



CONCORD SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

LECTIONARY  
LESSON 1

SUNDAY,  
JANUARY 5, 2020

**Jeremiah 31:7-14 NRSV**

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,  
“Save, O Lord, your people,  
the remnant of Israel.”

8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,

among them the blind and the lame,  
those with child and those in labor, together;  
a great company, they shall return here.

9 With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations[a] I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I have become a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

10 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 a 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 become like a watered garden,  
and they shall never languish again.  
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 give the priests their fill of fatness,  
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,  
says the Lord.

## **Background**

Welcome to 2020! We begin this year with a return to the Hebrew prophets and psalms. For the next few weeks, we’ll be in Jeremiah, Isaiah, the book of Psalms, Micah, Deuteronomy and Exodus. These passages do not tell a chronological story, but they do offer a wide narrative about God’s desires for and with us. In your own devotional period, take a look at our Concorde to see the other lectionary passages listed for this season.

Jeremiah is categorized as a prophetic book. It is prophetic in its ability to see the future and prepare for it today. An oft-cited passage for graduations and housewarmings, Jeremiah 29:11 is where God reminds us, “for I know the plans I have for you,” and Jeremiah 29:5 is the practical advice to “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.” This passage combines both divine wisdom and practical wisdom, blurring the lines between the two.

Today’s lesson will focus on starting 2020 off **together** in worship.

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with a partner.** What does “home” mean to you? As you think about this, underline every word in the passage that has to do with directions or the name of a region.

### **What’s happening during this passage?**

God sends an invite to all. God promises to bring people from all parts of the earth. It sounds like a massive homecoming! Everyone, including those who are disabled, those in labor and the weary will be gathered. They may arrive sad, but God promises that they will return “with consolations.” There’s imagery of “young women rejoicing in dance” and the “young and old being merry.” The return and travel to Home will be accessible for all.

The mourning will be transformed into joy, and there will be a season of overflow. Verses 12-14 detail the future promise of beauty and abundance.

### **Why does this matter for the people of this time?**

The prophet himself is not in exile, but in the land of promise called Judah. Anthea Portier-Young, professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School, argues that this passage is one that people desperately needed. The Israelites need to be encouraged that they will indeed “return from Babylonian exile and once again be established in the land of promise.” At this time, people are scattered across the land. This is a package of promises that would be particularly moving to those who have been targets of forced migration and deportation.

### **So did they ever make it back home?**

According to historical scholars, yes and no. Some call it a “failed prophecy.” Ingrid Lilly argues that they were “they were forcefully repopulated by the Assyrians, their homes were replaced by other refugees from other reaches of the vast Near Eastern empire, and they never returned home. Indeed, it seems that most of the Northern Kingdom remained exiles in Syria and Babylonia.” There were big promises made, especially to vulnerable people. Sadly, this homecoming did not happen the way it was imagined.

## **Learning all of this, how can modern Christians take encouragement from this text?**

It is hard to imagine a future when the present looks bleak. Jeremiah gives us a way to press through. It may feel like the promises have come back void. It is okay to be disappointed. Even this past week, we have been inundated with bad news. Attacks against Jewish people in worship, a shooting in a church, floods, fires, robberies, and escalating tensions in Iran due to a war-hungry and accountability-refusing president. How can we return Home and worship when it feels like the world is crashing all around us?

For this, we remember the prophet Jeremiah's ability to imagine. Jeremiah always kept his mind on two things: the promises of God and the needs of the people. In doing so, he found a way to be in solidarity with those who are struggling. Jeremiah's writings are instructive because they uplift the material and spiritual needs of a down-trodden people. He writes, much like Dr. King's Letter From a Birmingham Jail we've studied, a note of solidarity and power. It is human to be dismayed. Yet, we can hold each other tightly and continue to "build houses," "plant gardens," and "eat what they produce." (Jeremiah 29:5)

**What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?**

### **Connection to Today's World**

Ghana just hosted a major tourism and homecoming campaign called "The Year of Return." You may be wondering why so many Black writers, activists, storytellers, community members and others are traveling to Ghana this season. It might even feel like everyone and their mama is in Ghana. That's no accident. President Akufo-Addo spoke on the place of Ghana in Pan-African struggle movements and said that "under my leadership, Ghana will continue to ensure that our hard-won Pan African reputation is not lost. Making Ghana the focus of activities to commemorate the landing of the first enslaved Africans in the English colonies in North America is, therefore, a huge opportunity to entrench Ghana's leadership." It was an invitation for people who are part of the African Diaspora to return home and experience the motherland. A major theme of the homecoming campaign was "what is lost in the sea is returned by the waves." Participants experienced cul-



tural events like movie screenings, worship, dance parties, educational tours, seminars and other programs. These events were designed to connect people to a land they might not have ever known before. And while not all people are able to travel or make arrangements for cost, we are gifted with the stories that people bring back.

**Journal:** Reflect on the promises God makes about “grain, wine and the oil.” What makes your home hospitable? What makes Concord hospitable? What does Concord need to be more hospitable?

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**Closing:** Sing “Standing on the Promises.”  
Standing on the promises I shall not fall,  
List’ning every moment to the Spirit’s call.  
Resting in my Savior as my All in all,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing,  
Standing on the promises of  
God my Savior;  
Standing, standing,  
I’m standing on the promises  
of God.

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You are a God who has made a home for us. Not just somewhere beyond the River, but even here in this World. We thank you for a home like Concord Baptist Church of Christ where we can worship you and be connected to other believers.

God, we are hoping for your promises to come to fruition. We know that you hear our every cry and you answer prayers. Help us to notice the smaller victories and gifts that you have given us. Give us the endurance and patience to make it through difficult seasons. Lift the loads and make the burden easier, as we know you are able to do.

In Jesus’ name we pray,  
Amen.

**Works Cited**

<https://www.yearofreturn.com/about/>

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1963](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1963)

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2665](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2665)