

Jeremiah 31:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.

Analysis

Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together. This prophetic vision depicts the restoration of joy to Israel after judgment and exile. The Hebrew word for "virgin" (betulah, בֵּטָלָה) represents young unmarried women, while the mention of "young men and old together" emphasizes the comprehensive, multi-generational nature of this restoration—the entire community will participate in celebration.

The verb "rejoice" (samach, שָׁמַח) and the phrase "in the dance" (b'machol, בְּמַחְול) convey exuberant, physical expressions of joy. Dancing was a legitimate form of worship and celebration in ancient Israel (Exodus 15:20, 2 Samuel 6:14). The transformation described—"I will turn their mourning into joy"—uses the Hebrew haphak (הַפְּקָד), meaning to overturn or completely reverse, indicating God's sovereign power to transform circumstances.

The threefold promise of divine action—"turn," "comfort" (nacham, נְחַם), and "make them rejoice" (sus, שָׁעַשׂ)—reveals God as the active agent of restoration. This passage finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ, who turns the sorrow of sin into the joy of salvation (John 16:20-22), and points forward to the eschatological joy of the redeemed in God's presence (Revelation 21:4).

Historical Context

This prophecy comes from Jeremiah's "Book of Consolation" (chapters 30-33), written during the darkest period of Judah's history as Babylonian conquest loomed (circa 587 BCE). The people were facing devastating loss—destruction of Jerusalem, temple desecration, and exile. Jeremiah, known as the "weeping prophet," had spent decades warning of judgment, yet here he proclaims hope beyond catastrophe.

The imagery of dancing would have resonated deeply with the exiled community who remembered joyful worship in Jerusalem but now sat by Babylon's rivers weeping (Psalm 137:1-4). For those who had experienced the trauma of siege, deportation, and cultural dislocation, the promise that all generations would rejoice together offered profound hope for national restoration.

This prophecy was partially fulfilled in the return from Babylonian exile under Ezra and Nehemiah (538 BCE onward), when the community did indeed experience renewed joy. However, its complete fulfillment awaits the messianic kingdom, when Christ will restore all things and God's people will experience eternal joy in His presence.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise to transform mourning into joy challenge our response to personal or communal suffering?
2. What does this passage reveal about God's heart for restoration across all generations and age groups?
3. How does Christ fulfill this promise of turning sorrow into joy, both now and in eternity?

4. In what ways can the church today embody joyful worship that includes all ages and backgrounds?
5. What obstacles prevent us from experiencing and expressing the transformative joy God promises to His people?

Interlinear Text

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 30:11 (Parallel theme): Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;

Isaiah 51:11 (Parallel theme): Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

Isaiah 61:3 (Parallel theme): To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Jeremiah 31:4 (Parallel theme): Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.

Isaiah 51:3 (Parallel theme): For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Isaiah 35:10 (Parallel theme): And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Psalms 149:3 (Parallel theme): Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.

Nehemiah 12:27 (Parallel theme): And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

Nehemiah 12:43 (Parallel theme): Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

John 16:22 (Parallel theme): And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.