

Deep in Our Hearts

Our hearts call out to God – for healing, wholeness, mercy, salvation, wisdom. Jeremiah's prophecy assures God's people that God intends to draw close to us, claiming our very being as the centre of the new and everlasting covenant. Deep in our hearts, we will know God's Word; we will live in God's ways.

Focus Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31–34

At the time Jeremiah began his work as a prophet – around 625 BCE – the Hebrew people were divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, Israel, had been conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom, Judah. It is helpful to recall that biblical prophets spoke God's word to the Hebrew people. They challenged kings and officials; they called the people of God to account with God's law. Judah was in turmoil when Jeremiah spoke God's word to them. Conflict between Babylon and Egypt seemed to be forcing a choice between acquiescing to the Babylonians or serving as the first line of attack for the Egyptian Empire. Jeremiah's message to Judah was that the Babylonians were far stronger than they were, and should not be resisted. Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would not prevail against the Babylonians because the people had rejected God and turned to idolatry. Jeremiah was considered a traitor for saying that Jerusalem and the temple were vulnerable to defeat.

Beginning in 598 BCE, Jeremiah's prophecy came to pass when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah and exiled many of its leading citizens to Babylon. The fall of Judah was complete in 587, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the second wave of exiles was taken to Babylon.

In the midst of national disaster, Jeremiah prophesies that God will renew the promise that God had made through Abraham and confirmed in the Exodus. This covenant, however, will be different. In the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, the focus was solely on God's commitment. In this covenant, humankind and God will be present together. In a surprising turn, Jeremiah tells us that God will fulfill not only God's part of the covenant, but humankind's part also.

Jeremiah offers a glimpse of the world as God will have it. God's law will no longer be an external agreement that can be broken by people's unfaithfulness; the new covenant will dwell in the very being of each person. In God's new world, community interaction will be radically different.

Repentance from deep in the heart of the psalmist is the focus of **Psalm 51:1–12**, a psalm traditionally attributed to King David following the murder of Uriah. The psalmist recognizes the extent of his sin (v. 5), yet still asks with confidence for forgiveness and total restoration – a clean heart and a renewed relationship with God. The alternate reading, **Psalm 119:9–16**, is a pledge to treasure God's word "in my heart," and live in the ways of God.

The depth of God's steadfast and eternal covenant with humankind is evident in **John 12:20–33**. Choices about living in God's way are required; judgment will be rendered according to those choices. However, God's grace is continually offered. Jesus the Christ draws us close with saving love.

Jesus is cast as a high priest in **Hebrews 5:5–10**, appointed by God to bring saving love to all. The writer describes Jesus as a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek." Little is known about Melchizedek. He is mentioned in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. Melchizedek is seen as greater than Abraham, because Melchizedek blesses Abraham.

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Imagine a community where God's people know the promises of God deep in their hearts – where God's people sense that the power of God's saving love is at the very core of their identity. What about God is written deep in your heart?

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Focus Scripture
Jeremiah 31:31–34

Additional Scriptures
Psalm 51:1–12
or Psalm 119:9–16
Hebrews 5:5–10
John 12:20–33

We seek you with our whole hearts, O God. Draw us into the embrace of your loving and merciful promise, and teach us to live in your ways. Then make us bold to reach out and draw others into the joy of living in communion with you. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

