

**Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People**  
Second Sunday After Christmas – Year C

**RCL Readings** – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

**ACNA Readings** – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 84; Ephesians 1:3-14; Matthew 2:13-23

**Introduction.** Traditionally, in the UK especially, people feel quite flat after Christmas. January is seen as a dull month with nothing happening. The excitement of Christmas and the New Year are fast becoming a distant memory; the trees and decorations are gone; the nights are still dark, and nothing exciting is happening. However, no time is ever dull and without event where the Lord is concerned, and our readings remind us of that fact.

**Common Theme.** Although the RCL and ACNA differ in their choice of readings, there is a common theme of a new beginning, a gathering together of the people of God in certainty of his faithfulness, and thus, plenty of reason to rejoice and sing the Lord's praises. Although the Old Testament is speaking of the restoration of Israel and would have been understood that way, the New Testament speaks of what happens in Jesus the Messiah, which is where the certainty comes for Jew and Gentile alike.

**Jeremiah 31:7-14.** It is clear from this passage that there must be much rejoicing for what the Lord is doing, namely gathering Israel from where she has been flung over the years. Israel is described as chief of the nations, a reference to Israel being the apple of the Lord's eyes, his chosen nation. The passage makes it clear that this work of ingathering is being done by the Lord himself. Indeed the instruction from the Lord is that those who are redeemed are to praise him for saving them, and they are to use the name he revealed to Moses many years beforehand, a reference to his continued care for Israel. We do see, however, that the ingathering is only a remnant. The gathering is to be from the North and exclude no one on the basis of weakness, so that he could once again be a Father to them. The care of the Lord as a father is a recurring theme throughout Scripture and speaks of his deep and devoted love for his own. Although Israel is God's chosen people, nothing that happens to them is without effect on the nations who are told to hear what the Lord is saying about his work. They are to know that the Lord scattered Israel but now brings them back and will take good care of them. There is an implication that if God can do that to his chosen ones, then the nations need to be aware of what the Lord can do more widely. Verses 12-14 reflect a very common theme in Scripture, namely the restoration of Israel and the people of Israel. We see references to 'the bounty of the Lord' and 'a well-watered garden' (v. 12), dancing joy and gladness (v. 13), and an abundance among the priests. In other words, there is a blessing across the board. The Lord will bless his people and place them in the land that is his.

**Psalms 147:12-20.** The theme of rejoicing in the Lord continues in the reading from the Psalms, but the reason for it is similar to our reading in Jeremiah, namely the protection of provision for the people of Israel. There is even a reminder of the power of the Lord by alluding to the weather in verses 15-18. Our reading concludes with a further affirmation that the Lord has chosen and blessed Israel (v. 19) in a way that is not replicated to any other nation (v. 20). Although the passage is short, it is giving out the same

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message as Jeremiah and remains loyal to a definite theme throughout Scripture of God's provision for his chosen people and his care over them.

**Ephesians 1:3-14.** The epistle in both lectionaries continues the dominant theme of a personal relationship with the Lord that brings us under his protection and a recipient of his blessings. As with the Tanakh, we see there are many blessings from being with the Lord, but now the description is of spiritual blessings and we are pointed towards Jesus. There is a beautiful match in Scripture between God's dealings with Israel in the Tanakh and God's dealings through Christ in the New Testament. A personal relationship with the Lord is what counts throughout Scripture. Jewish-roots teaching helps us understand how the Lord works, and whatever is seen in his treatment of Israel is reflected to a greater extent in Jesus. In his writing to the Ephesians, the author is keen to show that the relationship with the Lord starts before the creation of the world. So whether you are part of Israel or a Gentile, there is an issue of God having his hand on people from the beginning. It rules out the idea of Gentiles being second-class citizens. Yes, there is a calling on Israel, but it is different to the calling of individuals, whether Jew or Gentile, for as Romans helps us to understand, we are one. Indeed Ephesians later talks of being "one new man" (2:15). We are being given an insight into the eternal work of the Lord through which he calls people to himself with an abundant blessing (vv. 3-9). These verses have a wonderful catalogue of blessing running from the sovereign choice of God to the sacrifice of his Son for our redemption, to the wonderful teaching that everything will one day be brought together under the Lord Jesus. What is clear in the passage, and especially verses 11-14, is that no one is of any difference when it comes to salvation. Israel had been chosen as a nation to make known the name of God, but within Israel and within the Gentile community all people are the same. Nowhere does the writer state that what he is talking about is for the Gentile alone, and nowhere does he put forward a different system for Jews. God has been faithful since the beginning and consistent in all that he did leading up to the final revelation of the Lord Jesus and the second coming.

**John 1:1-18.** The RCL helpfully takes us to John 1 and a message about the beginning. The link with Ephesians is obvious here. Everything of the Lord is traceable back to the beginning. The Lord has never moved to a second-best plan. He has been working to the same ultimate purpose all along, for all people. John even gives us a pointer towards creation itself revealing the Lord to be truly Lord of all. As we journey through John 1, we reach John the Baptist, who could be thought of as the last of the Old Testament-style prophets, even though he is known through the NT, that is to say that he announces the coming Messiah. He is there to reveal the light of the Lord as Israel was chosen to do, to make known the future Messiah. Verse 9 talks of the definitive work of the Lord making himself known to people, as he has done in the past to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and so on. There is a call to know the Lord, to become his children. When we think of how the Lord had made himself known to the individuals of Israel in the Tanakh, it is staggering now to find that invitation coming to 'all who receive him' (v. 12). Clearly the Lord is a relational Lord. He has interacted with humanity since the beginning (1:1-5), and he is still doing it today. Verse 14 reveals that the Word (who was there in the beginning according to v. 1) has come in flesh. We are not dealing with something new; we are not dealing with a

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Lord who changes his plans. The concluding verses of John now highlight again that the Word is God and, by linking Moses and the law in verse 17 and grace and truth through Jesus, we see further proof of a consistent and faithful God working through history.

**ACNA Readings**

**Psalm 84.** The ACNA chooses a different psalm, which at first glance may look like it goes in a different direction, but actually is dealing with the same issues – the protection of the Lord. It can be seen as a response to the calls of the Lord such as the one in Jeremiah. We see a yearning to be with the Lord, under his protection, and the weariness of managing without that protection. As the Psalmist relays the desire to be with the Lord, he also shows what a blessing it is when that is in place. There is a strong similarity with Psalm 147 in that the blessing of God is linked to his provision and the Lord's control over the weather to ensure that provision is constant (v. 6). It is interesting that although the earlier part of this psalm speaks of 'they' in the middle section, it is sandwiched by the reminder that a relationship with the Lord is personal. God is consistent. He has always dealt with individuals, and so it is of no surprise that verse 8 onwards is in the first person – a plea to the Lord coupled with that reiterated desire to be in the Lord's presence and under his protection (vv. 10-12).

**Matthew 2:13-23.** The ACNA's choice of Matthew 2 for the Gospel does not immediately seem linked to the other readings chosen until we understand that in the flight to Egypt we are seeing the further fulfilment of prophecy (v. 15, citing Hosea 11:1). When the wider picture of the history of the Lord is looked at, Egypt has played such a significant role. The Hebrews were in Egypt and, by understanding Moses the lawgiver and Jesus the giver of grace and truth, we have another parallel. As Exodus and the escape from Egypt unfolds, it becomes a prophetic picture of the Messiah leading his people out of sin and into glory. So in many ways, it was essential that Jesus fled to Egypt before returning to Nazareth to live as one of us for many years. Events in the New Testament are best understood when compared to those in the Tanakh, as we gain a much larger and clearer picture of our Lord.

**About the author.** The Revd Mark K. Madeley was born in 1968. He is an Anglican minister ordained into the Church of England in 1993. Having worked in Derbyshire and Yorkshire, Mark moved to Weston-super-Mare (just south of Bristol on the West Coast) in 2012 where he is currently rector of St. Nicholas with St. Barnabas. Mark also owns a travel company, MIB Travel, and since 2010, he has been operating all of the Shoresh tours originating in the UK. He is passionate about people going to Israel and learning the truth according to Scripture. He is also president of Christian Friends of Magen David Adom and a vice president of Magen David Adom UK, the UK arm of the Israel ambulance service. He is validated by Durham University as a distance tutor and marks theological and Church history assignments. He is married to Caroline and has two teenage children, Rachel and Benjamin.