

Faith Pulpit

Jeremiah 33 and the Certainty of God's Future Promises to Israel

Does God have a future plan for Israel? The prophet Jeremiah answers that question with an emphatic affirmative. While the bulk of Jeremiah's prophecies concern coming judgment, the Book of Consolation (Jer 30–33) gives hope that God is not finished with His chosen nation. Jeremiah 33 brings Jeremiah's brief section of comfort to a close, specifically restating some of the LORD's promises for Israel and the certainty that He will honor His promises to the nation.

The Context of Jeremiah's Prophecy

The content of Jeremiah 33 was given to the prophet when he was imprisoned in the court prison (v. 1). This is the second time the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah during this imprisonment (cf. Jer 32:2).

As the LORD introduces His revelation to Jeremiah, He begins by affirming His power and character (Jer 33:2). The LORD points out His power in creation. This indicates that the limitless resources of the Creator guarantee the fulfillment of the prophecies that follow. Additionally, the LORD affirms His unchanging character: "the Lord is his name" (v. 2, KJV). By identifying Himself by the title "Yahweh" ("the LORD"), He proclaims Himself to be the unchanging, self-existent one, who will keep His covenant promises. The certainty of the LORD's promises to Israel were based on His almighty power and unchanging character.

Furthermore, by way of introduction, the LORD declares that He can act powerfully ("great" [things]) and in ways that are incomprehensible and unattainable¹ by the merely human resources ("mighty" or "hidden things"; Jer 33:3). Because of the judgment that Israel was experiencing, restoration seemed impossible; nevertheless, the LORD assures Jeremiah that He can accomplish His plans. Jeremiah's

prophecy was not limited by negative circumstances, but it was based upon the LORD's ability to accomplish the unexpected in intriguing ways.

The Nature of God's Promises for Israel's Future

Much of Jeremiah 33 outlines the specific promises that God has made to the nation of Israel. These promises are divided into various sections by introductory formulas, which include the phrase "says the LORD [Yahweh]" (vv. 4, 10, 12, 14). This phrase highlights the divine origin of this material but also stresses divine approval and that God fully intended to accomplish these blessings on behalf of His people.

The first section of promises (Jer 33:4-9) begins with a very negative but realistic portrayal of the Babylonian invasion. The great houses of Jerusalem would be torn down to bolster the city walls during the siege (v. 4), and the remains of these houses would be used as a place to pile dead bodies (v. 5). Nevertheless, the LORD had a plan to bring "health and healing" to the nation (v. 6). As described in the verses that follow, this would involve physical and spiritual renewal. The captives of Judah and Israel would return, and the city would be rebuilt (v. 7). They would attain prominence and unity that the nation experienced in the Golden Age of Israel's history under Solomon ("at the first," v. 7). God would also provide spiritual renewal by forgiving their sin (v. 8), which ultimately would bring glory to His name (v. 9).

In the next section of promises (Jer 33:10-11), the LORD affirms that the desolate places of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 10) will once again rejoice (v. 11). The desolation was real; however, the LORD would transform that desolation into gladness, including celebration of marriage and worship in the house of the LORD (v. 11). This signals a complete reversal of the immediate judgment that the nation was facing because of their sin (cf. 7:34; 16:9; and 25:10).²

According to the LORD's word, the next promise is that those desolate places will once again be fruitful (Jer 33:12-13). Shepherds will pasture their flocks in full security throughout the land. The uninhabited land will be restored to productivity and peace.

The final section of promise affirms the LORD's faithfulness to the kingly and priestly lines (Jer 33:14-18).³ The LORD promises that at a future time ("the days come" or "are coming," v. 14), He will accomplish the blessings that He has pronounced upon Israel and Judah. The fulfillment of these promises will be centered in the righteous "Branch." The term "Branch" is Messianic, stressing the Messiah's connection back to David and the Davidic covenant (Isa 4:2; 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12). The Branch will execute judgment (Jer 33:15), establish righteousness (v. 15), deliver Judah (v. 16), provide safety for His people (v. 16), and purify His people in righteousness (v. 17). Reaffirming the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8-16; 1 Chr 17:4-14), the LORD promises that the Davidic line will rule over Israel eternally. Furthermore, the Levites will minister before the LORD continually (Jer 33:18;

Ezek 43–46).⁴ This promise is likely the promise made to Phinehas concerning a perpetual priesthood (Num 25:12-13).⁵ While interruptions in the rule of the kings and the service of the priests was a historical reality, these interruptions do not invalidate the promise of God. Rather, the lines would be preserved and in the future these roles would be established permanently according to the unwavering purposes of God.⁶

The promises of God to Israel concerning the future of the nation are stated specifically and purposefully, including both physical and spiritual blessings that God intends to shower upon Israel. Significantly, God knew about the failures and rebellion of the nation of Israel and made these promises anyway. As stated here, these promises have no conditions attached to them. The ultimate fulfillment of these promises is dependent only upon the character and power of God. God does not ever make a promise that He will not keep. The fulfillment of these promises is based only upon the covenant fidelity of God.⁷

While these promises had a limited, preliminary, and temporary fulfillment in the postexilic community, the full extent of these promises demands a future rule of the Messiah on the earth.⁸ The returns were incomplete, and the land did not attain the fruitfulness and peace that Jeremiah's prophecy envisions. No Davidic descendant ruled as a king or ruled permanently. Furthermore, the spiritual promises of cleansing and forgiveness have never been experienced by the people of Israel as a whole. The promises demand a future fulfillment in the millennial rule of Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 19:11–20:10).

The Certainty of God's Future Plan for Israel

Jeremiah 33 ends with a strong affirmation of the permanence of God's promises to Israel (vv. 19-26). Once again, this section can be divided by the notifications that God's revelation came to Jeremiah (vv. 19, 23, 25).

When "the word of the LORD" came to Jeremiah this next time (v. 19), the LORD stressed the enduring nature of His covenant promises with David and with the Levites (cf. vv. 17-18). The LORD gives Jeremiah a vivid illustration. God's promises to Israel, specifically to David and the Levites, are as secure as the day-night cycle. The LORD reasoned that breaking His covenants with David and the Levites would only be possible if the covenant with the day and night were broken (vv. 20-21; cf. Jer 31:35-37). The cessation of the day-night cycle is a hypothetical but impossible situation. Thus, the covenants of God with David and with the Levites are declared to be permanent. The LORD's promises to Israel are as unchanging as the day-night cycle. Additionally, the LORD declared that the descendants of David and of the Levites would be innumerable (v. 22; cf. Gen 13:16; 15:5; 22:17).

The prophecy about God restoring Israel was not without critics. These critical objections were communicated to Jeremiah by the "word of the LORD" (Jer 33:23). While the identity of these scoffers is debated (e.g., Gentiles or unbelieving Jews), their rejection of God's message is clear. They mocked

that the LORD had cast off the “two families” of His people (v. 24; probably the northern kingdom [i.e., Israel] and the southern kingdom [i.e., Judah]). Consequently, they refused to believe that God had a future plan for the nation of Israel. They failed to recognize that while the LORD’s judgment upon Israel and Judah was temporary, His promise to His people is permanent.

In response to the words of the critics, the LORD reaffirms the certainty of His covenant with Israel (Jer 33:25-26). The LORD once again appeals to the consistency of the day-night cycle (v. 25). God’s promise is as secure as the ordinance of the day and night. The LORD had not cast away His people but would be faithful to His covenant with David and with Abraham (v. 26). In His mercy, God promised to regather and bless His people Israel (v. 26).

The Significance of Jeremiah 33 for God’s Future Plan for Israel

Considering the teaching in Jeremiah 33, the reader finds strong confirmation that the LORD has a future plan for Israel. Firstly, the LORD has made numerous promises to the nation of Israel that demand a future fulfillment. Suggestions that these promises have been fulfilled historically or spiritually simply do not do justice to the descriptions in the text of physical and spiritual restoration, peace, and blessing for the entirety of the people of Israel. Secondly, God’s promises are certain. Just as the day-night cycle cannot be broken, God’s promises to Israel cannot be broken. Thirdly, the plan of God will be accomplished even though it seems humanly impossible. Circumstances may seem contrary, and scoffers may mock at God’s promises, but the LORD has the power and ability to accomplish His will for His people. The LORD can be trusted to keep His promises, with those with whom the promise was made, in the sense that the promise was intended.

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Works Cited

1. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](#) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 131.
2. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary, 16 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 299.
3. Jeremiah 33:14-26 is not found in the Septuagint but is strongly supported in Hebrew. Furthermore, many of the concepts found in this passage can be confirmed in other OT passages.
4. The offering of millennial sacrifices does not diminish the once-for-all nature of Christ’s death (cf. Heb 10:10-14). Sacrifices could never ultimately atone for sin. The millennial sacrifices probably will have a memorial and/or ceremonial function.
5. Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Old Testament edition (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1177.
6. Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 592.
7. Cf. Michael L. Brown, [*“Jeremiah,”*](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, revised ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 7:426.
8. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 591.

Dr. Keith Kobelia

Chair, Biblical Studies Program at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | kobeliak@faith.edu | [Other Articles](#)

Keith A. Kobelia (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) has taught in the Bible and Theology Department at Faith Baptist Bible College since 2014. He, his wife, Elizabeth, and their six children reside in Ankeny, Iowa.