

## **The Second Exodus (Part One)**

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It has long been observed that about one-third of the Bible is prophecy, and the majority of those prophecies have not yet been fulfilled.

In addition, nearly all of those unfulfilled prophecies pertain to the descendants of Abraham in general—and Jacob in particular—and to other nations and entities only as they encounter the descendants of these patriarchs.

Understanding the history and the future of the descendants of Jacob is paramount to understanding the rest of the Bible. In particular, grasping what God says will happen to these people allows us to make sense of this world's seemingly incomprehensible events. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," as Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) notes. But God has given us a vision of where current events are leading, and what will soon happen to the nations of Israel that have been scattered around the globe.

Historically, after the death of Solomon (*c.* 931 BC), the Kingdom of Israel split into two separate kingdoms. The northern ten tribes retained the name *Israel*, establishing their capital at Samaria. The southern tribes—Judah and Benjamin, along with part of Levi—became known simply as *Judah* (and its people known as *Jews*; see II Kings 16:5-6, KJV), continuing to be ruled by the royal line of David from the capital city of Jerusalem.

Two hundred years after this national division, the northern ten tribes were in a terminal state of wickedness and rebellion. Idolatry was widespread, pagan religious practices from the surrounding cultures were common and celebrated, God's law was trampled underfoot, and God Himself was scoffed at—much as in today's Western culture. God's prophets, warning of Israel's destruction and subjugation, were invariably ignored, mocked, or killed.

Around 722 BC, God caused Assyria to subdue Israel and enslave the people. The Assyrians deported the population from its homeland in Canaan to the southern shores of the Caspian Sea in what is today Iran (II Kings 17:5-6). The northern Kingdom of Israel thus passed from the view of all but the most obscure histories, becoming known as the Lost Ten Tribes.

The Jews—the southern Kingdom of Judah—followed the same course shortly thereafter. With few exceptions, the kings of Judah proved more corrupt than Israel's kings. Israel set the pace into idolatry, and Judah enthusiastically followed (Ezekiel 16:45-52). As with Israel, God sent prophets to Judah to warn her of destruction if she failed to repent. She refused. Between 604 and 585 BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar carried the population of Judah to Babylon (II Kings 24:14). Later, he totally destroyed Jerusalem, Temple and all, and "carried away captive the rest of the people" (II Kings 25:11).

Both kingdoms, having turned from their covenant with God, earned the penalty of national captivity.

***Reverse Migration***

After seventy years in Babylonian captivity, the Jews began returning to Canaan. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the Temple was restored under Zerubbabel and Joshua. However, the northern ten tribes of Israel never returned. After a long sojourn in and around the areas of their captivity, they migrated north and west into the European continent, eventually spreading from there into the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

However, this migration of Israel will reverse in the days ahead. The Bible shows in many prophecies that a *second* exodus will occur, and God's people will return to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The first exodus, when God brought the children of Israel out from Egypt, is a defining event for both Israelites and Christians. Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and even Pentecost all commemorate God's sovereignty, providence, and grace in liberating His people (see Deuteronomy 16:1-12). Yet, as remarkable as this spontaneous movement of millions of people from a plundered Egypt to a bountiful Canaan was, the Second Exodus will be so momentous that the original exodus from Egypt will pale by comparison:

"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers." (Jeremiah 16:14-15; see also 23:7-8)

In Isaiah 11:11-12, the prophet also tells of this time when

the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left. . . . He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

God tells Jeremiah, "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers" (Jeremiah 3:18).

During the first exodus, a few million Israelites left Egypt and headed for the land of Canaan, a relatively short distance away. Today, Israelites number in the hundreds of millions, and their current homelands are thousands of miles from Canaan. They cannot re-migrate to the Promised Land as a single group, for their movements have left them in numerous countries around the globe. Only the sovereign God can orchestrate such a regathering.

While some prophecies speak of Israel returning from every compass point (Isaiah 11:12; 43:5-7), Israel is most commonly foreseen returning from the north and the west (of the Promised Land) (Isaiah 49:12; Jeremiah 3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; Hosea 11:10; Zechariah 2:6), reversing the path of their migration thousands of years ago.

### ***Regathered to Zion***

The prophet Isaiah gives numerous descriptions of how this exodus will take place, such as the individual attention that will be given: "And it shall come to pass in that day . . . you will be gathered *one by one*, O you children of Israel" (Isaiah 27:12). He speaks of "a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel In the day that he came up from the land of Egypt" (Isaiah 11:16). A similar road appears in Isaiah 35:8-10:

A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it. . . . But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (see also Isaiah 43:16-21; 51:10-11)

Not all of Israel will be able to travel back via this Highway of Holiness, however. Isaiah 60:8-9 asks:

Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts? Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me; and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of the Lord your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you.

Isaiah 66:20 describes this massive undertaking further:

"Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the Lord, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord."

Jeremiah 30 and 31 give a broad overview of what God will do to bring back Israel and the rest of Judah, and restore the Promised Land to them. This was not fulfilled in the 1940s, when hundreds of thousands of Jews returned to their historical land and founded the modern State of Israel, for only *Judah* took part in that. The prophecies regarding the Second Exodus clearly speak of both Judah *and* Israel. Notice, for instance, Jeremiah 30:1-3:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. 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.'"(emphasis ours)

God refers to *both* kingdoms here—the descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel as well as the southern kingdom of Judah. The return of Israel will be the larger migration because, aside from the 70-year captivity in Babylon, some of the descendants of Judah have always resided in the Promised Land. Today, the State of Israel is predominately made up of the descendants of Judah.

However, neither Israel nor Judah has truly *possessed* the land since the time of their respective captivities. Despite some of Judah having *returned* to the land, ever since the Babylonian captivity, she has only rarely and intermittently held *sovereignty* over it.

After Judah was taken into captivity, Babylon ruled the Promised Land under Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon later fell to the Medo-Persian Empire, which then became sovereign over Jerusalem and the Promised Land. Because of their vassal status, the Jewish captives that returned from Babylon had to ask permission from Cyrus and Darius, the Persian kings, to rebuild the wall and the Temple. The Jews enjoyed a measure of peace, but their freedom depended on the favor of the ruling Persian emperor.

After Alexander the Great conquered Medo-Persia, the Greeks became the new overseers of the Land of Promise. Jews under the Maccabees gained a measure of independence until Rome took control of the area. Thus, during the time of Christ, Jews lived in the land and even worshipped in the Second Temple, but they did not really *possess* the land because it was under Roman jurisdiction. Since the collapse of the Roman Empire, notwithstanding some temporary Crusader holdings, the Promised Land has been under the sway of various Arab and Muslim nations—notably the Ottoman Empire—down to modern times.

Even now, the state of Israel does not control all of the land. Jerusalem is a divided city, and the Israelis have not dared claim all of the Temple Mount for themselves (even though they had the opportunity immediately following the Six Day War in 1967), because they know that it would result in an all-out war with the Muslims. Even though the Jews regained a considerable amount of land when it declared statehood in 1948, gaining even more during the Six Day War, the ownership is endlessly argued. Judah is not truly sovereign yet. It does not yet "possess" the land in the fullest sense of the word.

### ***But first, Tribulation***

Even though Israel and Judah will ultimately be restored to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they will first go through a time of tremendous tribulation and hardship:

For thus says the Lord: "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? 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." (Jeremiah 30:5-7; emphasis ours)

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)

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—both physically and spiritually, as we will see.