

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 31

KINGDOM PROPHECY, PART 31: JEREMIAH 31, PART 2

A clue that Jeremiah is not talking about the return to Israel from the Babylonian captivity is in verse 12, "And they will never languish again." Jeremiah cannot be predicting the return from Babylon because the nation has continually "languished" since the time of the Babylonian captivity; their return from Babylon didn't change that. Languish, *לָאָב*, means to have a grieving appearance or a sad look. It can refer to a person who is in need of sustenance and refreshment or one who is tired or faint. It connotes sorrow. Israel has been languishing throughout their history, but that will not be the case in the Messianic Kingdom. Those who deny a literal Kingdom or the literal restoration of Israel in that Kingdom are simply denying the plainly presented truth of the Word of God. Constable recognized this and wrote, "These verses cannot be describing the conditions following the Israelites return to the land after the Babylonian Captivity. This is clear from Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi." [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible: Isaiah-Daniel*, p. 4:295].

Jeremiah also indicates there will be priests in the Messianic Kingdom in verse 14: "I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance." With the exception of Dr. Constable, I could not find any commentaries that understood this prophecy in its literal context. They either make it about the return from Babylon, they spiritualize it, or they make it a reference to the church.

Matthew Poole, a seventeenth century Puritan displayed his Replacement Theology by means of a metaphorical interpretation of this verse and through the use of typology. "By *priests* some understand the ministers of the gospel, whom God here promiseth liberally to provide for; or rather, by giving a success to their ministry, and letting them see the fruit of their labours, make to rejoice: in which metaphorical sense I should rather interpret it, applying it first to the priests of the Jews after the captivity, of whom it is said, *Ezra 6:16*, that they *kept the feast of the dedication of the second temple with joy*; and *ver. 22*, *the Lord had made the people joyful*. Nor were the people for a short time only *satisfied with the Lord's goodness*. In a secondary typical sense it may also signify the spiritual success and rejoicing of good ministers under the gospel, and the spiritual joy of believers. This rejoicing is metaphorically expressed by *fatness*, with allusion to the fat of the sacrifices under the law. It is a usual thing for God by his prophets to express New Testament duties and privileges by phrases borrowed from the worship of God under the Old Testament." [Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 2, p. 588]. Under his metaphorical treatment of this verse, it applies first to the priests who returned to Israel from Babylon and then he applies it to the church age. He claims the Old Testament prophets were expressing New Testament duties and privileges.

A theologian from the nineteenth century spiritualized this verse. Notice in this quote his use of Greek philosophical dualism in which the material is bad and the spiritual is good. “[I]t scarcely need be said that we must look beyond the outward and sensual to the inward and spiritual, and think not of food for the body but of food for the soul; of that which will meet man's deepest, greatest wants, and make his soul as a watered garden, and cause him to sorrow no more at all.” [Henry Cowles, *Jeremiah, and His Lamentations; With Notes, Critical, Explanatory and Practical*, p. 234]. He denied any literal understanding of living in the land enjoying the bounty in the sense of physical sustenance.

The point is, this isn't the way to interpret the Scriptures. The entire context of Jeremiah 30-31 is about the nation of Israel as a national entity. This will be explicitly confirmed later in Jeremiah 31:35-37. Most commentaries don't say much about verse 14. The way most commentaries read seems to imply they are talking about the return from Babylon rather than about the Messianic Kingdom but they seldom say so. You can be left wondering just what their position really is.

Jeremiah 31:15–22 ¹⁵Thus says the LORD, “A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.” ¹⁶Thus says the LORD, “Restrain your voice from weeping And your eyes from tears; For your work will be rewarded,” declares the LORD, “And they will return from the land of the enemy. ¹⁷“There is hope for your future,” declares the LORD, “And your children will return to their own territory. ¹⁸“I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For You are the LORD my God. ¹⁹‘For after I turned back, I repented; And after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh; I was ashamed and also humiliated Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’ ²⁰“Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly still remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,” declares the LORD. ²¹“Set up for yourself roadmarks, Place for yourself guideposts; Direct your mind to the highway, The way by which you went. Return, O virgin of Israel, Return to these your cities. ²²“How long will you go here and there, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth— A woman will encompass a man.”

The prophecy concerning Rachel weeping has several possible connections to biblical events. Ramah was located on the border of the Northern and the Southern kingdoms. Rachel is a symbol of Jewish motherhood. “The lamentation of Rachel is heard at Ramah, as the most loftily situated border-town of the two kingdoms, whence the wailing that had arisen sounded far and near, and could be heard in Judah. Nor does she weep because she has learned something in her tomb of the carrying away of the people, but as their common mother, as the beloved spouse of Jacob, who in her married life so earnestly desired children. Just as the people are often included under the notion of the ‘daughter of Zion,’ as their ideal representative, so the great

ancestress of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh is here named as the representative of the maternal love shown by Israel in the pain felt when the people are lost." [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "Jeremiah, Lamentations" in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., p. 8:274]. This is the illustration Matthew used to portray the grief of the mothers in Bethlehem when Herod killed the male babies in an effort to kill the future Messianic King (Mt. 2:16-18). It is a picture of the Jewish mothers mourning over the captivity, relocation, and dispersion of the Jews from the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and over the future captivity and relocation to Babylon of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, (which was still future at the time of Jeremiah's writing). Given the context of Jeremiah 30 and 31 it seems likely this is also referring to the dispersion and persecution of the Tribulation followed by restoration. The context of Jeremiah 30 and 31 does not allow for a small, local restoration that falls short of the Kingdom glories to be associated with it.

Almost no theologian assigns any prophetic significance to verse 15 beyond the destruction by Assyrian and later by Babylon. Walvoord, without specifically commenting on this verse, assigns this pericope (vv. 2-30) to the future.

Peters says Jeremiah 31:15-17 is referring to the resurrection of Old Testament saints. George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, prop. 126, obs. 5, pp. 2:253-256]. In a sense, this is true. All the Old Testament believers who have died will be resurrected and brought back into the land when the Messianic Kingdom begins. "[Quoting from numerous Old Testament Scriptures] What else, if the prayer of these prisoners is ever answered, but a *Pre-millennial* resurrection is to be anticipated? For, taking such passages together, what have we here but a reference by the prophet to his own death and to dead saints, to the ability of God to raise them up or deliver them, to 'the set time to favor Zion,' which is to come when the Lord shall appear the second time unto salvation, and this prayer to be released from death shall be answered, to a joyful gathering of the people to praise the Lord in Jerusalem, when 'the children of death' shall be loosened? ... Even in such a Ps. as the 69th, faith grasps the resurrection, in the words: 'The Lord heareth the poor and despiseth not His prisoners,' for death is brought before us in the preceding verses, when suddenly the strain is changed into exultation, and we are told that the prisoner shall be released, and they shall return with praise to the holy land." Some of this exegesis is questionable, but the believing Old Testament saints will be resurrected to enjoy their Kingdom covenant promises. I've read enough of Peters to be certain he recognizes that Jewish believers who survive the Tribulation will also be going into the Kingdom and why he limits Jeremiah 31:15-17 to the resurrection of Old Testament saints, is puzzling to me. This is out of character for him to be this far away from a proper exegetical understanding of a verse. This verse is not referring to resurrection but to the future when the Jews who survive the Tribulation will enter the Kingdom. What Peters wrote here is true to an extent but it seems to leave an important element out. The exegetical methods he uses to reach this conclusion doesn't seem to be valid.

Wiersbe also understands this prophecy to be about the end times and not about any return from the Babylonian captivity. "The promises recorded in Jeremiah 31:2-22 don't apply to Ephraim/Israel after the Captivity, because the Samaritans weren't a part of the rebuilding of the land. These promises apply to the scattered Ten Tribes in the end times when God will call the Jews together and restore them to their land. Then there will be one nation, and the Samaritans will worship, not on Mt. Gerizim, but on Mt. Zion. Jeremiah pictured God summoning His family and gathering His flock, leading them out of the desert into the fruitful garden. Since none of this happened after the Captivity, we can assume it will occur in the end times when Ephraim repents and turns to the Lord." [Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Prophets*, pp. 222-223].

God commands the weeping to stop because He is going to restore all of the Israelites back to the land. God is specifically addressing Ephraim/Israel, the Northern Kingdom. This cannot be referring to any restoration that has occurred because the people subjected to the Assyrian dispersion never returned. Some have returned to the land at this time in unbelief, but this isn't to a land that matches the description of the Messianic Kingdom that is yet to arrive. The conclusion has to be this is an end times prophecy. At some point, the Israelites are going to confess their sin and mourn over it. The idiom about slapping the thigh refers to a Hebrew way of expressing remorse, horror, and terror (Ezek. 21:12). God still views Ephraim as His child. It bears repeating that He will discipline them but He will never abandon them. The discipline will eventually bear fruit and Israel will be restored.

Ezekiel 21:12 ¹²"Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the officials of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with My people, therefore strike your thigh.

The picture here is one of national lamentation and sorrow over the destruction and dispersion of the people of the Northern Kingdom as represented by Rachael weeping for her children. Ultimately, this situation is equally applicable to the Babylonian destruction and captivity and to the Roman destruction and dispersion. God tells them to stop weeping because the children will be returned from the lands where they have been dispersed among those who are their enemies. At some point, Ephraim is going to plead with God for forgiveness and restoration and God will hear their request. They will one day understand that the Lord's discipline was due to their own rebellion. They will acknowledge Him to be their God and He will restore them. God reacts to Israel's confession and change of heart through a magnificent display of fatherly love for them. This restoration and reconciliation is still future; it is an end times prophecy.

The picture of a highway bringing the people back to the land for the final restoration is a prominent theme in Isaiah. The word highway, מַדְבָּר, means a main road, a highway that is an open country thoroughfare that is relatively wide and maintained. It is used ten times in Isaiah and six of them are referring to the Messianic Kingdom.

Isaiah 35:8–10 ⁸A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. ⁹No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 40:3–4 ³A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴“Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

Isaiah 49:8–11 ⁸Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; ⁹Saying to those who are bound, ‘Go forth,’ To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights. ¹⁰“They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water. ¹¹“I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up.

Jeremiah 31:16 and Isaiah 11:16 seem to be parallel verses concerning Ephraim and the final restoration in the land to occur as the Tribulation ends.

Isaiah 11:16 ¹⁶And there will be a highway from Assyria For the remnant of His people who will be left, Just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

God is calling what is now faithless Israel to turn their attention to returning to the land of Israel. The implication seems to be they need to and will return in faith which is in keeping with the context of chapters 30-31.

“For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth—a woman will encompass a man.” The last sentence of verse 22 has confused expositors and no one knows exactly what it means. Some theologians, Calvin for example, claim it is a reference to the birth of Christ but that seems forced and not exegetically possible. Constable believes it refers to the formerly unfaithful wife of Jehovah returning to her Husband and clinging to Him in faithfulness. Many believe it simply refers to some sort of proverbial saying about something amazing and hard to believe, but if that is true, the meaning has been lost to history. The fact is no one knows what it means.

Jeremiah 31:23–26 ²³Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Once again they will speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes, ‘The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy hill!’ ²⁴“Judah and all its cities will dwell

together in it, the farmer and they who go about with flocks. ²⁵“For I satisfy the weary ones and refresh everyone who languishes.” ²⁶At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.

Up to this point, Israel, or Ephraim the Northern Kingdom, has primarily been the recipient of the prophecy in chapter 31 but now the Lord includes Judah. Just as God has promised to restore Israel to the land, He will restore Judah to the land. God is promising a return to the land area of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, and to Jerusalem just as He promised a return to Samaria for the Northern Kingdom. The reference to the holy hill is a reference to the Temple Mount. Righteousness will be the order of the day in the restored land. The picture here is one of peaceful, righteous living in the land of Israel. This is a restoration of the unified Kingdom that existed before the Kingdom split after Solomon's death. The citizens of Israel and Judah will be reunited and unified.

Jeremiah obviously received a lot of disturbing prophecy about the coming judgment and destruction of Judah. Now he has received some wonderful prophecy concerning the future restoration of both Israel and Judah. This is most likely why he wrote the sleep in which he had received this Word was pleasant. This was good news compared to what he had received prior to this.

Jeremiah 31:27–30 ²⁷“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. ²⁸“As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD. ²⁹“In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.’ ³⁰“But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.

Notice that once again both Israel and Judah are included in the promises recorded here. This is another textual proof that Jeremiah 30-31 is not referring to a local return of Judah from the Babylonian captivity. This will be an end times regathering of the Jewish people, the remnant believers, whose ancestors were from both Kingdoms, North and South.

“Behold, days are coming” is used three times in Jeremiah 31 to introduce three of the remaining sections in the chapter (31:27, 31, 38). “The phrase “Behold, days are coming” is used 15 times in his book. It is used in a negative sense seven times, and refers then to the coming destruction of Judah and surrounding nations. Some of the negative occurrences have eschatological implications (cf. 7:32; 9:25; 19:6; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52). The final nine occurrences of this phrase [in Jeremiah] are eschatological, pointing to a future period of blessing for Israel when (1) the nation will be restored to the land (16:14-15; 23:7-8; 30:3); (2) the righteous Branch of David will be ruling over a united monarchy (23:5-6; 33:14-15); (3) the nation will be experiencing peace and prosperity in the land (31:27-28; 33:14, 16); (4) the new covenant with its cleansing from sin will be in effect (31:31-34), and (5) the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt as a holy city

that will never again be destroyed (31:38-40). These promises transcend anything that Israel has experienced throughout her long history. They will find their ultimate fulfillment only in the millennial age when the messianic kingdom is established, when God will fulfill all the promises He made to Israel and Judah (33:14)." [Charles Dyer with Eva Rydelnik, "Jeremiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1153].

Israel is going to become an amazingly productive place during the Messianic Kingdom. Just as God can see to it the land and its productivity have been destroyed as part of the temporal punishment God has used to discipline Israel, God will see to it that the land is incredibly productive during the Kingdom. The availability of agricultural products is a measure of the prosperity of a nation. A plentiful food supply is necessary for people and nations to prosper. The destruction Israel will experience during the Tribulation will be massive, but God will insure they are able to rebuild and be prosperous.

The Jewish people have a history of believing they are being punished for the sins of their ancestors. Whether that is true or not, and it isn't, they think it is true but during the Kingdom they will no longer say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." The problem is the Jewish people, generation after generation, have rebelled against God; therefore, each generation has had to suffer the consequences of that rebellion some more severely than others. They never should have believed this proverb because as far back as Moses, it was clearly said every person is responsible for his own sin.

Deuteronomy 24:16 ¹⁶"Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

Jeremiah is telling them this proverb is faulty, it is not the case, and it will not be the case in the Kingdom. Ezekiel, writing after Jeremiah, said the same thing.

Ezekiel 18:2-4, 20 ²"What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'?" ³"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. ⁴"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.... ²⁰"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

Some people will say, "But doesn't the Bible say the sins of the father will be visited on the third and fourth generations following?" Deuteronomy 5:9 does reveal that truth but the context is quite different. This Scripture is misused a lot in the church particularly by Pentecostals and Charismatics. "Idolatry is equated with hating God, and parents who engage in idolatry will influence their children and grandchildren negatively. Yet for

those parents who love the Lord and keep His commandments, there is a spiritual legacy that extends multigenerationally. Hence, the reference to multiple generations has nothing to do with “generational curses” but rather normal consequences.” [James Coakley, “Deuteronomy” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 275]. Certainly, children raised by godly parents have left the faith, but they have a better chance of believing and remaining in fellowship with God than do the children of unbelieving parents.

Deuteronomy 5:9 ⁹“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, [Exodus 20:5 and 34:7 are making the same point].

The context of Deuteronomy 5:9 concerns spiritual issues. It involves the commandment to have no other gods before Yahweh and to refrain from making idols. Fathers who lead their children away from God almost inevitably produce a lasting legacy in the family. They can lead their children to God or they can lead them to demons but they can't do both. Deuteronomy 24:16 is in the context of various laws dealing with relationships between people. It is referring to the fact that the punishment for sin is death. The context between the two is different.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 concerns the New Covenant which I will deal with later. It is sufficient to say for now that this Covenant will not be completely fulfilled with Israel and with Judah until the Second Coming of the Lord and the Kingdom begins. This is in keeping with the context of Jeremiah 30-31 which is about the future Messianic Kingdom.

Jeremiah next presents the revelation from God that Israel as a nation is forever. No one can suggest Israel no longer exists if this is Scripture is simply read as the promise of God to the nation.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 ³⁵Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶“If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” ³⁷Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

“To underscore Israel's permanence in relation to the new covenant, God compared her existence to the heavens and the earth. As God had appointed the sun for light by day and the moon and stars for light by night (Gn 1:14-19), so He had appointed Israel as His chosen [choice] nation ... forever. Just as it is impossible to stop the natural fixed order of sun, moon, and stars, neither is it possible to make Israel ... cease from being a nation. The power God displayed in creating the universe was the power that He exercises in preserving Israel as a nation. Throughout history people have tried in vain to

destroy Israel, but none have succeeded—and none ever will. Those who claim that the Church replaces Israel in God's program, or who claim that the NT teaches this, fail to come to grips with promises such as these." [Charles Dyer with Eva Rydelnik, "Jeremiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1154].

Since Israel is the recipient of the New Covenant promises, this is also implicitly a promise that the New Covenant is a perpetual, eternal Covenant.

God revealed two conditions under which Israel would cease to exist as a nation. God established the fixed order of the natural world that exists around us; Israel could cease to exist if this fixed order ceases to exist. The only other way Israel could cease to exist is if man could somehow measure the heavens and if he could examine the inner structure of the earth. If these things could happen, only then would Israel "cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done." God is proclaiming the extent of Israel's sin and rebellion, but He will not abandon them. That's grace.

Jeremiah 31:38–40 ³⁸"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹"The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. ⁴⁰"And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

This Scripture cannot be referring to the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the city at that time because God's promise to preserve Jerusalem was not fulfilled after that return. Jerusalem was to be destroyed again in 70 A.D. and Israel would not exist as a nation again for nearly two thousand years. Jerusalem has existed as a city in one way or another but it was insignificant and suffered under Muslim rule. Jerusalem is destined to suffer major damage during the Tribulation. This is a prophecy concerning Jerusalem that looks far into the future and the Messianic Kingdom.

The description of the city's land area assures us this is a real city being described; it cannot be interpreted as a spiritual, heavenly, or symbolic city. Keil and Delitzsch represent a spiritual interpretation and Replacement Theology, but, at the same time, they seem to recognize and acknowledge kingdom fulfillment. "This prophecy, then, reaches on to the time when the kingdom of God shall have been perfect: it contains, under an Old Testament dress, the outlines of the image of the heavenly Jerusalem, which the seer perceives at Patmos in its full glory. This image of the new Jerusalem thus forms a very suitable conclusion to this prophecy regarding the restoration of Israel, which, although it begins with the deliverance of the covenant people from their exile, is yet thoroughly Messianic. Though clothed in Old Testament dress, it does not implicitly declare that Israel shall be brought back to their native land during the period extending from the time of Cyrus to that of Christ; but, taking this interval as its standpoint, it combines in one view both the deliverance from the exile and the redemption by the Messiah, and not merely announces the formation of the new covenant in its

beginnings, when the Christian Church was founded, but at the same time points to the completion of the kingdom of God under the new covenant, in order to show the whole extent of the salvation which the Lord will prepare for His people who return to Him." [Keil & Delitzsch, "Jeremiah and Lamentations" in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 8:287].

Israel will be a permanent nation and Jerusalem will be its permanent capital city. The tower of Hananel and the Corner Gate are the corners of the north wall. The hills of Gareb and Goah seem to form the western boundary. The southern boundary is the Hinnom Valley, the valley of dead bodies and ashes. The east boundary is the Kidron Valley to the Horse Gate.

This whole area will be an area holy to God. The Messiah will be enthroned there. The Temple will be there. The Jewish people will be restored in the land in peace, safety, and blessing.

Dennis Waltemeyer
Fredericksburg Bible Church