

Fact Sheet for **“Es-cha What?”**
Jeremiah 30-31

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When is Jesus returning? What is the next event in biblical prophecy? Has the antichrist already been born? What is the Rapture? Will we live through the Tribulation? Can we see prophecy being fulfilled in our news today? These questions all belong to an area of theology named “eschatology.” Es-cha what? Eschatology. This is a strange sounding word, but it is easy to understand. The NT was written in Greek, and the Greek word for “last” is pronounced “es-cha-tos.” Therefore “eschatology” is the study of last things, or as we often put it the study of end times. This is perhaps the toughest area of theology to get a handle on. One reason for this is that there is no single passage that clearly lays out all that will happen in the future. Instead we find bits and scraps of information about end times scattered throughout the Bible. And there is a second reason. The biblical information about end times is most often shrouded in a fog. Specific things are said, but in a way that we are left scratching our heads as to what they mean.

Jeremiah 30 and 31 are eschatological chapters. As you read through them you can sense the fog. There are parts of those chapters that would soon have fulfillment in that day, and parts that have not yet been fulfilled. The people in Jeremiah’s day would not have caught this. Instead they would have expected all to be fulfilled in fairly short order. On the other hand we, 2½ thousand years later, recognize that parts of these two chapters are about end times. They never have been fulfilled as of yet. We get this understanding immediately from the first two verses of chapter 30. Read Jeremiah 30:1-2. Judah returned from captivity in Babylon after 70 years, but Israel never did. And that is still true. These verses hint therefore at end times, times yet future to us.

The next verses have the same end times feel. Read Jeremiah 30:4-7. Are these verses only referring to the Babylonian captivity or are they referring to the Great Tribulation spoken of in the book of Revelation? Then read the next verse. Remember that the Jewish people were in servitude under the Romans. So this wasn’t immediately fulfilled. Israel is not in servitude to others today... or are they? This is again some of the fog.

Then there is a very puzzling verse. Read Jeremiah 30:9. Will David literally be resurrected to life and reign as king over Israel in the end times? Other passages seem to say so (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5). Or is the NLT correct in its translation of Jeremiah 30:9, relating this to Jesus the Messiah? Again, we have the fog.

If you read through the rest of chapter 30 you can see fulfillment as they returned from Babylon, but you can still sense that these verses can relate to end times.

Chapter 31 begins with some great words about God’s faithfulness. Read Jeremiah 30:1-3. God was reminding the people of Jeremiah’s day that He had not abandoned His people. His love for them is everlasting. God continues in His faithfulness to them. Is this still true? Is God still faithful to His promises to them? You bet!

In the 1800’s this was much harder to see. Israel had ceased being a nation almost 2,000 years earlier. In fact, no one (not even their Rabbis) even knew any more how to vocalize Hebrew. So there was a trend in those years to spiritualize God’s promises to Israel and apply them to Christians instead. But along came a fellow named Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. He resurrected the vocalization of the Hebrew language from the dust of oblivion. His daughters grew up only hearing and only speaking Hebrew. The Hebrew language was resurrected. It is much easier for us to see that God is still faithful to His promises to Israel.

In the following verses of chapter 31 there is again fog. Jeremiah 31:5 is one example. Today Samaria is currently under the administration of the Palestinian Authority. Don't you get the sense from Jeremiah 31:5 that one day it will be under the full control of Israel?

Israel has received Jewish immigration from all over the world. But is this a complete fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:8. Or is there an end time fulfillment being hinted at?

Then there is a song that we sing based on the KJV of Jeremiah 31:12 that we clearly understand this as referring to end times.

Jeremiah 31:15 is quoted in the Matthew 2:17-18, and we need to take a rabbit trail on those two verses in Matthew for a moment. In Matthew this referred to the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, 5 miles south of Jerusalem, by Herod. In Jeremiah this referred to the captives leaving from Ramah, 5 miles north of Jerusalem, for Babylon (see Jeremiah 40:1). Rachel was Joseph's and Benjamin's mother. Joseph fathered Ephraim and Manasseh, the major tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel which had been exiled to Nineveh in 722B.C. Ramah was a town in that northern kingdom. But why did Matthew use the word "fulfilled"? That word had a broader sense than what we usually understand. There is a parallel being drawn in Matthew between the tears shed over the people going into exile in Jeremiah's day and the tears shed over the infants killed by Herod at Jesus' birth.

God encouraged the Jewish people through Jeremiah of His future blessing for them. Read Jeremiah 31:27-30. In Jeremiah's day everyone suffered because of the sinful choices of many Jews. But the days would come when the only ones to suffer would be the ones who would make sinful choices.

Then God spoke of a new covenant. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Do you remember a verse we repeat each month (1 Corinthians 11:25)? Instead of the words "new covenant" in that verse the KJV has "new testament." A covenant is an agreement between two parties. It is the same thing as a testament. In the old covenant (the old agreement, the old testament), the Mosaic Law, the Holy Spirit did not indwell people. In new covenant (the new agreement, the new testament) the Holy Spirit does indwell Christians. These verses in Jeremiah speak of Jews one day becoming Christians who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And they will know the LORD powerfully!

Now look as to how firm God's promises to Israel are. Read Jeremiah 31:35-37. In an encouragement communicated through Jeremiah God spoke of Jerusalem being rebuilt, never to be overthrown anymore forever (Jeremiah 31:40b). But Jerusalem was destroyed in 70A.D. by Titus. Did God fail to keep His word to Israel? Not at all. What Jeremiah wouldn't have seen was the application of this to end time events because of the fog.

What can we take away from these two chapters?

1. We have already begun to take part in the new covenant. The Holy Spirit indwells us. One day in the future the Jewish people as a whole will take part in this same new covenant. Indeed many already have in the Messianic movement.

2. We can be encouraged that God is always faithful to His promises. This is true for the Jewish people. This is true for us. One of the very strong evidences we have of this is Israel becoming a nation again. What other nation has lost both their country and their language for nearly two millennia then come back?

3. Be careful about end time prophecy. It is way too easy to make a mistake in your perception.

4. Don't let your love for God grow cold. In the words of Jeremiah don't be guilty of eating sour grapes. Keep your relationship with God warm, vibrant, and growing.

5. And if you have never chosen to take part in the new covenant then now is the time to make that right.