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Jeremiah 29:1 - 31:22



Jeremiah - Steve Gregg

In "Jeremiah 29:1 - 31:22," Steve Gregg speaks about false prophecies given by Hananiah against Jeremiah and the future of the people of Israel. Gregg explains that despite the current struggles and their captivity in Babylon, God had plans to restore them and bring them back to Jerusalem after 70 years. God wanted His people to have faith in His good plans for their future and to trust that He had not abandoned them. The message emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's plans, even in challenging times.

Transcript

We left off last time at Jeremiah 28 where Hananiah, the false prophet, was doomed by his own false prophecies against Jeremiah. He broke the yoke that had been on Jeremiah's neck and said, Thus, the Lord has broken the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In other words, saying that Nebuchadnezzar would no longer be able to afflict the people of Judah, which was of course a false prophecy.

And contrary to what Jeremiah had been saying, and more than that, Jeremiah had said that the captivity in Babylon would be 70 years, but Hananiah was saying no in two years. In less than two years, Jeconiah, the king who had been taken into captivity, would be returned and all the people who had been taken away to Babylon would come back to Jerusalem. And so Jeremiah said, well, that's a false prophecy, you're counseling a rebellion against the Lord, and therefore you will die within a year.

And last we read at the end of chapter 28, Hananiah the prophet died the same year, in the seventh month. How he came to his end, we don't know, but we do know why. Now in chapter 29, it says, These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive.

To the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. This happened after Jeconiah the king and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah, and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. Now, we read in chapter 52 of Jeremiah in verse 28 that

there were 3,023 people who had been taken away captive with Jeconiah.

And we know that Ezekiel was one of those. It says the people who went away into Judah at that time, they were the ones that Hananiah the prophet had falsely said would return within two years. However, Jeremiah is telling them, no, you better not count on that.

There were apparently false prophets in Babylon too, that is among those 3,000 people who had been carried away, there were some Jews who claimed to be prophets, and who were telling them, ah, don't worry, this is only a short time. We'll be going back to Jerusalem soon, don't settle in here, in Babylon. And Jeremiah's letter is essentially to tell them, don't pay attention to those prophets, they don't know what they're talking about, and in fact, you'd better settle in, plant vineyards and farms and build houses and marry your children off, have grandchildren, great-grandchildren, because you're going to be there for a while, and pray for the peace of that region because you're going to be there and you're going to want to be in a peaceful place.

So he's saying, resign yourselves to your captivity because for the rest of your natural lifetimes you're going to be in Babylon. Now it's interesting, the conditions that the captives had there was certainly not like the slavery in Egypt that prior to the time of Moses the children of Israel endured, because they had been put under hard servitude by Pharaoh. Here, the Babylonians simply deported people from their homeland so as to not give them any ideas about rising up and claiming liberation or independence from Babylon.

Once Babylon conquered an area, it was hard, of course, to maintain such a large empire and to hold down rebellions, obviously the natural tendency for someone who had been conquered by Babylon, if they had been left in their own home, would be after the Babylonian armies had gone or had left only a small occupational force to seek to rise up and proclaim independence from Babylon again, and the patriots of the conquered territories would be the ones who would be most likely to give trouble to the conqueror. And so taking the royal family, the intelligentsia, the powerful people, and taking them away to Babylon was simply Nebuchadnezzar's way of making sure they wouldn't be in Jerusalem to stage an uprising against him in the future. But they weren't treated real badly in Babylon.

In fact, they were able to have houses and farms and things like that. How they acquired land there to farm is not known. They probably didn't have a lot of money when they were carried away into captivity, but it may even be that the Babylonians assigned regions for them to divide among themselves to farm and to live in so that they'd have these Jewish colonies.

We know that Ezekiel, who was among them, lived, it would appear, in a Jewish colony in Babylon. And so these people had begun to settle in, but they weren't really settling in because they had false prophets among them telling them, don't settle in, you're going

home soon. And Jeremiah wrote a letter to them to correct that notion.

It says, verse 3, Now here's the letter, but it says that Zedekiah, the king of Judah, sent these people to Babylon. It doesn't say why they were sent to Babylon. Jeremiah piggybacks his letter on whatever mission they were already on and says, here, carry this for me.

And this reminds us that they didn't have postal service in the ancient world, even in Paul's day when he was writing all his letters. They didn't have an empire-wide postal service or a courier service. Actually, if you wrote a letter, you pretty much had to carry it yourself or find someone who was going to the place you wanted it to go and induce them to carry it for you.

And so here, Jeremiah wants to get a letter off to the Babylonians. It's clear that the Babylonians are not monitoring the correspondence that's coming from Judah to Babylon. This is not a real lockdown situation.

They're not like they're in prison in Babylon. And since Zedekiah is basically at peace with Babylon at this point, prior to his rebellion against Babylon, he could send messengers safely to Babylon and back for various purposes. He might have even been sending tribute money back to Babylon, which he was obligated to send.

But these messengers sent by Zedekiah to Babylon were going to carry this letter also from Jeremiah. And here's how the letter reads. To Israel, to all who are carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit, take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands so that they may bear sons and daughters, that you may be increased there and not diminished, and seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it, for in the peace, in its peace, you will have peace.

So he says, pray that the Babylonian cities you live in will have peace, that there won't be invasions and turmoil and so forth, because you're going to be experiencing what they experienced for a while. If they are at peace, you'll be at peace, and therefore pray for them to have peace. Paul actually gave similar instructions to Christians about the Roman government.

And in 1 Timothy 2, verses 1 and 2, Paul said, Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. Christians are in a little bit of a similar situation to the exiles in Babylon.

They're away from their homeland and living in a world that's pagan. And yet we have to

live here for the time being. So it is to our advantage if the world in which we live, though it's not Christian, has relatively stable and peaceful and prosperous circumstances.

And so Paul says we should be praying for the governments that we live under, even though they are pagan. And that was the assumption in Paul's days, that the Roman government was pagan. But it could still be prayed for, that God would give peace to the empire, so that Christians would have peace.

That's apparently a good thing. Now we know that persecution of Christians sometimes has good effects too, but Paul seemed to indicate it's more desirable that we should have peace rather than a situation of turmoil and persecution. And so also, Jeremiah's letter to the exiles is that you should pray for the land of Babylon, that they'll have a peaceable season, so that you will also experience peace there.

Verse 8, For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause them to be dreamed. Now it says your dreams which you cause to be dreamed, meaning the people are causing the prophets to dream these dreams. Apparently the people were paying the prophets to come up with dreams and oracles, and that's one reason the prophets gave the kind of dreams and oracles people would like to hear.

It kept them in business. And so the people themselves were causing these prophets to dream these dreams and give these oracles, probably by supporting them financially, as long as they gave the kind of dreams and oracles they wanted to hear. For they prophesy falsely to you in my name.

I have not sent them, says the Lord. For thus says the Lord, after 70 years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you and cause you to return to this place. This is the second time he mentions the 70 years.

The first time was back in chapter 25 and verse 12, where he revealed for the first time that it would be a 70-year captivity. He repeats himself here in verse 11, For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and go and pray to me and I will listen to you and you will seek me and you will find me when you search for me with all your heart.

Now, verses 11 and 13 are often quoted verses by Christians. We often quote verse 13, telling people that they need to seek God with all their heart if they hope to find him. That is, a half-hearted seeking of God will not necessarily yield any revelation of him or any intervention from God.

And I think that's true. Likewise, verse 11 is often quoted by Christians. In fact, it may be

one of the most often quoted Old Testament verses, it seems to me these days.

I didn't hear it as much when I was young, but it seems like I hear it all the time now. Everybody quotes this as one of their favorite promises. The thing is, it's not a promise directly made to Christians, it's a promise made to the exiles.

And I'm often asked, even on the radio program, whether it's legitimate for us to claim promises like this for ourselves. And a lot of times the people who are asking are suspecting that it's not really what we should be doing. We should recognize that these promises really are to somebody else, originally, in other circumstances than those that we're in.

And therefore it might not be legitimate for us to be laying hold on them. But you know, I don't think it's all that wrong. Although there is a certain audience, a certain circumstance in which these words are spoken, it is nonetheless a revelation of God's overall character and his purposes for his people.

And the Bible makes it very clear that the promises that God made to Israel are ultimately to Christ and to those who are in Christ. So, although there would be some promises God made to Israel that would not necessarily have a direct application to us, a promise like verse 11 is really quite generic and basically is only affirming that God's plan for his people is a good plan. And although he's encouraging those who are in Babylon that although they feel like something bad has happened to them, this is actually something that can go well for them.

God actually plans to restore their descendants eventually after 70 years back to the land of Jerusalem. God has a plan for them. They might as well just settle in and enjoy the plan as much as they can because it's not going to get worse for them at this point.

God has a positive end for them, not a negative end for them. Now, to what extent we can apply that to ourselves, we could take it as a generic statement that God has a good plan for his people, which is true. You could apply it to your own circumstance too, although the problem here is that this promise to the Jews at this time is that they won't really be experiencing any new crises.

The crisis has passed for them. God wants them to settle in, have a peaceable life, and just expect the next thing is a good thing. That is, after they've had a long time raising their children and grandchildren in their land, God's going to restore them back to Jerusalem again.

That's a good thing. Essentially, he's saying you don't have to worry that in the immediate future you're going to have more of the same kind of disasters you've been experiencing. I've got a better plan than that for you.

Yet, of course, the individual Christian can't be quite sure that that's God's word to him,

at least that implication. We can say for sure that God has ultimately good plans for us. I mean, Paul says that, doesn't he, in Romans 8.28, that all things work together for the good of those who love God.

I recall, according to his purpose, it sounds like in general it's the same kind of a principle. Although, of course, in some people's lives they may find that the next patch of road is not all that smooth, because there are trials and there are disasters, and we can't assume that we, each of us in our own individual circumstances, and in the way God is dealing with us and has plans for us, that we're all in a parallel situation to these exiles who have been through the hardest part now. And he's basically saying, relax, I've got a good plan for your life, and this is intended not simply to refer to what would happen 70 years off, but that God is on their side now, they can look forward to a better situation than they had in the time of war in Jerusalem.

And we can't always be sure that God has better times for us in our outward circumstances in our near future. But we can take it as a general, long-term, overall affirmation of God's purposes for his people. His plans are good.

His plans are not for evil. He wants us to have peace in the end. There is a future hope, but in verse 11 it seems to be promising peace in the immediate future for these people, and that would not necessarily be something that transfers to every Christian at any given time in their life, because there are times of turmoil ahead for some.

And so he says, at that time you'll call upon me and you'll go and pray to me and I'll listen to you then. You'll seek me and you'll find me when you search for me with all your heart. It does suggest that God is only interested in wholeheartedness, and in a sense we can see that half-heartedness in seeking God is insulting to him.

It's like not taking him seriously. If there is a God, then nothing can be more worthy of being taken seriously. If there's no God, then there's no sense seeking him half-heartedly if he's not there.

A half-hearted seeking of God is simply irrational. It acts like there is a God, but he's not important enough to devote entirely your whole heart and your whole life to. And therefore it rather demeans God.

It demeans God more than atheism does, because atheism doesn't demean God. Atheism just says he's not there. And when someone says he is there but doesn't take him seriously and doesn't seek him with their whole heart, they're basically placing him on the level with other things and below the level of some things in terms of importance.

God has to become everything to those who believe in him or else it's an insult to him. That's why we're commanded, and Jesus said this is the first and greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength

and all your mind. And so to seek him with all your heart is the only kind of seeking that he really promises to reveal himself to.

But people who do seek with all their heart will find him. Now, I know Christians or people who were Christians who say they used to seek God, and in their mind they sought him with all their heart, but he didn't show up and therefore they gave up the search. Well, then they weren't searching with all their heart.

And searching with all your heart doesn't mean that you give it a few days or a few years even, and you put out your best effort, but then if God doesn't show up you can dispense with him. You see, the fact that you can dispense with him at all means you never had your whole heart invested. If you invest completely your whole heart in the pursuit of God, you can't readily give up that search, because your heart isn't, you're invested.

Your heart's totally devoted. And if he doesn't show up soon, the pain of heart just keeps you seeking, because you've got nothing else, you've got all your eggs in one barrel. And so if he doesn't come through, there's nothing for it but to die.

And so you don't want to die, you just keep seeking until you find. It's like if you're seeking water in a desert and you hope that over the next ridge you're going to finally find the oasis, but you get over the ridge and it's not there. Well, you don't just say, okay, I guess I'll just die then.

No, as long as you've got breath, you keep seeking for that which you desperately need. And the same is truth-seeking God. If someone says, I sought God when I was younger, I didn't really get much out of that, so I don't do that anymore.

Well, that person who says that was not seeking with all their heart. They weren't totally all in, or else they wouldn't have just said, well, okay, I gave it a shot. If you're just giving it a shot, you're not all in.

You've got to be wholly invested, jumping in the deep end, off the cliff, as it were, and then you'll find that underneath are the everlasting arms. And then you seek with your whole heart. That's when he's found.

Anything less is an insult to him, and that is no doubt why he doesn't reveal himself to half-hearted people. It's an insult to him. I will be found by you, he says, and I will bring you back from your captivity.

I'll gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I've driven you. Now, it's important to note that they weren't just taken to Babylon. They were taken to many nations, all the nations I've driven you to.

And some of them, of course, may be not even part of the Babylonian exile, but people who were exiled in the time of the Assyrians or other times. They've been driven by it. I

mean they've had a cataclysmic warlike history, and a lot of Jews have been expatriated from the land over the years and the centuries before this.

So Jews have been spread out. The diaspora was all over in many nations. And yet he said, I'll draw them back from all the nations.

And sometimes certain passages in Jeremiah, especially in chapters 30 through 34, are quoted by modern Christian prophecy teachers where God says, I'm going to draw them back to their land from all the nations where they've been driven. And they say, this can't be the Babylonian exile because that was just a Babylon. But now the Jews are in all nations, and therefore this must be a future gathering that God promises to bring them back from.

But you can see that the Babylonian exile is referred to as being to all the nations. Certainly there were nations that they weren't driven to, but it's a hyperbole. The idea is Babylon had conquered many nations, and therefore the Jews were taken away and distributed among some of those nations.

So it's not just one nation they were driven to. It says, from all the nations and all the places where I've driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I caused you to be carried away captive. Because you have said, the Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon.

Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, concerning all the people who dwell in this city, and concerning your brethren who have not gone out with you into captivity. Thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will send on them the sword, famine, and pestilence, and will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad. Obviously a reference back to the vision he had in chapter 24 where he saw two baskets of figs.

And the ones that were left in the city were the ones who were the rotten ones. The good basket of figs was the exiles, the ones he's writing to here. He's saying, you exiles, your prophets are telling you you're going to come back to Jerusalem.

You don't want to come back to Jerusalem. The people in Jerusalem are the rotten figs, and I'm going to send them into worse condition. They're going to face a siege that you haven't had to go through.

They're going to see bloodshed in their streets that you haven't had to see. You don't want, you don't envy them, you don't want to come back home right now. And I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, and I will deliver them to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them.

Because they have not heeded my words, says the Lord, which I sent to them by my

servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, neither would you heed, says the Lord. Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all you of the captivity whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab, the son of Coliah, and Zedekiah, the son of Meaziah.

These are otherwise unknown to us men, but these apparently were false prophets among the exiles in Babylon, who prophesy a lie to you in my name. Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. And because of them, a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah, who are in Babylon, saying, The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire, because they have done disgraceful things in Israel.

They have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives. They have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them. Indeed, I know, and I am a witness, says the Lord.

Now, these two false prophets were not only lying in the name of the Lord, they were also committing adultery with their neighbors' wives. These were wicked men. And God is saying, I'm going to deliver them over to the king of Babylon.

He's going to roast them in the fire. By the way, roasting people in fire was a Babylonian thing to do. The Persians never did that.

The Persians considered fire to be sacred. And therefore, when they executed people, they didn't burn them. They did other things, like feed them to lions.

We see this also with Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, putting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into a fiery furnace. But the Persian king, Darius, puts Daniel into a den of lions. Different cultures, different forms of execution.

But the Babylonians did burn people. And we have other confirmation of that in Daniel chapter 3. The difference is that Daniel chapter 3 records Nebuchadnezzar putting three men into a fire, and it doesn't burn them because they are righteous men and God preserves them. These two men are false prophets, and the fire is going to roast them well enough.

And they will be so proverbial for the horrible thing that happened to them that when people curse, other people will say, may God make you like those two. Now, why would Nebuchadnezzar do this to these two guys? In general, the exiles in Babylon are on reasonably peaceful terms with the king. Why these two guys coming under this punishment? Well, almost certainly it's because of the nature of their message.

They're stirring up discontent among the exiles. They're claiming that Babylon will fall soon and that the Jews who are taken captive will be sent home. First of all, it's an anti-Babylonian message.

Secondly, it would have an impact on the morale of the people so that they would never settle in, and they'd be more difficult for the Babylonians to rule and to manage, more so than if they just settle in and be happy and say, well, we'll stay here for a while. So these prophets were actually speaking things that the Babylonians would find troublesome. Apparently, although we don't have record of it after this, Nebuchadnezzar must have arrested these two men and thrown them into the fiery furnace, as he later would do with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or maybe had already done.

Actually, I think that probably Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, since they had been in captivity for about eight years longer than this time, maybe they had already been through the fire. We don't know the exact timing of their ordeal. It says in verse 24, you shall also speak to Shemaiah, another false prophet.

We know he's a false prophet because it says in verse 31, in the middle of verse 31, it says, because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I have not sent him, and he has caused you to trust in lies. So here's another of the false prophets that lives among the exiles. You shall also speak to Shemaiah, the Nehelamite, saying, Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, You have sent letters in your name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, to Zephaniah, the son of Maaziah, the priest, and all the priests, saying, The Lord has made you priests instead of Jehoiada, the priest, so that there should be officers in the house of the Lord over every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet, that you should put him in prison and in stocks.

Now, therefore, why have you not reprov'd Jeremiah of Anathoth, who makes himself a prophet to you? For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long. Build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit. Now, this is apparently a second letter that he sent.

Jeremiah sent the first letter that was probably up through verse 23, and then a response was sent back to Jeremiah's letter to the priests in Jerusalem by this man Shemaiah, saying, Listen, isn't God, hasn't He entrusted with you the responsibility to keep crazies off the street, false prophets who claim to be prophets? Aren't you supposed to put them in the stocks and teach them a lesson? How come you're not doing this to Jeremiah? says this false prophet. Interestingly enough, this man Shemaiah, who's writing a letter, claims to be a prophet, and yet he's saying, You're supposed to put all the prophets, everyone who's demented enough to think he's a prophet, put them in stocks. Well, of course, he couldn't put Shemaiah in stocks.

He's over in Babylon, but the implications are that, of course, I'm the exception. You should put anyone who thinks he's a prophet in stocks because he's got to be crazy, except me, of course. Why haven't you done that to Jeremiah? And he makes reference to the letter that Jeremiah had sent to them in the earlier verses.

Verse 29, Now Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the

prophet. Shemaiah was actually telling this man, the priest, to put Jeremiah in stocks, and Zephaniah apparently was more sympathetic toward Jeremiah and did not put him in stocks, but did apprise him of what had been written about him in this matter. And he has caused you to trust in a lie.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family. He shall not have anyone to dwell among his people, nor shall he see the good that I will do for my people, says the Lord, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord. To say he will not have anyone among his people may mean he'll have no offspring, and therefore no one of his people will live to the end of the 70 years to see the good that has been prophesied by Jeremiah.

That would be this man's judgment. It seems like worse judgments would be deserved since under the law of Moses, if somebody was a false prophet, they should be stoned to death. Actually, Jeremiah's prophecies against these false prophets often is relatively merciful.

They should have been stoned. Now, chapter 30 through 33, a fourth chapter section, is a distinctive section in Jeremiah that resembles some of the very shorter sections, for example, in chapter 23, which had been Messianic, the Messianic age. There are, as we know, many passages of this kind in Isaiah, but this section, chapters 30 through 33, are the only section in Jeremiah that have any kind of a protracted vision of the Messianic age.

This section is sometimes called by scholars the little book of comfort. The book of comfort, as you know, is the title given to the last part of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 40 through 66 is often labeled the book of comfort.

This shorter version of a similar prophecy to those is given the title the little book of comfort by some. Now, if you remember the book of comfort in Isaiah, chapters 40 through 66, it was set in the context of the end of the Babylonian exile and God freeing them through Cyrus to go back and rebuild their city in Jerusalem in the temple. That was the ostensible setting of the book of comfort in Isaiah, but we found that much of what was really prophesied had to do with Jesus and the present Messianic era.

The return of the exiles from Babylon simply provided the springboard for bringing up the matters of the Messianic era. That is also true in this section we're about to read. We're going to find prophecies of God returning the exiles from Babylon that Jeremiah gives, but really the details as we read them will have an application to the present age, the Messianic age, and passages from this section, of course, are quoted in the New Testament to that effect, and that is how we know that they are about the Messianic age.

We have this segment of four chapters that kind of stands out roughly in the middle of

the book. It begins in chapter 30, the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, now I just want to say it says this is the word that came to Jeremiah. It apparently came in a dream.

We don't hear about that right away, but when you get to chapter 31 and verse 26, it says, after this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me. It sounds like he was asleep when this word was being given to him, so he kind of woke up, and it sounds like he went back to sleep again. He looked around, went back to sleep.

Realized he'd been asleep, but it was a pleasant experience having these dreams. So here's the word, chapter 30, verse 2. Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. Now this is not a reference to writing all the prophecies that he's given previous to this, because it's not until chapter 36 in other circumstances that he's actually told to do that.

In chapter 36, in verse 2, God said, Take a scroll of a book and write in it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. And by the way, that prophecy in chapter 36, or that command to write down his prophecies, was about 20 or 21 years after he had begun preaching in the 13th year of Josiah. So about 20 years' worth of prophecies were to be written down under this command in chapter 36, verse 2. But chapter 30, it looks like it's probably just the contents of this dream, the contents of chapters 30 through 33 that are to be written down in this particular occasion.

It would seem. For behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will bring back from captivity my people Israel and Judah, says the Lord. And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

Now, these are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah. For thus says the Lord, We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and a nod of peace. Ask now and see whether a man is ever in labor with a child.

So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, like a woman in labor, and faces all turned pale? Now, this reference to people holding their hands on their loins and acting like a woman in childbirth, this is just a reference to the agony that people are in because of the judgment that's upon them. And it's actually an image that Isaiah used several times, three or four times at least. Isaiah talked about when the judgment would come upon Israel or Judah or even some of the pagan nations that Isaiah professed against that says they will be like a woman in childbirth with their hands on their loins.

So basically, it's just a metaphor for the childbirth. There's not really a child being born here, and there's not really a man having a child. It says, why do these men act like they're having a child? Men don't have babies, do they? That's what he's saying.

But they're in agony as if they're in labor. 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, for it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from your neck, and I will burst your bonds. Foreigners shall no more enslave them, but they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up to them.

Now, this time of Jacob's trouble, this is the only place in the Bible that uses that expression, but if you are conversant in popular prophecy teaching of the dispensational sort, you know that the time of Jacob's trouble is a label that dispensationalists give to the future tribulation. In fact, it's one of the arguments they give for a pre-tribulation rapture because they say it's not a time of the church's trouble, the tribulation is a time of Jacob's trouble. Israel is going to be purged in the tribulation.

It's Israel that God's dealing with in the tribulation. It's Jacob's trouble, and therefore the church doesn't need to be here and can be raptured prior to that. Well, first of all, the argument would not be sound even if the tribulation is called the time of Jacob's trouble because it does not tell us that the church wouldn't be here also.

After all, it could be Jacob that troubled, and the church could be preserved through it. I mean, the reasoning is not sound. But what's worse is there's no reason to refer to the tribulation that they're thinking of as a time of Jacob's trouble since the term is only used here in Scripture, and it's not talking about a future tribulation.

It's talking about the pain of those who are conquered by Babylon but when it says that Jacob will be saved out of it, it says that the yoke will be broken off his neck, verse 8, which is obviously talking about the yoke of Babylon, the present captivity that Jeremiah is concerned with here. Israel will be saved out of the Babylonian captivity. The time of Jacob's trouble is that which came upon them through the Babylonian invasion and war and conquest and captivity.

That's trouble for Israel, but it's not permanent. He'll be saved out of it. God's going to break the yoke, that is Babylon's yoke, from off your neck and burst your bonds, and foreigners will no more enslave them, it says in verse 8. So this time of Jacob's trouble is not a reference to some future tribulation but rather to the tribulation that Jeremiah has been talking about all along.

It says in verse 9, But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Now David, of course, is dead, and this is not a reference to the resurrection. Some dispensationalists believe that in the millennium, when David is raised from the dead, he will actually reign in the millennium, and they use a verse like this.

They're going to serve David their king, I'm going to raise him up. But actually, David is a code name for the Messiah, not only here, elsewhere as well. The prophets did not know

what the Messiah's name would be, obviously.

It was not yet revealed to them. And because it was not, they sometimes called him David because he would be the permanent and most recent occupant of the Davidic throne, of the Davidic dynasty. You might remember that Rehoboam was referred to as David.

Rehoboam was David's grandson, but when he increased the burden on the people of Israel, they said, attend to your own house, O David. We're going off and doing our own thing. And they started a separate kingdom and departed from the dynasty of David and made their own king.

But they referred to Rehoboam as O David because the whole dynasty is named after David. In a sense, the way that all the kings of Egypt, no matter who they were, were called Pharaoh. Or the kings of Gerar were called Abimelech.

They were part of, it was like a throne title. In Israel, David was the throne title. He was the king and the founder of the dynasty.

And so any king from him could be called David, and especially since the Messiah was going to be the antitype of David. David was a type of the Messiah. You remember when Malachi is talking about John the Baptist, he refers to him as Elijah.

Well, that's not his real name, but Elijah is a type and a shadow of John the Baptist. And since the prophets didn't know the real names of the historical characters that would follow, they often would label them, give them the name which is of the person in the Old Testament that is the one that is the type of them. Ezekiel 34 also refers to the Messiah as David.

Ezekiel 34, 23, talking about the time of Christ, the present age, and it says in verse 23, I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, my servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David, a prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken it.

Likewise, in a similar passage in Ezekiel 37, 24, it says, Ezekiel 37, 24, David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in my judgments and observe my statutes and do them. This statement, they shall have one shepherd, is reminiscent of what Jesus said in John 10, 16, where he says, I have other sheep you don't know about.

I'm going to go bring them also, and then there will be one flock and one shepherd. This prediction, there will be one shepherd over them, refers to him as David. But of course, Jesus referred to it as himself.

He said, I'm the good shepherd. This is a reference to the Messiah. Hosea 3, 5 also refers

to the Messiah as David.

Hosea 3, 5, the end of a Messianic section says, Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days. So David is, at least three different prophets make reference to the Messiah as David. And so when it says in Jeremiah 30 in verse 9, they shall serve the Lord their God, and they'll serve David their king.

It's talking about the Messiah here. It's talking about after the exile, God will have his kingdom under David, that is under David's seed, David's descendant, the Messiah, and God's people will serve him. And that would be, of course, the remnant who came to Christ and who have served him ever since, throughout the age of the church.

Therefore do not fear, O my servant Jacob, says the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel, for behold, I will save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid, for I am with you, says the Lord, to save you. Though I make a full end of the nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you.

But I will correct you in justice and will not let you go altogether unpunished. So you're going to have to go through some chastening, which they were in Babylon, but he would eventually make a full end of the power of Babylon and its days would be finished, but not so with Judah. He's got future for them, although they will not go unpunished.

Verse 12, for thus says the Lord, your affliction is incurable, that is by human means. He's going to say in verse 17, for I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord. But humanly, your affliction is incurable, your wound is severe, there's no one to plead your cause, that you may be bound up, you have no healing medicines.

This is so much like Isaiah's description of the nation as a man full of putrefying sores from head to foot, no one has been there to bound up, no one has poured in ointment on their sores. So this is the same kind of a picture of the nation, but as I pointed out in verse 17, he says, I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord, which is, of course, in Isaiah, the function of the servant of the Lord who will, by his stripes, heal them. All your lovers, verse 14, have forgotten you, they do not seek you, these are the false gods they used to worship.

For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased. Why do you cry about your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable, because of the multitude of your iniquities, because of the sins, your sins have increased, I have done these things to you. Therefore, all those who devour you shall be devoured, and all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity.

Those who plunder you shall become plunder, and all who prey upon you will, I will make a prey. For I will restore health to you, and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord, because they called you an outcast, saying, this is Zion, no one seeks her. That is, Zion had ceased to have lovers seeking her anymore, she'd been abandoned, but now God seeks her, and heals her.

Verse 18, thus says the Lord, behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on the dwelling places. The city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan. And of course, there's the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Zerubbabel's day.

Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving, and the voice of those who make merry, I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish. I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all who oppress them.

Their nobles shall be from among them, and their governor shall come from their midst. Then I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach me. For who is this who pledged his heart to approach me? Now, the governor that would be in their midst probably is a reference to Zerubbabel.

He'd be one of their own. They would not be in a Babylonian territory governed by a Babylonian official, but when they return, they will be governed by a man of their own people. And in fact, Zerubbabel was descended from David.

In fact, he was descended from Jeconiah, the king, the last king in the procession of David's line. And so Zerubbabel is actually called a governor in Ezra. And so this is predicting that.

The last line of verse 21, for who is this who pledged his heart to approach me, actually is paraphrased in the NIV more like for who would dare of himself to approach me. That is, I will cause him to approach me. I will give him the opportunity to do that, the privilege.

No one can do that on their own, says the Lord. Verse 22, you shall be my people, and I will be your God. Now, this oft-repeated formula, they shall be my people, I shall be their God, or in this case, you shall be my people, I will be your God, frequently found in Jeremiah and other places in the Scripture.

It's essentially a wedding vow. In ancient times, this is how people got married. A groom would say to his bride, you're my wife.

And she would say, you're my husband. And that would be the vow. That was the earliest form known of Middle Eastern marriage vows.

And so to say, you're my wife, you're my husband, is essentially the way you contracted a wedding. And to say, you will be my people, and I'll be your God, that's essentially a reference to a new covenant, a new marriage covenant. He's going to make reference in chapter 31, famously, to the new covenant, which is a marriage covenant.

In chapter 31, verse 31, we're not there yet, but there's the implications of a new wedding, a new marriage to his people. Verse 23, Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind. It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.

The fierce anger of the Lord will not return until he has done it, and until he has performed the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will consider it. Back in chapter 23:20, he had used a similar phrase.

He says, in 23:20, he says, in the latter days you will understand it perfectly. There are things that he's prophesying that pertain to the latter days. They'll be better understood at that time.

Remember, Daniel is told about his prophecy that it would be sealed up, and it's not to be understood. But the time will come when men shall run to and fro, and knowledge will increase. And it says, and the wise will understand.

And this, of course, is referring to the present age where Paul said that the Holy Spirit had made known to the holy apostles and prophets things that were hidden from generations of the sons of men previously. There are things that were predicted, but still their meaning was somewhat hidden, not quite understood. They would be understood at a later time.

And remember, Peter said in 1 Peter 1, in verses 10 through 12, he said that the prophets searched diligently and sought to know what manner of time the spirit of Christ in them was prophesying when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. The glories that would follow is, of course, the resurrection and subsequent kingdom of God. He says the prophets of old spoke about this, he says, but to them it was given information that they were not speaking for themselves, but he says for us, who have had the gospel preached to us through the Holy Spirit.

He said those are things which even the angels desire to look into. There are things that God was predicting through the prophets that the prophets did not understand, the people did not understand, even the angels were curious to look into it. It was a mystery, but Peter says it's now been proclaimed to us through the spirit-inspired preaching of the gospel.

The New Testament message is the latter days when you would understand these things. And so we're able to consider and understand it from a perspective that was not available to Jeremiah's original audience. But now we can understand it, and the New

Testament writers are those who have broken the code for us when they quote from passages like these.

Chapter 31, At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord, the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness. Israel, when I went to give him rest, this is using the imagery, of course, of the Exodus to be a type of what he's going to do.

And, of course, what he was going to do in the near future from Jeremiah's time was bring the exiles back to Babylon. The Exodus is seen as a prototype of that kind of rescue. But then, of course, we know from the New Testament that this second Exodus motif is applied to Christ and to our salvation, our being delivered from the bondage of sin.

It says, The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving kindness, I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel.

You shall again be adorned with your tambourines. You shall go forth with dances of those who rejoice. You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria.

The planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food. For there shall be a day when watchmen will cry out to Ephraim, Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God. Sounds like Isaiah 2 somewhat.

But this is, he says, I have drawn you. This is the same expression that Hosea uses when he's talking about the Exodus, reminding them of how God drew them in the wilderness to himself. In Isaiah 11, you know that verse 1 is quoted by Matthew.

When Israel was young, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But then Hosea goes on, As they called them, so they went from them. They sacrificed to bales, and burned incense to carved images.

I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms. And they did not know that I was the one who healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bonds of love.

And I was to them as those who take the yoke from the neck. I stooped and fed them. He's talking about the manna.

Now, it's all poetic language. He's saying, I brought my son out of Egypt, and I helped him learn to walk, and I fed him like a parent does to a child. But they went after other gods, and so forth.

But he says, they didn't know I was the one who healed them. He healed their bitter waters of bondage, and took the yoke from their neck. But he says, I drew them, Hosea

11.4, I drew them with gentle cords.

That's what he says, the same word in chapter 31 of Jeremiah, verse 3. Therefore, with loving kindness, I've drawn you. Talking about how he's led them through the wilderness of the Exodus, and likening that to what he's going to do now, and bringing them back to Zion. Jeremiah 31.7, 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. And that is, of course, what the New Testament says, it is only a remnant of Israel that is to be saved. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, which is the Babylonian exile, I will 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 the child together.

A great throng shall return there. That is, those who would have the most difficulty traveling, and who might otherwise decide not to make the trip. Blind people, people with children, people who are in labor, he says, I'm going to bring them too.

Now, this doesn't necessarily find a fulfillment in the return of the exiles because most of the people who were exiled did not return. Although, perhaps among the ones who did were some of the ones like these who, in the remnant that God saved, they were not always the ones that were the most successful, the ones that were the most powerful. The people who probably had successful businesses and farms in Babylon were the ones most loath to leave them and go back to Jerusalem.

So, it may well have been that the ragtag people who did make it back were of this sort who were the disenfranchised, the handicapped, people who were not the powerful and comfortable ones in Babylon. They shall come with weeping and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water in a straight way in which they shall not stumble.

For I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn. 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. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he.

That would be Babylon, but also we've been ransomed from the hand of Satan, who is certainly stronger than we are. 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 of the herd. Their souls shall be like well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all.

Very recognizable images of the messianic age from some of Isaiah's oracles. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, the young men and all together. For I will turn their

mourning to joy.

I will comfort them and make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord. By the way, verses 12 and 13 separately were popular songs back in the 70s.

I don't hear them sung anymore, but they're kind of neat songs. Maybe I'll teach them to you sometime. Two different songs.

One from verse 12, one from verse 13. 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. Now this is quoted obviously by Matthew in chapter 2, verses 17 and 18 and applied to the time when Herod slew the infants of Bethlehem in his attempt to kill the newborn Jesus.

Matthew said that's the fulfillment of this verse which he here quotes. Now you might say well why would this verse be applied to that? Well that is a good question because this verse is really not part of a negative prophecy but a positive one. It is true that verse 15 describes a negative situation but verse 16 is predicting the reversal of it that says 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.

Rachel's weeping because her children have been taken away into captivity in Babylon. They're no longer there but they're going to come back. Stop weeping now.

There was a time of weeping when the children were carried away into Babylon but now it's time to stop weeping because they're coming back and there is hope in your future says the Lord that your children should come back to their own borders. So in Jeremiah's usage of this he's saying there was a time of weeping. You could picture the ghost of Rachel in her grave near Ramah weeping because as it were she's watching the the exiles be depopulated from the land.

Her children no more. Now why would Matthew say this has anything to do with what happened in the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem? That is a very difficult thing to answer. Commentators have never done a very good job in my opinion.

My thought is this that first of all the reference this verse is called for in Matthew because of the location, Bethlehem. Rachel was as we're told in Genesis buried near Bethlehem. She died when Jacob and his family were traveling and they were not far from Bethlehem when she died so she was buried nearby.

So since the slaughter took place in Bethlehem it's easy for Matthew to see that the idea of Rachel weeping in her grave could have applied to this situation because she was near enough to be if she was aware of anything which she of course was not this is poetic but the picture is she's nearby weeping in her grave as these infants are all

slaughtered. But he might also see the slaughter of the infants by Herod as the first of a series or a first of a prolonged program of persecution of Romans against the people of God. To stamp out the Messiah Herod the Roman official killed innocent Jewish babies and this was just the beginning.

Eventually the Romans would do more devastating things to the people in Israel. This is just one act of Roman tyranny that would be its ultimate fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews as in the days of Jeremiah. As the Jews had been deported from Babylon and Rachel is perceived there as weeping their departure so would the Jews be deported by the Romans.

And the first act of Roman aggression against the Jews on this occasion to wipe out the Messiah might be seen as simply part and parcel of a whole program that begins now. The Messiah has come. The prophet said the coming of the Messiah would also herald the downfall of the old system.

With the coming of the baby Jesus it begins and it doesn't end until AD 70 when the whole judgment is complete. Matthew might be looking at that whole period as one piece as Isaiah seems to merge those two things together. The coming of the new order is connected with the fall of the old order.

As Jeremiah speaks of Rachel weeping because of the Babylonian exile the deportation of the Jews so Matthew might be already looking at the deportation of the Jews by the Romans and sees Herod the Roman the Roman appointee that is he was really an Edomite but he was appointed by Rome he's a Roman official as making that first move just as when in Luke 13 people came to Jesus and told him about Pilate slaughtering Jews in the temple, Galileans. Jesus said well these were not more sinful than other Galileans said if you don't repent you'll all perish in the same way. He said you'll all likewise, means in the same way perish, that is at the hands of Romans maybe even in the temple since Josephus tells that many of the Jews were slaughtered in the temple when the Romans broke in but the point is it's a Roman act of aggression against helpless Jews.

Pilate on that occasion in Luke 13 and yet Herod's act of aggression, Pilate's act of aggression could be seen as simply the beginning of a process that is in motion which will find its culmination in the destruction of Jerusalem and another exile as it were, another diaspora of the Jews like that which Jeremiah knew of and therefore Matthew might be connecting the Babylonian exile in principle with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans which would be a reasonable thing to do and therefore seeing the death of these infants in Bethlehem nearby where Rachel was as a suited counterpart to what Jeremiah talked about, Rachel weeping seeing the Babylonians carry off her children but the prophecy here is really one of positive outcome refrain your voice from weeping your kids are coming back and in verse 18 he says I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself saying you have chastened me and I was chastened like an untrained bull,

restore me and I will return for you are the Lord my God, surely all my turning after my turning I have repented and after I was instructed I struck myself on the thigh that is like how stupid I was, it's just a gesture of recognizing your mistake and I was ashamed yes even humiliated because I bore the reproach of my youth God says 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 set up sign posts, make landmarks set your heart toward the highway the way on which in which you went, turn back oh virgin of Israel, turn back to these your cities how long will you gad about oh you backsliding daughter, for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth a woman shall encompass a man, now we're just about out of time, obviously we will not finish this chapter in this session in fact this is probably a good place to stop but it's a frustrating place to stop if I say nothing about this last line because it is one of the more difficult statements in the book of Jeremiah to make sense of the Lord will do a new thing in the earth, like what? a woman shall encompass a man, well what does that mean? most translations translate a woman will protect a man, the word in the Hebrew actually does mean encompass or surround but it's like an army might surround you know someone to defend them, a bodyguard might surround someone, it's a protective surrounding so the idea seems to be a woman is protecting a man what does that mean? well it's hard to know what that means and I'm going to only be able to make a suggestion it may not mean this at all but if a woman is seen protecting a man it's a reversal of roles men are supposed to protect women the woman is the weaker vessel, generally speaking men are the ones who defend the weaker ones, so that figuratively there's a reversal of roles here where the weaker party is defending the stronger party or the stronger party is seen in a more vulnerable position at the mercy of the weaker party and it is suggested by some that this may be a reference to God, who's the man, the stronger party, becoming a human being, becoming weaker and being protected by a woman, a mother that is the incarnation God putting himself in the position of not being the strong one but the one who's cared for and protected and nurtured by human beings, I mean a woman to be exact but even for God who is so much stronger than people and the one who usually would protect them to be made vulnerable and weak so that his welfare and his safety depends on human parents, human beings the weaker ones, so that there's kind of a reversal of roles, God who used to protect them is now being protected by them in a sense this may not be a satisfying answer to you and I don't blame you if it isn't because it's very difficult to find a satisfying explanation of this but it looks like it is in fact talking about the advent of the messianic age where he says the Lord will do a new thing in the earth, Isaiah used that language to be in contrast to the old exodus he said don't remember the former things meaning the exodus but remember the new thing that I'm doing and then he goes on to describe the new covenant so it would seem that the new thing has to do with the coming of the new covenant and certainly it came, its beginning was when Jesus was born, when God became a man, when God took on a weaker form and became vulnerable and at the mercy as it were of humans, who were of course generally weaker than he is most of the

time, so it's like people are the women, the woman he's the man, but he comes under a vulnerability and the need to be protected by human mother, human father and so forth there may be a better answer but if there is it's awfully hard to find, that's a very bizarre statement and its meaning has been much speculated about and with that speculation we'll just have to leave off and come back and pick up the rest of the chapter at the beginning of the next session