

Jer. 31:27-40, The New Covenant
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Overview

1. v. 26 marks a strong break in the poetry section, 30-31. Before this, the emphasis is on sin and restoration; now, it is on covenant and God's laws of creation.
2. Internal structure of the covenant section: three-fold repetition of the formula, "Behold, the days come."
 - a) 27-30, a revised concept of sin.
 - b) 31-37, a renewed covenant with God.
 - c) 38-40, a restored capital for the nation.
3. In addition to studying these three paragraphs here, we must also consider the NT application of 31-37 to believers of all races and nationalities.

A. 27-30, A Revised Concept of Sin

In fact, there are two revisions in view here. Both God and the people will show a change. But there is an important difference between these changes.

1. 27-28, God moves from destruction to restoration.
 - a) The language recalls 1:10,12, which describes both the events that will happen (root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build, plant) and God's diligence (1:12 "hasten," "watch over" = *\$oq"d*, pun with almond in v.11 *\$aq"d*).
 - b) 28a asserts that God has hastened the destructive part of his purposes.
 - c) Now 28b promises that he will also hasten the constructive aspect as well. v.27 amplifies this: God will restore the population both physically and economically.
2. 29-30, The people move from blaming others to accepting responsibility.

To understand these two verses correctly, we must recognize that both of them describe what "they shall say." v.29 tells what the people's attitude has been; what they have been accustomed to saying. v.30 tells what they will say in the promised day to come.

- a) 29, What have they said in the past? "The children are punished for the sins of the fathers." The grape parable was very common; Ezekiel devotes an entire chapter (18) to refuting it. The people refuse to see their own sin as part of the cause for their judgment. After all, they are Josiah's

generation, which turned to the Lord! In their eyes, it's only the fault of previous generations that brings the Lord's judgment on them.

- b) 30, In the coming day, they will realize that every person must bear his own iniquity, and that their own sin merits the suffering they have endured.
- c) *Application*: In fact, the behavior of the parents has a great deal to do with the fate of the children. Rom. 5 shows that the disobedience of one man (Adam) made us all sinners. Jer and Ezek are not denying this; but they are saying that this does not leave us without personal guilt. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge, but only because the children have imitated their fathers and eaten sour grapes too! Adam's sin has made me a sinner; because I am a sinner, I sin personally; because I sin personally, I am guilty before God.

This doctrine is particularly damning to freudian views of psychology. It is popular to blame our problems on our parents. They may in fact contribute to our problems, but we will never find a clear conscience if we insist on rolling the blame back to them. We must accept responsibility ourselves for our actions.

3. The big difference between God's change and the people's change:

- a) The people's change is a change of mind. They did not expect it to happen. No one said, "Today, I believe that it's all my father's fault, but I plan to change my mind five years from now and accept personal responsibility for my actions and their consequences. This is a conversion.
- b) God has planned his change from the first, right back in chapter 1, where he promised both destruction and restoration, and assured Jer that he would watch over both aspects of the message, to bring it to pass.
- c) *Application*: Be sure you maintain the correct view of the relation between God's actions and man's actions.
 - 1) Some people feel that man is in the driver's seat, deciding moment by moment what to do, and God is busy jumping around to patch things up when they go wrong, like a harried babysitter trying to keep up with Horrible Huey.
 - 2) This paragraph shows us very clearly that it is man who is fickle and changeable; the Lord has planned the end from the beginning, and is working all things according to the counsel of his own will.

The people's revised concept of sin, and God's move from destruction to restoration, is not accidental or circumstantial. To underscore

their solemnity, the Lord embeds them in a solemn covenant that defines anew his relation to the nation Israel.

B. 31-37, A Renewed Covenant with God

31 makes the basic point: God is establishing a new covenant with the whole nation, North and South together. 32-37 amplify this point by describing first the old covenant and then the new one that replaces it, and then giving a solemn promise that the new one is indeed in place.

1. What is a covenant?

A solemn agreement between two parties; like a contract today, but with differences.

- a) Contracts are usually between peers. The basic notion of the kinds of covenants that God makes with his people is that of an asymmetric agreement between a feudal lord and his vassals (like a king and his knights).
- b) Contracts constrain specific *actions* and deliverables explicitly. The covenant defines the *relation* between the two parties, and leaves many actions implicit.
- c) Thus contracts define the most that one can expect out of the relation. A covenant defines the tenor of the relationship, but is not exhaustive, so in a sense it defines the least that one can expect. The notion of faithfulness to covenant, *xesed*, implies that one acts in keeping with the relation that the covenant defines, whether or not the specific actions involved are spelled out.

2. 32, the Old Covenant

The two covenants are contrasted on four points. Consider first the condition of the Old Covenant on these points:

- a) Its *timing*, the exodus from Egypt. This is the covenant that God made with the nation on Mt. Sinai, focused on the ten commandments.
- b) Its *mechanism*, "held them by the hand." This expression is a metaphor for leading. Over and over in the OT, one holds someone's hand to lead or be led. Furthermore, it's a rather primitive kind of leading, such as you would use with someone who can't pay attention or who is prone to wander away.
- c) Its *response*, "which my covenant they brake." The nation disobeyed its terms. In fact, their disobedience to this covenant is precisely why they are on their way into exile (recall Lev. 26). Jer does not here call out God's response, but we know it from the previous chapters; judgment on their sin.
- d) Its *relation*, "I was (and still am) a husband unto them." Cf.

3:14, where, after indicting the nation for its infidelity, he urges them to return to him on the grounds that he is still their husband. A covenant does *not* cease to exist when it is broken. It is still a covenant, and still binding on its parties. God chooses this metaphor for the relation here precisely because it is permanent, in spite of their rebellion.

3. 33-34, the New Covenant

Again, the same four points command our attention.

a) Its *timing*, expressed in two different ways.

- 1) "In those days" (31), Jer's recurring expression for the coming time of restoration.
- 2) "After those days" (33). Can't be the same days; probably a reference back to the Exodus and the covenant established there. After that time covered by the older covenant, God will establish a new one.

b) Its *mechanism*. No longer an outward leading by the hand, but now God's law will be written in their hearts, in their inner being.

- 1) Ezekiel expresses this in terms of a heart transplant and the gift of God's Spirit: 36:26,27.
- 2) 1 John 2:20,27, the teaching ministry of the Spirit in the life of every believer.
- 3) *Application*: Currently, the Lord is exercising me over how greatly believers in this age have failed to believe this clause of the New Covenant. Rome sought to harness the church in outward constraints and organization, thereby rendering the leading of the Spirit superfluous, and even persecuted as heretics those who were sensitive to this tremendous gift. The reformation did not correct this aspect of Rome's error.

There are, indeed, those who claim the Spirit's authority, but who do not abide by the Scriptures; e.g., tongues-speakers whose meetings are dominated by women. We should have no trouble identifying them: Jer promises that God's law is written in our *hearts*, and omitting the constraint of his word is as wrong as forgetting that his Spirit now ministers it to our hearts. But it is equally wrong to seek to lock the church into organizational strait-jackets that not only correct those excesses but also quench the Spirit of God.

c) Its *relation*, establishment of the "God-People" relation that we considered in 30:22; 31:1. This is a relation that can persist only while they are obedient: consider the initial

invitation in Exod. 19:5-6. The unilateral bond of husband was all that God could claim under the broken old covenant, but the new covenant will permit the desired "God-People" relation to flourish.

d) Its *response*, both on their part and on God's

- 1) Under the old covenant, some would disobey, and others (like Jer) would have to call them back to obedience. Under the new, they will all know him. In the words of Rom. 11, "all Israel shall be saved."
- 2) God will forgive their sin (of breaking the previous covenant).

4. 35-37, the Promise

Heb. 6:17,18 lays down the principle that God encourages his people concerning his council by confirming it with an oath or promise, and in these two things, his sovereign council and his inviolable oath, we have strong consolation. The previous verses have given us God's council on this matter of the new covenant. Now, that we might have strong consolation, he confirms it with a double promise.

a) 35-36, The Cycles of Nature assure us of the Return of Israel as a Holy Nation.

First, he reminds them of the natural cycles of nature: the sun rises and sets; so does the moon; the stars march through the sky in orderly sequence; the waves move to and fro. ("Divideth" is more properly "moveth, stirreth.") These cycles are so regular that he calls them "ordinances," just as we call them "laws of nature."

Israel's status as a nation before God, that is, as his faithful people, is as much a part of the way the world is to be as are these regular laws of nature.

Israel is not now a nation before God; the promise does not insist that they must be, but only that this hiatus be temporary. Their cessation as a holy nation cannot last forever. The sun rises again after it sets; the waves that recede from the shore come crashing in again; so Israel, after waning as a nation under Babylon's oppression, will one day wax strong again.

b) 37, The Size of Nature assures us of the Duration of Israel before God.

Even in our day of modern science, a critical unanswered cosmological question concerns the size of the universe (whether it is open or closed). If we spend more than a few moments thinking about what lies beyond, we get dizzy very rapidly.

The idea of measuring heaven and earth does not start with Jer. God challenged Abram to do it, when he assured him that his descendants would be as numberless as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) and the stars of the heaven (15:5). Jer is recalling those promises. Some of the nation may turn apostate, and perhaps, like Elijah, one may not be able to see the 7000 faithful, but that's only because the entire nation is so vast that you cannot find them all. God will never cast off *all* the seed of Israel. Note the "all." He definitely will case off *some* of them, but there will be a remnant.

- c) Thus these promises call to our attention two implications of the new covenant. Both of these are guaranteed because of the new provision that the law of God will now be written in the hearts of his people, so that they will not break his covenant.
 - 1) In spite of their sin, Israel will never be entirely cast off. There will always be a righteous remnant, a few of the stars of the heaven, a handful of the dust of the earth.
 - 2) Though the nation may pass for a time off the pages of history, it will return, and that as a holy nation, as surely as the sun, moon, and stars return, and as the waves crash onto the beach.

God's two promises show that this renewed covenant has particular reference to the nation of Israel. So now the prophet turns to the capital of that nation and shows how it will share in the changes.

C. **38-40, A Restored Capital for the Nation**

It is vitally important for us to remember that for all of the OT prophets, the New Covenant is political and geographical as well as spiritual. We can see this clearly in Ezekiel 36:21-38. For Jer as well, the physical restoration of Jerusalem is as much a part of God's purposes as is the spiritual restoration of the people. Notice here the *purpose* of the restoration, its *extent*, and its *duration*.

1. The Purpose of the restoration.

v.38, the city shall be built *to the Lord*. v.40, even its most defiled precincts shall be *holy unto the Lord*.

- a) Originally, the city was not built "to the Lord," but as a Jebusite citadel.
- b) David sought it as his capital, not for any spiritual significance, but because it lay on the border between the northern and southern tribes and would be a neutral position from which to govern, much as the District of Columbia is in the US.
- c) Through its history, it was marred by idolatry.

All of this will be changed in the restoration. For the first time, the city will really be a holy city, the capital of God's kingdom on earth.

2. The Extent of the restoration.

Jer names landmarks in Jerusalem in a counterclockwise direction, starting from the NE. One can draw a map from the details in these verses. We cannot escape the conclusion that Jer is describing a physical city tied to recognizable landmarks.

3. The Duration of the restoration.

One might try to make a case that Jer is describing the restoration under Nehemiah. This would be difficult to reconcile with the previous two points: Neh shows that the people were far from devoted to the Lord even after the return, and "the hill Gareb" is most likely the western hill, which was probably not included in Nehemiah's city. But this third point shows conclusively that Jer is not promising the restoration under Neh, for that restoration was destroyed under the Romans in AD 70 and again in AD 132, while the one described here "shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever."

We have surveyed a prophecy of perhaps the most important eschatological concept in the OT, the New Covenant. The NT has much to say about this concept. In fact, "testament" means "covenant," and the last 27 books of the Bible take their name from the New Covenant. Before we move on in Jer, we should review the NT teaching on this point.

D. The New Covenant in the New Testament

The NT discusses the New Covenant in the synoptic gospels; Romans; 1,2 Cor; and most notably in Hebrews. These passages clearly extend certain parts of the New Covenant beyond Israel, to gentile believers in the Lord Jesus. Just as clearly, there is one important component of the New Covenant that they do not mention at all.

1. Gentiles do not receive the promises of the land!

The one important provision of the New Covenant that the NT does NOT apply to gentiles, or indeed say much about at all, is the promise of restoration to the land! We have seen that these promises were not fulfilled in the time of Nehemiah. Furthermore, they are much too concrete and specific to be spiritualized in reference to the church (and the NT never thus spiritualizes them). If God is to be faithful to his word, there will be a time yet future when Israel's sun will rise again, and she shall again be a nation before God, with her capital upon Zion's hill.

2. Gentiles enjoy forgiveness of sin.

- a) One of the points on which the old and the new covenant were contrasted was the response: the people responded to the old by breaking it, and God judged them accordingly. But under the new covenant, "they shall all know me ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (v.34).
- b) Heb. 9:11-23 draws a detailed contrast between the old covenant (embodied in the tabernacle worship) and the new in this regard. Christ's blood ratifies the new covenant (9:15), and thus is the means of removing our sin (14,15). This is emphasized in all four accounts of the Lord's Supper, where we read either of Christ's "blood of the new covenant" or of "the new covenant in his blood."

We know *that* Christ's blood procures our forgiveness. The New Covenant explains *how*. God has promised forgiveness through this covenant, but the covenant requires a sacrifice for it to take effect, and Christ's death is that sacrifice.

3. Gentiles enjoy a spiritual rather than a legal order.

Heb. 8:13 makes the point that the establishment of a new covenant shows that the old one is obsolete. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6, contrasting the letter with the Spirit. The contrast is between the physical ordinances (cf. "led by the hand") and the indwelling Holy Spirit whose ministry is emphasized under the new covenant. This is why we no longer require a physical sanctuary or a hierarchical structure of leadership; we enjoy the inner leading and power of the Holy Spirit. Much of the failing of Christianity down through the ages has resulted from quenching the Spirit through attempts to restore an Old Covenant organizational structure.

Conclusion

1. Enjoy the forgiveness of sin that the New Covenant provides.
2. Recognize the spiritual empowerment that it furnishes, and do not hinder it by returning to weak and beggarly elements.
3. Look forward to the future fulfillment of the other promises of the covenant, when God's kingdom shall come on earth, as it is in heaven.

Psalm or Hymn?

Analysis

Overall structure is chiastic: the two outside sections are double temporal p's (though the distinctive IF occurs only at the start of each). Also, the outer two sections concern physical restoration, while the central section is more spiritual.

- A. 31:27-30, coordinate temporal p: Both God and the people will show a change.

References to restoration serve as a transition to the previous section--but also match the rebuilding in the last paragraph of this section.

The coordinated temporal p's here present two changes in perspective. God changes from destruction to restoration; the people change from blaming others to accepting responsibility.

1. temporal p: God moves from destruction to restoration.

a) time: 31:27 HIN."H YFMIYM B.F)IYM N:)UM-Y:HWFH

b) text:

1) W:/ZFRA(:T.IY)ET-B."YT YI&:RF)"L W:/)ET-B."YT Y:HW.DFH
ZERA()FDFM W:/ZERA(B.:H"MFH

2) comparison p: explicit reference to 1:12 (\$QD) and 1:10
(verbs of destruction and building).

31:28 W:/HFYFH

a> K.A/):A\$ER \$FQAD:T.IY (:AL"Y/HEM LI/N:TOW\$ W:/LI/N:TOWC
W:/LA/H:AROS W./L:/HA):ABIYD W./L:/HFR"(A

b> K."N)E\$:QOD (:AL"Y/HEM LI/B:NOWT W:/LI/N:+OW(A
N:)UM-Y:HWFH

2. temporal p: The people move from blaming others to accepting responsibility.

a) time: 31:29 B.A/Y.FMIYM HF/H"M

b) text: quote p: understand both halves of the contrast as being governed by LO)-YO)M:RW.; KY)M is not part of the quote, but Y)MRW has been elided after it. Parallels: 7:32; 16:14,15; 19:6; 20:3; 23:7,8; 38:4. That is, neither Jer nor Ezek accepts this saying as valid in any period of Israel's history, against Greenberg, who sees Jer as sympathetic with it now but not later (Ezekiel I, 340).

1) quote f: LO)-YO)M:RW. (OWD

2) quote: contrast p: for full commentary, see Ezek. 18.

a> text:

1>)FBOWT)FK:LW. BOSER

2> W:/\$IN."Y BFNIYM T.IQ:HEYNFH

b> contrast: illustration p

1> text: 31:30 K.IY)IM-)IY\$ B.A/(:AWON/OW YFMW.T

2> K.FL-HF/)FDFM HF/)OK"L HA/B.OSER T.IQ:HEYNFH \$IN.FY/W
S

B. 31:31-37, ampl p: God will cut a new covenant with the nation. (cf. 32:36-41)

1. text: temporal p

a) time: 31:31 HIN."H YFMIYM B.F)IYM N:)UM-Y:HWFH

b) text: W:/KFRAT.IY)ET-B."YT YI&:RF)"L W:/)ET-B."YT Y:HW.DFH
B.:RIYT X:ADF\$FH

2. ampl: contrast p

a) thesis: comment p

1) text: 31:32 LO) KA/B.:RIYT

2) comment <BRIYT>
 a> temporal p
 1> text:):AŞER K.FRAT.IY)ET-):ABOWT/FM
 2> time: B.:/YOWM HEX:EZIYQIY B:/YFD/FM L:/HOWCIY)/FM
 M"/)EREC MIC:RFYIM
 b> concession p
 1> text:):AŞER-H"M.FH H"P"RW.)ET-B.:RIYT/IY
 2> concession: W:/)FNOKIY B.F(AL:T.IY B/FM N:)UM-Y:HWFH

b) antithesis: evidence p

1) 33-34, text: quote p
 a> quote f: comment p
 1> text: 31:33 K.IY ZO)T HA/B.:RIYT
 2> comment: temporal p
 a: text:):AŞER)EK:ROT)ET-B."YT YI&:RF)"L
 b: time:)AX:AR"Y HA/Y.FMIYM HF/H"M N:)UM-Y:HWFH
 See Aranoff on accents; we could also attach the temporal clause to the quote rather than to the quote formula. The reference is obscure; is it to "those days" "in" which the restoration takes place (cf. v.31)? Then why are these changes delayed until "after those days?" In fact, nowhere else is anything posited "after those days." Alternatively, these might be the days of the original Exodus (v.33), but then why the singular in 33 and the plural here?
 b> quote:
 1> NFTAT.IY)ET-T.OWRFT/IY B.:/QIR:B./FM
 2> W:/(AL-LIB./FM)EK:T.:AB/EN.FH
 3> W:/HFYIYTIY L/FHEM L"/)LOHIYM
 4> W:/H"M.FH YIH:YW.-L/IY L:/(FM
 5> reason p
 a: text: quote p
 1: quote f: 31:34 W:/LO) Y:LAM.:DW. (OWD)IYŞ
)ET-R"("HW. W:/)IYŞ)ET-)FXIY/W L"/)MOR
 2: quote: D.:(W.)ET-Y:HWFH
 b: reason:
 1: K.IY-KW.L./FM Y"D:(W.)OWT/IY L:/MI/Q:+AN./FM
 W:/(AD-G.:DOWL/FM N:)UM-Y:HWFH
 2: K.IY)ES:LAX LA/(:AWON/FM
 3: W./L:/XA+.F)T/FM LO))EZ:K.FR-(OWD S

2) 35-37, evidence: coordinate p
 The "then" in the conditions in each of these are to be understood as summaries of the base covenant for which these assurances are evidence.

a> 35-36, quote p
 1> quote f: comment p
 a: text: 31:35 K.OH)FMAR Y:HWFH
 b: comment <YHWH>
 1: NOT"N \$EMEŞ L:/)OWR YOWM/FM XUQ.OT YFR"XA
 W:/KOWKFBIYM L:/)OWR LFY:LFH

2: ROGA(HA/Y.FM WA/Y.EH:EMW. GAL.FY/W
3: Y:HWFH C:BF)OWT \$:M/OW
2> quote: conditional p
a: if: 31:36)IM-YFMU\$W. HA/XUQ.IYM HF/)"L.EH
MI/L.:/PFNAY N:)UM-Y:HWFH
b: then: G.AM ZERA(YI&:RF)"L YI\$:B.:TW. MI/H:YOWT
G.OWY L:/PFNAY K.FL-HA/Y.FMIYM S
b> 37, quote p
1> quote f: 31:37 K.OH)FMAR Y:HWFH
2> quote: conditional p
a: if:)IM-
1: YIM.AD.W. \$FMAYIM MI/L:/MA(:LFH
2: W:/Y"XFQ:RW. MOWS:D"Y-)EREC L:/MF+.FH
b: then: G.AM-):ANIY)EM:)AS B.:/KFL-ZERA(YI&:RF)"L
(AL-K.FL-):A\$ER (F&W. N:)UM-Y:HWFH S

C. 31:38-40, contrasting temporal p: restoration of the land (30:18;
32:42-44)

1. thesis: temporal p

a) time: 31:38 HIN."H YFMIYM {ZZ} [B.F)IYM] N:)UM-Y:HWFH

b) text:

1) W:/NIB:N:TFH HF/(IYR LA/YHWFH MI/M.IG:D.AL X:ANAN:)"L \$A(AR
HA/P.IN.FH

2) 31:39 W:/YFCF) (OWD {Q:W"H} [QFW] HA/M.ID.FH NEG:D./OW (AL
G.IB:(AT G.FR"B

3) W:/NFSAB G.O(FT/FH

4) 31:40 W:/KFL-HF/("MEQ HA/P.:GFRIYM W:/HA/D.E\$EN
W:/KFL-{HA/\$.:R"MOWT} [HA/\$.:D"MOWT] (AD-NAXAL QID:ROWN
(AD-P.IN.AT \$A(AR HA/S.W.SIYM MIZ:RFX/FH QODE\$ LA/YHWFH

2. antithesis: temporal p

a) text:

1) LO)-YIN.FT"\$

2) W:/LO)-Y"HFR"S

b) time:

1) (OWD

2) L:/(OWLFM S