
Day 235 - August 23

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Jeremiah's Prophecies During Siege*

Readings: *Jeremiah 33:10-13; 30:1-24; 31:1-26*

Reflections:

- As Jeremiah completes his prophecy of hope even in the midst of judgment, Jeremiah 33 ends with two images of hope. First, the joy of a wedding being restored: “the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voice of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, ‘Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever.’” Second, the security of a shepherd caring for his sheep, “flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them.” These two images will one day be again used by Jesus as he portrays himself as the bridegroom (John 3:22-30; Luke 5:33-39) and the good shepherd (John 10:7-18). Jesus well aware of these passages makes it clear that he is the one that is bringing these promises of Jeremiah to fulfillment.
- Jeremiah 30 returns to messages of hope for the future. God directs Jeremiah to write down the messages that he is giving Jeremiah. This parallels God’s direction to Habakkuk and reminds us again the importance of creating a written record of what God says to us so that we don’t forget those key insights or directions from God.
- The messages of hope would no doubt almost seem impossible to the people of Israel. “I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds. No longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.” “Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make them afraid. I am with you and will save you.” “I will discipline you but only with justice...” It is easy to see how the people of Israel, based on this passage, would have a very hard time accepting a spiritualized approach to the restoration of God’s kingdom where the king died a sacrificial death and all people were welcomed equally into God’s new community. Even with this said, we must remember that all of these prophecies are set within the larger context when God is making it clear that it is a heart change that is ultimately needed and that all nations will one day be blessed.
- God’s words to Israel seem paradoxical at points. “Your wound is incurable...but will restore you to health and heal your wounds.” But this is only in appearance. God is saying that humanly speaking, there is no hope for Israel. They were constantly looking for some ally or alliance with another nation to rescue them. God is boldly declaring, “all your allies have

forgotten you; they care nothing for you.” But even though everyone has abandoned Israel, God would still be their savior and healer.

- Within another passage of hope in restoration, Jeremiah 30:18-24, we find another reference to the coming king. “Their leader will be one of their own; I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?” “So you will be my people and I will be your God.” This is an interesting way for God to describe his intimate relationship with the Messiah. It would bring to the people’s mind God’s relationship with Moses. This question of “who will devote himself (herself) to be close to me?” is the cry of God’s heart. Throughout the story of Scripture, God is always looking for those that truly love him and want to be close to him. Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah all had special relationships with God. In a very real sense, they were all friends of God.
- The passage returns to God’s judgment and again we see the consistency of God: “The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this” (see Philippians 1:6). This passage reveals again that God has higher purposes that he is completing as a part of the unfolding drama of Scripture. God makes it clear that before and even during the unfolding of his purposes, we as people often don’t understand what God is doing. Only in hindsight do we see the reasons for the purposes of God.
- “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again...you will... dance with the joyful...plant vineyards...and enjoy their fruit.” Possibly some of the confusion of the reader regarding the prophecies about the Messiah and the restoration of Israel is that in some ways, Israel in the coming years will be restored as a remnant returns and rebuilds the temple. But the restoration will only be partial and so in some ways these promises regarding the land and a physical restoration are true. Yet, the fullest and most complete form of restoration will come when the Messiah reveals the kingdom of God and how it fulfills the promises of God within a spiritual community.
- In Jeremiah 31, this promised restoration contains images again of Eden, the promised land and the intimate relationship God desires to have with his people: “I will lead them besides streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father...he who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd...they will be like a well watered garden...and my people will be filled with my bounty.” All of these images of new wine and oil, large flocks and herds, everyone dancing and celebrating reminds us of the kind of life God wanted for his people. Our hearts long for the garden of Eden, a place where we live in harmony with nature and will each other, where we enjoy the blessing of God and have all of our needs met.
- The second half of Jeremiah 31 gives us a window into God’s promise of a people who will come before him truly repentant and dependent on him. Jeremiah 31:15 (“A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping...”) will come to actual fulfillment at the time of the Messiah’s birth (See Matthew 2:18). This great suffering of the people will ultimately lead to

a deep and real repentance. God's heart is moved by true repentance, "Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him."

- In the promise of restoration, God gives the people through Jeremiah a very practical encouragement that we can take to heart in our own lives when we face real struggles. "Set up road signs, put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take." The road that leads them into captivity will be the same road they take when God saves them. This reminds us that sometimes the things that happen that cause us great pain can also be used by God at the time that he restores.
- At the end of this promise is a very cryptic prophecy that is difficult to understand, "The Lord will create a new thing on earth – a woman will surround (or protect) a man." This passage finds a parallel in Isaiah 43:18,19, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." The reference to God doing a new thing clearly points to a future season of the Messiah. Now, what does it mean that "a woman will surround (envelop or protect) a man." Here are a few options from scholarly debate. It could mean be a reference to the birth of Jesus, "A woman (that is Mary) will carry a man (rather than a baby) in her womb." This would suggest that somehow something supernatural would occur that the Messiah that was born was somehow complete and divinely mature, even in the womb. This is possible but seems a bit unlikely as it is a very weird image that is never really explained or unpacked in other sections of Jeremiah. It would appear from the way this verse sets in the text that it was somehow easily understood by its readers. Another option would be to translate it, "A wife will cling to and be faithful to her husband." This would fit in the context as Israel is portrayed as a faithless wife ("how long will you wander?" and this would imply that the woman (wife of God) would be intimately devoted to (surround) a man (God as husband). This would mean that God is being somewhat sarcastic. "I will do a completely new and unique thing: A wife will be intimately devoted to her husband." Now this fits the context better and with Jeremiah's overarching themes. The question is why the words "woman" and "man" are used rather than "wife" and "husband". A third option is that this is referring to the complete reversal of the new Messianic order. Where men (the stronger) normally surround and protect the women (the weaker), that in the new order the weaker will be the protector of the stronger. This would make the reader think that when the new Messianic order appears, it will be completely backwards to what they would think and that weakness will be the source of strength and protection. This translation fits a bit better with the verb (to surround or protect) and with the use of man and woman, rather than wife or husband. It may also point toward the verse, "I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint." There is a fourth option which calls back to the garden of Eden and the calling of Eve to be a helpmate for Adam. In this case, the woman would return to her role of actually being a helpmate and the curse of her trying to dominate the man would have been broken. This again has some merit as the Messianic reign that is promised would reverse the curses of the fall and this would then establish this passage as a parallel passage to Isaiah 43:19. It still seems like such a

translation would be further expanded on. With all of this said, this prophetic passage is difficult to understand. It seems that either the second or fourth are more likely and may in fact be both implied (Israel will be faithful, the curse will be broken).

- This prophetic word is then set in its overall context. “At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.” Isaiah is saying that all of these promises came to him in a dream and when he woke up he felt the peace and confidence of God having spoken through him. When God speaks to us, it normally comes with a sense of peace, certainty, and clarity that let’s us know that we know that God had orchestrated the dream.