

# **Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 26, Jeremiah 30-33, The New Covenant**

© 2024 Gary Yates and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 26, Jeremiah 30 to 33, The New Covenant.

Our focus in this segment is going to be on Jeremiah's promise of the New Covenant.

And as we're looking at Jeremiah's promise of restoration, I think we understand the central importance of this passage. Really central to Jeremiah 30 to 33 in the sense that this New Covenant is how God is going to bring about this restoration and salvation. What is God going to do in the restoration of his people that will break this pattern of centuries and centuries of rebellion? How is God going to heal this broken marriage? How is God going to restore the relationship with his unfaithful son? The New Covenant is central to that.

For us as Christians, the New Covenant is important because it bridges really in many ways the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us the promise of the New Covenant. The New Testament gives us the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

So, I would lose my credentials as a Christian if I didn't spend some time focusing on the New Covenant. I'm going to begin by reading the passage, and then we're going to look specifically at what the promises are and what is this New Covenant all about. Before we even read the passage, though, remember the context of the covenant history of God and his people throughout the Old Testament. Salvation history in the Old Testament is built around a series of covenants that God establishes with people, trying to bring humanity back into a right relationship with him.

The relationship was fragmented when Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled against God. They were given a position where they were God's vice-regents. They were God's image on earth.

They were to reflect his glory and his honor. They were to, I think, in some sense, spread the Garden of Eden through the earth so that all of humanity could experience God's blessing. When they rebelled against that, God, like an ancient Near Eastern king, was going to implement his rule through a series of covenants.

The first covenant with Noah, the promise not to destroy the earth again, but the responsibility that whoever sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed. After the rebellion at the Tower of Babel, God is going to make a covenant with Abraham.

He's going to promise him land, many descendants, and he will now become the instrument of blessing that God originally gave to Adam.

This covenant is going to establish Abraham's descendants as the people of God. The Mosaic covenant is going to establish for those people how to live as God's people. They are going to be blessed if they obey the covenant.

They are going to be cursed if they disobey. The history of the culmination of this, they experienced the covenant curses because they do not obey God's commandments. God gave them a king and made a covenant with the house of David, the Davidic covenant, that promised that David's family would rule forever, that established David's throne and rulership over the land.

Ultimately, David and his sons, as God's vice-regents, would rule over the entire earth. But the obligation that was placed upon them is that each Davidic king within that line would be blessed or punished based on his obedience or disobedience to God. There's a connection between each of the covenants as they emerge in God's plan and the covenants that have already come before.

The Davidic king would enable them to possess the land and be free from their enemies. But the Davidic king also had a responsibility if they wanted to keep that land to obey the Lord. So, Jeremiah, again, is the culmination of the failures of the house of David, the judgment that is going to come upon them.

So, God has made these series of covenants: the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and the Davidic covenant, but in the working out of salvation history, there's this long pattern of disobedience. The new covenant is ultimately going to be the solution for that and also how God is going to bring about this glorious restoration that's described for us in the book of Consolation. Here's the passage.

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. 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, but this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each one his brother saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

So, in this session, we're going to focus specifically on this passage and the promises that are given here, the specific promises, and really how this fleshes itself out in some other parts of the Old Testament as well. I think the first thing that stands out to me as I'm looking at this is that in verse 31, the Lord says, the covenant that I'm going to make, this new covenant, will not be like the one that I made with their forefathers on the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

So, what's central to this new covenant and what's going to give it the power to ultimately do what the first covenant could not is that there is going to be an act of salvation that would transcend the Exodus. And we talked about this new Exodus in the last session. Remember Isaiah saying that the second Exodus will be greater than the first in that, number one, the Lord's going to bring them out of many nations.

Number two, they will not have to leave the land of Babylon in haste the way that they did with Egypt. Number three, the Lord's going to transform the wilderness into an oasis. So, there's going to be an easier journey back to the land.

And number four, they will come back to the land to worship the Lord and they will never again be taken away from it. So, there is an act of salvation that's going to transcend the first Exodus. It just, it stands out here.

This is not going to be a covenant like the one when, in my love and my grace and my mercy and compassion, I rescued your fathers out of Egypt. It's not going to be like that. In fact, it is going to be something even greater than that.

And it is going to be an act of salvation through this new Exodus and this larger salvation that the Lord is going to bring them. This will be the thing that makes it finally stick. The relationship will work the way that God has designed it.

Jeremiah, in chapter 23, verses seven and eight, also as he's giving a promise of restoration, is looking for a second Exodus greater than the first one. He says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord when they shall no longer say, as the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of Egypt, but as the Lord lives, who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country. So, the paradigmatic act in salvation throughout the history of the Old Testament has been the Exodus.

But this deliverance is going to be so great that they really are not going to even reference it anymore. This is going to be a greater act of salvation. So, I think what we have going on in the history of salvation throughout the Bible is that you have God. There's a pattern of where God rescues and delivers people.

That's what salvation is about. God rescues the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. In the New Covenant, God is going to rescue them out of the bondage of captivity.

Jesus comes to bring redemption out of the captivity of sin. So, you have this recurring pattern. The way that God saves in the past is true of the way that God saves in the present and the way that he will save in the future.

God is a God who rescues. But what G.K. Beale has also emphasized about salvation history in his New Testament theology is that salvation can also be understood as these series of acts of deliverance and new creation where God is constantly doing a greater work in each aspect of the moving forward of salvation history. So, there are these series of new creation acts in which God ultimately brings fallen humanity or his people back to himself.

With each act of new creation, with each act of deliverance, God is doing a more powerful work that will ultimately bring us to the place where God's kingdom will be fully restored, man will be living in a right relationship with the Lord, and there will never again be the need for judgment because God's going to do away with sin. But let's just think about how salvation history works in this way. Adam sins and rebels.

And so, God is going to raise up a new Adam, Noah. And he says to Noah, be fruitful and multiply. He gives to Noah the same position that he gave to Adam.

There is a rescue and a deliverance. When God restores Noah after the destruction of the flood, there is a new creation. We have a second Adam, another new Adam, in the story of Abraham.

And just as Adam was given the position in the garden of being a king and a priest, Abraham's descendants, kings will come forth from you and they will be a kingdom of priests. They're restored to that Adamic position. And then the Lord is going to do this act of new creation where he brings them out of captivity in Egypt.

The Lord is going to raise up new Adams with David and Solomon. They are going to help the people of Israel experience the kingdom of God more fully, possess the land that God had promised them, remove the enemies that were there, and enjoy the presence of God through the temple and a permanent sanctuary. So they are new Adams, and acts of new creation are happening there.

But when the captivity occurs, this new creation, this new Exodus, is going to be greater than anything that God has done for his people in the past. Finally, as we move into the New Testament, the deliverance that Christ brings in and the new covenant being implemented in its initial stages. And then at his second coming, the new creation that is finally going to bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

So, God is constantly throughout the Bible. There's a storyline of where God is consistently and persistently rescuing and delivering people. That's what God does in his mercy and grace.

He is bringing people out of their bondage to sin. He is raising up new Adams, who will implement his kingship on earth. Ultimately, that's bringing us to a new heaven and a new earth where this new covenant will be fully experienced.

The first promise of this passage is that the Lord did something amazing for Israel in the past. They cried out to God in their bondage. From the perspective of what Israel was going through in the Exodus, it looks like there was no deliverance for them.

Egypt is the most powerful nation on earth at this time. How are they ever going to get out of bondage? Well, the Lord delivers them. And in an incredible act of mercy and grace, he raises up a deliverer for them in Moses.

He carries out the plagues. He brings about the deliverance at the Red Sea. And the Lord says the new covenant is not going to be like the one that I made when I brought your fathers out of Egypt.

It will be a greater demonstration of my love, grace, and mercy. Finally, this is what it's going to take for this salvation to stick. In this previous act of deliverance, the Lord made himself Israel's husband.

But in the future act of deliverance through this great act of salvation, the Lord is ultimately going to guarantee the fidelity of his wife. And Israel will become a faithful covenant partner. All right.

So that's the, I think, the beginning part of this. Now, I'd like to go to the end of this passage in verse 34 and focus on a second aspect. Well, what does this mean? What is this incredible act of salvation, this greater act of new creation, this new Exodus? What does it involve? Why is this so much better? I think a second thing that's emphasized in this text is that part of this new salvation will involve a radical and free forgiveness of sin that even goes beyond the grace and the forgiveness that God has shown to Israel in the past.

At the end of verse 34, I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. All right. In the experience of exile, this is precisely what Israel needs because the exile was God's punishment for their sin.

And so, as God is promising this radical and free forgiveness, that's what makes salvation possible. In the book of Isaiah, the Lord says, announce to the people that

their years of hard service and labor are over, and now it's the time of forgiveness. God is no longer holding his sin or holding the sin of the people against them.

In chapter 14, the people in Jeremiah's day, they come to the Lord and they give God this confession of sin. It looks good. It sounds good.

They say the right words. It's everything that you would want in a confession of sin except for one thing. There's no real genuine repentance in their lives.

The Lord says I don't accept their confession. And there's a specific statement made. The Lord does not accept them.

He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. So why does Israel go through the experience of exile? Why is Judah taken away into captivity? Because the Lord remembers their sins. And they're going to have to be punished for that.

Well, the deliverance, obviously, in the new covenant, the Lord is no longer going to remember their sins. So, there's this promise that Israel absolutely deserved what they experienced in exile, but there's this promise that the Lord is going to radically and freely forgive their sins. He's going to blot them out.

He's going to take them away. And again, the message of Jeremiah and the message of the second half of Isaiah, which is also talking about deliverance from exile. We see the same thing here.

Chapter 43, verse 25, in the second part of Isaiah, says this: I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake. All right. Why does God forgive Israel? It's not because of who they are.

It's for his own sake. And the Lord says he blots them out. In other words, he takes an eraser and simply removes it from the record.

But through the exile, God has held them accountable for their sin. He's punished them. He's put them in servitude because of their sin.

But this forgiveness will mean the removal of the sin that has necessitated the punishment in the first place. And the Lord says this, and I will not remember your sins. So Isaiah 43, verse 25, says exactly the same thing as Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 34.

He says, put me in remembrance, and let us argue together. Set forth your case so that you may be proved right. Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me, but the Lord is getting ready to forgive his people.

Chapter 44, verse 22, another promise in the second half of Isaiah about the forgiveness of Israel's sins. The Lord says, I have blotted out your transgression like a cloud and your sins like a mist. So, the Lord says, your sin is going to be like the fog in the morning that disappears.

Okay. The Lord had sent them into captivity for their sin, but when he delivers them, their sins are going to be wiped away, and they're going to disappear like a cloud. Then he says this in Isaiah 44, 22, returns to me for I have redeemed you.

Okay. Here's how radical the forgiveness is going to be. In Isaiah 44, verse 22, the Lord forgives them even before they return to him.

And sometimes, in the prophets, the interplay between a divine initiative and human responsibility, there are different emphases depending on the text that we're in or what the prophet's trying to do. Sometimes, they're going to emphasize divine initiative. And in this case, that's definitely there.

The Lord is going to forgive even before they return. And it's the forgiveness of the Lord that's going to motivate their return. There are other places in the prophets like Jeremiah chapter 29, the Lord will restore them when they seek me with a whole heart.

So which prophet's telling us the truth? Well, they both are. The Lord is definitely the one who is going to initiate the restoration here, but there's also the human side of this where they're going to have to return to the Lord. But the forgiveness that God gives here in Isaiah 44, verse 22, is a forgiveness that is extended to them before they even return to him.

Some of my favorite images and metaphors in all of the Old Testament are the ones that are used to describe the forgiveness that God gives to us with our sin. Psalm 103, the Lord is going to remove our sin as far as the East is from the West. Try to imagine what he's talking about there.

In Micah chapter 7, when again another prophet is promising the restoration of his people after the judgment of exile, Micah chapter 7 verses 18 and following literally says that God is going to declare war on the sins of his people. And God's fought all kinds of holy wars on behalf of Israel in the past. In the future, the Lord's going to fight a holy war against Israel's sin.

And it says that the Lord is going to trample underfoot the sin of his people. And then, after he's trampled them underfoot, he's going to cast them into the depths of the sea. So what was it about the new exodus that was going to be so transforming? It was the greatness of forgiveness and the radical and extreme nature of this.

Now you might be asking, well, we have all kinds of examples of forgiveness throughout the Old Testament. One of the key characteristics of God's character and one of the things that God reveals about himself upfront as Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, is that he is a God who is slow to anger, abounding in mercy, and all of those kinds of things. We've seen that throughout the history of the Old Testament.

But I believe that in the new covenant, there is a degree of forgiveness being offered here that wasn't even true even under the first covenant. In the old covenant, and the way that things were set up under the Mosaic law, sacrifices that provided atonement for sin, and there was a requirement of sacrifice, sacrifice only provided atonement for certain types of sins. It only provided atonement for unintentional sins.

When someone like David committed a defiant act of sin against God, and he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband, David had no sacrifice that he could offer at that point to resolve that issue with God. And so he has to come to God in Psalm 51 and throw himself on the mercy of the court and plead for God to blot out his sin. God did that for David.

And God, throughout Israel's history, does that for them often. There's no sacrifice for sin; God provides it. But what this covenant is promising is that type of free mercy and grace and forgiveness that doesn't necessarily distinguish between intentional and unintentional sin the way that the sacrifices did, God's going to give that to Israel.

Israel constantly had the need on a yearly basis for the Day of Atonement to cover all of the sins that were not covered by the other sacrifices. There was no way that even an individual Israelite could have offered a sacrifice that would cover every one of their sins. And so that yearly need for atonement reminded them that if they were going to live in the presence of God, they needed those sins atoned for.

They needed the defilement of their sin that had accumulated on the altar to be cleared away so that they could actually get the opportunity to live in God's presence for another year. And God graciously did that for them on a yearly basis. But I believe that what the promise of the new covenant involves is that there is going to be a level of mercy and forgiveness beyond what Israel has ever experienced in their past history.

And it's the radical nature of that forgiveness and the depth of mercy, that's what's going to grab the heart of the wife and ultimately convince Israel to be a faithful people. You see, as we look at forgiveness in the Bible and as we look at God's grace, really experiencing that forgiveness does not lead us to say, you know, look at what we can get away with. Real forgiveness transforms our hearts to the point that we



want to say, I want to live for God, and I want to express back to Him my devotion and my love for the great love that He has shown to me.

Forgiveness doesn't motivate license. Forgiveness motivates love and commitment. Paul says, should we say, let us sin, let us sin more that grace may abound.

God forbid. We've been delivered from our sin and part of the way that God delivers us from that sin is the power of the love of forgiveness. And Israel has experienced that in all kinds of ways in their past history.

When they cheated against God on the honeymoon by worshiping the golden calf before the tablets had even been fully worked out, God extended mercy and grace to them. But the covenant that I make with them in the future is not going to be like the one that I made when I brought them out of Egypt. It's going to be even better than that.

And I think a deeper level of forgiveness and a deeper experience of the forgiveness of God is going to be part of that. Alright, so in making the new covenant resolve the issues that have been raised by the failures under the old covenant, well, with regard to the past, it provides forgiveness for all of the sins and the failures that have occurred in the hundreds of years up to this point. But there also needs to be something, if this new covenant is going to work, well, what about the future? How are we going to guarantee that this pattern of sin doesn't continue? Well, the forgiveness, in part, is going to motivate that.

But a second component of this new salvation that God is promising to Israel, what's going to be at the heart of this new covenant is that the Lord is going to give his people a new enablement and a new capacity to obey the Lord. And the way that that is explained in the book of Jeremiah is that Jeremiah says, the Lord is going to write his law on their hearts. So, in the old covenant, the law was written on the stones.

And it was this commandment that, it was the series of, that stood externally to the people and commanded them to do certain things. In the same way that when we see a don't walk on the grass or wet paint, we just have this internal, without an internal desire to keep that external commandment, we're not going to follow. And so, what God is promising there is, I'm going to give you a desire not to walk on the grass.

When you see that wet paint, I'm going to put the desire of the person who put that sign there in the first place, and I'm going to give you the enablement and the capacity to obey me and to keep these laws and these commandments. Okay. It is again, the solution to the problem that was especially true of the people in Jeremiah's day.

The forgiveness of sin, Jeremiah, the Lord had said to Jeremiah, I'm going to remember their sins and punish them. So, the solution is the Lord says, I'm going to forget their sin and not remember it. But when the Lord says, I'm going to give them a new heart, and I'm going to write the law on their heart, this specifically reverses what we read about in Jeremiah chapter 17, verse one.

Here's the condition of the people that Jeremiah is ministering to. He says the sin of Judah is written with a pin of iron, with a point of a diamond, and it is engraved on the tablet of their heart. So, think about these iron tools that were used to inscribe messages and letters and words on tablets.

In the same way, the sin of Israel is deeply etched into their heart and in their character. It's their nature. And they do not have a desire to obey God.

And so, what God is going to do is take hearts that have sin etched into them. And he's going to erase that and replace that with a heart that has his word etched into it. And then they will have the internal desire to obey God.

17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? Well, the Lord is going to do heart surgery for his people, and he's going to cure their heart problem. Chapter 32, verses 39 to 40, clarifies that when God writes the law on the heart of his people, they will have the desire to obey him.

They will always be faithful. The Lord is going to put his fear within them. They will keep the law and this disaster of exile that the people experienced in the days of Jeremiah.

They're never going to have to go through that again because the new covenant will give them the ability and the capacity to obey. So, as we start thinking about this idea of new covenant and new heart, there's all kinds of passages and things from the Old Testament that start running through my mind. This idea that God is going to give a new heart to his people is something that has already been talked about back in the book of Deuteronomy.

And I want us to notice a movement that takes place in the book of Deuteronomy that I think is reflective of what's going on in Jeremiah as well. In Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 16, the Lord says to the people, circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. Cut away that hard part on the outside of your heart that is keeping you from obeying God.

Circumcise your heart and experience a heart transformation. Give your heart to God so that you will have a desire to obey him. And notice here, God is commanding Israel to do that.

Well, we know that the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy and the rest of the Old Testament they're a hard-hearted people. And ultimately, they're going to be sent away into exile. So, in Deuteronomy 30, what is God going to do for his people when they're in exile? He says this: when they come back to him and when they repent and when they turn to the Lord when they're living in these countries, the Lord will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all of your hearts.

So, Deuteronomy begins with the idea, circumcise your heart to the Lord. That's your responsibility. The people can't do it.

Ultimately, God will give them a new heart and God will give them the capacity to obey. Now, they had the ability to obey, and we'll talk about that, but they chose not to follow the Lord. The Lord is ultimately going to intervene and do heart surgery that will transform them.

We see the same movement in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 11 is going to, I'm sorry, Ezekiel chapter 18. Let me read that passage.

Ezekiel chapter 18, verse 31 says this: cast away from you all of the transgressions that you have committed and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? So, what does God tell Israel to do? Get a new heart. Get right with God.

Turn away from your sin. Get a new heart. Why should you die for your sin? And if you don't experience this heart transformation, that's where you're heading.

Okay. So, it's something that God tells the people of Israel to do. They are to circumcise their heart.

Well, the Lord says to the people in Ezekiel chapter 11, verses 18 and 19, the Lord says I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. So, Deuteronomy says, circumcise yourself to the Lord.

Circumcise your heart. The people are rebellious and stiff-necked. When they are sent away into exile, God will circumcise their hearts.

The book of Ezekiel, get yourself a new heart. Why should you die? Ultimately, they experienced the judgment of exile because they would not turn back to God. What does God promise them? I will give them a new heart.

That same movement is present in the book of Jeremiah. In the call to return that's given at the very beginning of the book, remember the metaphor that's used there. Jeremiah chapter four, verse two, circumcise your heart.

Plow up the, the soil that's resistant and, and, and return to God. Circumcise your heart. The people ultimately do not do that.

Why? Because the sin that they love is engraved on their hearts. That's their desire. That's their heart.

So, what does God promise to do in Jeremiah? He promises to give them a new heart. So, the same movement from get yourself a new heart. The people don't do it.

God ultimately gives them a new heart. That's not just Jeremiah. It's Deuteronomy and it's Ezekiel as well.

There's a pattern. God is going to do the heart surgery that will bring about the transformation of his people. Okay.

We ask ourselves the question, all right, and God's going to write the law on their heart, give them the desire to obey. God's going to do the heart surgery on them. How? How does that happen? How does God ultimately write the law on his heart? Well, we begin to bring in some other passages and some other promises for the prophets.

You see, Jeremiah is somewhat unique in the terminology new covenant, but there are a number of other prophets who are basically talking about the same thing and this covenant that God is going to make with Israel in the future. The timing of the new covenant is going to be the time of the kingdom and the restoration. So, the new covenant is not something that is exclusive to Jeremiah.

It really goes along with the promises of restoration that we read throughout the prophets. And the specific way, as we take Jeremiah and as we laid that passage beside these other promises about what God is going to do in the lives of the people of Israel to bring about this restoration, here's the way that he's going to write the law on their hearts. He is going to do that by pouring out in a new way, in a fresh way, his own spirit.

And so, the writing of the law on the heart in Jeremiah is connected to a number of other prophetic passages that are specifically going to talk about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the pouring out of God's spirit. Let me just mention a couple of these. Isaiah chapter 32 verses 14 and 18.

Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. Judah and Israel are going to be under judgment. Verse 14 says the palace is forsaken.

How long is that going to last? Verse 15, until the spirit is poured out from us on high and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. What's going to bring about the transformation? The Lord is going to pour out his spirit in a new way. How is the Lord going to write the law on his heart, on the hearts of his people? He's going to put his own spirit within them.

Chapter 59 in Isaiah verses 20 and 21. The Lord says there, a redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression, declares the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them.

It doesn't talk about the new covenant, but this is the future covenant that God's going to make with his people. The Lord says, my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth or out of the mouth of your offspring. The Lord says I'm going to pour out my spirit, and the spirit is going to even put the words of God into the mouth of his people.

Now I want you to remember in Jeremiah chapter one, that's what God did for Jeremiah as a prophet. And Jeremiah swallowed those words and they were sweet to his taste. And as a result of that, Jeremiah became an embodied representation of the word of God.

He lived out God's word. That is what is ultimately going to happen to all of the people of Israel. They are going to become living representations of God's word.

Why? Because of the enablement and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Joel chapter two says that the last days are going to be the time when God pours out his spirit on all flesh and all Israel, young men, young women, old men, old women, all of Israel, the great, the leaders, the prophets, but the people themselves. There is going to be a pouring out on the spirit of people, on the people of God, unlike anything that has ever been experienced in the past.

And that's what's going to make it possible for the law to be written on their hearts so that they will have the desire to obey. Now, I think it is especially helpful to take Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34, and lay it beside what I think is the passage that most closely parallels this in the prophets, Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 26 to 28. So, let's look at this passage.

In our class, as we're studying this passage, I often have my students take these two texts and lay them side by side and compare what things are in this passage that are similar and what things are in these passages that may be different. And I think they inform our understanding of each. But here's what Ezekiel says.

Verse 26, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. Jeremiah says, I'm going to write the law, the Lord's going to write the law on our hearts. The message in Ezekiel is even more translation, the Lord's going to give you a new heart altogether.

And he says, I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and to be careful to obey my rules. So, what was it in Jeremiah that enabled them to obey? The Lord is going to write the law on their hearts.

What is it in Ezekiel that is going to give the people the capacity to obey? The Lord is going to put his spirit within them. Therefore, what does Jeremiah mean when he says God is going to write the law on the people's hearts? It means the Lord is going to enable their obedience through the giving of his own spirit. It's as if Israel has been an unfaithful covenant partner.

So, the Lord is going to come within them in a way and in a capacity that will enable them to finally be a faithful covenant partner. Now in light of all of this and in light of what's being promised for the future, I think it's important to understand what Jeremiah is saying and what Jeremiah is not saying about the old covenant. He is promising that in the future there is going to be a greater enablement and a greater empowerment.

There is going to be a pouring out of the spirit, unlike anything that Israel has ever experienced before. There is going to be a more radical forgiveness and all of this is part of the enablement. But what Jeremiah is not saying is that he is not claiming that God had not provided enablement and empowerment under the old covenant.

I think many people have this understanding. Well, if Israel was ever going to obey God in the old covenant, they were going to have to do it basically in their own strength. Circumcise your own heart.

Get yourself a new heart. Or if they were going to keep the law, it was basically kind of this external thing where they live by the rules. It was a legalistic system.

They didn't have grace to help them do that. That's not what Jeremiah is saying about the old covenant. He is also not saying that God set his people up for failure and made it impossible for them to obey him under the old covenant.

That's not true. God, through the salvation that he had provided at the exodus, God had provided a salvation that offered spiritual transformation to the people of Israel. The problem was that many of the individuals that lived within the nation of Israel at that time did not avail themselves to the grace that was there.

It is not saying that there was no grace in the old covenant and the difference is the new covenant is going to provide grace. It is saying that what will be different between the old covenant and the new covenant is that the people will fully avail themselves of this overwhelming grace that God is going to pour out on them. Listen to this.

When the Lord says in Deuteronomy chapter 10, circumcise your hearts, or when the prophet Jeremiah says circumcise your hearts, if the Lord did not give them the ability to determine in their heart that they were going to follow the Lord, then that's basically kind of an empty command. The fact that the Lord is commanding them to do that seems to reflect that they had the capacity, if they responded to God in the right way, to obey Him and to keep His commands. When Moses gives them the Mosaic Law and then when he reminds them of their covenant responsibilities in Deuteronomy chapter 30, he does not tell the people of Israel, you know what, you can't keep the Mosaic Law because it's impossible.

He tells them that God has given them the ability to obey His law. In Deuteronomy 30, it says this in verse 11: the commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you. It is neither far off in the heavens that you have to ascend up into the heaven to get it.

It's not down into the depths of the earth where you have to dig deep. It's right in front of you. The Lord, by what He did for the people at the Exodus, through the miracle of salvation, the Lord had made spiritual personal transformation available.

The problem was that many of the people under the old covenant never availed themselves of that. But under the old covenant, as individuals responded to the grace of God and as they believed in God, I believe that they experienced a spiritual regeneration and a transformation that is similar to what we experience as believers today. As they came to know the Lord in a personal way, God did a work of transformation in their lives where they had the capacity to love Him and obey Him and to have the law written on their hearts.

The psalmist says in Psalm 37, verses 30 and 31, the mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of God is in his heart. His steps do not slip.

So, there were people under the old covenant that experienced exactly what Jeremiah is promising. I'll write the law on their hearts. The psalmist says I've got that.

In chapter 40, verses 7 and 8, David, as the king, says, behold I have come in the scroll of the book it is written of me. David says as the king, I realize that the book of the law has some things to say to me. It's written about me.

I wrote a copy of it down as I came to the throne. But then he also says in verse 8, I delight to do your will, O my God. Your law is within my heart.

So, the old covenant did not involve people straining and trying as hard as they could in their own effort in some human external way to obey God in a legalistic way. They experienced spiritual transformation. I believe they experienced a regenerative work of the spirit.

The ministry of the spirit and the work of the spirit in the Old Testament is not clearly laid out and expanded for us, but I believe that it was there in some real way. There was a transformation that people like David who truly knew the Lord, they experienced that. In Psalm 119, David in these lavish ways expresses how much he loves the law of God.

It's more precious to him than honey, sweeter to him than honey, more precious than gold. And you say, if David's this excited about Leviticus, imagine what he would feel like if he could read Romans and 1 John. But even as an old covenant believer, he loved the law of God.

And in that Psalm, he doesn't just express his love for God's word. He also says, God, do your work in my life that will give me the disposition and the will to obey this. I realize I can't do it on my own. Give me the grace that I need.

And God willingly afforded that to people who came to know him in a personal way. When David has sinned, after his sin with Bathsheba, and after he's hidden this sin, finally, after the long period of just turning away from God, he comes to God in Psalm 51, and he says, created me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me. I think what David is envisioning there is the work of spiritual transformation that makes it possible, whether under the old covenant or the new covenant, for an individual to obey the Lord and follow his commands.

That was provided for people under the old covenant. You say, okay, well, if that's true and it makes sense, what do we do with passages like Deuteronomy chapter 29, verses two to four? Moses says to the people here, Moses summoned all of Israel and said to them, you have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all of his servants. Your eyes have seen this.

But then he says, but to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. What's going on there? I think the point is the fact that the people have not availed themselves of the grace that God has made available.



And as a result of that, their punishment has been that they have not experienced the transformation of the heart that the Lord did for those who truly knew the Lord.

And for the generation that came out of Egypt, all of them died in the wilderness because they had a rebellious heart. And even in the generation that's preparing to go into the land, there are large numbers of those people who do not know the Lord in a personal way. So, these descriptions of Israel as being stiff-necked and rebellious and hard-hearted, we might look at that and say, well, you know what? God just set his people up for failure.

And in an ultimate sense, that's true. Ultimately, there needed to be a Savior. But within that old covenant, when individuals came to know the Lord, God provided the capacity for them to obey.

So, here's the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant was a national covenant that was made with the entire nation of Israel. As a national covenant, that covenant involved and included both believers and unbelievers.

It involved people who, as ethnic Jews, experienced the deliverance of the exodus. But there were also people within that group who had never personally placed their faith and trust. They had never experienced that personal transformation.

As we go throughout Israel's history, it appears that the remnant of those who truly knew the Lord and had experienced personal salvation was often a very tiny minority. The nation that did not know the Lord was stiff-necked and rebellious.

They were hard-hearted. They were the ones that the Lord has not yet, to this day, given you a heart to understand and to obey. But that was their own choice.

That was not the failure of the covenant itself. Those who truly knew the Lord, who in personal repentance and faith came to know Him, experienced heart transformation. The difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is that in the new covenant, every individual who is a part of that covenant will know the Lord in a personal way.

Every person who belongs to that covenant will truly have a saving relationship with God. And when people come into that saving relationship with God through faith and repentance, God does this work of transformation. You see, the old covenant was in many ways like our church roles.

Our church roles are made up of our church members and people who know the Lord in a deeply personal way. But our church roles are also made up with people

who have no relationship with God. They may be a member of the church, but they don't know the Lord.

That's Israel under the old covenant. And in most cases, it seems like the majority of the people were those who had never experienced a personal salvation. The empowerment of the new covenant is that God will enable the entire nation to follow Him.

Here's why the pattern of sin is going to be broken. Here's why exile will never have to take place again: everyone who is a part of this covenant is going to know the Lord and be a part of God's people. But Jeremiah in the Old Testament as a whole is not saying that people in the old covenant did not know about or did not experience this kind of transformation.

Remember what Jesus says to Nicodemus in John chapter 3. He says you must be born again. You must experience a spiritual transformation in order to come into the kingdom of heaven. And Nicodemus says, what do you mean by new birth? What are you talking about? Can I enter into my mother's womb again? Can I enter into my mother's womb again and be reborn? Jesus, what are you talking about? And Jesus says to him, are you telling me that as a teacher of Israel, you don't know about these things? You don't know about Ezekiel 36? You don't know about... This is a heart transformation that God has always done for those who truly knew Him.

But the empowerment and the enablement of the new covenant is that everyone who is part of the covenant will know the Lord. And so, there's the forgiveness for the past, and then there is the enablement for the future. Now, quickly, we're coming near the end of our time here.

I want to work through what are the other specific promises that are given about the new covenant in 31 to 34. After God puts the law in the hearts of His people, it says in verse 33, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. So, the restoration of the covenant relationship, that expression is known as the covenant formulary.

The Lord is their people, the Lord is their God, Israel is God's people, that's going to be restored. 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. Okay.

Everyone who is part of this covenant will have a direct personal relationship with God. And in many ways in the old covenant, because of the national covenant and the way this was set up between people that were both believers and unbelievers, God's presence was largely mediated to the people of Israel through their priests, through their prophets, through their leaders. In the new covenant, there is going to

be a more direct relationship with God because everyone who is a part of the covenant will know the Lord.

And then finally, we come back to the promise that we focused on earlier in the lesson. God says I will forgive their iniquity and their sin. I will remember no more.

All of those things, the forgiveness of sin, the writing of the law on the heart, the restoration of the covenant relationship, the direct knowledge of God that everyone within that, that's the enablement. That's the empowerment. That's the great work of salvation.

That's the second Exodus that will be greater than the first. And as believers in Christ, you know, we should be excited about this because the New Testament will clarify that this new covenant is not just for the house of Israel. It's not just for the house of Judah.

As the people of God, we're experiencing this new covenant now. Jesus says as he goes to the cross and gives the cup to his disciples on the night before his death, this cup represents the blood that is going to affect the new covenant that Jeremiah promised. Jeremiah promised the new covenant.

Jesus enables and brings into reality what the new covenant promised. And we live as followers of Jesus, experiencing the blessings of the new covenant where God has put his spirit within us. We're not just forgiven.

We are empowered to live in a new way. Now, in light of that, I want to close with a quote. John Golden Gate says, we as New Testament believers, we live in the time of fulfillment.

We live in the time of the new covenant. We live in a time where there has been this pouring out of the spirit, and whatever ministry the spirit of God had in the Old Testament, we realize that through the death of Christ, the spirit of God has a much greater, there's been a greater pouring out of the spirit. The love of God because of what Jesus did for us on the cross has a greater capacity to grip our hearts and to change our lives.

But he says, Golden Gate says, think about that in light of what we see often in our own experience and in the life of the churches as a whole. He says, in practice, the position and the lives of Christian believers or the practice and lives of Christian believers are not so very different from those of Old Testament believers. We are like Ruth and Hannah, who produce the fruit of the spirit, but we are also like Jacob and David, who more obviously live according to the flesh.

And then he goes on and says, you know, let's think about this pouring out of the spirit. When we look at our own lives sometimes or the lives of the believers in the New Testament, for example, in the book of Corinthians, Golden Gate says, it is as if the spirit is not yet given. Or rather, if we look at it from the perspective of First Corinthians, it is not as if the spirit is not yet given, far from it.

In fact, it is as if the giving of the spirit has brought more problems to be solved. So the Corinthian church is as liable to covenant lawsuit and divine casting out as was the people of God in Old Testament Israel. As believers in Christ, we need to come to understand the enablement and the empowerment that we have under the new covenant.

God has put his spirit in our... God has given us the internal desire and ability to obey him. And those of us who are ministers of the gospel and ministers of the new covenant need to realize the power of the message that we share and the power of that message to change people's lives. We do not change people's lives by our preaching, our personalities, our programs, our churches.

We change people's lives with the life-changing message of the new covenant that God forgives the sins of the past, and God enables us to obey as we look toward the future. In our next lesson, we will reflect more on how we understand the new covenant in light of the new Testament and the added revelation that's given us there. But as we close this lesson, we can celebrate the empowerment and enablement that we have because we have already begun to experience what Jeremiah promised to the people of Israel and Judah that would be a part of their restoration and their return to the Lord.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 26, Jeremiah 30 to 33, The New Covenant.