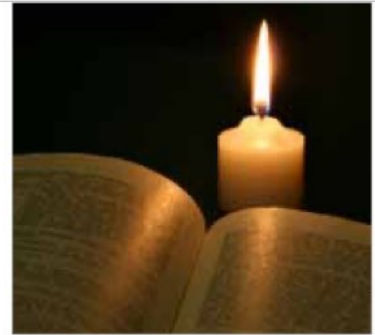


# Advent: The Power of Hope

Our hope in Jesus will work in and through our lives.

*"I hope you feel better." "I hope you have a healthy baby." "I hope I get an A in that class." "I hope she likes me." "I hope to make a difference in the world." "I hope their marriage makes it." "I hope I get a raise." "I hope we have world peace by Christmas."*



*Every day we use that small, magical word—hope. It's tough to live, or even make it through one day, without hope. What is hope? Based on these examples and the biblical text we're going to explore, hope is a vision for better days that changes us in the present. There's something up ahead, around the corner, in sight, and it's good. But that good future isn't just*

Scripture: [Jeremiah 33:14–16](#)

Based on: [The PreachingToday.com](#) sermon series "The Promise of Better Days: Looking at Advent through the Old Testament," by Matt Woodley.

## Part 1 Identify the Current Issue

In our Advent journey, we meet the prophet of hope, a man named Jeremiah. Around the year 627 B.C., when Jeremiah would have been about 16, God came to him and said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5).

Now fast-forward 40 years. Jeremiah is still a spiritual leader for his community, but the nation is in a crisis. The year is 587 B.C., and the king of Babylon and his troops have surrounded the capital city of Jerusalem, setting up a deadly siege, leaving the people inside Jerusalem on the brink of starvation (2 Kings 25:2–3). Zedekiah, the king of Israel, still thinks he can beat the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, so he keeps fighting back. Meanwhile, Jeremiah tells the king, “It’s over, Zedekiah. Just give up and give in. The king of Babylon will come into the city and you will surrender, so you can trust God and do it the easy way, or you can do it the hard way.” (By the way, Zedekiah will choose to do it the hard way—see 2 Kings 25:5–7).

The rest of the spiritual leaders and prophets were assuring the king that Jeremiah was a fraud and a crackpot. They kept telling the king exactly what he wanted to hear: “We always win, because God is always on our side.” On the other hand, Jeremiah kept warning the king that these false prophets were merely offering cheap and false hope: “They dress the wounds of my people as though they were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14).

Jeremiah’s basic message was this: Look deeper, king, because this isn’t a military thing; it’s a spiritual thing. In other words, the people of God have rejected the covenant of God. They’ve been committing spiritual adultery for far too long (Jer. 2:12–13; 3:21). King Zedekiah didn’t like this message, so he branded Jeremiah an unpatriotic menace to national security, arrested him, and threw him in jail.

In the midst of these grim historical circumstances, as Jeremiah sits in a squalid prison cell, misunderstood, persecuted, hunted down, mislabeled, and derided, he will proclaim some of the most powerful words of hope found in the entire Hebrew Bible. Chapters 30–33 are often called the Book of Consolation or the Book of Hope. Notice that hope, according to the Bible, is a vision for better days: “The days are coming,” declares the Lord (Jer. 33:14). All throughout the Old Testament there are hints and pictures and clues that say the same thing: Better days are coming. The clues and pictures are so powerful they should take our breath away.

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: Hope is about a promise.

For the follower of Jesus, hope always depends on the reliability of the one who makes the promises. Hope is never based on our wishful thinking or positive feelings or even how much faith we have. Hope is based on a God who is really there, a God who has left good and sufficient reasons for us to know and trust him. If the whole Jesus Christ thing isn't reliable and trustworthy, then it's not worth our hope.

Read Jeremiah 33:14–16.

[Q] When have you been disappointed by promises made, but not kept?

[Q] What was this “gracious promise” to which the Lord refers?

[Q] How has God kept promises throughout history that allow us to put our trust in him today?

[Q] What promises of God give you hope?

### Teaching Point Two: Hope is about a person.

The vision for a better future isn't based in our wishful thinking or even our faith in that future; instead, the promises point to a specific person. Hope is not wrapped up in a season or a program, or in a new job or a better spouse or a bigger house. Hope is wrapped up in a Person. The biblical word for this person is *Messiah*. In verse 15, this person is called a “righteous Branch” who will “sprout from David's line.” God kept promising: I will raise up a king like David—but much better than David. He will rule my people; he will bless the whole earth.

In Jeremiah 33:16, the Messiah is called “The Lord our Righteousness.” In the Bible *righteousness* is a relational term. In other words, a righteous person is someone who lives rightly with God and others. This Branch, this Promised One, this Messiah will be called “The Lord our Righteousness.” In other words, he will get it right—all the time. He will be the only fully righteous human being who has ever lived. And this leads into the heart of what Christians call the gospel. The New Testament declares that when Jesus—the Lord our Righteousness—died on the cross, he took upon himself our unrighteousness, and in a marvelous exchange, we received his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:20–21). That is astoundingly good news for all of us!

**[Q]** What does it mean to you that God’s promise centers on a Person, rather than a program or campaign?

### Teaching Point Three: Hope changes us in the present.

Hope is about a promise and a person. Now all of that sounds academic and safe until we get to the last part of our definition of hope: it changes us in the present. Once you start down the path of hope, there’s no turning back. Or think of it this way: hope can *ruin* your life. Once you start hoping, your heart starts to burst with longing—because now you have something that you want.

Hope will turn your life upside down. When you come to Jesus he will up-end your life. He will inject a massive dose of hope in your heart. You can’t go back to normal life anymore. Jeremiah couldn’t just go along with the crowd that was cheering Zedekiah and offering cheap and shallow hope. God had given him a picture of a new future and a new hope. Even if it meant going to jail, Jeremiah couldn’t look back.

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## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

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As we walk through this season of Advent, this season of waiting, longing, rejoicing, and hoping, perhaps it is best to conclude this study with more questions than answers:

- [Q]** Is your hope centered in the person of Christ or something else?
- [Q]** As you have grown as a Christian, has your hope expanded or diminished?
- [Q]** What are you willing to risk because of who Jesus is and what he has done?

**Action Point:** How can you kindle an attitude of hope and expectation this Advent season? Create your own Advent calendar of God’s promises. Advent starts the fourth Sunday before Christmas. You can purchase an Advent calendar and hide a verse behind each “door.” Or you could simply number and pin small envelopes containing verses to a poster board. If needed, use [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) or a similar internet resource to search “God’s promises.”

—Study by Matt Woodley, with Kyle L. White