

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.

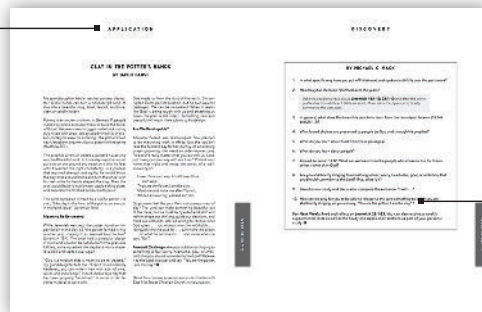
HOW TO USE

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 9, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Follow God's
expressed plans,
and hope in his care.**

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 2)

THEME: Hope for the Hopeless

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 29:1-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 33:8-11; 119:41-43; Proverbs 16:1-4;
Jeremiah 33:14-26; Hebrews 11:8-10

HOPE IN GOD'S PLANS

BY MARK SCOTT

Robert Burns wrote a piece entitled "To a Mouse." The most famous line in that poem was, "The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men." It means that no matter how carefully a project is planned, something may still go wrong with it. Burns wrote it after destroying a mouse nest with his plough. He felt bad about it and wrote an apology. One could superimpose that famous line on Jeremiah 29.

Jeremiah continued to warn the people of God of the coming judgment of God through Nebuchadnezzar. As the wicked king from Babylon advanced to Jerusalem, Jeremiah warned the people not to believe the false prophets who predicted that the exile would be short-lived. Jeremiah wanted the people who were hauled away to Babylon in the deportation in 597 BC to settle in and get used to their new normal and their hope in God's plans. Thus, the famous letter to the exiles.

The Details of the Letter*Jeremiah 29:1-3*

Jeremiah's *letter* (book or scroll) was sent from Jerusalem to the *exiles* (those "removed" or "carried away"—the word occurs six times in this text) in Babylon. It was sent to the *surviving elders, priests, prophets, and others*. The second verse is a parenthetical historical reference. Royalty (the king and his mother), lawyers, the *skilled workers* (carpenters or engravers), and *artisans* (metal workers) had already been hauled away. Two men—*Elasah* (i.e., God has made) and Gemariah (i.e., the Lord has accomplished)—were charged with the responsibility of delivering the letter.

The Duties in the Letter*Jeremiah 29:4-9*

Speaking on behalf of God via this letter, Jeremiah outlined nine duties for the exiles. Since the exile would be extended further than any of them knew, the people were told to *build houses and settle down*. Additionally, they were to *plant gardens and eat* the produce from those gardens. They were to *marry* and have children. Harkening back to the dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28), they were to *increase in number*. They were to *seek the peace and prosperity of the city* where they lived. Beyond that, they were to *pray* for their captors and their cities to do well.

Of course, all the above would take time, which meant no one would go home any time soon. Other voices spoke against the content of Jeremiah's letter. But their prophecies and dreams were not from God. The Lord had not

sent them. They were *prophesying lies*. So, part of their duties was "not" to do what other voices were crying out for them to do.

The Destiny in the Letter*Jeremiah 29:10-14*

Jeremiah marked out the destiny for the future of God's people in this section of the letter. The Lord revealed to Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years. This actually was referred to later when it was fulfilled in Daniel 9:2. When the time was completed, God would bring his people (his messianic remnant, for sure) back to the Promised Land.

Verse 11 has received much attention in recent years. The verse is printed, it seems, on as many coffee cups as inside Bibles. People like to claim it in a personal way. It is often applied to mean that God has his own special plan for every individual. But it actually was part of a letter for corporate exiled Israel. God had plans for them, and that plan included *prosperity* (actually, *shalom*, peace, or well-being) in such a way that no one would harm (do evil to) them. God had a *hope* (reward) and a *future* for them. Had God not fulfilled that plan, the Messiah would not have come to save the world.

Israel's response to this destiny was twofold: to pray to God and to seek God. Prayer prompted God's response and seeking him with their whole hearts caused God to be found. God ultimately gave them the desires of their hearts by bringing them home. That was their ultimate destiny.

The Death of the Letter*Jeremiah 29:15-23*

A quick shift takes place in the letter at verse 15. Jeremiah moved from destiny to death. The letter ended with a strong warning. The people who stayed in Jerusalem in defiance to the Lord's word would experience *sword, famine, and plague*. They would be like rotten figs (cf. 24:1-10). The other nations would make fun of Israel because they did not listen to their God.

The warning was also given to those who had gone into captivity and were listening to the lying prophets there. Many of them would not return. They would tragically die in Babylon, experiencing a curse for their *outrageous* (disgraceful, vile, or foolish) behavior which would never have been approved by God. The best laid plans are to follow God's plans. ■

APPLICATION

WHEN YOU'RE NOT WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

BY DAVID FAUST

Marcus enjoys playing the guitar and composing music. He dreams about performing in Nashville someday; but for now, his job as a sanitation worker enables him to support his family.

At a CIY conference when she was 15 years old, Sarah decided to become a missionary; but currently she is scraping together the money to pay for her college education. The mission field seems like a far-off goal.

Ann requires around-the-clock care, so she now lives in a nursing home. She misses the house where she lived for the last 40 years.

Love for God and country motivated Jason to join the military, but the Army deployed him to a cold, lonely spot in northern Europe where the main enemy he fights is boredom.

Those names are fictitious, but we can relate to the situations. What should you do when your circumstances don't match your dreams and aspirations? The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the Jews who were exiled in Babylon, hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. Their surroundings felt foreign and their future looked bleak. Jeremiah's message to them can help any of us who find ourselves in uncomfortable situations.

Bloom Where You Are Planted

The prophet advised, "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce" (Jeremiah 29:5). Don't whine about your new surroundings; make the most of the opportunities. You will be in Babylon for a while, so adapt and grow there.

Be a Force for Good and Make Things Better

The Jews didn't want to be in Babylon, but instead of complaining, Jeremiah counseled them to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city . . . because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7). The godly prophet Daniel rose to a position of influence and be-

came a force for good in a pagan society that needed his wisdom. An older friend of mine isn't happy about living in a rehab center, but she is a force for good there, praying for her caregivers and encouraging other residents in Jesus' name.

Trust That God Is Leading

Four times in his short letter, Jeremiah mentioned that the Lord himself carried the people into exile (vv. 4, 7, 14, 20). Technically the Babylonians were the ones who did that, but behind the scenes, a divine plan was being fulfilled. "In all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

Don't Be Deceived

The Lord warned his people not to listen to deceivers who "are prophesying lies to you" (vv. 8-9). When circumstances distance us from our spiritual support systems and we move away from encouraging friends or a familiar home church, it's tempting to compromise our values. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18), we must remember who we are and what we believe.

Never Lose Hope

God promised the exiled Jews, "For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). Eventually their long exile in Babylon would end and God would restore them to their land. Meanwhile, they needed to trust the Lord's assurance, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

God remains faithful in any situation—even when we feel like strangers far from home.

Personal Challenge: At times, do you feel like a stranger in today's cultural environment? Identify one practical step you will take to serve the Lord faithfully while you await his future blessings. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, what have you surrendered to God (perhaps something you've been stubbornly clinging to like a fear, worry, heartache, or ambition)?
2. When people voice their opinions, how do you know whom to listen to and whom not to listen to?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 29:1-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. How would you summarize God's plans in this passage?
4. Compare and contrast each of the following expressions to what we read in Jeremiah 29:
 - "Bloom where you're planted." —Anonymous
 - "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." —Elbert Hubbard
 - "Do what is right, not what is easy nor what is popular." —Roy T. Bennett
 - "You've got to know who to [and] who not to listen to." —Amy Grant
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. How did the people (both those who did not go into exile and those who did) disobey God?
 - What were the consequences for their disobedience?
8. How would you use this passage to encourage/advise/coach someone whose life isn't currently going according to their plans?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What do you need from God to follow his plans, even in difficult, unwanted circumstances, and to hope in him?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 31:1-17, 31-34**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖