

Session 12 The Forerunner Message in Jeremiah 31

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The theme of Jeremiah 31 is a saved and reunited Israel in a new-covenant relationship with God. The nation of Israel will be both *physically* restored (Jer. 30) and *spiritually* restored (Jer. 31).
- B. Outline for Jeremiah 31
- 31:1-6 Israel rebuilt, blessed, and unified
 - 31:7-146 Israel regathered and returning to the land
 - 31:15-22 The end of Rachel's weeping
 - 31:23-26 God's blessing on Judah
 - 31:27-30 Increase coming to Israel and Judah
 - 31:31-34 The new covenant
 - 31:35-37 The Lord's eternal commitment to Israel
 - 31:38-40 Rebuilding Jerusalem

II. ISRAEL REBUILT, BLESSED, AND UNIFIED (ISA. 31:1-6)

- A. The promise in 31:1 both *concludes* Jeremiah 30 and *introduces* Jeremiah 31. The Lord promised that all the families of Israel will walk in covenant relationship with the Lord (31:1; Rom. 11:26).

¹“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... “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest.”³The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.” (Jer. 31:1-3)

1. ***Survived the sword***: This was partially fulfilled after the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. Its ultimate fulfillment will be at the end of the age when all the families of Israel are saved.
2. ***Found grace in the wilderness***: In the Great Tribulation, Jews will find divine provision in the wilderness similar to the time after their exodus from Egypt (Rev. 12:14-16).

¹⁴But the woman [remnant of Israel] was given two wings...that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman... (Rev. 12:14-16)

³⁵“I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples [nations], and there I will plead My case with you face to face...”³⁷and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant...” (Ezek. 20:35-37)

¹⁴“...I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. ¹⁵I will give her...Achor as a door of hope... ¹⁶You will call Me ‘My Husband...’ (Hos. 2:14-16)

3. ***I went to give him rest***: The Lord will give Israel rest. Israel is only at rest when they are in right relationship with Lord and in the land. Their ultimate rest will occur in the Millennium.

4. **The Lord appeared of old:** The Lord visited Jeremiah, the representative of Israel, to give assurance of His love, forgiveness, and salvation despite Israel's long history of rebellion. The Hebrew *merahq* can mean chronological distance or geographical distance (NAS). I interpret this as the Lord coming to Jeremiah from a distance, maybe in dream state (31:26).
 5. **Everlasting love:** God's love is as a Father and Husband (31:9, 20, 32; cf. 2:2; 3:4, 14, 19).
¹⁷“...**He will quiet you with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.**” (Zeph. 3:17)
 6. **I have drawn you:** This was first said by Hosea who described the Lord as affectionately and gently drawing Israel as one might lead an animal to food (Hos. 11:4). The story of Israel is the long story of tender father waiting for and embracing a prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32).
⁴“**I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love...I stooped and fed them.**” (Hos. 11:4)
- B. The Lord is the ultimate nation builder (31:4-6). He will rebuild Israel in a way that brings joy to her cities and farms. The crops and vineyards destroyed by military invasions will be restored, resulting in great joy. Israel will be united in worshipping God in Jerusalem (31:6).
⁴“**Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall...rejoice.** ⁵**You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria...** ⁶**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.’**” (Jer. 31:4-6)
- C. **Virgin:** Israel is presented as an adulteress who, in returning to God, will be transformed to a virgin.
²...**I have betrothed you to one husband...as a chaste virgin to Christ.** (2 Cor. 11:2)
- D. **Watchmen:** Watchmen stationed on the hills of Ephraim were to warn of an approaching enemy (6:17). But here the watchman cry out to signal the time to make a pilgrimage to Zion.
- E. **Go up to Zion:** God will reunite Judah and Israel (called Samaria in 31:5 and Ephraim in 31:6).

III. ISRAEL REGATHERED AND RETURNING TO THE LAND (ISA. 31:7-14)

- A. The nations are called to sing, celebrate, and pray that the Lord will save Israel (31:7-10). The nations are to declare God's message—He scattered Israel, but will gather and keep her (31:10).
⁷...“**Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among [on behalf of] 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...**
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.’**” (Jer. 31:7-10)
1. **Prayer:** Any who love Jerusalem are to sing, shout, proclaim, give praise, and say, “O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!” Engage with gladness, without reluctance.
 2. **Shout:** To shout implies taking a public stand for Israel without drawing back in timidity.
 3. **The chief of the nations:** Israel is referred to as the “chief nation” and the Lord's firstborn son (31:9; cf. Deut. 7:6; 26:19; Lev. 20:24-26; Ps. 135:4; Amos. 6:1).
¹**Woe to you who are at ease in Zion...notable persons in the chief nation...** (Amos 6:1)

B. The Lord will gather the remnant of Israel as a great multitude and bring them to the land (31:8-9).

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... a great throng shall return there. ⁹They 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. (Jer. 31:8-9)*

1. **Great throng shall return:** To “return” to the land presupposes that they had previously lived in the land before they were forced out of it. A great number will return from all over the earth, not just from the north where they went into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.
2. **North country:** Israel will return to the land after being delivered from a northern enemy in the end times (Jer. 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; Joel 2:20). The northern armies of Gog and Magog will attack Israel from the north, but then God will destroy them at the end of the Great Tribulation (Ezek. 38:15; 39:2).

¹⁵*“Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you ...a great company and a mighty army. ¹⁶ You will come up against My people Israel... It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes.” (Ezek. 38:15-16)*

- a. Scripture often refers to Israel being attacked from the north (Isa. 14:31; 41:25; Jer. 46:6, 10, 20, 24; 51:27, 48; Joel 2:20, Zeph. 2:13).
- b. Jeremiah prophesied the Babylonian army would come from the north to judge Israel (Jer. 1:13-15; 3:12, 18; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 25:9).
3. **Weeping and prayer:** Israel will return to the Lord with sorrow over their sin and with tears of repentance, praying for God’s favor and direction (31:18-19; cf. 3:21-25; Isa. 63:7-64:12). Zechariah described Israel’s national repentance, mourning, and conversion (12:10-14).
4. **Blind and lame:** When the Lord re-gathers the remnant of Israel, no one will be excluded—the blind, lame, expectant mothers, and women in labor will be helped to return (Isa 35:5-6).

¹⁰*“I will pour on...Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son.” (Zech. 12:10)*

⁵*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. ⁷The parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water...there shall be grass with reeds and rushes. (Isa. 35:5-7)*

5. There is no evidence of healings or waters bursting forth when they returned from Babylon.

6. **In a straight way:** The Lord will provide a road for them to walk on so that they do not stumble. The word “straight” (*yasar*) is often translated as “smooth.” He will lead them beside rivers on a smooth and level path so they do not stumble. This “New Exodus” in the end times will be an easier and safer journey than the first exodus under Moses.
- 9“...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.” (Jer. 31:8-9)*
- 14“...the days are coming...that it shall no more be said, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵but, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’” (Jer. 16:14-15)*
7. **Rivers of water:** The Lord will cause Israel to walk by the rivers of waters. This parallels the water from the rock when journeying through the wilderness (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13).
8. **I am a Father to Israel:** The Lord is motivated to save Israel by His tender love as a Father (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1-6). Being their Father describes His bond with Israel.
- C. The nations must hear and proclaim God’s purposes and promises for Israel (31:10-14).
- 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.’*
- 11For the LORD has redeemed...and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he.*
- 12Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD...¹⁴My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,” says the LORD. (Jer. 31:10-14)*
- D. **Redeemed and ransomed:** “Redeemed” and “ransomed” are terms used originally in Israel’s secular life and commercial transactions. For example, a family could “buy back” or redeem another family member who had become an indentured servant due to personal debt.
- E. **One stronger than he:** The Lord will free Israel from strong enemies who hold them captive. He freed them in Egypt from the strong yoke of Pharaoh. The ultimate “stronger one” will be the Antichrist, the “end-time Pharaoh,” whose yoke will be broken off Israel (30:8).
- 7“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. ⁸...I will break his yoke from your neck and will burst your bonds...” (Jer. 30:7-8)*
- F. **Sing:** Israel shall sing in the temple in Jerusalem, described as the height of Zion. This singing will come after a season of sorrow and weeping in the Great Tribulation (31:9, 18-19; cf. 3:21-25).
- ⁵For His anger is but for a moment; His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. (Ps. 30:5)*
- ¹How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! ²My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God...⁵Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. ⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baca, [valley of weeping]...⁷they go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. (Ps. 84:1-7)*

IV. THE END OF RACHEL'S WEEPING (ISA. 31:15-22)

- A. The promise of redemption and salvation in 31:7-14 will not occur until after a time of anguish. Israel will experience the anguish of exile, but that will surely be followed by comfort (31:15-17).
*¹⁵...“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...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.” (Jer. 31:15-17)*
- B. **Bitter weeping:** Jeremiah “metaphorically” heard Rachel’s weeping in Ramah. Rachel died around 1,700 BC, over 1,000 years before Jeremiah’s ministry. Jeremiah described her as weeping, for her children had been taken as captives by the Assyrians 100 years before he wrote this.
1. Rachel is known for the sorrow related to her children. She died in sorrow in childbirth, and figuratively she continued to weep as her descendants were carried into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, as well as when her children were murdered at Herod’s command (Mt. 2:16-18). In each situation, God promised to turn the lamentation of Israel’s mothers into rejoicing.
 2. Jeremiah pictures Rachel weeping for her lost children and comforts her with God’s promises that they shall yet be restored when Ephraim cries out to God, with repentance, for salvation.
 3. The land of Israel has been “orphaned” on several tragic occasions when her children were killed or taken away as captives.
 4. Rachel was the mother of *Benjamin* (southern kingdom) and *Joseph* (his sons were Ephraim and Manasseh; their territory covered a large area of the northern kingdom). She is connected with both the northern and southern kingdoms, both the Assyrian and the Babylonian exiles.
 5. **Ramah:** Ramah was a staging place where the Judean exiles were gathered before being taken to Babylon (40:1). Many believe Ramah is the place where Rachel was buried. It was in the territory of tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:25) on the boundary between Israel and Judah.
 6. **Your work shall be rewarded:** The Lord exhorts Rachel to stop weeping because He will reward her labor and return her children from captivity.
 7. **Land of the enemy:** This applies to all the lands to which her children have been taken.
- C. Jeremiah heard another cry coming from Israel repenting and turning to the Lord (31:18-19).
*¹⁸“I have surely heard Ephraim **bemoaning himself**: ‘You have chastised [disciplined] me, and I was chastised, like an **untrained bull**; restore me, and I will return, for You are the LORD my God. ¹⁹Surely, 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...” (Jer. 31:18-19)*
- D. The Lord comforted Israel in affectionate terms as a loving Father (31:20).
*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...**” (Jer. 31:20)*

V. GOD’S BLESSING ON JUDAH (ISA. 31:23-26)

- A. The land of Judah will be honored instead of shamed after enduring the severe discipline of the Lord (31:23-25). Israel will endure the Lord’s discipline when oppressed by the Antichrist’s empire. Jerusalem will be seen as the global center and home of justice. The mountain of holiness speaks of the millennial temple. People will bless one another by God’s glory on Jerusalem.

²³....“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!...’”

²⁶After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me. (Jer. 31:23-26)

- B. *My sleep*: Jeremiah apparently received part of the prophecy in 31:1-40 in a prophetic dream (31:3).

VI. INCREASE COMING TO ISRAEL AND JUDAH (ISA. 31:27-30)

- A. The Lord promised to give great increase to the people and livestock in the land (31:27-30).

²⁷“Behold, the days are coming...that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. ²⁸...As I have watched over them to pluck up...to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” says the LORD. (Jer. 31:27-28)

- B. Here the Lord emphasized individual responsibility (Ezek. 18:2-4; cf. Deut. 24:16; 2 Kgs. 14:6). There was a widespread sentiment among the Israelites in the Babylonian captivity that they were being punished for the sins of past generations, such as those of the generation of Manasseh.

²⁹In those days they shall say no more: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” ³⁰But every one shall die for his own iniquity... (Jer. 31:29-30)

VII. THE NEW COVENANT (ISA. 31:31-34)

- A. The announcement of the new covenant is considered one of the high points in the Old Testament.

³¹“Behold, the days are coming...when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers... My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,” says the LORD. (Jer. 31:31-32)

- B. The glory of the new covenant is the Holy Spirit indwelling each believer to enlighten their understanding, to inspire and motivate their heart, thus transforming their lives (31:33-34).

³³“But this is the covenant...I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts...

³⁴No more shall every man teach [exhort] his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me...and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:33-34)

- C. The Lord’s eternal commitment to Israel is that He will never cast them off (31:35-37).

³⁵Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun...by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night...³⁶“If those ordinances depart from before Me...then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me...”³⁷“If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel...” (Jer. 31:35-37)