

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Redeems

TEXT: Jeremiah 31:23-34

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God is working to bring about the redemption of His people.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Introduce:

Illustration Option: Back in 2000, 23-year-old Cornealious Anderson III, nicknamed Mike, was arrested for robbing a Burger King at gunpoint. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison, released on bail, and told to await orders on when to show up to serve his time. The orders never came. Due to a clerical error, Anderson never went to prison.

But instead of using his freedom to commit more crimes, Anderson started his own construction business, became a youth football coach, and volunteered at his local church. He also got married, had three children, and became a well-liked member of his community.

Thirteen years later, the state discovered their error and put Anderson behind bars for nearly one year. As the case received international coverage, an online petition for his release gained more than 35,000 signatures.

After a court hearing that lasted a mere 10 minutes, the judge conceded that Anderson was a changed man and granted him credit for the years he should have been in prison. A teary-eyed Anderson walked out of the courthouse with his wife and daughter, telling reporters that he was grateful to God. (Source: <https://listverse.com/2016/01/24/10-incredible-real-life-stories-of-redemption/>)

Video Option: As you watch this video of a man whose future was held in the hands of a judge because of a crime he committed, consider how God redeems us even though we are guilty of sins. **Play Video:** https://youtu.be/a_lY8Vxn8c8

Discuss: How does this story of redemption help us understand the way God redeems us despite our sin?

We move to a section of the book of Jeremiah that many Bible scholars call “the Book of Consolation.” While God’s message through Jeremiah has primarily been about judgment, the focus now shifts to the exciting days of redemption and restoration. In Jeremiah 31, God’s plan of redemption is described. As we examine Jeremiah 31:23-34, consider the way God has provided redemption for you even though you are guilty because of sin.

LOOK IN: UNPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

God spoke first of the restorative nature of His redemption.

God’s Redemption is Restorative—Jeremiah 31:23-26

²³ *This is what the Lord of Armies, the God of Israel, says: “When I restore their fortunes they will once again speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities: ‘May the Lord bless you, righteous settlement, holy mountain.’”* ²⁴ *“Judah and all its cities will live in it together—also farmers and those who move with the flocks—* ²⁵ *for I satisfy the thirsty person and feed all those who are weak.”* ²⁶ *At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been most pleasant to me.*

The Sovereign Lord of Armies and the Personal Covenant God of Israel spoke of the coming day when His people would be restored.

Identify: How does this passage describe the restorative nature of God’s redemption?

- The redemption of God’s people after their judgement means there would come a day when they would be brought back to the land from which they were taken. In this redemption process their fortunes would be restored.
- They would once again speak a blessing in the “land of Judah and in its cities.” It was a blessing they once spoke as they enjoyed God’s presence, and they would once again speak it upon their return.

- God's righteousness would characterize their towns and villages, and God's Mountain. Judah and Jerusalem would be called a "*righteous settlement* and a *holy mountain*."
- God's redemption would be available to "Judah and all its cities" including its farmers and shepherds. The blessing of God's redemption was available to all.
- God's redemption would restore the empty and tired soul replacing it with hope and peace.

Identify: How did Jeremiah describe how he felt as he awoke from this dream in which God was speaking? Why would this dream be pleasant to Jeremiah despite his current circumstances?

Jeremiah was not in the best of circumstances. He had been preaching judgment, the exile of Judah's people had already begun, and more disaster was coming. He had been ridiculed, rejected, and persecuted. Yet, this dream of the restoration of God's people gave him a "most pleasant" sleep.

Discuss: God has revealed His redemptive plan for restoration to us through His Word and not through dreams. How can knowing God's redemption plan give us a "most pleasant" sleep? How can it encourage us to keep telling others about God's redemption?

The promise of restoration should bring believers peace and pleasure. God has promised to be with His people through each challenge life brings (Matthew 28:20). Sometimes those challenges come from our own sinful choices, but the promise of restoration provides the certainty of His redemption, which is available to all who turn to Him in faith. Additionally, when we wonder if telling others about the redemption available through Christ is really making an impact, we can be sure that telling others about God's redemption will make a difference to those who respond.

After Jeremiah awakes from this pleasant sleep, he declares some exciting news.

God's Redemption is Productive—Jeremiah 31:27-30

²⁷ "Look, the days are coming"—this is the Lord's declaration—"when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of people and the seed of animals."²⁸ "Just as I watched over them to uproot and to tear them down, to demolish and to destroy, and to cause disaster, so will I watch over them to build and to plant them"—this is the Lord's declaration.²⁹ In those days, it will never again be said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."³⁰ Rather, each will die for his own iniquity. Anyone who eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge.

God's redemption would not only restore, but it would produce fruit. In this case, that fruit would be the multiplication of the Jewish people and their livestock. It was not men, by their own effort, that would produce this fruit. It would be God who "will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of people and the seed of animals." It was as if God was planting fields of "people seeds" and "animal seeds," which eventually would populate the entire land.

Guide: What does verse 28 communicate regarding God's activity and character?

We can learn from verse 28 that God cannot and will not ignore sin. A Holy and Righteous God can't ignore sin. Sin has consequences. Therefore, God reminds His people that there was coming a time when they would be exiled for 70 years because of their sins. God would deal with His people's disobedience. He used strong words to describe His actions as He *watched over* Judah's demise: *uproot, tear them down, demolish, destroy, and cause disaster*. However, the second part of the verse highlights God's restoration. After overseeing their judgment, He would *watch over them to build and to plant them*.

Even though redemption would be provided and available, we are still reminded that God will and must punish sin because He is holy, and we are not. Sin and holiness cannot coexist in the presence of God. The God who pronounces judgment upon His crowning creation for their sins, also provides the only means from which man can be redeemed. Therefore, we should understand that God is not a cold-hearted God who only passes judgment for sin. His discipline and judgment for sin and His plan of redemption are indicative of His character of being a loving, yet just God.

Discuss: Notice the phrases in verses 29-30. What does this communicate regarding man's sin? How did it impact the generations?

We see in this passage, and the first passage we examined, the beautiful picture of how God restores and makes our lives productive when He redeems us. Yet, God still reminded his people that personal responsibility for sin could not be ignored.

Discuss: What do verses 29-30 communicate regarding how we should approach our own choices to sin? Do we expect God to restore us and make us productive without taking responsibility for our sins?

A common saying in Judah's last days was *"the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."* Today, lots of people play the "blame game." They excuse their sin by saying, "This is just the way I am" or "I had a terrible upbringing." While our past experiences can influence our situation, God's Word still affirms we are responsible for our actions. Jeremiah confirmed the truth of personal responsibility: *each will die for his own iniquity.* He affirmed that *anyone who eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge.* Defiant sinners would bear the consequences of their own sins. (ETB Leader Commentary)

Finally, we see that God's Redemption is Comprehensive—Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ "Look, the days are coming"—this is the Lord's declaration—"when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." ³² "This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—my covenant that they broke even though I am their master"—the Lord's declaration. ³³ "Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days"—the Lord's declaration. "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." ³⁴ "No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them"—this is the Lord's declaration. "For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin."

Not only did God's message to His people describe redemption in the context of how God would restore the Israelites to their land and make them productive again, but it pointed to another day in the future—"the days are coming." God announced that at a time in the future, *He* would make a "new covenant."

God's activity with His crowning, yet sin-broken creation, throughout the Old Testament pointed to the "new covenant." Every covenant after the fall and ruin of humanity pointed toward God's ultimate redemption plan. It was revealed as God made various covenants.

- The Abrahamic Covenant promised to Abraham and His covenant descendants a *land*, a *nation*, and a *blessing* to extend to all nations (Genesis 12:1-3).
- The Mosaic or Sinai Covenant gave Israel the *law*, the *sacrifices*, and the *choice* of blessing or curse (Exodus 19).
- The Davidic Covenant that promised an *everlasting dynasty*, a *perfect ruler*, and the *Promised Messiah* (2 Samuel 7).

Guide:

- What did the previous covenants reveal about the sin nature of man?
- How would the new covenant be different from other covenants?

God's plan of redemption through these covenants is completed and perfected in this "new covenant." Every action of God throughout history and every covenant He made revealed the complete brokenness of man, his inability to save himself through good works, and the need for redemption that was only available from the covenant God. This "new covenant" would be comprehensive in that it would be complete, and only God could provide and sustain it for eternity.

- The new covenant is transformative from the inside out. God would change the minds and hearts of those connected to Him by the new covenant.
- The new covenant brings a new relationship with God—"I will be their God, and they will be my people." Those connected to God by the new covenant have a personal and close relationship with God.
- This new covenant would be revealed to all mankind. No one would be without excuse before Holy God. God's covenant would be made known and available to all mankind, but receiving it was not automatic.
- The new covenant brings true and complete forgiveness and cleansing from sin. The sacrificial system under the old covenant could only *cover* sin and its guilt; the new covenant brings forgiveness so complete that it could be said that God no longer remembers the sin of those connected to Him through the new covenant. The fact that God would *"forgive their [our] iniquity and never again remember their [our] sin"* is truly incomprehensible in a world where everyone desires retribution for sins committed against them.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

Jesus revealed that He was the One who would institute the new covenant in Luke 22:20—*"In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'*" Jesus specifically instituted this new covenant by His death on the cross. Hebrews 8 tells us that the redemption provided by this new covenant is far superior because it was Jesus, God's Son who provided it: *"But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises."*

Remind: Let's revisit our opening illustration. While Cornealius was out on bail, he still had a crime hanging over his head. While he was out, his life did change. He did good things and tried to make a new life. But the crime was still hanging over his head. He was still guilty of a crime. While he did good works, he couldn't redeem himself. It took a judge declaring him "redeemed" for him to really be a free man.

Perhaps you are still trying to redeem yourself from sin by trying to be good or live a good life. While striving to do good is honorable, it can't redeem you from the curse and brokenness of sin. Only the new covenant that was established through Jesus Christ can pronounce you a free and forgiven person! And, when you are pronounced redeemed by God, you are given a new relationship with Holy God and a promise that your sins are no longer hanging over you for eternity.

Challenge: Do you know of individuals who are still trying to fix their sin-broken lives through means other than receiving the redemption that the new covenant offers through Jesus Christ? How can you communicate with them the value of God's redemption through Jesus Christ? Perhaps you are the one who needs to be redeemed by Christ. Consider talking with someone in your church or group, or with God Himself regarding your need to receive redemption through Jesus Christ for you sins.