

Jeremiah 31:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Analysis

God describes the remnant's return: they come weeping with supplications (prayers), and God Himself leads them. These are tears of repentance, grief over sin, and joy at restoration. The phrase 'I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters' promises provision during their journey—unlike the historical return which faced hardship, the ultimate restoration will lack nothing. 'In a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble' assures that God removes obstacles and guides perfectly.

The declaration 'I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn' is profoundly tender. Despite Israel's rebellion, God remains their Father. Ephraim (representing the northern kingdom) is called 'firstborn'—the favored son receiving the inheritance. This shows that God's fatherly love transcends their unfaithfulness. He does not relate to them based on their merit but on His covenant commitment and paternal affection.

This fatherhood theme is central to the gospel. Jesus taught us to pray 'Our Father' and revealed God's fatherly heart through the prodigal son parable (Luke 15:11-32). Paul emphasizes that believers receive 'the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father' (Romans 8:15). God's relationship with His people is not merely contractual (covenant) but familial (father-child). This changes everything

—we obey not from fear but from love, and we approach God with confidence as beloved children.

Historical Context

The historical return from Babylon was difficult—opposition from surrounding peoples, poverty, and the challenge of rebuilding (Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle these struggles). Yet Jeremiah's prophecy points beyond this to the ultimate return when God's people come from all nations (Acts 2; Revelation 7:9), led by Christ the Good Shepherd, to dwell forever in God's presence without tears, pain, or death (Revelation 21:4).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that God is 'a father to Israel'—how does this paternal relationship shape our understanding of God's dealings with His people?
2. How do the tears of returning exiles reflect both repentance for past sin and joy at restoration—and how does this apply to Christian conversion?
3. In what ways does God 'lead' His people along straight paths where they will not stumble?

Interlinear Text

בְּבֹכִי	יָבֹאוּ	וּבְתַחֲנוּנִים	אֲבִילֶם	אֲזַלְיֶם	אֶל
with weeping	They shall come	and with supplications	will I lead		
H1065	H935	H8469	H2986	H1980	H413
בְּנְהַלֵּי	מַיִם	בְּדֶרֶךְ	יֵשֶׁר	לֹא	
by the rivers	of waters	way	in a straight		
H5158	H4325	H1870	H3477	H3808	
וְיִכָּשְׁלוּ	בָּהֶם	כִּי	הִיא יְתִי	לְיִשְׂרָאֵל	לֹא אֲנִי
wherein they shall not stumble				to Israel	for I am a father
H3782	H0	H3588	H1961	H3478	H1
וְאֶפְרַיִם	בְּכֹרִי	הוּא			
and Ephraim	is my firstborn				
H669	H1060	H1931			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 3:4 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?

Matthew 5:4 (Parallel theme): Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Exodus 4:22 (References Israel): And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:

Jeremiah 50:4 (References Israel): In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God.

Jeremiah 31:20 (Parallel theme): Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 63:13 (Parallel theme): That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble?

Psalms 23:2 (Parallel theme): He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Revelation 7:17 (Parallel theme): For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Isaiah 64:8 (Parallel theme): But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Jeremiah 3:19 (Parallel theme): But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.

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