

The Promise of a New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:27-40

Jeremiah 31:27-40 - *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. ²⁸ And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.*

²⁹ In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’

³⁰ But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

³⁵ Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night; who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar. (The Lord of hosts is His name.) ³⁶ “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.”

³⁷ Thus says the Lord: “If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel, for all that they have done, says the Lord.

³⁸ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that the city shall be built for the Lord from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ The surveyor’s line shall again extend straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it shall turn toward Goath.

⁴⁰ And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the Lord. It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever.”

Background Notes

The first half of Jeremiah 31 predicted the future restoration of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In our last Talk, we mentioned that this reunification and spiritual restoration of all Israel has not yet taken place - and it is certainly not being “fulfilled spiritually” in the Church today. ***The Church is not a “New Israel,” and the Church does not replace Israel.*** In the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, Israel consists of the *literal* descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The second half of Jeremiah 31 records the prediction a **New Covenant** that will be made with restored and reunited Israel, both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The whole Land of Israel will once again be filled with people and animals. No longer will there be desolate areas, as existed during the exile in Jeremiah's day (v27-28). In that coming day, there will be such blessing that no one will say (as they said in Jeremiah's day) that they were suffering the consequences of the sins of their fathers (v29-30). God will make a New Covenant with **all Israel**.

Doctrinal Points

1. The blessings of the New Covenant will be experienced by restored Israel.

The subject of the New Covenant is quite involved, because Jeremiah 31 says it will be made with Israel - but the New Testament seems to apply it to the Church. Recently I wrote an essay entitled "*A New Covenant But a New Israel*" to help explain and harmonize all the Scriptures that deal with the New Covenant. Our Doctrinal Points will quote directly from sections of this essay. (The entire essay can be read on our website, www.growingchristians.org.)

"A number of Old Testament prophecies predicted a future covenant that God will make with His people, Israel. Several times it is called an "*everlasting covenant*," and in Jeremiah 31:31 it is called a "*new covenant*."

"The old covenant was the Law that God gave through Moses. It was a *conditional* covenant that God made with the nation of Israel – and Israel broke this covenant. However, in His grace, God declared that He would make a **new** and **unconditional** covenant with His chosen people. Under this New Covenant, God promised His people that He would "*forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more*" (v34).

"When we look at the **context** of the Old Testament prophecies predicting the future New and everlasting Covenant, we find that *the promise was given to Israel* - that is, it was given to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jeremiah 31 said that this New Covenant would specifically be made with the "*house of Israel and the house of Judah*."

"In Jeremiah's day, the people of God were no longer the united nation of Israel, but two nations - the house (kingdom) of Israel in the north, and the house (kingdom) of Judah in the south. When Jeremiah said that the New Covenant would be made "*with the house of Israel and the house of Judah*," it would have been quite obvious to his audience exactly who he meant. The people who heard Jeremiah speak, and those who read the prophecy he wrote, would have clearly understood that **the new covenant would be made with the Jewish people**—the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were the people who had broken the old covenant, the Mosaic Law, and these were the people who would now be encouraged with the promise of a New Covenant.

"Notice - the Lord guaranteed that the Jewish people would never be eliminated or cease to exist (v35-37). In these verses the Lord used the continuous cycles of nature to illustrate the permanent status of the Jewish people as His

chosen people. He went on to compare the impossibility that He would ever reject them (even though they had sinned) with the impossibility of measuring the vastness of the universe! Those are pretty powerful statements about the permanence of His New Covenant with His people Israel!

“In the New Testament the *“new covenant”* was mentioned several times. When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (or communion) He said, *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you”* (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul wrote, *“He has made us competent as ministers of the new covenant.”* The other New Testament references to the New Covenant are found in the letter to the Hebrews. The New Covenant was described as *“a better covenant”* in Hebrews 7:22 and 8:6, and the *“eternal covenant”* in Hebrews 13:20. It was specifically called the *“new covenant”* in Hebrews 8:8 & 13, Hebrews 9:15, and Hebrews 12:24.

“In all of these specific New Testament references, a good case can be made that the New Covenant is made with ***all believers*** - not just with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After all, when Paul said to the Corinthians that they were *“ministers of the new covenant,”* he was speaking to Corinthian *Christians*, and the letter to the Hebrews was written to Hebrew *Christians*.

“However, Jeremiah 31:31-37 guaranteed the New Covenant to the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - the Jewish people! And in verse 37 God stated that He would never reject them, in spite of all they have done. In this unconditional covenant there’s certainly no idea of God replacing or redefining Israel, then, or at any time in the future.

“So how is this apparent inconsistency in the Bible to be explained? If the New Covenant is to be made with Israel (as the Lord promised in the Old Testament), why does the New Testament seem to apply the New Covenant to all believers in Jesus Christ? Various theologians and students of Scripture give quite a wide range of explanations. The most popular and prevalent explanation is that God has ***replaced literal Israel with the Church***, because of Israel’s failures as the covenant people of God - and thus the Church today is the New Israel. This way of thinking is known as “Replacement Theology.”

“Unfortunately, “Replacement Theology” has serious hermeneutical or interpretive problems. It completely redefines the Old Testament definition of the nation and land of Israel. It declares the Church to be the “New Israel,” and the Land of Israel is allegorized, and said to be the “land of blessing” for the Church, the New Israel. Replacement Theology flies right in the face of Romans 11, where a clear distinction is made between the Church and Israel. It is obvious from this ***inspired text*** that ***both Israel and the Church coexist at the present time.***

“The teaching of Romans 11 is that Israel has been “set aside” only ***temporarily***, until the spiritual restoration of “all Israel” (v26) in the future. In the meantime, the Church is in the position of favor and blessing in God’s program - but the Church has not replaced Israel. ***Israel is still Israel!***” The blessings of the New Covenant will be experienced by restored Israel.

2. The blessings of the New Covenant have been extended to the Church.

Continuing with more of my essay, “*A New Covenant But a New Israel.*” Here is the best way to harmonize the Scriptures dealing with the New Covenant.

“While the Lord committed Himself to keeping His promises with the people to whom He made His unconditional covenants, ***He is not bound or restrained from extending the benefits of His covenants to anyone He may choose.*** After all, ***He is God, and He can show His grace to anyone of His sovereign choice.*** The promise of the New Covenant was given to Israel, and it will be fulfilled with the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when the Lord returns. However, ***the blessings of the New Covenant have been extended to all believers today.***

“As for Israel: out of the present secular nation of Israel, a group of godly Jewish people will not only return to the Land, but they will be restored to the Lord. This is the “godly remnant” that was mentioned as “all Israel” in Romans 11:26. It is with this godly remnant of Israel that the Lord will fulfill the promise of His New Covenant, and they will receive its blessings.

“The Church has not replaced Israel, but the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant made with Israel have been extended to the Church. All believers today have the law of God written on their hearts, and believers today know the Lord’s presence in their lives.”

Practical Application

Remember Israel when you look at nature.

When we look at the wonders of nature, we rightly think of God as the all-powerful Creator and as the perfect designer. Jeremiah 31:35-37 says that we should also think of Israel when we look at nature. “*Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea and its waves roar - (The Lord of hosts is His name.)*” ³⁶ “*If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.*” ³⁷ *Thus says the Lord: “If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord.*

These verses indicate that as long as the laws and cycles and wonders of nature exist, there will always be the “seed” or “offspring” of Israel - the Jewish people, who will form the foundation of restored Israel in the future. ***These verses alone refute any kind of “Replacement” theology!*** The Church has not replaced Israel. The Church is not some kind of ‘new Israel.’ God says that even the stability of nature is a testimony to the permanence of Israel.

So remember Israel when you look at nature.