Jeremiah 30:5-7

(5) For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. (6) Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? (7) Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.
King James Version

This is what must happen before the Second Exodus. Notice that it is called "Jacob's Trouble," not either "Israel's Trouble" or "Judah's Trouble." *Both* houses will experience it. God causes Jacob's descendants to be greatly troubled because of their sins. This time of unprecedented crisis—"none is like it"—corresponds to the time of "great tribulation" of which Jesus Christ warns:

> "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . . For then there will be *great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time*, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:15-16, 21-22; emphasis ours throughout)

Luke's version of the Olivet Prophecy uses different language to describe the same time and events:

> But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. *For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. . . .* For there will be *great distress in the land and*

> *wrath upon this people*. And *they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations*. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-24; see Revelation 11:2; emphasis ours)

Just as Christ reassures us in Matthew 24:22 that this will not be the complete end of mankind, Jeremiah promises that Jacob will be saved out of his trouble. Even though that "day" is great, and like nothing we have seen before, it will not be the end of Jacob.

Jeremiah 30:5-7 does not detail *why* that time is one of tribulation. The only clue we have in these verses is that God compares it, not just to a woman in labor, but to a *man* in labor. This is certainly an unusual symbol, but the picture of the sorrows and pains of labor and childbirth elsewhere helps us to understand what it portends. For example, Isaiah 13:6-8 prophesies:

> Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man's heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.

A similar illustration appears in Isaiah 26:16-18:

> LORD, in trouble they have visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them. As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

Paul also uses this symbol in I Thessalonians 5:1-3:

> But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (see also Isaiah 66:6-24; Jeremiah 4:31;

13:20-27; Hosea 13:12-16; Micah 4:9-10.)

Overall, the symbol is one of anguish, sorrow, intensity, great discomfort, and pain. The prophets contain scores of examples of God's anger at the sins of His people. It is with good reason that the prophecies mention that only a "remnant" will return: Even though the descendants of Jacob will ultimately be saved, the percentage of the current hundreds of millions of Israelites and Jews who survive that trouble will probably be small (see Isaiah 10:20-21).

However, *how* this illustration is applied is interesting. When it applies to God's enemies, the emphasis is clearly on the pain, anguish, sorrow, and fear of what is ahead (Jeremiah 49:20-24). But when it refers to Israel, as in Jeremiah 30, there is always hope that the pain will be turned to joy, just as with a physical birth (Isaiah 66:8-9). It is painful, but a tremendous blessing is promised to come when it is over (compare Jesus' use of this metaphor in John 16:21).

A hint of this hope appears in Jeremiah 30:7: "But he [Jacob] shall be saved out of it." The pain and the anguish will not end in total annihilation. Certainly, a dear price will be paid in human lives, but the peoples of Jacob will survive and be blessed—botl physically and spiritually

— David C. Grabbe

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The Second Exodus (Part One)

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