

# THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2023

## Unit: Jeremiah (Part 2)

### Theme: Hope for the Hopeless

**Overview:** In darkness there still can be hope—like when grade-school students come into a classroom and see the blinds pulled and the projection unit on. A movie beats homework any day. Jeremiah sounded warnings, but he also sounded hope. From the potter, students will learn the hope in repentance. From a letter, students will learn the hope of God’s plans. From a new covenant, students will learn the hope of God’s loyal love. From the purchase of a field, students will learn the hope of God’s promise. From restored land, students will learn the hope of God’s faithfulness.

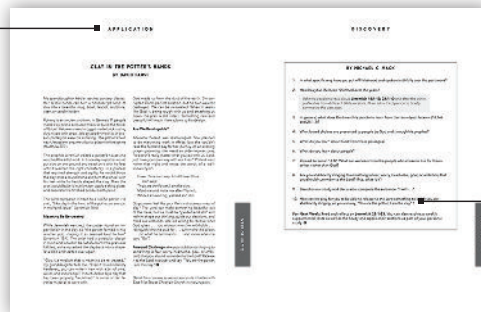
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 16, 2023

**LESSON AIM:** **Accept the Lord's new covenant, and hope in his loving-kindness.**

**UNIT:** Jeremiah (Part 2)

**THEME:** Hope for the Hopeless

**LESSON TEXT:** Jeremiah 31:1-17, 31-34

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 2:13-18; Luke 22:14-20;  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 8:7-13;

## HOPE IN GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

BY MARK SCOTT

Jeremiah 31 is clearly one of the high-water marks of the Old Testament. The new covenant is announced toward the end of the chapter; its text is quoted at length in Hebrews 8:7-13. But a bit earlier in the chapter is a messianic verse dealing with the mothers of Israel losing their babies; Matthew 2:13-18 quotes that verse when telling of Herod the Butcher killing males 2 years and younger after Jesus was born.

After writing his famous letter to the exiles (chapter 29), Jeremiah started predicting the restoration of Israel (chapter 30). But false prophets—including Pashhur (chapter 20) and Hananiah (chapter 28)—continued to play havoc with that restoration. This made life hard on Jeremiah—he was threatened in chapter 26. But the prophet moved back to the theme of restoration in chapter 31.

**God Brought Hope Out of Hopelessness***Jeremiah 31:1-17*

This section of Scripture is divided into three parts, each starting with the phrase, “*This is what the Lord says*” (vv. 2, 7, 15). The key words in this section are God’s love (*ahabah* in Hebrew) and God’s unfailing kindness (loving-kindness in many versions; *chesed* in Hebrew). The God of the Bible specializes in bringing hope out of hopeless situations. The broad sweeps of the fruit of this hope are joy, peace and prosperity, and renewed commitment.

Evidently God had in mind restoring *all the families of Israel*, not just Judah. The northern tribes who survived Assyria’s sword would *find favor* with God, who would *give rest to Israel*. God’s love was the key to this restoration. He wanted to rebuild *Virgin Israel* to where they would do the “*dance of joy*.” They would plant vineyards—not in Babylon but in Samaria—and eat the fruit from them. They would accept God’s call to go to Jerusalem (Zion) to worship.

God’s people would be brought back from captivity *from the land of the north* (the normal path taken *from the east to Israel*). In fact, they would be brought back from the ends of the earth. All types of people would be welcome in this return—*blind, lame, expectant mothers and women in labor*. They would shed tears of repentance and joy. God would lead them *beside streams of water* (Psalm 1:3; 42:1) where they would *not stumble*. God would treat Israel as his *firstborn son*.

God moved from addressing Israel directly to addressing *the nations* concerning Israel (v. 10). God, who *scattered Israel* in his judgment, would regather them—similar to how a shepherd gathers his sheep. God can gather Israel because he is stronger than Israel’s enemies. This would bring all kinds of joy and prosperity (vv. 12-14).

But the joy and prosperity must be delayed. The Babylonian captivity will cause the mothers of Israel to weep and *refuse to be comforted*. They will witness their sons being hauled away to Babylon. They will return, but not for 70 years. Interestingly, Matthew finds some typological fulfillment when Herod attempted to kill toddler Jesus. The famous verse 15 is one of the Bible’s layered prophecies. It first concerned Rachel (Genesis 35:19), and it also applied to Jeremiah’s time. Later, it would apply to the mothers of Israel who lost their children to Herod’s jealousy (Matthew 2:16-18).

**God Brought New Out of the Old***Jeremiah 31:31-34*

The baby who ultimately was spared by his flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18)—even though the mothers of Israel would rightfully mourn—would establish a new way of being right with God. He would live and die, and in doing so, he would usher in a new covenant. The new would come from the old. The old was not bad for its time, but like the apple blossom gives way to the apple, so also the new would owe its birth to the old.

Jeremiah looked into the future, even past the birth of Christ, to when the new covenant would be enacted. The new covenant (which delivered people from a slavery to sin) would be different from the old covenant (which delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt). God acted like a betrothed husband to Israel, but she broke covenant with him in being adulterous (i.e., idolatrous).

When the new covenant (an agreement with one side setting the demands) was enacted, the law was not to be written on stone (think *Ten Commandments*), but on the people’s minds and hearts. Under the new covenant, it would no longer be necessary to encourage people to know the Lord, because it is through his covenant that people know him (cf. John 17:3). This applies to all members of the new covenant. And the best thing about the new covenant is the availability of total forgiveness for all. ■

## APPLICATION

### GOOD MOURNING

BY DAVID FAUST

One letter makes all the difference. What a contrast between the words *morning* and *mourning*! When *morning* arrives, sunrise welcomes a new day, a fresh start, and new opportunities. *Mourning*, though, sounds like sunset. It means darkness is approaching or already has arrived.

*Mourning* is an extended period of sorrow and grief. It's a time for letting go, saying goodbye, and feeling the pain of separation.

#### Are You a Mourning Person?

Jeremiah predicted dire consequences for the Jews. Because of their unfaithfulness, they would endure decades of Babylonian exile—an extended period of mourning. But God's loving-kindness would never give up on them. "I have loved you with an everlasting love," the Lord said, and "I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3). Restoration and renewal were ahead, a time when "young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well" (v. 13).

Have you ever endured an extended time of sorrow and depression? How should you respond when mourning comes?

**Don't think you can avoid it.** Job was right: We are "born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Pain, loss, and sorrow eventually come our way. Peter wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

**Don't minimize it.** God doesn't trivialize our sorrows. He takes them so seriously that his beloved Son "took up our pain and bore our suffering" (Isaiah 53:4). In my own experiences with mourning, I have found that if I lean into my sorrow, I come out of it faster than if I try to ignore and suppress it.

**Don't refuse to talk about it.** Shakespeare wrote, "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o'er wrought heart and bids it break."

**Don't compare one person's grief with another's.** "Each heart knows its own bitterness" (Proverbs 14:10). The suffering of others may look mild, but you aren't walking in their shoes. Another piece of ancient wisdom says, "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart" (Proverbs 25:20). If you are too casual about someone's heavy heart, you will add to their burden instead of easing their pain.

**Don't assume it will last forever.** Jeremiah predicted the Lord would turn his people's "mourning into gladness" and "give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow" (Jeremiah 31:13). Just as mourning means something deeper than merely being sad, gladness means something deeper than merely being happy. Circumstances can make us happy, but only the Lord can make us glad. Genuine gladness comes when our burden of guilt has been removed and our sense of purpose has been restored. Aren't you glad that God promises to forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more (v. 34)? In this new covenant reality, with God's law written on our hearts, we get a taste of heaven's glory where the Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). He can change mourning into morning, turning a long dark night into a bright new day.

**Personal Challenge:** When have you gone through a season of mourning (extended sorrow or grief) in your own life? What helped you through it? What did you learn from it? If you are now in a time of mourning, consider talking about it with a trusted friend or a Christian counselor. ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, how did you encourage, advise, or coach someone whose life isn't currently going according to their plans?
2. How do you like to celebrate when you receive good news?  

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 31:1-17, 31-34** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.
3. Scan the passages for sentences with the word "will," especially those in which God says, "I will . . ." Overall, what was God promising the people?
4. Reread 31:3, perhaps several times. Take a few moments to meditate on those words from God. Let them sink in. Imagine God speaking those words directly to you.
  - How do these words make you feel? (What emotions do they evoke?)
  - How would you respond to him?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. Through Jeremiah, the Lord pointed forward to the "new covenant" (31:31) in Jesus' blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). This new covenant has brought us forgiveness of our sins and a new relationship with God. How does this new covenant fulfill God's many promises in these passages in this study?
8. In 31:10, God tells the people to "hear the word of the Lord" and then "proclaim it." With whom and how will you proclaim God's Word from these passages we've heard and discussed in this study?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. God's promise to the people of Jeremiah's day to turn their mourning into gladness will ultimately be fulfilled for all of us when, "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4). What do you need from God, and from us, to persist in hope as we wait for Jesus' return?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 32:2, 6-9, 16-27, 36-41**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■