

Jer. 33:14–16

Ps. 25:1–10

1 Thess. 3:9–13

Luke 21:25–36

A Message of Hope

**Goal for
the Session**

From Jeremiah, youth will hear words of promise and hope and apply them to making change in the world.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Jeremiah 33:14–16

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Angela Bauer-Levesque

Opening with a formula typical of salvation oracles, “the days are surely coming,” verse 14 introduces divine first-person speech. God is assuring the audience that God will fulfill “the promise,” literally “the good word” with a definite article—not “a” promise, one of many, but a particular one made to both the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Harkening back to Jeremiah 23:5–6, another eschatological interlude, verse 15 reiterates what was promised there, namely, that God will birth a “righteous” (*tsedaqah*) offspring of the Davidic monarchy, who will act in ways that will promote “justice and righteousness” (*mishpat* and *tsedaqah*).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Jennifer Ryan Ayres

Here we meet the God who promises to protect and restore the people, even as they are in the midst of great suffering and at the edge of despair. It is in precisely this context that God speaks the promise, and it is in precisely this context that despair opens the door to creativity and hope. Calvin acknowledged that the promises of God seem to disappear, but that with faith and patience, we look forward to their fulfillment.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Deborah A. Block

This text insists that covenantal life in all its expressions is characterized by justice and righteousness, allowing no dichotomy of “prophetic” and “pastoral.” Life together is to embody the nature of God, “The LORD is our righteousness.” Jeremiah uses the name first for a promised person (23:6) and again here, intentionally, for a promised place (33:16). The vision of the time to come impugns the time at hand. What leader and what community could claim “The LORD is our righteousness”? The promise challenges our reality, and drives a reappropriation of “righteousness.” The word is uncommon, if not pejorative, in common parlance and unwelcome in the lexicon of many faithful because of its frequent companionship with “self.”

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Gary W. Charles

As I listen to the cries of Jeremiah throughout the scope of his prophecy, I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future will be a reality beyond the violent boasts of the ruling Babylon of the day. I long for the day that is surely coming when in God’s future the poor are not sent to shelters or forced to sleep on the streets. I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future has no space for violence, when we will stop producing body bags—because there are no dead soldiers to fill them. I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future affords no room for rancor, a day when our world is no longer torn asunder by racism and sexism and homophobia.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 33:14–16

YOU WILL NEED

- current newspapers
- 4 purple or blue candles
- white candle
- Advent wreath
- lighter
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- envelope
- Bibles
- poster board
- newsprint
- marker
- paper, pens
- tape
- taper candles

For Responding:

- option 1: information brochures from a local women’s or youth shelter, large cardboard box, newspapers, scissors, brown craft paper, paper, pencil, tape
- option 2: index cards, pens
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2; envelopes; markers; art supplies (optional)

For Music Connection:

- recording of “Hope” by Royal Tailor, music player

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people have plenty of reasons to be hopeless if they pay attention to the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the glut of information available on the Internet. The pressures and problems of adolescence can be overwhelming. Yet, Jeremiah 33:14–16 offers a message of hope. As disciples of Jesus Christ, many young people crave the opportunity to make a difference in the world. Claiming and working for the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s vision is one way young people can help change the world.

God of love, may your message of hope resonate in me as I prepare to teach in a sometimes seemingly hopeless world. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, prepare an Advent wreath by placing four candles (purple or blue; use the same color your church uses in worship) on a wreath with a white candle in the middle of the wreath. If you are using option 1 in Responding, contact a local women’s or youth shelter. Learn what kinds of items the people who use the shelters might need. Gather information brochures from the shelter.

Greet the youth warmly. Distribute the news sections of recent newspapers. Have each participant tear out a news story that seems hopeless. Give participants an opportunity to read the headline of their stories aloud and explain why they selected that story. Tear out the headlines and put them into two piles: situations where people are suffering (for example, a single mom loses her home) and situations where people have taken too much and are hurting others.

Explain that many situations in the world can make us feel hopeless. However, today’s Scripture offers a message of hope.

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Have a participant light one of the purple candles and pray:

Holy One, as we begin our Advent journey together, may our lives be transformed through the hearing of your holy Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Comment that today’s session focuses on a reading from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. Introduce Jeremiah with the following information and activities:

- ✠ Jeremiah was one of God’s prophets or messengers. He lived about 600 years before Jesus was born. He lived and worked in Jerusalem. Hand out Resource Sheet 1 (Map) and invite the youth to locate Jerusalem.

Advent (from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “an arrival”) refers to the coming of Jesus the Christ into the world.

Prophet: one who proclaims a message from God.

- ✪ Jeremiah preached during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. This was a time of great upheaval because Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were battling each other for world dominance. Invite the youth to locate Judah, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia on Resource Sheet 1 (Map). Wonder together what impact the three world powers’ war efforts would have had on Judah.
- ✪ Jeremiah warned God’s people that if they did not change their ways, a foreign army would conquer the nation of Judah. The people worshiped other gods. They did not treat one another with justice or respect. Their leaders behaved in ways that showed they distrusted God.
- ✪ The people did not change, and Jeremiah’s words came true. The Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and forced many citizens of Jerusalem to go into exile in Babylon.
- ✪ Distribute Bibles and ask a volunteer to read Jeremiah 32:26–35. Imagine certain people in exile—silversmiths, teachers, young children, youth. Discuss: How do you think the exiles would have felt hearing Jeremiah’s words?

Ask the youth to turn to Jeremiah 33. Explain that the words in Jeremiah 33 were spoken to the people of Judah who had been captured and marched off to Babylon.

Read together Jeremiah 33:14–16. On a posted sheet of newsprint, lead the group in rewriting Jeremiah 33:14–16 in their own words. Then explore the following question together:

- ✪ What is God promising the people who are living in exile in Babylon?

Option: Play contemplative music, such as “By the Waters of Babylon,” while the youth write their letters.

Distribute paper and pens. Ask the group members to imagine that they are the people in exile and write letters of response to Jeremiah in Jerusalem. Wonder how the people received his hopeful message and how it might have changed their lives for the better. After sufficient time, invite the youth to read their letters. Discuss:

- ✪ How can Jeremiah’s hopeful message bring justice to people today?

Invite a volunteer to draw a large scale of justice in the middle of the poster board. Retrieve the headlines you put into two piles. On and around the low end of the scale mount the clippings from the first pile, situations where people are suffering. Around the high end of the scale, mount the clippings from the second pile, situations where people have taken too much and are hurting others. Discuss ways Jeremiah’s message of hope applies to each situation.

Discuss ways the youth can live out Jeremiah’s message of hope and participate with God in bringing about a just world. Plan to take an action (for example, write a prayer and share it in a worship service, send a card, visit, prepare food, put on a worship or an entertainment program for a group in your community).

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Advent Mission Project** Help the youth convey hope to others through a collection. Look together at the brochures you have brought. Discuss why people need to live at the shelter.

Option: Check with church staff to see if any Advent project is planned so this can be coordinated with it or youth can participate in it.

EASY
PREP

If possible, provide other supplies such as stickers, glitter pens, stencils, or stamp sets.

What kinds of things might they need? Make a manger in which the congregation might gather such items. Cover the box you have brought with brown paper. Cut newspaper into thin strips and place inside the box to make “hay.” Ask volunteers to write a notice for your church newsletter or bulletin about the manger project. Place the manger in the sanctuary for worship or in some other prominent place in the church. Discuss how the project helps to spread Jeremiah’s message of hope. Arrange for you and the youth to deliver the items to people in the shelter before Christmas.

- 2. Making a List, Checking It Twice** Help the youth pray for justice in hopeless situations. Give each participant an index card and a pen. Invite participants to prayerfully consider a person or a situation in their life where there is brokenness or hopelessness.
 - ✧ Describe the person or situation on the index card without using specific names of people or places.

Have participants fold their cards in half and find a partner. Invite partners to exchange index cards and promise to pray for justice in that situation during the coming week.

- 3. Cards of Caring** Help the youth convey hope to others through greeting cards. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Card), envelopes, and markers. Invite youth to write a simple greeting on the front of the card and a message of love on the inside of the card. Discuss:
 - ✧ How does spreading God’s love create hope?
 - ✧ How can you spread God’s love during the coming week?

Challenge participants to give or send their cards to someone in need of God’s love.

CLOSING

Gather the participants around the Advent wreath. Give each person a taper candle. Have each participant name a hopeful situation in the world. After the situation is named, invite participants to light their taper candle from the lit candle. Close with this blessing:

Follow the light of hope that comes from God’s promised justice. Amen.

Extinguish all of the candles.

■ ENHANCEMENT

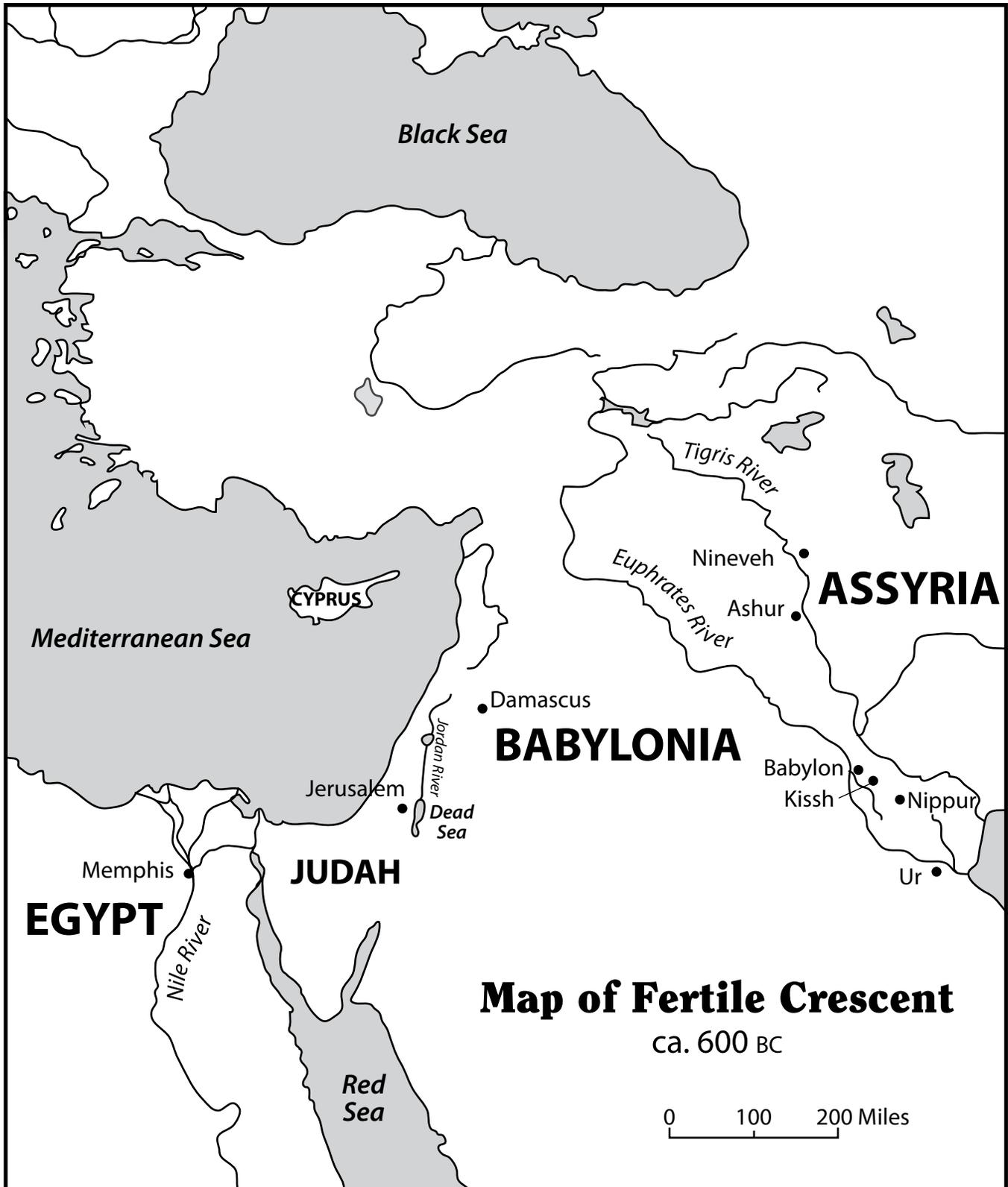
MUSIC CONNECTION

Explain that you are going to play a song about hope. Ask participants to select a phrase from the song that particularly resonates with them. Listen together to “Hope” by Royal Tailor. Give participants an opportunity to name their selected phrase and explain why the phrase is meaningful to them. Explore the following questions:

- ✧ When have you felt hopeless like the situations described in this song?
- ✧ In what ways does this song connect with the message about hope found in Jeremiah 33?

Search YouTube to find the song.

Map



A Message of Hope

Youth
Resource Sheet 2

Card

