

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 28, Jeremiah 30-33, Stages of Restoration, Part 2

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 28, Stages of Restoration from Jeremiah 30-33.

We continue to look at Jeremiah's message of restoration for the people of Israel and beyond, simply what he was saying to the people of that day and even to the people of Israel.

What are the implications of Jeremiah's message for the working out of salvation history? How do we understand the message of Jeremiah in light of the New Testament? What God is doing in the church today? Those are some things that we're going to continue to explore in the second session talking about the stages of restoration. We saw the idea in the last session that the kingdom promises that are given in the prophets are promises that are experienced now, but yet they are also promises that are in some sense unrealized and not yet. The prophets had four basic ideas about what God was going to do in this future restoration for the people of Israel.

Number one, there was going to be a return to the land.

Number two, there was going to be the rebuilding of the cities especially the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple.

Number three, there was going to be a new David to reign over the people.

And number four, the blessings that God would give to Israel would extend to the nations. So, as we come to the New Testament, those things are being fulfilled in Christ. We have reached a stage of fulfillment where the kingdom of God has arrived, but yet even though the kingdom has been inaugurated, it has not yet been consummated.

We talked about the three stages of restoration in our last session. The first stage of restoration was the return from exile that occurred when the people came back to the land after Cyrus issued the decree. Cyrus and the Persians defeated the Babylonians in 538.

Shortly after that, Cyrus issued the decree saying that the Jews could go back to Jerusalem. They could rebuild the temple. They could worship the Lord.

They could live in their land. That was the beginning of what Jeremiah had prophesied. Jeremiah had said that in 70 years, the Lord would bring the exiles back from Babylon.

Stage two of that restoration, though, occurs with the first coming of Jesus. As we come to the end of the prophetic era in the Old Testament, and then through the intertestamental period and into the New Testament era, we see that the conditions of exile were still in place for the people of Israel. They were still under oppression.

They were still under bondage to foreigners. They were still under the more severe bondage to their sin. And so, Jesus comes in his first coming to bring into effect the promises that the prophets had made about Israel's restoration and their return from exile.

The new aspect of the new covenant that we enjoy as believers today is brought about by the cross and by the death of Jesus. Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant. He gives us that prophecy in Jeremiah chapter 31.

The fulfillment of that new covenant comes into effect through the death of Jesus. Remember that when God had established a covenant with Israel, the old covenant was established by sacrifice and by the sprinkling of blood on the people. There was a death that brought that old covenant into effect.

There is a death that also brings the new covenant into effect. And there were two primary things that were provided for us. There are two primary aspects of the new covenant blessings that have been given to us because of the death of Christ.

Number one, we have the radical forgiveness of sin that was promised, that the Lord will no longer remember our sins because there's been a perfect sacrifice that's been offered for that. We also have the spiritual enablement and the spiritual empowerment that comes from the new covenant as God writes his law on our hearts. And when we place the promise of Jeremiah 31 beside other prophecies in the Old Testament like Ezekiel 36, we understand that the writing of the law on the hearts, the spiritual enablement comes from God pouring out his spirit on his people.

On the night of the Last Supper, as we read this passage in the last session, Luke chapter 22, verse 20, Jesus says to the disciples, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. So just as there was blood that established the old covenant with Israel in the time of Moses, there is blood, and there is a sacrifice of far greater weight and far greater value that also brings the new covenant into effect. This is especially an idea, this new aspect of the new covenant, how this is all brought into effect by the death of Jesus.

This is an idea that is especially important in the book of Hebrews. And the book of Hebrews is going to teach about Jesus. He is our perfect high priest.

He has not simply offered animal sacrifices and animal blood for our sins. He has offered a more perfect sacrifice. He has not just served at the earthly tabernacle or the earthly temple that was only a shadow of the heavenly one.

By his sacrifice, he has actually passed into the very presence of God in heaven. He has provided a perfect sacrifice as a perfect high priest. As a result of that perfect sacrifice, he has effected and mediated for us a new covenant relationship with God that is vastly superior to the old covenant that was associated with the Levites, the animal sacrifices, the earthly tabernacle, and then the temple in Jerusalem.

So, Jesus has offered a perfect sacrifice. He is a perfect high priest. And so in Hebrews chapter 8 verse 7, it says, for if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

For he finds fault with them when he says, and then the book of Hebrews chapter 8 verses 8 to 12 gives us a quotation of Jeremiah 31 verses 31 to 34. In fact, this is the longest quotation of the Old Testament in any part of the New Testament. So, a passage that was obviously important to the early church, obviously significant to the writer of the book of Hebrews.

What Jeremiah promised to the people of Israel is what we experience as the church today. Those blessings have come into effect. There are not two new covenants.

There are not two different peoples of God. We enjoy the blessings of the new covenant that God promised through the prophets because of the work of Jesus. And there is this lengthy quote in Hebrews chapter 8 from Jeremiah 31 that makes this point, I think, crystal clear.

Okay, you can directly connect what Jeremiah promised to the people of Israel to what we have as believers in Jesus Christ today. Why is that a possibility? It's because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Hebrews chapter 10 verses 10 to 14 is going to return to that same idea.

And here's what it says there. It says, and by that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. What was true about the sacrifices of the Old Testament? They had to be offered on a recurring basis.

The day of atonement and the sacrifices, the sin offering for both the priest and the people, had to be offered on a yearly basis. And if that yearly sacrifice was not

carried out, there was no atonement. The people would not be allowed to live in the presence of God unless that sin was dealt with on a recurring basis.

So, Jesus offered a superior sacrifice because he only offered it one time. Hebrews says, and every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. I mean, there was atonement in the Old Testament, but in a real sense, animal sacrifices could not fully resolve the sin issue.

They could not fully affect that radical forgiveness that was promised by the new covenant. They could not bring the spiritual enablement that would come about as the death of Christ brings the love of God to bear in our hearts. It brings about the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' death accomplishes something that that old covenant and those old sacrifices could never accomplish. It says, verse 12, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies shall be made a footstool for his feet. So, the kingdom promises have been initiated and inaugurated by the death of Jesus.

And Jesus, by his death and then his resurrection and then his ascension, where he has taken up his position at the right hand of the Father, he is ruling at God's right hand. He has entered into a new aspect of his kingdom rule because of the perfect work that he did for us on the cross. There is a new aspect of God's kingdom that has come about as a result of the work of Jesus.

So, the Bible can talk about God's kingdom in a couple of different ways. It can speak of the fact that God's kingdom is everlasting. He's a sovereign king.

He does whatever he is, and that has been true from the very beginning of time before there was even the world. It always has been. It always will be.

It is in the present. But the Bible can also speak of God's kingdom as something that is new, something that was eschatological, and that era of God inaugurating and initiating his kingdom rule in a new way was accomplished through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. And then he says, "...for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us saying, this is the covenant that I will make with them after these days.

And again, Hebrews chapter 10 gives us a long and lengthy quotation of Jeremiah 31, verses 31 to 34. So, Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant is not just important to the theology of the book of Jeremiah. It's not just important to the message of the prophets in the Old Testament.

It's a key passage that helps us understand what Jesus accomplished for us through his death. This enablement, this empowerment, this transformation that the new covenant has brought about is something that we are already experiencing in Jesus. The argument of the writer of Hebrews is that Hebrews was written to a group of people who were thinking of going back to their old Jewish ways, back to the sacrifices, back to the Mosaic law, back to the earthly temple, all of these things that were associated with the old covenant.

And what the writer of Hebrews is saying is, why would you ever want to go back to the old covenant when you are already experiencing the eschatological blessings of the new covenant? Why do you want to go back to animal sacrifices when you have the empowering, perfecting sacrifice of Jesus that has brought this new covenant into effect? Why do you want to go back to the old covenant and the Mosaic law and the defeat and death that it brought when we have a life where God has written his law on our hearts, and we can live for him? So, the quotations of Jeremiah 31 are very important to the argument of the book of Hebrews to say, here's why Jesus is so important to us. Here's why we don't want to go back to the old covenant. Jesus is a perfect high priest who has brought these blessings of radical forgiveness and empowerment and enablement, and there's no reason why we would ever want to go back there.

So, we think about these blessings of the new covenant that we're experiencing. This is how God has transformed our lives. As we preach the gospel and share Christ with people and see the spiritual transformation that God brings about in people's lives, that's the reality of the new covenant.

That's the power that Jesus has to change lives because he's bringing into effect precisely what Jeremiah had promised. So, there is an important connection in the theology of the New Testament between Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant and the realization, implementation, or inauguration of the blessings of that covenant through Jesus's death. Stage one was their return from exile.

In stage two, Jesus comes to announce the blessings of the kingdom, the blessings of restoration, and he brings that about through his perfect sacrifice and his perfect death. As we're thinking about that, there's another connection between Jesus, Jeremiah, and the cross that I find absolutely fascinating and that I'd like to talk about for just a couple of minutes. Now, in order to do this, to help us see this further connection between Jesus, Jeremiah, and the cross, we have to bring into this and into the discussion the book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah talks about a servant of the Lord, and he talks about an individual servant of the Lord who would be the one whose mission would be to save and restore Israel as the national servant of the Lord. In the theology of Isaiah, God had made Israel his servant nation to proclaim and declare his glory to the nations, but

they had failed in their mission as God's servant. Isaiah says in chapter 42, my people Israel, they're a blind and a deaf servant.

They were supposed to lead the other nations to God. They couldn't even find their own way to God. Instead of reflecting God to the nations through their obedience to the law, they became disobedient.

There has to be in the theology of Isaiah, the failure of the national servant requires an individual servant who will restore the covenant relationship between God and Israel. This individual servant is focused on in the book of Isaiah in a series of what are called servant songs. Those servant songs are found in chapter 42, chapter 49, chapter 50, and chapter 53.

As Christians, we're all generally familiar with the passage of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. How would this individual servant fulfill his mission? How would he restore the national servant? How would he bring about their forgiveness and deal with their sin problem? Well, ultimately, what chapter 53 says is that this individual servant, to fulfill the mission that God had given to him to restore the people, would have to die, and he would have to offer his own life as a sin offering for the people. God was pleased to crush him and to put him through this suffering so that he might bring about the salvation of the people of Israel.

Isaiah 53:6 says, all we, the people of Israel, we have gone astray and all of us, like sheep, we've turned to our own way, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And as this righteous servant who is completely innocent himself of any wrongdoing offers himself for the people of Israel, God accepts him as a sin offering for the people and his death ultimately brings about the restoration of the national servant. Okay.

Now, you might be saying, I thought we were talking about Jeremiah and the new covenant. And why do we get lost here with Isaiah and the suffering servant? Well, just a couple of other things. As we think about the servant in the book of Isaiah, you know, the question is raised: well, who is this servant? You know, how do we know him? How do we recognize him? As Christians, we immediately think the suffering servant is Jesus.

Isaiah 53 is a prophecy about the cross. Acts chapter 8, when the Ethiopian eunuch reads that passage, and Philip explains to him, he says, let me tell you, this is how it's fulfilled in Jesus. We understand Jesus is the suffering servant.

But as you go back to the book of Isaiah and you look at this in the context of that prophecy, the identity of that servant is not really clear. It's somewhat mysterious and shadowed. We can sort of see him as if we're looking through a soft camera lens,

and we can see the shadows in the silhouette, but the exact identity of this figure is not that clear from the book of Isaiah itself.

And remember the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8, when he's reading this passage, he says, who's this talking about? Is it about Isaiah? Is it about someone else? And as I read Isaiah, that question arises as well. Someone has said that the way that the suffering servant is described in Isaiah is he's presented as a new Moses, and he fulfills the different roles of prophet, priest, and king. Ultimately, this is going to be fulfilled in Jesus.

But as this person is described in Isaiah, one person has described it this way, the Lord presents this figure that is going to come and save Israel. And in a sense, as he's describing him, he leaves an open job description. There's almost like a help-wanted sign hanging in the second half of Isaiah.

Who is this figure that is going to be the servant? Who is going to be this new Moses that restores the people, performs this role of prophet, priest, and king, and brings about this new exodus and deliverance and restoration that the prophets talked about? Well, as this whole idea of the individual servant begins to work out, as this open job description is placed there, help wanted, Israel needs a deliverer; in the Old Testament, it begins to seem like there are various individuals who carry out this role. In some ways, the prophet Isaiah himself is a servant-like figure. And he's the prophetic herald who announces, the Lord, the time of God's favor is coming, release for the prisoners.

Isaiah, in some sense, is a servant-like figure. But as we come to the book of Jeremiah, we're finally back to Jeremiah here. Here's where I was going. Jeremiah, in many ways, as a prophet, as he fulfills his prophetic commission and his calling by God, resembles for us very closely the servant of the Lord that is described, this individual servant who suffers in the fulfillment of his mission.

Remember the servant songs in Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 53. In the servant song in Isaiah 50 verses four to nine, it tells us that the individual servant is going to be obedient to God. He's going to be faithful to his calling, which immediately provides a direct contrast between him and the nation.

He is going to give his back to be beaten and he is going to be shamed and then vindicated. So, we have a prophet who is called by God, fulfilling his mission, his back is beaten, he's shamed, and then God ultimately vindicates him. Well, we almost hear the echoes of Jeremiah chapter 20.

Jeremiah preaches the message of the need for submission to Babylon. He reminds the people of their covenant unfaithfulness and the sins that they have committed.

And it tells us in Jeremiah 20 because of that, he is arrested, and a priest by the name of Pasher beats Jeremiah and throws him into prison.

It looks like, you know, who's going to answer this open job description? Well, Jeremiah definitely has so far. Isaiah 53, in that great passage about the suffering servant and a wonderful Old Testament passage reminding us of what Jesus would do for us. Here's a description of the servant, Isaiah 53, verses seven and eight.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that before it shears is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Okay, if this is the open job description of the suffering servant, if I were reading this, this would not be a job that I would want to apply for.

In many ways, as God gave Jeremiah his calling and Jeremiah came to realize what all that calling involved, it was a job description that he wasn't necessarily all that ready for as well. But terminology that is used here to describe the suffering servant is going to be used in Jeremiah to describe the suffering that's used here in Isaiah is going to be used to describe the suffering of Jeremiah. Notice it says there, he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and he is cut off from the land of the living.

In Jeremiah chapter 11, in verse 19, as Jeremiah is praying one of his laments and one of his confessions to the Lord, he's talking about his calling and all the suffering and abuse he's encountered. In this passage, he's talking about the fact that the people in his own hometown of Anathoth want to put him to death. And Jeremiah describes himself like this.

He says I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes saying, let us destroy the tree with its fruit and let us cut him off from the land of the living. So, the idea of the lamb being led to the slaughter, being cut off from the land of the living, that terminology that's used with reference to the servant in Isaiah 53 is used with reference to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 11.

Now we're not going to get into the critical issues about which text came first and the date of Isaiah and all of that. I simply want us to understand this: in this open job description that's given about a suffering servant who is going to ultimately restore his people, Jeremiah, in many ways, seems to fulfill that role. But we know, and we understand, that Jeremiah is ultimately not the one who is going to bring about the restoration that was promised by the prophets.

Jeremiah definitely answers the job description. He is faithful to the calling that God puts upon him. And like the servant, he gives his back to be beaten.

He's shamed, he's persecuted, he's opposed, he's suffered. Like a lamb, he's led. But the ultimate work of this servant was not accomplished by Jeremiah.

There has to be someone who comes after Jeremiah who is going to answer and fulfill that job description in a much greater way. Jeremiah suffers persecution. And poetically, he's led like a lamb to the slaughter, and the intention of his enemies is to put him to death and to cut him off from the land of the living.

Jesus answers that job description all the way. What was poetically true of Jeremiah is really and literally true of Jesus. He is the lamb that has led to the slaughter.

And in the way that Jeremiah never could because Jeremiah himself is a sinful Israelite, Jeremiah, the Lord, provides that sin offering and atonement. He's the sinless one on whom the sins of the people are placed. He's the one that God crushes, and he's the one who becomes the sin offering so that he might restore the people.

And he can do that because he is sinless in every way. Jeremiah was a servant of the Lord, small s, who anticipates and prefigures for us the ultimate suffering servant. But Jesus was a more perfect suffering servant.

Isaiah 53:7 says that as the ultimate suffering servant, this individual who restores Israel did not open his mouth and did not complain about his suffering. Well, when I remember the confessions of Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapters 11 to 20, Jeremiah definitely opened his mouth at times. And we saw he was, I think, righteous in doing so, but he doesn't completely fulfill what Isaiah 53 is looking forward to.

Isaiah 53, 12 says that the suffering servant ultimately will intercede for many. And as a result of that, he's going to be the one that, by his death, brings the people back to God. Just what we've seen about the new covenant and the death of Jesus in the book of Hebrews, he will effectively intercede for many.

Well, remember what God had said to Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 7, verses 16, 11:14, 14:11, 15: 1, do not intercede for this people, do not pray for them. So, Jeremiah, by the suffering and the opposition that he encounters and really by the message of hope that he gives to the people, the suffering servant is going to bring the healing of Israel. By his stripes, we are healed.

Jeremiah is going to announce in the Book of Consolation that there is going to be healing and medicine for those for whom there was no healing. But Jeremiah cannot fully carry that out. He is promising a restoration that, from his perspective, is still future because his life only anticipates the perfect servant and the perfect sacrifice that he would make.

And when that sacrifice comes, then the blessings of the new covenant can become a reality. And that's what we experience because of what Jesus has done for us. And as we preach the gospel and as we see people's lives changed, as we see people who have struggles with addiction or people who have struggles with sexual orientation or sexual sin, whether it's heterosexual or homosexual, as we see people who deal with struggles with alcohol or problems in their marriage or greed or selfishness, as we see their lives being transformed, we're reminded of how God writes the law of his heart on his people.

As we see that transformation coming about in our own lives and the ways that God has changed me and continues to change me, I've been a Christian for 40 years, and there are so many other ways that I need to be changed, but the power of the new covenant is real because the perfect servant has offered that sacrifice that brings the people back to God. The death that was required to affect the new covenant that Jeremiah promised has already happened. And in the New Testament, as we look at all of this, probably my favorite passage about just the enablement or the empowerment of ministry is related to Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant.

That passage is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 2. Paul raises a question as an apostle and a missionary that I think if you're a pastor, a teacher, a Christian worker, or even just a believer as we think about living our lives out, it a question that should come to mind every once in a while. Paul says, as I think about the incredible responsibility of preaching the gospel, as I think about the awesome eternal life and death implications of the ministry and the message and the calling that I've been given by God. Remember the prophets being called watchmen and the awesome responsibility of that.

Paul senses that same kind of obligation, that same kind of responsibility before God, as he thinks of his ministry as an apostle. And he raises this question. He says, who could possibly be sufficient for these things? As I think about my responsibility as a missionary, as an apostle to preach this gospel, and this gospel has eternal life and death implications, who is sufficient for these things? Who could possibly, in and of themselves, carry this commission out or bring about the changes in people's lives that God desires to bring? And the obvious answer to that question is none of us are sufficient for these things in ourselves.

But here's the incredible promise of the new covenant is that as the new covenant promises and blessings begin to work in our lives and begin to work in the lives of the people that we minister to, God is the one who makes us sufficient. Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 3 verses 4-6 that our sufficiency comes from God. The sufficiency that God provides through Jesus Christ is connected to those promises that Jeremiah made to the people of Israel and Judah back in Jeremiah chapter 31.

Paul speaks about the power of the new covenant in the lives of the people that he's ministered to and reminds the Corinthians of what the new covenant has done in their lives. And we think about all the problems and issues that were there with the Corinthian church. Paul could still look at their lives and say, but you know, I see the transforming power of the gospel.

I see the transforming effect of the new covenant in your lives. And here's what he says: are we beginning to commend ourselves to you? This is the beginning of chapter three, or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or for you? Paul's ministry was being challenged by many in the Corinthian church. And he says, okay, let's think about my credentials.

Do I need to give you external letters and three letters of reference showing you that I'm a valid apostle of Jesus? He says, think about this. He says we don't need those kinds of letters of recommendation because, in verse two, you yourselves are our letter of recommendation. You know, what reference letter does Paul need to validate his ministry? The changed lives of the people that have come under the hearing of the gospel through his ministry.

And he says you are our letter of recommendation written on our hearts to be known and read by all. And I can't help but hear the echoes of God's promise that he was going to write the law of the heart on his people. But in this passage, changing the image just a little bit and thinking about the transformation that has come about in his own life, Paul says, you yourselves are written on our hearts.

The new covenant and what God has done in my life have enabled me to love you in this way. And I see in your lives, the effect of the new covenant as well. He goes on dealing with the same imagery, and he says, you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God.

The transformation that has come about in your life is reflected through the power of the spirit. And this letter, this commendation letter that is based on your lives, reflects the power of the working of the Holy Spirit that was promised by the new covenant. And that's been written on our hearts because the new covenant has transformed us as well.

And so, there is a now and a not yet aspect to the new covenant and the kingdom promises that Jeremiah gave to us. Stage one, remember, was the return from exile. Stage two is brought about by the first coming of Jesus and is affected by the death of Christ.

As believers in Jesus, we're experiencing those blessings and benefits now. There are no two new covenants: a new covenant that God has made with the church today and a new covenant that God's going to make with Israel in the future.

There is one new covenant and we are experiencing the blessings of that right now. Okay. Now, all this is going to raise another interpretive issue.

We keep, you know, raising more problems and more questions as we work through the theology of this. The present enjoyment of the new covenant by followers of Jesus raises for me an interesting question. I'm going to go back to Jeremiah 31, verse 31.

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Who specifically is the recipient of the new covenant? It is the house of Israel and the house of Judah. So, the question is, here's my issue, my question.

If we are not Jewish and I am not Jewish, I don't belong to the house of Israel or the house of Judah, how do we get in on the blessings of what God had promised to Israel? Okay. New covenant promise, house of Israel, house of Judah. Is it just for Israel? I think we have to understand, and we've moved forward from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

I think now we need to step back and go from Jeremiah backward to the rest of the history of the Old Testament and God's entire covenantal program. What God is doing in the new covenant ultimately goes back to and brings about a fulfillment of what God has promised in all of the other covenants that were a part of the salvation history of the Old Testament. The new covenant that God promised for Israel and Judah in the book of Jeremiah and in other prophetic texts is related to all of the other covenant promises that God made with Israel prior to this.

You see the different covenants in the Old Testament are not, here's one covenant, it's isolated, it's its own thing. Here's another covenant: God's going to do something else. There's a third covenant: God changes his strategy.

Really all of the covenants are ultimately interrelated to each other and they're part of one plan and one program. They ultimately funnel into each other, and ultimately, they funnel into Jesus. And the new covenant promise that God made to Israel ultimately goes back to the covenant that God made with Abraham.

And remember the covenant promises that God gave to Abraham. He said, I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to give you a land, and through you, all the nations on earth will be blessed. God's design and God's intention in the Abrahamic covenant that precedes the new covenant is that all of the blessings that God would give to the people of Israel were ultimately to become a source and an instrument of blessing to the world as a whole and to the nations.

God's design was always to use Abraham, Israel as Abraham's descendants, to bring and to be the instrument of his blessing. They were going to be a kingdom of priests. They would mediate those blessings to all of the other nations.

We as the church today, as followers of Jesus, we get into the blessings of the new covenant because of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. Okay, let me repeat that again. We get into the blessings of the new covenant because of the promises that are in the Abrahamic covenant.

If Jesus is the seed of Abraham, as Galatians chapter 3 says that he is, and if Jesus is ultimately the one through whom the Abrahamic covenantal promises are fulfilled, then we come through that covenantal promise into the blessings and benefits of the new covenant that's promised by Jeremiah. The Abrahamic covenant says, in you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The blessing that is specifically given through the new covenant promised by Jeremiah, radical forgiveness of their past sin and enablement and empowerment for the future, through Abraham, through the Abrahamic covenant, those promises are given to those who are followers of Jesus.

All these covenants ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ. And as we are in Christ, we become the recipient of those benefits and blessings. Okay.

So hopefully that helps to answer that issue. How do we as Gentiles, how do we get into the Jeremiah 31:31 promises? Well, it's through the agency of the Abrahamic covenant. But that raises another issue for us.

Keep dealing with the issues and the questions here. The mention of Abraham and Israel, and the Old Testament covenants, and specifically the statement in Jeremiah 31 that God is making this new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, reminds us that there is finally a stage three to the restoration and the kingdom promises. We spent a lot of time talking about stage one and the return from exile.

We've talked about stage two and the beginning of the kingdom and the beginning and the implementation and inauguration of the covenant blessings through the first coming of Jesus, and how those benefits are made real in our lives and transform our lives through the death of Christ. But there is a stage three to the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises that completes salvation history and fully brings into effect all of the blessings of the kingdom, all of the eschatological blessings that God had promised through the Old Testament prophets. Stage two has occurred for us at the first coming of Jesus.

It becomes real in your life individually when you believe and trust and appropriate what Christ has done for you. Stage three in the final consummation of these new covenant kingdom restoration promises from Jeremiah and the Old Testament

prophets will finally occur at the second coming of Jesus. And I believe stage three is going to involve several important things.

Number one, the kingdom of God will fully be established as Jesus comes to rule and reign. I mean, he entered into a new phase and a new aspect of his kingdom rule through his death, resurrection, and ascension in connection with his first coming, but we're still waiting for the full final manifestation of the kingdom of God, and that will occur at his second coming. We can read about that in Revelation 19.

Jesus comes back as a powerful warrior. He destroys his enemies. He brings about a final judgment, and then he establishes a kingdom of peace that's described for us in Revelation chapter 20.

A second thing that is going to happen in stage three of the implementation of the new covenant restoration promises is that the law of God will finally and fully be written in the hearts of his people. And even our very ability to sin will be taken away from us. You see, through the death of Jesus, we have this new enablement.

The law of God has been written on our hearts. The spirit has been put within us, and we have the desire and the internal enablement empowered by God to live out the life that God wants us to live. 2 Peter 1 says, we have been given everything that's needed for life and godliness.

But Romans chapter seven reminds us that there's another law at work in our lives, and it's the law of sin and the reality of our sin nature, and we're still living with that. And that's why, in one of our earlier sessions, we talked about the fact that John Goldingay says, you know, when you look at the life of believers in the New Testament, sometimes they don't seem all that different from the lives of people in the old. It's because we're still wrestling with and struggling with the problem of sin.

And that's going to be there until the time that the kingdom comes in its full manifestation and God transforms us completely so that we no longer live immortal bodies that have to wrestle and struggle with sin. That's part of stage three as well. But I also believe, and I know that there are really good biblical scholars that, you know, would disagree with this or that have other ideas or perspectives, but I also believe that stage three of this fulfillment, the final manifestation of the kingdom of God, the final recognition and fulfillment and realization of the covenant promises and the restoration that was envisioned by the Old Testament prophets is also going to mean the restoration of God's people, Israel.

I believe that the specific covenant promises that God has given to the people of Israel and the specific things and ways that God is working in and through the people of Israel they are so important to salvation history, that those specific promises that God has given to the people of Israel are also going to find their fulfillment in that

final consummation. Now, again, we obviously have varying opinions about this in the church, and there are different theological systems. And it's not a test of spirituality, what you believe about these particular issues, but we have some theological systems that want to stress for us that the promises of restoration that are given through the prophets are spiritually fulfilled and figuratively fulfilled in and through the church.

We have other theological systems that have stressed that the kingdom's promises to Israel are going to be literally fulfilled in the people and nation of Israel. And sometimes to varying degrees of how rigid and how fully do we see that implemented. So, we have these two different systems.

Some say, you know, the kingdom promises that God gave to Jeremiah and to the other prophets. They are figuratively fulfilled in the church. Other theological systems that say, no, they're going to be literally fulfilled through the people of Israel. And I think my understanding as I have come to read the Old and the New Testament together is that this is not an either-or question.

It's not simply a question of whether it will be fulfilled figuratively and spiritually in the church or literally and in a real way by the people of Israel. I think it is a both and. And salvation history involves that, yes, in the present aspect of God's kingdom, in the now part of this and what we experience of the new covenant because of what Jesus accomplished through his death, we are experiencing the blessings of the new covenant and the promises to Israel are being fulfilled figuratively in the church today.

We have become the new Israel. Philippians chapter 3 says, we are the true circumcision. The 12 apostles that Jesus appointed in some way represent for us a new beginning for the people of God.

And there is one people of God, not two people of God. And there's one new covenant, not two new covenants. And so, we are experiencing the blessings of the new covenant and of the kingdom in a figurative way.

But I believe that the promises that God has made to Israel are such an important part of salvation history that God's covenant faithfulness demands that he keep those promises to the people of Israel as well. All the way back in Genesis chapter 12, God began to work through the instrumentality of the Israel people. And I believe the Israel-specific aspect of salvation history carries through to the very end.

And so, I believe that these promises of restoration that God gave to the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah about their land, about their return, those things are so important. They're so inbred in the message of the Old Testament. There's something that you hear again and again and again, and they are so

important to the story of what God is doing in bringing his kingdom to earth that they are not simply spiritually fulfilled in the church.

Those promises are going to be fulfilled as God works to bring about the restoration of the people of Israel themselves. I want to go back to Jeremiah and highlight a few places where we begin to understand how important this specific commitment that God has made to Israel, how important this is in the mind of God, and how important these specific covenant promises that God has made to Israel. How much do they play into the message of the prophets? And the answer we get is that they have huge importance.

Listen to what God says about Israel, Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 35 to 37. 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. If this fixed order departs, what fixed order are we talking about? The fixed order that we observe every morning when the sun comes up and then when the night comes, that cycle that constantly repeats itself.

I never go to bed at night and wonder, I wonder if the sun's going to, I wonder if it's going to come up tomorrow because God has established this order and it's fixed. He says, 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. Okay, so God has made a commitment, in a sense, there's a covenant anchor here that I believe that God has sworn himself to forever.

And he says, how committed am I to the people of Israel? How committed am I to fulfilling the specific covenant promises that I made to them? Well, I am as committed to that as I am to the sun that comes up every morning and the stars and the moon that come out every night. It is a fixed thing that I have sworn myself to fulfill. And so, I believe that there is a restoration for Israel that awaits stage three.

Not just because I believe that we need to read and interpret the prophets in a hyper-literal way and sometimes do injustice to the metaphors and the figures that are there, but because I believe that there are covenantal promises that underlie what God is going to do for Israel, what the prophets are saying that the Lord will do for Israel. And those covenant promises remain in effect. Think about the promise of land and how important that is to the people of Israel.

In Jeremiah chapter 32, in the midst of these restoration promises, there is a reminder of how much land is a specific part of those restoration promises. Jeremiah performs a sign act in Jeremiah chapter 32, and it is directly related to the covenantal promise of land. Jeremiah is directed to go and to redeem back the property of his relative Hanamel.

And, you know, he's following Old Testament custom here. Whenever a relative had to sell land, it was your obligation to purchase it back and to make sure that it stayed within family hands. The Lord did not want families to lose their land.

That was their heritage from the Lord. And so, Jeremiah goes and he carries this out and they sign the title deeds. And there's a real emphasis on making sure that there's a written document here that confirms that this land belongs to Jeremiah and his family.

But there's a deeper significance behind all of this than simply fulfilling a family obligation. Jeremiah carries out this sign act at the time when the Babylonians are getting ready to take the land. And so, the question that arises in Jeremiah 32 is, why purchase the land, why pay this money and why make this investment, and why go through this process where you write out the two copies of the deeds and you seal one up, and you keep one open, and you put them in jars to make sure that they're preserved? Why do all of that? Well, the answer is because God has made a specific promise to his people that he is going to bring them back to that land.

And that was part of the covenant that God had established with Israel. And I believe that even as we move into the New Testament and Romans chapter 4 verse 13 says that God's people are going to be heirs of the entire earth, we've been given a title deed to the entire land or the entire earth because all of it belongs to Jesus, every square inch of it. But part of that covenant and part of salvation history and part of the way that God is going to work that out is by fulfilling the specific covenant promises that God has made to Israel.

And so I think we have clues and hints and indicators that lead us to that conclusion in the book of Jeremiah and in the Old Testament. Then we have an important anchor passage in the New Testament as well in Romans chapters 9 to 11, where Paul is going to reflect on God's covenantal promises and God covenantal commitment to the people of Israel. This focus is on the ethnic people.

The focus of Romans 9 to 11 is clearly on the ethnic people of Israel. Paul says, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they be saved. He's talking about ethnic Jews.

He's talking about the people of Israel. And I believe the term Israel is going to have that meaning throughout Romans 9 to 11. The theological point that Paul establishes in Romans 9 to 11 is that Israel's unbelief throughout its history has not invalidated God's covenant promises.

They remain in effect. Paul says that God is fulfilling the covenant promises that he has made to Israel in two specific ways. Those promises are going to be fulfilled.

Number one, there is a remnant of grace among the Jewish people who are coming to Christ in the present age, and they become a part of the church. And just like throughout Israel's history, there's always been a remnant of believers who were part of the true people of God. There are Jewish people coming to know Jesus in the present era.

And through God's grace, God is fulfilling his covenant promises as they come to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant. But Paul goes on to say that beyond that, a second way that God will fulfill his covenant promises to Israel is in the future, after this time of national blinding is over and in connection with the time when Jesus will prepare to come back and in connection with the restoration of all things in the end times, there is going to be a national turning of the people of God to Israel. And Paul has this to say in Romans chapter 11, verse 26, and in this way, all Israel shall be saved as it is written.

The deliverer will come up from Zion. He will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

So, the Lord says, there's going to be a turning of the people to Israel. There is going to be salvation that's given to the people of Israel, where God is going to bring about a restoration of Israel for those who are left from all the judgments and the things that will happen in the end times. And we can debate about the fact whether this involves a kingdom and a national entity and all the things that are envisioned by the prophets, or it simply talks about a turning spiritually of the Jewish people to God.

That's not really the important issue, but the reminder is, and what is important, God keeps his covenant promises. Just one final reflection, and we'll close this. Why does this matter to us? What importance do we really attach to all this? Well, I want to remind you of what Paul says to us as believers in Romans chapter eight.

He says we have been chosen by God. We have been elected. We have been justified.

Ultimately, we're going to be glorified. He has called us. We are God's people.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. And immediately after the time that Paul talks about the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God, the next issue that he is immediately going to address is God's everlasting commitment to Israel. How can I know as a follower of Jesus that nothing will ever separate me from the love of God? All I need to do is look at God's abiding commitment to Israel.

The prophet Jeremiah promised a new covenant. The Old Testament prophets promised a future kingdom. There would be a return to the land.

There would be the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the temple. There would be a new David. There would be the inclusion of the nations.

As we work our way through the story of salvation history in the New Testament, we understand those promises are being fulfilled in stages. Stage one is the return to the land. Stage two is the coming of Jesus at his first coming where he brings the new covenant into effect.

Stage three is the future restoration where our salvation will be made complete, where God's kingdom will come to earth, and God's covenant promises to Israel will also be fulfilled as a part of that restoration.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 28, Stages of Restoration from Jeremiah 30-33.