

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today's topic is A DISCIPLE SHARES WHAT HE LEARNS FROM JEREMIAH. **SHARING FROM SELECTED CHAPTERS FROM JEREMIAH**

This past week we have read, meditated and prayed from Jeremiah chapters 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36 and 37. Now we will use our notes to share important truths and lessons from some of these chapters.

(S) **Jeremiah 30:5-11** is a prophecy concerning the return from exile and the coming Messiah King.

First. Verse 5-7 describes God's present judgement. It pictures the misery of the people during the siege of Jerusalem, just before Judah's exile to Babylon in 586 B.C. It will be "the time of Jacob's trouble", a time of fear.

Second. Verse 8-11 describes God's future salvation. On that future day of salvation, God will break the yoke of slavery and tear the bonds of living under foreign rulers and foreign laws (8). Instead of serving foreigners as slaves in Babylon, they will serve God as free people in the land of Israel (9). The fact that God will bring their "descendants" from a distant land shows that the exile will last till the next generation and only their descendants will return from Babylon to Israel (10)(29:10). After that God will raise for them David, their king, whom they will serve (9). And God will completely destroy all the nations where they were slaves (11).

This is a clear reference to the return of Judah from exile in Babylon, the first coming of Jesus Christ and the final judgement of the nations at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Just like all the prophets of the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah saw the whole future of God's mighty acts as mountain ranges in the distance, without being able to distinguish the distance between one mountain range and the next mountain range. Like all the prophets in the Old Testament, Jeremiah prophesied that the return of Israel from exile in Babylon and the restoration of the land to Israel would be immediately followed by the coming of the Messiah King and these events would be immediately followed by the final judgement of the godless nations. Only in the light of the New Testament do we know that the first coming of the Messiah took place 500 years after the return from exile and 2000 years after this event the final judgement has not yet taken place.

(T) **Jeremiah 30:12-17** is a prophecy concerning the perishing of Judah as a nation and their future restoration.

First. Verse 12-15 describes God's present judgement. The nation of Judah is *figuratively* pictured as a woman who has received an incurable and deadly wound (12). In the past "she had many lovers", that is, foreign nations with whom she made treaties and on whom she relied for help against the world empires, Assyria and Babylon. In Jeremiah's time Judah's situation became desperate, because these nations had let her down to perish (14). Judah became like a woman scorned and deserted. No one pleads her cause (13). Her former allies care nothing for her. Judah must realise that it is God who has allowed this to happen in order to punish Judah for her many sins and her great guilt against God (14-15).

Second. Verse 16-17 describes God's future salvation and judgement. God is aware that the godless nations mock him, because his people went into exile. They call Judah "an outcast". The mockery of the godless nations will be one reason why God will again have mercy for his people. Because these godless nations think that God's people no longer exists and that no one needs to reckon with them, God himself will heal the wound of his people and restore her health. God will save his people because his own honour is at stake (17)! And he will cause the godless, oppressive and persecuting nations to suffer the same destiny. They too will be plundered and go into exile.

(S) **Jeremiah 30:18-22** is a prophecy concerning the rebuilding of Israel and the coming Messiah.

First. Verse 18-20 describes the rebuilding of Israel. After the return from exile from Babylon, Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the number of people in Israel will increase. They will again meet as a community in the presence of God and they will sing and rejoice. But the godless, oppressive nations will be punished.

Second. Verse 21 describes the coming Messiah in human terms. The Messiah is called Israel's "leader" and "ruler", who will arise from the nation of Israel. God says that he will give this ruler access, so that he will be able to come close to God. This is exceptional, because God asks who among men would dare to come close to God. Every ordinary human being is a sinner and will die if he dared to approach God, because the holy "God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). But this leader of Israel is able to do what no other human being can do: he can come close to God, because he is absolutely sinless and much more than an ordinary human being! He is the Messiah. In the light of the New Testament, we know that Jesus Christ came into the presence of God as the Mediator between man and God. Hebrews 9:24-26 says, "He will enter heaven itself to appear *for us* in God's presence. He will appear *once for all* to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Third. Verse 22 describes *the new people of God*, not as the result of returning from exile, but as the result of what the Messiah will do! Because of what the Messiah will do, Israel will again have the ideal relationship: they will be God's people and the God of the Bible will be their God. In the light of the New Testament, both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ will be God's people and the God of the Bible will be their God" (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10)! According to the New Testament, what has been promised to the believers in Israel during the Old Testament period is also promised to all believers of all the Gentile nations after the Old Testament period (2 Cor 1:20).

(T) **Jeremiah 31:2-6** is a prophecy concerning the meeting between God and his people. This is a *figurative* description of the future return from exile to the land of Israel. "All the clans of Israel" (1), that is, the remnant of the ten tribes of Israel and the remnant of the two tribes of Judah will return from exile. They are pictured as coming straight through the desert from Babylon to the land of Israel (2). In the distance they see the Lord coming closer to them and the Lord says, "I have loved you with an eternal love; I have drawn you with loving kindness" (3). The word "eternal" describes not only time, but divinity. It describes the fact that God loved Israel, not just from the beginning of its history, but because of whom God himself is. God's love for the believers in Israel is not based on whom Israel is, but on whom God is. After punishing Israel's sins, he will again show favour to her. Israel will again be rebuilt. She will again be like a virgin and rejoice greatly (4). The Israelites will again plant vineyards (5) and have watchmen who guard their fields by night. And the Israelites will again go up to Jerusalem for the annual festivals (6).

(S) **Jeremiah 31:7-14** is a prophecy concerning the restoration of all the tribes of Israel.

First. Verse 7-9 describes the promise that God will save *all the tribes of Israel*. All the nations in the world, including "the coastlands", are called to rejoice because of what God will do to his people, Jacob. "The coastlands" are the countries alongside the Mediterranean Sea, which from Israel's point of view were the most distant countries. Israel is called "Jacob", which means "deceiver" and emphasises the fact that Israel *does not deserve God's grace*. The name "Israel" means "he wrestled with God" and emphasises the fact that God's people *will eventually overcome*. Both names "Jacob" or "Israel" is an indication of all the tribes of Israel. Israel is called "the foremost of the nations", because God chose her from all the nations to be his special people (Am 6:1; Dt 7:6). The Israel whom God will save by gathering them, ransoming them and redeeming them from the hand of those stronger than they is "the remnant of Israel". Not every descendant of the nation of Israel, but only a remnant will be saved (3:14). Not every descendent of the nation of Israel, but only the believers in Israel belong to God's spiritual Israel (Rom 9:6). All God's promises of salvation to "Israel" are in fact made to only the minority of believers in Israel.

God will bring Israel from the land of the north, that is, from the countries Assyria and Babylon, to which they have been exiled, and which can only be reached via the north. God will guide them tenderly. God calls himself "Israel's father" and he calls Ephraim "his firstborn son". When the name 'Ephraim' is mentioned besides the name 'Israel', the intention is to indicate the ten tribes of the former northern kingdom of Israel. Not only the remnant of Judah, but also the remnant of the other ten tribes will share in God's glorious salvation. Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's children, but according to Jacob's promise in Genesis 48:5, they received the same position as the oldest two sons of Jacob. According to 1 Chronicles 5:1-2, they received the rights of firstborn because of Reuben's sin against his father. And according to Genesis 48:19-20, although Ephraim was the youngest son of Joseph, he received the first place. That is why Ephraim is called "the firstborn son". It emphasises that God will certainly not give up the former ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Second. Verse 10-14 describes the promise that God will restore them to the land Israel. God, who scattered Israel to foreign nations, will also gather them from there. He will gather them like a shepherd gathers his sheep. He will redeem them from the power of those who enslaved them and bring them back to "Zion", which is here a another name for the land of Israel. They will rejoice and have a great abundance of grain, wine, oil, herds and flocks. They will be like a well-watered garden and they will sorrow no more. Young and old will share in the joy. The priests will have an abundance to eat, because of the many sacrifices the people will bring. All the people will enjoy the abundance which God will graciously grant to them.

(T) **Jeremiah 31:15-22** is a prophecy concerning the future return and a call to repentance.

First. Verse 15-17 describes the mourning of Rachel in Ramah for her children. Rachel was the wife of the patriarch Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Ephraim was Joseph's 'firstborn' and represents the kingdom of the northern ten tribes. Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son and represents the kingdom of the southern two tribes. Ramah was a town on the border of these two kingdoms. It was also the place from which Nebuchadnezzar took the Israelites into exile to Babylon (40:1). While she lived, Rachel passionately desired to have children. Here, in *figurative* language, Rachel is pictured as mourning because her children are taken into exile and she has no child left. This is a sad picture of the end of both kingdoms of Israel. God comforts her by promising that there is hope for her future. Her work of bringing them into the world and raising them to adulthood will be rewarded. Her children will in the future return to their own land.

Second. Verse 18-20 describes the repentance of Ephraim. In these two verses, the northern tribes accept God's discipline of their sin and plead for God's help in their repentance. They acknowledge that in the past they had behaved like an unruly calf, stubborn, disobedient and uncontrollable. They plead with God *to cause them to turn*. Then they will turn. Thus they acknowledge that they cannot turn with all their hearts to God without God's sovereign inner regeneration. They acknowledge that God will cause them to repent and to feel deeply ashamed of their former life. God answers their acknowledgement by stating (in affirmative question form) that Ephraim is his son, the child in whom he delights. And God says that he has not forgotten the northern ten tribes, but yearns for their repentance.

Third. Verse 21-22 describes Jeremiah's call to both Ephraim and Judah to return. This prophecy could well have been made at Ramah just before the exiles were deported to Babylon. Jeremiah exhorts the exiles to set up road signs along the way to Babylon, so that these could guide them back to Israel when they return. Then Jeremiah passes over the whole period of exile and calls the exiles, which are viewed as being in Babylon, to return back to Israel. He exhorts them to doubt no longer, because God is going to create something new. The return of a whole nation from exile is humanly speaking impossible. However, God is going to make the impossible possible!

(S) Jeremiah 31:31- 34 is a prophecy concerning the new covenant.

First. The old covenant. The old covenant consisted of God's covenant made with Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai. After God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, he gave them the Ten Commandments to keep as a way of living as God's people. Israel failed miserably and turned again and again to idolatry and to selfish lives, thus breaking the old covenant! Therefore there was a need for a new covenant that will not be like the old covenant.

Second. The new covenant. The new covenant cannot refer to Israel's restoration after the exile simply because the other prophecies in these chapters deal with the restoration of Israel. The prophecies in these chapters also contain prophecies concerning the Messiah (30:9,21-22)! The first coming of the Messiah took place 500 years after the return from exile!

Moreover, the contrast in Jeremiah 31 is not between Israel before the exile with Israel after the exile. The contrast is between the old covenant that God made in the past at Sinai with the new covenant that God will make in the future at the first coming of the Messiah. Nowhere in the Bible is the restoration of Israel from exile regarded as such a big event as to be called "a new covenant" or a new beginning of the nation of Israel. Rather, both the prophecies and history in the Old Testament give the impression that after the return from the Babylonian exile *Israel simply continued the old covenant* of the law, the temple, the priests and Levites, the sacrifices, etc. just as she did before the exile. The old covenant represented the beginning or constitution of Israel as God's people. The new covenant will represent the beginning or constitution of *the new people of God*.

Finally, in the light of Hebrews 8:8-13 in the New Testament, there can be no doubt that this new covenant refers to the new covenant that God realised at the first coming of Christ! In the old covenant of the Old Testament, God's law was written outside people's hearts on two stone tables. But in the new covenant in the New Testament, God's law will be written inside people's hearts and minds! The contrast is not between outward and inward obedience to the law, because God's laws written on the two stone tables also intended to rule the hearts of people. *The real contrast is that the old covenant led to the constitution of the old people of God, whereby the bond that bound them together as God's people was purely outward, namely their nationality. The new covenant will lead to the constitution of the new people of God, whereby the bond that binds them together as God's people will be inward, namely regeneration.* Thus, while the people of the old covenant were bound together by birth or nationality, the people of the new covenant will be bound together by rebirth or regeneration. Everyone belonging to this new covenant people of God will not be characterised by something outward, like nationality or particular religious ceremonies. They will be characterised by the fact that God has sovereignly written his laws in their heart and mind, so that they will truly be God's people. The determining factor will be God's inward work in the heart and mind of people, by their personal relationship to God, in which each individual will know God personally and intimately. This is the real contrast between the old and new covenant. The old covenant constituted the beginning of God's people during the Old Testament period. The new covenant will constitute the beginning of God's people during the New Testament period right up to the second coming of Christ.

In the old covenant, the laws came from the outside and had to be accepted inwardly. God's Old Testament people could not do this perfectly. Again and again the prophets rebuked Israel that they lacked knowledge of God. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knows its master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Jeremiah 4:22 says, "My people are fools; they do not know me. ... They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good." And Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children."

The words, "They will be my people and I will be their God" was always *the ideal* under the old covenant, *but could never be fully realised* under the old covenant. They are fully realised under the new covenant. During the new

covenant, not only teachers, but all God's people will have genuine knowledge of God and know God personally. Christ will make atonement for the sins of believers, remove God's holy anger against their sin and reconcile them to God (1 Pet 3:18).

Third. The new covenant was originally made with the believers of the house of Israel, but will include the believers from all the nations. Jeremiah's prophecy was still a part of the Old Testament revelation. During the Old Testament period, only Israel was God's people. At the first coming, Christ began to gather the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:5-7). After his death and resurrection, he began to gather his sheep from every nation in the world (Jn 10:16; 12:31-32). As a symbol that Jesus Christ had fulfilled all the requirements of the Law and abrogated the Law, the curtain of the temple was torn. *Israel was not substituted by the Church, but Israel was continued and extended in the Church to include believers from all the nations of the world.* What the Old Testament prophets did not know, God revealed to the New Testament apostles, namely, that *believers from all the nations in the world will share in the new covenant on equal terms with the believers in Israel* (Eph 2:11-22; 3:2-6; Gal 3:28).

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.

First. Every day have a quiet time from one chapter from Ezekiel. The selected chapters are Ezekiel 18, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38 and 39. Record the meditations of all your quiet times in a notebook. Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net. Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".