

# 11. JEREMIAH

626-586 BC

Jeremiah was from a priestly family and is regarded as a prophet of doom, warning Judah about the coming judgment that would sweep the next generation away. The Babylonians were the oppressors.

But he also prophesied that after those days God would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel. He would put his law within them and write it on their hearts so that they would all know him, from the least to the greatest. This New Covenant would not depend on obedience to a book of law, but on the empowering, indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus made a new covenant with his disciples and we celebrate it at the Lord's Supper, but the covenant made with Israel still awaits fulfillment.

## **Beyond the Ark of the Covenant** (Jer 3:15-18)

These verses describe Israel's future during the Messianic reign. When the Messiah returns to earth, he will provide Israel with leaders after his own heart who will give them knowledge and understanding. Ancient Judah and Israel will be united as one nation, Israel, as they are today. They will multiply and prosper in their promised land to which they have returned. They will all know the Lord and will have good civil servants to rule over them under the Messiah. Israel will no longer follow the inclinations of their evil hearts.

They will no longer need the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord which disappeared at the Babylonian destruction of the Solomonic temple. The ark was a meeting point for the Lord and his people, a place where he would make his will known to them. In Solomon's temple, the Lord dwelt between the cherubim on the lid of the ark. That was his throne, but during the Messianic reign, the whole of Jerusalem will be called the Lord's throne. Jeremiah doesn't say how that would eventuate, but Isaiah tells us that the glory of the Lord will rise over Jerusalem and

the Lord will be her light during both day and night. Jerusalem at that time will have no need of the sun or moon to give light (Isa 60:1-3, 19-20). All nations will be drawn to that light and gather in Jerusalem to learn his ways. In speaking of New Jerusalem, John says: The city has no need of sun and moon to shine on it, for the glory of the Lord gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations walk by its light, and the world's leaders will bring their glory to it" (Rev 21:23-24).

In those days Israel will live in the land that the Lord gave to their ancestors as an inheritance and all nations will flow to Jerusalem. They will go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob (Isa 2:2-4, Mic 4:1-3) to seek the Lord (Zech 8:22). The Messiah will live in Zion in those days and many nations will join themselves to him and become his people (Zech 2:10-11); presumably neighboring nations who will form part of extended Israel.

### **The reign of the righteous Branch** (Jer 23:3-8)

Here we have a classic example of the oft-repeated prophecies that the Lord will regather Israel to their land, multiply them, and give them good leaders. No one will be missing; the whole nation will be saved and brought back to Israel, from all the countries where the Lord had driven them, including those currently living in the US, UK, Canada, France, and Russia.

The prophecies relate to the millennium after the return of Jesus the Messiah, who is a righteous Shoot (rather than branch), sprouting up from the root or stump of David. Jeremiah (23:5, 33:15), and Zechariah (3:8, 6:12), both build on this imagery begun in Isaiah 4:2. The 'shoot' is the Messiah, the promised offspring of David, who will rule as king and execute justice and rule the world in righteousness. In his days Israel will be saved and will dwell securely. In vs. 6 the Messiah is called "The Lord our Righteousness." The same name is given to Jerusalem (Jer 33:16) because when the Messiah reigns there, he will extend justice and righteousness throughout the land and Jerusalem will be a righteous city. Justification by faith through the death of Christ is not in focus here; we should not interpret OT prophecies by doctrines that were not yet revealed, although the deity of the Messiah and his substitutionary death on the cross for us throw light on why the Messiah should be called "The Lord our

Righteousness". He is God, and it is through him alone that we truly become righteous people.

## **The Lord will summon a sword on all who live on Earth** (Jer 25:29-33)

Jeremiah spoke about the judgment that would be executed on Israel and the surrounding nations by God's servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. However, in this passage, the judgment extends to the whole world.

Peter said that judgment would begin with the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). During the Great Tribulation both Christians and Jews will suffer great persecution resulting in many martyrs. The Lord said he would begin to work disaster in the city that is called by his name and that is brought about by the nations who lay siege to Jerusalem.

The return of the Messiah is portrayed as a noisy descent from heaven. The Lord will roar from his holy dwelling *on high*, he will roar *over* his land, and shout *against* all the inhabitants of the Earth. The tumult will resound to the ends of the Earth as the Lord destroys the wicked who besiege Jerusalem. Disaster will spread from nation to nation. A great storm will arise from the ends of the Earth (Gog). The clamor is the noise of great armies. The number of dead will be enormous, all over the world, and too many to be buried.

In the earlier judgments of this chapter many Middle Eastern countries are named, but here we have the climax of God's judgments on the world. The Lord himself comes and roars like a lion. He is against *all the inhabitants of the Earth*, entering into judgment with *all flesh*. The clamor will resound to the *ends of the Earth*. He will shout like those who tread grapes, "treading the winepress alone (Isa 63:3), "treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God" (Rev 19:15). During this final world war, great armies will stir from the *remote parts of the Earth*. The wicked will be put to the sword in this great world war as the armies slaughter one another.

## **A time of distress for Jacob** (Jer 30:3-11, 18-24)

A day is coming when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess (vs. 3).

This is the promise, and now in these last days, the Lord has brought Israel back to the land that he gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel has taken possession of part of their land, but it is a continual struggle, there have been many battles, and the task is not complete. The biggest battle is yet to come and will be followed by the Messianic era when Israel will serve the Lord their God and ‘David,’ their king.

Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would save Israel from the distant countries where he had scattered them because of their disobedience. They would enjoy peace and security and no one would make them afraid again. The Lord is restoring their fortunes before our very eyes. They were declared a nation in 1948, their ancient cities are being rebuilt; they won control over Jerusalem in 1967. Their population will soon reach ten million and they are regarded among the top ten most powerful nations of the world.

As I write, they are at war with Gaza and under attack from other neighbors. Worse is to come, a time of panic and terror and no peace, a time of great tribulation. None will compare with it. It is called a time of trouble for Jacob. Jesus called it a time of great distress unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again (Mt 24:21). He added: If God had not cut short those days, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect, those days have been shortened.” Jacob will be saved out of it. That time of great distress, the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:14), is a major theme of the book of Revelation, a book written to churches and in which Christians are in focus.

Israel’s yoke of slavery will be broken and they will finally serve the Lord and David their king. ‘David’ is usually interpreted as the Messiah, who is a descendant of David. Vs. 21 declares that Israel’s leader would be one of themselves, no longer would foreigners rule over them. God will make this leader draw near and he will approach him. Who is near to God, if not his own Son, Jesus our great high priest? Israel will once again be God’s people and he will be their God.

Others interpret this David as being the resurrected, original king David. This would be possible, as the saints will be resurrected and their role is to rule the world. It would be appropriate for King David to assume this role but unprecedented. The resurrected saints will dwell in the New Jerusalem and rule over the Earth (Rev 5:10). Hosea and Ezekiel also speak of David as being king or prince over Israel. Ezekiel calls him a shepherd. See Hos 3:5, Ezek 34:23-24, 37:24-25. However, a prince of Israel is mentioned several times in conjunction with the new temple (Ezek 44:3, 45:7, 16, 46:2) and it is clear that he is not the Messiah and equally clear that he is not the resurrected David. Instructions are given concerning giving gifts to his sons (Ezek 46:16-18) and this is not appropriate for the Messiah or a resurrected David.

My anger will rise like storm, it will swirl down on the heads of the wicked like a whirlwind (vs. 23).

This is equivalent to the end-time pouring out of the bowls of wrath on the Earth (Rev 16). It is a time of judgment destined for the latter days when God will accomplish his plan. Israel will be restored to her land, where she will experience the glorious Messianic era, but first, she will have to go through great tribulation while God puts an end to the nations as we know them. The times of the Gentiles, the thousands of years during which Israel has no king, will finally be fulfilled (Lk 21:24).

### **Israel's New Covenant** (Jer 31:31-40)

The New Covenant that the Lord makes with Israel is the New Covenant from which the NT gets its name. The bulk of the Jewish nation rejected their Messiah at his first coming, so this New Covenant still awaits them at the time when the Messiah returns and pours out his Spirit upon them. This promise of a New Covenant for the house of Israel was to replace the Old Covenant which was based on the Law of Moses. It was for the whole nation, all of them from the least to the greatest. Paul connects the New Covenant with Israel to a time when the deliverer will come from Zion and banish ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:26-27). It is at the Lord's coming that all Israel will be saved.

The Lord seals his promise to Israel with an oath. He says that only if the fixed order of the sun, moon, and stars vanish from his sight, will

Israel ever cease to be a nation for him. Only if the heavens can be measured and the world's foundations be explored, will he reject all the descendents of Israel because of what they have done.

Christians are already beneficiaries of the New Covenant, of being born again and having God's law written on their hearts, but the Jews, as a nation, will be last. Because of the rejection of the Messiah at his first coming, their conversion will not take place until the Messiah returns. The first will be last and the last will be first.

Many people among the nations have believed in Jesus and enjoyed the blessing of this New Covenant. Paul told the Corinthians that he was a minister of a New Covenant, not of the letter of the law, but of the Holy Spirit. This prophecy that God will make a New Covenant with Israel is still to be fulfilled. It will happen "after those days" when the Lord restores their fortunes. From that day on, during the millennium, they will all know the Lord, because through the new birth, his law will be in their hearts. He will be their God and they at last will truly be his people. They won't have to encourage each other to know the Lord, because they will all know him and have their sins forgiven, from the least to the greatest.

The night before he died, Jesus was eating the Passover meal with his disciples when he took the cup of wine and said: This cup represents my blood that will be shed for you. It is the blood of God's *New Covenant* with you (Lk 22:20). He was declaring that the New Covenant spoken about by Jeremiah would be ratified by his blood. The disciples were all Jews and they knew about Jeremiah's new covenant. But the New Covenant he made with them would include Gentiles also, it was a covenant for all who would believe in him, the Church. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12. The writer says that "Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant" (Heb 7:21) because it results in the permanent forgiveness of sins (Heb 10:16-18). He adds that it is "an eternal covenant" (Heb 13:20). The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians and the writer stresses throughout that the New Covenant, being better, makes the old one obsolete.

Jesus' said that the New Covenant was in *his* blood, not in the blood of animal sacrifices. He died for all, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul gave instructions on how the Lord's supper should be celebrated by

Christians, but that does not detract from the fact that the New Covenant announced by Jeremiah was a prophecy concerning Israel in a future period when all Israel would be saved. God would write his law on their hearts and they would become his people in a new relationship. He would pour out his Spirit on them and they would be born again just as Christians have experienced. They would all know him and would not need to teach each other to know the Lord.

Jeremiah confirms to us that he was talking about literal Israel and not the Church, which he didn't know about. He added that in those future days, Jerusalem would be rebuilt as the Holy City, to which they would be forever connected. It would never be destroyed or demolished again (Jer 31:38-40). So the New Covenant in Jesus' blood is for both the Church and for Israel. All have their sins forgiven through the blood of Jesus and all will be God's people during the millennium.

## **God's promises to David and the Levites will be fulfilled** (Jer 33:14-22)

The days are coming when God will fulfill this promise to David and cause to arise from among his offspring, a king who will execute justice and righteousness in the *land*. The branch is the Messiah, Jesus. The passage cannot be spiritualized so it is made to refer to the Church. It is tied to Jerusalem which will be called: "The Lord is our Righteousness" because it will be ruled over by the Messiah. David will never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel and the Levitical tribe will never lack a man to minister before the Lord at the altar. It was understood that there would be a time when Israel would be scattered among the nations, but the promise is that the restored monarchy and priesthood, the two pillars of Israel's national identity, would be everlasting. The fulfillment of the prophecy is just as sure as the permanence of day and night, and the impossibility of anyone counting the stars in the sky, or the sand on the seashore.

Neither will it be a reinstatement of the old form of doing things, but a renovation of it. The Messiah, as the sovereign Lord of the universe, will be a perfect king. He will rule in a way that no king has done before. The Messiah, who made the perfect sacrifice through his death on the cross, reconciling fallen humanity and the whole created order

to God, will also be a perfect high priest. Religion and politics will be perfected during the millennium because the Lord will be on the throne as a divine ruler. Without this restoration of the Davidic monarchy *and* the Levitical priesthood, God's great promises made in this passage would fail. The Lord's promise is sure; he will restore the fortunes of the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and will have mercy on them.

The Church is not in focus here, but they also are made to be a kingdom and priests to serve God (Rev 1:6, 5:10). They will share in Christ's reign on earth and have direct access to the presence of God whom they worship.