

Herod's Slaughter of Innocents a fulfillment of prophecy?

Given the title "King of the Jews" by Rome, Herod's search for the prophesized Jewish King of the Jews was frustrated, and in his anger, slaughtered all male Jewish infants under the age of two around Bethlehem and adjacent areas, which is recorded only by Matthew (Matt 2:16-17). In addition to this vindictive act was the puzzling statement of this tragic event as a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 31:15) just before the New Covenant was declared (Jer 31:3-34).

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent men and killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

**"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more."** (Matt 2:16-18)

This is what the Lord says:

**"A voice is heard in Ramah,
Lamenting and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
She refuses to be comforted for her children,
Because they are no more."** (Jer 31:15)

Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob (Gen 29:17-20), was never recorded as "weeping for her children." However, as the wife of Jacob, who was renamed Israel (Gen 32:28-30), Rachel's "lament and bitter weeping" can be figuratively understood in the context of Herod's murder of the male children of Israel that were "no more."

The prophet Jeremiah, author of the books Jeremiah and Lamentations, was a major prophet during the decline and fall of the southern kingdom of Judah. Prophesying about 40-50 years during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, Jeremiah began his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah's reign (626 B.C.) until the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the 11th year of Zedekiah's reign (586 B.C.). Jeremiah witnesses the rise of Babylon, the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, and the three deportations of thousands of Jews.

Chosen by God (Jer 1:5-10) to confront His people, Jeremiah warned the nation of Judah of their covenant rebellion and exhorted their return to God. Salvation was through God not by military alliances with Assyria, Egypt or Babylonia.

To gain a better insight and understanding of this fulfillment of prophecy, a good observation of the text of Jeremiah 31 is required, and it becomes apparent that this passage is a part of Jeremiah 30; thus, it should be included in this examination.

With an introduction to addressing the divided kingdoms Israel and Judah (Jer 30:1-4), God then speaks to the nation in the singular sense by addressing them as Jacob (Israel).

Notable to both Jeremiah 30 and 31 is the repeated use of "the Lord says / declares," or something equivalent, which places an emphasis on whatever is being said.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, **"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says:** 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For behold, days are coming,' **declares the Lord,** 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' **The Lord says,** 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall take possession of it.'" Now these are the words which **the Lord spoke** concerning Israel and Judah: (Jer 30:1-4)

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It appears that by observing carefully all the instances of "the Lord says / declares," a summary of God's message can be discerned.

This is the time of Jacob's distress (Jer 30:7)

"For this is what **the Lord says**:
'I have heard a sound of terror,
Of fear, and there is no peace. (Jer 30:5)

Do not fear, Jacob My servant,' declares the Lord (Jer 30:10)

'It shall come about on that day,' **declares the Lord of armies**, 'that I will break his yoke from their necks and will tear to pieces their restraints; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. (Jer 30:8-9)

For I am with you,' **declares the Lord**, 'to save you;
For I will completely destroy all the nations where I have scattered you,
Only I will not destroy you completely.
But I will discipline you fairly
And will by no means leave you unpunished.' (Jer 30:11)

I will discipline you fairly (Jer 30:11)

"For this is what **the Lord says**:
'Your broken limb is irreparable,
And your wound is incurable. (Jer 30:12)

I will restore you to health (Jer 30:17)

For I will restore you to health
And I will heal you of your wounds,' **declares the Lord**,
'Because they have called you an outcast, saying:
'It is Zion; no one cares for her.'" (Jer 30:17)

Restoration will bring joy

"At that time," **declares the Lord**, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people."

This is what **the Lord says**:
"The people who survived the sword
Found grace in the wilderness—
Israel, when it went to find its rest."
The Lord appeared to him long ago, saying,
'I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you out with kindness. (Jer 31:1-3)

For this is what **the Lord says**:
"Sing aloud with joy for Jacob,
And be joyful with the chief of the nations;
Proclaim, give praise, and say,
'Lord, save Your people,
The remnant of Israel!' (Jer 31:7)

Hope for the future for Israel's children. Matthew's quotation of Jeremiah 31:15 (Matt 2:16-18) places an emphasis of the consequences of the nation of Israel's covenant infidelity (Ex 19:3-8). It is representative of losing the land and the fall of Jerusalem as Jeremiah witnessed. And while it may seem that the Mosaic Covenant has failed, there is hope for the children of promise, regarded as the descendants of Abraham (Rom 9:6-13), which is what is reflected in Jeremiah 31:16-26, and sets the stage for the introduction of the New Covenant.

This is what **the Lord says**:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
Lamenting and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
She refuses to be comforted for her children,
Because they are no more."

This is what **the Lord says**:

"Restrain your voice from weeping
And your eyes from tears;
For your work will be rewarded," **declares the Lord**,
"And they will return from the land of the enemy.
There is hope for your future," **declares the Lord**,
"And your children will return to their own territory. (Jer 31:15-17)

This is what **the Lord of armies, the God of Israel says**: "Once again they will speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes,
'The Lord bless you, O place of righteousness,
O holy hill!' (Jer 31:23)

The New Covenant

"Behold, days are coming," **declares the Lord**, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of mankind and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to uproot them, tear them down, ruin, destroy, and bring disaster on them, so I will watch over them to build and to plant them," **declares the Lord**. (Jer 31:27-28)

"Behold, days are coming," **declares the Lord**, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," **declares the Lord**. "For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," **declares the Lord**: "I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," **declares the Lord**, "for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember." (Jer 31:31-34)

This is what **the Lord says**,

He who gives the sun for light by day
And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
The Lord of armies is His name:
"If this fixed order departs
From Me," **declares the Lord**,
"Then the descendants of Israel also will cease
To be a nation before Me forever."

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This is what **the Lord says**:

"If the heavens above can be measured
And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
Then I will also reject all the descendants of Israel
For everything that they have done," **declares the Lord.** (Jer 31:35-37)

"Behold, days are coming," **declares the Lord,** "when the city will be rebuilt for the Lord from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead, to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. (Jer 31:38-39)

Matthew's statement of Herod's slaughter of male Jewish infants as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15 was God's association of Jeremiah's setup to the introduction of the New Covenant to the birth of Jesus; Jesus Christ's birth inaugurates the New Covenant.