

The Restoration of Israel and Judah

Jeremiah 31:1-26

Jeremiah 31:1-5 - *“At the same time,” says the Lord, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”* ² *Thus says the Lord: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness— Israel, when I went to give him rest.”* ³ *The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you.* ⁴ *Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.* ⁵ *You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria. The planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food.”*

Background Notes

Jeremiah 30:7 revealed that even though a time of great tribulation is coming for Israel. In Jeremiah it is called “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” However, the good news is that Israel will be saved out of this time of great trouble. *“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it. It is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.”*

The future “Tribulation period,” (*“the time of Jacob’s trouble”*) will last for seven years, according to Daniel’s prophetic vision (Daniel 9). A large remnant of godly Jews will come out of this period of tribulation. They will turn to the Lord Jesus as the Messiah whom they once rejected. They will receive Christ as their King when He returns. These saved Jewish people will constitute the population of the restored nation of Israel, when the Lord begins His reign over the whole world from the re-established throne of David in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 30:3 says that this good news will apply to both the house of Israel **and** the house of Judah - both the northern kingdom of Israel (that fell to the Assyrian forces in 722 BC), and the southern kingdom of Judah (that fell to the Babylonian forces in 586 BC).

In Jeremiah 31 the house of Israel and the house of Judah were once again differentiated. In fact, regarding the New Covenant, verse 31 says, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”*

The first half of chapter 31 discussed the restoration of the “house of Israel” - the northern kingdom of Israel (v1-22), and the restoration of the “house of Judah” - the southern kingdom of Judah (v23-26). In verse 1, notice that all the families of Israel will be restored *“at the same time”* - at the same time as the events of chapter 30. That time will come in the future, at the time of the return of Christ.

The fact that the house of Israel and the house of Judah are differentiated in this chapter emphasizes the fact that these prophecies of restoration refer to the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel - **not** to Christians. **The Church has not replaced Israel and the Church is not the “New Israel.” Israel is Israel!** So these prophecies of the restoration of the reunited house of Israel and house of Judah do not refer to the Church, but to the literal, physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Doctrinal Points

1. In the future, the northern kingdom of Israel will be restored.

The northern kingdom of Israel was also known as Ephraim, because Ephraim was a large and major tribe of the northern kingdom. Notice that Ephraim was mentioned four times, in verses 6, 9, 18, and 20. Verses 2-5 assured the house of Israel that just as surely as God delivered Israel from Egypt, so He would, with love, rebuild the house of Israel. He will bring them back with joy and dancing to the fertile hills of Samaria in northern Israel. They will go up to Jerusalem and to the millennial Temple to celebrate the feast, during the time of the earthly kingdom of our Lord.

Jeremiah 31:6-14 - *“For there shall be a day when the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.’”*

⁷ For thus says the Lord: “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations. Proclaim; give praise, and say, ‘O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!’ ⁸ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth - among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together. A great throng shall return there. ⁹ They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble. For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.

¹⁰ “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ ¹¹ For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. ¹² Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord. For wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. ¹³ “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow.

¹⁴ I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord.”

The Lord will restore the house of Israel by bringing descendants of the supposedly “lost Ten Tribes” of Israel back from the remote parts of the earth. They will come with tears and repentance. The Lord will lead them back home – tenderly leading those who are handicapped in some way, and women who are about to give birth (v7-9). All the nations will acknowledge the miracle of the return of Israel! The house of Israel will not only return to the Land, but in that day they will be joyful, and at peace, and very prosperous (v10-14).

Jeremiah 31:15-22 - *“Thus says the Lord: “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”*

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord: “Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. ¹⁷ There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.

¹⁸ “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained bull. Restore me, and I will return, for You are the Lord my God. ¹⁹ Surely, after my turning, I repented; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh. I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth.’

²⁰ Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still. Therefore, My heart yearns for him. I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.

²¹ “Set up signposts. Make landmarks. Set your heart toward the highway, the way in which you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, turn back to these your cities. ²² How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter?

In verses 15-17, the Lord referred to northern Israel as “Rachel.” Rachel was Joseph’s mother. Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were major tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel. Rachel was seen weeping for her children, because of the great loss at the time of the Assyrian conquest of the north. But Rachel will be comforted in the future when the house of Israel returns and is restored (v15-17).

Matthew 2:18 revealed that verse 15 was fulfilled as a *type* when the mothers of Bethlehem wept for their children who were killed by King Herod. Matthew 2:17-18: *“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning. Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”*

In verses 18-22, the Lord will respond in grace to Ephraim’s prayers of repentance. The house of Israel will return from their years of wandering to the towns and cities of northern Israel - part of the Lord’s earthly kingdom.

The end of verse 22 may be the most difficult verse to interpret in the entire book of Jeremiah: *“For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth— a woman shall encompass a man.”* I’ve read at least seven different interpretations of this verse! One interpretation says that the woman may represent Israel who, as a nation, will finally come to embrace the Lord. On the other hand, the verse may be just a proverb - meaning that things will be amazingly different when the Lord establishes His kingdom on this earth. But one thing is sure: in the future, the northern kingdom of Israel will be restored.

2. In the future, the southern kingdom of Judah will be restored.

Jeremiah 31:23-26 - *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: ‘The Lord bless you, O home of justice, and mountain of holiness!’ ²⁴ And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with*

flocks. ²⁵ *For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.* ²⁶ *After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me.*”

When these verses are interpreted literally, we see that the Land of Judah, her cities, and the Temple Mount will be restored in righteousness and peace. These conditions were certainly not fully met when the Jewish people returned from their Babylonian captivity. The return to Jerusalem from Babylon was only a foretaste of what's to come in the future.

Once again let me emphasize - we believe that these verses *should not be “spiritualized,”* as some Bible commentators do. The restored Land, the cities of Judah, and the Temple Mount (holy hill) of Jerusalem are *literal!* They are not to be spiritualized and turned into “blessings within the Church today.” No! In the future, the southern kingdom of Judah will be restored – literally!

Practical Application

Learn the secret of a good night's rest!

Jeremiah received this encouraging prophetic vision from the Lord while he was sleeping, and he awoke feeling great after a good night's rest! We've all had that experience - and we wish it would happen more often!

What's the secret? This verse gives us the key: fill your mind with God's Word, and with praise for God's wonderful blessings. Count your blessings - not sheep! That's the secret of a good night's rest.