

August 15 : Scriptures Jeremiah 18-20

SUMMARY

Another prophetic object lesson! So far, we've seen the Lord use Jeremiah's linen undergarment, Judah's drought, and Jeremiah's "no marriage or children" prohibition as visuals for His words to Judah. Now we have the Potter's House event that reveals a lesson for Judah to Jeremiah. It's a simple lesson. God is sovereign and will do what He wills to any nation. However, it's up to the nation's people and their response. A proper response can cause the Lord to relent according to His word to Jeremiah. A refusal to respond correctly will seal the deal. The Potter has full rights over the clay.

But the Lord already knows how Judah will respond. They'll ignore Him, so He again announces the exile judgment because of their idolatry (18:17). Rather than listen to Jeremiah, the people plot against him – again. They think God's words will continue and life will go on, as usual, so they can denounce Jeremiah and ignore him.

I see that today when God releases real prophets who bring a "now" word, but most Christian churches ignore them because "we have the Bible, church tradition, and wisdom to guide our way. Why listen to a supposed prophet? Besides, the function of the prophet (and apostle) ended after the first generation of the church." Let me give a rebuttal. Ephesians 4:11 says, "And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." Jesus took these existing functions already found in the 1st-century synagogues and amped them up for service to plant and mature the born-again people of His new movement, the kingdom of God in us. Those who say Jesus isn't raising prophets and apostles anymore 1) have to separate those two functions from the remaining 2-3 [depending on whether you count pastor-teachers as one or two functions], or 2) are declaring the entire church has matured to the point of "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness" (Ephesians 4:13). If every Christian in Jesus' global congregation isn't at that point, then He will continue bringing forth *ALL* the leadership functions regardless of people pride in declaring what God does or doesn't do and ignore legitimate, God-sent leaders. Enough said.

How does Jeremiah respond? Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he prays an imprecatory (curse) prayer. Yeah, I know Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and we're to pray for them and not curse them (Luke 6:28). But when the Holy Spirit prompts the prophet (or King David) to pray this way, then it's according to God's will – which doesn't bode well for Jeremiah's persecutors (18:21-23).

And another prophetic object lesson! This time it involves a clay jar. Jeremiah's message is simple. Because the people have committed idolatry, the Lord's judgment is on the way. It's the utter destruction of the city and its inhabitants. Jeremiah's message takes place at the Potshard Gate, the gate out of which the people carried their trash down to the Valley of Topheth and Hinnom, Jerusalem's garbage dump. Fires continually burned there (and later became a picture for eternal punishment in the afterlife, i.e., hell). So with the backdrop of the broken pottery all around Jeremiah, the leaders, the people, and the garbage dump beyond, Jeremiah declares that so many people will die in the coming siege and warfare that the only place to dump the bodies (not bury them) is the city dump. This is how the Lord regards His obstinate people – garbage. Jeremiah then smashes the clay jar as a sign of what will happen to the city. Its houses and building will also be smashed. Why? Because people were practicing their idolatry on the flat roofs of their homes. The idolatrous houses were similar to the flat-topped altars on the high places where the people made their sacrifices to Baal. So Yehovah will tear down the "altars," the houses, and smash them to pieces as should have been done to the idol altars around the area (19:10-13). The city will become like God's garbage dump. After that episode, God tells Jeremiah to go to the Temple courtyard and declare the city's destruction.

As usual, people aren't too happy with Jeremiah's words. Pashhur, the priest, the son of Immer and chief official in the temple of the Lord, arrests Jeremiah and has him beaten and put in stocks (20:1-2). Do you think that stops Jeremiah? Fat chance! God, through Jeremiah, tells Pashur that his family will be killed in front of his eyes, the city destroyed, and all the wealth of Judah's kings will be taken along with Pashur and the people to Babylon. There he will die.

For the rest of chapter 20, Jeremiah again complains and laments about his ill-received ministry and the persecution he must face. Well, it's not like Yehovah didn't warn him (1:17-19). Imagine living in a time of prosperity while society's morals rot around you, and the message you've received from God is the opposite of what people are experiencing. You know, like living in parts of the U.S. today. Imagine preaching utter destruction when everyone else sees safety and security and thinks, "this could never happen here." You'd look like a religious crank. That's how Jeremiah feels (20:7-8). But when he tries to keep his mouth shut, the Holy Spirit drives so hard for him to prophesy that it feels like a fire inside of him that will consume him if Jeremiah doesn't let it out. And, of course, the people react to God's true words through Jeremiah. The prophet reassures himself that Yehovah will stand with and support him against his enemies.

Despite that assurance, Jeremiah laments his ministry's difficulty (20:14-18). Simply put, he curses the day he was born and wished it had never happened. Again, Jeremiah sounds an awful lot like Job.

INSIGHT

Even though God announces good or bad against us, He often leaves it up to our response to either confirm His plan or relent His intent. On a basic level, He's announced that all sinners will die and be separated from Him for eternity. If we refuse to turn from our wickedness because, as Judah said, "It's hopeless. We will continue to follow our plans, and each of us will continue to act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart" (18:12), then we get what's already coming. We will be "uprooted, torn down, and destroyed." However, if we change and act according to God's plan to save us from oncoming doom, He will relent, and we'll be "built and planted" (Jeremiah 18:7, 9).

August 16 : Scriptures Jeremiah 21-23

SUMMARY

Chapter 21 opens with a different Pashur going to Jeremiah on behalf of the king to seek God's word about the Babylonian siege currently in progress. This event happened in 587/586 B.C., just before Jerusalem's collapse. King Zedekiah had decided to ally himself with Pharaoh Hophra against Nebuchadnezzar to break Babylon's threat against Judah. With the Babylonian army camping on Jerusalem's doorstep and trouble building up in the city, King Zedekiah wants to know what's coming. He'll wish he never asked Jeremiah that question.

Jeremiah gives three answers. 1) To Zedekiah: The weapons you see outside will enter the city and stop in the center (21:4). Your people will die by the sword, a great plague, and famine. 2) To the Jerusalemites: If you surrender to the Babylonians, they'll exile you, but you'll live. It would be best for you since the Lord is set on destroying the city and all who remain in it. 3) To the house of David: You'd better govern righteously, or you'll be walloped with my judgments. In your pride, don't think you're beyond my reach, and you're still going to experience my hand for what you've done in the past.

God's message to the kings of Judah carries over into chapter 22. The words of the previous chapter are similar to these warnings, but chapter 21 was for Zedekiah. Chapter 22's words to Judah's kings fit all of them during Jeremiah's ministry, especially King Jehoiakim. Yehovah tells them to rule according to His righteous ways and laws. If they do, they'll continue to reign. If not, then God will uproot and tear down the palace. Even though the palace is like the "summit of Lebanon" (covered with cedar and having standing cedar pillars like the mountainside), God will hew them down and burn them as He allows Babylon to destroy the building. Its destruction will be a sign and an object lesson to all who pass by about Israel breaking God's covenant with them (22:8-9).

Refresher time: Jeremiah prophesied during the final years of Judah before the exile. The line of kings is Josiah – Shallum (Jehoahaz) – Jehoiakim – Jehoiakin – Zedekiah. Yehovah's following message is for King Josiah's son, Shallum. The Babylonian army will capture him, and he will die in exile.

The next word is for Jehoiakim. Jeremiah begins with a stinging rebuke for Jehoiakim's opulence and outrageous expenditures to create a palace fit for a super-king rather than rule in a godly way. He's stooped to "dishonest profit, bloodshed, and committing extortion and oppression" to get his moolah (22:17). What's his judgment from Yehovah? He'll be killed and "buried like a donkey." He'll be dragged out, dropped outside

Jerusalem's gate, and left to rot. All those who lived in the palace, all the sycophants who sucked up to Jehoiakim, will be taken captive and humiliated (22:22-23).

And now comes a word for Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiakin (Coniah). Yeah, not so good. God says in very picturesque terms that He's going to rip Jehoiakin from his throne and throw him (and his mother) to Babylon as one would tear a ring from a hand and throw the ring away. There in Babylon, Jehoiachin and his mom will die.

Chapter 23 has a similar theme to the famous Psalm 23. They're both about shepherds. Psalm 23 declares, "The Lord is my shepherd." Jeremiah 23 has Yehovah saying, "Woe to my shepherds!" Judah's leaders have failed to keep God's people together. The sheep have been exiled, and the leaders have failed to tend to them and, in the words of President Trump during his time hosting *The Apprentice*, "You're fired!" God will regather his people and put proper leaders over them, leaders that will care for God's people. In fact, we move into an amazing prophecy about Jesus. Yehovah says He will raise a Righteous Branch (a messianic title) from King David's family line, who will be Israel's best and perfect King (23:5-6). He will regather the exiled people of Israel and rule over them with justice and righteousness. So much so that this Righteous Branch, King Messiah, will be called "The Lord, Our Righteousness." This prophecy will happen in the days of Israel's Great Regathering to the Land that will dwarf the Exodus from Egypt (23:7-8).

As part of the indictment against Israel's wicked shepherds, Jeremiah turns his words against Judah's priests and false prophets. They're adulterers (cheating on God with the idol gods). They've left God's path and pursued the slippery path of idolatry and wickedness (23:11-12). They've led God's people astray, so they'll be judged. Israel and Judah's prophets have done nothing to stop Israel's evildoers, so the prophets and the people are like Sodom and Gomorrah in God's eyes. Can anyone tell me what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah? Right. God will destroy Jerusalem as He destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel.

Why does Yehovah speak so harshly about Judah's prophets? Because if they were true prophets, they would speak His revealed word accurately. They wouldn't prophesy what comes from their heads but from God's heart. On what does God base this accusation? 23:17 says, "They keep on saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord has spoken: You will have peace.' They have said to everyone who follows the stubbornness of his heart, 'No harm will come to you.'" In other words, the false prophets speak the opposite of what Yehovah said. Because of that, God's people aren't warned or corrected. Who has stood in the Lord's counsel and listened to His genuine prophetic word? None of them.

They've run out to the people with whatever they've thought up. If they had been true prophets, they would have preached against Judah's sin rather than dish out words of comfort to wicked people. God's word is "like fire and like a hammer that pulverizes rock." It acts upon whatever it hits. Since the people remain unchanged, the false prophets spreading their fake dreams as God's word are liars. They're worthless as God's prophets. Should anyone (people, prophet, priest) ask Jeremiah the customary, "What is the Lord's burden?" (because prophetic words have a weight that bears down on the prophet to urge them to speak), he's to smack them with, "*YOU* are a burden to the Lord!" Any prophet or any person who declares they have the "burden of the Lord," a prophetic word, when they don't, then God will judge them for their presumption (23:36-39). God no longer wants that phrase to be used because it supposes a prophetic function. Either someone knows what the Lord says, or they don't. Stop playing around, false prophet.

INSIGHT

Are there true prophets speaking God's words today? I believe so. Those words align with the Bible and ring in our spirits when we hear them. There are also many prophet wanna-bees who claim to be prophets and put on a good show, but the source of their "word from the Lord" is their minds or fanciful dreams. You can tell because they may do so with intensity when they speak, but we sense no impact." On the other hand, I've heard prophets who speak in normal, conversational tones, but the impact of their words leaves their hearers breathless, silent, and stunned. God's word affects people. Man's word manipulates people.

August 17 : Scriptures Jeremiah 24-27

SUMMARY

We're now at chapter 24 and have another prophetic object lesson! Yehovah gives it to Jeremiah in a vision of deliciously good figs and rotted figs. God's message is simple. The exiles are excellent figs. They were the ones who listened to the Lord and cooperated with His plan (surrender to your exile judgment). Even amid a terrible fate, their God will look after them. Think about this – the Babylonian exile is set to last 70 years. Most of the exiles will never see their homeland again. But their children will. This situation is similar to God's 40-year wandering in the wilderness for the rebellious Israelites. Those who disobeyed Him dropped dead. Those 20 years old and up remained under God's exceptional daily care but out of the Land until they all died. Because of their unfaithfulness, they did not get to the Promised Land. However, their children will. They will leave the idolatry of Babylon and come home to live their lives in obedience to God, much like the first generations of Joshua and after.

I love God's word to His "good figs." "I will keep my eyes on them for their good and will return them to this land. I will build them up and not demolish them; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God because they will return to me with all their heart" (24:6-7). Even amid punishment, if we cooperate, we find God's grace, His unmerited favor. However, for the rotted figs (King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem—those remaining in this land or living in the land of Egypt), those who resisted God's plan (the officials) or refused to obey (those who fled to Egypt for protection), they're toast.

Chapter 25 is a long chapter with far-reaching prophecies to Judah and the nations surrounding them. The Lord's word to Judah through Jeremiah is:

- "I've prophesied for 23 years about your need to reject idolatry and turn back to God. You refused to obey. Yehovah has sent you prophets, and you ignore them.
- So, King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army will come and destroy Judah. He will take you away, and the land will lie desolate for 70 years.
- When 70 years are up, I'll punish Babylon and make it a ruin forever (that took a while, but it happened) (25:1-14).

But the Lord doesn't stop there. The King of the nations declares His judgment on other nations (I'll include the modern-day names, so you know where they're located):

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- I'll also punish the nations. I'll make them "drink a cup" that will make them stagger because of war.
 - It will hit **Judah, Egypt, "mixed"** (*ereb*, Arab) peoples, **Uz** (NW Saudi Arabia, by the Red Sea), the **Philistines** (Gaza Strip), **Edom/Moab/Ammonites** (Jordan), **Tyre/Sidon** (Lebanon), **Dedan/Tema/Buz** (W Saudi Arabia), **Arabia** (Saudi Arabia), **Zimri** (unknown), **Elam/Media** (Iran), **kings of the north both near and far from one another; that is, all the kingdoms of the world throughout the earth** (generally north of Israel), and **Shishek** (another name for Babylon/Iraq).

There are a few things to consider here. 1) These nations will be struck by war and "fall down and never get up again" (25:27). If literal, then this is a prophecy for the End Times. If figurative, then they will cease to be the nation they are and become another nation in the future, such as Media/Elam becoming Persian becoming Iran. 2) Yehovah says this judgment will strike "all the kingdoms of the world throughout the earth" (25:26). If this means the whole earth, then this is most certainly a prophecy of the End Times. But the Bible often refers to the nations around Israel (Israel as the focal point) as the "whole world," meaning the known biblical world. If so, this could be a future word against nations surrounding Israel that are Islamic today. God's point is if He's going to strike Judah in judgment for their disobedience, He'll most certainly judge the nations that attack His people.

25:30-38 most certainly speaks to the End, for God's judgment reaches "all the inhabitants of the earth" and "all humanity" (25:26-27). Also, "on that day" (25:33) is a phrase used for a day when the Lord acts or the End Time Day when the Lord upends human dominion and establishes His rule over the whole earth.

The Jeremiah narrative returns to King Jehoiakim, son of King Josiah, in chapter 26. Jeremiah is in the Temple, urging the people to repent. "If you don't repent, the Lord will make this place like Shiloh," where the Tabernacle stood for many years until the Philistines destroyed it and took the Ark in 1 Samuel 4. Saying that the Lord will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple doesn't sit too well with the leaders and the people, so they arrest Jeremiah and put him on trial for sedition. Jeremiah's defense? "This is the Lord's word, and I'm sticking to it. Do what you will. But if you kill me, you just add more innocent blood to your hands" (26:12-15). Long story short, cooler heads prevail. Jeremiah wasn't alone. Other prophets like Micah (during King Hezekiah's reign) and Uriah (during the same time as Jeremiah) prophesied the same. On the one hand, Hezekiah didn't lift a finger against Micah. On the other hand, King Jehoiakim killed Uriah. What to do? An influential man named Ahikam (son of Shaphan) supported Jeremiah, so the prophet was spared.

Around the same time as chapter 26 (during Jehoiakim's reign), Jeremiah brought the message in chapter 27. It was another prophetic object lesson, an illustrated lesson. Yehovah addressed it to the nation to the east (Edom, Moab, Ammon) and north (Tyre, Sidon) of Israel. Again, it's a simple word. God has given the power and authority to Nebuchadnezzar to conquer these nations and enslave them (chains and bars of the yoke). Those who surrender to God's intention will be spared and survive. Those who don't, won't (27:1-11). But when Babylon's time at bat is up, Yehovah will use other kings to conquer it.

Judah gets the same message. However, we get an insight into the situation. The Babylonians had already threatened the city and taken priceless treasures from the Temple, and the local prophets declared that those things would be restored soon to Judah. Not so, says Jeremiah. They're prophesying lies. If they're prophesying the truth, let them pray, and the Lord will confirm their word by returning the captured items. If not, it proves the false prophets as the liars they are. However, the Lord declares that rather than the treasures being restored, the rest of the Temple's furnishings will also be taken to Babylon (27:19-22). They will be restored *after* the Lord is done punishing Judah, not before.

INSIGHT

The Jewish people have been in the Roman exile since A.D. 70. According to Jesus, the leaders were punished, the Temple destroyed, and the nation exiled because they refused Him as their Messiah. However, after many generations have died in exile, God has brought them back to the Land and has begun restoring their inheritance! We live in the third era following Joshua's conquering Canaan, the Babylonian Exile, and the Roman Exile. How exciting!

August 18 : Scriptures Jeremiah 28-30

SUMMARY

Chapter 27 flows into chapter 28 with the words, "In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year" (28:1). What happens is a prophetic smack-down. Hananiah declares the Lord will restore Judah's king and treasure within two years, and Hananiah is responding to Jeremiah's yoke-prophecy. Jeremiah shoots back sarcastically, "From your mouth to God's ears! Amen! May it happen – but it won't. Hananiah will be right only if it comes to pass" (28:9). Hananiah pridefully yanks the yoke off Jeremiah's neck to emphasize his point. Then Jeremiah levels a genuine word from God, complete with a future confirmation. 1) Babylon's yoke will be iron, not wood. There's no breaking Babylon's grip over Judah until the Lord says so. 2) Because Hananiah caused the people to distrust the Lord, he will die – which he did "that year in the seventh month" (28:17). So there.

Many prophets in Judah and among the first exiles in Babylon prophesied a short stay in Babylonia. Yehovah will deliver them soon, have no fear. But Jeremiah knew it would be a multi-generational 70-year exile, so they better prepare to settle in for the long haul. Chapter 29 is a beautiful word for the grieving exiles suffering as strangers in a strange land surrounded by idols. After all, the Lord did tell them earlier (paraphrased), "You want idols and not Me? Then enjoy more idols than you can handle and without My presence." Now Yehovah comforts them through Jeremiah.

The Lord tells them to settle in, build houses and families, and seek the well-being of the nation where they live. If it thrives, so will they (29:4-7). "Don't listen to the prophets who lie to you," says Yehovah. "There's no quick way out of the exile, and it *will* last 70 years. But don't fear." And then comes a beautiful word from a loving and merciful God that has comforted many of His people. "For I know the plans I have for you' – this is the Lord's declaration – 'plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart'" (29:11-13). What does the Lord promise them? When the time comes, He will bring them home!

But what about the false prophets in Judah and Babylon? Like the rotten figs vision, the Lord will destroy them (29:18). Three prophets are named as provoking the Lord's anger through false prophecy – Ahab, son of Kolaiah, Zedekiah, son of Maaseiah (false and immoral prophets who also committed adultery), and Shemaiah the Nehelamite. The first two will be killed in front of the exiles. This act will confirm Jeremiah's message.

Shemaiah and his descendants will be cut off and won't see the Lord's restoration of His people.

Chapter 30 is a great section about Israel's restoration. But it doesn't speak of the Jewish peoples' return from the Babylonian Exile but their End Time restoration, and it's a powerful word about suffering and joy. Let's walk through it.

- Restoration of Israel and Judah (the northern and southern kingdoms as one people) is coming (30:1-3). They will return to their Land!
- The Jews' restoration will begin with a terrible time called the time of Jacob's Trouble (30:7). It will be a time of terror, not peace. People will be gripped with fear at what's happening.
- We know this is an End Time prophecy because of the verse "How awful that day will be! There will be no other like it!" (30:7). This helps us understand what Jesus prophesied about His people during the End Times.

Jeremiah: "Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor" (30:6) and Jesus: "All these events are the beginning of labor pains" (Matthew 24:8).

Jeremiah: "*There will be no other like it!*" (30:7) and Jesus: "For at that time there will be great distress, *the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again*" (Matthew 24:21).

Jesus refers to the same End Time event Jeremiah refers to – the Time of Jacob's Troubles.

- As bad as it will be, it is the day the Lord finally "breaks the yoke" (Jeremiah theme) of other nations from the Jewish peoples' necks, "never to be enslaved again" (30:8).
- God will restore them to their Land with His Davidic king to rule them – Jesus (30:9).
- Yehovah will bring all the exiles home from around the world (30:10) and punish the nations (30:11).
- Israel is in pain because of the Lord's discipline for their sin, but He will heal them (30:13-15, 17). God will give the nations what they gave Israel (30:16) in keeping with

His promise to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt" (Genesis 12:3).

- Those who were known as God's outcasts, about whom God no longer cared (30:17), will find themselves restored, renewed, revived, rejuvenated, increased, and honored by their God. The world will see that the Jews are God's people, and He is their God (30:18-22).
- As for the wicked of the world – a storm of God's judgment is building.

When will this happen? Yehovah says, "In time to come you will understand it" (30:24), which means no one will understand this fully until the actual event unfolds.

Wow.

INSIGHT

Truth bomb – prophecies about future events are only correct if they happen, proving a prophet's *bona fides*. "You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a message the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the Lord's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

We've had many prophets who claimed the Lord told them President Donald Trump would win the election in 2020 and continue as President. Regardless of our feelings about the election, he wasn't *officially* recognized as the U.S. President. Many "prophets" who were wrong about their decrees stood their ground and tried to work around the situation, attempting to prove themselves legit by Bible standards. Other prophets admitted their mistake and returned to seek the Lord (Jeremiah Johnson), which I think is admirable. Under the threat of death, the Mosaic Covenant prophets had to be 100% accurate. Under the New Covenant, we expect the same accuracy, *but* Paul says we are imperfect in exercising spiritual gifts. I look at a prophet's overall track record of accuracy and character before determining whether they're valid. However, based on the Trump prophecies and some prophets' "cover-their-behinds" attempts to excuse themselves, it sure did thin out the prophet herd and highlight the genuine prophets.

August 19 : Scriptures Jeremiah 31-32

SUMMARY

Our reading today is two long chapters, and they have astounding content that's important to every person on earth. Because of the phrases "At that time" and "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people" in 31:1, this section is a continuation of chapter 30, the End Time prophecy of Israel's restoration.

Chapter 31 starts with a lovely comfort for God's people in exile. The context is the final exile (as we know it now, the Roman exile) and the End Times from chapter 30. Though His people are "in the wilderness," Yehovah has stayed with them. His love was never lifted and remained an everlasting love. In covenant terms, "everlasting love" means an unbroken covenant commitment to His people (31:3). Yehovah will rebuild the land of Israel. His people will hear of it and declare it's time to return to their God-given homeland. The Lord will bring them all home (31:7-9)! No nation will be able to prevent it from happening (31:10-11). Both the land and the people will be revived (31:12-14).

31:15 is an interesting verse. Why is "Rachel weeping for her children?" Because when Babylon exiled the people of Judah, they passed by Bethlehem, Rachel's burial place," on their way to captivity. "Rachel wept for her descendants" as they stumbled past her grave. But Rachel need not weep any longer because Yehovah will bring her children, the people of Israel, home (31:16). Jeremiah prophetically sees Rachel's grandchild, Ephraim (representing all of Israel), crying out in repentance (31:18-19). Yehovah also yearns for His people so He will act and bring them back (31:20). He tells His people to remember their way home (31:21). When they return, Israel will become idyllic (31:23-24). At this point, Jeremiah awakens. God gave him this prophecy through a dream.

The Lord's words sum up Jeremiah's ministry to him. "See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant" (1:10). Previously, Jeremiah spoke of Judah's uprooting, tearing down, destruction, and demolition. Now comes Jeremiah's words of Israel's rebuilding and replanting (31:27-28). In the new order, God will demand individual responsibility for sin rather than generational responsibility.

And now we come to one of the most remarkable prophecies in scripture – the New Covenant Promise. First, the word "new" here doesn't mean something brand new, as if it never existed. The connotation is something that's already existed which is renewed. What has already existed is the Sinai/Mosaic covenant. God is going to renew that covenant into a better covenant. Why is that needed? Because the people of Israel were unable to keep

their commitment to it. Why? Because they didn't have the hearts for it. It's tough to follow the rules when your heart urges you to break them to satisfy yourself. That's not just Israel's problem – *it's our problem, too!*

We're all born spiritually dead, and our hearts have no desire to follow God. Israel continually broke their covenant with God because their hearts weren't in it. Therefore, Israel (and all of us) need a heart transplant. This change of heart is what's coming in the New Covenant Promise.

The New Covenant won't be like the old one that Israel couldn't keep (31:31-33). It will be better because the commands will be written on their hearts. In other words, they will know what God wants and will want to obey. Obedience is what will identify who belongs to God and who doesn't. *It's all about obedience!* Furthermore, all of God's people will know Him intimately. No one will need to clue someone else in about the Lord. God's people will have first-hand knowledge of God, not second-hand. Yehovah "will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin" (31:34).

Yehovah affirms His covenant with Israel as unbreakable (but adjustable, as we've seen). "If this fixed order departs from before me (the sun, moon, and stars)—this is the Lord's declaration—only then will Israel's descendants cease to be a nation before me forever." (31:36). Moreso, "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will I reject all of Israel's descendants because of all they have done—this is the Lord's declaration" (31:37). Do you grasp what this means? Yes, God loves all the nations on earth and every person of those nations. But Yehovah created Israel through a miracle by enabling an elderly man and a post-menopausal woman to conceive a child. They are beloved and unique to God and carry a tremendous blessing and responsibility among the nations. Even though Yehovah had to chastise Israel repeatedly, He never abandoned them. On the contrary, He ensured Israel prevailed as a people and a nation because He still has great plans for them.

Chapter 31 ends with God's promise that Jerusalem will be rebuilt and never "be uprooted or demolished again." Therefore, this places this chapter in the End Times and into the Messianic Age.

Chapter 32 begins with another prophetic object lesson through Jeremiah's land purchase. Jeremiah is imprisoned in the guard's courtyard in the palace (32:2). The prophet had been locked up because of the Lord's word about the city's destruction, and King Zedekiah's capture was likely seen as cowardice and sedition, and it demoralized the people, especially with the false prophets declaring that Jerusalem will not fall.

During this time in prison, God tells Jeremiah that his cousin will come to him and ask Jeremiah to exercise the right of redemption to buy his cousin's land (32:6-7). The right of redemption is part of the Torah and ensures that family land stays with the original family allocation. This visit indeed happened, so Jeremiah knew it was the Lord's word telling him to go ahead and do this. Why is this important? Because Babylon had laid siege outside Jerusalem's gates, and Jeremiah had prophesied the people would either be killed or exiled. Why redeem family land if the Lord will make you abandon it? It doesn't make sense.

After the transaction is signed, Jeremiah tells his stenographer, Baruch, to seal the copies in an earthen jar, so they last a long time. And here's the prophetic meaning – even though the land will be emptied and desolate, the people of Judah will return and once again make land transactions, and life will continue. This prophecy and prophetic action is a message of hope from Yehovah (32:13-15).

Jeremiah responds to God with praise for His almighty power and sovereignty. He made a covenant with Israel, they disobeyed and broke it, and the Lord brought on the covenant punishment of warfare and exile as He promised. Yehovah responds, "Yes, there is nothing too difficult for Me. Even though I will use the Babylonians to destroy and burn this city, punishing and sterilizing it of its peoples' idolatry, I can and will bring My people back." When the people return, Yehovah will create in them "integrity of heart and action" (32:42), i.e., the New Covenant (so you can now see why this chapter follows chapter 31). We know this is an End Time prophesy because the Lord uses words and phrases like "permanent covenant, never turn away, and never again" (32:40). When the time comes for Israel to enter into the New Covenant, God will restore their fortunes and bless them tremendously.

INSIGHT

I want to point out a few things about the New Covenant. First, the context places it at the end of human history when human dominion ends on earth, and the whole world is placed under God's rule as it was in Eden. People will still have rulership and stewardship responsibilities, but God will rule the earth. Jesus will sit on His throne in Jerusalem as Israel's King (Ezekiel 37:24; Revelation 20:4). Nations and people groups will still exist under their kings and leaders, but all will bend the knee to Jesus in Israel. According to Jeremiah, it will be at the transition point between the age of human dominion and the messianic age when God will gather all of His people (the Jews) home to Israel and renew the Sinai/Moses covenant as the New Covenant. The difference between the Sinai/Moses covenant and the New Covenant is simple. Instead of the Torah written on stone and parchment, God will write His law on peoples' hearts. They will

have a new heart that responds to God and a new spirit (spiritual regeneration). God will put His Holy Spirit in His people to help them live God's way and want to do so. (Ezekiel 11:16-20, 36:24-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34). Furthermore, the Sinai/Moses Covenant was ratified and sealed with animal sacrifices. The New Covenant was ratified and sealed in Jesus' blood. So, the difference between the Sinai/Moses Covenant and the New (Renewed) Covenant is the location of the Law, the changed nature of the person, and the blood by which it is sealed.

Second, the New Covenant began about 2,000 years ago. Surprise! On the eve of sealing the New Covenant and making it available to all, Jesus gathered His Jewish disciples for Passover. The Passover explained what Jesus was about to do – be the “blood of the Lamb” that would cause death to “pass over” God's people, all those who gathered in “God's Household” for salvation from God's punishment on the kingdom of darkness. But during the Passover meal, Jesus said that His blood would be the sacrifice that sealed the New Covenant. “In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, ‘This cup (the third cup of Passover that represents the Passover Lamb's blood) is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:20). Therefore, Jesus set the stage for the New Covenant at His death.

Third, the New Covenant is set in motion when the Holy Spirit is poured out on people. Up to the Day of Pentecost (which in Hebrew is *Shavu'ot*, “Weeks”), the Holy Spirit would rest *on* people for specific functions (prophet, priest, king). On *Shavuot*, the Holy Spirit came to live *in* people (Acts 2:4). This was THE SIGN that the New Covenant had begun because Jeremiah's prophecy said, “*I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people*” (31:33). Ezekiel's parallel prophecy says, “*I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances*” (Ezekiel 36:27).

So what's going on? The New Covenant began 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, 10 days after He ascended to heaven to begin His intercessory work, and on the day the Holy Spirit arrived. The Jewish believers entered that covenant, and later, God showed the messianic Jewish leaders that He was inviting the Gentiles to join, according to His plan. Here's the point: *The fulfillment of the New Covenant is when ALL the Jewish people embrace Jesus as their Savior and King at His return. He will transform an entire nation into born-again New Covenant people who will love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.* May that day come quickly!

August 20 : Scriptures Jeremiah 33-35

SUMMARY

Chapter 33 picks up Jeremiah's continuing saga as a prisoner in the courtyard of the guards (from ch. 32). Jerusalem is under siege. People have torn down houses to reinforce the city's defenses. Despite this, many will die, and their corpses will fill the houses (33:5) because of the Lord's anger. However, Yehovah tells Jeremiah that He will return to His people after their punishment and bring "health and healing to it and indeed heal them" along with abundant peace (33:6). He will purify the people from their sins and forgive them. God's vision of restoration must have amazed Jeremiah as the prophet was standing amid utter desolation with the smell of death all around him. Not only will the city be restored, but the cities, pasturelands, and countryside will also be.

When will this happen? In the days when Yehovah places His King, from David's line, known by the nickname "The Righteous Branch, on Israel's throne. Israel will also have a High Priest with Levite priestly assistants ministering (33:19-32). This is God's *unbreakable* covenant promise regarding Israel's kingship and the priesthood.

In chapter 34, Jeremiah *again* goes to King Zedekiah to tell him what the Lord has declared – the city will fall, and Zedekiah will be captured. (You'd think the king would have gotten it through his thick skull by now!) But the Lord adds a special addendum. King Zedekiah will be exiled but survive. He will live in Babylon in peace, and when he dies, he'll be honored (34:5).

Well, you have to give the Jerusalemites an "A" for effort (but an "F" for failure). They start doing the right thing by covenanting to free their servants during the crisis. But then they broke their covenant (see the problem?) and forced their servants back into service. These aren't slaves, and Israelites could only do that with people from the nations around them. These were Hebrew servants (34:9-10), fellow Judeans who agreed to work for their master (employer) to get themselves out of a financial problem. Well, God doesn't take kindly to those who break their word. He was pleased when they followed the intent of the Torah to set indentured servants free but became angry when they forced them back into servitude. Therefore, because they profaned His name by breaking the covenant they had made in His name, Yehovah is granting the violators freedom – to die by the sword, plague, or famine (34:17). Why will they die? Because the covenant they made was a blood covenant. By slicing animals in two and walking between the part, the covenant partners declare, "May what happened to these animals happen to me if I break this covenant." And they call on God's name to enforce the punishment. They broke their covenant, so God will execute the death penalty for the sake of His name, which they

invoked. Even though the Babylonians are withdrawing (which prompted the violators to take back their servants), God will bring the Babylonian army back to complete the job (34:21-22).

We get another object lesson in chapter 35. This time it focuses on the Rechabites, the descendants of Rechab, whose son, Jonadab, commanded his family never to drink wine or settle down with houses, fields, or any other agriculture. Jeremiah invites them to the Temple to drink wine, and they all refuse. They inform the prophet that they've obeyed their "father" for generations and remain tent-dwellers to that day. The only reason the Rechabites live in Jerusalem is the besieging Babylonian army that would have attacked them in the countryside.

God's point is made. Rechab's descendants obey a man's command for generations, but the people of Israel disobey their God's commands generation after generation. For that reason, God will smite the Jerusalemites. As for the Rechabites, "Rechab will never fail to have a man to stand before me always" (35:19), which means a God will always have a Rechabite serving Him as a priest.

INSIGHT

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). Yes, this verse's context is Yehovah's judgment against Jerusalem, but the statement encourages us. If God revealed great and incomprehensible things that Jeremiah didn't know, He could do the same for us should He choose. In fact, Jesus gives a similar promise to His disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come" (John 16:13). Does this apply only to Jesus disciples that were a part of His inner circle at the Passover or for all His disciples? Good question. If the Spirit speaks what He hears, did the Holy Spirit stop hearing from the Father and the Son after the first century? Hardly. Do we no longer need to have God's truth revealed to us? No. Every generation needs God's truth revealed to them. Do we no longer need to know "what is to come?" No. When the Father needs us to know what's to come, the Holy Spirit is the one through whom He gets that info to us (see the prophet Agabus, Acts 11:28, 21:10). So call on the Lord! Don't be shy. Ask Him to speak to you through His Spirit.

August 21 : Scriptures Jeremiah 36-38

SUMMARY

Chapter 36 is easy to follow. It's the account of Jeremiah dictating his prophetic words to his scribe, Baruch, who then reads it to the people gathered in the Temple. The officials hear the words and take the scroll to the impious King Jehoiakim, who listens, shreds the scroll as it's read, and dispatches guards to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. Not a smart move! However, God commands Jeremiah to write another scroll with the original words and additional prophetic material. I'm just sayin' this is remarkable! God inspires Jeremiah to write down "all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim, Judah's king, had burned in the fire." Either Jeremiah had incredible powers of recollection, or the Holy Spirit greatly inspired him. I believe the Holy Spirit miraculously repeated what was on the previous scroll. This event should reassure us that though 40 authors scribed the Bible over almost 1,500 years, the Holy Spirit can preserve His Word for all generations. We can rely on it as long as people are faithful to translate it with care under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Chapter 37 occurs just before Jeremiah is arrested by King Zedekiah and put under guard (see ch. 32:1-3). Even though Zedekiah, his officers, and the Judahites paid no mind to the Lord's words through Jeremiah, they still sent messengers to the prophet to ask him to pray for the situation (37:3). The Babylonians had been besieging the city, but the army heard that Pharaoh was marching out from Egypt to confront Babylon. So the Babylonians broke camp to meet Pharaoh's troops. This reprieve provided much-needed relief to the people in Jerusalem. However, King Zedekiah wanted to know if this was a permanent withdrawal. Jeremiah's answer? Nope. He'll be back, and this city will fall. Even if you defeated Babylon's army, the badly injured Babylonian soldiers would be able to attack and smite Jerusalem.

During the reprieve, Jeremiah leaves to check on his family's land but is accused by Irijah of defecting to the Babylonians (aka Chaldeans). Jeremiah is arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. King Zedekiah calls Jeremiah to a private talk where Jeremiah repeats the King's fate. He also asks Zedekiah not to send him back to jail because he'll die there. So, Zedekiah puts Jeremiah into custody in the guard's courtyard. Ta-da! That's how Jeremiah gets there.

But sadly, that's not the end of Jeremiah's troubles. He continues with the same message from the Lord, "Surrender to the Babylonians, or you'll die." The king's officials don't like the message because, in their eyes, it weakens the citizens' morale. Everyone knows that within Jerusalem's walls, the people have a chance. If they were to go outside, the

Babylonians would surely kill them all. Duh! Jeremiah's message is totally counter-intuitive (and that's how the Lord's words often come across to us). After hearing the officials' report, King Zedekiah permits them to do what's needed to quiet Jeremiah. The officials take Jeremiah and drop him in a cistern, a deep pit in the ground used to collect water. That's not bad in the dry season. In the wet season, it's full of water, and Jeremiah could have eventually drowned. Since there was only mud in it, this event likely took place in mid-summer. A compassionate Cushite (Ethiopian today) named Ebed-melech (Servant of the King) saves Jeremiah with the help of 30 guys, and Jeremiah returns to the courtyard of the guards.

The chapter ends with Jeremiah's private conversation with the King reiterating the Lord's warning – surrender, and the city is spared or resist, be captured, and the city burned.

INSIGHT

I'm so completely impressed with how the Lord watches over His word. 1 Peter 1:25 says, "but the word of the Lord endures forever..." and Psalm 199:89 says, "Lord, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven." God's word is "living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12) and "like fire...and like a hammer that pulverizes rock" (Jeremiah 23:29). God not only preserved His word after King Jehoiakim burned it up, Yehovah preserved it up to our day. Gee, do you think the Lord wants us to have His word? Duh.