

JEREMIAH 31

THE NEW COVENANT

This chapter goes on with the good and comfortable words which were begun in the chapter before. They were given for the encouragement of the captive Jews in Babylon; for they assured them that the Lord, in due time, would restore them or their children to their own land, and make them a great and happy nation again – especially by sending them the Messiah, in Whose Kingdom and grace, many of these promises were to have their ultimate fulfillment. Although these exceedingly great and precious promises were originally words of comfort and cheer to those poor exiles, we also may find them to be firm foundations of hope and full fountains of joy!

In this second part of the prophet's song, both the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the former Northern Kingdom of Israel are the subjects of the most gracious promises. With the eyes of his spiritual vision, the prophet here stood upon an elevated mountain; and from its summit, he beheld the ten northern tribes of Israel returning to their capital city of Samaria (verses 4-5). And from there, they resolved to proceed across the border to Mount Zion, in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (verse 6). They went with songs of gladness, mingled with tears of penitence and contrition (verses 7-14); and there they were received back – like a lost, wandering child – into the arms of their loving and gracious Father (verse 9).

But now the prophet hears the voice of one who is in sorrow (verse 15). It is the crying of Rachel, the mother of Joseph and the ancestress of the tribe of Ephraim; and she is weeping for her children because they are carried away into captivity. But Jehovah Himself speaks to the troubled Rachel (verses 16-17), and bids her to refrain from weeping and tears. And why? Because her work would be rewarded, her children would be rescued from the land of the enemy, and they would come again to their own land. Moreover, Jehovah hears Ephraim, the grandson of Rachel, pouring forth strains of genuine repentance, and turning unto God with an acknowledgment of his sin (verses 18-19). The Lord listens and says, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still... I will surely have mercy upon him!" (verse 20) How tender is the heart of God! How infinite are His compassions! Here it almost seems that we have the parable of the prodigal son itself! We almost see the father hastening to meet him, and welcoming him back to his fond embrace!

In light of all this, gracious encouragements are given to the Lord's captives in Babylon to prepare for their return to their own land (verses 21-25).

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The prophet speaks of the glorious restoration of the Lord's people – verses 1-25
- ❖ He speaks of the days of the Gospel, in which the Lord would make a new covenant with His people – verses 26-40

They must think of nothing except coming back to their own country, out of which they had been driven. They must entirely engage their whole selves in this matter. Their minds must not fluctuate or be uncertain about this matter, but they must resolve upon it and not allow themselves to be distracted with cares and fears. And in order to encourage them to do this, God gives them an assurance that He will create “a new thing” – that is, strange and surprising – “in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.” The Church of Christ is compared to a woman (Rev. 12:1); and as such, she is the weaker vessel, she possesses a timorous spirit, and she is entirely unfit for military actions. Nevertheless, she shall surround, besiege, and prevail against any mighty man of the world. Instead of armies surrounding the camp of the saints (Rev. 20:9), we are here given the assurance that the camp of the saints shall surround those enemy-armies. Many interpreters understand this “new thing” to be a reference to the incarnation of Christ, for God did indeed have an eye for that purpose when He caused His people to be brought back to their land. A woman – the Virgin Mary – enclosed in her womb the Mighty One, Who was to be the Savior of the world! Surely this would serve as an assurance to the poor captives that God would not cast them off, for this blessing was to be among them!

It was in a kind of dream or vision that the prophet beheld all this; and now he awoke, and his sleep was sweet unto him (verse 26). It was very pleasant to him – the prophet of sorrow – to hear of better times, and to learn that God’s captive people would one day return to their own land; for it was a dream which would certainly come true, and its reality would far exceed the conception which he had formed of it. But the hand of the Lord immediately seizes him again (beginning in verse 27); and in a vision, He carries him far away into the future – into the midst of Gospel-times. Jeremiah not only sees Israel and Judah restored to Mount Zion, but he also sees them taken again into a covenant-relationship with the Lord! (verses 31-40) And the covenant is not that of Sinai, which was a covenant of grace by works; but it is a new covenant of grace by faith – the laws of which are not written upon tables of stone, but upon the heart! The old covenant would decay and vanish – not because it was evil in itself, but because man was not able to fulfill its terms. Under the more glorious covenant of the Gospel of Jesus, provision would be made for the forgiveness of sin, as well as for a renovation of the heart of men. This new heart would lead them to love the Lord their God and serve Him – not as slaves; but as sons and daughters, who delight in His will and seek His glory alone.



Lord, in these gracious days of the Gospel, we beseech You to fulfill Your gracious Word by putting Your law in our minds, and by writing it upon our hearts! Amen.