

Scripture Summer School

Jessie 6

Earth





“The earth groans”

Earth's story in the Prophets





Labour Pains

Romans 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God

....

... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies ...

... For in hope we were saved ...



God's Covenant with Earth

Our deepest existential fear:

- And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' (Gen 6:6-7)

God's solidarity with all of earth's inhabitants

- 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.
As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.' (Gen 8:21-22)
- Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark ... (Gen 9:8-9)



The grief of approaching exile: Jeremiah 4:19-31

- **The prophet's groans (and God's?)**

- *My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! ... Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land (Earth) is laid waste. (vv19-20)*

- **The experience of God's people**

- In denial:

*And you, O desolate one,
what do you mean that you dress in crimson,
that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold,
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?
In vain you beautify yourself.
Your lovers despise you;
they seek your life. (v 30)*

- The agony of entering exile

*For I heard a cry as of a woman in labour,
anguish as of one bringing forth her first child,
the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath,
stretching out her hands,
'Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!' (v 31)*

- **The experience of Earth**

- An unravelling of creation

*I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.
For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a
desolation; yet I will not make a full end. (vv 23-27)*

- Earth mourns

*Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back. (v 28)*



During exile: Earth's sabbath rest: Isaiah 7:18-25

¹⁸ On that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹ And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thorn bushes, and on all the pastures. ...

²¹ On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, ²² and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey.

²³ On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briars and thorns. ²⁴ With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briars and thorns; ²⁵ and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread



Coming out of exile: Jeremiah 31

- **God's covenant faithfulness to God's people:**

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people (v1).

- **The newness God brings:**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. (v 27-28)

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (v 31-34)

- **The unshakable covenant with Earth forms the backdrop to this renewed covenant with God's people:**

Thus says the Lord,
who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the Lord of hosts is his name:
If this fixed order were ever to cease
from my presence, says the Lord,
then also the offspring of Israel would cease
to be a nation before me for ever. (v 35-36)



God's solidarity with the covenant partner: Isaiah 42:13-16

- Image 1: God as the mighty warrior rescuing God's people
- Image 2: God as a woman in labour, giving birth to the hopeful future
- Image 3: the Shepherd
- Image 4: Creator of light out of darkness

The LORD goes forth like a soldier,
like a warrior he stirs up his fury;
he cries out, he shouts aloud,
he shows himself mighty against his foes.

¹⁴ For a long time I have held my peace,
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labour,
I will gasp and pant.

¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their herbage;
I will turn the rivers into islands,
and dry up the pools.

¹⁶ I will lead the blind
by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them.

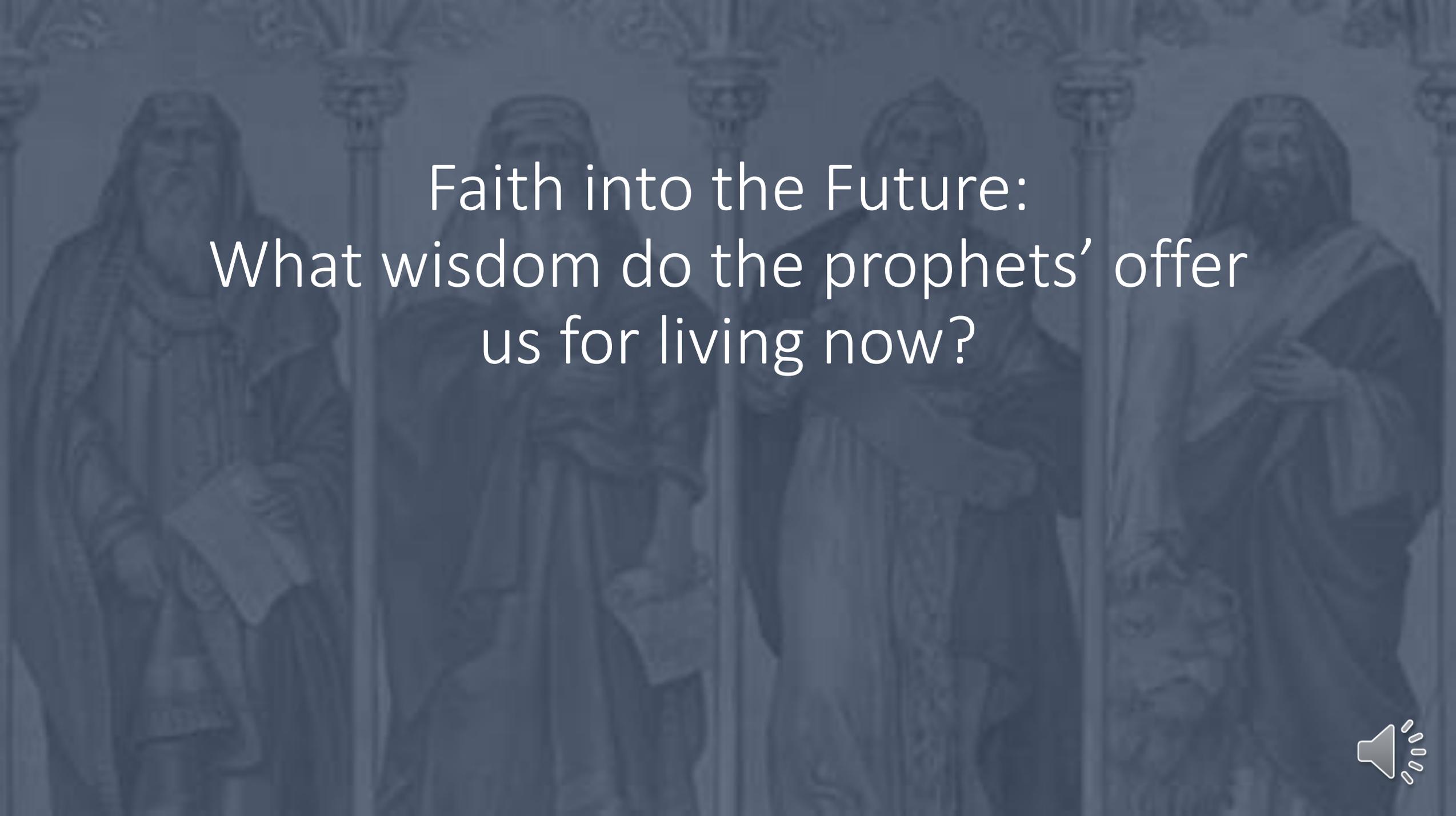


To think about ...

How are our own story
and Earth's story
interwoven?

Is the image of
childbirth a helpful
one for reflecting on
how newness
emerges?



The background features a faint, blue-toned illustration of four figures, likely prophets, standing in a row. Each figure is dressed in traditional, flowing robes and holds a tall, slender staff. At the top of each staff is a flame or a similar symbolic element. The overall style is reminiscent of a woodcut or a traditional religious print.

Faith into the Future:
What wisdom do the prophets' offer
us for living now?

