

"A FUTURE WITH HOPE" – EXPLORING JEREMIAH 27-31

Cross Group Small Group Guide

Each week before you meet, please watch the assigned video and read the scripture passage. Gather safely with your group—outdoors, wearing masks, keeping 6 feet of distance, not sharing food or drinks OR by meeting online/by phone (some options are Zoom, Google Group, Facebook Room, Skype, Facetime, etc.) Pray for God to be present as you meet and share.

WEEK 1: EXILE

Chapter 27 takes place after 597 BCE when the Babylonians first defeated Jerusalem, pillaged the city and Temple, and took many of Judah's prominent citizens into exile in Babylon. ([Read more about Babylonian Captivity here.](#)) Judah lived in uncertainty about what the future would bring. Jeremiah prophesies that the Lord God is about to hand over all of Judah and surrounding kingdoms to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Therefore, he tells them, submit to Nebuchadnezzar to survive, and to continue living where they are. Don't listen to false prophets who tell you it won't happen like this: they lie to you, and you will be driven out and perish.

PREPARE:

Watch the video of Pastor Beth Ann setting the stage for this study:

<https://youtu.be/EJ34vei6l6s>

Then read the assigned scripture passage: Jeremiah 27:1-15 (NIV):

27 Early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: **2** This is what the Lord said to me: "Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. **3** Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. **4** Give them a message for their masters and say, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Tell this to your masters: **5** With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. **6** Now I will give all your countries into the hands of my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. **7** All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

8 "If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the

sword, famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I destroy it by his hand. ⁹ So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' ¹⁰ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. ¹¹ But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the Lord.'""

¹² I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. ¹³ Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the Lord has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴ Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying lies to you. ¹⁵ 'I have not sent them,' declares the Lord. 'They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.'"

CROSS GROUP DISCUSSION (suggested total time - 1 hour)

Connect:

Take some time to get to know each other/catch up with one another! Each person may answer these questions:

1. Share your name and how long you've been a part of our church.
2. What does your life look like right now (work, family, at home or going out to work, etc.)?
3. Why did you sign up for this group? What are you hoping to give/get out of this 4-week small group experience?

Explore: Jeremiah 27:1-15

Jeremiah's prophecy is not welcome news for Zedekiah, king of Judah. He wants instead to listen to those who tell him what he wants to believe: that God will help Judah to fight, resist any future attack by Babylon, and prevail.

- How do you decide when to fight and when to surrender?
- How can we discern between what is of God and what comes from our own desires?
- Do you think nations today can avoid calamity by obeying God? Why or why not?

Judah was experiencing a time of high anxiety, caught between the past that no longer existed (before 597 BCE) and not knowing what was going to happen next.

- How did people then understand God's role in what was happening to them? How is our understanding of God's role today different or similar?

- In what ways does this time feel like a kind of exile for us today?
- What do you think it means to be faithful to God amid uncertainty?

Pray:

Share prayer requests with one another. Promise to pray for one another throughout the week. End your time in prayer. Either one person may pray for the group or each may offer prayers, and someone closes the time.



WEEK 2: SETTLE

In Chapter 29, Jeremiah writes to the exiles, Temple leaders and prominent citizens of Judah who had been forcibly relocated to Babylon in 597 BCE, a few years prior. Instead of encouraging them to resist or flee, Jeremiah's letter tells them instead to settle in where they are, and that this is how the Lord will preserve them. Moreover, they are to work for the welfare of the city in which they've been exiled and prepare to live there for a long time.

PREPARE:

To learn more about the book of Jeremiah, watch "Overview: Jeremiah":

<https://youtu.be/RSK36cHbrk0>

Then read the assigned scripture passage: Jeremiah 29:1-14 (NIV):

29 This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." ⁸ Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

¹⁰This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

CROSS GROUP DISCUSSION (suggested total time - 1 hour)

Connect:

Take some time to continue getting to know each other better and to check in with each other. Each person might answer these questions:

1. What's been your biggest joy or success this past week? What was your biggest setback or challenge?
2. Catch up on any prayer requests from the week before.
3. What are you looking forward to in the next week or two?

Explore: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Jeremiah delivers a word from the Lord to the exiles in Babylon. They are to build houses and settle down, cultivate gardens for food, marry and raise families.

- Do you think Jeremiah's letter was received as good news or bad news by the exiles? Why?
- What might get in the way of them seeking "the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile"? Why does the Lord want them to do these things?
- Imagine our present situation as a kind of exile. What might it look like for us to "settle in" instead of fighting it, for the sake of our own wellbeing?
- What kind of "garden" might you be planting in this situation? How are you taking steps to lead to something healthy and lifegiving for you?

Verse 11 is one that is often lifted up, out of context, as inspiration for young people, for example: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

- Knowing these words were for a people looking at 50+ years of exile, how do you hear these words now? What do they mean for you?

Pray:

Share prayer requests with one another. Promise to pray for one another throughout the week. End your time in prayer. Either one person may pray for the group or each may offer prayers, and someone closes the time. +

WEEK 3: PROMISE

In Chapters 30-33, Jeremiah proclaims a word of hope for the people's future...a promise that God will bring Israel and Judah home again from exile and return them to their land.

PREPARE:

Read this news article (9/8/20) about the Stockdale Paradox:

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/story/2020-09-08/stockdale-paradox-having-faith-but-confronting-reality>

Then read the assigned scripture passages: Jeremiah 30:1-3; Jeremiah 31:1-14 (NIV):

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ²“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. ³The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,’ says the Lord.”

“At that time,” declares the Lord, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.”

²This is what the Lord says:

“The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the wilderness;
I will come to give rest to Israel.”

³The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

⁴I will build you up again,
and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.
Again you will take up your timbrels
and go out to dance with the joyful.

⁵Again you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

⁶There will be a day when watchmen cry out
on the hills of Ephraim,
‘Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the Lord our God.’”

⁷This is what the Lord says:

“Sing with joy for Jacob;
shout for the foremost of the nations.

Make your praises heard, and say,
'Lord, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.'

⁸ See, I will bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labor;
a great throng will return.

⁹ They will come with weeping;
they will pray as I bring them back.
I will lead them beside streams of water
on a level path where they will not stumble,
because I am Israel's father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

¹⁰ "Hear the word of the Lord, you nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:
'He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'

¹¹ For the Lord will deliver Jacob
and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.

¹² They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—
the grain, the new wine and the olive oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.

¹³ Then young women will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

¹⁴ I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,"
declares the Lord.

CROSS GROUP DISCUSSION (suggested total time - 1 hour)

Connect:

Continue taking time to get to know each other better and to check in with each other. Each person might answer these questions:

1. What's something that's surprised you this week?
2. Catch up on any prayer requests from the week before.

3. If nothing were holding you back, what would you most like to be doing next weekend?

Explore: Jeremiah 30:1-3; Jeremiah 31:1-14

The Lord tells Jeremiah to write down these words of comfort and consolation, and in so doing, commit them to posterity. Within a few years, in 587 BCE, Jerusalem was destroyed and even more of God's people were driven into exile in Babylon, where they remained for the next fifty years.

- How might these written words—carried to Babylon with them—have been a touchstone for the community in exile?
- How is God's Word a helpful touchstone for us today?

The Lord's comforting words predict a time of return when the people of Judah and Israel would be restored to their land. But even these hopeful words hint at how returning would also be difficult... "with weeping they shall come" (vs 9), "I will turn their mourning into joy" (vs 13). When they did return after many years, Jerusalem lay in ruin.

- What do you imagine will be different on the other side of this time? What changes do you see already beginning to take place that may stick?
- What do you hope will be different on the other side of this?

Adm. James Stockdale was a POW in Vietnam for seven and a half years. He said that to "have faith but confront reality" was the way to survive living with uncertainty. "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality."

- How has your perspective on this time we are in shifted over the past six months?
- How do you balance facing reality with never giving up hope?
- What kinds of thoughts about the future give you the resiliency to keep going?

Pray:

Share prayer requests with one another. Promise to pray for one another throughout the week. End your time in prayer. Either one person may pray for the group or each may offer prayers, and someone closes the time.



Week 4: RETURN

In Chapter 31, Jeremiah continues to offer words of comfort and consolation for the exiles and those who would soon become exiles.

PREPARE:

Watch "The Way of the Exile" video: <https://youtu.be/XzWpa0gcPyo>

Then read the assigned scripture passages: Jeremiah 31:23-34 (NIV):

- ²³ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "When I bring them back from captivity, the people in the land of Judah and in its towns will once again use these words: 'The Lord bless you, you prosperous city, you sacred mountain.'
- ²⁴ People will live together in Judah and all its towns—farmers and those who move about with their flocks. ²⁵ I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint."
- ²⁶ At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.
- ²⁷ "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the Lord. ²⁹ "In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'
- ³⁰ Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.
- ³¹ "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.
- ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to [b](#) them, [c](#)" declares the Lord.
- ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

CROSS GROUP DISCUSSION (suggested total time - 1 hour)

Connect:

Continue taking time to get to know each other better and to check in with each other. Each person might answer these questions:

1. Where have you seen God this week? Or, what has brought God, this study, or this group to your mind in the past week?
2. Catch up on any prayer requests from the week before.
3. Name something new you've learned about another group member (maybe the person to your right, if you're sitting together).

Explore: Jeremiah 31:23-34

In Chapter 31, Jeremiah continues to share words of hope and promise that Judah will again return to its land, and the Lord will see the people rebuild, replant, and reestablish their lives there.

- What do you intend to restart or build when Covid is no longer a concern for you?
- What do you think God wants to "write on your heart" at this time so that you never have to wonder if it's true?
- How do you intend to sustain and strengthen your faith in God as we wait for a return to "normal"?

The video "The Way of the Exile" describes how, after God's people returned to the Promised Land, they still lived under foreign rule as a kind of exile in place. Similarly, today we continue to live in a kind of exile until all creation finds our "home" in God.

- How is modern life—not just life under Covid—like a kind of exile? How are Christians called to live intentionally "in exile"?
- What would being "home" in this world—instead of in exile—be like? What would the world look like?

The video describes a "third way" of living in exile, not conforming to the ways/values "of the world" nor opening combatting them. Instead, the third way is living in the tension between "loyalty and subversion".

- What are some of the ways of "the world" that Christians should live in tension with?
- What are some examples of faithfully living in this tension?

Pray:

Share prayer requests with one another. Promise to pray for one another throughout the week. End your time in prayer, giving thanks for the time you've spent together and how God has been at work in it. Either one person may pray for the group or each may offer prayers, and someone closes the time. ✝