

Main Idea: In Jeremiah 31, we discover the transforming power of living in light of the future. In Jeremiah 31:26-40 the Lord gave Jeremiah three promises regarding the future that brought great refreshment to him in the very difficult present in his life.

The Setting: Jeremiah’s present situation was challenging.

1. He knew God’s judgment was coming.
 2. He received a vision of the future that refreshed him in the present (26).
- I. Promise #1: I will restore my people (27-30).
- A. The Lord said He wasn’t through with His disobedient people (27).
 - B. The Lord said He was going to build and plant Israel again (28).
 - C. The Lord said that changes were coming (29-30).
 1. People won’t blame their problems on the sins of others any longer (29).
 2. People will deal with their own sins (30).
- II. Promise #2: I will make a new covenant with my people (31-34).
- A. The new covenant isn’t like the old covenant (31-32).
 1. Under the old covenant, God was like a husband to His people.
 2. Under the old covenant, Israel was like an unfaithful wife.
 - B. Under the new covenant the Lord changes people inside out (33-34).
 1. He puts His law on our hearts (33a).
 2. He establishes a permanent relationship with us (33b).
 3. He enables us to know Him personally (34a).
 4. He removes the sin barrier that once separated us (34b).
- III. Promise #3: I will preserve my people (35-40).
- A. The Lord guaranteed that He wasn’t done with the nation of Israel (35-36).
 - B. The Lord guaranteed that He wouldn’t reject all the descendants of Israel (37).
 - C. The Lord guaranteed that He had plans for the city of Jerusalem (38-40).
 1. He used the nation to give us the Messiah.
 2. He used the city to give us the cross.

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves two life-changing questions.

1. Am I living in light of what God did in the past?
2. Am I living in light of what God will do in the future?

Knowing the Future Makes All the Difference Now. That’s the title of today’s message from God’s Word. God of course knows the future, and in His Word He tells us much about what’s coming. He certainly does in today’s text. And this future prediction makes all the difference in how we live our lives now.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-3, 7-8, 15-17, 26-40

One evening several years ago while I was winding down and heading for bed, the phone rang. The hesitation on the other end of the line let me know it was probably a telemarketer. It turned out to be some organization taking a political survey. The young man asked me a host of questions, but two in particular stick in my mind. One went something like, “*Are things in the state of Ohio getting better or getting worse?*” And the other was, “*In your opinion, what’s the biggest problem in the state of Ohio?*”

I could tell that the fellow who asked me could care less about my answers. It was just his job to click off the required questions to get his paycheck. But the questions are certainly worthy of our attention. What do you think about the future, specifically the future of our state and country and world? Which words first come to your mind? Are things *getting better* or *getting worse*?

I told the man I was concerned about the issue of *morality* in our state. He asked me to repeat the word, like he hadn’t heard it before. “Oh, okay, *morality*,” he said. “Next

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at messages from the life of Jeremiah, see the WBC series in 2010.

question.” And that sort of sums up the way things are these days. It’s the economy that matters, right? What we need most are better jobs and the assurance of financial security. But morality? Who cares about morality? As if there’s no connection between the direction of our economy and morality.

We would do well to pay attention to the Old Testament prophets. Now there’s a group of men who saw the connection between the morality of a country and its direction. Read what Amos had to say, and Joel, and Isaiah, and the rest. And of course, as they pointed out, the root problem isn’t morality itself, but idolatry. When we fail to worship the true and living God as He deserves and begin to worship false gods of our own making, we inevitably turn away from the commandments of the Creator God and begin to plummet down the moral slide that leads to destruction.

We’ve been sitting at the feet of the prophet Jeremiah for three weeks. You can’t help but admire Jeremiah. He had one of the hardest jobs I can imagine. He was called to be a prophet and given the assignment of telling his people that their country was going to be destroyed and they would either be killed or carried into exile in chains. His people not only rejected his message, but thought he was a traitor and hated him for it.

But he kept loving his people and demonstrated his love for them by preaching God’s Word year after year, calling them to repent, warning them of the impending judgment. And even after the judgment came, he continued to show his love for them by writing lamentations to help them grieve and turn back to God.

How did Jeremiah respond in a God-honoring way to such difficult life circumstances? Here’s a more relevant question. *How can we do it?* That’s what this series is all about, *Learning from the Lamenters: Living By Faith When Times Are Hard*. We’ve been looking at four highlights from Jeremiah’s life that reveal to us how he did just that, how he lived by faith during the toughest of times.

This morning we’re finishing our expositional pondering by looking at an event that happened towards the end of Jeremiah’s life. In Jeremiah 31 we find a series of messages that the Lord gave to this prophet around the year 587 BC. This makes Jeremiah a sixty-year-old man give or take. It’s just a year before the Babylonian army breaks down the walls of the capital city, destroys God’s temple, kills thousands of Jews, and carries the rest from the promised land into captivity.

The Setting: Jeremiah’s present situation was *challenging*.

Overwhelming might be a better word. The false prophets had been saying, “The Lord won’t let our city be taken! We’re His chosen people!”

But Jeremiah knew better. Yes, we’re God’s people and that’s the very reason He *will* let this city be taken. We’re His people but we haven’t been living like we’re His people! So judgment is coming! And for thirty-nine years Jeremiah preached that message to a hard-hearted, sin-loving people.

What sustained him? In short, it’s that he *saw what others failed to see*. That’s what living by faith is all about. He saw the seriousness of sin. He saw the need to repent. He saw the inevitability of divine judgment for unrepentant sin. And he also saw, by God’s gracious enablement, that there was life beyond the judgment.

Look at verse 26, “At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.” As far as I can tell, that’s the only time we find Jeremiah experiencing anything *pleasant* in the book. It wasn’t just that he had a good sleep. It’s what happened while he was asleep that encouraged Jeremiah. Apparently, he had a dream, a special God-sent dream regarding the future. *And it refreshed him in the present (26)*.

The content of this dream/vision actually begins back in 30:1 and goes through 31:25. In the vision the Lord gave Jeremiah a revelation of what was coming after the judgment

ended. If we scan the text of the vision in chapters 30-31, we will see some key phrases that jump off the page again and again.

30:3 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD.”

30:8 “‘In that day,’ declares the LORD.”

31:1 “‘At that time,’ declares the LORD.”

31:6 “There will be a day.”

31:17 “‘So there is hope for your future,’ declares the LORD.”

31:27 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD.”

31:31 “‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD.”

31:38 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD.”

What’s the subject of this pleasant message that the Lord gave to Jeremiah while he was sleeping and enabled him to wake up refreshed? It’s about *the future*.

Brothers and sisters, we’re going to discover this morning the transforming power of knowing and living in light of the future. And not merely the *one-year-from-now judgment is coming* future, either. Jeremiah had been preaching about the near-future for thirty-nine years, yet that certainly didn’t cause him to wake up refreshed. But this did. Something else is coming, says the Lord, and I want you to write it in a book because I want my people to know about it (30:2). And that’s what Jeremiah did. It’s called Jeremiah’s “book of consolation” which we find in chapters 30-33.²

We’re focusing today on just section of this book of consolation. In Jeremiah 31:26-40, the Lord gave Jeremiah three hope-giving promises regarding the future that fortified his soul for the present. The promises of God can do the same for you and me, too.

I’m not sure if the Lord delivered these promises during the dream or after it. Verse 27 indicates that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah, but doesn’t specify when. It seems to indicate that the vision itself runs from 30:3-31:25. Then after Jeremiah woke up, the Lord revealed to him the implications of the vision in 31:26-40.

I. Promise #1: I will restore my people (27-30).

Listen to verses 27-30, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when 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 and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.²⁹ In those days they shall no longer say: “‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’”³⁰ But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”

Stunning words. Hope-giving words. The Lord put three predictions on the table.

A. The Lord said He wasn’t through with His disobedient people (27).

B. The Lord said He was going to build and plant Israel again (28).

C. The Lord said that changes were coming (29-30).

Those three predictions are stunning. If you know your Bible history, you’ll recall that there hadn’t been a united Israel since the nation split 350 years earlier in 930 BC. What’s more, there hadn’t been a “house of Israel” for nearly 150 years since the Jews in the northern kingdom were carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. But now the Lord announces in verse 27, “I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals.” God made it clear He was going to restore and reunite the northern and southern nations of Jews.

And He even included the animals. “I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men *and of animals* (22).” Why mention animals? Think

² See the helpful explanation in the *NIV Study Bible* footnote on p. 1165.

about it. In 587 BC there weren't many animals around in Jerusalem. Why not? The Babylonian army had been hauling off men and animals for nearly twenty years (their invasion began in 605 BC).

This is an amazing set of promises! Know this, says the Lord. I am not through with my people. I am going to replant the house of Israel and the house of Judah together right back here in this land, and I'll bring the animals back too.

There are going to be some other changes as well, says the Lord. Specifically, there will be two massive changes that actually undergird the other changes.

1. *People won't blame their problems on the sins of others any longer (29).* That's the point of verse 29. "In those days people will no longer say [as they were saying in Jeremiah's day], 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'" It's not our fault our country is going down the tubes, said Jeremiah's peers. It's our forefathers' fault. God is punishing *us* for what *they* did.

Wrong, says the Lord. It's not either/or. It's both/and. Yes, your forefathers sinned, but so have you. And the day is coming when my people will stop blaming their problems on others. Related to that is a second massive change.

2. *People will deal with their own sins (30).* That's the point of verse 30, "Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge." It's just a fact. As sinners, we are blame-shifters by nature. We tend to blame others for our predicaments. And we may even blame God by wrongly assuming that He's doomed us to misery because of what others have done to us.

My wife Sherry worked as a librarian in a local school and she once told me about a situation that illustrates the point. A group of fifth graders were making noise in the library and she told them it needed to stop. At which point one young female student raised her hand and said, "I can't be quiet. I have an anger problem, and this computer makes me angry. You can't expect me to be quiet when I'm angry."

I love my wife's response. "Listen. This is the library and since there are other students studying, it will be quiet in here. And if you won't be quiet, then you can go down to the principal's office right now to talk to him about your anger problem." And the room became quiet!

That fifth grader's not alone, is she? She reminds me of *me*. I don't like to deal with my own sins either. I find it much easier to put the blame somewhere else. And so I excuse my sinful anger and say the problem is my genetics, or my upbringing, or the way people have treated me, and so on.

But it's not true, it's not the whole story, and the Lord won't let me justify the notion that it is. If need be, He will send me to the principal's office so I'll learn to face up to my real problem. Like He did with Judah. This kind of thinking needs to change, says the Lord. And I am going to change it, says the Lord.

This is the first promise the Lord gave to Jeremiah. *I will restore my people.* Indeed, I will restore my people in such a way that they will stop blaming their sin on others and start dealing with their sin in ways that please Me.

Those are two powerful indicators that a person has changed, aren't they? We stop blaming our sin on others. And we start dealing with it ourselves.

"But how?" you ask. "How does that happen?" The answer is, God must do it. But again, how does He do it? How does the Lord transform blame-shifters? The Lord gives His answer to that question in His second promise to Jeremiah.

II. Promise #2: I will make a new covenant with my people (31-34).

Notice verse 31, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” There it is. There’s God’s method for transforming blame-shifters. He established a new covenant.

Many Bible scholars say the text before us is Jeremiah’s greatest contribution to biblical truth. This is one of the most important passages, not only in the Old Testament, but in all of God’s Word.³ It’s here that the Lord announced that a new covenant is coming. The concept of “covenant” is very important in the Old Testament. A covenant is essentially an arrangement between two parties. Our English word comes from the Latin meaning “a coming together.” God entered into a covenant with Noah, with Abraham and his descendants, with Israel, with David and his descendants, with the Levitical priesthood, and more.

But here’s the only mention of this particular covenant in the Old Testament. A new covenant is coming. What is this “new covenant”? The Lord gives two insights here.

A. The new covenant isn’t like the old covenant (31-32). He says in verses 31-32, “Behold, the days are coming [NIV ‘The time is coming’], declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.”

The Lord reminded Jeremiah of two realities in old covenant living. *First, under the old covenant, God was like a husband to His people.* You remember the story. The Lord chose to rescue the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and brought them to the promised land. On the way He took them to Mount Sinai and entered into a covenant relationship with them. He became their husband and He promised to take care of them forever.

But of course, the old covenant didn’t last. It couldn’t. It couldn’t solve the sin problem. Manage it, yes. Sort of control it for a time, yes. What was the problem? It was a second reality.

Essentially, under the old covenant, Israel was like an unfaithful wife. Although she was loved unconditionally by her husband (who was none other than God Almighty), she kept running after other lovers. Not just once either, but again and again and again for century after century. Israel ran after the Canaanite gods, and the Egyptian gods, and the Assyrian gods, and on and on. She spurned the faithful love of her husband and lived like a prostitute, and thus broke the terms of the first covenant.

The wages of sin is death. The wages of spiritual adultery is a dead marriage. That’s the way it is in the old covenant.

But the new covenant isn’t going to be like that, says the Lord. It’s not that the old covenant was bad, just insufficient. Sinners need more than God’s laws written on stone tablets. They need new hearts that will keep those laws. And what they need yet lack, says the Lord, I will provide for them.

In fact, please notice carefully the words “I will” in this passage, for they are the key to lasting hope. A sinner cannot patch up things with God by doing something for God. Rather, God must do it for the sinner. And so, He told Jeremiah, “This is what I am going to do.”

I will make a new covenant—verse 31.

I will make it with the house of Israel—verse 33.

I will put my law in their minds—verse 33.

I will be their God—verse 33.

I will forgive their wickedness—verse 34.

³ See Charles Feinberg, p. 574.

I will remember their sins no more—verse 34.

I will. I will. I will.

Who will establish the new covenant? I will do it, says the Lord. I will make a new covenant and under that covenant I will do everything that sinners need in order to be right with Me. And what is it specifically that sinners need which the old covenant missed and the new covenant provides? It's this.

B. Under the new covenant the Lord changes people inside out (33-34). Morality tries to do it outside-in, but that never lasts. I'm going to change sinners inside-out, says the Lord. Under the new covenant, says the Lord, I will bring about heart change by taking action in four ways. Let's consider carefully four outcomes of the new covenant.

1. *He puts His law on our hearts (33a).* Notice verse 33a, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them [NIV84 'in their minds'], and I will write it on their hearts."

It's amazing how prone we are to try to regulate religion. *Tell me how to dress. Tell me what Bible version to use. Tell me how much money to give.* We love lists of do's and don'ts. But look back at Israel's history. It doesn't work. The old covenant approach doesn't work. It doesn't go deep enough and therefore doesn't last long enough. We need for the Lord to put His law into our minds and write it on our hearts. And that's precisely what He does under the *new covenant*.

Again, the new covenant is not like the old covenant. In the new covenant, the Lord accomplishes what the old covenant could never accomplish. He produces heart change that leads to life change. He gives us the desire to worship Him, and walk with Him, and give our tithes to Him, and raise our kids for Him, and tell other people about Him.

If we don't desire those things, then we'd better take inventory concerning whether we are really members of the new covenant. The sad reality is that churches are filled with people who think they're right with God because they keep the list. That's the old covenant, my friend, and it doesn't work.

When God truly saves a person, He gives that person a new heart and writes His law on that heart. If that's never happened to you, I urge you to admit it, acknowledge your need for it, and ask the Spirit of God to accomplish it in your life. Say to Him, "O Spirit of the Living God, please give me a new heart!" And He will, for that's what He loves to do under the new covenant. Yet there's more. A second outcome.

2. *He establishes a permanent relationship with us (33b).* We see this at the end of verse 33, "And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Notice the permanency in that promise. I will do it and it will be so, says the Lord. I have a people who are mine, and I will be their God forever. This relationship is permanent because He establishes it with His new covenant people.

3. *He enables us to know Him personally (34a).* He says in verse 34a, "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD."

The Lord isn't saying we won't need teachers under the new covenant, for other passages make it clear we do (Ephesians 4:11-12; Titus 2:15). But we won't need teachers to tell us, "Know the Lord." People outside the new covenant need that exhortation, but not those on the inside. If the Spirit has given you a new heart and put the law of God on it, then you know the Lord. Sure, you need to know Him better, but He's real to you, and personal. This is a blessing of the new covenant, for we know Him. Not just about Him. We truly know Him personally. And want others to know Him too!

4. *He removes the sin barrier that once separated us (34b).* Look at the end of verse 34, "For I will forgive their iniquity [NIV84 'wickedness'], and I will remember their sin no more." This is my biggest problem, and yours. Sin. And I can't get rid of

my sin on my own. I can't erase it. I can't undo it. I can't make it go away. But under the new covenant God does it for me. He forgives my sins and remembers them no more.

How can a holy God do that? Isn't He being unjust if He overlooks our sins? No, because He doesn't just overlook our sin. He deals with it. He administers the proper punishment for our sin.

But we don't receive the punishment. His Son does. His Son has chosen to endure the punishment we deserve in our place. "This is the new covenant in my blood," says the Son of God to us the night before He was crucified (Luke 22:20).

This is the heart of the new covenant. God gives the sins of His undeserving people because His Son took those sins as their substitute. God judged His Son on the cross so that now He can pardon those who believe in Him. My friend, if you have believed in Christ and His cross-work, there is no barrier any longer that separates you from God. He has removed it. If you desire to be reconciled to God, acknowledge your sin, put your trust in His Son, and He will forgive you. This is the outcome of the new covenant.

Yet there's more! There's another promise, says the Lord. And this future assurance makes all the difference now. Promise one, I will restore my people. Promise two, I will make a new covenant with my people. Now promise three.

III. Promise #3: I will preserve my people (35-40).

As Americans we tend to pride ourselves in our individualism and this affects how we read our Bible. We come to a passage like Jeremiah 31, read about forgiveness, and immediately think about ourselves as individuals. While it's true that God does forgive and restore individuals, it's also true that God forgives and restores a *people*. In this final section of Jeremiah 31, the Lord revealed three guarantees concerning His people.

A. The Lord guaranteed that He wasn't done with the nation of Israel (35-36).

Listen to verses 35-36, "Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name [NIV84 'the LORD Almighty']:³⁶ 'If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.'"⁴

Did you catch that last line? When will the offspring/descendants of Israel cease to be a nation? As God answers that question, He invites us to look at the daily rhythm of the sun, moon, and stars rising and lighting up the sky. There are few things more predictable than this. Every morning that sun shines. Every night those stars light up the sky. Even if there's cloud cover, that's still happening. That's the *fixed order*, says the Lord. We can count on it.

Well, we can count on this too, says the Lord. Here's my answer to the question, when will Israel cease to be a nation? Only when I tell the sun, moon, and stars to stop shining. In other words, not until My plan for the cosmos is accomplished. The Lord is guaranteeing to Jeremiah that He is not done with the nation of Israel.

Look back for a moment at verse 31 and answer this. With whom did the Lord say He was going to establish the new covenant? With *the house of Israel* and *the house of Judah*, right? That's important to see. The Lord said He would make a new covenant with the descendants of the people with whom He had established the *old* covenant.

Is that the church? No. It's Israel. The church didn't exist in the sixth century BC. God said He would establish a new covenant with the descendants of the people with whom He formed the old covenant.

⁴ In the NIV84, "'Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,' declares the LORD, 'will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.'"

But does that mean that the church has no part in the new covenant? No, that's not what it means. I have found a helpful word picture by commentator Christopher J. H. Wright. He says that we need to see three horizons when we read this passage. The first is close, the second more distant, and the third far distant. I don't necessarily agree with all the details of Wright's interpretation, but I'd like to borrow his three horizon framework as we consider the future.

The first horizon is what this promise meant for Israel. This is the closest horizon and it was reached in about seventy years when the Lord brought a remnant of Israel back to the land. The second horizon is more distant, about five hundred years removed from Jeremiah, and was reached when Christ came to earth and established His church made up of Jews and Gentiles. But the third horizon has yet to be reached. It's what is going to happen in the future to Israel, to Jewish people, to the "offspring of Israel" (verse 37).

We need to see all three horizons when we read the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31. Was the new covenant for Israel? Yes. That's horizon one. Does it apply to the church? Yes, that's horizon two. Has the church now replaced Israel or is there still more in store for Israel? That's horizon three.

Christopher J. H. Wright explains, "Some commentators reject and denounce any attempt to read the new covenant text of Jeremiah 31 with Christian significance. They brand such reading as 'supersessionist', i.e. the presumed belief that the Christian church has simply replaced the Jews, who are said to have been rejected from God's purposes. Such commentators therefore wish to confine the relevance and the promise of these verses to ethnic Old Testament Israel and contemporary Jewish people alone, and regard Christian appropriation of them as 'preemptive', and distorting. However, it seems to me that it is as wrong to *exclude* a Christian reading of these texts at Horizon 2 (in relation to the New Testament's understanding of fulfilment in Christ), as it is to jump immediately to that horizon and interpret the text *exclusively* in Christian terms. But having done all we can to hear and interpret the text at Horizon 1, it is surely necessary for any reading of the text that claims to be *Christian* to reflect on how it is further and ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ. That is certainly what the New Testament does."⁵

He is right. As Charles Feinberg explains, "The same death of Christ that implemented the new covenant for Israel does so for all sinners for all time."⁶ Of course, Wright and Feinberg are just telling us what the New Testament writers tell us.

Listen to Paul's words to the Corinthian church members in 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

Note Jesus' words as quoted by Paul. *This cup is the new covenant in my blood.* This cup, this cup He drank to the full, this experience of the wrath of God, this shedding of His own blood, resulted in the establishing of a new covenant. We don't sacrifice lambs any longer. That's old covenant activity. We put our total trust in the final lamb that was slain, Jesus the Messiah. That's new covenant activity.

Next week, the Lord willing, we'll be returning to our series in Hebrews picking up where we left off in Hebrews 7. The writer of Hebrews loves Jeremiah's prophecy. He says in Hebrews 9:15, "Therefore he is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that those

⁵ Wright, C. J. H. (2014). [*The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*](#) (A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; pp. 335–336). Inter-Varsity Press.

⁶ Charles Feinberg, p. 575.

who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” He later says in Hebrews 12:24, “And to Jesus, the mediator of a **new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

And then there’s Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:15-17 where the writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 in its entirety (the longest Old Testament quote in the New Testament) to make the point that the old covenant is gone and that believers today are enjoying the blessings of the new covenant that Christ established. Oh, yes, in future weeks there will be lots of discussion of the implications of Jeremiah 31 in our community groups.

For now, however, let’s raise this important question. If we who are the church are already enjoying new covenant blessings, what happened to Israel? Is God finished with Israel? Has the church replaced Israel in God’s plan so that there’s no longer a distinction under the new covenant between Israel and the church?

Some say yes. It’s called replacement theology (or covenant theology) and there are different strands of replacement theology held by our brothers and sisters. And they indeed are our brothers and sisters who are seeking to do what we’re seeking to do with these texts. They’re comparing them, systematizing them, wrestling with how a new covenant promise made to Israel applies to those of us in the church. And I respect these brothers for their exegetical efforts. But I also disagree with them. Here’s one of the main reasons. In verses 36-37 the Lord Himself gives a second guarantee.

B. The Lord guaranteed that He wouldn’t reject all the descendants of Israel (37). Notice verse 37, “Thus says the LORD: ‘If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD.’”

Can the heavens above be measured, and can the foundations of the earth be searched out? They can’t, and those are the conditions that must be met, says the Lord, before He will cast Israel aside for good.

So yes, the church enjoys wonderful new covenant blessings in this age. We’ve reached horizon two. But that doesn’t mean that the church has replaced Israel, nor that the Lord is done with Israel. To the contrary, He has a wonderful plan for Israel which will be accomplished when we reach horizon three.

The prophet Ezekiel talked about this in Ezekiel 37:26, “I will make a **covenant of peace** with them. It shall be an **everlasting covenant** with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.”

“What then happened to Israel?” you ask. In the New Testament we discover that at Jesus’ first coming some Jews believed in Him, but the majority did not. As a nation Israel rejected Jesus, said no to His new covenant blessings, and experienced a hardening. Consequently, as Paul explains in Romans 9, God cut them off of the vine and grafted believing Gentiles into the vine (Rom. 9:30-33).

But does that mean Israel stumbled beyond recovery? No, says Paul in Romans 11:11. Indeed, at Christ’s second coming Israel will be grafted back into the vine and experience the complete fulfillment of the new covenant blessings (see Zech. 12:10-13:1; Rom. 11:11-32). That’s horizon three.

I appreciate Feinberg’s point of clarification, “The NT is careful to state in each instance what elements in the blessings promised Israel may be transferred to the common enjoyment of Israel and the church. It is neither warranted nor in harmony with Scripture to go beyond this.”⁷

⁷ Charles Feinberg, p. 575.

Yet there's more. The Lord gives a third guarantee, and this one is even more specific. It's not just about the nation of Israel but the capital city of that nation.

C. The Lord guaranteed that He had plans for the city of Jerusalem (38-40).

Listen to verses 38-40, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate.³⁹ And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah.⁴⁰ The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."⁸

While those details about Jerusalem might not mean much to us, they did to Jeremiah. He grew up three miles northeast of Jerusalem and preached there often. The Tower of Hananel was on the northeast corner of the city. The Corner gate probably refers to the northwest corner. We don't know where Gareb and Goah are, but the point of all this description seems to be that not only is there a future in store for this city, but it's going to be expanded. And this is no spiritual city, but an actual city, a real city for a real nation to fulfill a real plan. And the plan? "This city will be rebuilt *for Me*," says the Lord in verse 38. And it will be "*holy/sacred to the LORD*," says verse 40, with this concluding sentence, "It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

You say, "Okay, what is the point about the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem?" It boils down to this. *He used the nation to give us the Messiah. He used the city to give us the cross.* That's the point. Sinners need a Messiah and sinners need the cross. And what we need, the Lord promised to provide. And He has.

So now we know what made this man tick. Jeremiah didn't live with his eyes glued to the problems of the present. He lived in light of the future.

Take Inventory: Let's ask ourselves two life-changing questions.

1. *Am I living in light of what God did in the past?* I ask this because much of what was future to Jeremiah is now past to us. Christ *has* come and shed His blood and established the new covenant. Are you living in light of it? Are you trusting in Christ and in His atoning sacrifice and are you now enjoying the benefits of the new covenant?

2. *Am I living in light of what God will do in the future?* We know what's coming, my friend. We have His promises. God has promised to do some things, for Israel, for the church, and for you and me. The first horizon has already come. And so has the second. The third horizon will be here soon. Are you ready?

Song of Response: #186 "*The Old Rugged Cross*" (all four verses)

Communion – Luke 22:14-20 "This cup... is the new covenant in my blood."

This evening: Preachers in Training – 1 Thessalonians

3:4-5	Matt Wilson
3:6-7	Homer Sperry
3:8-10	Chris Dolan

⁸ In the NIV84, "The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."