DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Consolations of the Prophet

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 30:1 through 33:26

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." (Jeremiah 30:3)

BACKGROUND

In this lesson's text, the sequence of messages telling of impending destruction is interrupted. These four chapters, a message of comfort and future hope, are frequently called "The Book of Consolation" by Bible scholars. Although Jeremiah typically announced judgment and punishment for the sins of the Jewish people, in these chapters he proclaimed God's promise of restoration. God revealed through the prophet that the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would one day return to their land and be reunited.

Although chapters 30 and 31 are not dated, it is probable that Jeremiah wrote some of this prophecy of restoration either while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians or shortly thereafter. Chapters 32 and 33 took place during the siege—the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, while Jeremiah was imprisoned in the court of the guard. Although the Jews would shortly be led into captivity by the Chaldeans, God wanted the people of Judah to know that He still loved them and cared for them. In a merciful revelation of events to come, the Lord foretold a future time of peace and prosperity.

Most commentators agree that the prophecies of Jeremiah 30-33 refer not only to the restoration of Jerusalem after the seventy years of captivity, but also to the regathering of the Jews from all the nations in the end times. Therefore, besides bringing hope to the Jews of Jeremiah's time, these chapters should encourage all those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. In this "Book of Consolation," Christians can find promises of the coming of their King and Priest, Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. According to Jeremiah 30:14-15 and Jeremiah 32:28-35, why was God allowing His people to be taken into captivity and to experience such pain and suffering?

OPENER

NOTES

God was allowing the Jews to experience the consequences of their sins. They had refused to listen to His instruction, and had worshiped idols and committed abominations. This would be an appropriate time to point out to your students that God is a just God, and sin has consequences. However, God is also merciful. Your group may be able to offer examples of times when suffering the consequences of sin led people to repent and turn back to God.

2. Even as the people of Judah were being punished for their sins by God through the Chaldeans, God sent Jeremiah to encourage their hearts. Name at least four aspects of Jeremiah's prophetical utterance in chapter 30 that would have brought encouragement to the people.

Your group should have no difficulty in generating a lengthy list of the specific encouragements listed in this chapter. They will include:

- *Verses 3, 10, and 18—The people will be released from captivity and return to their land.*
- *Verse 8—Their yoke and bonds will be broken.*
- *Verse 9—They will serve the Lord once more.*
- *Verse10—They will enjoy rest, quietness, and freedom from fear.*
- *Verse11—A remnant will be spared.*
- *Verse 17—Israel's incurable wounds will be healed.*
- *Verse 18—Jerusalem will be rebuilt.*
- *Verse 19—The people will rejoice. They will be multiplied, and given honor.*
- *Verse 20—Those who oppress them will be punished.*
- *Verses 21—They will be governed by One of their own, their Messiah.*
- *Verse 22—They will be acknowledged as God's people.*

Point out to your class that this series of prophetical promises, like many others recorded in Scripture, had both a near and a far-reaching meaning. Some commentators liken these dual prophecies to looking at a range of mountain peaks. From a distance, the ridges look as if they are adjacent, but actually, they may be many miles apart. In this chapter, the prophet described both near and far events as if they would all happen soon.

As we consider these prophecies in the light of the current upheaval in the Middle East, we can get a sense of the hope that must have sprung up in the hearts of the Jewish people as they heard the prophet's words. It is yet unclear how the references to end time events will evolve, but we know that they will! To emphasize this point, it might be interesting to collect a few recent headlines from that region of the world

from your daily newspaper or the internet, and discuss what a contrast those headlines present to the beautiful promises listed in these verses.

3. In chapter 31, God continued the theme of the glorious days ahead for Israel and Judah by describing a future time of dancing (verses 4 and 13), planting (verses 5 and 28), and singing (verses 7 and 12). However, in Jeremiah 31:2, God reminded them of an incident from their past. Why would the historical reference in this verse be of encouragement to the Jews?

This verse seems to be a reference to the forty years of wandering in the wilderness after the Children of Israel refused to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Because of their unbelief and disobedience, God ordained that all those who were twenty years of age and older would bleach their bones in the wilderness. However, He still loved His people with an "everlasting love" (verse 3). Their children found grace in the eyes of the Lord and were allowed entry into the Promised Land. Similarly, although the people of Judah would fall to the Chaldeans, their descendants would be allowed to return to their homeland in the future. That message was one of encouragement in the dark days of the moment.

Ask your class: How does God use past trials and victories to encourage us? The point should emerge that as we reflect on God's presence with us in days gone by (even in times of discipline and correction), it reassures us that He will continue to be with us in our present circumstances and into the future.

4. Jeremiah was careful to repudiate the proverb, "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29-30). What is the meaning of this proverb, and why does God reject it?

The proverb means that children suffer for the actions of their fathers. The Jews used this proverb, which is also alluded to in Ezekiel 18:2-3, to avoid taking responsibility for their own sins. While we realize that evil parents can give their children scars and issues to deal with, these people claimed that they were being punished for the sins of their predecessors. They asserted that they had done nothing to deserve God's wrath. God rejected this proverb because He does not want us to blame others for our own sins.

You may wish to follow up this question by asking your class how people today fail to take responsibility for their sins. They may bring up such thoughts as: refusing to acknowledge that a particular behavior is sinful, adopting a "victim mentality," justifying or making excuses for their sins, ignoring and/or rejecting any responsibility toward God, etc.

5. In Jeremiah 31:31, God announced through the prophet that the day would come when He would institute a new covenant with His people. What is the

core difference between the old Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant? Jeremiah 31:32-34

The core difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that the new one is a personal relationship with God himself, in which His law is in the inward parts and written in the hearts of His people. Thus, the covenant between God and His people would move from external (written on tablets) to internal (a change of will, heart, and conscience). The law would no longer be one of prescribed observances and requirements, but would instead become an intrinsic part of the nature of God's chosen people.

Ask your class: How does this covenant promise relate to us today? Discussion should bring out that we have the privilege of entering into this covenant with God Himself. We have the opportunity to repent, turn our backs on sin, and receive forgiveness through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

6. In Jeremiah 32:6-15, God told Jeremiah that his cousin Hanameel would come and ask him to buy land in Anathoth, an area that had already been seized by the Chaldeans. Given that Jeremiah was in prison and that he knew the captivity would last for seventy years, the command on the surface would seem illogical. How did Jeremiah receive assurance that he was supposed to do as Hanameel suggested?

God revealed ahead of time to Jeremiah that Hanameel would come with this unusual request. The day Hanameel came and spoke the words just as God had said he would, Jeremiah had the assurance he needed that this was indeed an assignment from God. Jeremiah's obedience concretely demonstrated his faith that God would restore the land and rebuild Jerusalem.

It might be interesting to note to your class that Jeremiah had been serving God in a prophetic ministry for almost forty years at this point, and yet he seemingly needed confirmation of this assignment. Ask your class: How do you feel when God asks you to take a step of faith? In what ways has God reassured you in those times? Perhaps some of your students would tell examples of times when they stepped out in faith, and describe the thoughts and feelings they experienced then. The point should be made that God understands we are human. If our hearts are open and honest toward Him, however, He will not fail to provide the reassurance and strength that we need to follow Him in obedience.

7. Jeremiah stepped out in obedience to God and purchased the occupied field. However, he still recognized how illogical the purchase was, so he prayed to God (Jeremiah 32:16-25) and received an assurance (Jeremiah 32:27-44). Review this prayer communication between Jeremiah and God. What did Jeremiah do right in his prayer? How did God's answer encourage Jeremiah?

Jeremiah began his prayer affirming his confidence in God's power (verse 17). He continued with a rehearsal of God's mighty deeds, interwoven with praise and thanksgiving. He did not charge God foolishly. He did not demand an explanation. Instead, he laid out the facts as he understood them before the Lord and waited for God's reply.

God replied by focusing on the point Jeremiah had started with—that He was the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth. He then asked Jeremiah the question, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" He went on to describe the destruction and the reason for it (verses 28-36). He verified in verse 42 that reconstruction would occur. Finally, He gave Jeremiah the understanding that he had prayed for, explaining that the transactions of real estate exchange would once more be established in Israel.

8. In Jeremiah 33, God promised to make Jesus Christ the King and Priest of Israel (verses 15-18). In verses 20-21, what assurance did He offer of this covenant?

God said that His promise was as sure as the covenant of day and night. In other words, if we believe the sun will rise tomorrow morning and set tomorrow night, then we can believe that God will place his Son upon the throne of David.

Wrap up your lesson by focusing on the assurance we have when we build our spiritual lives upon the promises of the Word of God. Class members can no doubt offer many inspiring examples of promises God has made real in their personal lives.

CONCLUSION

Even as God fulfilled His promise of punishment, He consoled His people with a promise of restoration and prosperity. We, too, can be assured that God will do what He says He will do. He is the Lord, the God of all flesh—is there any thing too hard for Him?