

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
DECEMBER 14 2024

a candle in the dark

Scripture Story: Isaiah 11; 29; 40.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 58.
Key Text: Isaiah 40:31.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The prophecies of Isaiah come from a troubled time in Jewish history. Threatened by powerful empires all around, losing its connection to God, the nation of Judah was on the downward path that would end with exile in Babylon. Isaiah's prophecies warned of God's judgment on the surrounding nations, and pointed forward to a brighter time when the Jews would be restored to their homeland. During the exile in Babylon, these words brought hope to the captives.

For Christians, Isaiah's prophecies point forward not only to Israel's return from exile, but to the coming Deliverer, Jesus, who would set all humanity free from exile and bondage to sin. The week's lesson focuses on hope, and how God's promises can bring hope in the darkest times in our lives. Students are encouraged to relate Israel's experience to their own, and to recognize that God offers hope when they are discouraged and in despair. Specifically, the lesson should focus on the fact that Jesus is the one who will bring deliverance from sin, fear, and discouragement—just as He promised to do for His people Israel.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that God offered hope to His people in their darkest times. *(Know)*
- Sense that God offers the same hope to them today. *(Feel)*
- Place their faith in Jesus as the living embodiment of God's promise of hope and deliverance. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 1: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history." (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Divide students into groups of three or four. Ask each person to share with the group one time

when things were going very badly for them and/or they felt really discouraged. Ask: What gave you hope during that time? What Bible promises did you recall when you were facing difficulties?

Invite students to share some of God's promises from the Bible that are reminders of God's provisions and His sustaining love regardless of the circumstances they may be facing. Be prepared to wrap up by sharing an example of your own.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

For seven and a half years, American General Robbie Risner was held prisoner under terrible conditions in a Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp. Kept in solitary confinement, cut off from any communication with home, starved, beaten, and tortured, prisoners fought to hang on to their sanity.

Early on during Risner's time in prison, he noticed a vent in the floor of his room and wrestled the grate off it. Stretching out on the floor on his belly, he was able to stick his head down the opening a little ways. What did he see? Not a secret escape tunnel, but a pencil-sized hole in the bricks and mortar. Through that hole, he could see a single blade of grass.

It was the only bright, colorful, living thing in a gray world of brick and stone. It was the only sign of life and hope, and each day Risner stared at it, drawing strength from this one tiny vision of the outside world.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

When we're discouraged, when things go badly, the smallest things can give us hope. It could be a single blade of grass, as it was for Robbie Risner in his prison cell. It could be an encouraging word from a friend, a Bible verse, a memory of a time when things were better, linked to the promise that someday they will be again. For God's people in the dark times of oppression and captivity, promises of a restored homeland and a Deliverer who would come to set them free kept their hope alive. That same hope—in Jesus, our Deliverer—can encourage us even when things are at their worst.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

The passages in the *Into the Story* section are written in the form of poems, such as the book of Psalms. These ancient poems express God's promise of hope and deliverance for His people. They paint a creative word-picture of what Jesus would do when He came to earth. The promise of a better future helped people get through hard times.

Divide your class into pairs or groups of three. Give each group paper, poster board, and art supplies. Say: I want you to write a message of hope like Isaiah did. Yours should be for someone your age who is going through a hard time. What promises would encourage that person and offer light in their darkness? You can use a combination of Bible promises (from the lesson passage and/or other places in the Bible) and your own words of encouragement. When you've decided what to write, copy it out on poster board and illustrate it.

After each group has completed their poster, display the posters in your Sabbath School room or somewhere else in church.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The historical time period in which Isaiah lived was at least 200 years before the exile into Babylon, but the prophecies in the book of Isaiah point forward to this time period and are very relevant to the experience the Jews went through during those years. Isaiah's prophecies speak to a people who are on the verge of giving up hope. The "chosen people" have been chosen to be rebuked and punished by God, oppressed and overrun by foreign nations.

The years of fighting against foreign powers, culminating in the exile in Babylon, tested the faith of the people of Israel and Judah and caused them to rethink their beliefs about their relationship with God. The earlier books of the Bible are full of stories of victory and triumph—God promising that Israel will triumph over their enemies and providing victory, as when they settled the land of Canaan and drove out the Canaanites. Their understanding of

the covenant with God was that they would worship God, and He would bless and protect them.

When they found themselves on the losing side, God's people questioned whether God had abandoned them. Isaiah and the other prophets were there to point out that suffering was part of God's plan to lead them back to a faithful relationship with Him, but also to reassure them that hard times wouldn't last forever.

"The many prophecies concerning the Saviour's advent led the Hebrews to live in an attitude of constant expectancy. Many died in the faith, not having received the promises. But having seen them afar off, they believed and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. From the days of Enoch the promises repeated through patriarchs and prophets had kept alive the hope of His appearing" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 699).

When we go through difficult times, despair and discouragement, we must remember that God still cares. We only need to renew our relationship with Him and walk with Him consistently. Looking at the experience of Israel and the messages God gave to His people can teach young Christians that there is always something to be learned from suffering, and that God always promises a way out. We may not always understand how God fulfilled His promises this side of heaven, but, like the Hebrews of old, we can see them "afar off," and continue to believe. Most important of all, we can see that the Scriptures point to Jesus as the one who will ultimately deliver us from all suffering. That was true 700 years before His birth, and it's just as true today.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Creative Writing

This week's lesson calls for some creative writing—creating a modern-day "prophecy of hope," using a combination of Bible verses and the students' own words. Some students find writing intimidating, perhaps because it's been difficult for them in school. Working with a partner or small group should take some of the pressure off. If one member of the group is more comfortable writing, the other(s) can contribute ideas and leave the actual words to the person who likes writing.

It also helps to remind students that this isn't school—you're interested in their ability to communicate a message of hope, not to spell or punctuate.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Divide students into pairs and ask them to pray

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

for each other. If they feel comfortable doing so, they can share with each other either personal prayer requests or prayer requests for people who are in need of hope and encouragement. Allow a few minutes for students to pray together, then close with a prayer for the whole group.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God's people in the Bible went through tough times. God's people today—you and I—go through tough times as well. The Bible does not promise us that life will be easy or that everything will always go well just because we're Christians. In fact, Jesus said, "In this world you *will* have trouble" (John 16:33, NIV; emphasis added). But He also added, "Take heart! I have overcome the world."

The promise of the Messiah's coming was the hope that shone light in the darkness for the Jews in ancient times. It's the same promise that encourages us today. We know that He has already come and proven God's love and power by dying for us and rising again. Now our hope looks forward to His second coming when God's promises to Israel—and to all people—will be completely fulfilled. We can trust that Jesus will bring hope to our lives today, and an even greater hope of a new earth where we'll no longer experience the trials and troubles we have today.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*),* chapter 58.

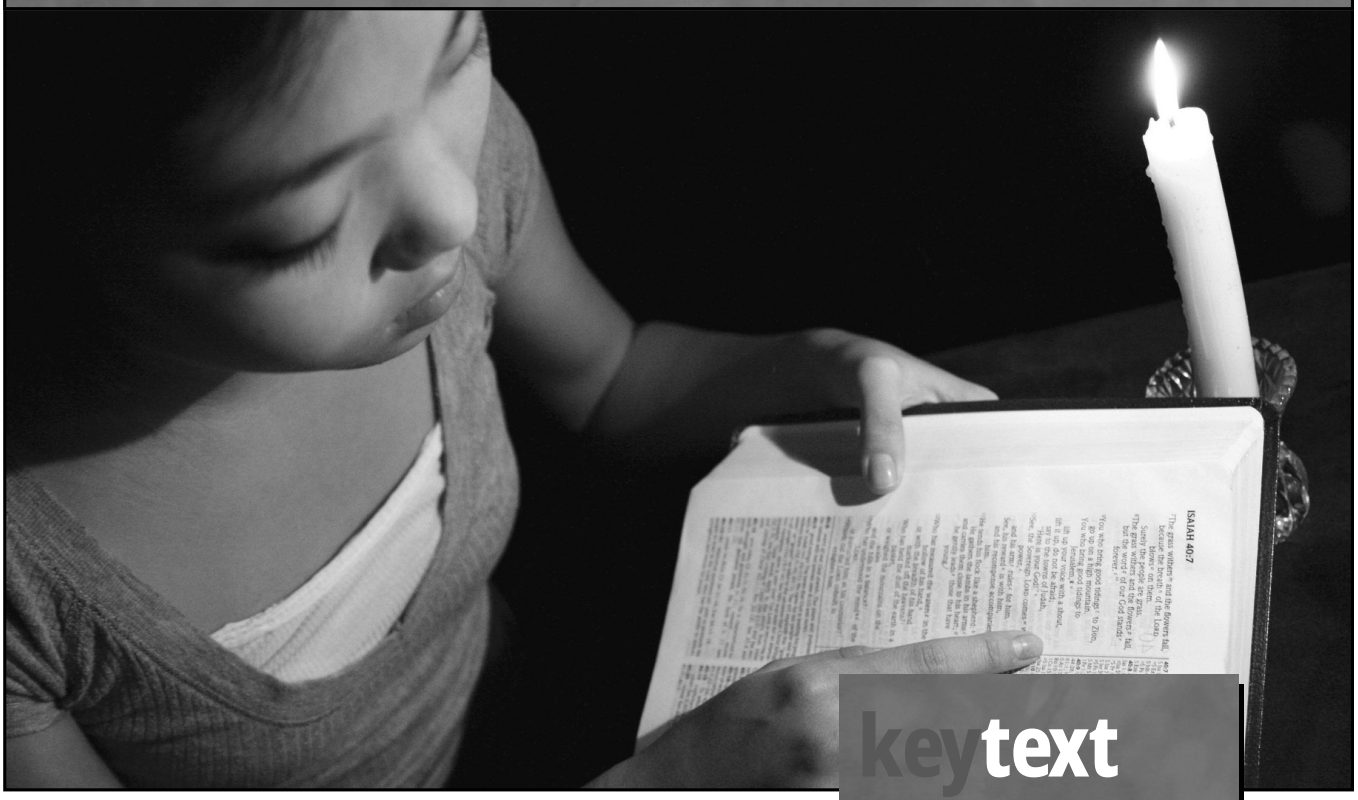
*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Isaiah 11; 29; 40.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 58.

a candle in the dark



COLLEEN CAHILL

key text

"Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

(Isaiah 40:31, NIV)

flashlight

"Century after century passed away; finally the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel. As the Jews departed from God, faith grew dim, and hope well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future. The words of the prophets were uncomprehended by many. . . . But in heaven's council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined; and 'when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son. . . .' Galatians 4:4" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 700).

what do you think?

When things are really going badly for me, I usually . . .

___ talk to someone about it.
___ pray.
___ think of something I can do to make things better.
___ get more and more discouraged.
___ try to avoid dealing with the situation.
___ focus on positive things.
___ imagine a time when things will be better.

did you know?

The prophecies of Isaiah come from some of the darkest hours of Jewish history—from a time God seemed to have abandoned His people. Foreign invaders threatened the nation of Judah. Long after the time of the historical prophet Isaiah, his prophecies took on deeper meaning as the nation entered its darkest time—the time Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians, and its people were taken into captivity. But through God's prophet came a message of hope for the future.

Like a tiny candle flame flickering in darkness came the promise that someday the years of exile and captivity would end. God's people would be restored to their land.

But the prophecies of Isaiah looked forward to more than just a return from exile. They pointed forward to a coming Deliverer who would do far more than provide freedom for exiled captives. They foretold the coming of a Messiah who would set people free from bondage to sin and despair. When things were at their worst, God gave His people the hope of ultimate deliverance.

INTO THE STORY

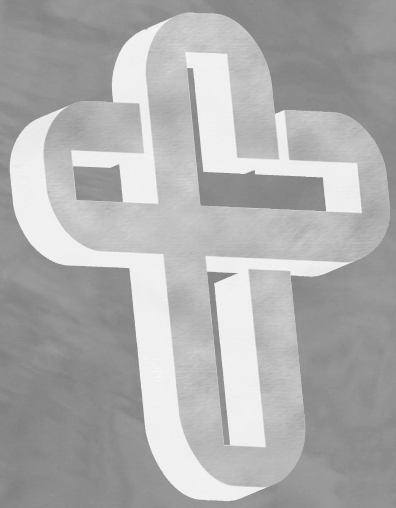
"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

"He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear and their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

(Isaiah 11:1-9; 40:28-31, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

What promises did God make to His people in these passages?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What hope would those promises have offered to Jews faced with the loss of their freedom and their homeland?

_____
_____
_____
_____

If you lived in the time of the exile to Babylon and you heard or read these prophecies, how do you think they would make you feel?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What kind of Messiah or Deliverer is promised in these passages? What will He do for God's people?

_____
_____
_____
_____

How are these prophecies relevant to us today? What hope do they offer for people in 2024?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" **(Isaiah 9:2, NIV).**

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" **(Isaiah 9:6, 7, NIV).**

"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" **(Romans 5:5, NIV).**

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" **(Galatians 4:4, 5, NIV).**

further insight

"From the days of Enoch the promises repeated through patriarchs and prophets had kept alive the hope of His appearing."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 699

"In word and deed the Messiah was to reveal the glory of God the Father, to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God."—Ellen G. White, *Royalty and Ruin*, p. 244

Sabbath

Read Galatians 4:4, 5 and Isaiah 51:4-6.

In His Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history" (Fundamental Belief 1, The Holy Scriptures).

When things were darkest for the people of Israel, God promised hope in the form of a Deliverer who would come and restore the world to a perfect state. When we're at our darkest hour, God also promises to help us. Choose one Bible verse from the passages we're studying this week, plus one other Bible promise, that can give you hope when you're feeling discouraged. Write both verses out below:

Sunday

Read Isaiah 11:1-9 and Isaiah 40:28-31.

Imagine that you are one of the exiled Jews in Babylon. When you think of what has happened to your homeland and your people, how do you feel? What are your feelings toward God?

When you meet on the Sabbath with other Jews in exile, someone stands and reads the words of the prophet Isaiah—the same passages found in our *Into the Story* section. As you listen to these words, what thoughts and ideas come to mind? Do they change the way you feel about the future? about God?

Monday

Read Isaiah 40:31.

In some Bible translations this passage begins: "Those who *hope* in the LORD . . ." Other translations begin: "They that *wait* upon the LORD . . ."

The idea of *hope* is closely connected to the idea of *waiting*. If we always got what we wanted right away, we'd never know the meaning of the word "hope." Hope is what we do when things aren't going our way, when our prayers aren't answered right away. Hope is what carries us through the dark hours while we *wait* for an answer to prayer. What are you waiting for today? What gives you hope?

Tuesday

Read Isaiah 25:9.

Read the passage from *Prophets and Kings* in the *Flashlight* section of the lesson. In this passage Ellen White takes us beyond the time of Isaiah, beyond the time of the exile and return from Babylon, to the era when Jesus was born. At that time, Mrs. White says that "faith grew dim, and hope well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future." Yet it was at that very time that God's divine plan fell into place. When things seemed so dark that many people had given up hoping for a Deliverer, at that moment God Himself came into the world in the form of Jesus of Nazareth—the ultimate Deliverer.

God's people waited thousands of years for the promise of a Messiah to be fulfilled. Jesus' followers have waited 2,000 years for the promise of His second coming to be fulfilled. Do you think today we're living in the time when faith has grown dim, and hope no longer seems to illuminate the future? If so, what can this passage say to us?

Wednesday

Look up Isaiah 9:6 in the *Punch Lines* section. Using a Bible concordance and/or a chain reference Bible, find other verses in the Old Testament that foretell the coming of Jesus. List some below. What information does each verse give about the coming Messiah?

Thursday

Read Psalm 31:24; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 15:13; and Romans 12:12.

Our Bible lesson this week has been all about offering hope to people who are discouraged. When the Jews were discouraged and felt God had abandoned them, the promise of a Messiah and Deliverer gave them hope. What gives you hope when times are tough? If you had a friend who was discouraged, what hope could you offer? Can you think of someone you know now with whom you can share this hope? How will you do it?

Friday

Read 1 John 5:14.

In your prayer time today, ask God to keep hope alive in your heart. If you're discouraged about any situation in your life right now, choose a Bible verse you can memorize and repeat to give you hope. Tell God in prayer that you are claiming that verse as His personal promise of hope to you!

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 58.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.