***Jeremiah 31:15-28 Thus says the Lord: “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.” 16Thus says the Lord: “Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. 17There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That your children shall come back to their own border. 18“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the Lord my God. 19Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’ 20Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord. 21“Set up signposts, Make landmarks; Set your heart toward the highway, The way in which you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, Turn back to these your cities. 22How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter? For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth - A woman shall encompass a man.”***

***23Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: ‘The Lord bless you, O home of justice, and mountain of holiness!’ 24And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with flocks. 25For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.” 26After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me. 27“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.***

We’re back with Jeremiah tonight. Recall with me that last week, God told the people that they were about to be returned to the land of Israel from captivity. They would return from all areas where they have been scattered. This is a dual prophecy in that it speaks of the return from 70 years of captivity, but also speaks of the time in the future when the Messiah will join all people’s together in His Kingdom and will rule Jew and Gentile alike. Tonight, we study the mercy that God will show Ephraim, which is often used as another name for Israel. He has seen their suffering and heard their cries. Now, He will act with Mercy and Deliverance, as a Father towards a beloved child.

Verses 15-17 *Thus says the Lord: “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.” 16Thus says the Lord: “Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. 17There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That your children shall come back to their own border.* Now, the scene changes. We are introduced to Rachel. We all remember Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, the beloved wife of Jacob. Here she is represented as weeping bitterly and lamenting the loss of her children, the descendants of Israel. She searches for them in vain and refuses to be comforted. This is all figurative language. This is not hard for people to understand – a mother weeping for a lost child. Almost everyone can identify with this. *A voice was heard in Ramah –* Ramah is a city of the tribe of Benjamin, near where Rachel was buried. She is weeping and lamenting bitterly. Remember that last week, we talked about the public crier, who would go up on a high hill and cry out so that his voice carried further. This is the idea here. Rachel’s voice is heard, as though she was on a high hill and crying bitterly for her children. *Refrain your voice from weeping, And your eyes from tears* ***–*** God says – shhhh. Stop crying now and dry your eyes. This is understood as a parent may speak to a child, gently telling her that everything will be all right. *For your work shall be rewarded –* Your work – what work? The work of bringing children forth and raising children has not been in vain. Your work will be rewarded. You will not be denied the satisfaction of seeing your children do well. *And they shall come back from the land of the enemy –* Your children will return from captivity and, in a future Messianic Kingdom, shall be reunited with all tribes and the Gentiles in Christ’s Kingdom. *There is hope in your future, says the Lord, That your children shall come back to their own border.* There is a great expectation and hope! Though, the current situation of captivity feels very hopeless, God has not forgotten His promises. There will be a return – by Cyrus in the short-term. The people returned within their own borders and rebuilt, after the land lay desolate for 70 years. They not only were released from captivity, but returned within their own borders of old, to a land promised by God to their forefathers.

Verse 18 - *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the Lord my God.* We met Rachel earlier. Now, we meet Ephraim. This name represents the 10 tribes other than Judah and Benjamin. He is seen lamenting his unfaithfulness to God, when God has been so good to him. He is contrite and repentant. He earnestly wants to be restored and reunited with his God. This is the change that the captivity was intended to bring. The people have seen the miserable state of their situation and realize that they rejected and turned from God. God instructed them by discipline. The people are compared to an untamed bull. When we turn from God, we need His chastisement and discipline to turn us back to His way. Hebrews 12:11 says - *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* No one likes discipline while it’s happening, yet we almost always look back and see how loving the discipline was and how unloving allowing us to remain in our sin would have been. God chastens us because He loves us.

Verse 19 *Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’* After the chastisement, Ephraim (meaning the Jewish people), I came to myself and repented. This was not fake or half-hearted remorse, but full and heart-felt repentance. After receiving instruction with respect to the sin against God, I struck myself on the thigh. Striking the thigh is a sign of surprise and concern. This is seen as the people becoming crystal clear on their sin. The people are ashamed and humiliated that they have acted so foolishly and brought this upon themselves. They deserted God. They acted as a rebellious teenager and now must bear the consequences of this rebellion. It is heavy on the people’s hearts, and they regret it greatly.

Verse 20 *Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.* The questions are rhetorical. They are asked with an obvious answer. It has the idea almost like someone asking if the sky is blue. The answers are a resounding yes. Israel is still the child of God’s affection and the focus of His promises. He delights in Ephraim. Though God has had to chastise the people and send them into captivity, He remembers them still. His thoughts are still with Israel. God’s heart yearns for a restoration in relationship. You probably remember times that your parents had to discipline you, yet you knew that your parent loved you. My father used to say that – this hurts me worse than it hurts you. I never understood that until I had children. Now I do. God does not want separation. He wants restoration. He will surely show His people mercy. Psalm 103:8 says *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* I thank God that He is slow to anger with me.

Verse 21 *Set up signposts, Make landmarks; Set your heart toward the highway, The way in which you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, Turn back to these your cities.* Set up markers, stones, to mark the way home from captivity. The people will return in the same way they came. Returning to the land of Judah and to their own cities.

Verse 22 *How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter? For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth - A woman shall encompass a man.”* Gad is a word my grandmother used to use. It has the idea of being directionless and thoughtless. Backsliding daughter reminds them of the way they deserted God. *For the Lord hath created, or doth create, a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man* ***–*** Most theologians agree that this is meant in the context of something never seen before – a virgin conceiving and bringing forth a Child, as in the Messiah. God is creating a new thing, in which all the nations of the world will be given access to Him, through Jesus. The coming Christ child will encompass all mankind and fix by way of the Cross what Adam broke in the garden.

Verses 23-25 *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: ‘The Lord bless you, O home of justice, and mountain of holiness!’  24And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with flocks. 25For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.” Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel –* God again reiterates that He is the God of Israel and is all powerful. He will restore the cities to the people. Jerusalem will be one of the cities restored and will once again have worship, holiness, and justice there. And justice and holiness will return to the Temple mount. *And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with flocks –* Not only will the cities be reinhabited by the people, but the countryside as well. It will be a full restoration. There will be peace and once again crops and flocks will be raised by the people. *For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul –* God is promising to comfort the people and deliver them from their sorrows and afflictions. They will once again prosper and have abundant food and housing. They will be satisfied in Him.

Verse 26 *After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me.* Jeremiah awakes from this vision. It is a sweet vision, and he feels very glad and comforted. This is quite different than the way we have seen Jeremiah in many of the prophecies. Remember that he is known as the weeping prophet and for good reason! He has been very troubled by the judgements and the calamities that he has been shown. Now, he awakes and feels great comfort. His sleep is sweet.

Verses 27-28 *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.* ***I will*** *sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast –* The land lay desolate for 70 years in the captivity. Now, God will seed it with crops and livestock, that it may be replenished and prosper again. God will give great increase. *And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord -* God will show great care in restoring the people. He will keep His promises. In Jeremiah 18, God said He would pluck up the people and send them into captivity. Now, He will use that same care to reestablish His people in the land that He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

 And so we leave Jeremiah tonight. He has awakened from this vision reassured and rested. The terrible devastation he knew was coming and has now seen come will be reversed and he is assured that the people will be restored. Likewise, we have that wonderful reassurance that one day Christ will gather us to Himself, and, in time, we will live in a new heaven and a new earth, restored to perfect relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We eagerly await that time. While we eagerly await, we will be busy working and witnessing, bringing as many as will believe to the knowledge of Jesus and Hope of our Eternal Home. He is faithful to forgive. May we be faithful in our work to show others the Way, the Truth, and the Life in our Lord Jesus Christ.