

**UNIT 7 JEREMIAH AND THE PROPHETIC MOVEMENT - LESSON 8****"INTERLUDE OF HOPE"****STUDY PASSAGE: Jeremiah Chapters 30-33**

The dismal gloom and oppressive atmosphere of imminent judgment that pervade chapters 21-29, suddenly lifts in chapters 30-33 into the hopeful message of a future time of blessing. It is only an interlude, chapter 32 returns to the theme of judgment. But the interlude has its intended effect. It reminds them that beyond the chastening ordeals of the present, God's steadfast love for His people will provide future restoration and renewed prosperity. Faith in this hope would, no doubt, inspire courage to endure the coming disasters.

In this lesson, we will briefly examine what the prophets taught about the future. Predictions were important elements in their messages, but what was their purpose? Were they accurate? What relevance do they have for us?

**1. WHAT WAS JEREMIAH'S OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE?**

These few chapters of Jeremiah, called the "Book of Consolation", contain a collection of various utterances proclaimed by the prophet throughout the course of his ministry. The theme that binds them together is Jeremiah's hope for the future of his people. These confident declarations for the future, from the man who had steadfastly denied hope for the present, must have made profound impressions upon his audiences.

**(a) Chapters 30-31 Assurances of Restoration**

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| <u>30:1-3</u>     | Book of Consolation. God's promise of restoration is made to both Israel and Judah (v3).  |
| <u>30:4-9</u>     | Day of Distress. The agony of a woman about to give birth depicted Israel's captivity, but future release is promised.  |
| <u>30:10-11</u>   | God's faithfulness and promises gave encouragement to the dismayed people.  |
| <u>30:12-17</u>   | Healing of Wounds. God caused Zion's wounds (v15), and He will restore them to health (v17).  |
| <u>30:18-22</u>   | Rebuilding of Jerusalem. The citizens of Jerusalem were guaranteed that their land would be completely restored and they would be ruled by one of their own people. |
| <u>30:23-31:1</u> | God's Intentions. The ultimate intention of the present tempest of God was that God would be recognized as Sovereign by the combined tribes of Israel.              |



- 31:2-6 Restoration Promised. Because of God's deep love for them, the people can be assured that God will give them renewed life in their own country.
- 31:7-14 Joyful Return. Despite the strong materialistic colouring in the description of the nation's joyful salvation, there is evidence of a deeper spiritual awareness.
- 31:15-22 Divine Comfort. The lamentation (v15) and penitence (v19) of the chastened nation is consoled by the promise of the return of scattered children and the return of Israel (v17,20,21).
- 31:23-30 The Heavenly Sower. In the future, the people will again use phraseology which will depict Judah and Jerusalem as the place of righteousness and true spirituality.
- 31:31-34 The New Covenant. The Mosaic covenant will not be sufficiently flexible for the new age of divine grace, and so will be replaced. The new covenant will be written deeply into the wills of the Israelites, who will obey it by choice, rather than by compulsion. Here, Jeremiah is "telescoping" future events. He is talking in the short term of the actual return from exile. In the long term he looks forward to the new covenant brought in by Christ himself.
- 31:35-37 The Ground for Confidence. Just as the sun came in the daytime and the moon at night, so God was unchanging and therefore Israel could depend on Him for the future (despite what might happen in the present).
- 31:38-40 Jerusalem Rebuilt. The concept of Jerusalem being rebuilt has spiritual significance, because, however unclean the locale, God will purify it just as he will purge the nation from sin.

(b) Chapter 32 Illustration of Restoration

Purchasing Real Estate (vs1-15)

With as much publicity as possible under the circumstances, Jeremiah purchased the title to a piece of family property, knowing that while he himself would never settle there, under the future conditions of peace and prosperity, other exiles would return and resume life on familiar soil.

Human Reaction (vs16-25)

Jeremiah's humanity is apparent here. Like many another person since, he began to have second thoughts about the wisdom of his action once he had purchased the property. In some distress he prayed to God and was reassured concerning the future. He tries to quell his rising anxieties by thinking there is nothing too difficult to achieve in human life for the God who created the cosmos.



### Divine Explanation (vs26-44)

God uses Jeremiah's own words (v17) to reassure him that nothing is beyond the ability of the creator. Rooftop idolatry had been one of the more blatant spiritual offences of God's people, whose consistent wickedness throughout history is stressed here. However, the unity between God and the nation will never again be disrupted, since the returned exiles will be renewed in will and spirit. Such a revival will be a perpetual covenant (v40). Following Jeremiah's example, land will again be bought and sold, and the necessary procedures followed, presupposing a stable economy flourishing under God's provision.

#### (c) Chapter 33 - Implications of Restoration

##### Restoration of the City (vs1-9)

Where God has destroyed, He will rebuild.

##### Restoration of the Land (vs10-13)

After the desolated villages of the country have been restored, God will be gratefully acknowledged as responsible. Once again sheep will pass under the hands of the Shepherd, (this being the normal way of counting them as they entered the fold for the night). God's people will then feel the loving touch of the Master's hand.

##### Restoration of the Leaders (vs14-26)

With the reversal of national fortunes, true worship will be carried out in the Temple, and all that is lacking is an ideal king. Verses 15 and 16 promise that a king will emerge from Davidic lineage to restore the old dynasty. The new name of Jerusalem will be, "The Lord our Righteousness", showing that she is finally exemplifying covenant holiness.

NB. The meaning of 'Zedekiah', who was king at the time of Jerusalem's overthrow (32:1) was, "The Lord is Righteous". Hence we can appreciate the added import of this prediction.

## **2. WERE JEREMIAH'S PREDICTIONS FULFILLED?**

It is true that, after Jerusalem's fall and the Jews had lived in exile in Babylon for many years, there was a national restoration to Palestine. The city of Jerusalem was rebuilt and living conditions throughout the country resumed. Even the temple was rebuilt (with encouragement from such prophets as Haggai and Zechariah), and worship practices recommenced. Israel's religion from this time onward was much purer, being freed from idolatry and characterised by a close allegiance to the Mosaic Law. However, the prophetic ideal that had been envisaged, didn't come.

The main features of Jeremiah's predictions had been the New Covenant, the Righteous Messiah, and National Peace and Prosperity - what actually took place though, was a strict return to the Old Covenant (producing Judaism and a harsh observance of external religious regulations); an externally controlled Governor instead of a King (and political power eventually came into the hands of the priestly aristocracy); an era of economic and political hardship and oppression.



No doubt this was confusing to the returned exiles, to say the least. But it was not that Jeremiah had been mistaken. Soon, further prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) rose to declare that the promised hopes were still future and that the nation must wait patiently and faithfully for them to arrive. The mistake was with the returning exiles. So limited was their view to a material and national outlook, that they were still failing to appreciate the spiritual aims of the prophets. Consequently, they misinterpreted their messages of future hope.

Proper understanding of the prophets' teachings is to be finally gained from the New Testament. Jesus Christ was God's final word of revelation, and the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). The two reference points that must be kept in mind when interpreting the message of the prophets are:

- (a) the prophet's historical setting, and
- (b) the New Testament explanation (and fulfilment).

Consequently, we see that:

1. The New Covenant, typified in the Old Mosaic Covenant, and prophesied by Jeremiah and the Prophets, has been fulfilled (1 Cor. 11:25) by union with Christ (Heb. 8:12; 9:15)
2. The Ideal Righteous Messiah, typified in David of old and prophesied by the prophets, has also been fulfilled in Christ by resurrection from the dead (cf. Acts 2:30, 31, 36; Eph. 1:20, 21)
3. The idyllic conditions of peace and prosperity, typified in the material blessings of Israel of old, and prophesied by the prophets, has similarly been fulfilled in Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-12; 2 Cor. 5:17). In other words, what was ideal in the prophetic description, is spiritual in New Testament explanation.

### 3. **How Does the New Testament Interpret the Messages of The Prophets?**

A recurring theme throughout the prophetic writings is that of the "Day of the Lord". Each of the prophets sounded his warning of impending judgment, or made his plea for a genuine return of heart to God, in the personal conviction that the "Day of the Lord" was imminent. These statements about how close the "Day of the Lord" was, ranged over a period of more than 200 years, and even then it was still to come! Were the prophets wrong in claiming that the Day was arriving in the political upheavals of their times? They were correct in what they said would happen to their nation. Yet century after century passed with "The Day of the Lord" continuing to be a future event. How are we to understand these things?

Let us see what the New Testament has to say about the hopes and predictions of the prophets.

- (a) In Isaiah 61:1,2 his hopes for the "Day of the Lord" are fulfilled by Jesus (Luke 4:18-21). Jesus reads these words of Isaiah from a scroll in the synagogue and then says, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read".



- (b) The prophet Isaiah in Chapter 59:20,21, speaks of his hopes for Israel. Paul quotes these words in Romans 11:25-28 and understands them to mean that the true eternal seed of Abraham, which includes both Jews and Gentiles, will be saved by God. The Gospel is open to all.
- (c) Hosea's picture of "that day", in Hosea 1:10, is that the people who are not usually "My People" or "My Beloved" in God's eyes, will in fact be called "the children of the living God". In Romans 9:25,26, Paul tells us this has happened. Both Jews and Gentiles are now God's children.

The "Day of the Lord" is the Day when the Lord Himself will be present amongst His people, ruling in justice and peace.

The nearness of the Day sensed by the prophets, was not so much a matter of time, as a matter of the nearness of the presence of the Lord. God's nearness was sensed throughout century after century, until at last in Christ, He stepped into the scene of history. The ideal had come!

Today, we live in the end time. There is still to be, of course, a final consummation. But both our understanding of Scripture, and our personal relationship with God, must recognise that ever since the Incarnation of Christ, history has been in its "last days". God is dwelling with men. His presence means judgment for the wicked, but salvation for those who turn to Him with humble and repentant hearts.

#### **QUESTION 1:**

Jeremiah 30:10, 11: What promise (v10), what assurance (v11a) and what purpose (v11b) gave encouragement to the dismayed people?

#### **QUESTION 2:**

Jeremiah 31:7-14: Despite the strong materialistic colouring in the description of the nation's salvation, what evidence reflects a deeper spiritual significance (vs7, 9, 11, 14)?

#### **QUESTION 3:**

Jeremiah 31:35-37: How did nature provide evidence that God was unchanging, and therefore, Israel could depend on Him for the future (despite what might happen in the present)?

#### **QUESTION 4:**

Jeremiah 32:1-15: Where was Jeremiah, and what was happening to Jerusalem at the time of this incident (v2)? How was he certain that God was directing his actions (v6-8)? What did Jeremiah do (v9)?

#### **QUESTION 5:**

How was the message of Malachi interpreted in the New Testament (Mal.3:1; Mark 1:2; Mal.4:5, 6; Luke 1:17; Matt.17:10-13)?



**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY**

In Jeremiah 33:1-9, what gracious promise was assured the imprisoned prophet (v3)? What was the essential character of the restoration that was being foretold (v8)?