

International Conversation Cafe

Old Testament: Hopelessness and Hope from the Prophets

Have you ever felt hopeless? To be hopeless is to feel your situation will never change for the better. There are a lot of reasons people feel hopeless. Sometimes we feel hopeless because we think there is no possibility of improvement or change, whether in a relationship or in ability. "I am hopeless at mathematics." "Because of a hopeless misunderstanding, our relationship ended."

The nation Israel went through years of hopelessness, feeling that their people would never flourish. God had told them not to worship other gods, because he was the Creator and deserved their worship. But they turned their back on God. Instead, they followed idols, images that were man made. So God sent prophets to the nation to warn them of disaster if they persisted in worshipping idols. But the nation did not listen to the prophets. Eventually, the entire nation was overpowered by the Assyrian (740 BC) and Babylonian empires (598 BC). The nation was plunged into hopelessness. Jeremiah was a prophet who warned Israel. Because of their rejection of his message, Jeremiah often felt hopeless.

Take a minute to explain the situation in your own words.

Jeremiah 25 is an example of a warning to the nation Israel.

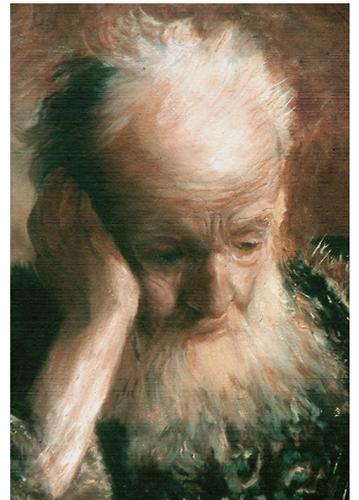
⁴The LORD has sent prophets to you time after time, but you refused to listen. ⁵They told you that the LORD had said:

Change your ways! If you stop doing evil, I will let you stay forever in this land that I gave your ancestors. ⁶I don't want to harm you. So don't make me angry by worshiping idols and other gods.

⁷But you refused to listen to my prophets. So I, the LORD, say that you have made me angry by worshiping idols, and you are the ones who were hurt by what you did. ⁸You refused to listen to me, ⁹and now I will let you be attacked by nations from the north, and especially by my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. You and other nearby nations will be destroyed and left in ruins forever.

Questions

1. Why was God angry at Israel? How do you feel about his anger?
2. How did God try to get Israel to change their ways?
3. What was going to happen to Israel if they did not change?
4. What do you learn about God?
5. What do you learn about people?



Rembrandt, van Rija. Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem. C.1630. Oil on panel, 58 x 46 cm. Rijkmuseum. Amsterdam

God Gives Hope to Israel

Even though Israel turned their back on God, God did not turn his back on Israel even though he punished them. He promised to send them a king who would rule with justice and mercy. The following words were written by the prophet Isaiah to Israel, promising them a future hope.

Isaiah 9

A Son Will Be Given to Us

² The people who are now living in darkness
will see a great light.
They are now living in a very dark land.
But a light will shine on them.

⁶ A child will be born to us.
A son will be given to us.
He will rule over us.
And he will be called
Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.
He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and
Prince Who Brings Peace.

⁷ The authority of his rule will continue to grow.
The peace he brings will never end.
He will rule on David's throne
and over his kingdom.
He will make the kingdom strong and secure.
His rule will be based on what is fair and right.
It will last forever.
The Lord's great love will make sure that happens.
He rules over all.



Le Nain Brothers, The Nativity, 17th century,
Oil on canvas, Private collection

1. *What do you notice in the painting?*
2. *What do you like and why?*
3. *How do you think this painting relates to Isaiah 9?*

Describe the ruler God promises in verse 6.

Whose throne does he rule from? (v. 7) Why is this important?

What are the characteristics of his kingdom?

Who do you think the king is?

The word, "child" speaks of someone born. The word, "son" speaks of a position of privilege in a family. Do you think this wording is important? Why?

How do these prophecies influence your attitudes about God?