

Jeremiah 31:15-19 + 22-25 + 36

Jeremiah 31:15 - "Thus said the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not."

Ramah was a city of Benjamin, (see Judges 19:13,) near which Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was buried. Ramah was also the place where Nebuzara-dan collected all the Jews in chains, previous to their removal to Babylon (Jer 40:1) As the mother of three tribes, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, Rachel is regarded as the mother of the whole ten. From her tomb, she is heard weeping for her lost sons, killed or being taken away in exile.

Jeremiah 31:16-17 - Here she is bidden to dry her tears, "for there is hope to thy posterity" and thy work shall be rewarded.

This promise was particularly fulfilled with respect to the tribe of Benjamin, as well as that of Judah, in their return under Cyrus (Ezra 1:5).

But this passage portends a greater fulfillment, and is quoted concerning Herod's massacre of the infants:

Mathew 2:17-18 - "Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing consolation, because they are no more.'"

The hope, then, was that despite this tragedy, the Seed had survived and would fulfill His destiny.

Ramah is about 5 miles north of Jerusalem, Bethlehem about 7 miles south of Jerusalem, so the New Testament reference isn't because of location.

Just as the exiles were deported to Babylon, Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt before Herod's massacre. He would return to live in Israel, and obtain our redemption on the Cross. Final fulfillment will be his return at the end of time and at the Resurrection.

"They were not," in Hebrew, is singular; each was not: each mother at the Bethlehem massacre had but one child to lament, as the limitation of age in Herod's order, "two years and under," implies; this use of the singular distributively (the mothers weeping severally, each for her own child), is a coincidence between the prophecy of the Bethlehem massacre and the event, the more remarkable as not being obvious.
—Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

The high place of the world

Interestingly, the word Ramah can also signify a high place; hence the Targum of Jeremiah paraphrases it, "in the high place of the world."

The “high places” are mentioned 117 times in the Bible as centers for idolatry and often the place of sacrifice of children to idols like Molech.

“A voice was heard in the high place of the world, the house of Israel weeping and mourning after Jeremiah the prophet, whom Nabuzaradan the chief of those that slew, sent from Ramah; lamentation and weeping with bitterness, Jerusalem weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were gone into captivity.”

The chapter in which this reading is set mentions the new covenant promised:

Jeremiah 31:33 - “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.”

And even the places where abominations and idolatrous worship was performed will be redeemed:

Jeremiah 31:40 - “And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever.”

Persecution

What ties together the story of Hagar with Rachel weeping for her children in Jeremiah 31:15?

See Galatians 4:21-21

Galatians 4: 29 - “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.”

Ishmael “mocks” Isaac at a feast given for him when he was weaned:

Genesis 21:9-10 - “And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.”

Paul expands the “mocking” - to jest, take lightly, make sport of - to take in the more malevolent idea of persecution, following the Midrashic expansion on the tale.

The mind-set of self-effort that Abram and Sarai used in solving their problem is contrasted to grace and waiting on God. The son of the bondwoman always mocks, belittles, persecutes and hunts down the son of Promise, both in history and within our own hearts.

