

Why Are Christians Hopeful?

Jeremiah 31:1-40

Do you believe in guardian angels? Why or why not?

Why do you trust the Bible?

- **Because its prophecies come true**
- **Because Jesus affirmed the Old Testament**
- **Because the people who wrote the New Testament were connected with Jesus.**

History Lesson

God made the world in six days.

God became angry with humanity.

5 The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. 6 So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. 7 And

the Lord said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.” 8 But Noah found favor with the Lord. (Genesis 6:5–8 NLT)

God started over with Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives.

Then God became angry again with humanity and started a new nation through Abraham.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you

with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:1–3 NLT)

This nation became a monarchy with King Saul as their king.

After King Solomon, it became a divided nation.

5 Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. 6 And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.” (Exodus 19:5–6 NLT)

It was to be an example for the world of how to have a relationship with God.

In addition, it was to be the nation in which the Messiah would be born.

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was utterly taken over by Assyria.

5 Then the king of Assyria invaded the entire land, and for three years he besieged the city of Samaria. 6 Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:5–6 NLT)

18 Because the Lord was very angry with Israel, he swept them away from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained in the land. 19 But even the people of Judah refused to obey the commands of the Lord their God, for they followed the evil practices that Israel had introduced. (2 Kings 17:18-19 NLT)

Furthermore, the Assyrians began to populate Israel with people from other defeated nations.

24 The king of Assyria transported groups of people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and resettled them in the towns of Samaria, replacing the people of Israel. They took possession of Samaria and lived in its towns. (2 Kings 17:24 NLT)

The descendants of these foreigners and the remnant of Israel were dubbed "Samaritans" later on. Because of their mixed ancestry and rejection of temple-based worship, the Samaritans were despised as a "unclean" people during Christ's time.

Last week we read in 2 Kings 22 that they found a scroll, probably Deuteronomy, during Josiah's reign.

A prophecy said that Judah would fall, but not in Josiah's lifetime.

In 586 BC, that prophecy came to pass as Babylonia captured Judah.

In the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. 13 As the Lord had said beforehand, Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures from the Lord's Temple and the royal palace. He stripped away all the gold objects that King Solomon of Israel had placed in the Temple. 14 King Nebuchadnezzar took all of Jerusalem captive, including all the commanders and the best of the soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans —10,000 in all. Only the poorest people were left in the land. (2 Kings 24:12–14 NLT)

The northern kingdom (Israel/10 tribes) never had a godly king.

The southern kingdom (Judah/2 tribes) had only eight godly kings out of twenty kings.

Adam to Abraham = approx. 2000 years

Abraham to Jesus = approx. 2000 years

Jesus to present = approx. 2000 years

How Can You Obey?

Jeremiah was a prophet during the period preceding the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, whereas Ezekiel and Daniel were written while the Jews were exiled. Ezra deals with the return of the Jews, which God promised through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah over 70 years before. The book of Nehemiah also describes the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem following the end of the exile.

What Does The Bible Say?

10 This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans

for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.
12 In those days when you pray, I will listen. 13 If you look for
me wholeheartedly, you will find me. 14 I will be found by you,”
says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your
fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you
and will bring you home again to your own land.” (Jeremiah
29:10–14 NLT)

**Jeremiah is direct. God tells him that the exile in Babylon
will last seventy years. But, on the other hand, God will not
forget them and has wonderful plans for their future.**

**When Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian
captivity, it was determined that the idolatry and false gods
of the surrounding nations would never again corrupt it.**

Following the return of Jews to Israel and the temple's rebuilding, there was a revival among Jews.

How Can You Obey?

When God disciplines us, it is to help us learn necessary behavior.

No matter what you are going through, God has plans for you. If not in this life, it will be in the next.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Additional Notes:

The Deep Dive Into The Bible segment was inspired Michael S. Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*, ed. John D. Barry and Rebecca Van Noord (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine, 2014), 121–122; Peter R. Schemm Jr., “*The Agents of God: Angels*,” in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 276, and David Jeremiah, *What the Bible Says about Angels: Powerful Guardians, a Mysterious Presence, God’s Messengers* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 188.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

1. God Restores Joy and Peace When His People Repent of Sin.

2. God Desires to Bless His People as They Walk With Him in the New Covenant He Promised.

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: Jeremiah likely wrote these prophetic words sometime around 600 BC as the Babylonians attacked Judah and deported many Jews back to Babylon. This chapter spoke of how God would restore joy and peace to His people, promising a new covenant with them.

Explore:

The tragic character of Jeremiah's prophecies of impending judgment and his empathetic response (Jeremiah 9:1) have led many to call him the weeping prophet. Nevertheless, in this chapter God revealed good news for Jeremiah to share with the sinful people of Israel.

God Restores Joy and Peace When His People Repent of Sin

(Jeremiah 31:1-22)

In verses 1-14, God spoke to Jeremiah of His plans to restore peace and joy to His people Israel. He addressed the northern kingdom first. This area had already gone into exile 136 years before. Their southern kinsmen rejected them as traitors and half-breeds (the Samaritans of Jesus' day), but God had good news of restoration for them.

Verses 2-6 speak of building, planting, and making merry.

Walking in the ways of God, contrary to popular opinion, is not a joyless exercise in drudgery. It actually leads to joy, peace, and fulfillment. David expressed it so well in the Twenty-third Psalm: God leads us to good grass, beside the kind of water we need, and He protects us. The wandering sheep is the one who ends up in brambles or in the jaws of predators.

Vineyards in particular denote a time of peace and stability, undisturbed by war or violence. Jeroboam had built golden idols in Israel to keep the people from going to worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25-33). God announced to Jeremiah a time when the people of the northern kingdom would employ watchmen to remind them of when it was time to go to worship in Jerusalem again. God intended to do more than restore the northern and southern captives—He intended to deal with both parts of the split kingdom. We should pray and work for times of peace and stability in our homes, families, and neighborhoods. We need them in order to thrive and prosper, just as vineyards do.

God's plan to restore included those who ordinarily did not participate in such traveling and building: blind, lame, pregnant, or already in labor. God would indeed bring them back, as a tender father restores a wayward son (verses 7-9).

Verses 10-14 address the entire earth. The nations and coastlands frequently indicated Gentiles, people in faraway places. They, too, had an interest in what God would do to restore Israel. Rejoicing and plenty would mark the new life in Israel. Priests ate a prescribed portion of what the people brought to sacrifice. In the restored Israel, the priests would have plenty to eat.

Rachel (verse 15) was the mother of Joseph, who was the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, from whom two of the larger tribes of the northern kingdom would come. Jeremiah brought up the sorrow that the punishment of Israel's and Judah's rebellion against God would have caused their patriarchal ancestors.

Rachel's children would soon go into exile. Ramah would indeed be a staging point for the exiles, and Jeremiah himself would spend some time there after Jerusalem's fall.

Yet God had good news, even in the grief of national loss (verses 16-20). God comforted grieving Rachel, and through her, He comforted her children. There would be restoration, and indeed, Israel would return from its exile. God knew their grief. More important, He knew their repentance (verses 18- 19). God's love endures, and He will gladly remember His wayward people in mercy (verse 20). Israel and Judah had committed heinous immorality on a national scale. Still, after judgment and repentance, God showered them with mercy and grace.

Our sin has most definitely hindered our relationship with God, and the consequences are severe. It makes Him seem distant, but He yearns to be able to shower us with mercy and grace.

Turning to God in faith and repentance changes things. He eagerly moves us to the good list, so to speak, and will overwhelm us with mercy.

God's restoration is so certain that He instructed Israel to mark the way they went out, because that would be the way they would return. Sadly, the faithless daughter would be just as slow to believe God's promise of restoration as she was to believe His promise of judgment (verses 21-22). The new thing on earth seems to refer to a common proverb of the day about which the meaning is no longer clear. Many scholars take it to mean, in general, the weak (Israel's captives) will overpower the strong (their captors). Still, it is unclear.

Explore:

God Desires to Bless His People as They Walk With Him in the New Covenant He Promised (Jeremiah 31:23-40)

God had benevolent plans for Israel and Judah, and the remainder of this chapter builds the case. Even though the land would be desolate and Jerusalem demolished, new inhabitants

would fill both the land and the city, and thrive there (verses 23-25).

Apparently, God delivered this message to Jeremiah via a dream (verse 26). The dream of God's restoration must have been pleasant indeed.

Verses 27-30 use the image of God's filling the land with people and animals as a farmer would fill soil with seed for a rich harvest. God had been working against them; He would now work just as hard for them. In Judah's deportation, the few, the remnant who still followed God, went into exile along with the idolatrous majority. In the coming day, that would never happen.

Verses 31-34 reveal a marvelous new covenant. Israel repeatedly broke the old covenant that God had established following the Exodus from Egypt. In the new covenant, God promised to work within the hearts of His people. External prods and

encouragements to obedience would lose importance—people would obey from the heart!

What is the importance of the new covenant in verses 31-34? First, we should contrast it with the old covenant. The old one was broken by Israel many times over hundreds of years. The new one would not rely on external rules and obligations. The new one would find its roots in what had always been the problem—the human heart itself. How would God plant His law within believers under this new covenant? How would He write it on their hearts? He would do it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Many early Jewish believers found transition from the old to the new very difficult. Yet, the New Testament writers were quite clear that Jesus Christ inaugurated the new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Passages such as Romans 11:27, and especially Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:14-18

point out that if the old covenant had been good enough, then God would have had no need to introduce a new one.

The old covenant of Moses' time was sealed in the blood of a multitude of sacrifices and continued over hundreds of years. It could never bring the hope of salvation. That comes only through the new covenant, sealed with the blood of Jesus' one sacrifice on the cross, the one for the many. God brought Jesus back to life, and this gives us assurance of new life as well. We can now walk with God, with His law in our hearts and at peace with Him.

God then appealed to the rhythms and constants of the natural world to highlight His promise and goodwill for His people (verses 35-37). This physical world came from our Lord. The Bible often uses examples from the natural order to underline important points. The rhythm of sun, moon, and stars would wear out long before God's love for Israel came to an end.

Measuring the fullness of heaven and earth is not possible.

Neither is it possible for God to break His steadfast mercy. To make it very clear, God then referred to some of the parts of Jerusalem that would be rebuilt. He even promised to extend the city (verses 38-40).

Explore:

- The Bible uses the term covenant often enough that we should look at the word more closely. A covenant is an agreement, but a very solemn and important agreement. In Abraham's time, people often marked a formal covenant through the sacrifice of an animal, sliced down the middle, giving rise to the expression to cut a covenant with someone. This idea was in play in Genesis 15:7-18 when Abraham cut up the sacrificial

ani- mal and waited for God to pass through the two parts indicating the covenant. God's covenant with Abraham promised that Abraham and his descendants would be His people. He promised that through Abraham's seed, He would bless all the peoples of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3).

Explore:

What about Rachel weeping in Ramah? Is this a prophecy?

Matthew 2:17-18 refers back to this passage in Jeremiah. Ramah was a few miles north of Jerusalem and served as the departure point for many of the exiles headed toward Babylon. Bethlehem was a few miles south of Jerusalem and served as the lightning rod for Herod's paranoid fury after the birth of Jesus. Some scholars see a prophetic reference. Others see a reference that served to evoke, in Matthew's day,

Explore:

When the Bible speaks of going up to Jerusalem (Zion) to worship (verse 6), it did not mean going northward, as we commonly think. It means going up in elevation and especially going up to a place of supreme importance.

Explore:

Hilkiah didn't consult Jeremiah about this matter, or even the Prophet Zephaniah, one of Josiah's kinsmen (Zeph. 1:1), who was ministering at that same time. Perhaps Jeremiah was not in the city but at his family home in Anathoth, and Zephaniah may also have been out of Jerusalem. But the king's committee found a capable servant in Huldah the Prophetess, whose husband Shallum was in charge of the royal wardrobe. Along with Huldah, the prophetesses in Scripture include Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Naodiah (Neh. 6:14), the wife of

Isaiah the Prophet (Isa. 8:3), Anna (Luke 2:36), and the four daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8–9).

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Distinct*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002), 154–155.

Explore:

It finally happened. For decades Jeremiah had prophesied judgment upon God’s people. Over and over he said God would punish them with sword, famine, and captivity. He turned out to be right. Jeremiah knew what he was prophesying about. In the year 597 b.c. the Babylonians swooped down and attacked Jerusalem, killing many and carrying most of the rest into captivity.

When judgment finally arrived, something remarkable happened. Jeremiah changed his tune. The next several chapters are filled with some of the most wonderful promises in all of Scripture. After twenty-eight chapters of gloom and doom,

Jeremiah came bearing tidings of grace and glory. He promised that God would bring his people back from captivity (30:3). He would love them “with an everlasting love” (31:3) and “turn their mourning into gladness” (31:13). He would make a new covenant with them (31:31) and give them “singleness of heart and action” (32:39). God would even “cleanse them from all the sin they have committed” (33:8).

Jeremiah summarized all these blessings in one wonderful promise: “ ‘For 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’ ” (29:11). The promise meant that God knew what he was doing. He had known it all along, as he always does. God makes his plan and then he carries it out. Everything he does is for the ultimate good of his people.

Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 406–407.

Explore:

Jeremiah sends a letter to the exiles in Babylonia (29:1–3).

Instead of assuring them that their captivity will be short, he advises them to settle down. They are to build houses and plant gardens and make a life for themselves (29:4–6). They are also to work hard and pray for the city where they are exiled (29:7).

They are not to believe the vain hopes of false prophets and clairvoyants (29:8–9).

Jeremiah is blunt. God is telling him that the period of exile in Babylon will be seventy years (29:10). But God will not forget them and has wonderful plans for their future (29:11). This

future will begin when they turn to God with their whole heart (29:12–13). When they finally do this, God will not hide from them (29:13–14). He will gather them from all the places where they are scattered—and bring them home (29:14).

Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 309.

Explore:

Several different letters are involved in this chapter: a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles (vv. 1–14); a letter concerning Jewish false prophets in Babylon to which Jeremiah replied (vv. 15–23); a letter from Shemaiah to the temple priests concerning Jeremiah, which he read (vv. 24–29); and a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles concerning Shemaiah (vv. 30–32). Correspondence

like this wasn't difficult to maintain in those days, for there were regular diplomatic missions between Jerusalem and Babylon (v. 3), and Jeremiah had friends in high places in the government.

Jeremiah's word of encouragement (vv. 1–14). Sometime after the deportation in 597, Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon to tell them how to behave in their new land. A man with the heart of a true shepherd, Jeremiah wanted to enlighten them and encourage them in their life in Babylon. Governed by special laws concerning "clean" and "unclean" things, the Jewish people would have a difficult time adjusting to a pagan society. Jeremiah wanted them to be good witnesses to the idolatrous Babylonians, and he also wanted them to be good Jews even though separated from their temple and its services. He addressed himself to the needs of three kinds of people.

Those With No Hope (vv. 4–6). The exiles had lost everything but their lives and what few possessions they could carry with

them to Babylon. They'd lost their freedom and were now captives. They'd been taken from their homes and had lost their means of making a living. They were separated from relatives and friends, some of whom may have perished in the long march from Jerusalem to Babylon. No matter how they looked at it, the situation seemed hopeless.

How should we handle such a depressing situation? Accept it from the hand of God (v. 4) and let God have His way. It does no good to hang our harps on the willow trees and sit around and weep, although this may be a temporary normal reaction to tragedy (Ps. 137:1–4). One of the first steps in turning tragedy into triumph is to accept the situation courageously and put ourselves into the hands of a loving God, who makes no mistakes.

Those With False Hopes (Jer. 29:6–9). The false prophets had convinced the people that the stay in Babylon would be a brief

one, perhaps two years (vv. 8–9). Thus, there was no need to settle down and try to resume a normal life, but Jeremiah told them just the opposite. Since they would be there as long as seventy years (v. 10), there was plenty of time to build houses and set up homes. It was important that the exiles have families so there would be people available to return to Judea when the Captivity ended. This small Jewish remnant was holding in its hands the future of God's great plan of salvation, and they must obey Him, be fruitful, and multiply (v. 6).

It would be easy for the Jews to wage constant warfare against their idolatrous Gentile captors, but Jeremiah instructed them to strive to get along with the Babylonians. The exiles were to be peacemakers, not troublemakers, and they were to pray sincerely for their enemies (Matt. 5:43–48; 1 Tim. 2:1–3; Titus 3:1–2). It was possible to be good Jews even in a pagan land. Remember, if we reject the wooden yoke of submission, we end up wearing only an iron yoke of subjugation (Jer. 28:12–14). Thus, the best

course is to yield ourselves to the Lord and to those who are over us, no matter how badly they may treat us. (See Peter's counsel to Christian slaves in 1 Peter 2:18–25.) To indulge in false hopes is to miss what God has planned for us.

Those Who Have True Hope (vv. 10–14). True hope is based on the revealed Word of God, not on the “dream messages” of self-appointed prophets (v. 10, NIV). God gave His people a “gracious promise” (v. 10, NIV) to deliver them, and He would keep His promise. God makes His plans for His people, and they are good plans that ultimately bring hope and peace. Therefore, there is no need to be afraid or discouraged.

In every situation, however, God's people have the responsibility to seek the Lord, pray, and ask Him to fulfill His promises, for the Word and prayer go together (Acts 6:4). The purpose of chastening is that we might seek the Lord, confess our sins, and draw near to Him (Heb. 12:3–13). According to Jeremiah 29:14,

these promises reach beyond the Jews captive in Babylon and include all of Israel throughout the world. Jeremiah was looking ahead to the end of the age when Israel will be regathered to meet their Messiah and enter their kingdom (Isa. 10:20–12:6).

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Decisive*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 122–125.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny

depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a

simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 5

Do you believe in guardian angels? Why or why not?

Question 2 of 5

Why do you trust the Bible?

Question 3 of 5

What purpose did God have for Israel?

Question 4 of 5

What lessons do we glean from God allowing foreign countries to take the Israelites into captivity?

Question 5 of 5

So why are Christians hopeful?