



# CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

DECEMBER 12 2020

## 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 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*, pp. 699, 700).

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.

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### III. CLOSING

#### Activity

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

Divide students into pairs and ask them to pray for each other. If they feel comfortable doing so, they can share with each other either personal prayer requests or

### 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.*

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). 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 the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at [www.cornerstoneconnections.net](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net).