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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2023

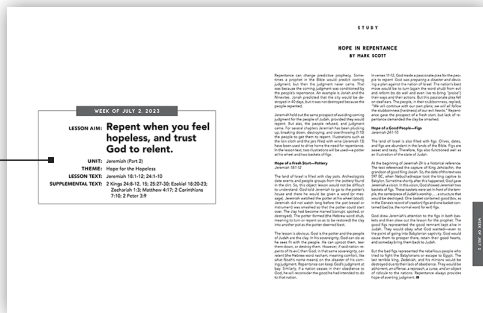
Unit: Jeremiah (Part 2)

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.

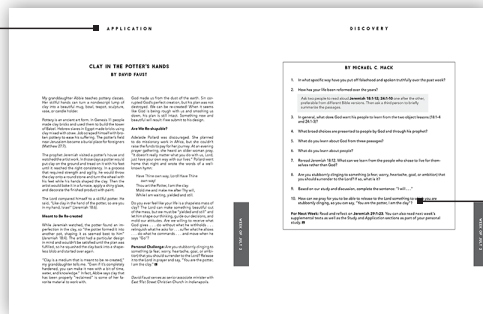
HOW TO USE

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 30, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Hold as confidently
to God's faithfulness
as you hold to day
following night.**

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 2)

THEME: Hope for the Hopeless

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 33:1-11, 15-26

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 8:22; 9:8-17; 15:1-6; 2 Samuel 7:16, 25, 26, 29;
2 Chronicles 21:7; Job 38:1-3, 12-13, 19-20;
Psalm 104:19-23

HOPE IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

BY MARK SCOTT

For God, the calendar is deeply embedded in covenant. God made covenants with people (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.), but he also made covenants with creation. Day follows night and spring follows winter. God's faithfulness drives the rhythms of creation (Genesis 8:22; Job 38:4, 19-20; Psalm 104:19-20).

In the same way, God's faithfulness drives the rhythms of his dealings with his people. Jeremiah 33 is about God's promise to restore his people to their land and their prominence. The alternating pattern of judgment and blessing continues in this chapter. God's faithfulness is one thing on which his people can consistently count.

It Still Doesn't Look Good

Jeremiah 33:1-5

As eager as the people of Judah might want to lean into the faithfulness of God, their circumstances at this juncture do not look good. For one thing, Jeremiah remained in jail (i.e., *the courtyard of the guard*). But *the word of the Lord* can never be imprisoned (cf. 2 Timothy 2:9). It came to Jeremiah and revealed that the people's puny efforts to resist their Babylonian captors would be futile.

The *LORD* (his revealed name), who made heaven and earth, pleaded with the people to *call* on him. God promised that he would answer their call and even teach them *unsearchable things*. But the people's futile efforts to defend themselves was evidence they trusted more in their own intelligence and power than in God's faithfulness. They sought to protect themselves from their oppressors by tearing apart their houses and palaces to use as plugs for the holes in the city walls. But their efforts were insufficient to stop *the siege ramps and the sword* from devouring Jerusalem. The people's wickedness led to dead bodies being strewn throughout the city. It did not look good.

But It Will Look Better

Jeremiah 33:6-11

As sure as day follows night, God would restore his people. God promised numerous things to Israel as part of this restoration. He promised them *health and healing* (i.e., perfectness and soundness). This blessing would enable them to enjoy *abundant peace and security* (*shalom*—well-being—and "truthfulness").

God would bring both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom back *from captivity*. He would be part of their rebuilding efforts (through Ezra and Nehemiah). More importantly, he would *cleanse* (purge or purify) them from sin and *forgive* (pardon) their rebellion. The fruit of this would reintroduce and proclaim God's name among the nations. Renown, joy, praise, honor, and awe would come to God from the nations. Gentiles would be forced to admit that Israel's prosperity and peace were God's doing.

In times past, *Judah and Jerusalem were desolate* (wasted) and uninhabited. But in the days ahead, *sounds of joy and gladness* such as that of a *bride and bridegroom* would echo through the land. The voices of people bringing their offerings to God would ring through the hills. The song would be a familiar one, "*Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever*" (cf. Psalms 100:4-5; 106:1; 107:1; 136:1-3). Because Israel has a covenant-making and faithful God, Israel's *fortunes* (literally the captives returned) would be restored.

Because of the One Who Will Make the Difference

Jeremiah 33:15-26

David ultimately will make the difference in this restoration. His name is mentioned six times in this section. But by this time, he has been dead for almost 500 years. So what *David* are we talking about? This really means the *righteous Branch* from David's line. This must be Jesus. He is the one who will do what is *just and right*. He is the *Righteous Savior*.

He will bring his kingly identity alongside of his sacrifice (notice the place that the Levitical priests occupy in this text) to make things new. This reality is so sure that Jeremiah likened it to the covenant God made with day and night. This will happen, just like day follows night. God would even increase the impact of this influence by causing David's descendants and the Levites to increase as stars in the sky and sand on the seashore (cf. Genesis 15:5).

All of God's promises find their "yes" (fulfillment) in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David are all players in this drama of salvation as God restores not just Israel, but the entire universe. God's faithfulness is as sure as day and night. ■

APPLICATION

HEAVEN'S BRANCH OFFICES

BY DAVID FAUST

My dentist's office is only a 15-minute drive from my house—a fact I never gave much thought until I lost a tooth during a mission trip to Romania last year. Thousands of miles from the source of relief, I gained new appreciation for my dentist's skill and more empathy for my missionary friends who serve in remote places where dental and medical care are scarce.

In 2020 the pandemic closed church doors for several weeks, and many Christians felt sad and disconnected. Phones and Zoom meetings kept us in touch, but I missed rubbing elbows with the wise old saints, the energetic little kids, and the rest of our motley saved-by-grace crew who get together every Sunday morning.

Proximity matters. We're designed for relationship, not remoteness—for congregating, not isolating. "Better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away" (Proverbs 27:10). Even if they aren't relatives and they aren't perfect, friends and neighbors are good to have around.

How Accessible Is God?

Proximity to God matters, too. Does the Lord ever seem far away? Is he accessible when you need him? Is he available when you feel scared and alone? What if you are desperately sick in the hospital? Or locked in prison?

Because he preached God's truth boldly and without compromise, the prophet Jeremiah endured many hardships, including being arrested and "confined in the courtyard of the guard" (Jeremiah 33:1). Although he lost his freedom, he didn't lose access to his faithful heavenly Father.

Jeremiah 33:3 has been nicknamed "God's telephone number" because in that verse the Lord says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

Branches of the Branch

Jeremiah lived in depressing and dangerous times, but he foresaw a joyous future for God's covenant people. Better days were ahead. In the future God would "make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15). Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled this messianic prophecy about "a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely" (Jeremiah 23:5).

Isn't it interesting that Jesus, the Righteous Branch, called his disciples branches, too? He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

We use the word *branch* for a stem that extends from a plant or tree, but it also can describe a river's tributary or the subdivision of a business. Banks, stores, and restaurants expand their reach by establishing branch offices where they conduct business on behalf of the company. Branch offices wear the parent company's name and brand, and they are accountable to the corporate headquarters, but their smaller sizes and convenient locations make the businesses more accessible to the public.

The kingdom of heaven has branch offices, too. The Righteous Branch keeps branching out! All over the world, Christ extends his ministry through ordinary people wherever his disciples gather and serve. At times, our local congregations might appear small, weak, and unimpressive, but God sees things differently. Our churches, small groups, and Christian families are branch offices of heaven, making God's love accessible to those who need him.

Personal Challenge: Would people in your community be surprised to learn that your local church is a branch office of heaven? Why, or why not? What steps could you take this week to strengthen your personal connection to the Branch (Jesus Christ)? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, with whom did you share God's desire to be in relationship with us?
2. Use the following sentence to tell us about your week: The bad news is _____, but the good news is _____.

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 33:1-11, 15-26** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. Summarize this passage using the following sentence: As sure as day follows night, God will . . .
4. Why might the people have needed to know both the bad news circumstances that were to come (vv. 1-5, 10a), and the good news of the future (vv. 6-9, 10b-11, 15-26)?
5. Jeremiah made prophetic reference to Jesus, the "righteous Branch . . . from David's line . . . the LORD Our Righteous Savior" (vv. 15-16). In what ways is Jesus the fulfillment of all God's good promises?
6. What do you learn about God from this passage?
 - What do you learn about yourself?
7. Don't overlook the vital transition words God used: *nevertheless* (v. 6) and *yet* (v. 10). As you look at your current (and even future) circumstances and God's faithfulness, share something from your own life using one of those words. *For example, "Because of my injury, I will probably always walk with a limp. Nevertheless, God has given me health and healing as well as peace and hope in him. And someday, I will not only walk without a limp; I'll run on streets of gold!"*
8. With whom will you share your bad news/good news story this week?
You can also include God's bad news/good news story: "For the wages of sin is death, BUT [Nevertheless] the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What do you need from God to live in his "nevertheless" this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Nahum 1:1-15** as we begin a new unit on 7th-century minor prophets with the theme, "Justice Will Come." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■