

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 2, 2023

LESSON AIM: Repent when you feel
hopeless, and trust
God to relent.

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 2)

THEME: Hope for the Hopeless

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 18:1-12; 24:1-10

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Kings 24:8-12, 15; 25:27-30; Ezekiel 18:20-23;
Zechariah 1:3; Matthew 4:17; 2 Corinthians
7:10; 2 Peter 3:9

HOPE IN REPENTANCE

BY MARK SCOTT

Repentance can change predictive prophecy. Sometimes a prophet in the Bible would predict coming judgment, but then the judgment never came. That was because the coming judgment was conditioned by the people's repentance. An example is Jonah and the Ninevites. Jonah predicted that the city would be destroyed in 40 days, but it was not destroyed because the people repented.

Jeremiah held out the same prospect of avoiding coming judgment for the people of Judah, provided they would repent. But alas, the people refused, and judgment came. For several chapters Jeremiah has been plucking up, breaking down, destroying, and overthrowing (1:10) the people to get them to repent. Illustrations such as the loin cloth and the jars filled with wine (Jeremiah 13) have been used to drive home the need for repentance. In the lesson text, two illustrations will be used—a potter at his wheel and two baskets of figs.

Hope of a Fresh Start—Pottery*Jeremiah 18:1-12*

The land of Israel is filled with clay pots. Archeologists date events and people groups from the pottery found in the dirt. So, this object lesson would not be difficult to understand. God told Jeremiah to go to *the potter's house* and there he would be given a *word* (or message). Jeremiah watched the potter at his wheel (stool). Jeremiah did not watch long before the *pot* (vessel or instrument) was smashed so that the potter could start over. The clay had become *marred* (corrupt, spoiled, or destroyed). The potter *formed* (the Hebrew word *shub*, meaning to turn or repent so as to be restored) the clay into *another pot* as the potter deemed best.

The lesson is obvious. God is the potter and the people of Judah are the clay. In his sovereignty, God can do as he sees fit with the people. He can uproot them, tear them down, or destroy them. However, if said nation *repents of its evil*, then God, in that same sovereignty, can *relent* (the Hebrew word *nacham*, meaning comfort, like what Noah's name means) on the *disaster* of his coming judgment. Repentance can keep God's judgment at bay. Similarly, if a nation ceases in their obedience to God, he will *reconsider the good* he had intended to do to that nation.

In verses 11-12, God made a passionate plea for the people to repent. God was *preparing a disaster and devising a plan* against the nation of Israel. The nation's best move would be to *turn* (again the word *shub*) from evil and *reform* (to do well and even live to bring "praise") their ways and their actions. But this passionate plea fell on deaf ears. The people, in their stubbornness, replied, "*We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness [hardness] of our evil hearts.*" Repentance gave the prospect of a fresh start, but lack of repentance demanded the clay be smashed.

Hope of a Good People—Figs*Jeremiah 24:1-10*

The land of Israel is also filled with figs. Olives, dates, and figs are abundant in the lands of the Bible. Figs are sweet and tasty. Therefore, figs also functioned well as an illustration of the state of Judah.

At the beginning of Jeremiah 24 is a historical reference. The text referenced the capture of King Jehoiachin, the grandson of good King Josiah. So, the date of this text was 597 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar took the king captive to Babylon. Sometime shortly after this happened, God gave Jeremiah a vision. In this vision, God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. These baskets were set *in front of the temple*, the centerpiece of Judah's worship . . . a structure that would be destroyed. One basket contained *good* (*tov*, as in the Genesis record of creation) *figs* and one basket contained *bad* (*ra*, the normal word for evil) *figs*.

God drew Jeremiah's attention to the figs in both baskets and then drew out the lesson for the prophet. The good figs represented the good remnant kept alive in Judah. They would obey what God wanted—even to the point of going into Babylonian captivity. God would cause them to prosper there, retain their good hearts, and someday bring them back to Judah.

But the bad figs represented the rebellious people who tried to fight the Babylonians or escape to Egypt. The last terrible king, Zedekiah, and his minions would be destroyed due to their lack of obedience. They would be *abhorrent, an offense, a reproach, a curse, and an object of ridicule* to the nations. Repentance always provides hope of averting judgment. ■

APPLICATION

CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HANDS

BY DAVID FAUST

My granddaughter Abbie teaches pottery classes. Her skillful hands can turn a nondescript lump of clay into a beautiful mug, bowl, teapot, sculpture, vase, or candle holder.

Pottery is an ancient art form. In Genesis 11 people made clay bricks and used them to build the tower of Babel. Hebrew slaves in Egypt made bricks using clay mixed with straw. Job scraped himself with broken pottery to ease his suffering. The potter's field near Jerusalem became a burial place for foreigners (Matthew 27:7).

The prophet Jeremiah visited a potter's house and watched the artist work. In those days a potter would put clay on the ground and tread on it with his feet until it reached the right consistency. In a process that required strength and agility, he would throw the clay onto a round stone and turn the wheel with his feet while his hands shaped the clay. Then the artist would bake it in a furnace, apply a shiny glaze, and decorate the finished product with paint.

The Lord compared himself to a skillful potter. He said, "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6).

Meant to Be Re-created

While Jeremiah watched, the potter found an imperfection in the clay, so "the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him" (Jeremiah 18:4). The artist had a particular design in mind and wouldn't be satisfied until the plan was fulfilled, so he squashed the clay back into a shapeless blob and started over again.

"Clay is a medium that is meant to be re-created," my granddaughter tells me. "Even if it's completely hardened, you can make it new with a bit of time, water, and knowledge." In fact, Abbie says clay that has been properly "reclaimed" is some of her favorite material to work with.

God made us from the dust of the earth. Sin corrupted God's perfect creation, but his plan was not destroyed. We can be re-created! When it seems like God is being rough with us and smashing us down, his plan is still intact. Something new and beautiful will result if we submit to his design.

Are We Re-shapable?

Adelaide Pollard was discouraged. She planned to do missionary work in Africa, but she couldn't raise the funds to pay for her journey. At an evening prayer gathering, she heard an older woman pray, "It doesn't really matter what you do with us, Lord, just have your own way with our lives." Pollard went home that night and wrote the words of a well-known hymn:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine
own way!
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Do you ever feel like your life is a shapeless mass of clay? The Lord can make something beautiful out of the mess, but we must be "yielded and still" and let him shape our thinking, guide our decisions, and mold our attitudes. Are we willing to receive what God gives . . . do without what he withholds . . . relinquish what he asks for . . . suffer what he allows . . . do what he commands . . . and move when he says "Go"?

Personal Challenge: Are you stubbornly clinging to something (a fear, worry, heartache, goal, or ambition) that you should surrender to the Lord? Release it to the Lord in prayer and say, "You are the potter, I am the clay." ■

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DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what specific way have you put off falsehood and spoken truthfully over the past week?
2. How has your life been reformed over the years?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 18:1-12; 24:1-10** one after the other, preferable from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. In general, what does God want his people to learn from the two object lessons (18:1-4 and 24:1-3)?
4. What broad choices are presented to people by God and through his prophet?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Reread Jeremiah 18:12. What can we learn from the people who chose to live for themselves rather than God?
8. Are you stubbornly clinging to something (a fear, worry, heartache, goal, or ambition) that you should surrender to the Lord? If so, what is it?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. How can we pray for you to be able to release to the Lord something to which you are stubbornly clinging, so you can say, "You are the potter, I am the clay"?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 29:1-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖