1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 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.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The book records "the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin" (Jeremiah 1:1). God called him as a young man to be "a prophet to the nations" (1:5-6). His scribe, Baruch, wrote down many of his messages (Jeremiah 36:4, 32). Because of his grief over his people's sin and coming judgment, Jeremiah is often called "the weeping prophet" (Jeremiah 9:1).

Audience

Jeremiah spoke primarily to the people of Judah and Jerusalem—kings, priests, false prophets, and ordinary citizens—during the nation's final decades before the exile. He also delivered messages concerning the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 46–51) and wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29).

Date

Jeremiah's ministry began in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (about 627 BC) and continued through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, until Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC and beyond (Jeremiah 1:2-3)—a span of more than 40 years.

Setting

The Assyrian empire was crumbling and Babylon was rising as the dominant world power. Despite King Josiah's reforms, Judah's heart had turned to idols, injustice, and empty religious ritual. Jeremiah warned that disaster was coming "from the north" (Jeremiah 1:14), and he lived to see Nebuchadnezzar besiege Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and carry the people into captivity.

Theme

Jeremiah sounded warnings, but he also sounded hope. The same God who would "uproot and tear down" promised to "build and plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Through a potter's wheel, a letter to the exiles, the promise of a new covenant, the purchase of a field, and the restoration of the land, God showed that he had "plans to give you hope and a future" (29:11).

Why Study Jeremiah?

Life can feel hopeless when circumstances are bleak and the future is uncertain. This study shows that God is faithful even in the darkest days. It calls believers to repent and trust God to relent, to follow God's plans when life does not go according to theirs, to rest in his loving-kindness and new covenant, to hope in his promises when they seem impossible, and to hold to his faithfulness as surely as day follows night.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1:	Jeremiah 18:1-12; 24:1-10
WEEK 2:	Jeremiah 29:1-23
WEEK 3:	Jeremiah 31:1-17, 31-34
WEEK 4:	Jeremiah 32:2, 6-9, 16-27, 36-41
WEEK 5:	Jeremiah 33:1-11, 15-26

WEEK ONE

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

STUDY: 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.

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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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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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, preferably 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)?
   - What broad choices are presented to people by God and through his prophet?
4. What do you learn about God from these passages?
5. What do you learn about people?
6. Reread Jeremiah 18:12. What can we learn from the people who chose to live for themselves rather than God?
7. 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?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
9. 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.

WEEK TWO

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

STUDY: 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. Hearkening 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.

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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 became 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.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.

WEEK THREE

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

STUDY: 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; 12:22-24

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.

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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.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Hope in God's promise even when it seems impossible.**

STUDY: Jeremiah, Part 2

THEME: Hope for the Hopeless

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 32:2, 6-9, 16-27, 36-41

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 33:7-11; Matthew 19:25-26; Luke 1:35-38; Romans 4:18-21

HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISE

BY MARK SCOTT

Kids say, "Promises, promises." The interpretation is, "Talk is cheap; you make promises, but you do not deliver on your promises." But in contrast to kids (and adults), God does deliver on his promises. In the case of Judah's captivity in Babylon, God promised to bring his people back to the Promised Land, and he did. Against all odds, Jeremiah was calling on his people to believe in the promises of God (cf. Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11:13-16).

The setting for the lesson is established in the first five verses of Jeremiah 32. Zedekiah was in the 10th year of his reign and had turned against Nebuchadnezzar. He had imprisoned Jeremiah in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah (Jeremiah 32:2). He did not like what he considered to be the treasonous prophecies of Jeremiah about surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah did not like hearing that he would be deposed and shipped off to Babylon.

A Time to Invest

Jeremiah 32:6-9

While in prison, Jeremiah received word from God that his uncle Hanamel (God is gracious) would visit him. God told Jeremiah that Hanamel was going to offer to sell a field to him. Why would anyone want to buy a field when the country was about to surrender? During such chaos, is it a good time to invest in real estate? However, this was in keeping with Mosaic Law (Leviticus 25:25-28); plus, an example of this is in the book of Ruth (4:1-6). In fact, to perpetuate a family's viability, the nearest relative bore the responsibility to purchase the land.

Sure enough, Hanamel visited Jeremiah and made him the offer. This field was at Anathoth (the name means "answers to prayer"), just miles from Jerusalem—an area that may well have already been in control of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah obeyed the Lord and purchased the field. Jeremiah 32:10-15 (not part of the lesson text) affirmed that the deal was sealed. Jeremiah paid seventeen shekels of silver (about seven ounces) for the property. This investment would make sense only if God kept his promise about bringing his people back to possess this land. This explained why Baruch was given the deed to care for after the transaction (32:16).

A Time to Pray

Jeremiah 32:16-27

Jeremiah must have thought the property transfer rather absurd. So, he prayed that God would make good on it all. In his prayer, Jeremiah acknowledged God's great power and outstretched arm and admitted *nothing was too hard* for the Lord. This phrase occurred again in question form (v. 26).

Jeremiah's prayer contains a juxtaposing of elements. On the one hand, he knew that God showed *love* (*chesed*—loyal love) to thousands. But he also knew God allowed the ripple effects of the sins of parents to be felt by their children. While God is open to the ways of all mankind, still he reward(s) each person according to their conduct. God had brought Israel out of Egypt with miracles (which continued) and gave them the land flowing with milk and honey. But Israel did not obey or follow God's law, so now God was at the precipice of bringing disaster on them.

Jeremiah admitted in his prayer that this judgment had more than begun. The Babylonians had brought siege ramps, sword, famine, and plague to Israel's doorstep. Buying land did not seem wise to Jeremiah, but he did it anyway because nothing was too hard for the Lord.

A Time to Return

Jeremiah 32:36-41

The verses that precede this paragraph offer a gruesome picture of the burning of the city of Jerusalem. It looked bleak. But God promised to gather his people from the land of their oppressors and bring them back to let them live in safety.

Once back, God would restore their relationship. They would be his people and he would be their God. He would give them *singleness of heart and action* (one heart and one way), and they would experience peace for themselves and their children. God would make an *everlasting covenant* with them. God would do good by them to the point of inspiring the people to properly fear God and never turn away from him. God would not be passive in this. He would do it with all his heart and soul. No matter how glum the circumstances seem, God will make good on his promises.

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WHAT SOME CALL FOOLISH

BY DAVID FAUST

God stretched my faith when I became a parent. I was 24 years old and my wife, Candy, was 23 when our first child was born. Matt surprised us by arriving a few weeks early, weighing only 3 pounds 14 ounces at birth. Later, when our daughters came to us by birth and by adoption, a God-given mix of awe, joy, and holy fear again filled my heart.

God stretched my faith when our little family moved to New York to lead a new church on Long Island. Skeptical friends questioned our judgment and asked, "Do you really want to raise your family in that environment?" But we never regretted our decision. Our decade of ministry in New York brought us lifelong friends and we witnessed God's faithfulness as our fledgling church began to thrive and grow.

The Lord stretched my faith again when Candy and I bought our first house there on Long Island. By today's standards, the price we paid ($35,000) sounds modest, but for us it was a huge step. We didn't qualify for bank financing, so the seller agreed to hold the mortgage himself. My hand trembled a bit when we signed the papers and closed the deal, but for the next 10 years, that little house sheltered our family and enhanced our ministry.

Jeremiah's Redefinition of Success

My small steps of faith pale in comparison with the steps Jeremiah took. He didn't buddy up to powerful people; he spoke hard truth that offended the king. Instead of dressing for success and polishing his public image, Jeremiah carried around a rotten linen belt to show how the people had ruined their relationship with God. Another time he wore a wooden ox yoke around his neck to illustrate how the Babylonians would bind the Jews with the yoke of slavery.

Jeremiah didn't hang out in trendy places, either. He preached at the city dump. The Lord told him not to get married, have children, or attend parties and feasts. His preaching got him beaten and put in stocks, threatened with death, and lowered into a muddy cistern. By worldly standards, Jeremiah was a failure. We call him the weeping prophet for good reason. But genuine success is not defined by popularity, image, wealth, and comfort—nor by outward appearance and public accolades—but by faithfulness to God.

What some call failure, God considers success. What some call foolish, God calls faith.

Jeremiah's Field of Dreams

Jeremiah 32 describes a real estate transaction a Bible commentator calls "one of the most remarkable examples of personal faith found in the Bible." It appeared routine: Jeremiah bought a field, then signed and sealed the deed. But if, as Jeremiah predicted repeatedly, the Jews were going to be driven from their land, buying property there didn't look like a wise investment! It was, however, a bold demonstration of faith and hope.

Jeremiah believed in an impossible-looking dream—that someday in the distant future, God would restore the people to their land. The prophet prayed, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17). Jeremiah put his faith into action and backed up his words with his money. Are we willing to do the same?

Personal Challenge:

Looking back over your life, when and how has God stretched your faith? What steps of bold faith have you taken recently? How will you put your faith into action this week?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. With whom have you proclaimed God's Word over the last week?

2. What is the riskiest investment (whether financial or otherwise) you've ever made?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 32:2, 6-9, 16-27, 36-41**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize those verses.

3. In what ways do you see Jeremiah's faithfulness to God throughout this Bible text?
   - How did God reassure Jeremiah when things in his life didn't make sense?

4. Look at Jeremiah's prayer and all it included: words of worship, declaration of his trust in and surrender to God, praise for God's love and power, and recognition of the people's unfaithfulness. What can we learn about prayer from this?
   - What does Jeremiah's prayer tell you about his faith?

5. Though God had loved and provided for his people, they did not obey him, which brought about these dire consequences. What do you learn about the importance of obedience from this?

6. Imagine you were one of the people of Israel and Judah. You're losing your home and city, which will "be given into the hands of the king of Babylon" by the sword, famine, and plague. "But," God says, he will bring you back . . . and much more. How do you feel about and respond to his promises?

7. What do you learn about God from this Bible text?

8. What do you learn about people?

9. God always desires to bring his people back home (think of the prodigal son, for example). With whom in your life will you share God's yearning to have a relationship with us?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

11. When you can't yet see how a life situation will turn out, what do you need so you can obey God regardless of the circumstances?
    - How can we as a community of believers help one another in this regard?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 33:1-11, 15-26**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

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

STUDY: 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.

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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)?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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?

7. What do you learn about yourself?

8. 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!"
   - 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: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.