

Jeremiah 31

Introduction:

Background:

Jeremiah was born in Judah to priestly parents (1:1) during the reign of wicked king Manasseh. He would have been in his early teen years when he received the call of God (1:2) in 627 BCE. It was in 626 (1 Chr 34:3-7) that Josiah began his reforms, and in 627 Ashurbanipal died leading to the rapid disintegration of the Assyrian Empire. Five years later in 622 (2 Chr 34:8-28) they found the Book of the Law in the temple and Josiah accelerated his reform efforts. But Josiah died in 609 and Jeremiah's ministry as God's spokesperson began.

From 609 to 587 Jeremiah preached judgment to the people of Judah, telling them that God was going to send them into captivity just as He had the Northern 10 tribes of Israel. He was hated, despised and an enemy of the state.

In 587 he prophetic preaching came true. Babylon came into Jerusalem, destroyed the city, the walls and the temple and carried back a large percentage of the population into exile (Daniel and Ezekiel). But, Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem. God had called him as a prophet to Judah and he stayed on for the dismal task of continuing to preach to a hardened people who would not even now turn to God despite the judgment of God they had witnessed.

Jeremiah chapter 31 falls during this time period. The book of Jeremiah is not laid out in chronological order, but rather in order according to themes. The message in chapter 31 occurs after the fall of Jerusalem. Most of the book of Jeremiah (and Lamentations) is dark and dismal. Jeremiah was primarily a prophet commissioned by God to take a message of judgment to a people who would not listen.

However, there is a section in chapters 30-33 where the focus changes from judgment to hope. Let's spend some time this morning in Jeremiah 31 asking God to teach us some truths about forgiveness.

Jeremiah 30:1-3 actually serves as an introduction to the whole section. (Read)

Interesting that most older commentaries and Bible scholars saw these chapters as almost exclusively speaking about Christ's coming and the Millennial Kingdom. That is interesting because one of their reasons for interpreting this passage that way, was due to the fact that Israel did not exist as a country and did not possess the Land. This popular interpretation radically changed in 1948 when Israel came back into existence and once again possessed the Land.

Our understanding of the passage is not determined by current events or someone's opinion, but by the clarity of Scripture. What did this message mean to these people when they first heard it? And what event(s) occurred that they would have understood as the fulfillment of this?

We need to understand this, before we can know what God's wants us to learn from it.

In Chapter 31 we find 4 aspects of God's forgiveness vividly display in the restoration of Israel.

The first aspect is found in verses 1-6.

- I. God's forgiveness is complete. (1-6)
 - First God says, "this isn't new stuff, I have been telling you this since I brought you out of Egypt." (1,2)
 - A. Their homes and their lives will be rebuilt. (3,4)
 1. God's refers to Israel has a virgin again. As though she has been completely restored.
 - B. Their land will be replanted. (5)
 - C. Worship in Zion will be restored. (6)
 - The watchmen on Mt. Ephraim indicates that this is for all Israel and not just Judah.
 - Notice that this complete forgiveness does not erase consequences.
 - i. They had to rebuild, God wouldn't build their homes and the temple for them.
 - ii. Replanting a vineyard was a five year process. It took four years for the vine to produce a crop and the forth years crop (according to Lev.) was the Lord's. So it would be five years before they would enjoy the fruit of the vine.

The second aspect is found in verses 7-14.

- II. God forgives for His own glory. (7-14)
 - A. The people will return rejoicing. (7)
 - B. No one will be left out. (8)
 1. This indicates that there is still an aspect of this prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled (some of which was in 1948). During the restoration from Babylonian Captivity people did not come from every direction.
 - C. They will return with a realization that they offended their father. (9)

- D. All the people (Israel and other nations) will be directed to focus on God. (10-14)
 - 1. His redemption and ransom of his flock. (10,11)
 - 2. His abundant goodness (12-14)

The third aspect is found in verses 15-30.

- III. God's forgiveness is conditioned on individual repentance. (15-30)
 - Notice that I did not say God's forgiveness is unconditional.
 - A. We are given a powerful picture of Rachel mourning over the total destruction of her rebellious children. (15)
 - B. God promises that there is still yet hope. (16-17)
 - C. God's promise of restoration and forgiveness comes as a result of Ephraim's repentance. (18-20)
 - D. Even the physical instruction regarding the landmarks and signposts is a picture of repentance. (21,26)
 - Repentance = "turn the other way"
 - A. Individual sin and individual repentance are in view. (27-30)
 - Vs. 29 is a proverbial saying claiming that children will suffer for sins they did not commit, but their fathers did.

The fourth aspect is found in verses 31-40.

- IV. God's forgiveness is everlasting. (31-40)
 - 31-34 = The high point of Jeremiah's theology. He is outlining here, the most significant aspect of God's future relationship with His people.
 - A. This 'New Covenant' was described by Jeremiah to the people in Judah during the exile. (31)
 - B. This 'New Covenant' would replace the one they broke previously. (32)
 - C. This 'New Covenant' would not be written on temporal stones, but on their heart (inner man – the part of them that lives for eternity). (33)
 - D. This 'New Covenant' will result in God's forgiveness and promise "not to remember their sins anymore." (34)

- E. This forgiveness found in the 'New Covenant' is as certain as the sun, moon, stars and sea. (35,36)
- F. This forgiveness found in the 'New Covenant' is as certain as it is that no one will be capable of measuring all of space the all of this planet. (37)
- G. God will establish His City for ever, as a sign of His everlasting forgiveness. (38-40)

Conclusion:

1. Have you experienced God's forgiveness in your life?
 - He is the same God and He offers this same forgiveness to all who will believe and repent.
2. As a believer are you experiencing this forgiveness on an ongoing basis?
 - God is still in the business of forgiving His children.

God promises complete everlasting forgiveness for His glory to all those who repent.