

Jeremiah 33: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Jeremiah chapter 33. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard. Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name. Call to me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege mounds and against the sword. They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil. Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.

I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth, who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. Thus says the Lord, In this place of which you say, It is a waste without man or beast, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring thank-offerings to the house of the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first says the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, In this place that is waste, without man or beast, and in all of its cities, there shall again be habitations of shepherds, resting their flocks, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely, and this is the name by which it will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, Thus says the Lord, If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, Have you not observed that these people are saying, The Lord has rejected the two clans that he chose,

Thus they have despised my people, so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the Lord, If I have not established my covenant with day and night, and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant, and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy on them. Jeremiah chapter 33 is the last chapter of Jeremiah book of consolation. It connects with the previous chapter and its timing. It's also in the period of Jeremiah's confinement in the court of the God during the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon.

When human hopes fail, the Lord reminds his people and the prophet of his identity. He is the one who created and the one who upholds the world in his creation and his providence. The name of the Lord is declared here as an assurance. It recalls all of the things that he has done. The Lord invites Jeremiah, and perhaps by extension the people, to call to him. He will answer them and show them great and hidden things. Jack Lumbum notes that this is related to the phrase in Deuteronomy, great cities fortified up to heaven. The point here is that things otherwise inaccessible, truths of the divine counsel, will be made known to the prophet if he asks.

[4 : 52] Judahites are at this time crowded in Jerusalem to fight the besieging Chaldeans. They've torn down the houses of the city and even royal buildings to fortify the inside of the city wall against the opposing army of the Chaldeans. Their efforts, however, will be futile. All they will be doing is gathering more bodies to be struck down by the Lord in his wrath. The Lord has hidden his face from them, and he won't hear their cries or their prayers. However, the present judgment will pass, and the Lord will heal and will restore the city. The futile hope expressed in places like Jeremiah chapter 8 verse 22. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? Will finally be realized. The city will be re-established in peace and security. The fortunes of Judah and Israel will be restored. The damning slate of their sins will be wiped clean. Their guilt and impurity will be dealt with. The Lord will delight in the city once more, and rather than being a byword among the nations, the Lord's grace city will provoke fear and praise among the Gentiles when they see what the Lord has done for his people.

Several earlier oracles spoke about the desolation of the city, describing it in terms of the silencing of voices. Jeremiah chapter 7 verse 34. And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste. In chapter 25 verse 10. Moreover I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. The situation, however, will be completely reversed. The silent, desolate city will once more be filled with the voices of inhabitants, voices raised in song, voices of gladness and laughter, voices declaring the praise of the Lord as they make their way to the rebuilt house of the Lord. The dead city will be raised up to a new youthful life.

Habitations of shepherds and their resting flocks will be restored in all of the different regions of the land. The list here resembles the list at the end of the preceding chapter. Like the oracle of verses 10 to 11, verses 12 to 13 seem to speak from a time, whether in the present or a future projected by the prophetic message, in which Jerusalem and Judah is desolate. The statement, behold the days are coming, is found on several occasions in Jeremiah's prophecy. Here it introduces a promise of the restoration of Israel and Judah's political life and nationhood through the raising up of a righteous branch for David. The words of verses 14 to 16 are pretty much the same as those in chapter 23, verses 5 to 6. Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely and this is the name by which he will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. The re-establishment of David's house and reign is an important theme in several prophecies. The condemnation of the false shepherds in Ezekiel chapter 34 also contains this theme in verses 23 to 24. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord, I have spoken. In Zechariah chapter 3 verse 8.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are assigned. Behold, I will bring my servant the branch. Zechariah chapter 6 verses 12 to 13.

And say to him, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the branch, for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne, and there shall be a priest on his throne, and the council of peace shall be between them both. In Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1.

[9 : 02] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit. It might seem that David's family tree is about to be cut off. Indeed, at the end of chapter 22, Jehoiakim seems to be doomed to die without an heir. Matthew chapter 1 suggests that this was overcome, most likely through adoption. The promised king would be good and wise. He would execute justice and righteousness, the fundamental duties of the king, the sign that the king knew the Lord.

The reference to Judah and Israel also suggests a kingdom that is no longer divided. This will be fulfilled when the Lord has gathered his people from all of the lands to which they have been scattered.

In the earlier, almost identical prophecy in chapter 23, the expression the Lord is our righteousness was designed to play off the name of Zedekiah as the last king of Judah. His name meant, my righteousness is the Lord, and it stood as an indictment upon him as he failed to live up to it.

It promised something great, but it was hollow. Here, however, the expression is not used to name the descendant of David, the true Zedekiah. Rather, it is used to name the city of Jerusalem.

This is similar to prophecies such as Isaiah chapter 1 verse 26. Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Also the very last verse of the book of Ezekiel in chapter 48 verse 35.

[10 : 24] And the name of the city from that time on shall be, the Lord is there. In verses 17 to 18, there is a promise of the restoration of both the kingly and the priestly lines. The duties of the priest are spoken of at more length here. They offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, and make sacrifices forever. Judah is either currently facing or on the brink of facing a great crisis of discontinuity, but it will pass. The two great divinely appointed offices that secured continuity in the people's worship and political life will be established once more, and they will be preserved by the Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity raised unsettling questions about the Davidic covenant and the reliability of the Lord's word. The covenant with David and the covenant with the Levitical priests here are both guaranteed.

The covenant with the Levitical priests might be referring back to Numbers chapter 25 verses 11 to 13. The chapter ends with a divine response to the claims being made by some persons that the Lord had rejected the two clans that he chose. Some have suggested that the two clans here are the Levites in the dynasty of David. However, it is more likely that it is a reference to Israel than

Judah. The identity of the people who are making the claims is not clear either. It may be people of the city, or it may be a reference to the surrounding nations. However, Israel's status is guaranteed by the Lord, by his power, and by his covenant faithfulness. In chapter 31 verses 35 to 37, we found a similar claim to this one here. Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar, the Lord of hosts is his name. If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever. Thus says the Lord, if the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the Lord. The re-establishment and continuance of the people of the Lord is as certain and sure as the Lord's upholding of the structure of the cosmos.

A question to consider, how does Jeremiah chapter 33 give us a model for finding security and certainty in a time when everything seems to be falling apart?