

Born to Win

Jeremiah #22

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You've probably heard the expression "The Lost Tribes of Israel" but you may not realize what people are talking about. Late in their history, Israel was divided into two nations—the house of Israel and the house of Judah. After a little over 200 years, the 10 northern tribes, which were called the house of Israel, were carried captive by the king of Assyria. After another 130 the house of Judah, which was centered on Jerusalem, went captive to Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem after 70 years in exile, but the tribes of the house of Israel were *never heard from again*. Hence, the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.

The prophets never forgot the house of Israel. God frequently made mention of them in prophecies about the last days. I *think* most commentators assume that all these prophecies were fulfilled in the Jews. But if that were true I really would have expected a little different *wording* of the prophecies as written. Here's one, for example, in Jeremiah, chapter 31:

Jeremiah 31

KJV

²⁷ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

What he, basically, is saying is that these two kingdoms have been desolate long enough. I'm going to have lots of people in the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Now, bear in mind that when Jeremiah was writing this the house of Israel had been *gone* into captivity for over 130 years, and God only knows where they all were by this time. He goes on to say in verse 28:

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

²⁸ And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, said the LORD.

²⁹ In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

³⁰ But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eats the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

What in the world does that mean? Well, it's a kind of a proverb they invented to justify what was happening to them. They were saying, "Our fathers did some bad stuff and we're hurting for it." And God says, "We're all going to have to get over that. Everybody is going to die for *his own* iniquities. He's not going to die for *somebody else's* iniquity."

Now, the expression "the house of" is an important distinction and one that must not be lost. It is *not* an ethnic description. When God speaks of Israel ethnically, he calls them "the children of Israel" or he calls them "the children of Jacob" and he's talking about an ethnic group of people. When he speaks of "the house of Israel" he is making an important distinction in that it is a *political* description, not ethnic. All

the refugees, for example, the 10 northern tribes who settled in Judah after the northern tribes went in captive—a lot of them got out of there and settled in Judah—but they’re now part of the house of Judah. It’s a political description for the *governing body* of that group of people. Yet, in spite of the fact that Israel was gone, Jeremiah sees a “*house of Israel*” in the future. And then, right after this, comes a passage that might be familiar to you if you’re a Bible reader, because it deals with what we call the New Covenant. And it’s surprising in its content. You may never have understood exactly what it was that God said he would *do* about this new covenant. In verse 31, Jeremiah 31, he says this:

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³¹ Behold, the days come, said the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

³² Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was an husband to them, said the LORD:

³³ But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, said the LORD, [...]

Okay, we’re talking about a covenant now being made with a *political entity*, with a group of people, a nation of people—not just with individuals scattered here and yon. “I’m going to make a new covenant with them.” What are the terms of that new covenant? He says:

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³³ [...] I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Now, the distinction that’s being drawn here is between a Law which originally was written in tables of stone. God says, “Now I’m going to write it in your *hearts*. It’s going to be something that’s a part of you. It’s going to flow out of your innermost being that you would keep these commandments.” Mind you, we’re not talking about a *different law*. We’re talking about *where* the Law is written—stone or in your heart.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁴ And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, [...]

You won’t have to walk up to somebody on a park bench and say, “Do you know the Lord, brother?” “*Everybody*”, he says “will know me.”

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁴ [...] from the least of them to the greatest of them, said the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Now, I suppose there are different ways of interpreting this passage, but the language of it seems to point toward the *last days*—a time when *nobody* will be out here wandering around the streets who doesn’t know about God. He says, “All of them will know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” And this thing about making a new covenant with the house of Israel—well, somehow or other we’re going to have to *find* them in order to make a covenant with them. So, the author of Hebrews, picking up on this theme, surely places it well into the future in his own day. He was writing somewhere late in the first

century and he's still talking about a new covenant *yet to come*. In Hebrews 8, the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

¹ Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

² A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

All right, he's talking about Jesus. He's had a lot to say about him all through the first seven chapters, and in chapter eight he decides he's going to create a little summary for us. In verse six, it says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

⁶ But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

That's interesting. Jesus now is the mediator of a *better* covenant than that one we heard about before, established up on *better promises* than the one that was given before. Then he says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Well, okay, the first covenant was faulty—what was wrong with the first covenant? Well, he tells us. Verse 8:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

⁸ For finding fault with them, [...]

And it would have to be so, wouldn't it, because obviously when a covenant is made between God and some people, if there's a fault in it, the fault's not going to be with God. The fault obviously was with them. Because of that, he says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

⁸ [...] Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

Now, here it is again. This is not a covenant with just *anyone*. It is a covenant with *two political entities, two governing structures*. Now, mind you, Jesus created a New Covenant with *his disciples* at the Last Supper, but this covenant is different from that. It is made with two distinct governmental entities. Now, what is this covenant all about? Well, here's what the writer of Hebrews has to say about it in Hebrews 8, verse 9. He says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

⁹ Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord.

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Wow! Obviously the writer of Hebrews has focused in, has nailed down the question of which covenant we're talking about—it's the same one Jeremiah was talking about. And it's not a new covenant exactly made with *all mankind* like the Christian covenant we normally talk about. It's a specific covenant made with *two specific nations of people*. What's he going to do? He says:

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

¹¹ And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: [...]

Just like Jeremiah said.

Hebrews 8

KJ2000

¹¹ [...] for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

That's the end of the quotation out of Jeremiah. Now here's what the writer of Hebrews has to say about that:

Hebrews 8

AKJV

¹³ In that he said, A new covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away.

Interesting. He didn't say it *had vanished*; he said it's ready. Now, I might think that this was the covenant that Jesus established with his disciples if it were not for the *specific object* of the covenant. This is not a covenant that is made with the Gentiles. It is a new covenant with the *same* people he made the Old Covenant with, it's just that the terms are different. And the law isn't even what's different, it's *where the law is written* that is different, and a lot of misunderstanding has been generated in Christian theological circles about this particular question. There's, of course, also another reason why I don't think this is talking purely about Jesus and his covenant with his disciples. Ezekiel wrote about the same time Jeremiah was writing. The house of Israel was long gone and lost, and yet Ezekiel had some important things to say about it.

Ezekiel chapter 37, in verse 15—Ezekiel is in captivity in Babylon by the river Chebar. He has had several visions and finally here comes this one about Israel at some time in the future.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

¹⁵ The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,

¹⁶ Moreover, you son of man, take you one stick, and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: [...]

Now, basically, this is another way of saying the house of Judah because Judah was composed of three tribes, plus several of the refugees that had come down from the north.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] take you one stick, and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write on it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions:

Now, what we're talking about here is a separate governmental entity that had been established in northern Israel well before Ezekiel was ever born or Jeremiah was ever born—they are latecomers on the scene. It was shortly after the death of Solomon, and there were 10 tribes. Ephraim was the leader of all this group—Ephraim, one of the sons of Joseph. That's why it's the *stick of Joseph* and the *stick of Ephraim and all of his companions*—which considered Naphtali and all the rest of the 10 northern tribes of Israel. Okay. I have two sticks. One one of them is written “Judah”, one is written “Joseph and Ephraim”. He says:

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

¹⁷ And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in your hand.

Now, Ezekiel *has* to understand what that means. That's as clear as crystal to him and I have little doubt that, for all of their history, these people had *worried* about the division that existed among all the tribes of Israel—their brothers in the north, who were separate from them. They'd actually *gone to war* against them once or twice. It was a long-standing thing and a deep and profound desire, I expect, on many people's part to see these nations *back together again*. It was God's will that they be separated when they were but, “Here's a time”, God says, “coming in the future what I'm going to put them both back together again.” Bear in mind—10 tribes on the one hand, three plus refugees on the other hand, forming two different governmental units. He says:

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

¹⁸ And when the children of your people shall speak to you, saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these?

¹⁹ Say to them, Thus said the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand.

²⁰ And the sticks where on you write shall be in your hand before their eyes.

I don't know if this looked like a magic trick or if it was just was two sticks tied together or what, but the whole thing was that they were to be *put together*.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²¹ And say to them, Thus said the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, where they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

Now, what did Ezekiel think he meant by that? He thought—*had to think*—that he was talking about Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulon, Naphtali, all those northern tribes of Israel up there, that had gone captive over 100 years before under the Assyrians and *nobody knew* where those people had gone. God said:

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²¹ And say to them, Thus said the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, where they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into

their own land:

²² And I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

Wow! For those two prophets who heard this—Jeremiah and Ezekiel—the realization that, sometime off in the future, God was going to reconcile this terrible civil war, this split in the kingdom, and bring everybody back together again under one banner must have been awfully good news. Now, of course, many people who look at this *assume* that it was fulfilled when Judah returned to Jerusalem 70 years later. But is that what *Jeremiah and Ezekiel* thought the prophecy meant? I don't think so. For one thing, they expected a return of the *monarchy*—something that never happened in history. Now, perhaps he's speaking metaphorically, but we're not through with this yet. He says:

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²² [...] one king shall be king to them all [...]

Okay, so far so good.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²³ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁴ And David my servant shall be king over them; [...]

Now, that's awfully explicit here. I can easily understand how he might mean by that some *descendant of David*—that is the house of David, David's Dynasty would be the ruling dynasty and would continue. David was long dead and, frankly, all of his sons were gone into captivity, too. Where is this "David my servant" being king over them going to come from? Because, in fact, when Israel came back out of Babylon 70 years later, they brought *no king* with them.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²⁴ [...] and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

²⁵ And they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelled; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: [...]

Forever! Well, that didn't happen. They were there for a while but then they were *scattered again*.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²⁵ [...] and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Not for a while, not a little bit, *forever*. Now, I think a lot of Christian commentators, at this point, are probably going to say that *has to be* the Messiah—who is a descendant of David—who will be the one ruling over these people forever. But you still have got to look way down through history to find that time—we haven't come to it yet—when Israel and Judah, united, are in their land *forever* with the Messiah as their prince.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²⁶ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: [...]

Not for a little while, *permanent*.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²⁶ [...] and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the middle of them for ever more.

Hey, there is *no* sanctuary of God in Judah today.

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

²⁷ My tabernacle also shall be with them: yes, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
²⁸ And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the middle of them for ever more.

Well, I'll guarantee you one thing: the *heathen today* do not know that God has sanctified Israel. If they did, they wouldn't be trying to *blow them up* every time they turn around. Now, frankly I don't see how we can conclude at all that this prophecy has been fulfilled in history. It looks to me very much like something *way off* into the future that Ezekiel is talking about here—and the same thing is true of Jeremiah. I think neither of them understand how *far* into the future they're looking, but both of them are looking *well beyond* their lifetimes for whatever it is that God is going to do. And then Jeremiah adds something to this that Ezekiel doesn't mention, but which is sobering when you read it. It's in Jeremiah, chapter 31, verse 35.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁵ Thus said the LORD, which gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

Big introduction here. Okay, what is God going to say?

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁶ If those ordinances [...]

What's that? The moon, the stars, the sea.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁶ If those ordinances depart from before me, said the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

Wow! Now, I don't think he's talking about from *that time* forward, I think he is talking from the time of the *fulfillment of this prophecy* forward that that's going to be true. You can take it however you like it, but he says:

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁶ If those ordinances depart from before me, said the LORD, then the seed of Israel [...]

Now, by “seed of Israel” he’s got to now be talking ethnically.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁶ [...] shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

³⁷ Thus said the LORD; 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 for all that they have done, said the LORD.

What he means by that is, “Ain’t no way. No way that I’m *ever* going to *permanently* cast off all the seed of Israel.” And to this you will find the Apostle Paul agreeing in Romans, the 11th chapter.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

³⁸ Behold, the days come, said the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel to the gate of the corner.

³⁹ And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it on the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath.

Places we don’t know, but obviously he’s getting the whole thing together.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

⁴⁰ And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, [...]

He’s talking now about Gehenna, the city dump, where they threw dead bodies and burned them.

Jeremiah 31

AKJV

⁴⁰ [...] and all the fields to the brook of Kidron, to the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever.

Well, it was. It was plucked up and thrown down whenever Israel went captive. But he’s talking about a time *in the future*. But the temple that was built in Herod’s day *did* get thrown down so, apparently, we’re looking even *beyond that*. Indeed, we are.

There is now less than a year to go before the final fall of Jerusalem. And God comes to Jeremiah—and this time he’s not in his private quarters when God comes to speak with him, he is *somewhere else*. Jeremiah 32, verse 1:

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar.

² For then the king of Babylon’s army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah’s house.

Jeremiah is in jail. Well, you knew it had to be coming with all the stuff he'd been doing, through chapter after chapter that we have read, now—of all the times he went down and made people angry with his prophecies—sooner or later it was going to get him in jail.

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

³ For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Why do you prophesy, and say, [...]

That's the point. And here comes, now, a summary of what Jeremiah had said that got him thrown in the slammer. Here is Zedekiah's indictment, which includes a statement of what Jeremiah had said, quote:

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

³ [...] Thus said the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it;

⁴ And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes;

Eyeball to eyeball you're going to be with the king of Babylon, said Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

⁵ And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, said the LORD: though you fight with the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper.

Now, all he's doing is telling him the truth. He's saying, "Here's what's coming down the pike at you, folks!" And he gets in jail for it. And Jeremiah said:

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

⁶ And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁷Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come to you [...]

It's rather an odd thing to toss in, at this point. But Jeremiah is in prison, God comes to him and tells him "Somebody is going to come to you and want you to buy a piece of property." Think about it. Here he is in jail, the whole country is going into captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah is in there and can't do anything, and yet his nephew is going to come to him and say, "I want you to buy a field of mine. The right of redemption is yours to buy it. Would you buy it, please?" And sure enough, he showed up and said, "Hey I want you to buy this. The redemption is yours. Buy it for yourself", and Jeremiah says, "Well, I knew that was the word of the Lord because *it came to pass*." So in verse nine it says:

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

⁹ And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.

¹⁰ And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.

¹¹ So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open:

¹² And I gave the evidence of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the

book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison.

You realize what's going on here? All it is just a transaction of the way they transferred property. It had to be signed in front of witnesses and they had to go down to the courthouse and record the deed, just like we do today. What on earth is God having Jeremiah buy a piece of property for at this *terribly* late date? Well, God answers him. He says:

Jeremiah 32

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days.

¹⁵ For thus said the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

Jeremiah would never have it—none of those people. It would be 70 years before anyone was there again. But the chain of the title to the land was secure to Jeremiah, his family, and his descendants as a result of that. Why did that really matter? Probably not very much at all for Jeremiah. But, see, here's the message that rings down to us through *all* these generations: There are a lot of people who go around saying the return of Christ is at hand—“Oh, he's going to be coming very *soon*, now”—and sometimes religious organizations lead people to sell their property, sell their land, and give it to the church and then they get ready to flee off into the mountains somewhere.

You know, what Jeremiah says here is important—that houses and property and all that will once again be valid in this land. *Don't stop* living your life. *Don't stop* providing for your children. *Don't stop*, you know, taking care of these details just because you think the *end is near*—especially if some idiot prophet is coming along with long hair and a long beard and a sign that says, “Flee from the wrath to come.” Don't get in too big a hurry for these things. Live your life. Live it to the end. That's what God expects us to do.

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