*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

Lesson 3 Answer Key – Jeremiah 31

Winnetka Bible Church

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Dear friends,

Welcome to the study of the last of these three wonderful chapters in Jeremiah. Thank you for staying with the task as we mine the depths of precious gems in the prophetic word of God.

Lesson 1 looked at the historical setting of the exile of Judah to Babylon. We have called that experience a “wilderness of loss,” based on the bitter pain expressed in Psalm 137, and the hope offered in the reality that the survivors “found grace in the wilderness” (Jer 31:2). We noted that loss bring grief, and sometimes guilt, which calls us to repentance. But loss can also be God’s primary way to show us the grace he brings to us in our wilderness experiences.

We saw the grace in the hope offered in prophetic scriptures as a light shining in a dark place when all other lights go out (2 Pet 1:19-21). We looked at the promise given to those who “love His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8), and how that Day should motivate us to greater hope, greater purity, and greater outreach to the lost. The prophetic hope offered in Jeremiah 29 includes the great promise in Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles that God knows the plans he has for them, plans to prosper and not to harm, plans to give them a future and a hope, when they seek the Lord with all their heart.

In Lesson 2 (Jeremiah chapter 30) we looked at God’s latter day promises for Israel, focused on the return of Christ. This coming event is our source of ultimate hope in any wilderness we travel through in this life, including Covid-19. Chapter 30 expounded on the day when Jesus (“David their king”) returns to reign on earth (30:9, 21). God promised Israel a day of restoration to their land forever. This promise is linked to Christ’s return, which is the “blessed hope” of all His followers.

Chapter 31 is the capstone exposition of finding God’s grace in a wilderness of loss. I came across this chapter in my devotional many weeks ago when I had just learned of Pastor Keith’s decision to take the call in Appleton. It spoke to me of how God provides for us in times of change or loss, the application of which has expanded greatly to include our present distress under Covid-19. God’s grace in the wilderness includes an offer of future hope (31:4-14). It is also a call to a process of heart change through godly sorrow and repentance here and now, which reveals to us just how deep the everlasting love of God for us is in spite of our sin (31:15-22). This results in a satisfaction of our soul that is like awakening from a good dream (31:23-26). The offer of “grace in the wilderness” culminates in a wonderful and unique proclamation of the coming of a New Covenant one day, which is ultimately realized only in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (31:27-40). This New Covenant was inaugurated for everyone who would believe, Jew and Gentile, in his first coming. Jeremiah focuses on its completion in a particular way in God’s relationship with the true remnant of Israel at his second coming.

This is a mountaintop chapter in OT prophecy, much like Isaiah 40. It is a gourmet banquet of biblical sustenance for your soul. May you savor each entrée on this menu and be satisfied.

Pete

**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)?

1. *Jesus. He is the only one who could dare approach God, drawing near to the Father on our behalf through his perfect sacrifice on the cross at his first coming. By doing this, he opened a way of access for us to draw near God’s throne of mercy and grace. Through Jesus’ blood, our sin can be atoned for, and we can become God’s covenant people. This is offered to Jewish people and Gentiles alike. At his second coming, he will fulfill the hopes of all who hold dear the prophetic promises as a light in our dark world.*

*The Bible tells us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). In order to understand prophecy, we must look for the telltale signs of Jesus and his mission. Jer 30:21-22 is a very clear Messianic reference, and it provides context for interpreting the neighboring passages. Jeremiah 31 also contains clear Messianic references, which we will consider as we seek to answer the question, how do we find grace in the wilderness of our loss?*

**OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH 31**

1. **The Big Promise: God Shows Grace and Love to Us in the Wilderness of Loss (31:1-3)**

**1.1 The Hope that Comes from a “Latter Days” Perspective (31:1)**

 **1.2 The Promise of God’s Grace and Love in our Wilderness of Loss (31:2-3)**

1. **The Big Question: How does God Show Grace and Love to Us in this Wilderness?**
	1. **By Offering us Hope: Promise of Restoration as a Sign of His Goodness (31:4-14)**
	2. **By Offering us Change: God’s Mercy for those who Repent (31:15-22)**
	3. **By Offering us Satisfaction: The Power of a Good Dream (31:23-26)**
2. **The Big Reward: A New Covenant of Redemption through the Work of Christ for all true Israel, yet to be Fulfilled in “the Latter Days” (31:27-40)**
3. **The Big Promise: God Shows Grace and Love to us in the Wilderness of Loss (31:1-3)**

**“At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people."**

**2 Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, 3 the LORD appeared to him from far away.**

**I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”**

**1.1 The Hope that Comes from a “Latter Days” Perspective (Jer 31:1)**

**31:1** ***Q: To “what time” is this verse referring?***

***A:*** *The “latter days” (30:24 immediately preceding this verse). This is when “Israel and Judah” (i.e., all 12 Tribes) will be reunited in return to the land (see 30:3). It is yet future even now.*

***Q: 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?***

***A:*** *This would represent a reunification of the kingdom of Israel under one King. This was the original state of the Davidic covenant, but lasted only two generations, David and Solomon. Under Rehoboam’s harsh rule, civil war erupted and the kingdom has never been united again.*

*Hosea 3:4-5 tells us that Israel will live many days without a king, and then in the last days they will return trembling to the LORD and to “David their King,” a clear reference to Messiah-Jesus. This refers to the end time repentance of a remnant of Israel who will turn to Jesus just before he returns as King over all the earth. They will then be part of his new covenant people.*

***Q: Who is “David their king”?***

***A:*** *See Matt 20:30-31; 21:9.* *At his first coming, Jesus was referred to by others as “Son of David” in recognition of his Messianic identity.*

***Q: When will Jesus sit on His throne? What is his first act as King?***

***A:***  *See Matt 24:29-31; 25:31-41. When he returns in glory, he will gather the elect from the four winds (24:31), he will sit on his throne (25:31), and he will gather the nations before him to separate the sheep from the goats, the former to enter his kingdom, the latter to be cast into eternal fire (25:31-41).*

***Q: What should the promise of Jesus’ return grow in us? Titus 2:13***

***A:*** *A “blessed hope!”*

**1.2 The Big Promise of God’s Grace and Love in our Wilderness of Loss (31:2-3)**

**“Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, 3 the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”**

*Here in these two verses is the major theme of this entire study. God’s people found grace in their wilderness, because the LORD came to them from far away, and showed his everlasting love for them and faithfulness to them.*

*Wilderness experiences are not usually our favorite times of life. They are times of uprooting, of loss of a familiar home base, of wandering aimlessly. We easily lose sight of our destination, and thus begin to lose hope in finally arriving at where we want to be.*

*God’s Word tells us that we are strangers and aliens in this world. We are pilgrims never quite at home on earth. It is as though we are exiles, citizens of another country, for God is calling us to his heavenly city, our eternal home (Phil 3:20-21; Heb 11:13; 1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11).*

*Israel already had known one epic wilderness experience, the Exodus from Egypt. While that experience started with liberation from bondage, it was derailed by their sin of unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea, when they rejected the counsel of Caleb and Joshua and went with the majority report, fearing to enter the Promised Land at the opportune time (Numbers 13-14).*

*Following that momentous lapse of faith, they wandered for 40 years in a wilderness. But it was there that God was able to humble them and test their hearts, so they would learn that life comes from the word of God.*

“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” Deut 8:2-3

*Now, more than 800 years later, the people of Israel find themselves in another wilderness – not a wilderness Exodus away from bondage, but a wilderness of going back into bondage in Babylon. Yes, God is disciplining them, but he is also* ***discipling*** *them in this experience. The wilderness is a proving ground of our hearts – will we find life in the word of God, or will we rebel again, and lapse into unbelief? Will we find our sustenance not in the bread we produce, but in the Bread of life, Jesus, whom God showers down upon us every day?*

*The promise of Jeremiah 31:2-3 is that God is longing to help us discover the grace he offers in the wilderness of our loss, grief, and pain. Those who survived the destruction of their homeland will find grace in the wilderness, if they turn to the Grace-Giver. They, and we, will discover that he loves us with an everlasting love. His aid will come to us as though it was from far away.*

*And so in our wilderness of loss, whether from Covid-19 and its effects, or from other losses in life, we should examine ourselves and ask these basic questions. How is God humbling me in this wilderness? How is he testing me? What obedience is he calling me to? How can I sustain myself in this wilderness not by feasting on my own productivity or power, but on the Bread of life, Jesus? Is Jesus my spiritual food for each day?*

*And as I pursue the Lord in the face of the wilderness I am in, am I discovering in new and deeper ways just how sufficient his grace is for me? Am I finding out how great his everlasting love for me really is? When we see the value of such lessons, we can embrace our divinely-ordained identity as pilgrims journeying through a wilderness to our eternal home.*

1. **THE BIG QUESTION OF JER 31: How does God show His Grace and Everlasting Love to the Exiles?**

*God shows his grace and love by offering hope, change, and satisfaction to the exiles in the wilderness. Then he promises them the “big reward” of redemption and ultimate restoration for all those of the “true Israel” in the latter days.*

* 1. **By Offering HOPE: Promise of Restoration as a Sign of God’s Goodness (31:4-14)**

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? *Not yet.*

*A question the reader of this series may honestly ask: Why does God so frequently point us to the “latter days,” the end of this age, as the focus of hope for his people? All generations but one will die off before ever seeing that hope realized. How is that “offering hope”?*

*The question is fair. But scripture is clear. Biblical hope looks forward all the way to when the sons of God will be revealed, and the creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption. These things will not come to pass until Christ returns to subdue all his foes and bring in his everlasting kingdom. But for the believer, it is the certainty of that event and the age to follow that is the essence of biblical hope. All other “hope” is futility.*

**“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” Romans 8:18-25 ESV**

So the follower of Christ is called to a faith and hope like all those heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11: 1, 39 –

**“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. . . . . . And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised”**

* + 1. **The Joy and Promise of Future, Final “Latter Days” Restoration to the Land (31:4-9)**

**“Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. 5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. 6 For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'" 7 For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.' 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.”**

**Clues that this promise is still future:**

* **Context of 30:18-31:1 “latter days . . . at that time”** (see above, Deut 4:25-31)
* *The reign of Jesus as ruler over them (30:21)*
* *They will understand this in the latter days (30:24)*
* *At that time God will be the God of all the clans of Israel (united 12 tribes once more) and they will be his people – restoration of covenant relationship with God (31:1)*
* **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.
* *31:1-7 describes primarily merrymaking, joy, gladness and praise*
* *By contrast, the return from Babylon was characterized by a mixture of joy and weeping in Ezra 3:11-13, and great trouble and shame in Neh 1:3-4.*
* **List all the positive benefits promised in this final return to the land, in Jer 31:4-14.**
* *Rebuilding 31:4*
* *Dancing 31:4*
* *Replanting 31:5*
* *Return to Zion from Ephraim 31:6*
* *Salvation of the remnant of Israel 31:7*
* *Regathering of Israel from all parts of the earth 31:8*
* *Merciful restoration to God their Father 31:9*
* *Regathering the scattered sheep to God their Shepherd 31:10*
* *Ransom and redemption of Israel from those too strong for him 31:11*
* *Radiant joy over the goodness of the LORD and material blessings he brings 31:12*
* *Turning mourning and sorrow into comfort and gladness 31:13*
* *Satisfaction with the goodness of God 31:14*
* **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, and never has been since, in any earthly sense.

The “Kingdom” of Christ has a “Now and a Not Yet” nature to it. He is King, and his kingdom now is growing, but it awaits the full, final revelation of his Kingdom which we will not see until he returns. He is waiting until the Father puts his enemies under his footstool (Psalm 110:1). But when we see the Return of the King and the establishment of his Kingdom in all its fulness, we will see Israel as the “chief of the nations” to whom all nations will come for justice (Isa 2:1-5) and worship of the King, Jesus (Zech 14:16-17).

Along this same line, Isa 60:1-12 says of Israel in the future Kingdom Age, “Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you. 11 **Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. 12 For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste.”**

* **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. Isa 11:11-12 speaks of a second regathering a remnant of Israel from the 4 corners of the earth, yet future.
	+ 1. **Compelling the Nations to Declare God’s Coming Rescue of Israel (31:10-14)**

**“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.' 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD.”**

* **In 31:10, who is speaking? To whom?**  *God is speaking to the nations.*

**What is He telling them to do?** *To hear the word of the Lord and repeat it*

**What will they say?** *They will proclaim that God, who scattered Israel, is now regathering*

 *them in the last days. He is shepherding, ransoming, and redeeming them out of more*

 *powerful nations.*

 **What will make this miraculous (31: 11)?** *Israel will not have enough power of its own*

 *to be delivered from more powerful nations; it will occur only by divine intervention.*

* **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 and spread the Word? *Scattering and gathering was a cycle of the early church in the book of Acts. God used persecution to scatter the church so the word of the Lord would spread to more people. Scattering by persecution also grows the faith of those facing such trials.*
* **Shepherding**: *God shows his tender care for his flock – feeding, guiding, guarding, nurturing and growing our faith*
* **Ransoming and redeeming**: *these actions reflect the work of Christ on the cross; he paid the price we could not pay, he bought us out of slavery to sin.*
* **Comforting; turning mourning into joy:** *the sorrow of Good Friday is turned around by the joy of Easter. In like manner for each of his followers, Jesus brings good out of evil, life out of death, making something out of nothing (see Rom 4:17; 8:28; 12:21) in whatever wilderness we find ourselves. And for the true remnant of Israel in the last days, they will come through the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:7), the “great tribulation” (Matt 24:21), a time in which God will gather all nations to battle against Jerusalem (Zech 14:2). “Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him” (Zech 14:5), and the mourning of the true remnant of Israel will become joy.*
* **In 31:12 and 31:14, what attribute of God is highlighted? *The Goodness of God.***
* **How does the wilderness of loss challenge our belief, trust, and hope in this attribute?**

*When we face loss or other wilderness experiences, we tend to begin questioning if God sees or cares about us. We may even doubt his goodness. In the face of attacks by others, David clung to the goodness of the Lord. He challenges us to wait upon the Lord in such times (Psalm 27:12-14).*

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

 **the bitterness of loss and other wilderness disappointments? Heb 11:6, 11-16, 32-40.**

*His Goodness. We must believe he exists, and that he is good – he rewards those who diligently seek him. We must cultivate a faith with a long-term view, “a long obedience in the same direction.” We must resolve to hold to our faith in God’s promises despite never seeing them completely fulfilled in this life, for there is eternal life ahead in which all will be revealed and fulfilled for our good and for his glory.*

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

*One can understand the offer of hope as “grace in the wilderness.” But for that hope to be ours, God calls us to a change in our hearts. This part of Jer 31 is perhaps the most intimate. We can see in it that the very process of repentance we must go through to find hope is itself a grace from God. If godly sorrow is necessary to lead us to repentance, then we should see our wilderness experiences as an opportunity to turn our hearts more fully toward God as he draws us with “cords of kindness” (a phrase from Hosea 11:4).*

**“Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." 16 Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. 17 There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country. 18 I have heard Ephraim grieving, 'You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the LORD my God. 19 For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.' 20 Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the LORD. 21 "Set up road markers for yourself; make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. 22 How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encircles a man."” (Jer 31:15-22 ESV)**

* **Describe the emotions of the loss of “Rachel’s children” in 31:15;** see Matt 2:16-18.

*Rachel was a shepherdess, for whom Jacob had love at first sight. Yet she had to share him with Leah, and she bore the pain of delayed fertility, as she watched Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah conceive children by Jacob. Finally God “remembered Rachel,” opened her womb, and she bore Joseph (Gen 30:22-24). Later she would die in childbirth as Benjamin was born (Gen 35:16-19). Through the sons of Joseph came the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Benjamin was a small tribe which together with Judah made up the southern kingdom after the national split.*

*So when the grieving of Ephraim is heard in Jer 31:18, it is reflecting on the grief over the loss of the northern tribes, including Ephraim and Manasseh, which happened in 722 BC at the hands of Assyria. When Jer 31:15 refers to a voice heard weeping in Ramah, it is referring to the grief of the southern tribes over the Babylonian exile in Jeremiah’s day. Ramah was a town 5 miles north of Jerusalem, which the Babylonians used as a staging area to take the captives of Judah in exile to Babylon (see Jer 40:1). So the weeping described in this passage reflects the collective grief of all Israel over the loss of their homeland and the loss of their liberty as they go into exile.*

*Jeremiah describes all this grief as “Rachel weeping for her children.” The loss of a child is among the greatest griefs of life. There is no way to assuage that sorrow. No doubt many parents in the exile to Babylon had to bury a little one. Perhaps that explains their bitter hatred of Babylon to the degree that they wished for Babylonian babies to be murdered (Psalm 137:9).*

*Among the ironies of prophecy is that this deeply painful loss experienced by many in the Babylonian exile was a foreshadowing of the equally devastating pain of those parents in Bethlehem whose children were ripped from their arms at the hands of Herod’s soldiers. His paranoia over the thought that a king of the Jews had been born drove him to mass murder of innocents (Matt 2:16-18). There is horrible, unexplainable, inconsolable grief and pain in the hearts of those caught up in, and victimized by, these events. The ensuing wilderness of such a painful, devastating loss can rock one’s world, shaking one’s faith to its core.*

* **What is the incongruity of God’s command in 31:16?**  How is it justified in 31:16-17?

*God’s response to the pain of grieving, bereaved parents is almost incomprehensible at first. How does he expect weeping parents to keep from weeping in their hour of loss?*

*The challenge in this somewhat hyperbolic response from God is for those who are grieving – not just the parents of lost children, but all Israel as well – to look to the future. There is a day of reward, a day of return, a day when the children of Israel will come back to their own country. There is hope for the future of Israel, even if in the very distant future for that to be a “forever” reality.*

*This is where faith is either grown or blown - do we really believe that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18)?*

* **Describe the stages of individual repentance in 31:18-19.**

*First, they grieve. Pain has to be felt to be real. Note that it is “Ephraim” here; that would be anachronistic if it was referring to the Babylonian exile, since that involved Judah (southern tribes), not the northern tribes who had been destroyed by Assyria 136 years previously. So this text is looking to a future regathering of both Judah AND Ephraim (Israel), yet future even now.*

*Second, grieving Ephraimites come to acknowledge that their pain and grief is a result of divine discipline for their sin. David describes being under the discipline of God in Psalm 32:4 –* **“For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah.”** *This recognition of divine discipline implies an admission of guilt, a confession of one’s sin.*

*Third, there is a longing to be in closer fellowship with God –* **“bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the LORD my God.”** *There is a recognition similar to that expressed in Psalm 73:21-26. There is not sorrow one has been caught, but sorrow that one has hurt God.*

**“When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, 22 I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. 23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”**

*Fourth, there is a restatement, a recommitment that the LORD is my God (31:18).*

*Fifth, there is an acknowledgment that God’s discipline was effective in bringing about repentance. This caused a sense of shame over one’s sin.*

**Jer 31:19 “For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”**

* **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.

*Godly sorrow does lead us to repentance, if we humble ourselves under God’s disciplining hand of God (Isa 66:2; 1 Peter 5:6). Psalm 51 ia another passage describing the sorrow over sin that characterizes genuine repentance.*

* **Describe the tension between remembering and forgetting the sins of our youth** (compare Jer 31:19 with Psa 25:7; Micah 7:8-10, 18-19; Psa 103:11-13; Phil 3:12-16)

*We should learn from the sinful mistakes of our youth so as to avoid repeating them in the future. We should grow in discernment to avoid foolish choices, humility over our own susceptibilities in order to flee temptation, and reliance upon the Spirit to overcome our fleshly impulses. At the same time, we must remember that if we have genuinely repented, God has separated us from our sin as far as the east is from the west, and he remembers them no more. We need to do the same. “Carry the lesson, bury the transgression.”*

* **What is God’s response to genuine repentance in 31:20?**

***Here is the heart of “finding grace in the wilderness.”*** *God responds to the repentant Ephraimites (remember, looking toward a future, latter days repentant band of Ephraimites) with an incredible outpouring of love:*

**“Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the LORD.” (Jer 31:20)**

*This is the central expression of God in this mountaintop chapter. It is the exposition of God’s claim in 31:3, where he says he has loved Israel with an everlasting love, and therefore he has continued his faithfulness to them, even though they have been so often unfaithful to him. This is especially poignant, given the ages between this utterance and what will be its ultimate expression, the love of God awaiting the end-time repentance of the true remnant of Israel.*

*“My heart yearns for him” is more literally translated “my bowels sound for him.” The deepest seat of emotions in that culture was the bowels, and groaning, rumbling sounds expressed the deepest yearning of affection and empathy.*

*The closest parallel in the New Testament is the unceasing love and faithful yearning of the Father of the Prodigal Son. He waits on the porch, looking for the return of the Prodigal. There is no condemnation, no “See, I told you so” to greet his long-lost son. There is only anticipation, yearning, and finally joyous reception for the one sinner who repents, one more victory in the cosmic battle to redeem his fallen creation. Our sins they are many; His mercy is more. (See Luke 15:11-32). It is so of his love for us, and so is it of his love for the true remnant of Israel.*

* **Why is it important to set up guideposts in our walk with God?** Jeremiah 31:21-22

**21 "Set up road markers for yourself; make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. 22 How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encircles a man."”**

*The wilderness of loss in this life takes us on many unfamiliar paths over many days. But the moments when we find God’s all-sufficient grace need to be memorialized, treasured, and shared as a testimony to others, if we are to remember and make the most of the lessons learned. Here there was a detour of discipline, there we found a highway of hope. Always remember our destination is not in this world – it is a better one, a heavenly one.*

**Hebrews 11:13-16** “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

*The final phrase of Jeremiah 31:22 – “a woman encircles a man” – is one of those sayings in scripture which escapes a clear understanding. It is likely an old proverb, the original meaning of which has been lost. Various interpretations have been offered – perhaps referring to Israel overcoming nations that are stronger than her; perhaps an allusion to Israel finally embracing God; perhaps a reference to the virgin birth. Bottom line: we just don’t know for certain what this means.*

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

*Israel – and we as well – can find grace in our wilderness of loss by looking to the hope in God’s promises of his final victory at the return of Christ. Furthermore, we can make that hope practical and meaningful here and now by finding grace through of daily repentance. We can see our wilderness experiences here and now as a pathway to drawing closer to God, renouncing our sin and discovering his everlasting mercy and love for us, his prodigal children. And we can benefit from the valuable lessons learned in the wilderness, setting up guideposts for ourselves and others, should we pass that way again. God’s Word applied to our wilderness experiences truly becomes a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105).*

*Now comes the third phase of our discovery of grace in the wilderness. It is a sense of satisfaction that God gives us when we come in humility and repentance to embrace the hope he offers to all in Christ. It is a sense of contentment, satisfaction, almost a dream-like experience, that all we really need in this life is Christ.*

**“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes: "'The LORD bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!' 24 And Judah and all its cities shall dwell there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. 25 For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish."**

**26 “At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.” Jeremiah 31:23-26**

* **Describe the dream given to Jeremiah in 31:23-26.**

*In 31:23-24 it is clear the reference is to a future time when Judah is blessed with a restoration of fortunes in the land. In 31:25 there is a promise that God will satisfy and replenish every weary soul in Israel, referring to all the nation, reunited once more. And in 31:26 we are told Jeremiah awoke from what had been a pleasant dream filled with these messages of latter-day hope, repentance, and restoration for his nation.*

* **When God shows us grace in a wilderness of loss, how is almost dream-like?**

*Discuss with a Christian friend. Have you ever found the Lord giving you a sense of peace through a dream? Or perhaps from a difficult wilderness trial in which God revealed something new and precious to you, that it almost seemed like a dream?*

* **How is the hope we have in Christ’s return more than a dream?**

*Reflect back on the certainty that fulfilled prophecy adds to our faith (2 Peter 1:19-21) which has been mentioned in this study before. How much does the faithfulness of God to bring his promises to pass satisfy you and help you find grace in your wilderness?*

* **Why do we need the hope given to us in the prophetic sections of scripture?**
* **Rom 5:1-5 *Hope brings joy.*** *We rejoice in hope. Suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. And hope overcomes shame, because God’s love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So hope is what puts our suffering now into perspective and helps us endure with a Spirit-filled character and love.*
* **Rom 8:23-25 *We hope for what is not yet seen.*** *What we are hoping for is the day of the redemption of our bodies (at the return of Christ).* ***Hope teaches us patience*** *as we await his return.*
* **Titus 2:13 *His return is our “blessed hope.”***
* **2 Peter 1:19** ***Hope is a light in the dark places of life, when all other lights go out.*** *The testimony of prophecies that have already been fulfilled (e.g., prophecies about Jesus’ first coming) give us a certainty to our hope that makes the promise of his second coming a light shining in a dark place for us here and now.*
* **1 John 3:2-3 *The hope of Christ’s return motivates us to purify ourselves for that great day.*** *Those who have the hope of Christ return (his “appearing”) will seek to purify themselves now to be ready for him when he returns*
* **2 Cor 5:10-21** ***Hope is a motivation for evangelism and missions as ambassadors of Christ to a dying world in need of reconciliation to God through Christ.*** *The knowledge that we will stand before Christ at the believer’s judgment and the healthy fear of the Lord that should evoke in us should motivate us to fulfill our role as his ambassadors to the world here and now.*

1. **The Big Reward: A New Covenant of Redemption and Restoration for all True Israel through the Work of Christ, yet to be Fulfilled in “the Latter Days” (31:27-40)**

*The latter-days hope for Israel is now described in more detail. This section divides neatly into three parts, each beginning with the phrase,* **“Behold the days are coming”** (31:27, 31, 38). *This phrase, as well as the contents of this section, indicate a yet-future fulfillment, when those “forever” promises in the land come true.*

*It should be noted that this is also the only reference in the OT where a “new covenant” is promised by that specific phrase.*

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

**"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28 And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD. 29 In those days they shall no longer say: "'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' 30 But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”**

* *Israel and Judah will be reunited and grown (31:27); this hasn’t happened yet, but one day God will sow the seed of man and beast in the regathered nation. The reunited nation will grow in population and in herds of animals.*
* *Just as God watched over them in the breaking down of the nation, a process of which the exile to Babylon was just the beginning, so when he reunites Israel and Judah in the future, he will watch over them in the rebuilding and replanting (31:28). God desires so much to build us up, not tear us down (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Eph 4:12, 29). But sometimes he has to first tear down in order to build up his people (Jeremiah 1:10).*
* *Unlike the proverb in Jer 31:22 that we acknowledged above has some obscure meaning likely lost over the centuries, the proverb in 31:29 is made clear by the following phrase:* ***“but everyone shall die for his own iniquity.”*** *There will be recognition of individual accountability for sin; no more blaming others. This proverb was likely used by those facing exile to Babylon to blame the Exile on the sins of their parents (Ezekiel 18:2-4). The deflection of blame for our sin and the resulting judgment began in the Garden, as both Adam and Eve dissembled over their personal responsibility for the Original Sin (Gen 3:12-13). God will have none of that human game-playing and blame-laying. He says, “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek 18:4). In the latter-days context here in Jeremiah, the reference would point to the day of final judgment of unbelievers. Revelation 20:11-15 describes the Great White Throne Judgment, where all the dead, great and small, whose names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life are gathered to stand before God and face eternal judgment. Only by trusting in Christ’s work on the cross can anyone avoid that fate.*
1. **Redemption of all the remnant of Israel in New Covenant (31:31-37)** see Rom 11:25-27

**"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."**

**35 Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD of hosts is his name: 36 "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever." 37 Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD."**

* **The Declaration of a New Covenant: based solely on the work of Christ, applied to Latter-days Israel, resulting in their national reunion and restored relationship with God**

 **(31:31-34)**

*Jer 31:31-34 is one of the longest, if not the longest, quotations of the OT found in the New Testament (Heb 8:8-12). It is the only mention of a “New Covenant” in the Old Testament! Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant at the Last Supper (Luke 22:20), looking forward to his substitutionary, sacrificial atonement for us through his blood shed on the cross the next day. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the New Covenant mediated by the work of Jesus is a better covenant, enacted on better promises (Heb 8:6). It is not based on Law, which no human can fulfill. It is based on Grace. Only by the grace found in this New Covenant can anyone, Jew or Gentile, be saved, declared right with God, made eternally alive, delivered out of spiritual bondage, rescued from loss, reconciled to God, presented faultless before his throne, and adopted into God’s forever family. Finding grace in the wilderness only truly happens when we find the grace offered to us by God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ to rescue us from our wilderness of eternal loss.*

**31:31** *While the New Covenant was inaugurated at the Last Supper and initiated by the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross, Jeremiah’s focus is primarily on the application of New Covenant grace to those in the last-days remnant of Israel. Note again the formula that the Lord, through the prophet, addresses this New Covenant to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” Although the New Covenant has largely brought in Gentiles, as Isaiah 49:6-7 foretold, one day the true remnant of Israel will in a sense ratify that New Covenant as well. Thus, Jeremiah is looking forward to a time which has not happened yet, when the northern and southern tribes of Israel will once more be* ***united*** *and* ***restored back into a new covenant relationship with God, based on the work of Christ on the cross****. That day is coming, God says in His word.*

**31:32** *The New Covenant, as it will be applied to latter-day true Israel, will be unlike the Old Covenant. It is based on grace, not on law. And unlike the old covenant, which the people broke before Moses even descended from Sinai (golden calf), all the people will know the Lord (31:34) and they will be a nation before God forever (31:36).*

*Verse 32 also alludes to the marital aspect of the old covenant, to which Israel was unfaithful as an adulterous wife. God experienced the pain of abandonment, betrayal, and his own unrequited love for Israel (see Ezekiel 16; Ezek 22; entire book of Hosea). Israel didn’t break solely a legal covenant; they broke a marital covenant with God. Yet he remains faithful to his covenant and will make a New Covenant with them one day.*

**31:33** *The first part of this verse again makes clear that God is referring to a national covenant – “with the house of Israel,” here using Israel in the sense of all the tribes reunited. It is a specific application of the New Covenant in Christ with the remnant of latter-days Israel who will look to Jesus and mourn for him whom they pierced. God will pour out a spirit of grace and supplication on them, and they will turn to the one their people crucified, and find in him not condemnation, but the grace of a fountain filled with his blood for the cleansing of their sin. Yes, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is also for some of the lost house of Israel (Zech 12:10-13:1), among the “many” for whom His atoning blood was poured out (Matt 26:28).*

*When the remnant of Israel returns to the Lord, he will write his law not on stone tablets, but on their hearts. This makes the New Covenant better than the old, because God will change their hearts, their wills, their minds, and consciences. It will be internalized, resulting in real change, which many under the “Old Covenant” never did, although they were commanded to (Deut 10:16).*

*Ezekiel 37:11-28 gives a parallel description of the fulfillment of this New Covenant for latter-day Israel. It begins with God pouring out His Spirit on them, making them alive (37:11-14); regathering and reuniting them in the land (37:15-22), and then establishing “David” as their shepherd and King (Jesus; 37:22-28).*

*Some will question this interpretation of this passage. Why the focus on latter-days Israel when the New Covenant is offered to all people? Because that is what this text does. We cannot know all the inscrutable purposes of God. But there is a sense of closure, of the gospel coming full circle. There had to be one people, one ethnic group, to whose world the Son of God would be born in order to be fully human – the scandal of “particularity” – yet his coming was intended to be a blessing for all the world (the universality of the offer: “whosoever will may come”). And for that blessing to go beyond the particular setting of the people to whom he first came (Israel), the gospel had to make a significant break with the original group of people in order to show God’s fairness, that there is no privilege attached to being part of any ethnic group. Thus the original group (Israel) would have to be set aside after their initial favor of being visited by God. Yet at the end of time, after being proclaimed to all the nations, the gospel will make its way back to Israel, back to Jerusalem where the New Covenant was inaugurated, and be offered one last time to the people who both birthed and buried Messiah at his first coming. This last step demonstrates that God is faithful to his covenant promises, even when we are not.*

**31:34** *The New Covenant through the blood of Christ opens direct access to God for each believer (Rom 5:2; Heb 4:16; 10:19-22). We can know God directly without any Mediator other than Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5-6). This direct knowledge of God is available to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who receives Him as Savior and Lord.*

*And so for the believing remnant of Israel in the last days, all will one day be saved and know the Lord (Rom 11:26-27). He will forgive them, and remember their sins no more (Isa 43:25). This will complete the renewal of the marital covenant between God and true Israel. All true Israel shall know the Lord.*

* **God’s promise that they shall never again cease to be a nation before Him (31:35-37)**

*God seals this promise of a New Covenant renewal with the true Israel of the last days with an oath appealing to the fixed order He has created, the sun, moon and stars. Israel will never cease being a nation before Him forever, nor will He cast off their offspring for all they have done. God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises cannot be annulled. Such is the eternal endurance and truthfulness of His word.*

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

**"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. 39 And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. 40 The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."**

*Jerusalem will be established forever under the terms of the New Covenant relationship between God and Israel in the Latter Days. The Tower of Hananel in the northeast corner of the city and the Corner Gate in the northwest are mentioned also in Zech 14:10. Gareb and Goah are likely southern markers though less well-identified.*

*It is unlikely that such specific locations are meant to be taken as metaphors for some spiritual, non-literal entities. Literature just does not employ such concrete, directional language for vague, ill-defined spiritual realities.*

*What is clear is that this final rebuilt version of Jerusalem is “for the LORD.” It is for His glory. Even the place of refuse and pollution, the Kidron Valley, will be sacred, made holy to the LORD.*

*This grand, New Covenant-enabled prophetic promise for latter-days Israel ends on a note sounded before – “It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.” This makes it a promise yet to be realized, but certain in its fulfillment because of the faithfulness of He who promised it.*

*This concludes our discussion of the text of Jeremiah 31. Please consider the questions on the next page for personal reflection and application of the many wonderful truths and promises found in these chapters.*

**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. How have you found moments of God’s grace in the wilderness of loss (Jer 31:2)? What have you discovered and applied from Jer 31, or from other scripture passages about suffering, such as Paul’s experience in 2 Cor 12:7-10, or Job 1:13-22?
2. As you are in a wilderness of loss, do you believe God loves you with an everlasting love?

 Do you believe God continues His faithfulness to you? (Jer 31:3)

1. 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; see Psalm 119:105; Psalm 23; Psalm 48:14; John 10:27-29)

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 yet 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)