



WEEK

Reflection notes on Jeremiah

September-November 2021

Jeremiah's Call: Hope and Lament in a Time of Change

From 12 September to 28 November, we're exploring the book of Jeremiah in a sermon series. We encourage you to read over the assigned passages of Scripture and to reflect prayerfully in the week before each sermon.

Week 7: Restoration for Judah and Israel (for 24 October; please read chapters 30-33 this week)

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."—Jeremiah 31:33-34

The news of Sydney's lockdown ending no doubt brought a sigh of relief for many. It signalled a time of new possibilities, of opportunities for gathering with others and looking forward to many things we might have taken for granted before lockdown. It's fair to say in some ways, ending lockdown has given us a new perspective on 'freedom.'

Now in the book of Jeremiah, chapters 30-33 also turn to some good news and to a reality that absolutely shapes our perspective on how we live our lives. The themes of these four chapters turn positive, as some commentators point out, reminding us of Jeremiah's early calling in 1:10: *to build and to plant*. Here, he claims God will restore the nation (chapter 30), make a new covenant (31), bring back Israel to the promised land (32) and ultimately honour the Davidic covenant he had made years before (33).

While the previous 29 chapters show the people's perpetual stubbornness that leads them into judgment and exile, we've also learnt of God's persistent call through Jeremiah for Israel to return to the Lord. God's character of grace is across all of those pages, especially as we hear Jeremiah's sober and constant words to God's people. Yes, his faithfulness to God cost him personally. Now he is buoyed

no doubt by the visionary hope he hears from God of this new covenant. He must have listened with relief as the Lord says, ‘The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel’, (31:2).

The vision of this new covenant, of restoration and freedom, is indeed grand and gracious, especially considering Judah’s rebellion. For when God does bring them back, he promises that ‘they will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord,’ (31:12). Another translation here says, ‘they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord.’ They will be ‘like a well-watered garden and they shall languish (or sorrow) no more.’

In other words, God’s desire from the beginning for his people to flourish is not about to change, even given the people’s idolatry and spiritual adultery. ‘My people will be satisfied with my goodness (bounty)’ he declares (31:14), themes we see consistent throughout Scripture (Isaiah 58, John 10:10). No more will they seek satisfaction from false gods or lifeless idols. No more languishing or sorrow. The Lord *will* be their satisfaction, their contentment, their all!

As one commentator says, ‘Once again, God asserts that Judah and Israel’s renewal and permanent relationship with him are as secure as the natural order. God will keep his promises no matter what’ (33:25-26).

So God in his infinite faithfulness brings goodness on his people (32:29-42). His covenant will not be broken—the Lord’s invitation to ‘call on me and I will tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know’ (33:3) rings here louder than ever.

It is the promise of his eternal covenant, the ‘already but not yet’ kingdom that has come through Jesus and will be secured when he comes again. And as we imagine this new covenant, this ultimate restoration and freedom, may we join the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem with ‘sounds of joy and gladness . . . with voices of those who bring thank offerings to the Lord’ (33:10,11). ‘For his love endures forever.’

Reflection Questions:

1. In chapter 32 Jeremiah buys a field during the siege. What do you think this symbolizes?
2. What do these four chapters teach you about God’s character?
3. How does your perspective of God’s eternal covenant affect how you live?

Prayer: *Thank you, Almighty God, that you don’t break your promise of covenant relationship, that you desire our good and invite us to call on you each day. Forgive us for the times we look away from your goodness, and plant in us a hope that we cannot but share with others. Because of Jesus, Amen.*