

Toward Understanding the Importance of the New Covenant in Godward Ministries
Jeremiah 31:27-40

Introduction: Too often we confine the New Covenant discussion to only Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is quoted in Hebrews 8. But let us not forget the context, and the complete details of the covenant. For our purposes today, we will consider 31:27-30, as well as 31:35-40. I realize we could expand it even further but our time is obviously limited.

- 1) Larger context: this paragraph is found in God's word of restoration to Jeremiah in 30-33.¹
 - a) The promise of future restoration of Israel and Judah—30:1-3
 - b) The promise of future distress for Israel and Judah—30:4-7
 - c) The details of the promise of restoration of Israel and Judah—30:8-31:26
 - d) The details of the New Covenant with Israel and Judah—31:27-40
 - e) The details of the everlasting covenant with Jerusalem—32:1-44
 - f) The details of "the good word" to Israel and Judah—33:1-26

- 2) Jeremiah records the following details about this covenant in 31:27-40:
 - The phrase "days are coming" is common in Jeremiah: 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 19:6; 23:5, 7; 30:3; 31:27, 31, 38; 33:14; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52
 - a) A replanting of the house of Israel and house of Judah—31:27-28
 - i) With both man and beast—31:27
 - ii) Yahweh will have previously brought 5-fold judgment: [note the 5 infinitives] to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster—31:28a
 - (1) Remember Jeremiah 1:10
 - iii) Yahweh intends [Qal imperfect] to bring 2-fold blessing: to build up and to plant—31:28b
 - b) In those coming days people will suffer the consequences of their own iniquity—31:29-30
 - c) In those coming days Yahweh will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah—31:31-34
 - i) The overall OT context of "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" demands this to be referring to Jewish people—31:31
 - (1) The phrase "house of Israel" is found 118 times in the OT, 13 times in Jeremiah alone
 - (2) The phrases "house of Israel" and "house of Judah" occur together 8 times in Jeremiah (3:18; 5:11; 11:10, 17; 27:21; 31:27, 31; 33:14)
 - (3) Eternal national covenants do not die because of old age. (Feinberg, p. 575)
 - ii) This covenant is contrasted with the covenant made at Mt. Sinai—31:32
 - (1) Clearly referring to Israel who **broke** [*parar*—break, violate, invalidate # 6565] the covenant.
 - (2) Israel broke this covenant in spite of the fact Yahweh was husband to them.
 - (3) The old covenant was made with Israel, not with the church.
 - iii) The partial content of the new covenant to be made with Israel **after** [*achar* # 310] the days of judgment and replanting just referred to in 31:27-30—31:33-34
 - (1) Regarding the internalization of Yahweh's law for Israel—31:33a
 - (a) He will put it within them
 - (b) He will write it upon their hearts
 - (2) Regarding the intimacy of Yahweh's relationship with Israel—31:33b-34
 - (a) He will be their God—31:33b
 - (b) They will be His people—31:33b
 - (c) They will no longer teach their neighbors and brothers the command. "Know the Yahweh"—31:34

¹ See an excellent discussion by Charles Feinberg, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, pp. 558-579.

- (i) Why? Because they **all** [emphatic] will know Yahweh
 - (ii) Who? From the least of them to the greatest
 - (iii) Why will they have this intimate knowledge of Yahweh?
 - 1. Because Yahweh will forgive their iniquity
 - 2. Because Yahweh will not remember their sin
 - d) But how can people be certain this will actually take place? God addresses this in 31:35-37
 - i) Yahweh Tsebaoth is the creator and sustainer of the physical universe—31:35
 - ii) Two hypothetical/conditional situations—31:36-37
 - (1) If [חֵן # 518] the fixed order of the physical universe ceases [Qal perfect], then Israel will cease [Qal imperfect] to be a nation before Yahweh all the days—31:36
 - (2) If [חֵן # 518] the limits of the physical universe can be measured and explored, then Yahweh will cast off [Qal imperfect] the seed of Israel for all they have done [Qal perfect]—31:37
 - e) Particular geographical aspects pertaining to Jerusalem of the new covenant with Israel—31:38-40
 - For a helpful study on this passage, see Dennis Swanson's article in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Volume 17, number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 17-34
 - i) The purpose of rebuilt Jerusalem—31:38a, 40
 - (1) The city will be rebuilt for [lamedh preposition] Yahweh (not for Israel)—31:38
 - (2) The boundaries will be holy to Yahweh—31:40
 - ii) The dimensions of rebuilt Jerusalem—31:38b-40a
 - Yahweh reveals 7 distinct boundary markers that will be holy to Yahweh
 - The description moves counter-clockwise from the northeast, westward, southward, and finally eastward
 - (1) From the Tower of Hananel—Nehemiah 3:1; 12:39; Zechariah 14:10
 - (2) Southwest to the Corner Gate—2nd Kings 14:13; 2nd Chronicles 25:23; 26:9; Zechariah 14:10
 - (3) Straight to the hill Gareb
 - (4) and then turn southeast to Goah
 - (5) The whole southern valley (Hinnom) of dead bodies and the ashes—considered the most defiled location near Jerusalem
 - (6) All the fields to the southeast as far as the brook Kidron
 - (7) To the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east side of the temple
 - iii) The indestructible nature of rebuilt Jerusalem—31:40b
 - (1) What?
 - (a) It will not be uprooted
 - (b) And it will not be thrown down
 - (2) For how long?
 - (a) Again to forever
- 3) Four views of the fulfillment of these details
- a) The various views
 - i) Never fulfilled—Amillennialists and Postmillennialists
 - (1) Must spiritualize the text in order to see no literal fulfillment
 - (2) Denies the accuracy of Scripture
 - ii) Partially fulfilled—some Premillennial Dispensationalism
 - (1) One New Covenant—two aspects, one for Israel and one for church age saints
 - (2) Two New Covenants—future one for Israel and present one for church age saints
 - iii) Completely fulfilled—Full Preterism, Liberalism, New Covenant Theology
 - (1) Must spiritualize or allegorize the text in order to see completed fulfillment

- (2) Denies the accuracy of history, the accuracy of Scripture, and the intelligibility of the passage to the original readers
 - iv) Yet to be fulfilled—some Premillennial Dispensationalism
 - (1) Literal/normal interpretation allows the text to mean what it says, awaiting a future literal fulfillment in God's time.
 - (2) The church enjoys New Covenant-like blessings, but is technically not under the New Covenant.
 - b) These various views are based on varying principles of interpretation (duh!), namely:
 - i) The "analogy of faith"²
 - (1) Generally identifies Israel as the church.
 - (2) The "analogy of faith" is based on a Greek phrase found in Romans 12:6 [τῆν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως *ten analogian tes pisteōs*] See MaGill's helpful comments³
 - See Robert Reymond's discussion of this principle⁴ Bernard Ramm's⁵, and Milton Terry⁶
 - (a) The *objective* genitive interpretation—the body of faith
 - (b) The *subjective* genitive interpretation—the prophet's personal faith
 - (3) The misuse of the "analogy of faith" leads to a symbolic interpretation
 - (a) Origen seems to have been the first to use the "analogy of faith" as part of his three-fold manner of interpretation (body, soul, and spirit), based on Proverbs 22:20-21.⁷
 - (i) See Ramm's helpful history of interpretation⁸ as well as Terry's.⁹
 - (b) The reformers used the "analogy of faith" as a corollary to "Scripture interprets Scripture" to counter the Roman Church's authoritative "rule of faith" which was an authority independent of Scripture.
 - (c) Many modern covenant theologians use the "analogy of faith" to exchange symbolic interpretation for literal interpretation of Scripture, especially in OT prophecy.
 - ii) Literal/normal interpretation
 - (1) Identifies Israel as Israel.
 - (2) This is the normal outcome of grammatical-historical exegesis.
- 4) How does all of this apply to my ministry today?
 - a) We need to handle accurately God's Word of Truth—2nd Timothy 2:15
 - i) Working diligently in the grammatical-historical approach to Scripture.
 - ii) We need to praise our God for the precise accuracy of His word
 - b) We need to remind ourselves regularly of the time-honored principle of *one-interpretation* (meaning) of a passage with *many possible applications*.
 - i) We need to pray for wisdom, sobermindedness, and diligence (among other things) in our study.

² See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 134-140.

³ Michael Magill, *New Testament Transline* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 559.

⁴ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 50-52.

⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 107-110.

⁶ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), pp. 579-581.

⁷ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., Ante Nicene Fathers, *Origen De Principiis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 4:359.

⁸ Ramm, pp. 23-92.

⁹ Terry, pp. 601-738.

- c) We need to trust that the sovereign God who communicated this prophecy is able to complete it in His time.
 - i) Let us not change the interpretation in an attempt to help God “save face.” He doesn’t need our help.
 - d) We need to keep a proper view of the New Covenant before God’s people today.
 - i) Let us teach accurately, encouraging people to trust their sovereign God who able to accomplish His will in His time.
- 5) Other notes from discussion

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