

# A biblical treasure hunt (Jeremiah 31:1-6)

Here are some gems from the Jeremiah reading for Sunday.

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One of my favorite ways to approach a biblical passage is to make it a treasure hunt. *Where can we hear echoes of other biblical stories? Where are the women hiding?* This game works with an English translation, but digging into the original languages—even just a little—provides another level of connection. Just remember to keep the chronology in order.

Here are some gems I unearthed from the Jeremiah lection assigned for Sunday (surely there remain plenty yet to be discovered):

- Verse 1: “I will be” (*ehyeh*) reflects Exodus 3 and God’s self-introduction to Moses: “I will be who I will be” (*yeh asher ehyeh*). (The Gospel of John capitalizes on this too, with its frequent “I am” sayings on Jesus’ lips.) Furthermore, the reciprocity in this verse, initiated by God, indicates covenant, a key concept in the Hebrew Bible and one that the Gospel writers (especially John) invoked and reworked as they developed theology within the community of Jesus-followers.
- Verse 2: The NRSVue uses the word “grace,” which tends to have particularly Christian connotations. For a more fitting context, note that in the Pentateuch this word (*hen*) is often translated as “favor” and does not always have God as the subject.
- Verse 3: “Faithfulness” translates the Hebrew *hesed*, which would hyperlink to scores of passages in the Hebrew Bible. But it is distinctly used in the book of Ruth, where we find a foreign Moabite woman, of all people, associated with this specific word for divine love (3:10). That story from the reconstruction period gives us a glimpse into what would come next for ancient Israel after exile: a time of rebuilding and debating about who belongs in the community (and who should be excluded).
- Verse 4: “Tambourines” names the same instrument that Miriam and the women play as they dance together in Exodus 15:21. Here it connects to “dance” in the next line.
- Verse 4: “Dance” appears here but also later, in verse 13, where the women are dancing. So *here* are some women hiding in the passage! This word also occurs several times in the Psalms in regard to celebratory movement (30:11; 149:3; 150:4).
- Verse 5: “Vineyards” invites us to remember the phrase of hope “everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree,” which the prophet Micah uses as an illustration of the restoration of Jerusalem (4:4). It indicates divine favor and freedom from foreign rulers. It was a potent enough image that George Washington enlisted it more than once in writing about his vision of a new country. Lin-Manuel Miranda’s codification of the phrase into song for *Hamilton* has renewed its power into the 21st century. (For a related treasure hunt, search for “vine and fig tree” to see how this biblical image serves as a litmus test for the community’s well-being and its standing with God.)

- Verse 6: With references to both Ephraim and Zion, the final verse looks back to a restoration of the time prior to the Divided Monarchy (~922 BCE) and the fall of the Northern Kingdom (~722 BCE) as a way to envision a restored, whole, and peaceful future for all God's people for all time.

All these treasure hunts lead us to gems that were meaningful millennia ago, but they also point to contemporary theological longings. There are endless ways to connect those dots.

Some treasure hunts are more hidden than others. For an in-depth and challenging though hugely rewarding quest, seek out [Elizabeth Polczer Schrader's work on Mary Magdalene](#) in John 20 and elsewhere.