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Day 236 - August 24

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## Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

### *Jeremiah Sees Spiritual Restoration Under the Messiah*

Readings: *Jeremiah 23:1-8; 33:14-40*

#### **Reflections:**

- Jeremiah has three very specific prophecies about the Messianic period. In Jeremiah 23:1-8 we see the promise of true shepherds who will tend (care) for the people, remove their fear (the primary emotional effect of the fall, "I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid.") and will own them in such a way as none are lost. These shepherds will find their source in the coming true shepherd. "I will raise up to David a righteous branch (descendent), a king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land...This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our Righteousness." Here we see God's concern for justice and mercy. We also see how the Messiah will carry the name of God himself, affirming that God himself will impart true and lasting righteousness to his people. This is a righteousness that is not earned but given as a gift.
- The last thing we observe in this first discourse is that the first redemption of Israel (the Exodus from Egypt) will be replaced in the second redemption (through the Messiah – still visualized as being restored to the land). Again we can see the obvious connections to Jesus but how others in Jesus' day would really question how Jesus could be the one who fulfilled these prophecies as Israelites were never restored to their land in the fullest sense.
- In Jeremiah 33 we see the prophet give a second discourse about the coming Messiah. He returns to the same images he introduced in Jeremiah 23. He repeats that the "righteous branch will sprout from David's line." He restates that this coming king will re-establish justice in the land as well as carry the name, "The Lord Our Righteousness."
- Jeremiah then builds on this prophecy by adding the promise that under this new king, the kingdom and spiritual order (symbolized by having a king on the throne and a priest to stand before God) would never end. In fact, he states that the priests (Levites) "who minister before me" will be "as countless as the stars of the key and as measureless as the sand on the seashore." This promise immediately calls forward the promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:4-6 where his descendents would be as many as the stars of the sky. This suggests that the spiritual priesthood would now become like the nation of God's people rather than just a single tribe within God's people. With this prophecy, we can see how the first Christ-followers would easily make the connection that the new people of God would be both a

“holy nation” and a “royal priesthood.” See 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

- This second discourse ends with the affirmation that God will not abandon Israel but will certainly restore them, provide a ruler from the line of David and will have compassion on them. Again, it is very easy to see how the Jewish religious leaders would have had a hard time accepting the spiritual nature of the kingdom Jesus declared. They believed that all of these promises should be fulfilled physically and with direct relationship to ethnic Israel and within the boundaries of the land that had been promised to them as a nation.
- The third discourse is possibly the clearest of all the prophecies. His prophecy states that Israel will be re-established among the other nations and with creation (animals), that each person will stand individually before God for their sin rather than suffering because of a previous generation’s sin, and that this new order will be grounded and founded in a new covenant. This covenant will not be written on dead, stone tablets. It will be written on the hearts of the people. In other words, the covenant relationship will be fully internalized within the people of God within their heart of hearts. This will result in each person knowing God from the least to the greatest. Within Moses’ covenant, only Moses really knew God. In the covenant to come, everyone would be like Moses, a friend of God.
- Now as we come to end of this prophecy, we see that God is very clear through the prophet to declare that Israel will always remain before God as a unique and set apart people: “Only if these decrees (the decrees of creation – sun, moon and stars) vanish from my sight...will the descendents of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” This clear statement has led many Christians to believe that Israel still will one day have a special role to play in the purposes of God. Others see this as yet another prophecy that will find a spiritual fulfillment in Christ as all those who are full of faith become the spiritual descendents of Abraham. Israel is not the Israel of flesh (ethnic descent) but the Israel of faith (spiritual descent).
- Now the final verses of this discourse are very interesting. The Kidron Valley (called Gehenna in Greek) was the city dump of Jerusalem and a place Jesus used to describe the final judgment. We have called it “hell.” In this passage it says that when the Messiah comes that this place of evil, judgment and death will be “holy to the Lord. The city will never be uprooted or demolished.” This promise makes the reader wonder, is God going to somehow do away with all forms of judgment? This doesn’t seem to be the point of this passage. The Kidron Valley was a place of great sin (child sacrifice and Baal worship) and so it also became a place of judgment and death. The redemption of this area was symbolic of God fully redeeming the sin and evil within Israel which was why God constantly judged them. This promise meant that even the worst areas of sin and failure and evil would be rooted out and the nation would be finally rid of sin, evil, judgment and death. This new city of God would be completely secure under his grace, mercy and power to transform our lives and relationships. As the first Christ-followers would one day declare, “Praise God for Jesus!”