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Here's Hope  
by Rev. Jerry Rea

## After

The word for today is "after." In Jeremiah, chapters 30-33 are called the "Book of Consolation." These chapters give hope for a future after the exile. In their exile they learned obedience through all that they suffered. After the exile they would once again serve and follow God. Judgment is never God's last word. God is dependable to restore Israel and the "children of Israel." They had to learn to trust the very nature of God.

The same thing is true of us today. God is faithful to judge and punish us as needed. A loving parent often has to discipline his children. The discipline is never easy or pleasant. Discipline cannot end soon enough. Then there is the "after." After this time, God will restore Israel. After their season of chastisement, or punishment, God would once again reconcile, and they would have a powerful and positive relationship again. The word is "after."

I've often mused on the meaning and actions related to "after." What do you do after you've sinned? What do you do after you've failed? What is the proper attitude to take after your church splits, or your marriage, or your friendships? When things happen (both good and bad), there's always an "after" stage. It's similar to breaking your arm or skinning your knee. In the after stage you heal. It doesn't mean your life is over. It doesn't mean you're now useless. It doesn't mean that your relationship with God is done.

After all, after the cross there was the resurrection. After Peter denied Jesus, his Lord found him... and restored him... and re-commissioned him. After Paul helped stone Stephen, what about his "after"? And, on a more personal note what do you do after you sin? We always say "everyone sins." That is so very true, but after we sin so many fall away. So many feel unworthy and unwanted. Forgiveness and reconciliation seem like a nostalgic dream or fairy tale.

Some of you are today living in an "after" stage. So, that other life is over. It is gone. It may (but probably not) come back. You can't even look forward for stressing over the past. Here's an idea. What if you thought about the fact that the God of your past, the one who has been there all along, is also the God of your future? You may have given up on yourself, but He has not given up on you.

Consider this. The matchless and infinite God you serve saw this day and all of its turmoil thousands of years ago. His plan for you and His provision for you do not stop. He is the God of "after." He is the God of now, but He is also the God of tomorrow, then the next day and the next. His love, concern, and plans move way beyond your current thought process. For you see, HE is the God of after.

Tomorrow is coming,  
But, God has already been there.

Praying for you and your "after"  
Jerry Rea