

“The Return of the King” Jeremiah 33:14-16 Advent Midweek 1 2021

The history of the Children of Israel in the Promised Land was like a great roller coaster ride. Just as a roller coaster slowly makes its way up to the top of the first drop, so also God led Israel, first by Moses and then by Joshua, to the spiritual heights as they conquered the Promised Land. Then, just as things started to settle down in peace and prosperity, the Children of Israel fell spiritually. They plunged down into the depths of spiritual darkness. As they fell, they rejected God’s protection over the land and the surrounding nations invaded and captured both land and people.

Soon the Children of Israel turned once again to the Lord, and they once again rose out of their despair. God rescued them from their enemies, and they prospered once again. The prosperity made them complacent and once more, they plunged into spiritual darkness and rejected God’s protection. The surrounding nations began to capture people and land until the Children of Israel turned back to the Lord. The Lord rescued them, and they prospered once again.

This cycle repeated. But, just like a roller coaster, every spiritual height was not quite as high as the last one, and every spiritual plunge went a little bit deeper than the one before it. Eventually, the spiritual plunge was so deep that the people never turned to the Lord. They were lost.

Soon Israel had a great civil war. The tribe of Judah absorbed the tribe of Benjamin and remained faithful to the descendants of King David, but the Northern Ten Tribes broke off and formed their own nation. The Northern Ten Tribes had nothing but evil kings. Eventually, the Assyrians conquered the Northern tribes and carried them away and resettled the land with their own people. The Northern Ten Tribes became the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Judah in the south was all that was left.

After Babylon gained control over Assyria, they turned their eyes south toward Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord called Jeremiah to give the bad news to Judah. The Babylonians were coming, and they were going to capture Jerusalem. The Scriptures inform us that Babylon had a different attitude toward Jerusalem. After Jerusalem fell, *a captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, “The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place. ³The Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you.”* (Jeremiah 40:2–3) While the Babylonians did not yet believe in God as the one and only true God, they were quite willing to give Him a place of great respect within the pantheon of gods they already revered.

So Jeremiah had the sad job of chastising Judah for their sin and warning them that they would fall to Babylon if they continued to reject God. His calling was very frustrating because every word that He proclaimed in the name of the Lord came true,

but no one listened to him. The Babylonians stripped the gold and silver from the temple and all the other buildings of the city and then they tore Jerusalem down to the ground.

Today’s text from the prophet Jeremiah comes from the time that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had Jerusalem under siege. The Holy Spirit had spoken through Jeremiah and made it abundantly clear that both the king and the people had forsaken their God. They had followed the ways and the religious practices of the world. They had assumed that if they did **just enough** to keep the temple worship going, bringing sacrifices and offerings, then God would be pleased, even appeased, and that he would protect them. After all, he was their God, and they were his people.

Jeremiah had to stand up to false prophets, who “prophesied peace when there was no peace,” and he had to stand up to the king, who refused to believe either that the city would fall or that this was God’s just judgment against him, his leadership, and the sins of all. All this got Jeremiah to become the object of scorn and derision; he was put in stocks and then in prison. Sadly, the people did not come to their senses until it was obvious that Babylon would enter the city ... when they saw that they were to leave their beloved land behind and enter exile in Babylon. It was then that the Lord gave words of comfort to the exiles. Amid all this message of judgment comes a section of his book that speaks of God’s love, his everlasting love and commitment to his people. Yes, God would punish them, with the “tough love” that takes discipline seriously. Yes, their sin had to be punished. Yes, Jerusalem, the “home” of king and people, would be lost, and they would be refugees in exile.

You see, God had a future and a hope for them. Jeremiah spoke of a future for both the king and the city, and he described them both in the same way: *“In those days (those days to come, when God would fulfill his promises once for all) and at that time (a time of God’s choosing, not ours) I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In 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.’ (Jeremiah 33:14–16).* The people were now aliens in a strange land, but they were promised a return home. And, 70 years later, the people returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt it. Their king and kingdom had to be destroyed to teach His people to repent.

Then about 600 years after the time of Jeremiah, Jesus came to Jerusalem and showed Himself to be a new and better king. He was of the house and lineage of David, but His kingdom was not of this world. He was at the same time both David’s son and David’s Lord. He established a new Judah and a New Jerusalem. By the

“The Return of the King” Jeremiah 33:14-16 Advent Midweek 1 2021

precious blood of His sacrifice on the cross, He has made it possible for the people of all nations to be citizens of this New Jerusalem. He is the righteous Branch to spring up for David. People who believe in Him for the forgiveness of their sins may live in this world, but they are no longer of this world. Those who live in this world but are no longer of this world have an eternal home with Jesus ... a place where all is righteousness and no sin can dwell.

While we live here in this world, we have embassies ... homes away from home. Places where God not only dwells with His people, but He also reveals Himself and passes out His gifts. Here the king and His people come together. He feeds us with His word and His body and blood are here to forgive and renew. Here He strengthens us until He calls us home to the New Jerusalem where we shall be safe and secure forever. Amen