressure. The destruction of the kingdoms that ignored the prophets' warnings points to the fact that we ignore the consequences of our actions (or inaction) at our peril.

The Jews had to undergo the exile before they could rediscover the purpose of their existence in the covenant. After their return, they devoted themselves less to political goals and more to knowing and observing the Law. Like them, young people who ignore their "prophets" may need to learn from experience before arriving at some maturity in life.

Materials Needed:

Opening Prayer: Icon corner, student texts

Introduction: Easel or wall pad, markers, Introduction Worksheet

Guided Reading: *Abingdon's Bible Maps for Children*

Activity A: "Jeremiah 16:1-18" Worksheet, pencils

Activity B: Bibles, paper, pencils

Activity C: *Time Travel through the Bible* DVD and Leader's Guide

Activity D: Jesse Tree Worksheet, craft items

1. Opening Prayer

Pray the selection from Psalm 51 on page 53 in the student text. Remind the students that this was David's prayer of repentance after he realized the enormity of his sin against Uriah.

2. Review

Review the main points of the previous lesson using the pages from your wall or easel pad. Use the time line on the Unit Page to recall the transition from tribal rule under the judges to the days of the kings in the last lesson. Note that in today's lesson we will see another transition, from the days of the kings to the days of the exile.

3. Introduction

Divide the class into two groups with each group considering one of the scenarios on the Introduction Worksheet. Each story calls for an older sibling or friend to give advice. Note that some people give the advice they think others want to hear ("Yes, go for it... Its okay; everybody does it.") Others challenge their hearers to do the right thing whether people like it or not.

Stress the fact that what we do has consequences. Today's lesson shows the consequences the Israelites faced when they ignored their covenant with God.

Background Reading (Anointed Kings):

"The prophets were the people's 'conscience.' They continually preached of God's faithfulness to His covenants and exhorted the people to be faithful. Often the prophets' moral teachings would upset the authorities who were less interested in the law of God than in their own positions. When King Ahab met the prophet Elijah, his first words were, 'Is it you, the disturber of Israel?' (3/1 Kings 18:16). The prophets' persistence in this role often led to persecution and death, down to the time of John the Baptist who was beheaded for decrying the immorality of King Herod. The Lord Jesus Himself was crucified, in part for challenging the behavior of the religious leaders. ...

"Prophets are needed for all times. They stirred up the awareness of Israel to realize that God's actions were not limited to earlier times but applied to the present and the future as well" (*LLI* 39-40).

4. Guided Reading, Pages 54-56

11 Jeremiah: God's Prophet

"When the Israelite leaders wanted Samuel to appoint a king over them, the prophet asked God for guidance. God told Samuel to grant their request but added, 'It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king.' (1 Samuel 8:7) The location was the people of the Covenant and God had promised to be with them by making for a king, they were looking to remove and replace to defend them, rather than God.

God let them have their way, but it was destined to fail. After Solomon, his kingdom was split in two, becoming the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. Over the next few centuries, these kingdoms were successive progressive, often at the expense of the past. They frequently looked to their pagan neighbors for support, sometimes adopting their ways and allowing the worship of their gods in the Holy Land. The kings permitted social injustice and paganism to flourish rather than uphold the Israelites' covenant with God.

Since the Israelites were drifting further from God and His ways, God raised up prophets to call them back to the covenant. The prophets were spokesmen for God, reminding the people of His love for them and His will. It had been with them in the past. Their discontent, rejection and victory as signs that the Israelites were being punished in the God who had chosen them to be His people.

54 God With Us: Grade 6 Unit 3: God Works in the Old Testament



Before the reading, **summarize the objectives of the lesson** on a wall pad or easel pad so that the page can be preserved and used for review next week.

Have the students **read the first two paragraphs** on page 54. **Refer the students to the map** on page 172 of their text showing the kingdom of David and Solomon. Note its growth from the time of Saul. Then look at the map of the divided kingdom on page 173 showing Israel with Samaria as its center and Judah with Jerusalem as its capital and/or the wall map of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Note that from this time the northerners came to be known as **Samaritans** and the southerners as **Jews**. Ask:

- What does the second map tell us about the power of the Israelites? (*Divided, shrinking*)

Have the students **read the next paragraph** in the lesson. Compare the prophets with the advisors in the opening exercise. The prophets' role was to remind God's People of the right path, the path of the covenant. Ask:

- What do the writings of the prophets and the daily horoscope have in common? (*Both written on paper - that's all! Prophets are not fortunetellers.*)

The Prophets Fight Idolatry

The prophets' first "target" was idolatry because God's First Commandment was "You shall have no other gods before me." You could not be a worshiper of God's People and worship pagan gods. Yet, "After several centuries as Israel in the temple of Baal which he had in Samaria, and also made a second god. It had been with them in the past. Their discontent, rejection and victory as signs that the Israelites were being punished in the God who had chosen them to be His people."

In the eighth century in Israel, the northern kingdom, came to be dominated by the Assyrians. When Israel tried to resist in 723 BC, the Assyrians invaded Israel and destroyed it. They deported its most important people. Those left behind came to be known as Samaritans, from the name of their chief city.

The southern kingdom was called Judah, and its people were called Jews. It also suffered under the Assyrians but survived. Judah was dominated by the Assyrians and then the

The prophets also reminded God's People that justice, truth and obeying the laws had no place in their way of life. "I hate, I spurn your feasts, I take no pleasure in your solemnities," the prophet Amos pronounced as God's spokesman, "If you would offer me sacrifices, then let justice surge like water and produce like an unfolding stream" (Amos 5:21-24).

The prophets warned that God would use them a people that was rejecting Him. All their kings and armies would be of no help unless they repented. "When you are a king, that he may reject you in all your cities," and your rulers, who said, "Give me a king and princes" (Hosea 13:10). They prophesied the destruction of their world because they had broken the covenant. "They shall come to you from Assyria and from Egypt from Zion you will have them say to me and from mountain to mountain, and the land shall

55



Note that many people think of prophets as predicting the future. That was not their aim. As God's spokesmen, the prophets pointed to the consequences of wrong choices: if you don't change your ways, this will happen. This is not fortune-telling.

Read the next section, "**The Prophets Fight Idolatry**" (page 55). Connect the idea of idolatry with what happens when people do the things others do just because "everyone's doing it so it must be ok." Note that the Jews and Samaritans had been taught that idolatry was wrong: they knew the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses but found reasons not to listen.

Background Reading (Prophets Announce God's Plan):

With the exile to Babylon, the prophetic ministry did not cease. Its tone, however, changed dramatically. Recalling the three great events of the Torah, the prophets now announce God's plan to effect something utterly 'new' - a new creation, a new exodus, a new covenant. From the promise that a remnant of the people will return to the land of Israel, chastened by their exile, the prophecies of this period expanded to envision a new, faithful Israel shining a beacon toward which all people would stream to encounter God" (OTB 4-5).

5. Jeremiah Pages 56-57

The Israelites had tried to become a nation like their pagan neighbors. They had rejected the covenant with God by idolatry and apostasy. God wanted them through the prophets, but allowed them to be defeated until they learned that their real strength came from being God's People and following His ways.

All those people believed and followed the prophets' teachings, none often the Israelites rejected the prophets' message. Elisha often tried to silence the prophets, from them into exile or kill them. But God was with the prophets and their word was to endure, even as the Israelites' kingdom disappeared.

Jeremiah

From a priestly family in the southern kingdom, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet as a young man. "The word of the Lord came to me thus: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.' (Jer. 1:5) 'I said, I know not how to speak; I am too young.' 'But the Lord answered me: 'Say not, 'I am too young.' For whenever I send you, you shall go, whenever I command you, you shall speak. How can I fear before them because I saw with you as children you, says the Lord.' (Jeremiah 1:6-7)

As Assyria fell and Babylon became powerful, people were returning to idolatry. Jeremiah called on them to return to the God that had been rejected. One day Jeremiah was working a potter working at his wheel. "Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly, he would take the mud upon himself and reshape it into another object of whatever sort he pleased. Thus the word of the Lord came to me: 'Clay that does not give, how can it be made? On this potter has done' says the Lord. Indeed, the clay is in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." (Jeremiah 18:1-6)

56

Old Testament Prophets

Elijah (750?) - Called the "father of the prophets," he fought idolatry in the northern kingdom from c. 875-841 BC (2 Kings 1-2 Kings 13). He and Moses were witness to Christ at His Transfiguration.

Elisha - The disciple of Elijah, he continued his master's mission as told in 2 Kings 2-9. The stories and legends of other prophets were recorded in books bearing their names.

Amos - A shepherd in the southern kingdom during the eighth century BC.

Hosea - The author who recorded the words of Jeremiah in exile.

Isaiah - A priest deported to Babylon (597 BC), who lived among the exiled Jews.

Jeremiah - He prophesied during the siege of Jerusalem (605-597 BC).

Haggai - Prophesied after the Jews had returned to the Holy Land (c. 520 BC).

Hosea - A poet in the northern kingdom, he prophesied c. 750 BC.

Isaiah - Called to prophesy in 742 BC, he is the longest prophetic book.

Jedai - This latest prophet (c. 400 BC?), quoted at Pentecost (see John 2:17-22).

Malachi - A prophet after the return from exile (5th century BC).

Micah - A Judah village, he prophesied at the end of the seventh century BC.

Nahum - He foretold the defeat of Assyria, which happened in 612 BC.

Oswald - The shortest prophetic book, it was written in the 8th century BC.

Zachariah - Prophesied at the same time as Haggai.

Zephaniah - Prophesied the fall of Jerusalem for adjoining pages.

Note that the Old Testament mentions many prophets and that the prophet Elijah is considered the most representative. **Refer to the story of Elijah** in Unit 8, Our Church Year (July 20).

Explain that Jeremiah was a prophet who lived at the end of the southern kingdom. He would die in exile. Continue the reading with this section.

Draw the students' attention to the three quotations in the section. *The first* describes Jeremiah's call. Stress that God knows each of us in the same way and has a mission for each of us - not as a prophet, but with another role to play in His kingdom.

This is an appropriate place to **mention clerical or monastic/religious vocations** in the Church.

The second quote describes how Jeremiah came to understand what God was doing with His people. Discuss how clay can be reshaped while it is still soft, before it is baked hard. Help the students see the point Jeremiah learned: as the potter can reshape his creation, so God can give His people a new form by destroying their nation.

The third quote tells Jeremiah's vision for how God would reshape His people: by making a New Covenant with them. Stress that Jeremiah did not know that it would be Jesus who would establish that New Covenant, not just with Jews or Samaritans but with anyone who would believe in Him. Stress that the Eucharist is the great sign of the New Covenant and that every time we receive the Eucharist, we are agreeing to follow the New Covenant in our lives.

House of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6-8) God would destroy Israel and remake it till it fulfilled His plan for it. Jeremiah lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon. His land is exile, none on at the hand of his countrymen.

Although he saw Jerusalem destroyed, Jeremiah knew that God's plan would not be overcome. He prophesied that God would establish a new covenant with His people. "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt, for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their fathers and brothers how to know the Lord, all from his heart's greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evil-doing and I will remember their sins no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Research these topics on the Internet -

Assyria
Babylon

Our Worship Recalls the Old Testament

Several of the prophets foretold the coming of a Savior who we know to be Jesus Christ. They are remembered during the Nativity Fast with hymns like this: From the descendants of Abraham, holy Prophets were raised up who in the fervor of the Spirit foretold the Word who was to come from the race of Abraham and the tribe of Judah, through their prayers, O Jesus, have mercy on us. (Sunday of the Ancestors)

57

6. Activity A (Jeremiah 16:1-13)

Distribute the Activity A Worksheet and have the students complete it in pairs, agreeing on their answers. Have the groups share their answers

- 7. Activity B
(The Prophets)** Assign each student one or more of the prophets whose books are (The Prophets) listed in the sidebar on page 55. Have them read the introduction to the book in their New American Bible and then summarize what they read to the entire class. Try to have them include a brief quotation from the prophet in their report.
- 8. Activity C
(Time Travel Through
the Bible)** View the first half of Part One, Section Three of this DVD (7 minutes), ending before the section on Rome (when Jonathan Frakes puts on a toga). This segment focuses on the idol worship of the Canaanites, which included child sacrifices. The Israelites mingled with these pagans and often worshiped their gods along with the LORD, in violation of their covenant with Him. The resulting downfall of their kingdoms takes them back to Babylon, now as exiles. Use the questions on pages 11-13 of the Leader's Guide to facilitate discussion.
- 9. Activity D (Jesse Tree)** Have the students complete the ornaments on the Jesse Tree Worksheet (Isaiah and Jeremiah).
- 10. Time Line** Refer to the time line poster. Have the students brainstorm the names of people mentioned in this lesson (*Old Testament prophets*) and indicate the period in which each lived. Write in the names and dates under each appropriate heading. Reemphasize the idea that, for the prophets, God and His ways were to be the focus of life in Israel.
- 11. Summary** End the lesson by summarizing the lesson from the aims on page 182, from the elements in the student text on which you focused and/or any other points raised in the lesson.
- 12. Closing Prayer** Conclude with the reading of the selection from Psalm 115 and/or the troparion of the prophets from the Sunday of the Ancestors on pages 57-58 in the student text.

What Advice Would You Give?

Situation 1

Fred and his two brothers were passing the sporting goods department in a store one day when Fred saw a display of stopwatches. He thought one of them would be ideal to have since he was assistant coach of a Little League team. Fred's younger brother Tom, who was on the team, encouraged him to take the watch. No one was around and anyway there were so many watches on display that one less would not be missed. You are Fred's older brother, Jim. How would you advise Fred and what reasons would you give?

Situation 2

Kim and Sue were great friends. One day Kim was clearing up the teacher's desk when she noticed the exam questions and answers for the following day's test. If Kim took the exam and copied the answers she and Sue would get better marks without much study. You are Sue.

- a) Kim asks you what to do. How would you advise Kim and what reasons would you give?
- b) Kim acts without asking your advice. How would you react? Would you say nothing, agree with what she did or criticize her?

What makes a good advisor?

A good advisor should:

- Help us understand the consequences of our action (or inaction).
- Help us realize the basis for the action we desire to take.

Jeremiah 16:1-13

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

¹ This message came to me from the LORD:² DO not marry any woman; you shall not have sons or daughters in this place,³ for thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who will be born in this place, the mothers who will give them birth, the fathers who will beget them in this land:⁴ Of deadly disease they shall die. Unlamented and unburied they will lie like dung on the ground. Sword and famine will make an end of them, and their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.⁵ Go not into a house of mourning, the LORD continued: go not there to lament or offer sympathy. For I have withdrawn my friendship from this people, says the LORD my kindness and my pity.⁶ They shall die, the great and the lowly, in this land, and shall go unburied and unlamented. No one will gash himself or shave his head for them.⁷ They will not break bread with the bereaved to console them in their bereavement; they will not give them the cup of consolation to drink over the death of father or mother.⁸ Enter not a house where people are celebrating, to sit with them eating and drinking.⁹ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Before your very eyes and during your lifetime I will silence from this place the cry of joy and the cry of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.¹⁰ When you proclaim all these words to this people and they ask you: "Why has the LORD pronounced all these great evils against us? What is our crime? What sin have we committed against the LORD, our God?"¹¹ " You shall answer them: It is because your fathers have forsaken me, says the LORD, and followed strange gods, which they served and worshiped; but me they have forsaken, and my law they have not observed.¹² And you have done worse than your fathers. Here you are, every one of you, walking in the hardness of his evil heart instead of listening to me.¹³ I will cast you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known; there you can serve strange gods day and night, because I will not grant you my mercy.

What two disasters would come upon the Jews? _____

Of what sin does the passage say they were guilty? _____

What was foretold in verse 13? _____

The Jesse Tree

