

Jeremiah 31:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities.

Analysis

Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. This verse uses vivid imagery of marking a return path to call Israel to repentance and restoration. **Set thee up waymarks** (natzav tsiyunim, נָצַב־יָלָךְ צִיּוּנִים) uses tsiyun, meaning road marker or monument—stones piled to mark trails. **Make thee high heaps** (tamrurim, תַּמְרוּרִים) refers to tall pillars or signposts visible from distance. These markers enable travelers to retrace steps on return journeys.

Set thine heart toward the highway shifts from external markers to internal orientation. The heart (lev, לֵב) represents will and affections. **The highway** (mesilah, מַסְלָה) means a raised, prepared road—the main route. **The way which thou wentest** acknowledges Israel's journey into exile; the same path leads back. This implies that return is possible, not a different, unknown route.

Turn again, O virgin of Israel uses shuv (שׁוּב) twice for emphasis—the central verb meaning return, repent, restore. **Virgin of Israel** (בְּתוּלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, betulat yisrael) is both tender (unmarried daughter) and ironic (given Israel's spiritual adultery). God still claims His bride, calling her back to covenant relationship. **Turn again to these thy cities** promises not just personal but communal, geographical restoration—rebuilt cities, renewed community.

Historical Context

Exiles faced the psychological challenge of imagining return after decades in Babylon. Many had never seen Judah; Babylon was home. God's call to 'set up waymarks' encouraged them to mentally and spiritually prepare for return, keeping alive the hope and intention to go back. Historically, when Cyrus issued his decree (538 BC), many Jews had assimilated and chose to remain in Babylon. This command separated those committed to covenant restoration from those comfortable in exile. The faithful remnant did return, rebuild, and await further fulfillment in Messiah.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What spiritual 'waymarks' help believers remember the path back to God when we've wandered into sin or spiritual exile?
2. How does God's persistent call to 'turn again' demonstrate His patience and desire for His people's restoration?
3. In what sense must we 'set our hearts toward the highway'—the known path of obedience—rather than seeking novel spiritual experiences?

Interlinear Text

הָצַד יָדִי	לְךָ	צִנּוֹת יָם	שָׁמִי	לְךָ	תִּמְרוֹר יָם	שָׁתִי	לִבְךָ
Set thee up	H0	waymarks	make	H0	thee high heaps	set	thine heart
H5324		H6725	H7760		H8564	H7896	H3820
לְמַסְלָה	דָּרְךְ	הָלַךְ כְּתִי	שָׁבִי	בְּתוֹלַת			
toward the highway	even the way	which thou wentest	turn again	O virgin			
H4546	H1870	H1980	H7725	H1330			
יִשְׂרָאֵל	שָׁבִי	אֵל	עַבְיָךְ	אֵלֶּה:			
of Israel	turn again	H413	to these thy cities	H428			
H3478	H7725		H5892				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 50:5 (Parallel theme): They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

Isaiah 48:20 (Parallel theme): Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.