

Jer. 31:31–34

Ps. 51:1–12 or

Ps. 119:9–16

Heb. 5:5–10

John 12:20–33

That's a Promise!

**Goal for
the Session**

Tweens will draw on Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant for assurance of God's unchanging love.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Jeremiah 31:31–34

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Jon L. Berquist

Jeremiah 30 and 31 are sometimes called The Book of Comfort. The chief claim of this passage about God's new days is that there will be a new covenant between God and the people. Throughout the Old Testament, covenants are used frequently to aid understanding of the relationship between God and people. Such covenants are not like contracts in the modern sense, which are agreements negotiated between two parties and entered into willfully. The ancient covenants are much more unilateral: one party (God) is much more powerful than the other (God's people), and so sets the terms. Such a covenant does not require the weaker party's consent or willingness.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Samuel K. Roberts

Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant—perhaps his most important single teaching—is also a powerful harbinger of the “good news” that will be preached and embodied in Jesus Christ. Jeremiah realizes that humanity simply does not have the capacity to heal itself. The great moral problem of humankind—that is, sin—is not cognitive, but rather concerns the sinful will. In Jeremiah's prophecy the new will for humanity will be a result of something that God does. Hope for such transformed wills lies within God's grace, not in any hope for human perfection.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Richard Floyd

Despite all the ways the people have broken faith with God, God will not break faith with them. God will bring newness out of destruction. God will bring hope where there is no hope. God will bring life out of death. God will make a way where there is no way. The days are surely coming when the people, from the least to the greatest, will *know* God—with all the intimacy that word entails. God will wash away the people's sins once and for all and remember them no more.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Woody Bartlett

What would it be like if God wrote the law on our hearts so that we would live within the creation with restraint and humility, living for the whole creation, not just for our singular, insular selves and our own narrow corner of creation? Here at the end of the season of Lent, this passage begs us to explore the ways that we need the law of love to be written on our hearts. It sets up the exploration in just two weeks of how the power of the resurrection can find a home in our hearts so that we, and those around us, can truly live a new life.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens know that change can be stressful. Their bodies are changing in rapid and sometimes uncomfortable ways. Their peer relationships can change quickly as friends move away or friendships from childhood fade. Divorce, unemployment, and other unpleasant realities of adulthood may cause tweens' connections with their parents and guardians to change. Tweens also are becoming increasingly aware of how change affects others. Use today's words from Jeremiah to point learners toward the bedrock reality of God's love, the only unchanging source of security and identity.

Holy Spirit, by your might, may my care for these learners today clearly reflect your greater love, which endures forever. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ purple cloth
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ wide ribbons from previous sessions
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 7, 29
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ pencils
- ☐ 20" length of wide green ribbon
- ☐ fine-tipped permanent markers

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: paper, crayons or markers
- ☐ option 2: vinegar, table salt, measuring cup and spoon, old pennies, glass jar with lid, paper towels
- ☐ option 3: red, quick-drying modeling compound; sharpened pencils

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using Responding option 2, bring an old penny for each learner—find pre-1982 pennies for best results.

Greet tweens as they arrive. Invite learners to arrange the purple cloth, candle, Color Pack 1, and wide ribbons from previous sessions in the center of your meeting space.

Gather the group and light the candle as a reminder of Jesus' presence with you on this Fifth Sunday in Lent. Invite tweens to recall what they know about the season of Lent. Take a quiet moment for group members to consider an answer to the question on Color Pack 1. Offer this prayer:

Holy God, send your Spirit to help us grow in knowing what it means to know, serve, and love you. Amen.

Introduce the topic of promises by asking:

- ✠ What's the first promise you can remember someone making to you? What happened?
- ✠ What promises have you made to others?
- ✠ If you could hear any promise today, knowing it would be kept without fail, what would you want this promise to be?

EXPLORING

Referring to the yellow and orange wide ribbons from March 10, remind tweens that the letter to the Ephesians affirms God's grace as a gift. Tell them today's reading offers a different image of God's grace.

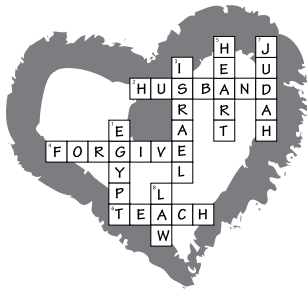
Review the word *covenant*—often used in the Bible to mean the promises between God and God's people. Recall the covenant God made with Noah's family, and all creation, not

to destroy creation. Recall the covenant God made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, to be in special relationship with the Israelites when they served God alone and kept the Commandments. Emphasize that only God is able to keep covenant perfectly. Today's reading is another important teaching about God's covenant.

Display Color Pack 7. Ask:

- ✠ What are your initial impressions of this person?
- ✠ What might be in the book he is resting his arm on?
- ✠ What do you think this person did for a living?

Tell students this is one artist's portrait of the prophet Jeremiah. Recall that a prophet in Bible times was a person called by God to deliver God's message to the people. To review the story of Jeremiah, play "Jeremiah Jeopardy," following the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 (Jeremiah Jeopardy).



As an extra challenge, read aloud Luke 22:19–20, Jesus' words when instituting communion. Discuss: When Jesus says that the cup of communion is "the new covenant in my blood," how might that be connected to God's promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah?

Have learners find Jeremiah 31:31–34 in their Bibles. Invite two volunteers to read aloud this text, alternating verses. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Covenant Crossword) and form pairs to solve the puzzle, referring to Bibles as needed for help. After pairs have finished, discuss:

- ✠ What makes this covenant "new" and different?
- ✠ What does the image of God as Israel's "husband" (v. 32) tell you about God?
- ✠ People in ancient Israel considered the heart to be the center of human will and decision making. What does this add to your understanding of God's promise in verse 33?
- ✠ How do you understand the second half of verse 34 ("I will forgive . . .")?
- ✠ How do you think the Israelites reacted when they heard God's promise of a new covenant?
- ✠ How do we make sense of God's promise knowing that, even today, not everyone knows God (v. 34)?

Look again at Color Pack 7. Imagine that Jeremiah is visiting your group:

- ✠ What questions would you like to ask him?
- ✠ What might Jeremiah say to assure you of God's unchanging love for you?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Impossible "If"** To dig more deeply into the meaning of God's unchanging love, read aloud Jeremiah 31:35–37. Point out that these verses are poetry. Verses 36–37 are "if-then" statements, in which the "if" clause will never be true. Challenge students to write and illustrate similar "if-then" statements about God's unchanging love, using images and words that people today will understand. (For example: "If Earth were ever to circle the moon, then God would stop loving us.") Arrange to display learners' statements and illustrations in your congregation's worship space.

2. **Clean Hearts Meditation** Invite tweens into a time of reflection about what it means to have clean hearts, hearts on which God “writes.” Ask a volunteer to put ½ cup white vinegar and 2 teaspoons of table salt into a glass jar. Give each learner a dirty, old penny. Invite them to examine their pennies, imagining that these pennies are their hearts, and to consider silently what has made their hearts and lives “dirty” as these pennies are dirty. Ask each learner to place his or her penny in the jar. Tighten the lid, then pass the jar around the circle so each learner can shake it as you read aloud Psalm 51:10–12, part of the psalm for this Sunday. Pour the coins out onto a stack of paper towels. Give each learner a coin and a paper towel to polish it with. As they are polishing the pennies, invite them to consider silently the promises that God is writing on their hearts. Discuss as a group: How does God’s promise of unchanging love make a difference in your daily living?
3. **Written on the Heart** To help students remember the image of God’s law written on our hearts, give each one a portion of red, quick-drying modeling compound and encourage them to sculpt a heart shape. Demonstrate how to use the point of a pencil to etch a word or phrase from Jeremiah 31:31–34 (or perhaps from Psalm 51:1–12) that speaks to them of God’s unchanging love. As they work, invite them to tell why they chose the words they did. Talk about ways that each one of you can help another person to “know the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:34) in the week to come. Encourage them to keep the heart in a visible place at home to remind them of God’s commitment to them.

CLOSING

During Lent you will add a ribbon to the worship space each week, creating a rainbow by Easter. Keep these wide ribbons to use in upcoming weeks.

Gather around the candle, and invite tweens to quiet themselves by singing “Dona Nobis Pacem” (Color Pack 29; track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Drape a 20" length of wide green ribbon over the cloth. Mention that green symbolizes renewal and can be a reminder of God’s new covenant in Jeremiah 31. Ask:

✠ What word, phrase, or image from today’s Bible reading will you remember, and why?

Provide fine-tipped permanent markers for tweens to write or doodle responses on the ribbon.

Offer this prayer:

Promise-making and promise-keeping God, thank you for claiming us as your people, forgiven and loved, now and always. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Offer this blessing:

(Name), God bless you as you go out to follow in God’s ways, treasuring God’s Word in your heart.

Jeremiah Jeopardy

To play this game:

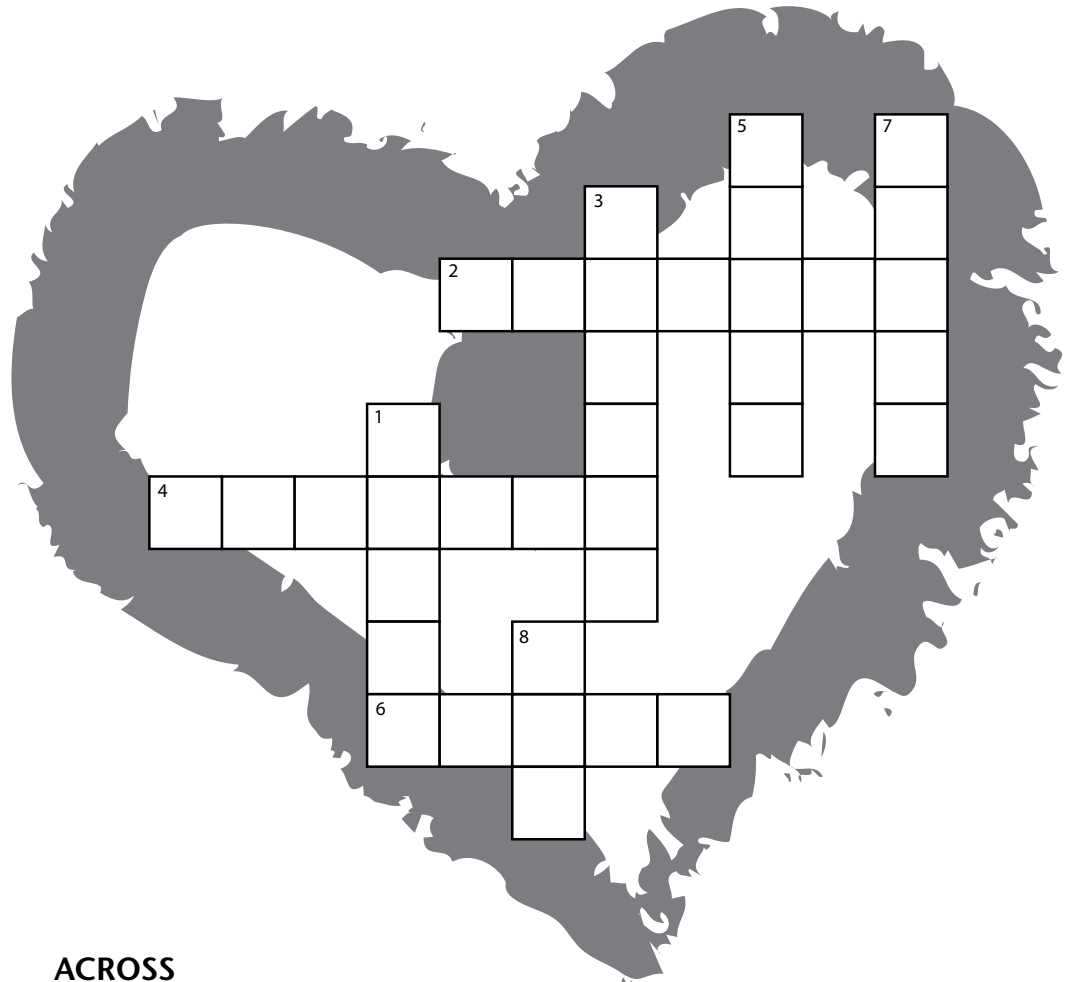
- Form three teams. Tell team members they may consult with one another and use their Bibles. Ask teams to designate one player to give the team's answer.
- Begin by reading aloud the first clue. The first team to signal by shouting "Jeremiah" may respond, in the form of a question.
 - If the team responds correctly, it wins one point and gets to try to answer the next clue.
 - If it does not respond correctly, repeat the clue and give the other teams a chance to signal and respond.
- Remember: Teams may not signal until you finish reading the clue. If a team signals prematurely, it cannot respond. Finish the clue for the other teams.
- Award the winning team a round of applause.

1. Jeremiah preached in this capital city of Judah. (*What is Jerusalem?*)
2. Of the Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian empires, this empire was the major threat facing Judah in Jeremiah's time. (*What is the Babylonian Empire?*)
3. Jeremiah lived about this many years before Jesus was born. (*What is 600?*)
4. The main point of Jeremiah's preaching was to explain why this catastrophic event happened to the people of Israel. (*What is the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem? or What is the exile?*)
5. Jeremiah warned the nation that it would be punished for doing this. (*What is worshipping other gods?*)
6. It's the age at which God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet; clue is Jeremiah 1:5. (*What is before Jeremiah was born?*)
7. In one of Jeremiah's most famous prophecies, he compares God to this kind of craftsperson; clue is Jeremiah 18:5. (*What is a potter?*)
8. Jeremiah is sometimes called "the weeping prophet," and this is what made him so sad; clue is Jeremiah 9:7–9. (*What is Jeremiah's sorrow over God's punishment of the people?*)

March 17, 2024
That's a Promise!

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

Covenant Crossword



ACROSS

2. An image from family life that describe God's relationship to the people in past times (Jeremiah 31:32)
4. God promises to do this to people's sin (Jeremiah 31:34)
6. The people will no longer do this (Jeremiah 31:34)

DOWN

1. The land from which God rescued the Hebrew slaves (Jeremiah 31:32)
3. One of the two "houses," or families, with whom God promises to make this covenant; the name of the Northern Kingdom of divided Israel (Jeremiah 31:31)
5. God will write this covenant on each _____ (Jeremiah 31:33)
7. One of the two "houses," or families, with whom God promises to make this covenant; the name of the Southern Kingdom of divided Israel (Jeremiah 31:31)
8. God will put this "within" the people (Jeremiah 31:33)