*Finding Grace*

*in the*

*Wilderness of Loss:*

*Lessons for Today from Israel’s Exile*

How a Glimpse of the “Latter Days” Offers Hope and Change for Present Day Believers:

A Study of Jeremiah 29-31

Part 1 – Jeremiah 29 3/22/20

Part 2 – Jeremiah 30 3/29/20

Part 3 – Jeremiah 31 4/5/20

Winnetka Bible Church

Adult Discipleship Seminar

My dear Winnetka Bible Church family,

The attached outline is offered for your personal Bible study. It began a few weeks ago as I was reading Jeremiah 31. I was struck by how this chapter shows God’s love in times of loss.

As the ensuing weeks unfolded, it became apparent that we all, as well as the world around us, are facing a series of great losses in our daily routines through events surrounding the Covid-19 outbreak. Now we will be losing our weekly gathering time, at least for several weeks to come. Government mandates will now impose upon us a scattering, a loss of face to face fellowship, prayer, breaking of bread, and teaching, including the Adult Discipleship Seminar. All the while, many are also struggling with the ever-present losses of life otherwise, whether it be health, or loss of loved ones, or a job, or a relationship.

These losses brings grief. As the Jewish exiles were taken to Babylon, they were in a wilderness of hurt, as these days are beginning to seem. It is like we are heading into a wilderness for which there is no map. And with the grief and uncertainty may come a sense of guilt, whether real or imagined. Did we sin in some way? Is God judging us?

God’s promise to the exiles was that they would find grace in the wilderness, as they realized they God had loved them with an everlasting love. The one who scatters promises He will one day gather us again to Him and to one another. But in the meantime He calls us to humble ourselves, draw closer to Him in repentance and rest, and seek Him with all our hearts.

When we do that, God promises us His grace and hope. He lets us know that He not only loves us as His child, He longs for covenant fellowship with us. And with the promises of hope, He points us to that day when Christ appears for us, the “blessed hope” of the true follower of Christ. In that day He will not only rescue us, He will bring in everlasting righteousness and peace, and heal all our diseases. That prophetic hope is given to us as a gift, as a light “shining in a dark place” when all other lights go out (2 Peter 1:19-21).

As I meditated, it became clear that Jer 29-31 forms a unitary section. Of special relevance are the 7 application questions toward the end of this packet. I pray this study will awaken in your hearts a deeper love for return of Christ our Prince of Peace. If it does, it should motivate us to greater hope, greater purity, and greater resolve to be ambassadors of reconciliation to the world, persuading and calling others to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

We know the Lord who scatters will regather us, whether sooner or later. May we soon reunite to share this study face to face. Until then, may these scriptures bless you and grow your faith, hope and love through our Risen and Returning King, Whom we will one day see face to face!

With love in the fellowship of the King,

Pete Jaggard

**3/22/20 FINDING GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS OF LOSS: Part 1 – Jeremiah 29**

**Getting a Glimpse of Latter-Day Hope**

**Setting:** Final Days of Judah and Exile into Babylon; multiple deportations (607-05 BC?, 597 BC, 586 BC) culminating in destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC. A time for Lament.

**Author:** Jeremiah: mocked, despised, rejected for his message of inevitable, coming judgment on Judah for their sin; thrown in a cistern; forcibly exiled to Egypt by countrymen; persevering.

**Jeremiah’s Overall Message:** imminent judgment on Judah for covenant infidelity, yet hope in restoration and a new covenant which God will establish with Israel and Judah in the latter days

**How was the Exile a Loss? In that Wilderness, how did God give Hope to the Exiles?**

**The Babylonian Exile was a Great Loss – the Loss of a Homeland, of a National Identity**

1. **Loss Brings Grief:** Contrast Emotions of the Exodus (Psa 136) and the Exile (Psa 137)

* **EXODUS:** Leaving the Bondage of Egypt to go to the Promised Land

Read Psa 136:1-2, 10-16. What was the predominant emotion of the Exodus?

* **EXILE** (860 years after Exodus):Forced to Leave the Land for Bondage in Babylon

Read Psa 137. What was the predominant emotion of the Exile?

1. **Loss Brings Guilt:** Discuss Real Guilt, Psychological Guilt, Survivor Guilt

**The Exile was because of the sin of Israel (30:14-15).** A loss sometimes prompts us to ask,

*Did I sin?* If so we must repent. Recognition of **real guilt** brings godly sorrow that leads to

repentance 2 Cor 7:8-11. But not all loss is directly a result of sin.

**Psychological guilt** may come from our own unwillingness to forgive ourselves, or from

the accusations of the enemy (Zech 3:1-10; Rev 12:10). We must resist these.  
 **Survivor Guilt**: Why did others die while I am spared to live on in this disaster?

1. **Loss Brings Grace:** How can we draw near to God in our pain? Where are the opportunities for God to show His everlasting love for us? **Jer 31:2-3**; 2 Cor 12:7-10
2. **What are to be the Priorities for the Exiles in the Wilderness of Loss? Jer 29:4-9**
3. **What are God’s Promises of Hope for the Exiles? What Change does He call for? 29:10-14**

**APPLY:** How has God provided hope, grace and change for you in a wilderness of loss?

What is the “blessed hope” of the believer? Titus 2:13

How do the Prophets (Prophetic Books of the Bible, as well any prophetic

sections of scripture) strengthen our faith and our hope? 2 Peter 1:19-21

Read 2 Tim 4:7-8. Do you love (*agapao*) the return of Christ? Does it motivate you?

C.S. Lewis *“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”*

**3/29/20 FINDING GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS OF LOSS: Part 2 – Jeremiah 30**

**Jer 30:1-3 The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah: Big Picture of What this Chapter is About**

* Promise of Reunification of Israel and Judah – has this ever happened yet?
* Promise of Return to the Land – Why is the Land Important? Gen 12:1; 35:12; 48:3-4.

**Jer 30:4-9 The “Time of Jacob’s Trouble”**

* These verses speak of a time when Israel and Judah have returned to the land together
* It is a time of great trouble unlike any other. Why is it so terrible? See Zech 12:1-3; 14:1-3
* But Jacob (Israel) will be saved out of it. How? Zech 14:4
* Who was the last king of Israel? What happened to him? 2 Kings 25:1-7
* The Promise of Liberation and the Return of the King (30:8-9). Who is the next King of Israel? See Hosea 3:4-5; Matt 20:30-31; 21:9.

**Jer 30:10-11 The Promise of Regathering, Accountability and Eternal Establishment of Israel**

* What is God’s Future Plan for Israel and the Nations? See Zech 14:9-19; Isa 2:1-5; 11:10-12
* What does God’s dealing with Israel’s accountability demonstrate?

**Jer 30:12-17 What are God’s Reasons for the Babylonian Captivity and Aftermath?**

* Israel went into Captivity because of its sin (30:12-15)
* Those who plunder Israel will be devoured for their sinful actions against Israel (30:16)
* God will heal Israel out of her shameful defeat and captivity (30:17)

**Jer 30:18-24 A Latter-Days Promise of Return and Restoration of the Covenant**

* Describe the blessings for Israel in 30:18-21.
* In 30:21, who is their “prince” from among them who will draw near to God and restore the covenant between God and Israel? Heb 10:19-23; 7:25
* What is the significance of the covenantal language in 30:22?
* In 30:23-24, what attributes of God will be exercised to accomplish all this?
* When will the people “get it,” that is, understand the meaning of this prophecy? (30:24)

**APPLY:** How should the wrath of God inform us and be part of our gospel and Christian life? John 3:36; Rom 1:16-18; 2:5; 5:8-10; 9:20-26; 12:19; 13:4-5; Eph 4:31-32; Col 3:5-9; 1 Thes 1:10; 1 Thes 5:9; Rev 19:15

How does the hope of Christ’s return help us now? Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2-3; 2 Cor 5:10-21.

**4/5/20 FINDING GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS: Part 3 - JEREMIAH 31**

**Review:** Who is the “prince” who comes from them and dares to draw near to God? (30:21) See Heb 10:19-23; 7:25. What will his work accomplish (Jer 30:22)?

**31:1** see also 30:3. What is the significance of Yahweh becoming the God of all the clans of Israel? Has this happened ever since this promise? When will this happen?

Read Hosea 3:4-5 for a very similar promise to Israel “in the latter days.” Who is “David their king”? See Matt 20:30-31; 21:9.

When will Jesus sit on His throne? What is his first act as King? Matt 24:29-31; 25:31-34. What should the promise of His return grow in us? Titus 2:13

**31:2-3 THE BIG PROMISE: God Shows Grace and Love to the Exiles in the Wilderness**

**Jer 31 THE BIG QUESTION: How does God show His Grace and Everlasting Love to the Exiles?**

1. **By Offering HOPE: Promise of Restoration as a Sign of God’s Goodness (31:1-14)**

Remember the importance of the land promised in the covenant to Abram in Gen 12:1, continued through Jacob to Joseph in Gen 48:3-4; 49:29-32. It was renewed in Deut 4:25-31. Has this promise of restoration been completely fulfilled? Clues that it is yet-future:

* 1. **The Joy and Promise of Future, Final “Latter Days” Restoration to the Land (31:1-9)**
* Context of 30:18-31:1 “latter days . . . at that time” (see above, Deut 4:25-31)
* Mirth of the return described in Jer 31:4-6, contrasted with Ezra 3:11-13; Neh 1:3-4. Compare and contrast the emotions in these two returns.
* List all the positive benefits promised in this final return to the land, in Jer 31:4-14.
* Promise of reunion of Samaria (northern tribes) and Zion (Jerusalem, Judah) 31:5-6. This did not happen on the return from Babylonian exile.
* Israel referred to as “chief of the nations” 31:7. Israel was not “chief of the nations” on return from Babylonian exile. See also Isa 60:3-6, 10-13, 19-21 for similar promises.
* Regathering will be from “the farthest parts of the earth,” not just from Babylon (31:8). Many Jews remained in diaspora (exile), e.g., Esther and Mordecai.

**1.2 Compelling the Nations to Declare God’s Coming Rescue of Israel (31:10-14)**

* In 31:10, who is speaking? To whom?

What is He telling them to do? What will they say?

What will make this miraculous (31: 11)?

* Describe the actions of God for Israel that the nations will one day declare to the world:
  + scattering and gathering: How does God use these to grow our faith?
  + shepherding
  + ransoming and redeeming
  + comforting
  + turning mourning into joy
* In 31:12 and 31:14, what attribute of God is highlighted?

How does the wilderness of loss challenge our belief, trust, and hope in this attribute?

What in our belief about God’s character do we need to hold onto when experiencing

the bitterness of loss? See Heb 11:6, 11-16, 32-40.

1. **By Offering CHANGE: God’s Mercy to Those who Repent in the Face of Loss (31:15-22)**

* Describe the emotions of the loss of “Rachel’s children” in 31:15; see Matt 2:16-18.
* What is the incongruity of God’s command in 31:16? How is it justified in 31:16-17?
* Describe the stages of individual repentance in 31:18-19. Have you ever “struck your thigh” over your sin (“I can’t believe I did it again!” – *WHACK!)*? See 2 Cor 7:8-11. Discuss the role of humility and hope in our response to God’s discipline.
* Describe the tension between remembering and forgetting the sins of our youth (compare 31:19 with Psa 25:7; Micah 7:8-10, 18-19; Psa 103:11-13; Phil 3:12-16)
* What is God’s response to genuine repentance like in 31:20?
* Why is it important to set up guideposts in our walk with God? 31:21-22

1. **By Offering SATISFACTION: “Good Dreams” about the Hope of Future Restoration (31:23-26)**

* Describe the dream given to Jeremiah in 31: 23-26.
* When God shows us grace in a wilderness of loss, how is almost dream-like?
* How is the hope we have in Christ’s return more than a dream? Does it satisfy you enough to be able to find grace in your wilderness? Why do we need the hope given to us in the prophetic sections of scripture? Rom 5:1-5; 8:23-25; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:19

1. **Redemption and Restoration of Israel’s Remnant in the New Covenant (31:27-40)**

**“Behold the days are coming”** x 3: We must look to the future to see Jer 31 completely fulfilled

1. **Repopulating and Replanting the Land (31:27-30)**

* Israel and Judah reunited (31:27-28); hasn’t happened yet
* Recognition of individual accountability for sin; no more blaming others (31:29-30)

1. **Redemption of all the remnant of Israel in New Covenant (31:31-37)** see Rom 11:25-27

* **New Covenant: based solely on the work of Christ (31:31-32a)**
* Initiated by the work of Christ on the Cross – Luke 22:20
* See **Heb 8:1-13** for quotation of this passage in Jer 31 (longest OT quote in NT?)
* Fulfilled for the remnant of Israel in latter days: see Ezek 37:12-28
* Complete renewal of marital covenant between God and Israel (31:32b-34)
* **All (true) Israel shall know the Lord (31:34; see Rom 11:26)**
* **God’s promise that they shall never again cease to be a nation before Him (31:35-37)**

1. **Rebuilding and Re-Consecration of Jerusalem (31:38-40)**

* Rebuilding the city of Jerusalem for the Lord (31:38-39)
* Reconsecration of the Valley (31:40a)
* Promise that **this (yet future) rebuilding will be forever permanent (31:40b)**

**SOME APPLICATION QUESTIONS from Jeremiah 31 for today’s believers:**

1. What “wilderness of loss” have you faced or are you facing?

Can you relate to the raw emotions experienced by the people of Israel as they were in captivity in Babylon (Psalm 137)?

1. As you are in a wilderness of loss, do you believe God loves you with an everlasting love?
2. How have you found moments of God’s grace in the wilderness of loss? What have you discovered and applied from Jer 31? From other scripture passages about suffering, such as Paul’s experience in 2 Cor 12:7-10, or from Job 1:13-22?
3. How has God shown His goodness to you in his actions of scattering and gathering,

shepherding, ransoming and redeeming, comforting, turning mourning into joy?

How is our belief in God’s goodness challenged and grown through times of testing our

faith through loss?

How do the faith stories of others who faced loss strengthen us in our losses? (Heb 11:6,

11-16, 32-40; 12:1-2)

1. How does loss sometimes help soften our hearts toward God through recognition of our sin and a desire to be changed, and to draw near to Him in genuine repentance?

How does God respond when we genuinely repent? (Jer 31:20)

1. What “guideposts” have you set up to remember how God has led you through a wilderness of loss in the past? How do these roadside markers help you navigate present-day trials?

(Jer 31:21-22)

1. Is your hope in Christ’s return like Jeremiah’s “good dream” (31:26)? Do you think of it as your “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13)? Does it give you strength in the face of loss?

What are the challenges we face when we are in the wilderness, and God asks us to draw strength from a promise which may be far in the future. i.e., the return of Christ?

Do you turn to the prophetic sections of scripture as a light shining in a dark place when all other lights go out – waiting for the light of Jesus to arise in your heart? (2 Peter 1:19)

**Pieces of the Puzzle: A Brief Outline of the Prophetic Perspective on God’s Dealings with Israel**

1. A people promised a land through whom all nations will be blessed; this blessing will come through a divine suffering servant-King who will be a Light to the Nations Gen 12:1-3
2. A people promised a day when they would inhabit the land forever in God’s blessing, in many passages such as Jeremiah 31 and Isaiah 60
3. A people who rejected their servant-King at His First Appearing (Isa 53:3; John 1:11)
4. Yet in His New Covenant the servant-King offered redemption to all who would believe, Jew or Gentile, breaking down the ethnic barrier and making peace through His cross so His salvation could extend to all peoples (John 1:12; Eph 2:13-22; Isa 49:6)
5. A people whom, because of their majority rejection of Jesus as Messiah-King, have undergone a “partial hardening” of heart toward Jesus (Acts 13:48-52; Rom 11:25)
6. During that time they will be scattered, captives among the nations (Luke 21:24)
7. The “hardening” is only until the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25)
8. Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles (not governed by the people of Israel), until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)
9. Then there will be a regathering of Israel to the land, out of their seeming extinction (Valley of Dry Bones), in successive stages, to restore them as a nation in the land (Ezekiel 37:1-14).
10. This process will culminate in a time of great distress for “Jacob” (Israel), yet they will be saved out of it (Jer 30:1-7; compare the attack of satan on the woman in Rev 12:1-6, 13-17).
11. This salvation of “latter days” Israel will occur only when, at the time of greatest distress, when all nations are surrounding Jerusalem and she faces certain destruction, God will pour out His Spirit on a remnant of Israel. They will turn to see their true Messiah, Jesus, the one whom they pierced, and mourn over Him as for an only child. At that time, a fountain of cleansing through the blood of Jesus will be opened for them, as it is for anyone, Jew or Gentile, who repents and calls upon the name of Jesus. They will thus become part of the redeemed people of God, and so they will be part of true Israel, “all Israel” who will be saved. Then Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives and be King over all the earth. (Zechariah 12:1 – 14:9; Joel 2:28 – 3:16; Rom 11:26-27).
12. When Jesus returns as Judge and King, He will fulfill for all the true remnant of Israel the promises of great blessing in the land as chief of the nations as described in Jeremiah 31, Isaiah 60, Joel 3:17-21, and many other such passages in the OT which are yet unfulfilled.

NOTES