

The background of the image is a rustic wooden fence made of dark, weathered planks. A green ivy vine with small, heart-shaped leaves is climbing over the fence, particularly concentrated on the right side and top. The text is overlaid on the fence.

The New Covenant

(Part 1)

A RuínandRedemption.com *Teaching Series*

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The New Covenant (Part 1)

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The New Covenant (Part 1)

I. The Background of the New Covenant

1. The KING of God's People: *The Reign of Solomon*

A) The Significance of Solomon's Reign: We finished our last lesson by talking about the beginning of Solomon's reign. It was the highest point in Israel's history. Everything in their past was building up to this; and for Israel, it couldn't get any better. In King Solomon, *God was fulfilling the promises He had made to David*. As Solomon dedicated the temple, he said: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His hand. . . Now the Lord has fulfilled His word which He spoke; for I have risen in place of my father David and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel." (1 Kings 8:15,20). Remember, back in 2 Samuel 7, the Lord had promised to David that He would raise up his son after him who would not only sit on his throne, but build a house for the name of the Lord (vv12-13). Here, Solomon's acknowledging that God had kept His promises.

And not only had God kept His promises to David: *Solomon's kingdom also brings to fulfillment the promises that God had made all the way back to Abraham*. In 1 Kings 4:20-21, Solomon's reign is described for us in this way: "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. . . Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." Do you see it? God had multiplied His people Israel like the sand on the seashore, just as He promised to Abraham back in Genesis 22 (v17; cf. 32:12). And God had given to Israel the full boundaries of the land that He had promised to Abraham back in Genesis 15 (v18; cf. 17:8). God had multiplied His people, He had given them a *place*, and with the temple He had crowned them with His *presence*.¹

B) The Beginning of Solomon's Downfall: Things couldn't get any better for Israel. Sadly, though, they would get worse. Solomon's heart turns away from the Lord, and the whole kingdom falls with him. My daughter asked me recently: "Does sin ever trick you?" I think that's what happened to Solomon. He was a good man, a godly man. He was humble leader, and a gifted teacher. But at some point, he lets his heart grow distant and begins engaging in activities the Lord had forbidden. In Deuteronomy 17 God lays out three commands for kings in Israel: The king "shall not multiply horses for himself. . . He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself." (vv16-17). But in 1 Kings 9-11, these are the things Solomon begins to do: It starts with *the gold* (1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:14-15); then *the horses* (10:26-29); and last of all Solomon isn't just *multiplying wives*, but marrying unbelieving women who worshipped other gods (11:1-4). One writer has summarized these three temptations as *guns, girls, and gold*.²

REFERENCE	SPECIFIC COMMAND	PROHIBITION	TEMPTATION
Deuteronomy 17:16	"he shall not multiply <i>horses</i> for himself. . ."	Guns	Power (Control)
Deuteronomy 17:17	"He shall not multiply <i>wives</i> for himself. . ."	Girls	Sex (Pleasure)
Deuteronomy 17:17	"nor shall he greatly increase <i>silver and gold</i> . . ."	Gold	Money (Security)

¹ The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible says: "The borders of Solomon's kingdom correspond with the borders promised to Abraham (see Genesis 15:18; 17:8; Deuteronomy 1:7; 11:24; Joshua 1:4 and their notes). Hence, Kings presents Solomon's rule over an empire that represented the long-awaited fulfillment of the patriarchal promises (cf. vv24-25)." (on 1 Kings 4:21). Jonty Rhodes notes of 1 Kings 4:20-21: "David's son Solomon takes to the throne, and initially all is well. . . See the promises being fulfilled? The people of Israel are as many as the sand by the sea, just as God promised Abraham in Genesis 22. They are living in the land stretching from the Euphrates to Egypt, just as God promised Abraham in Genesis 15. Solomon is ruling over them, as a wise father. People, paradise, the covenant king, but what about God's presence? In fact, this blessing too is lavished on Israel during Solomon's reign. The early chapters of 1 Kings tell of the building of a great temple for God."

² Rhodes: "Solomon [commits] exactly the sins. . . Deuteronomy 17 warned against. . . *Guns, girls, and gold*: they're all there."

We also have temptations, like Solomon. What are the ways sin may be trying to trick you in your life right now? I think one way sin tricks us is believing wrong things about God when we go through things that are hard in our life. Sometimes I find my heart getting frustrated with the Lord, or bitter, when I'm not seeing very much fruit in ministry. It's harboring these feelings that distances my heart from the Lord and can lead me down the road of giving in to other sins. I want the Lord to give me success and I pout when He doesn't. What I forgot is that this is exactly what the Lord had given to Solomon. And yet, for Solomon, it seemed it was success that began to turn his heart away. A child might want to play with a sharp knife, but that doesn't mean you give it to her. And the reason you don't is that you love her too much. Friends, God knows what's best for us. We can trust in Him.

C) The Result of Solomon's Sin: God had warned Solomon about this. When he was building the temple, the Lord had told Solomon that if he would walk in God's ways, the Lord's blessing would rest upon all Israel (1 Kings 6:11-13). And after Solomon had dedicated the temple, the Lord came to him in a dream and repeated the same message: If Solomon walked before the Lord, observing His commandments and keeping His statutes, the Lord would establish his kingdom (1 Kings 9:3-5; cf. 1 Chronicles 28:5-8; 2 Chronicles 7:17-18). But there was no such promise for Solomon and his kingdom if he were to turn away from the Lord. And so, sadly, when Solomon sins, it results in the shattering of the kingdom. The Lord tells Solomon in 1 Kings 11:11, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant." Sure enough, this is exactly what happens in the days of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. When the elders of Israel approach Rehoboam shortly after he had been anointed king, he speaks harshly with them. As a result, the northern tribes of Israel break off from Rehoboam and his kingdom, form their own nation, and appoint their own king. So, when Solomon sins, the kingdom gets torn in two. Rehoboam continues to be king over the tribe of Judah, along with the southern tribe of Benjamin (1 Kings 11:30-31; 12:21). They become known as *the kingdom of Judah* (with their capital in Jerusalem). The ten other northern tribes who split off form their own nation which becomes known as *the kingdom of Israel* (with their capital in Samaria).

THE UNITED MONARCHY		THE DIVIDED MONARCHY		
WHO REIGNED	WHO THEY REIGNED OVER	WHO REIGNED	WHO THEY REIGNED OVER	CAPITAL
King Saul	ALL 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL	The King of Judah	The 2 southern tribes	Jerusalem
King David		The King of Israel	The 10 northern tribes	Samaria
King Solomon				

Though the split was ultimately God's plan, Israel breaking off from Judah is presented in Scripture as an act of rebellion against their true Davidic king (1 Kings 12:19). Later, Rehoboam's son Abijah, the rightful king of Judah, had this to say to all the tribes of northern Israel: "Do you not know that *the Lord God of Israel gave the rule of Israel forever to David and his sons* by a covenant of salt? . . . So now you intend to *resist the kingdom of the Lord* through the sons of David. . ." (2 Chronicles 13:5,8). Abijah's words help us to interpret the splitting of the kingdom: Because God had given the rule to David and to his sons, to resist the kingdom *of Judah* was to resist the kingdom *of the Lord*.³

How do we interpret all this? How are we to fit the pieces together? I think it's easy to misinterpret what's going on here, if we're not careful. It's easy to read these Scriptures about Solomon and come to the conclusion that God turned His back on Solomon because Solomon had turned his back on

³ The Reformation Heritage Study Bible says of 2 Chronicles 13:5-8: "War against the house of David was rebellion against God. . . Judah's kingdom was God's kingdom, which He ruled through the Davidic king as His representative." The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible likewise says of verse 8: "Despite Rehoboam's offense, resisting David's dynasty was tantamount to resisting God himself." And the ESV Study Bible also concludes: "The Chronicler notes that in contrast to Jeroboam's kingdom and cult, the Davidic monarchy is the object of God's enduring promise (13:5,8). . ." A similar passage can be found in 2 Chronicles 30, where couriers are sent out from King Hezekiah in Judah to the northern tribes of Israel. They are sent out with the message that Israel should return to the Lord (the Old Testament language for repentance). Though the focus is the Passover, the ESV Study Bible says: "More than an invitation to participate in a festival (30:8b), they are really a summons to repentance (return to the Lord), so that God will avert his anger and the captives of the Assyrians will be returned (v9)."

God. But that's not true. Remember, back in 2 Samuel 7, God had made a very specific promise to David about his son Solomon, telling him: "when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul. . ." (vv14-15). The discipline God sent to Solomon was actually the proof of His love for him. The Lord wasn't punishing him as a judge; He was drawing him back as his father.

Ultimately, though, what's happening here with Israel's kingdom is about much more than just God's personal dealings with Solomon. Remember, Solomon wasn't just any person. As the king of Israel, he functioned as the covenant representative for God's people. We mentioned this in the last lesson: The entire well-being of God's people seems to be contingent on the obedience of one man. While Solomon kept the covenant, the people were blessed. But when he sins, the whole kingdom is split apart. Now here, we see what that headship meant in particular for Israel: *1) Solomon's sin directly results in Israel being separated from their rightful king* (and, in fact, into a state of rebellion against him). And, in connection with this, *2) Solomon's sin also directly results in Israel's separation from one another*. From now on, Israel would be separated from their true king, and separated from one another; they would be rebels against their rightful king, and hostile towards one another. All of this is meant to point us back to Adam's headship over all humanity. Adam's sin directly resulted in both our rebellion against God and alienation from one another. Solomon's sin echoes back to Adam's.⁴

	HEAD	ACTION	RESULT: GOD-WARD	RESULT: MAN-WARD
PICTURE	Solomon	Disobedience	Israel's rebellion against their King	Hostility and alienation from own kinsmen
REALITY	Adam		Our rebellion against our Creator	Hostility and alienation from one another

2. The CORRUPTION of God's People: *The Sin of Israel*

A) Israel in the north: After Solomon, things just continue to get worse.⁵ This was especially true of the kingdom in northern Israel. After breaking off from the Davidic tribe of Judah, these ten tribes appoint a man named Jeroboam as their new king. When Jeroboam *came* to power, he set his heart on *keeping* that power. But he realized there was something that could be a problem for him: God had commanded over and over again in His Law that true worship was to happen where the temple was. God had told His people: "you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come." (Deuteronomy 12:5).⁶ It was Jerusalem that God had chosen. So, in Deuteronomy 12, that's where God's people were commanded to offer up their burnt offerings. Further, in Deuteronomy 16, that's where all God's people were to go three times a year to observe the feasts of the Lord. Israel's new king didn't like the sound of this: "Jeroboam said in his heart. . . If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah." (1 Kings 12:26-27). So, to keep the allegiance of his people, he came up with a plan: He told the people it was too much of a hassle to go all the way up to Jerusalem. And he made two golden calves for them to worship instead, putting them in the northern and southern sides of his territory (Dan and Bethel). Then he appointed his own priests who didn't come from the tribe of Levi. Last of all, he invented his own feast, on his own day, a counterfeit of the one at Jerusalem.

THE BEGINNING OF FALSE WORSHIP IN THE KINGDOM OF NORTHERN ISRAEL

	WORSHIP	OFFERINGS/SACRIFICES	PRIESTS	FEASTS
WHAT GOD COMMANDED	The true God	Bring to the temple	Levites	In the 1 st , 3 rd and 7 th months
WHAT JEROBOAM INSTITUTED	False gods	Bring to Dan or Bethel	Non-Levites	In the 8 th month

⁴ Reflecting on what we've been discussing, Jonty Rhodes refers to 1 Kings 11:11-13, noting: "We need to be careful here. It's not that God brings the fullness of the covenant curses to bear on Solomon. . . Speaking about David's descendants, God had cautioned: 'When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him' (2 Samuel 7:14-15). . . At this stage of the story though, notice that the consequences aren't just for Solomon. Because of this one man's disobedience, the nation will be torn in two. . . While Solomon kept the covenant, the people were blessed. When Solomon rebels, disaster falls on his whole people." (*Covenants Made Simple*).

⁵ Clowney puts it: "After the days of Solomon, the history of Israel was a story of increasing apostasy and judgment." (p185).

⁶ This same truth is emphasized throughout the entire chapter. See Deuteronomy 12:5,11,14,18,26). It's impossible to miss.

Jeroboam is just the first king of northern Israel. But once he sets up the golden calves, the kingdom never recovers. The calves are never taken down. Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, there is only one essential criteria by which God assesses the kings of northern Israel: Did they tear down the golden calves or let them stay? The answer is always the same. With every new king, we read: “He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel sin.” (1 Kings 15:34).⁷ Jeroboam's message to the people of Israel was basically: “This is good enough.” But it was a lie. As long as the golden calves stood at Dan and Bethel, there was no true worship happening in Israel. Earlier, when Solomon had sinned, it resulted in *Israel's rebellion*. But now, when Jeroboam sets up the golden calves, it results in *Israel's corruption*. A false king had stolen their allegiance, and a false worship characterized their lives. As long as they stayed in Israel, they continued in rebellion against their rightful king. And as long as the calves stood at Bethel and Dan, they may have been religious, but their religion was useless, and even offensive, to God. All of this is a picture of our natural condition without Christ and apart from Him. Apart from Jesus, this is a description of who we are: Rebels against God and corrupted to the very core of our nature.⁸

B) Judah in the south: Things were a little better in Judah. Abijah, the king of Judah, gives a pretty fair summary of things when he says to Jeroboam and all Israel: “Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams, even he may become a priest of what are no gods. But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the Lord as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. Every morning and evening they burn to the Lord burnt offerings and fragrant incense. . . for we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken Him.” (2 Chronicles 13:9-11). It was true. Where Israel had failed, the tribe of Judah had continued to be faithful: They were led by the true Davidic king, their worship was performed by the proper Levitical priests, and they gathered together where God had set His presence, in the temple at Jerusalem. But they had their own issues. If Israel in the north was guilty of *idolatry*, Judah in the south was often guilty of *religious formality*. They had the temple, they had the priests, and they had their king, but their hearts were distant from God, and their lives were dishonoring to the Lord. Later, God asks them: “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? . . . I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. . . Bring your worthless offerings no longer. . . I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.” (Isaiah 1:11-13). See, Judah had better theology; but in a very real sense, that made them all the more guilty.

Judah did have a few good kings who led God's people to seek the Lord (such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah).⁹ But sadly, the good kings are the exception rather than the rule. On the whole, Judah's kingdom also proves unfaithful to the Lord, and increasingly so as time goes on: King *Jehoram* kills all his brothers to maintain control of the kingdom (2 Chronicles 21:4). *Amaziah* brings back the gods of Edom to bow down before them (2 Chronicles 25:14). *Ahaz* not only sacrifices to other gods, but closes the doors of the temple (2 Chronicles 28:23-24). *Manasseh* goes even further when he sets up altars for foreign gods *inside* the temple (2 Chronicles 33:4-5,7-8). Ahaz and Manasseh even sacrifice their own sons to other gods (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). Manasseh practices witchcraft and sheds so much innocent blood that he fills Jerusalem with it “from one end

⁷ This is the constant theme of the kings of Israel in the north. See 1 Kings 15:30; 15:34; 16:2; 16:19; 16:31; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 13:2; 13:6; 13:11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28. All these passages talk about “walking in the way of Jeroboam” and “in his sin with which he made Israel sin.” If there was any ambiguity as to what this might have meant, 2 Kings 10:29 gives us all the clarity we need: “However, as for the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, *even the golden calves that were at Bethel and that were at Dan*.” This is indeed why they go into exile (1 Kings 14:16).

⁸ It's interesting to note there are passages that describe Israelites who forsake their heritage in northern Israel to return to true worship and to give their allegiance to their rightful king in Judah. In 2 Chronicles 11:14-16, we read: “the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem . . . Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel followed them to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers.” Other passages include 2 Chronicles 15:9 and 30:1-12, where Israelites return to Judah. We mentioned earlier that in the Old Testament, *returning* is the language that is used for *repentance*. These instances seem to be Old Testament shadows and pictures for the reality that we are, by nature, outside of the kingdom of God. Jesus tells us: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

⁹ Jonathan Edwards (I think rightly) interprets these ups and downs as seasons of revival and decline. He says: “When things seemed to be come to an extremity, and religion at its last gasp, he was often pleased to grant blessed revivals by remarkable outpourings of his Spirit, particularly in Hezekiah's and Josiah's time.” (Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*).

to another” (2 Kings 21:16). And it wasn't just the kings. Zephaniah tells us: “Her *princes* within her are roaring lions, her *judges* are wolves at evening. . . Her *prophets* are reckless, treacherous men; her *priests* have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.” (3:3-4). Jeremiah calls out *the people* for their idolatry, asserting they had as many gods as they had cities (2:28). And shortly before the exile, Jeremiah asks them: “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!' . . .?” (7:9-10).

COMPARING THE KINGDOMS OF NORTHERN ISRAEL AND SOUTHERN JUDAH

	THEIR DEFINING SIN		THEIR LIVES	THEIR WORSHIP	THEIR PARALLEL
NORTHERN ISRAEL	Rampant Idolatry	Idols minus God	Defiant lives	False worship	Prodigals
SOUTHERN JUDAH	Religious Formality	Idols plus God	Double lives	Fake worship	Pharisees

3. The EXILE of God's People: *The Judgment of God*

A) *The Approach of the Exile*: God had entered into a covenant relationship with His people. But from the very beginning, He had also warned His people about the seriousness of covenant-breaking. Even before Israel had entered the land under Joshua, God had warned Israel that if they forsook Him and worshiped other gods, there would be discipline. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, the Lord tells Israel that this discipline would mostly take the form of *famine*, *pestilence*, and *the sword*. God also warns His people in these passages that if they refused to turn back to Him, this discipline would only become more and more severe as time went on.¹⁰ It could get to the point that the kinds of things that would happen to them are too horrible to even mention (see Deuteronomy 28:52-57). And ultimately, if Israel continued to turn away, *the final judgment was exile*: God would cast His people out of the land He had given them. After the dedication of the temple, these are the same warnings the Lord repeats to Solomon: “But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.” (1 Kings 9:6-7). Covenant-breaking is serious.¹¹

God had promised to send *famine*, *pestilence*, and *the sword* if His people turned away from Him. And, as they continued to forsake Him, that's exactly what He did. The purpose of God's discipline was to wake His people up; to help them come to repentance. Sadly, it didn't have that effect. Isaiah describes God like *a father who doesn't know what else to do for his son*, when he says: “Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? . . . From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil. Your land is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your fields—strangers are devouring them in your presence; it is desolation, as overthrown by strangers.” (1:5-7).¹² God was sending forth the covenant curses of famine, pestilence, and the sword as *the discipline of a father*.

We could also think about these covenant curses as the *birth-pangs of judgment*. When a pregnant woman is in labor, the pain doesn't come all at once. It starts slowly, and at the beginning, the pain is less intense. But it intensifies and grows more and more with each contraction. Well, the covenant curses were like contractions of judgment: God would send *a famine*, and then He would give relief. But when His people continued on in their sin and refused to turn back to Him, He would raise up a foreign army to come against them (IE, *the sword*). Then He would again provide relief. But each time the contractions would increase in intensity, just like God had said they would (cf. Leviticus 26).

¹⁰ This is emphasized throughout Leviticus 26. We read in 26:18: “If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.” The same thing is repeated again in verses 21, 24, and 28 of the same chapter.

¹¹ These are also called *the covenant curses*. There were others (such as the attacking of wild animals, cf. Leviticus 26:22), but most of them fall into the broader categories of *famine* (see Leviticus 26:19-20; Deuteronomy 28:23-24); *pestilence* or *plague* (see Leviticus 26:25; Deuteronomy 28:21-22, 27, 58-61), and *the sword* (see Leviticus 26:17; Deuteronomy 28:25-26).

¹² Gill says of Isaiah 1:5: “[Stricken] with afflictions and chastisements, with which God smites His people by way of correction for their sins (Isaiah 57:17), and the sense is, either that they did not consider what they were afflicted for, that it was for their sins and transgressions. . . or the meaning is, that the chastisements that were laid upon them were to no purpose. . .”

These birth-pangs of judgment continued and grew in their intensity until God's people were ripe for exile. It was then that God said in Micah 4:10: "Writhe and labor to give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth; for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon."¹³

THE COVENANT CURSES OF LEVITICUS 26 AND DEUTERONOMY 28

TYPES OF CURSES	CULMINATION OF THE CURSES	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CURSES	
FAMINE	THE EXILE	Sent as Discipline	The Discipline of a Father (Isaiah 1:5-7)
PESTILENCE			
THE SWORD		Sent as Judgment	The Labor Pains of Judgment (Micah 4:10)

B) The Reality of the Exile: Cardiac arrest happens when a person's heart stops pumping blood to the rest of their body. When someone goes into sudden cardiac arrest, it's incredibly serious. If it's not treated immediately, it can lead to death; and the only effective treatment is using a defibrillator to deliver a shock to the heart. This was the state of God's people. God had warned them over and again through the prophets. And He had sought to turn them back to Him by even the most severe forms of fatherly discipline. But there was no response. Nothing. It was like God's people had gone into a coma of sin; and there was nothing waking them up. There was only one thing left to do.

And so, we read in 2 Kings 17:6: "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria. . ." The exile began with *northern Israel*. The Assyrians came up against them and besieged their capital, Samaria, for three years. Afterwards, they took the city, and "Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria" (2 Kings 17:23). Things lasted a little longer for the kingdom of *southern Judah*. Many of those living in Judah thought they were immune from the possibility of being exiled. They trusted in the fact that they had the Davidic king reigning over them and they had the temple in Jerusalem. But soon enough, they were also sent into exile; this time by the hand of the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem, overtook it, and captured the king: "Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem. . . Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons. . ." (2 Chronicles 36:19-20). Exile had become a reality.¹⁴

	DESCRIPTION OF SIN	DURATION OF KINGDOM	DESTINATION OF EXILE	DATE OF EXILE
NORTHERN ISRAEL	Rampant idolatry	Sent first into exile	Exiled to Assyria	722 B.C.
SOUTHERN JUDAH	Religious formality	Sent later into exile	Exiled to Babylon	586 B.C.

It's hard to put into words just how devastating the exile was for God's people. It was horrific. Both the Assyrians and Babylonians were known for their cruelty. Many husbands and fathers would have been brutally killed during the capturing of the city, but the brutality also extended to the women and children (see Hosea 13:16 and Psalm 137:8-9). Those who survived from northern Israel were led

¹³ The imagery of the pain of childbirth is often connected with the judgment of the exile in the prophets: See Isaiah 26:17; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:9-10. Not only that, this imagery is also associated with the judgment of foreign nations for their wickedness as well (Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; Jeremiah 49:24; 50:43). Jesus also uses this same language to describe the beginning of the signs of the end: "But all these things are merely *the beginning of birth pangs*." (Matthew 24:8). For the particular instances of these birth-pangs in 1 and 2 Kings, notice: Israel's rebellion reaches new heights under Ahab in 1 Kings 16:29-34, leading to FAMINE in 1 Kings 17. *Relief* in 1 Kings 18, followed by future labor pains promised in 19:15-18. *Relief* in 1 Kings 20, followed by more wickedness in 21:1-16, leading to the SWORD in 1 Kings 22. Then *relief and rest* in 2 Kings 3 and 6:1-23, followed by FAMINE again in 2 Kings 6:24-33. *Relief* again in 2 Kings 7, followed by FAMINE and the SWORD in 8:1-15. *Relief* in 2 Kings 9-10, then the SWORD in 10:32-33, and again in 13:1-3. *Relief* in 2 Kings 13:4-5, 17, 22-25 and 14:25-27, but then in 2 Kings 15:29 it is the beginning of the end for Israel when the EXILE begins. We can note that while *pestilence* or *plague* isn't mentioned much in Kings and Chronicles, Amos 4:9-10 tells us that God sent it.

¹⁴ As Jonty Rhodes notes: "The last two chapters of 2 Kings lay out the near-total unpicking of the covenant blessings. The paradise land is struck with a famine so severe that no one can eat. Thousands of people are carried off into exile in Babylon. The covenant king himself is dethroned and imprisoned. And perhaps most horrific of all, God's temple, the place of his presence, is destroyed. People, paradise, God's presence, and the covenant king all lie in tatters. . ." (from *Covenants Made Simple*). Robertson says: "Though circumcised formally, Abraham's descendants now were treated as the uncircumcised, and so were cast out of the land." (*Christ of the Covenants*, p271). And again: "The prophets of Israel's later history served their contemporaries well by insisting on the inevitability of God's judgment on covenant breakers. The false idea of a wholly unconditional covenant relationship was proven to rest on an improper assumption." (*Christ of the Covenants*, pp271-72).

away with meat-hooks in their noses (Amos 4:2). The king of Judah was made to watch the death of his own sons before being blinded and led away to Babylon. But the pain went even deeper, because it seemed that everything God had done for His people was coming untrue. The God who had cut a covenant with Abraham and his descendants was now casting those descendants away. The God who had freed His people from their captivity in Egypt was now sending them back as captives to Assyria and Babylon. Their God, who had planted them in the land under David, was now uprooting them from it. The whole world was coming unraveled and spinning out of control. God had made them *a people*; but now He was cutting them off. He had given them *a place*; but now He was casting them away. He had crowned them with His *presence*; but now the temple was a burning heap of ruins.¹⁵

C) The Cause of the Exile: Some people have the notion that Israel was sent into exile because they broke God's commands: God had given them His Law, but they didn't keep that Law perfectly as He commanded, so He sent them away into exile. The notion is that God dealt with Israel according to the Law in the Old Testament, but now He deals with us in grace. But this understanding misses the whole point of what was happening in the exile. In Jeremiah 2:35, God tells His people: "Behold, I will enter into judgment with you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'" In other words, Israel wasn't being sent into exile because they had too much sin; they were being sent into exile because *they had refused to acknowledge their sin*. The problem wasn't the presence of their sin, it was rather a *lack of turning back to God*. Throughout the prophets it's the same message: Israel isn't being sent into exile because they've failed to keep some kind of law of works, but because *they've refused to return to the Lord* (Amos 4:6-12). What God was commanding wasn't better obedience; it was *repentance* (Hosea 14:1). The problem wasn't that Israel *broke the Law*; it was that they had *broken faith* with the Lord. Indeed, the covenant they had broken wasn't the Covenant of Works; it was *the Covenant of Grace*.¹⁶

THE CAUSE OF THE EXILE

NOT	A lack of better obedience	They broke the law of the Lord	Failure to keep a Covenant of Works
BUT	A lack of faith and repentance	They broke faith with the Lord	Failure to embrace the Covenant of Grace

And as we saw in the last lesson, the exile was about God's dealings with the entire body of the visible Church, corporately, as a whole. There were godly men, like Jeremiah and Daniel, who were swept away with the exile; why did they have to go through it along with everyone else? Because the exile wasn't about God's dealings with particular individuals; it was about God's dealings with the corporate body of the Church, as a whole. And the Church, in the days leading up to the exile, had become an apostate Church. It was no longer a Church that followed her Lord. In Leviticus 14, God gives the priests instructions about what to do when there was an infection of leprosy in a house. He was to go and look at the mark, and if it appeared deeper than the surface, he was to quarantine the house for seven days. But if the mark of leprosy had spread further after he came back to inspect it, the priest was to order them to tear out the stones, scrape out the plaster, and take it all out to an unclean place outside the city. Well, Scripture often speaks of "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah"; and over time, the whole house had developed an infection of chronic unbelief. God was like the priest, and he had been patient and given them time, but instead of going away, the leprosy of unbelief had only spread all the more; there was only one thing left for God to do. If God's people as a whole had embraced covenant faith, manifesting itself in corporate allegiance, it would have, in turn, resulted in corporate blessing. But *corporate apostasy* led God's people into the *corporate judgment* of the exile.

¹⁵ It's important to note that though God used the Assyrians the Babylonians to execute judgment against His people, that in no way meant the Assyrians and Babylonians were innocent of great wrongdoing themselves. It's the same principle we see at the cross, where Peter, speaking of Jesus, says to the Jews: "this man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." (Acts 2:23). In other words, God ordained and planned it—but they were still responsible. As the Westminster Confession puts it: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass, yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." (3.1). The Assyrians and Babylonians were godless men who did awful things. They will be held accountable, and in due time, the Lord would punish both nations for their own wickedness: "[The prophets] warned the people of the way God would use the Gentile nations as His instruments in judging Israel. They also warned the nations. . . God would indeed use them, but He would also judge them (Isaiah 10:5-19; 34:2-4)." (Clowney, p191).

¹⁶ This command to *return* is indeed echoed throughout the prophets, and it seems to be the single unifying exhortation to God's people leading up to the exile. Along with Hosea 14:1, see also Isaiah 31:6; Jeremiah 3:12,14,22 and Joel 2:12-13.

D) The Result of the Exile: God had cast Israel out of the land, and it seemed like this was the end for them. God had finally had enough. The Davidic king had been dethroned and taken into exile; the temple had been burned to the ground; and they themselves had been uprooted from the land God had promised their forefathers. It seemed like this was the end of the road for Israel: God was done with them forever. But it wasn't true. This wasn't the last chapter for Israel. We're given a hint of this way back in *Deuteronomy 30*. Here, Moses predicts that Israel would be banished from the land—but in the same breath he affirms they would be brought back in again, after they had humbled themselves and returned to the Lord (vv1-5). And the Lord says in *Leviticus 26:44-45*: “Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord.” Even before God had brought Israel into the land, He knew He would have to cast them out of it—but He also purposed to bring them back in.

And even before the exile, the prophets began *repeating* this message and also *expanding on it*: God would send judgment, yet He would “not execute a complete destruction” (Jeremiah 4:27) upon His people, but He would preserve “a remnant within them” (Isaiah 10:20-21). This remnant He would then bring back to the land, where He would again renew and restore them. As Amos says: “In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David. . . I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old. . . Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them. . .” (9:11-15). Israel's *future restoration* was just as certain a reality as their *present exile*. So much so that Isaiah named his two sons after these two truths. His second son he named, “Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey”, to signify the judgment of God's people (8:3-4). But his first son he named, “A remnant will return” (7:3). And so, the prophets “trumpeted disaster and doom, but they also announced that the Lord was not finished with His people. . . After the thunderstorm of judgment would come the bright rainbow of promise.” Israel had been uprooted from their land, but they would be planted back in once again. The temple had been leveled to the ground, but it would be rebuilt. God was disciplining and purging His people, but He wasn't breaking His covenant: The Lord would spare Israel a *remnant*; bring them back into the land; and *restore* them once again.¹⁷

WHAT ISRAEL WAS EXPERIENCING	WHAT GOD WAS SAYING THROUGH THE PROPHETS	
Complete Devastation	The Devastation of Exile would Not be Total	<i>God would spare a Remnant</i>
	The Devastation of Exile would Not be Final	<i>God would grant Restoration</i>

E) The Significance of the Exile: The idea of exile isn't something entirely new. Israel's exile points us back, first of all, to *the exile of Eden*. Because of his sin, Adam and his wife were cast away from the “garden of delight”; thrust away from God's presence. And it wasn't just Adam and his wife who were sent away from the garden into a state of exile—it was all humanity along with him. Because of Adam's sin, all of us are born into a state of spiritual exile, alienated from the Lord and cut off from His presence (Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:13,21). Only through Christ Jesus can there once again be restoration; only through the blood of Christ can we be brought back from our spiritual exile and restored to fellowship with God. *Exile* came through the first Adam, *restoration* through the second.

Israel's exile also points us forward to *the exile of the coming judgment*. Isaiah refers to the coming exile as “the day of punishment” (10:3). Joel describes it as “the day of the Lord” in such a way that makes it seem he's talking more about the final judgment than he is about the exile. And indeed, this is because Joel is setting forth the judgment of the exile as a type of the greater judgment yet to come.

¹⁷ Isaiah 8:18 clarifies the obvious: “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts. . .” It's also significant that Isaiah's *first* son signified hope; as if hope was firmly grounded even before the judgment. The quote cited above is from Edmund Clowney (*Unfolding Mystery*, p195). The chart below is also adapted from another quote by Clowney: “Two answers were given to the question of despair that even the prophets shared. First, the destruction would not be total: God would spare a *remnant*. Second, the destruction would not be final: God would bring *renewal*.” (p195, *Unfolding Mystery*). The renewal aspect is there but we will focus on it in more detail later. Perhaps the dual aspects of *God returning Israel to their land* and *renewing them in the land* could both fit best under *Restoration*.

He cries: “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.” And he says: “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. . .” (1:15; 2:31). We could also mention that it wasn't just Israel's exile that points us forward to the final judgment. After God had dealt with Israel in the exile, He would go on to deal with all the other surrounding Gentile nations. Joel had used the language of “the day of the Lord” to describe God's judgment of *Israel*, but later he would use the same language to describe God's judgment on *the nations* (3:14). And Isaiah uses the same imagery to describe the judgment that would come upon Babylon: “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near. . .all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them . . . They will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame” (13:6-8). The day of reckoning that would begin with Israel and extend to all nations points us forward to exile of the final judgment.

Finally, Israel's exile points us to *the exile Jesus endured at the cross*. Probably the clearest prophecy of Christ's sufferings in all of the Old Testament is Isaiah 53. Here, we're told the Messiah would be “pierced through for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (v5). Why? Because “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” (v6). But then Isaiah goes on to further describe Christ's sufferings in this way, in verse 8: “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?” The way Isaiah is describing what happened to Jesus at the cross is that He was *cut off out of the land of the living*. It's the imagery of exile. We were the ones who deserved to be exiled; cut off from living fellowship with God. But at the cross, Jesus was exiled in our place.¹⁸

THE EVENT OF THE EXILE	THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXILE	SCRIPTURE
Israel and Judah exiled to Assyria & Babylon	Points us back to the exile from EDEN	Eph.4:18; Col.1:13
	Points us ahead to the exile of JUDGMENT	Joel 1-3; Is.13:6-8
	Points us to Jesus' exile at THE CROSS	Isaiah 53:8

II. The Prophecies of the New Covenant

In *the last section*, we covered Israel's history from Solomon all the way up to the exile. Here in *this next section* we're going to transition to looking at what the Prophets say to God's people during their time in exile, and especially what they say about the new covenant. We'll be splitting this section into two parts: *In the first part* we'll be studying the prophets as a whole and what they say about the new covenant; and *in the second part* we'll be focusing specifically on what we learn about the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

PART I: THE PROPHETS AND THE NEW COVENANT

1. Understanding the ORIGINAL CONTEXT:

A) The Prophets: Jeremiah is the only prophet who actually uses the phrase, “new covenant”, and he only does so once, in a passage recorded in 31:31-34. But even in the overall context of this passage in Jeremiah 31, it's clear that Jeremiah associates the new covenant with some particular overarching themes, such as *Israel's returning to their land* (30:3; 32:37; 33:7); *the reversal of the covenant curses* (31:4-5,12-14,28; 32:40-42; 33:6-7,10-11); *the raising up of a new Davidic king* (30:9; 33:14ff); as well as *God's writing His Law on the hearts of His people* (31:33; 32:39-40); *the forgiveness of sin* (31:34; 33:8); and the reiteration of God's covenant promise that *Israel would be His people and He would be their God* (30:22; 31:33; 32:38). All of these themes are centered around what God would do for His people when He brought them back from their captivity in Babylon. So, what's really vital for us to understand is that the “new covenant” is associated with *all the things that God would do for Israel*

¹⁸ The Hebrew verb used here for *cut off* (*gazar*) is not the Hebrew verb for *cut off* normally used in association with the exile (*karat*). Still, this verb (*gazar*) is explicitly used in Ezekiel 37:11 to describe Israel's being cut off in the exile. As David Murray notes: “Just as Israel's exodus prefigured the work of Jesus in redeeming Israel from its sins, so Israel's exile and restoration prefigured *Jesus' exile* for the sins of God's people and His subsequent glorious restoration. . .” (*Jesus on Every Page*, p133).

when *He restored them from exile*. And though the other prophets don't use the specific language of the "new covenant", they do speak of these same themes.¹⁹ Many of the prophets announced Israel's future restoration, but this was especially true of the Major Prophets: *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, and *Ezekiel*.²⁰

PROPHET	DATE	TIME-FRAME OF PROPHECY	THRUST OF PROPHECY	
ISAIAH	740-686 B.C.	Before the Exile happens	There will be EXILE	There will be RESTORATION
JEREMIAH	626-586 B.C.	While the Exile happens		
EZEKIEL	592-572 B.C.	After the Exile happens		

B) The Situation: In Ezekiel 37, the prophet has a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. The Lord explains the vision to the prophet Ezekiel in this way: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'" (37:11). Israel's situation was so hopeless it was like a grave. The exile was death, and now they had been buried in Babylon. Through all His dealings, God had been so merciful to them, but they had "turned their mercies into miseries." God had given them a thousand chances, but they had blown them all; and now it was too late. Everything was ruined. They had scorned their temple and squandered their king. They had cast themselves out of the land and now they lay like dead corpses in the graves they dug for themselves in Babylon: "No exiled Israelite could paint a darker picture of the condition of a captive and scattered people. The situation was beyond human remedy."²¹

C) The Message: Everything shouted that God was done with Israel. But the prophets, speaking in God's name, declared something very different. In the words of Jeremiah: "This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation," declares the Lord. . ." (Jeremiah 25:11-12). "For thus says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'" (29:10).

¹⁹ Jeremiah only uses the phrase "new covenant" in 31:31, but 31:31-34 is part of the overall context of chapters 30-33 where Jeremiah is speaking of Israel's restoration. So, Jeremiah's understanding of the new covenant shouldn't be limited to 31:31-34 but extends (at the least) to the whole of chapters 30-33. This is confirmed by the fact that the same things promised in 31:31-34 are reiterated throughout the whole of 30-33: *God's writing His law on the heart of His people* isn't just mentioned in 31:33 but reiterated in 32:39-40. *The forgiveness of sin*, heralded in 31:34, is repeated in 33:8. The promise that *God would be Israel's God and they would be His people* isn't exclusive to 31:31-34, but is given both before (30:22) and after (32:38). And these same themes are also trumpeted by the other prophets. Thus, as Ligon Duncan puts it: "Jeremiah 31. . .[is] the only passage in the prophetic literature which uses the terminology new covenant. . .But. . .even in passages where the terminology of new covenant is not used in the Old Testament, the concept of new covenant is very present." And again: "Though Jeremiah is the only prophet to use the term new covenant, he is certainly not the only prophet to use the concept of new covenant." Robertson likewise notes of Jeremiah 31:31-34: "Although this passage in Jeremiah alone in the old covenant Scriptures mentions specifically a 'new covenant', the concept of the new covenant cannot be restricted to this single prophecy. A significant complex of ideas surrounds Jeremiah's prediction of the new covenant. These ideas are developed rather extensively in a group of prophecies found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is only in the broader context of these passages related to the new covenant that the message of Jeremiah 31:31-34 may be appreciated fully." (pp273-74). And again: "It is essential to see the new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah in this total biblical-theological setting. Although the term 'new covenant' occurs only in Jeremiah 31, the complex of ideas depicting the future expectation of God's people has a very broad base." (p278).

²⁰ Roberts notes: "This covenant was first and most especially revealed to three holy prophets from the Lord, and by them to the Jews: 1) *To the prophet Isaiah* long before the captivity of the Jews in Babylon came to pass. . .2) *To Ezekiel* in the twelfth year of their captivity. . .3) *To the prophet Jeremiah* in the eighteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar. . .God revealed and foretold by his prophet *Isaiah*, that He would make such a covenant with His people, that should be captives in Babylon, long before the captivity came to pass. This is very observable in the fourth and last part of his prophecy which is promissory, from chapter 40:1 to the end of his book, which is especially directed to His people, with reference to their captivity in Babylon, which should certainly come to pass. Most, if not all his sermons after that, observably insisting upon their Babylonian captivity, their comforts under it, their certain deliverance out of it, and the happy restoration of their church and common wealth, their temple, city Jerusalem, etc, when they should be brought again into their own land. . .God revealed this covenant also to *Jeremiah* in the court of the prison, in the eighteenth year of the captivity, when Jerusalem was besieged [in Jeremiah 32:37-40]. . .God revealed this covenant to his prophet *Ezekiel* [in 34:23-25]. . .His covenant promises are also sweetly laid down in chapter 36:22, etc. And afterwards [when] God having brought him in the Spirit into the valley full of bones, representing the dead and hopeless condition of the captives in Babylon, among many other sweet expressions, has these words [in Ezekiel 37:26-27]. . .In which chapters 36 and 37, this covenant is most sweetly described; especially in 36:22 to the end; and in 37:21 to the end. . .There are sundry other passages in the prophets setting forth the excellent blessings promised in this covenant; but this covenant is most eminently and peculiarly described by *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Jeremiah*." (pp1086-90).

²¹ The first quote is from Francis Roberts, p1103. The second is from Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, p194.

Exile was real, but it wouldn't be the last word. It was *awful*, but it wouldn't be *final*. Israel had turned their mercies into miseries, but God intended to turn “their miseries *again into mercies*.” They had let the temple become a heap of ruins, but God would rebuild it. They had thrust themselves out of the land, but God would bring them back in. They lay as dead men in their graves. But as Ezekiel looked over that valley of bones, God told him: “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.’” (37:12-13). In other words, “[God] could bring them out of Babylon into their own land, against all seeming improbabilities and impossibilities. Though they were as dead and dry bones, though buried in their graves. . .yet God could open their graves, and bring them out of their graves.” What the prophets were announcing to God's people was completely astounding: If Israel's exile in Babylon was *death*, then what the prophets foretold was *resurrection*.²²

	WHAT IT WAS	WHAT IT WAS LIKE	SCRIPTURE
ISRAEL'S HOPELESS SITUATION	Exile in Babylon	Death and burial in the grave	Ezekiel 37:11
THE PROPHETS ASTOUNDING DECLARATION	Restoration to the land	Resurrection from the dead	Ezekiel 37:12

2. Overviewing the GENERAL THEMES:

We mentioned that the new covenant is associated with all the things God would do for Israel when He restored them from exile. In Jeremiah 31:31, the Lord speaks of these future dealings as “*a new covenant*” with His people; but that's not the only way it's described in Scripture. Another way God describes these future dealings with His people is in Jeremiah 32:40, where the Lord says He would make “*an everlasting covenant*” with them. And in Ezekiel 34:25, the Lord looks ahead to these days and describes His dealings with Israel as making “*a covenant of peace*” with them (cf. Ezekiel 37:26).

These Scriptures are all talking about the same thing; just using slightly different language. But in all these passages that speak of Israel's future restoration, we can mention two things: *1) God is referring to these future dealings with His people in the language of covenant.* What God was going to do for His people was make a covenant with them. This is exciting. We haven't heard about God making a covenant with His people since the days of David. But now God is saying: I'm getting ready to make a covenant with you once again.²³ *2) This covenant God would make with His people wasn't going to*

²² Both quotes are from Francis Roberts. The full quotes are: “The sins of these Jews turned their mercies into miseries. . . But it is only the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, that according to this His covenant, turns their miseries again into mercies.” (p1103). And: “[God] could bring them out of Babylon into their own land, against all seeming improbabilities and impossibilities. Though they were as dead and dry bones, though buried in their graves. . .yet God could open their graves, and bring them out of their graves. He could give them a resurrection in Babylon.” (p1094). Roberts also says: “They could destroy their temple and holy city; God alone could cause them both to be rebuilt. They could cast themselves out of Canaan; God alone brings them back again into Canaan. They could bring themselves into Babylonian bondage and graves; God alone can break their bonds and bring them out. . .” (Roberts, p1103). And again: “In that sad and long captivity, God's covenant with David lay as dead, and David's seed as buried and cut off; but God would deliver them thence, and revive them out of their graves.” (p1110). Roberts comments again: “Oh they too much dishonored God, and forgot this His faithful covenant, when they spoke so despairingly: ‘Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts.’ But what said the Lord? ‘Behold, O my people, I will open your graves [namely], your Babylonian graves) and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.’ He would open their graves, and raise up their dead and dry bones, rather than His faithful covenant should fail, and not be performed.” (p1100). Roberts concludes by saying: “Hence, No Difficulties whatsoever or seeming impossibilities can hinder the accomplishment of Gods Covenants and Promises. God in this covenant promised to bring His people out of Babylon into Canaan, and to place them there. Alas! How hard and impossible a thing might this seem unto them? Canaan was wasted and depopulated; the holy city and temple destroyed and laid on heaps; the Jews carried captive into Babylon and there entombed like dead persons in their graves; the Babylonian kingdom being at that time the great and potent empire over the world, unlikely to be subdued by any visible power; and Babylon itself the royal seat of the empire being so strongly fortified; *naturally* by the great river Euphrates, *artificially* by walls extraordinarily thick and high. Yet notwithstanding all these difficulties and visible impossibilities, Gods covenant and promises for the Jews deliverance were exactly performed when the seventy years were accomplished, Cyrus and Darius taking Babylon in that night after Belshazzar and his Lords had sensually feasted and quaffed in the silver and golden vessels of the temple: immediately after which Cyrus proclaims liberty to the captives to return into Canaan for rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem. So they were placed in their own land, and (though they had troublous times, and many subtle malicious and potent adversaries, whereby the work was long obstructed and retarded, yet) they builded, prospered and finished.” (Roberts, pp1207-08).

²³ The context of this covenant as compared with those previous is also significant: “When God made covenant with Israel at

happen until later. All these passages speak about this covenant God would make with Israel in the future tense. In Jeremiah 31:31, the Lord says: “Behold, days are coming. . .when *I will make* a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . .” It’s the same thing in Jeremiah 32:40: “*I will make* an everlasting covenant with them. . .” And in both Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26, God says, “*I will make* a covenant of peace with them. . .” *It’s all in the future.* Every other time God makes a covenant with His people, it’s always in the present tense: the Lord comes to Adam in the garden and makes a covenant with him; He establishes his covenant with Noah; He cuts a covenant with Abram; He confirms His covenant to David. But now here, it’s in the future tense, to show us that God isn’t actually making this covenant with the exiles in Babylon—He’s speaking of something yet to come.

To summarize: 1) God is declaring He is going to make another covenant with His people. 2) This covenant is described in Jeremiah 31 as *a new covenant*, but it’s also described in other places in the prophets as *an everlasting covenant* (Jeremiah 42:40) and *a covenant of peace* (Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26). And lastly, 3) This covenant is associated with all the things God was going to do for Israel when He restored them from exile in Babylon. What were all these things that God was going to do for Israel? There were five promises in particular that God was making to His people: God was going to *return His people to their land*; He would *raise up for His people once again a Davidic king*; He was going to grant a *widespread spiritual reformation of His people*; He would *reverse the covenant curses He had sent to His people*; and He would *rebuild the temple* and dwell with His people once again.²⁴

WHAT IT WAS CALLED	SCRIPTURE	WHAT IT WAS ABOUT	WHAT IT WAS GOD WOULD DO
A New Covenant	Jeremiah 31:31	RESTORATION	Return His people once again to their land
			Raise up for His people again the Davidic king
An Everlasting Covenant	Jeremiah 32:40		Renew His people in an unprecedented way
			Reverse for His people the covenant curses
A Covenant of Peace	Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26		Rebuild the temple and dwell with His people

A) Return to the land: The first thing God was promising to the exiles in Babylon was that He would bring them back to their land once again. In Jeremiah 30:3 we read: “For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The Lord says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.’” Ezekiel likewise announces: “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land. . .’” (37:21). As our first parents were cast out of Eden, Israel had been cast out of Canaan. But it wasn’t the final word. God would gather His scattered people and bring them back into their land.

Sinai, they were a newly redeemed people; when he covenanted with David they were a people advanced to high prosperity and peace under a royal government; but when He covenanted with these captives, they were in an afflicted and enthralled condition. Then at Sinai, after at Zion; now, in Babylon. Then, in an anarchy, without any settled government; after, under a monarchy, under kingly government; but now, under tyranny, even the cruel Babylonian government.” (Roberts, p1222).

²⁴ These themes have been categorized in slightly different ways. Ligon Duncan follows O Palmer Robertson who summarizes these major themes “which relate essentially to the new covenant concept” as: 1) *The return of exiled Israel to the land of promise* (Jeremiah 30:3; 32:37; 50:5-19; Ezekiel 37:21,26); 2) *The restoration of God’s blessing on the land [and resurrection of His people]* (Jeremiah 32:43; 31:38-40; Ezekiel 37:12, 26); 3) *The divine fulfillment of previous covenantal commitments* (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:24-25); 4) *The Internal renewal by the work of God’s Holy Spirit* (Jeremiah 3:17; 31:33; 32:40; Ezekiel 37:14, 23); 5) *The full forgiveness of sins* (Jeremiah 31:34; 50:20; 33:8); 6) *The union of Israel and Judah* (Jeremiah 31:31; 50:4; Ezekiel 37:15f; 34:23); and 7) *The everlasting character of the new covenant* (Jeremiah 50:5) (see pp273-78). We have combined #4 and #5 and will deal with them together; we haven’t included #3 and #7 as these seem to strike more at the nature of what the new covenant is as opposed to what God has promised to do in the new covenant (we’ll come back later to deal with the nature of the new covenant). Francis Roberts summarizes the major themes in this way: “The subject matter or substance of this covenant on God’s part, consisted in many excellent covenant mercies promised therein to His afflicted captives. . . 1) His raising up the Messiah, [namely] Jesus Christ unto them. . . 2) His redeeming them out of Babylon’s captivity, and bringing them into their own land. . . 3) God’s cleansing of His people the Jews, when redeemed out of Babylon . . . from all their idols, from all their detestable things, and from all their transgressions. . . 4) God’s putting His Spirit within them, for the new framing and spiritualizing their heart. . . 5) God’s presence and residence in His sanctuary and tabernacle among His people, by His Spirit, Word, and public ministry forever. . . 6) God’s greatest covenant relation between himself and them; [namely] that He would be their God, and they should be His people. . . 7) Finally, the seventh and last covenant blessing, which the Lord in this covenant promised to His captives, was; the mutual covenant constancy between God and them in this everlasting covenant: He would not turn from them, and they should not depart from Him.” (p1105ff-1199).

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION	SCRIPTURE
PLACE	Israel was cast out of the land	They would be brought back in	Jer. 30:3; 32:37; Ezek. 34:12-13; 37:12,21

B) Raising up of the Davidic King: Not only would the Lord gather His scattered flock from among the nations; He would also raise up for them a shepherd. God declares through Ezekiel: “I will care for my sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered. . . Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.” (34:23-24). Obviously, David had already lived and died many years before. But the prophets were foretelling the coming of One like David who would come forth from David and reign on his throne (Isaiah 11:1,10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-16). Ezekiel says: “I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. . . My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. . .” (37:21-22,24). Notice how Ezekiel emphasizes that Israel would have *one shepherd* and be *one nation*. Ever since the kingdom had been divided under Rehoboam, there had been *two shepherds* leading *two distinct nations* (one in northern Israel and one in Judah). But the prophets looked forward to a day when God would unify His people under one shepherd.²⁵

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION	SCRIPTURE
PRINCE	The Davidic king was dethroned	He would reign once again	Is. 11; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25

C) Renewal of the people: Earlier we mentioned that God's people went into exile because they had become a church that had stopped following her Lord. There was a spiritual leprosy that had spread throughout God's people; an infection of chronic unbelief. The church, as a whole, had become an apostate church; and this corporate apostasy had led to the corporate judgment of the exile. But the prophets announced that God would do two things for His people: *1) He would forgive them.* God says through Jeremiah: “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (31:34). It would, indeed, come at a great cost, but Israel's sins would be completely atoned for. And not only would God forgive His people, *2) He would change them.* This seems to be the primary focus of the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31. God says: “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (31:33). Ezekiel likewise speaks of God giving His people a new heart and putting a new spirit within them (36:26-27). And so, the Lord would accomplish a great work *for His people* in atoning for their sins, and He would accomplish a great work *in His people* in changing their hearts. Both these things He would do in the restoration.

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION	SCRIPTURE
PEOPLE	God's people had chronic unbelief	God would forgive and change them	Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26-27

D) Reversal of the covenant curses: Leading up to the exile, God's people were made to experience the covenant curses of famine, pestilence, and the sword. The exile was the ultimate covenant curse. But now, the prophets foretold a reversal of the curses: Instead of famine there would be abundance; instead of drought there would be showers of blessing. The tree of the field will yield its fruit and the produce of the earth will bring forth its fullness (Ezekiel 34:25-29). God would “call for the grain and multiply it, and. . . multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field” (Ezekiel 36:29-30); and He would “eliminate harmful beasts from the land” so that His people could “live securely” (34:25). In short, there would be “a [cataclysmic] reversal of the curse of sin.” The covenant curses were sent as judgment for sin. Scripture tells us that the ultimate curse for sin is death; and in the exile, God's people were as dead men in Babylon. But in the restoration there would be a resurrection, and “the resurrection is the ultimate reversal of the curse of sin.” Israel was dead in their sin, but God would raise them from the dead; and in doing so, set into motion a cataclysmic reversal of the curse of sin.²⁶

²⁵ Duncan notes: “the idea of him being one shepherd is very significant, because the last time there had been one shepherd was when Solomon was reigning. Ever since, post Solomon, there had been two shepherds at least reigning in and amongst the peoples of God in the northern and southern kingdoms. And Ezekiel is longing for the day when there is one shepherd.” Robertson says: “a hallmark of the new covenant will be the merging of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. . . As the people of God are bound in the new covenant to the God of the covenant, so they are bound inseparably with one another.” (p277).

²⁶ The quotes are from Ligon Duncan. The full quote from Duncan is this: “There will be a reversal of the curse of sin.

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION	SCRIPTURE
PEACE	God had sent His covenant curses	He would send His covenant blessings	Ezekiel 34:25-29; 36:29-30

E) Rebuilding of the temple: When Solomon had dedicated the temple, the Lord appeared to him and warned him that if he or his sons turned away from following the Lord, God would cut off Israel from the land that He had given them, and the house, which He had consecrated for His name, He would “cast out” of His sight; it would “become a heap of ruins” (1 Kings 9:7-8). Sure enough, when the Babylonians come against Jerusalem and defeat it, among other things “they burned the house of God. . .and destroyed all its valuable articles.” (2 Chronicles 36:19). The temple—the place that had represented God's presence among His people—had been burned to the ground. But when the Lord promised to bring His people back to their land, He also made another promise: “I will. . . set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.” (Ezekiel 37:26-27). God's sanctuary had been destroyed—but it would be rebuilt again. The Lord even declares that the glory of the second temple “will be greater than the former” (Haggai 2:9). Not only would the temple be rebuilt—the next one will be better than the first. And once it was rebuilt, it would never again be destroyed, for this sanctuary would endure *forever*.²⁷

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION	SCRIPTURE
PRESENCE	The temple had been destroyed	He would set His tabernacle in their midst forever	Ezek.37:26-27

Israel had been cast out of their land, but God would bring them back. They had squandered their king, but God would put His Davidic shepherd-king back on the throne. God's people suffered from chronic unbelief, but the Lord would forgive their sins and change them from the inside. They had brought on themselves the curses of the covenant, but God would grant a cataclysmic reversal of the covenant curses. The temple had been burned to the ground, but God would raise it back up again:

	IN THE EXILE	IN THE RESTORATION
PLACE	Israel had been cast out of the land	God would bring them back into the land
PRINCE	The Davidic king had been dethroned	God would raise up once again the Davidic king
PEOPLE	God's people had turned away in rebellion	God would forgive their sins and change them
PEACE	God had poured out His covenant curses	God would pour out His covenant blessings
PRESENCE	The temple of God's presence was destroyed	God would set His sanctuary in their midst forever

3. Unpacking the COMPLETE SIGNIFICANCE:

In one sense, all these promises were fulfilled when the Lord restored His people from Babylon and brought them back into their land. But just like every other manifestation of the Covenant of Grace, there is a *dual fulfillment* to these promises. When the prophets looked ahead and spoke of Israel's restoration, they knew it would include all the things we've mentioned, but they also knew that behind these things there was so much more: “Jesus Christ, and the gospel of sinners' salvation through faith in him, was preached to the Jews in their captivity.” All these promises ultimately looked forward to Jesus and the gospel. There was indeed a partial fulfillment in Israel's restoration from Babylon, but this deliverance God wrought for His people points us to an even greater deliverance still to come.²⁸

Which is, of course, death. . . The dry bones resurrected are a picture of the everlasting covenant and how it brings a reviving to the people of God, from death to life. . . And of course, the redemption of our bodies. . . is seen to be a direct fulfillment of that old covenant promise of the full restoration of blessings. The resurrection is the ultimate reversal of the curse of sin.”

²⁷ The imagery of Ezekiel 37:26-27 is rich. The ESV Study Bible draws out the significance of the two Hebrew words used in these two verses: “The oracle's conclusion emphasizes the centrality of God's presence to the renewed people, the greatest of all blessings by far. The 'dwelling place' [of v27] (Heb. *mishkan*) recalls the wilderness tabernacle. The 'sanctuary' [v26] (Heb. *miqdash*) points rather to the temple, in particular the renewed temple, which will occupy Ezekiel's attention in chapter 44.”

²⁸ The quote is from Francis Roberts, p1101. Roberts goes on to summarize some of the particular ways in which Christ is set forth: “1) This covenant assured them of their return from Babylon to Zion, from captivity to liberty; and under that as a type, of the everlasting redemption of God's elect by Christ, out of their spiritual bondage under sin, and Satan. 2) This covenant assured them of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, with greater glory than formerly; and therein typically of the

	THE NEAR (PARTIAL) FULFILLMENT	THE FAR (ULTIMATE) FULFILLMENT
PLACE	God would bring them back into the land	JESUS AND THE GOSPEL
PRINCE	God would raise up once again the Davidic king	
PEOPLE	God would forgive their sins and change them	
PEACE	God would pour out His covenant blessings	
PRESENCE	God would set His sanctuary in their midst forever	

A) JESUS AND GOD'S PLACE: Earlier we mentioned that Israel's exile points us to the exile Jesus endured at the cross. Isaiah 53:8 tells us that “He was cut off out of the land of the living” for the sins of God's people. Here, Isaiah was speaking of *the Servant of the Lord*. Sometimes when Isaiah used this phrase he was referring to Israel in the corporate sense, speaking of God's people as a whole; but there were other times when Isaiah used this same phrase, “Servant of the Lord”, to describe Israel as a particular individual. Well, the prophet Isaiah foretold both exile and restoration for Israel; and when he did so, he wasn't only speaking of God's people as a whole, corporately; he was also looking forward and speaking of the Christ. Jesus is not only the second Adam; He's the second Israel. And as such, not only would He be cut off out of the land of the living; He would also be brought back in again: *If the exile is a picture of Jesus' death, the restoration points us forward to His resurrection.*²⁹

THE RETURN TO THE LAND AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
Israel's Physical Restoration from Exile	Jesus' Physical Resurrection from the Dead

There's also more that we can learn from Israel's exile and restoration. We saw earlier that the exile of Israel points us back to the exile of Eden. When Adam sinned, he was cast out of the garden; and all humanity along with him. Because of Adam's sin, every one of us are born into a state of spiritual exile; alienated from God and cut off from His presence. But *if Israel's exile to Babylon teaches us about our ruin in Adam, then their restoration to the land teaches us about our redemption in Jesus*. Israel was utterly powerless to deliver themselves; they were as helpless and hopeless as dead men in their graves (Ezekiel 37). But God would do for them what they could not do for themselves: They were as dead men in Babylon, but God would raise them up from the dead, deliver them from their captivity, and bring back to the land of promise. And is this not exactly what God has done for us in

building of His new city, and new spiritual temple, of both Jews and Gentiles, with surpassing spiritual glory. 3) This covenant assured them of pardon and cleansing, of justification and sanctification from all their idols and former uncleannesses. 4) This covenant assured them of a rich confluence of choicest spiritual blessings, from the saving influence of His Holy Spirit. 5) This covenant assured them, that David [namely], Jesus Christ the true David of God, should be their Prince and King forevermore. 6) This covenant assured them, that the Lord would be their God, and they should be His people, and that His tabernacle should be with them, yea He would set His sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore.” (pp1102-03). And again: “The Jews' deliverance from Babylon, was a reviving of their dead bones, an opening of their graves, and a bringing them as it were out of their graves in Babylon. So the elect's deliverance from their spiritual bondage, is their spiritual reviving and resurrection. . . The Jews were so delivered from Babylon, as that they were cleansed from their idols, detestable things and transgressions. And the elect are so delivered from their spiritual thralldom, that they are 'washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' The Jews delivered from Babylon, were called to build the temple of God (Ezra 1:1-3). So the elect being redeemed and actually delivered from their spiritual thralldom by Christ, 'are built up a spiritual house, as living stones. . . ' The Jews delivered from Babylon, came into their own land, the land of Canaan, their typical rest. So the elect are redeemed by Christ out of their spiritual bondage, that at last they might return into the true Canaan, heaven itself, the eternal rest promised to God's people, where they shall 'sit together with Christ in heavenly places.'” (Roberts, pp1124-25).

²⁹ As Clowney notes: “God's Servant was to be identified with Israel, and called by the name of Israel, yet He would also be distinguished from Israel, for He would bring back and restore those who would be preserved of Israel, and be God's light to the Gentiles.” (p202). Isaiah may also give us a glimpse of Jesus' “restoration to the land” later in the same chapter. After Jesus had endured the exile of the cross in Isaiah 53:8, God declares in verse 12: “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great. . .” To receive an allotted portion can mean inheriting or coming into possession of a land (cf. Joshua 13:7). So, Isaiah may well be using the same imagery of exile and restoration here, telling us that the Messiah would be exiled at the cross, but that after death, He would be brought back into the land once again. There are also other parallels we can draw between the restoration and the resurrection is that the exile was completely shocking for God's people, even though they had been told about it in advance. The only thing that seemed to surprise them more was when God brought them back to their land again—even though this was also precisely what the prophets had said would happen! In the same way, Jesus' death was shocking for His followers, even though He had predicted it from the very beginning. The only thing that seemed to astonish Jesus' disciples more than His death was His resurrection—though, again, this was precisely what Jesus had told them would happen.

Christ? For just like Israel, we were *dead in our sins*, but God, being rich in mercy, “even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. . . and raised us up with Him. . .” (Ephesians 2:5-6). And again, just as the Lord rescued Israel from Babylon, “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. . .” (Colossians 1:13-14). Truly, the *temporal redemption* God wrought for Israel when He brought them back from exile was always meant to point us forward to the *eternal redemption* He would accomplish for us in Christ.³⁰

THE RETURN TO THE LAND AND OUR REDEMPTION IN JESUS

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
Israel's Physical Deliverance from Captivity in Babylon	Our Spiritual Deliverance from Sin and Death in Christ

Lastly, *Israel's being gathered home to their land from exile points us forward to the day when Jesus will gather His people home to glory*. God's people lived as exiles in Babylon; they had to stay there many years, but it was never their true home. They longed for the day God had promised, when He would “bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their

³⁰ Roberts emphasizes this truth over and over again in his discussion of Israel's restoration to the land. He says: “Most, if not all [of Isaiah's] sermons after [Chapter 40 insist] upon their Babylonian captivity. . . and under this type [lead] them on further, to the great spiritual deliverance of God's people out of the woeful and more than Babylonian bondage under sin, Satan, [and] wrath, by the Messiah. . .” (p1089). And again: “This wondrous redemption of the captive Jews from Babylon had a spiritual mystery in it, shadowing out the greatest and spiritual redemption of God's elect from the bondage of sin, Satan, death, [and] hell, into which they were plunged by the Fall of the first Adam, and out of which they should be restored by Jesus Christ the last Adam.” (p1121). And later, “there is a notable analogy, or proportion between the Jews deliverance out of the Babylonian captivity, and the elect's deliverance from their spiritual captivity, for. . . there they were in as helpless and hopeless a condition, in reference to their deliverance, as dead bodies and dry bones in a grave. So the term from which the elect were delivered by Christ, is a state of sin, and a state of misery, under curse, wrath, death, [and] Satan; they being 'dead in trespasses and sins', 'under the power of Satan', and 'children of wrath, even as others'. The Jews deliverance from Babylon, was a reviving of their dead bones, an opening of their graves, and a bringing them as it were out of their graves in Babylon. So the elect's deliverance from their spiritual bondage, is their spiritual reviving and resurrection. . .” (p1124). And, “Hence, the great and wonderful redemption of captive Jews from Babylon to Canaan, was an eminent type of Christ's greater and more wonderful redemption of captive sinners from sin to grace; from Satan to God; from death to life; from hell to heaven. . . The Jews of old might notably spell out their spiritual redemption from sin and misery, in their corporal redemptions from Egypt and Babylon. These were to them, not only mercies, but mysteries; not only restorations for the present, but instructions also for the future.” (p1207). He concludes: “God in this covenant aimed at a higher end and advantage to His people than their present consolation; even their and their seeds' eternal salvation. And therefore under their corporal redemption from Babylonian bondage to Canaan's liberty and rest, He represents typically their spiritual redemption from sinful and hellish bondage to heaven by Jesus Christ.” (p1219). For, again: “Those promises about deliverance from captivity in the earthly Babylon, and the restoration of the captive Jews to their earthly Canaan, did chiefly intend spiritual mysteries; [namely] Christ's redemption of His spiritual captives from the bondage of sin and death, to life and heavenly glory. . .” (p1224). *In his discussion of this truth, and aside from the things already quoted, Roberts also gives several reasons for taking our redemption in Christ to be the fulfillment of Israel's restoration from exile, including these three:* 1) “The promises of God touching His people's deliverance from Babylon's captivity, are jointly proposed and intermixed with His promises of restoring His elect from spiritual captivity (cf. Isaiah 49; Daniel 9:2,24), which notably insinuates thus much to us; that in their redemption from Babylon's thralldom, God typed out their redemption from spiritual thralldom; and in that, they were especially to lift up their eyes to this.” Indeed, “Isaiah. . . assures the Jews of their deliverance by Cyrus. . . out of their sad Babylonian captivity (compare Isaiah 39-40 to 49:2) [and] he carries and raises them hereupon to behold and expect a far greater deliverance by Jesus Christ the Messiah, from spiritual captivity under sin, Satan, [and] wrath. . .” 2) “Unto God's covenant of promises for return of His people the Jews from Babylonian captivity, there are immediately annexed precious promises of the Messiah, for effecting and full completing thereof. And therefore after the Lord had largely expressed his covenant touching their return from Babylon (Jeremiah 32:26ff and 33:1-15), He presently adds: 'In those days, and at that time' ([namely] even in the days and time of this covenant with the captives, and before the expiration thereof) 'will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David'. . . In which expressions, the restoration of Israel, both from the Babylonian, and spiritual captivity, is ascribed to Christ, as to be accomplished by him fully and finally.” 3) “Israel's redemption of old from Egyptian bondage, was a plain type of the elect's redemption by Christ from spiritual bondage, as the mystery or sacrament of the Passover then. . . does unquestionably evince; . . much more, this greater redemption of the Jews from Babylonian bondage. . . was a type also of the elect's restoration by Christ from spiritual captivity. And therefore it is very observable, that when the Lord had promised, to gather his dispersed flock out of all countries, and to raise up to David a righteous Branch for saving Judah and Jerusalem, even 'The Lord our Righteousness', He presently adds, 'Therefore behold the days come saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, "The Lord liveth which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, the Lord liveth which brought up, and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north-country, and from all countries whither I had driven them, and they shall dwell in their own land.' By which he gives us to understand. . . [that] as Canaan whither they were to be brought, was a type of heaven, the eternal rest, so, both Egypt and Babylon, whence they were delivered, were types of their spiritual bondage and misery under sin, Satan, [and] death; and their redemption from Babylon was a type of their spiritual redemption by Christ, as well as their redemption from Egypt, and in some regards a more eminent type.” (see pp1121-25).

own land. . .” (Ezekiel 34:13), where the Lord himself would feed His flock and “lead them to rest” (34:15). Ezekiel declares that when God had gathered His people home, “They will live on the land” that He gave to Jacob; “they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, *forever*. . .” (37:25). And so, the rest that God was promising to give His people was an *eternal rest*. Though in some ways God did these things for His people when He brought them back into their land, these promises can only find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, on the day when He gathers us home to eternal glory. Peter writes that we live as exiles here on earth (1:1; 2:11); he even refers to Rome as Babylon (5:13). Like Israel, we are exiles in Babylon. But just as Israel looked forward to a promise of restoration, we look forward to “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21), when the Lord will gather His people out of this present “Babylon” in which we live as exiles, and bring us home to our eternal rest in *the new Jerusalem*.³¹

THE RETURN TO THE LAND AND THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
Israel's being Gathered Home from Exile to Jerusalem	Our being Gathered Home to the New Jerusalem

Summary: God's promise to return His people to their land was partially fulfilled when He brought Israel back from exile, but ultimately this promise looks forward to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, to Jesus' redeeming us from our sins, and to the day when Jesus will bring us home to eternal glory:

A SUMMARY: UNPACKING GOD'S PROMISE OF RETURNING ISRAEL TO THEIR LAND

	EXILE FROM THE LAND	RETURN TO THE LAND	SCRIPTURE
RESURRECTION	Jesus was made to endure exile at the cross	Jesus was brought up again from the dead	Isaiah 53:8
REDEMPTION	In Adam we were exiled from life with God	We've been brought back again through Jesus	Eph. 2:1-7
RESTORATION	We live as exiles in present-day Babylon	The Lord will bring us to the new Jerusalem	Acts 3:21

B) JESUS AND GOD'S PRINCE: In the exile, the Davidic king had been dethroned; but when the Lord brought Israel back to their land, He told them: “I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.” (Ezekiel 34:23-24). A shepherd-king would lead God's people in the restoration. Jeremiah refers to this same king as “a righteous Branch” whom the Lord would “raise up for David” (23:5-6; 33:14-16). Along with being called a *Branch*, Ezekiel speaks of this Davidic king as God's *servant*: “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. . . and David My servant will be their prince forever.” (37:24-25). In the restoration, God would raise up a shepherd-king for His people Israel. He would be called “a branch”, He would be called God's “servant”; and He would be a descendant of David. Later, the prophet Zechariah tells us he wouldn't only be a *king*, but “a *priest* on His throne” (7:13).

When God brings Israel back to their land, He raises up a man named *Joshua* to help shepherd His people. Joshua is the high priest (Haggai 1:1), and at one point God instructs Zechariah the prophet to make a crown of silver and gold, set it on Joshua's head, and tell him: “Behold, a man whose name is *Branch*. . .” (Zechariah 6:12). Joshua is a *priest*, and he's called *the branch*, and yet he can't be the shepherd-prince God was promising, because he was neither king nor a descendant of David. There is another man during Joshua's day named *Zerubbabel*; he was appointed the governor of Judah, and

³¹ We quoted Roberts earlier: “The Jews delivered from Babylon, came into their own land, the land of Canaan, their typical rest. So the elect are redeemed by Christ out of their spiritual bondage, that at last they might return into the true Canaan, heaven itself, the eternal rest promised to God's people, where they shall sit together with Christ in heavenly places.” (p1125). The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible likewise says (on Amos 9:15): “The promise is made that once the restoration of God's people has reached its culmination, they never need fear exile again. . . The early returnees failed to reach this stage of restoration, and Israel was subjugated time and again. The New Testament explains, however, that this permanent possession of Canaan will take place when Christ returns and gives to his people, Jews and Gentiles alike, permanent possession of the entire new earth (Revelation 5:9-10; 21:1-7), of which Canaan was simply a type (Romans 4:13).” Robertson notes: “Some might insist that 'literal' fulfillment of new covenant prophecy requires the return of ethnic Israel to a geographically located Palestine. Yet the replacement of the typological with the actual as a principle of biblical interpretation points to another kind of 'literal' fulfillment. The historical return to a 'land of promise' by a small remnant 70 years after Jeremiah's prophecy encourages hope in the final return to paradise lost by the newly constituted 'Israel of God.' As men from all nations had been dispossessed and alienated from the original creation, so now they may hope for restoration and peace, even to the extent of anticipating a 'land of promise' sure to appear in the new creation, and sure to be enjoyed by a resurrected people.” (p300).

not only was he a descendant of David (Matthew 1:12), but the Lord calls Zerubbabel His “servant”, and even tells him that He would take Zerubbabel and make him like a signet ring (Haggai 2:20-23). But Zerubbabel was only Judah's governor—not their king; he was never called “the branch”; and he certainly wasn't a priest. And so, though *Joshua* and *Zerubbabel* both reflect some of the traits of the shepherd-king God had promised, neither one of them is able to meet all the qualifications entirely.

The Lord explicitly tells Joshua that he and those with him were “symbols” of the shepherd-king who was yet to come (Zechariah 3:8). In other words, Joshua and Zerubbabel were just pictures and types of the true shepherd-prince that God was going to raise up for His people: He will be one shepherd, not two; He will be both priest and king; He will unify God's people into one flock (Ezekiel 37:21-22); and He will reign as their prince *forever* (Ezekiel 37:25). *Ultimately, these things are only fulfilled in Jesus*: He is the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He is *the seed of David* and yet our *High Priest* (Psalm 110:1-4); He reigns as *king*, yet He is “*a priest on His throne*” (Zechariah 6:13). He gathers both Jews and Gentiles into His fold, making them “one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16). And it's He who will reign as shepherd-prince over God's people *forever*.³²

ZERUBBABEL AND JOSHUA AS TYPES OF CHRIST THE SHEPHERD-KING

NEAR (PARTIAL) FULFILLMENT			FAR (ULTIMATE) FULFILLMENT		
ZERUBBABEL	David's son	The “servant” (Hag. 2:23)	JESUS	The true “Servant” and Davidic King	<i>“a priest on His throne”</i>
JOSHUA	High Priest	The “branch” (Zech. 6:12)		The true “Branch” and High Priest	

³² On Ezekiel 34:23-24, Roberts notes: “David [is] their shepherd, prince, and king forever. Christ is the true David; of whom David himself was but a type” (p1109). And again: “Christ is a second David; yea, the only true David.” (Roberts, p1206). On *Joshua and Zerubbabel as being types of Christ*, Roberts says: “[Christ] shall not only, as a 'branch of righteousness, grow up' to David (Jeremiah 33:15-17), but also. . . He should descend of David by Zerubbabel, a special type and forefather of Christ; as that passage of Haggai (2:21-23), being solidly understood, does intimate; for it is chiefly applicable to, and intended of Christ the true Zerubbabel.” (p1217). The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible says on Haggai 2:23: “Zerubbabel was God's chosen representative to accomplish his work. Isaiah spoke of a greater servant who would come, one whom Zerubbabel foreshadowed (Isaiah [43]:10). Jesus is the perfect descendant of Zerubbabel (Matthew 1:2) and the final, royal Servant of God (Acts 4:27,30).” And in its Introduction to Zechariah, it says: “Zechariah spoke both to Israel's immediate future and to the distant future in Christ. As with most prophecies of Israel's restoration after exile, the predictions he made had immediate significance for Zerubbabel the son of David, for Joshua the high priest and for Jerusalem. At the same time, however, Zerubbabel was only the continuance of, not the end of, the Davidic line. Joshua was also a continuance of the priestly line and was 'symbolic of things to come' (3:8). As a result, what was said about Zerubbabel and Joshua anticipated what the final son of David, the Messiah, would one day accomplish in full measure.” And again, on Zechariah 4:14: “Together [Zerubbabel and Joshua] foreshadowed the Messiah, the great Anointed One, who would unite the offices of priest and king into one person. . .” And lastly, on Joshua as “the branch” in Zechariah 6:12: “the immediate context makes it clear that this term refers to Joshua, the high priest. On the other hand, Zechariah had earlier stated that Joshua and company were symbols of things to come later (3:8); that is, that their actions were at best the initiations of blessings and judgments that would take place with the coming of the great Son of David. Thus it is not surprising that the term refers to the Messiah as well (see 3:8). Isaiah used it (Isaiah 4:2), as did Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16), as a title for the Davidic descendant who would rule on David's throne. . . The work of Joshua (as well as that of Zerubbabel) foreshadowed the work of Christ, our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; 7:24; 9:11) and our King (Matthew 22:41-46; Hebrews 1:8).” On *Christ unifying His people*, Roberts notes of Ezekiel 37:21: “Literally, they were thus united, at their return, under Zerubbabel, a son of David, and type of Christ; spiritually, they were thus united under Christ himself. . . that being a type and shadow of *this*.” (p1123). And again, on Ezekiel 37:15-17: “When Solomon was dead, the kingdom which was united and one, as the nation one under David and Solomon, was divided into two in the days of Rehoboam. . . This division occasioned constant enmity between Judah and Israel. . . Now in this covenant God promises to unite this divided nation and kingdom into one, under one King David. . . So that thereby, the miseries of their divided state should be removed; and the ancient happiness of their united state, as in the time of David and Solomon, should be restored. This covenanted union of these two sticks, these two kingdoms into one, has a twofold accomplishment; literal, and mystical: 1) *Literally* this was fulfilled, when Judah was returned from their captivity in Babylon. . . [for it is] very probable that about the same time many of the dispersed of Israel came back from Media, Persia and other places of dispersion. . . and joined themselves to them of Judah. . . 2) *Mystically and Typically* this union of these two kingdoms has its accomplishment, partly in the uniting of the Gentiles (typed by the kingdom of the ten tribes dispersed into pagan countries) to the church of the Jews under one shepherd Jesus Christ [Ephesians 2:13; John 10:15-16]. . . partly, in the gathering together, uniting and perfecting all the elect in one mystical body of Christ [Ephesians 4:12-13]. . . partly, in the day of judgement, when Christ shall gather corporally all His elect. . . up into his heavenly kingdom with himself to be ever with the Lord.” (Roberts, p1115). Rhodes draws out the implications that Israel's shepherd is both God and “David” when he says of Ezekiel 37:24-25: “David is back as king, and this time it's forever. . . Notice that the king is also called a shepherd. Earlier in Ezekiel, God has already given a long speech about these shepherd-kings. On the whole, they've been doing a duff job, so God announces, 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God' (Ezekiel 34:15). God will come as Shepherd-king. But didn't he say that David was going to fill that role? He did: 'I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David.' One king only. And it's God. And David. But one person. Beginning to get the picture?” (Chapter 7).

C) JESUS AND GOD'S PEOPLE: After Israel had been sent away to exile, the Lord declared that He was going to make *a new covenant*. We may tend to think this new covenant would also be with a *new people*. Now that Israel had been sent away to Babylon, God can start afresh with a people who will worship and serve and follow Him instead of constantly turn away from Him. But that's not what God does. In Jeremiah 31, the Lord tells us that He would make this new covenant “with *the house of Israel* and with *the house of Judah*” (verse 31). It was *a new covenant*, but God was going to make it with *the same people*; and He tells us why in verse 34: “*for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*” The new covenant would be associated with forgiveness; indeed, the new covenant would be *a covenant of forgiveness*. As the Lord also told His people through the prophet Ezekiel: “Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, so that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore. . . when I have forgiven you for all that you have done. . .” (16:62-63). This is what God did for His people in the restoration. When He brought Israel back into their land, He was pardoning them for everything they had done.

God's promise to *forgive Israel's iniquities* was *partially* fulfilled in the restoration, but *ultimately*, the forgiveness God alludes to here is the outworking of what He would accomplish for us *in Jesus*. The Hebrew word that's translated here in Jeremiah 31:34 as “forgive” [Hebrew *salah*] is the word used to represent the *effect* or *result* of atonement in the Levitical sacrifices. We read over and over again in Leviticus: “Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, *and he will be forgiven.*” (4:31). There's a connection here: *Forgiveness happens through atonement*. And so, when the Lord declares that He will *forgive Israel's iniquity*, we're pointed forward to the atoning work of Christ. And this is what our Savior himself taught the night before His sufferings. For when Jesus took the cup, He gave it to His disciples, saying: “Drink from it, all of you; for this is *My blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many *for forgiveness of sins.*” (Matthew 26:27-28). God could forgive Israel *their iniquities*, and He can forgive us *ours*, because He “has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” (Isaiah 53:6).³³

WHAT GOD WOULD DO FOR HIS PEOPLE: *THE LORD WOULD FORGIVE HIS PEOPLE*

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God Forgave His people in the Restoration	God Forgives His people through the cross of Jesus

God would *forgive* His people in the new covenant, but He would also *change* them. He would do a mighty work *for them* in atoning for their sins, but He would also do a supernatural work *in them* in changing their hearts. After God had brought His people back to their land, He tells them: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” (Ezekiel 36:25). *There's a very real sense in which God did this for His people in the restoration.* God's people struggled deeply with idolatry over the course of their entire history; from the days of the patriarchs, and in the desert under Moses, through the time of the judges, to the kings, all the way up to the exile. God's people can't seem to shake their addiction to idols. But when God restores Israel to their land, it seems as though they're all at once entirely healed. We read no more of Israel's idolatry. They're not perfect; they still have other struggles—but their idols are gone.³⁴

³³ We've intentionally not addressed the question of whether or how the forgiveness God would bestow in the new covenant is different than the forgiveness He had extended to His people in the old covenant. We'll come back to this in our study of Jeremiah 31. Here we're just showing that God fulfilled this promise partially in the restoration but ultimately in Christ. Roberts notes: “Remission of sins is a most sweet and comfortable blessing. . . This blessing is more often spoken of, than well understood; and yet it's better understood by many, than experimentally enjoyed.” (pp1448-49). Again he says: “How excellency do God's gratuitous mercy, and His justice meet in this great blessing of remission of sins! His gratuitous mercy, in that He remits freely, without any desert of the sinners, yea against all his desert; His justice, in that He remits righteously, upon expiation made by Christ's blood, and satisfaction given to God's justice. . . by His death.” (p1450). And again: “[God] flings away all His people's sins into the depths of the sea. . . as the Egyptians were all swallowed up in the Red Sea, and never troubled, terrified or afflicted Israel any more after that day. . . so their pardoned sins shall be all drowned in the sea of God's mercy and Christ's merit forever; they (though never so huge an army) shall never trouble, terrify or afflict them any more to their condemnation; in that sense they shall never be found any more at all. . .” (p1456). Lastly, “The Lord God forgives sins to all His sincere federates, most freely, most fully, and finally. Freely, without, yea contrary to all their desert; fully, without exception of any one sin of theirs; and finally, without all revocation or annulling of pardon once vouchsafed.” (p1489).

³⁴ As Roberts says: “No covenant dispensation so [thoroughly] cured God's people of Judah and Benjamin of their idolatry, of their stony hardness of heart, and other evils; as did this covenant dispensation under their captivity.” (p1093). And again, of Ezekiel 37:23: “This has reference to God's cleansing them by regeneration and sanctification, from the power and stain of sin,

And this is what God does for us *in Jesus*. The work God did in His people when He brought them back to their land is meant to point us to the work God would do in His people through Jesus in the new covenant. There's a sense in which the Lord did these things for Israel in the restoration, but the ultimate fulfillment of these promises is the work God would do in His new covenant people in the days following Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Whereas Israel suffered from a chronic unbelief and apostasy all their days leading up to the exile, God would perform a large-scale change in His new covenant people, for He would give them "a new heart" and put "a new spirit" within them (Ezekiel 36:26). So that, the Lord wouldn't only *forgive them*—but He would completely *change them*, giving them new hearts with new desires; this is called *regeneration*. And then He would put His Spirit within them, causing them to walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 37:37); this is a process called *sanctification*. God even promises their *perseverance*, for through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord not only says to His people: "I will not turn away from them", but also: "I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that *they* will not turn away from *Me*." (32:40). God was not saying that His people would be perfect. They wouldn't. But in the new covenant, they would be changed.³⁵

WHAT GOD WOULD DO IN HIS PEOPLE: *THE LORD WOULD CHANGE HIS PEOPLE*

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God changed Israel when He brought them back home	God changes His people when He brings us to Jesus

So then: God wouldn't just save His people from the *punishment* of their sin (forgiveness), He would also save them from the *power* and *pollution* of their sin (regeneration and sanctification). And once He claims them as His own, He'll never let them go (perseverance). Many of the other new covenant promises we've been looking at (*IE: Place, Prince*) are veiled: Jesus is there but we still have to open

especially of idolatry, set forth here in three words: *idols, detestable things, transgressions*. Though formerly they were extremely addicted to idolatry, yet after their return from captivity, they should be thoroughly reformed from that sin; they should be given to idolatry no more." (p1127). And again, Roberts writes: "The family of Terah, Abraham's father, beyond the flood, worshipped other gods in Chaldea before Abram was called into Canaan. The family of Jacob, while with Laban, and afterwards, [was] tainted with idolatry. The Israelites served strange gods in Egypt, even the idols of the Egyptians. When they were newly brought out of Egypt, and had solemnly covenanted with God against idolatry, while Moses was in the Mount with God, they idolatrously trespassed in the golden calf which Aaron made. . . In the days of the Judges they served the gods of the heathens. . . In the days of the Kings, Solomon encouraged, and shared in the idolatry of all his strange wives (1 Kings 11:6-8). Jeroboam set up the idolatrous calves in Dan and Bethel, whereby he made Israel to sin (1 Kings 12:28), to the end. And what shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of their idolatry, in the days of Ahab, Jehu, Hoshea, Manasseh, Amon, and of others till the very Babylonian captivity. Yea, they were very idolatrous even under their captivity. But now after they were brought out of Babylonian captivity, how did God wean them from their idolatry, detestable things, and prevarications! I read not, that I remember, of any their idolatries afterwards. They after that defiled themselves with their idols no more." (p1128).

³⁵ As Roberts notes: "These captive Jews had the Spirit of God before, and under their captivity; but God promises a more plenary endowment of them therewith, after their return from Babylon (Ezekiel 36:27)." (Roberts, p1131). And as we quoted Roberts earlier: "The Jews were so delivered from Babylon, as that they were cleansed from their idols, detestable things and transgressions. And the elect are so delivered from their spiritual thralldom, that they are 'washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.'" (p1124). *Roberts describes this change in the following ways*: "More particularly, this newness of heart and spirit is the new creation or new supernatural frame of the whole soul, heart and spirit in part, wrought by the Holy Ghost, according to the image of God. The nature of it, as a new creation or new supernatural frame. The subject of this newness is the whole soul. The degree of it is imperfect—but in part. The author of it, is the Holy Ghost. The pattern according to which this great new work is fashioned, is the image of God. . . This is a transforming renovation from the corrupt image of Adam, to the pure image of God; from the old to the new man." (pp1134-35). *On the new heart and new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26)*: "These two words, *heart* and *spirit*. . . when they are mentioned jointly and applied to man, as they are diverse times in this prophet, then (as Calvin has well noted) they are put for mans whole soul and all the faculties thereof, [namely], *the spirit*, for. . . the mind and understanding. . . *the heart*. . . for the. . . will and affections. . . By *spirit*, therefore I understand here all the upper faculties, the intellectuals, chiefly seated in the head; by *heart*, all the lower faculties of the will and affections, chiefly seated in the heart." (pp1131-32). *On the one heart and one way of Jeremiah 32:38-40*: "By *heart*, understand all inward principles and religious dispositions in the whole soul; by *way*, all outward expressions and practices flowing from those principles. . . the Jews had formerly been a very divided people in heart and way. . . [and still there are] men [who] walk most unworthy of the calling wherewith they are called. . . like boat-men, looking one way but rowing another." (p1160,61,69). *Roberts on how this change would be complete but not perfect*: "Though these new supernatural principles and qualities are implanted in the whole soul and every part thereof, yet are they. . . incomplete in every part; as an infant has all the parts of a man, but none of them [completely] perfect. . . Perfection of degrees is reserved for the world to come. . . They that talk of their gradual and complete perfection in this life, are in a dream or fond delusion. [But] though these new endowments of the new heart and spirit [are] imperfect and incomplete, yet are they growing and increasing daily towards perfection. Our inward man is renewed day by day. . . Living trees grow and increase, when dead trunks decay and rot." (pp1136-37). And again: "Every part is in some measure renewed, though none completely." (Roberts, p1142).

up the outer husk to get to the gospel seed. But here, what God would do for His people in the new covenant is described with such gospel clarity it's almost as if there's no outer husk at all; the seed has already burst through the shell. In God's promise to forgive His people and give them new hearts, it's as if the shadows are giving way to the substance; the types and pictures are giving way to the reality.

D) JESUS AND GOD'S PEACE: The exile was the ultimate covenant curse, but in the restoration, God would bring about a cataclysmic reversal of the curse of sin. Instead of famine, there would be abundance; instead of drought, showers of blessing. *Ultimately, this reversal of the curse is meant to teach us all that God would do for us in and through Christ.* Earlier we saw that the exile symbolizes Jesus' death. So, it's only fitting that when the exile was complete, God abolished the curse from His people and began pouring out His blessing upon them. Until Jesus was exiled for our sins, we lived under the curse. But in and through Jesus' exile at the cross, we've come out from under God's curse and entered into His favor and blessing. Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles. . ." When Adam sinned in the garden, he brought God's curse upon all of us; and we became the rightful inheritors of the covenant curses of famine, pestilence, and the sword; and ultimately, death. But at the cross, Jesus took God's curse for sin on our behalf; and in His resurrection, *He reversed the curse*, since "the resurrection is the ultimate reversal of the curse of sin." So that, now, in Jesus, *instead of being inheritors of God's curse*, we're ever and only recipients of *His blessing*. Paul says in Romans 8 that as believers, we may still face "famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (v35), but in Jesus these things no longer come to us as curses for our sin, but rather as hidden blessings from the hand of our loving heavenly Father.³⁶

THE REVERSAL OF THE CURSE AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God's reversal of the curse for His people after the exile	God's reversal of the curse for His people at the cross

So, the reversal of the curse teaches us about the blessing God lavishes on His people in Jesus. This is true for us as individuals, as we mentioned, *but it's also true for the church corporately, as a whole.* In fact, when God promised to reverse the curse in the restoration, He wasn't making that promise to individuals as much as He was to the entire people of God, collectively. God was promising to pour out His blessing on the whole corporate church. *Now, God did this, to a degree, when He brought Israel back to their land.* But after just a few short years, God is already telling His people: "because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. I called for a drought on the land. . ." (Haggai 1:10-11). And later, God even says to His people: "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me. . ." (Malachi 3:9). We're left asking: What happened to God's promise that He would annihilate the covenant curses from His people and pour out His blessing on them? The answer is that *though these things were partially fulfilled when God brought His people back to their land; ultimately, this promise of blessing looks past Israel's day and ours to a day yet to come.* Here again, Israel's restoration points us forward to the restoration of all things. Jesus began to reverse the curse with His death and resurrection, but it's not until the new heavens and new earth that He brings this work to completion. It's true, as we said, that the resurrection is the ultimate reversal of the curse of sin. But though Jesus has been resurrected, it's not until He establishes the new heavens and the new earth that *we as God's people* receive the "redemption of *our bodies*" (Romans 8:23). It's then, in the New Jerusalem, that Scripture tells us: "There will no longer be any curse" (Revelation 22:3).³⁷

³⁶ The quote is from Ligon Duncan; we referenced it earlier in section II.2: *Overviewing the General Themes*. In speaking of how God now, in Christ, turns curses into blessings for His people, Francis Roberts cites 1 Corinthians 3:21-22: "*all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death. . .*" and says this: "In and through Jesus Christ, the malignity, venom, poison, and mischief of death is removed; yea turned into great advantage unto God's covenant people. Not only the world, and life, but death also, with things present and to come, even all things are theirs, and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Death is theirs for good as well as life. . .What? Death theirs? Were it not better for them, death were not theirs? No. Death is their friend, not their foe. . .Of carnal men, it may be said, they are death's; they are death's slaves. . .But of Christians it may be said, death is theirs; theirs to serve them, to befriend them, to do them good. . ." (Roberts, p1553).

³⁷ It may be tempting to say that these promises of reversing the covenant curses, though left unfulfilled in the days of Israel's restoration, find their fulfillment in the new covenant church. This may be true to a degree, in that there would be a much greater effect of the gospel on the hearers in the new covenant as compared with the old; and thus, whereas God was forced to send corporate judgment to a largely apostate church in the old covenant, the church of the new covenant would be marked by

THE REVERSAL OF THE CURSE AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God annihilates the curse from Israel in the restoration	God annihilates the curse from His church in glory

E) JESUS AND GOD'S PRESENCE: In the exile, the temple had been destroyed. But when God restored His people, He promised that He would set His “*sanctuary* in their midst forever” and that His “*dwelling place*” would be with them (Ezekiel 37:26-27). These two Hebrew words that Ezekiel uses to describe God's presence are significant. The Hebrew word that's translated “dwelling place” in verse 27 (*mishkan*) is the same word used for the Old Testament *tabernacle*. God was promising that His tabernacle would be among His people. And the Hebrew word that's translated “sanctuary” in verse 26 (*miqdash*) is most often used to refer to *the temple*. God's temple had been destroyed in the exile, but here, the Lord is telling His people it would be raised up once again, and in such a way that this time, it would endure *forever*. In one sense, *God did these things for His people when He brought them back to their land*. He assures His people that He's dwelling among them (Haggai 2:4-5); and He leads them in rebuilding the temple. But even this temple doesn't last *forever*, as Ezekiel promised. And the reason is that *ultimately, these promises only find their true fulfillment in Christ*.

It's when Jesus came into the world that Scripture tells us: “the Word became flesh, and dwelt [Lit. *tabernacled*] among us. . .” (John 1:14); for Jesus himself was and is God's dwelling place among His people. And Jesus isn't only *God's tabernacle*, He's also *God's temple*. For indeed, *in His life*, Christ tabernacled among us; but *in His death and resurrection*, He was made to pattern Solomon's temple. The temple of Solomon was destroyed; but it would be rebuilt once again. And is this not exactly the pattern our Lord followed in His death and resurrection? Indeed, as Christ told the Jews: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). And John tells us explicitly that “He was speaking of the temple of His body.” (2:21). Jesus' body is God's temple; destroyed, as it were, at the cross; but after three days raised up once again. And though Solomon's temple was rebuilt, it didn't last. But Jesus, having been raised from the dead, ever abides as God's Sanctuary *in the midst of His people forever* (Ezekiel 37:26). Indeed, Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple were always meant to point us ahead to God's true and lasting Sanctuary: “*Inmanuel. . . God with us.*” (Matthew 1:23).³⁸

THE TEMPLE AND JESUS' LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God <i>tabernacled</i> with Israel in the restoration (Hag.1:4-5)	God tabernacled with us <i>in Christ's incarnation</i> (Jn.1:14)
God's <i>temple</i> was destroyed but rebuilt again (Hag.2:7-9)	God's temple is Jesus <i>in His death/resurrection</i> (Jn.2:19)

Earlier we mentioned that Joshua and Zerubbabel were two men that God used powerfully after He brought His people back to their land. We also noted that both of these men reflected many of the traits that would characterize the coming Shepherd-king that God had promised to send; and indeed, it was for this reason that Scripture refers to Joshua and those with him as “symbols” of the Messiah who was yet to come (Zechariah 3:8). But there's another way that Joshua and Zerubbabel prefigured Christ that we haven't mentioned yet. At one point, God instructs Zechariah the prophet to make a crown of silver and gold, set it on Joshua's head, and say: “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; *and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord. . .and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.*” (Zechariah 6:12-13). Zechariah is

following her Lord, and thus, corporate blessing. But Jesus also disciplines His church in the new covenant, as we see clearly in Revelation 2-3. Indeed, Jesus' words here mirror very closely God's words of rebuke to Israel after the restoration in Haggai 1-2 and Malachi 3. So that though there may be a degree of change in this respect from the old covenant to the new, the change is one of relative comparison rather than stark contrast. Perhaps there is less judgment on the whole for God's new covenant church, if you compare it with the old. But then again, we might argue, on the other hand, that judgment will be more severe for new covenant churches, since we have greater light than the old (Hebrews 10:29). So again, it seems that the main application here directs us forward to the complete annihilation of the curses in the new heavens and the new earth.

³⁸ The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible notes on John 1:14: “The verb translated ‘made his dwelling’ means ‘made his tent’ or ‘tabernacled.’ This language recalls Israel's tabernacle, which served as the place of God's presence on earth in the days of Moses (Exodus 40:34-35)—Jesus fulfilled that purpose in his incarnation.” And again, on Zechariah 6:13 it makes this note: “Jesus began to fulfill the rebuilding of the temple through the resurrection of his body (Matthew 12:6; John 2:18-21). . .”

placing the crown on Joshua's head, but he's speaking of someone else. And yet, as he does, we learn another important way that Joshua was a symbol of the Christ who was yet to come: *He will build the temple of the Lord*. Joshua was one of the men who rebuilt the temple in the days of the restoration. And so was Zerubbabel, for the Lord declares in Zechariah 4:9: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it." And when Joshua and Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple after God had brought Israel back to their land, they were acting once again as symbols, prefiguring the work of the coming Messiah. For these two men rebuilt *Solomon's temple* in the days of the restoration; but Christ would set about the work of rebuilding *the temple of the Living God*.³⁹

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT				THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT		
	THEIR IDENTITY		THEIR WORK		HIS IDENTITY	HIS WORK
ZERUBBABEL	Son of David	"servant"	<i>Rebuilding the Temple</i>	JESUS	The "Servant" & true Davidic King	<i>Rebuilding His Church</i>
JOSHUA	High Priest	"branch"			The "Branch" & true High Priest	

Jesus tells us in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church. . ." And so, in once sense, Christ is *building* His church. But in another sense, *He's rebuilding it*. Jesus is *building His Church*, just as Solomon built the temple of the Lord at the height of Israel's kingdom. But it's also true that Jesus' Church is something that's being *rebuilt*, as the temple was in the days of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Think about it this way: At the very beginning, God had built all humanity after His image (Genesis 1:27). All the glory and splendor of Solomon's temple couldn't have compared to mankind formed after the image of God. Humanity was like God's temple, carved with His own hand. But it wouldn't last; Adam's sin brought destruction to all of us. Like Solomon's temple at the exile, we became the ruins of what we once were. But now, in Christ, God is *re-building* humanity. For Jesus has drawn near to the fallen ruins of Adam, and He is now *re-creating us after His glorious image once again* (Colossians 3:10).

THE TEMPLE AND THE CHURCH

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God would rebuild the temple through Joshua/Zerubbabel	God is now rebuilding humanity in and through the Savior

In Ezekiel 37:26-27, God had told His people: "I will. . .set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people." *The final way this promise reaches its fulfillment is in the new Jerusalem*. When the Apostle John sees a vision of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21, he hears a loud voice from the throne, saying: "Behold, *the tabernacle* of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them. . ." (verse 3). Later in the same chapter, John writes more about this city, telling us: "I saw no *temple* in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (verse 22). In one sense, God dwells among us now, in and through His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16). But in another sense, as Paul writes: "while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. . .and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). There's a very real sense in which as long as we remain pilgrims on this earth, we're absent from the presence of the Lord. This is partially because even the earth itself has been affected by Adam's sin. Paul tells us that "creation was subjected to futility" and "the whole creation groans. . ." (Romans 8:20,22). It seems even creation was made after the pattern of the temple. For the earth was formed by God to be a house for His glory; and though our world is now desecrated and devastated by sin, the day is coming when "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption. . ." (Romans 8:21). The day is coming when the Lord will rebuild the earth itself; when this earth and its works will be burned up and our God will build "new heavens and a new earth. . ." (2 Peter 3:10,13); and *the whole earth* will be filled with His glory (Habakkuk 2:14).⁴⁰

³⁹ As Roberts had said: "This covenant assured them of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, with greater glory than formerly; and therein typically of the building of His new city, and new spiritual temple, of both Jews and Gentiles. . ." (p1102). The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible notes on Zechariah 3:8: "As important as Joshua and his associates were to the life of Israel at that time, they were not the final set of temple servants. They foreshadowed the coming Servant (the Messiah), who would fulfill their task perfectly. . ." And on Zechariah 6:13: "Joshua worked together with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. This action foreshadowed the work of the Messiah. As the King of God's people, the Messiah would also build the temple."

⁴⁰ The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible brings all these aspects together when it notes on Zechariah 6:13: "The New

THE TEMPLE AND THE NEW CREATION

THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT
God rebuilt Solomon's ruined temple in the Restoration	God will rebuild the earth in the restoration of all things

In this last section, we've been looking at what the Prophets announced to Israel during their time in exile. We've discussed the major themes in their prophecies (place, prince, people, peace, presence) and how each of these themes ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ. And we've mentioned that the new covenant is associated with all these things God would do for His people when He brought them back from exile. But though all these passages are speaking of *the new covenant*, they don't use that particular phrase. *In this next section*, we're going to look at the one place in the Prophets that does.

PART II: JEREMIAH 31 AND THE NEW COVENANT

³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

1. The FIRST Question: *How do we make any sense of Jeremiah?*

Here in Jeremiah 31, God is declaring He would make a “new covenant” with His people. This new covenant would be different than the covenant He had made with Israel at Sinai. *How so?* It seems in two ways, especially: *First*, God would put His Law within His people. Whereas God had written His Law on tablets of stone at Sinai, now, in the new covenant, He would write it on the hearts of His people. Indeed, God's people would no longer need to teach one another to know the Lord, for they would know Him already. *Secondly*, God would forgive Israel's iniquity and remember it no more.⁴¹

In short: *God would forgive His people*, and *He would change His people*. We've already discussed both of these promises in the section above. And there we also saw how both of these promises find their fulfillment in Christ. But there's a question that arises here: *Didn't God already do these things for His people?* It sounds very poetic to say God wrote the Law on stone tablets at Sinai but now He would write it on human hearts. But didn't the Lord write His Law on the hearts of His people *in the Old Testament?* What about David? Was not God's Law in his heart (Psalm 40:8)? Or what about the composer of Psalm 119, who wrote: “Your law is my delight” (verse 174)? Further: Did the Lord

Testament explains that Jesus began to fulfill the rebuilding of the temple through the resurrection of his body (Matthew 12:6; John 2:18-21), continues to fulfill it in the church (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22) and will ultimately fulfill it in the purification of the new heavens and the new earth as the dwelling place of God (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-3,22).” And again in Ezekiel 40:1: “Christ came as God's final temple in his first coming (John 2:19); the church is now the temple (1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22) and in the new heavens and the new earth there will be no temple because the whole earth will be filled with his presence (Habakkuk 2:14; Revelation 21).”

⁴¹ Roberts dedicated over 200 pages to just these four verses in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. pp1339-1555)! We're not able to give an exhaustive exposition here; other resources can be consulted for that. Our purpose here is to give a succinct exposition and overview of the passage. Roberts finds *four primary promises* in vv31-34: “God promises: 1) His donation and inscription of His Laws in their inwards, mind and hearts. . . 2) The great federal relation, union, communion and interest between God and His federates. . . 3) His federate people's more excellent and more universal knowledge of the Lord, than formerly under the old covenant. . . 4) Finally, God promises (as a foundation, ground or cause of all the former benefits), His own gratuitous propitiousness in Christ to them in the utter remission and oblivion, forgiving and forgetting all sorts of their sins. . .” (Roberts, pp1342-44). *We've simplified these into two* (Roberts' #1 and #4), as we've incorporated Roberts' #2 and #3 into #1. As for #2, we've written elsewhere about this already and will come back to it again later in this lesson. Though we've incorporated #3 into #1, we will still deal with the question of what it means that “all” shall know the Lord in our discussion below. Here, we can just mention that the knowledge of the Lord in the new covenant would be much clearer and more abundant than it was in the old covenant. Roberts notes of this three-fold newness: “Here, the mediatory office of Jesus Christ is tacitly implied, in the proper and peculiar fruits of his *priesthood*, *prophecy* and *kingship*; [namely] remission of sins, wrought by His *priesthood*; knowledge of the Lord, by His *prophecy*; and conformity of mind and heart to the Law of God, by His *kingship*.” (p1346).

only begin to forgive His people in the new covenant? Was there no forgiveness for God's people in the Old Testament church? Had not Scripture already said: "there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4)? So then: If God had already been forgiving and changing His people long before Jeremiah 31, how are we to make any sense of what's "new" about the new covenant?

A) FORGIVENESS: We've mentioned that the Hebrew word translated "forgive" here in Jeremiah 31:34 represents the *effect* or *result* of atonement in the Levitical sacrifices. When an Israelite had sinned, he was to bring an animal without defect to the tabernacle, lay his hand its head, and slay it. The priest would then apply the blood to the altar, and Scripture tells us: "Thus the priest shall make *atonement* for him, and he will be forgiven." (Leviticus 4:26). We pointed out there's a connection here between forgiveness and atonement, specifically: *Forgiveness happens through atonement*. The way God forgives sins is through the blood of atonement. So far, so good. But now what we need to understand is what the author of Hebrews clarifies for us when he writes that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (10:4). In other words: The atonement that forgives sins was never wrought through the blood of bulls and goats. *Why not?* He tells us again: "For the Law . . . has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things. . ." (Hebrews 10:1).

Here's what Scripture's telling us: The atonement wrought in the old covenant with the blood of bulls and goats *was only a shadow* of the real atonement God would accomplish for us in Jesus. And that's why there was a sense in which it could never really forgive sins. It was only a picture of atonement; not the real thing. It's almost as if all the sacrifices of the old covenant were like *God writing a check*. When you write a check, you're promising to make payment—but you have to actually have money in the bank to cover the amount. *Or think of a credit card:* Under the old covenant, God's people had been forgiven—but they were forgiven *on credit*. For centuries, they had tallied up a massive amount of sin-debt, putting it on credit, as it were, all the while knowing that "one day the bill will have to be settled." Well, if the old covenant was about God *promising to pay for our sins*, the new covenant is God *actually making that payment*. This is what the Lord meant when He said through the prophet Zechariah: "behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. . . and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." (3:8-9). And it's for this reason that the author of Hebrews tells us: "but now once at the consummation of the ages [Christ] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." This is how the forgiveness of sins would be something that's "new" in the new covenant.⁴²

⁴² This is indeed how the author of Hebrews clearly interprets the "newness" of forgiveness in Jeremiah 31:34, for he himself quotes Jeremiah 31:34 twice (in 8:12 and 10:17), and comes to this same conclusion as he expositors Jeremiah 31:34 especially in 10:1-18. Roberts notes: "God here promises. . . to be propitious to His people in another manner, and more perfectly, than of old." (p1441). And again: "The renewed sacrifices were a renewed accusation. . . In the old covenant sins were remembered again every year; but in this new covenant their sins should be remembered no more. . ." (p1441). And later: "That remission of sins under the old covenant. . . did not in essence, substance and kind differ from remission under the new covenant. Remission of sins was essentially, substantially and specifically one and the same under the new covenant and the old. . . As they who lived in the days of Christ, when He was crucified, had remission of sins by faith in Christ *then present*, so they who lived before Christ was manifested, had remission of sins by faith in Christ, *then future*, and promised; and we who live since Christ is exalted at God's right-hand, have remission of sins in Christ, *now past*. . . [Yet,] Remission of sins under the new covenant (though substantially the same, yet) accidentally differs from, and excels the remission of sins which was under the Old Testament. . . in diverse regards." (Roberts, pp1481-83). Here, Roberts uses the word "accidentally" to mean that the difference between the old covenant and the new isn't one of substance/essence but of administration/form. Palmer Robertson explains Jeremiah 31:34, asking: "But how can the prophet make so much of the forgiveness of sins as an integral aspect of the new covenant? Was not elaborate provision made under the Mosaic covenant for the forgiveness of sins? . . . In what sense may Jeremiah suggest that the unique foundational principle of the new covenant will be the forgiveness of sins? In response to this very legitimate question, it may be indicated that it is just the elaborateness of the old covenant provision for forgiveness that makes understandable Jeremiah's emphasis on the uniqueness of forgiveness under the new covenant. The constant renewal of sacrifices for sins under the old covenant gave clear indication of the fact that sin actually was not removed, but only was passed over. If the sacrifice of the day of atonement actually had established a person once and for all as righteous in the sight of God, why then was the ceremony repeated annually? The blood of bulls and goats inherently had no power to remove sin in the framework of God's just administration of the world. The provisions of the old covenant, founded on such animal sacrifices, could not effect the actual removal of transgressions. Jeremiah anticipates the day in which the actual shall replace the typical. Instead of having animal sacrifices merely represent the possibility of a substitutionary death in the place of the sinner, Jeremiah sees the day in which sins actually will be forgiven, never to be remembered again. The continual offering of sacrifice to remove sin not only provided a symbolical representation of the possibility of substitution. It also inevitably functioned as a very real reminder that sins had not yet been forgiven. By saying that sins would be remembered no more, Jeremiah anticipates the end of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. . . That forgiveness of sins which was foreshadowed under the old covenant shall find consummate reality in the new." (pp283, 286). Williams says: "We can liken this to writing a check. A check is a promise of payment, but there must be money in the bank to cover the check in order for

FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

IN THE OLD COVENANT	IN THE NEW COVENANT
There was a <i>promise</i> of forgiveness (the “shadow”)	There is the <i>payment</i> of forgiveness (the “substance”)

B) INWARD CHANGE: God wrote His Law on the hearts of His Old Testament people. There's no denying it. In fact, the Lord engraved His Law so deeply in the hearts of men such as David, that we can rightfully wonder if it's true to say God's Law is written in our hearts to a greater degree! But though many of God's people in the old covenant had God's Law written on their hearts, many more did not. *Even going back to the day that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt*, the people of God were characterized as “a perverse and crooked generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5). *And even up to the brink of the exile*, we still find the Lord protesting that “all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.” (Jeremiah 9:26). Though it was true there were many in the old covenant who had embraced the gospel from the heart, it seems this was the exception, rather than the rule. Though many in the old covenant knew the Lord—*many more remained unchanged*.

And this is what Jeremiah is saying would be different in the new covenant. The contrast he's making isn't absolute—it's *comparative*. Jeremiah's not saying God never wrote His Law on the hearts of His old covenant people. He's saying that whereas God's people in the old covenant were characterized as having uncircumcised hearts; God's new covenant people would now be characterized as a people who know the Lord. Whereas in the old covenant, there were comparatively few who were changed by the gospel; now in the new covenant, we wonder if any will be left unchanged. Whereas it seems to have been the relative minority that embraced Christ under the old covenant, the Lord would now apply His Word to the hearts of His people on a much greater scale. So again, it's not that God had never written His Law on the hearts of His people; *He had*. And it's not that there were never times when God poured out His Spirit on His people in remarkable ways; *there were*. But the comparison is between the old and new covenants in general: Scripture is contrasting the two dispensations on the whole; and the point is that whereas the old covenant was characterized by the writing of God's Word externally on stone, the new covenant would be characterized by the writing of God's Word internally on the hearts of His people. The same gospel was preached (Hebrews 4:2); but in the new covenant it will have a much greater effect; and it's precisely this effect that will be “new” in the new covenant.⁴³

it to be good. The entire Old Testament rite of sacrifice was about promise.” (p216). We quoted Rhodes above, who gives the credit card analogy: “This new covenant is the one that will deliver on all its predecessors' promises. To achieve this, it must genuinely deal with the death sentence that has been hanging over God's people. So far, they have been forgiven on credit. Just as when you buy a new TV on a credit card, you initially pay nothing but acknowledge that *one day the bill will have to be settled*, so for centuries God's people have been doing when they trusted in his covenant gospel. But their sin still needs to be paid for. The new covenant will have to pick up the tab—or rather it will be established by the man who will.”

⁴³ These last two paragraphs are more or less a review of what we learned in *Sinai, Part 2: II.6 (Effect)*. There we also cited other quotes at length that we won't repeat here. Speaking of this difference in effect from the old covenant to the new, Ball writes of Jeremiah 31: “*The Law* was written in tables of stone, yet so as it was engraven in the tables of the heart, though not in that plenty and abundance that afterward; for under the Old Testament God would have both letter and spirit, but more letter and less spirit. *But the Gospel* is written in the fleshly tables of the heart, yet so as it is committed to writing; for in the New Testament the Lord would have both letter and spirit, but more spirit and less letter than in the Old Testament.” (p165). And again: “God promises to give a new heart, and to put his Spirit into the inner man. . . And this promise God did fulfill daily in the Church of the Jews, but more sparingly according to the measure of grace, the fullness whereof was reserved unto the times of the Messiah.” (Ball, pp340-41). Roberts says that the nature of the promise of Jeremiah 31 is that “the inward federates. . .that now know God really, effectually, cordially, [and] experimentally. . .shall far excel the inward federates of the old covenant.” (p1418). And again: “In this promise we are not so much to consider the *private condition*. . .of some particular persons, visible federates under the new covenant; as the *public economy and administration* of the new covenant. The private condition of many particular persons may possibly be very dark and ignorant, having little knowledge of God or His ways. . .and yet the public administration. . .of the new covenant is for a universal knowledge of God. . .in comparison of which knowledge, that under the Old Testament. . .was as nothing; was gross ignorance rather than knowledge, *comparatively*.” (Roberts, p1418). And Calvin says of this passage, that Jeremiah “does not expressly deny that God formerly wrote his Law on their hearts and pardoned their sins, but he makes a comparison between the less and the greater. As then the Father has put forth more fully the power of his Spirit under the kingdom of Christ, and has poured forth more abundantly his mercy on mankind, this exuberance renders insignificant the small portion of grace which he had been pleased to bestow on the fathers.” (Hebrews 8:10). He then clarifies in the same place: “If it be objected and said, that the faith and obedience of Abraham so excelled, that hardly any such an example can at this day be found in the whole world; my answer is this, that the question here is not about persons, but that reference is made to the economical condition of the Church.” Again, Calvin says:

INWARD CHANGE IN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

IN THE OLD COVENANT	IN THE NEW COVENANT
It's <i>the few</i> who embraced the covenant from the heart	It's <i>the many</i> who embrace the covenant from the heart

2. The SECOND Question: *What are the things that are old in the new covenant?*

This passage in Jeremiah 31 is incredibly rich; but it's also easy to misunderstand. It's such a familiar section of Scripture that we tend to assume we know what it means without actually thinking through it. But if we want to understand this passage on the new covenant, we need to pay close attention to what Jeremiah is saying—and to what he's not saying. In particular, if we want to understand the new covenant, we need to begin by taking note of all the things in this covenant that *aren't new*. The best way to understand Jeremiah 31 is by asking: *What are the things in the new covenant that are old?*

A) The ESSENCE of the Covenant: For some of us, when we read through Jeremiah 31, we tend to automatically assume that the contrast Jeremiah's making is that of *Law and gospel*. It's a no-brainer! What's the difference? The old covenant was a covenant of Law, but the new covenant is about the gospel. But look at the text. Notice, first of all, that *it's actually the old covenant that's associated with redemption*. When the Lord refers back to the old covenant, He describes it as “the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (verse 32). Now, the old covenant was formally inaugurated *after* God had brought His people out of the land of Egypt; with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. But here, when the Lord refers back to the old covenant, He doesn't even mention Sinai. Instead, the Lord traces the old covenant back to the redemption He wrought for His people when He delivered them from Egypt. Isn't that amazing?⁹ It's the old covenant, not the new, that's being associated with redemption. *And notice, secondly, that it's actually the new covenant, not the old, that's associated with the Law*. It's of the new covenant that the Lord declares: “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it. . .” (verse 33). We automatically think of the old covenant as being the covenant of Law. But here in this passage, it's the new covenant that's being identified with the Law; not the old. So then, Jeremiah's not telling us that whereas the old covenant was a covenant of Law, the new covenant would be about redemption and the gospel. No, the old covenant was just as much about redemption, and the new covenant is just as much about the Law. But in the new covenant, *that same Law* would be written *in a different place*.⁴⁴

“We are not to surmise from this difference between letter and spirit that the Lord had fruitlessly bestowed his law upon the Jews, and that none of them turned to him. But it was put forward by way of comparison to commend the grace abounding, wherewith the same Lawgiver. . . honored the preaching of the gospel. For suppose we reckon the multitude of those whom he gathers into the communion of his church from all peoples, men regenerated by his Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. Then we will say that in ancient Israel there were very few—almost none—who embraced the Lord's covenant with their whole hearts and minds. Yet, reckoned by themselves without comparison, there were many.” (*Institutes*, 2.11.8).

⁴⁴ Palmer Robertson notes how *it's the old covenant that's associated with redemption*: “Interestingly, [in contrasting the new covenant with the old in Jeremiah 31:32], the prophet does not refer specifically to the formal inauguration of the covenant that occurred at Sinai. Instead, he refers to the covenant established on the day in which the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt.” (Robertson, p280). And again: “the 'old' covenant with which the 'new' covenant is being set in contrast was a redemptive covenant. Jeremiah mentions specifically that this covenant was established on the day that God redeemed Israel by bringing them out of Egypt. This old covenant cannot be characterized simplistically as a legalistic works-righteousness covenant. . . redemption was involved in this old covenant relationship. The Lord functioned as 'husband' to Israel under this relationship (Jeremiah 31:32).” (p282). As for how *the Law continues to be upheld in the new covenant*, Roberts notes: “The Law which God promises here to write in their hearts, is God's Moral Law formerly written upon tables of stone. . . So that Jesus Christ, and the moral law are not (as some weakly imagine), inconsistent, incompatible and irreconcilable; but most consistent, suitable and sweetly agreeable one to another. . . [Hence] God's Moral Law is not abolished, but established by His new covenant. Why? Because God's writing of His Laws in the hearts of His federates, is a primary promise, yea the very first article of His new covenant: 'I will give My Laws into their mind, and write them in heart hearts.' Had God intended by His new covenant to have abolished His Moral Law, He would not have new written it, but utterly have expunged it. But in that God undertakes to write His Laws again, and to write them more durably and indelibly than they were written before, not in the long-lasting tables of stone, but in the everlasting tables of mind and heart, hereby He eminently confirms and establishes the Moral Law, as that which shall never be reversed or repealed till the end of this world. . .” (pp1392-93). Roberts further elaborates: “The Lord has taken care to write His Moral Law, for the perpetuating thereof, three several ways, [namely] 1) *Naturally*, in the heart of Adam before his fall, under the Covenant of Nature, or of Works. 2) *Literally*, upon tables of stone, and that twice under the old covenant given at Mount Sinai. 3) *Spiritually* and most efficaciously, upon the spiritual fleshly tables of His people's minds and hearts, under the new covenant. The *first* writing was perfect, but not durable. The *second*

We know there's a contrast between the old and new covenants. That's the easy part. God is going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel *that is not like* the covenant He made with them when He brought them out of Egypt. The question is: What's the nature of this contrast? And what we just discovered is that the contrast Jeremiah's making is *not* one of Law and gospel. Jeremiah's *not saying* the old covenant was about Law, but the new covenant is about redemption and the gospel. Because again, *the covenant that's most associated with Law* here in Jeremiah 31 is actually *the new covenant*; not the old. And *the covenant most associated with redemption* is actually *the old covenant*; not the new. The truth is, both the old and new covenants are established upon redemption and yet branded with the eternal will of God as expressed in His Law. They're both crafted after the same pattern: In the old covenant, God redeemed His people, then gave His redeemed people His Law. It's the same thing in the new covenant. Indeed, there's both Law and gospel in both the old and new covenants; and they function in exactly the same way. So, when we read in verse 32 that God's people broke the old covenant, we're not to think the meaning is that they broke *the Law*. It's not that the old covenant with Israel was a strict arrangement of Law, wherein the Lord was like a task-master—but that now He enters into a new covenant with us based on grace and redemption. No, God wasn't a task-master to Israel in the old covenant; He was “a husband to them” (verse 32). The covenant Israel broke was a covenant of *gospel mercies*. So, when Jeremiah tells us they broke the covenant, he's not saying they broke the Law—but that they failed to embrace the covenant from the heart, by faith. And this is what will be different in the new covenant, *for God will now write His Law on their hearts*. So then, it's not that the old covenant differed from the new *in its essence*; the way they differed was *in their effect*.⁴⁵

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

	THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO
NOT	A strict covenant of Law-keeping	A gracious covenant of gospel mercies	The <i>Essence</i> of the covenant
BUT	God's people largely rejected it	God's people will largely embrace it	The <i>Effect</i> of the covenant

was complete, but ineffectual. The *third* is entire, efficacious, and permanent.” (p1394). And again: *The first writing* was not continuing, but quickly obliterated by the fall; *the second writing* was not effectual, but only discovered their sin and duty. . . *The third writing* is both effectual and continuing. . . So that this last inscription of God's Laws in the minds and hearts of the new covenant federates, does far excel all that went before.” (pp1374). John Murray says: “the new covenant is not indifferent to law. It is not contrasted with the old because the old had law and the new has not. The superiority of the new does not consist in the abrogation of that law but in its being brought into more intimate relation to us and more effective fulfillment in us: I will put my laws into their mind, and upon their hearts will I write them’ (Hebrews 8:10).” (*Covenant of Grace*). And Robertson clarifies: “Indeed, God shall write his will on the fleshly tablets of the heart, in contrast with the older engraving of his law on stone tablets. But it will be essentially the same law of God that will be the substance of this engraving.” (pp281-82).⁴⁵ Calvin notes of 31:33, *I will put My Law*: “By these words he confirms what we have said, that the newness, which he before mentioned, was not so as to the *substance*, but as to the *form* only; for God does not say here, ‘I will give you another Law,’ but ‘I will write my Law,’ that is, the same Law, which had formerly been delivered to the fathers. He then does not promise anything different as to the *essence* of the doctrine, but he makes the difference to be in the *form* only.” (on Jeremiah 31:33). Francis Roberts says: “Negatively, He declares what manner of covenant this new covenant should not be, [namely] not such a covenant as was the Sinai covenant, that old covenant: ‘Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. . .’ (Hebrews 8:9). This new covenant should not be according to that covenant. . . In all this negative the Holy Ghost seems to have respect to the *form* and *administration*. . . not to the *matter* and *substance* of the new covenant. . .” (pp1340-41). And again: “Before the time of this new covenant there was some kind and manner of God's writing His Laws in the hearts of His people. . . David himself was a man after God's own heart and himself confesses: ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy Law is within my heart,’ (Hebrew: ‘in the midst of my bowels,’ Psalm 40:8). . . Notwithstanding all this, thus granted, till the time of this new covenant God's Laws were not so written in His people's hearts, as since they have been. . . The efficacy of former administrations, was very weak and small, in comparison of this new covenant administration which is great and powerful. Under those, the Holy Spirit was but as it were sparingly sprinkled upon them. . . But under this, the Holy Spirit is plentifully poured forth as in streams and rivers upon them, and into them. . . Hence, the Spirit is said ‘not to be given, till Christ was glorified’ (John 7:39); not as if it had not been given at all; but because it was bestowed so sparingly and slenderly, in comparison to what is now, that it might seem not to be given at all.” (Roberts, pp1383-86). And: “The new covenant agrees with the old in *matter and substance*, although they differ in *manner and circumstance*. For, 1) The matter and substance of them both, is God's Moral Law. . . 2) The manner and circumstance of writing this Moral Law by God is very different under these two covenants. In the old covenant God wrote it in tables of stone; in the new covenant He writes in the fleshly tables of mind and heart. . . In the old covenant it was written more imperfectly, weakly, literally, ineffectually; though the people's hearts had some impression thereof upon them, yet they remained very stony, stubborn, untractable notwithstanding; but in the new covenant it is written more perfectly, strongly, spiritually, effectually. . .” (Roberts, pp1393-94). And Robertson says: “While the new covenant will be at radical variance with the old covenant with respect to its effectiveness in accomplishing its goal, the substance of the two covenants in terms of their redemptive intention is identical.” (*Christ of the Covenants*, p282).

B) The EXTENT of the Covenant: Some take the contrast Jeremiah's making in a different way; as being that of corporate versus individual. What's the difference between the old and new covenants? The old covenant was made with Israel as a corporate whole; it was established with the entire nation collectively; *and as a result, it was also mixed*. Since it was established with the whole nation, the old covenant was made up of both believers and unbelievers. But this is what would be different with the new covenant, for in the new covenant, "they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (verse 34). So, this is how others understand Jeremiah's contrast: Whereas the old covenant extended to a mixed multitude, the new covenant is limited to elect believers. And at first glance, this may seem to be what Jeremiah is saying. But notice, first of all, that *this passage explicitly tells us that the new covenant is a corporate covenant*. In fact, the only covenant in Jeremiah 31 that is explicitly corporate is the new covenant; for it's the new covenant—not the old—that's said to be made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . ." (verse 31; cf. v33). This is corporate language. So we can't say that whereas the Lord had established the old covenant with His people collectively, the new covenant is now only made with individuals. No, the new covenant is no less corporate than the old. And notice, secondly, that *the new covenant is no less mixed than the old*. No one would argue that this passage about the new covenant properly begins in verse 27. And in the opening verses of 27-29, we find the Lord describing the abundance of blessing that would rest upon His people in the days of the new covenant. But in the same breathe, the Lord also says in verse 30: "But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge." The Lord is using a metaphor here to convey the truth that He will judge His people individually in the new covenant. But as He does so, we learn something extremely important: Even in the new covenant church, there will be mixed in among God's people those who yet *eat the sour grapes—and die for their iniquity*.⁴⁶

If this is all true, how are we to understand verse 34, where the Lord tells us that in the new covenant, "they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. . ."? Well, even in the phrase being used here, Scripture itself is giving us a clue. This isn't the only place where Jeremiah uses this phrase, "from the least of them to the greatest of them"; and it's in discovering how the prophet uses this idiom *elsewhere* that we come to understand what he means as he uses it *here*. Along with using this phrase in 31:34, Jeremiah also uses this same idiom in two other places: Speaking of the people of Judah, Jeremiah says in 6:13, "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely." And again, the Lord declares to Jeremiah in 8:10: "Therefore I will give their wives to others, their fields to new owners; because from the least even to the greatest everyone is greedy for gain; from the prophet even to the priest everyone practices deceit." Now, when we see this same idiom used in Jeremiah 6:13 and 8:10

⁴⁶ We could say that *Jeremiah's broadest context in speaking of the new covenant extends to the entirety of chapters 30-31*. As Robertson notes: "The theme binding together the prophecies of Jeremiah 30 and 31 is indicated plainly in the first 3 verses of chapter 30. The prophet is told to write the words the Lord has spoken to him in a book, for the Lord would restore the fortunes of his people. The two chapters [Jeremiah 30-31] are bound together not only by their common theme, but also by a common introductory phrase: 'For behold, days are coming, says Yahweh. . .' (cf. Jeremiah 30:3; 31:27, 31, 38)." (Robertson, p279). In that sense, we might say that the new covenant passage of Jeremiah properly begins with chapter 30. But in the immediate context of 31:31-34, we can't be faithful to the text without beginning with verse 27. Not only is vv27-30 just before vv31-34, and not only does vv27-30 focus on the same subject and theme of vv31-34, but Scripture itself intentionally binds them together with the same opening phrase: "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord. . ." *On the danger of taking the corporate element out of the new covenant*, Robertson says: "It is rather tempting to set the individualistic dimension of this covenant over against a corporate concept, and to find the distinctiveness of the new covenant in this specific area. . . But this passage of Jeremiah should not be cited to prove the substitution of the individual for the people of God as a whole in the new covenant. Jeremiah does not set a personal faith-relationship in the new covenant in opposition to a corporate relationship. He maintains both of these features with equal emphasis. The prophet explicitly states that the new covenant shall be made corporately. Not just with individuals, but fully in accord with the whole pattern of God's dealing with his people throughout redemptive history, this new covenant shall be made 'with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Jeremiah 31:31). . . If the new covenant is being fulfilled today, it should be expected that both the corporate and the individualistic elements currently are finding realization. The corporate dimension which played such a vital role in God's old covenant dealings with his people must not be omitted from the present realities of the new covenant." (pp286-87). *The idiom of verse 29* was evidently used by the Jews in or before the exile, and carried the meaning of something like: "We're being punished now because of the accumulated sins of our fathers." In other words: *They're* the ones who sinned but *we're* being punished. Engaging in a sinful lifestyle is akin to "eating the sour grapes" and reaping the punishment of that lifestyle akin to having one's teeth "set on edge." These Jews were just as much to blame as their ancestors, but they were blaming their punishment on their fathers, hypocritically and falsely protesting their own innocence. God does not affirm this statement as in any way having been true; but only alludes to it being what the Jews had said, declaring this would no longer be repeated in the new covenant.

to describe the wickedness of the people, it becomes much clearer what it means *and* what it doesn't mean. Surely Jeremiah isn't saying there wasn't a single person who knew the Lord. Surely Jeremiah isn't telling us that each and every individual in Judah, without exception, had turned away from God. This can't be true; because we know that—at the very least—Jeremiah himself, along with Baruch the scribe as well as a faithful man named Ebed-melech knew and trusted the Lord (cf. 39:15-18; 45:1-5). No, when Jeremiah declares that God's people in the old covenant had turned away from Him “from the least even to the greatest”; *he's making a relative contrast in absolute terms*. Jeremiah's not saying that every single person without exception had turned away from the Lord; he's rather characterizing the vast majority of them. The idiom is meant to generalize the people as a whole, collectively. And this is exactly what Jeremiah is saying in 31:34 about *the new covenant*: He's not telling us there were *no individuals* who knew God in the old covenant, nor that *every individual* would know Him in the new. But that, whereas *on the whole*, God's people had turned away from Him in the old covenant, they will know Him now in the new. It's not the *extent* of the covenant that will differ; but the *effect*.⁴⁷

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

	THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO
NOT	Extended to a mixed multitude	Limited only to elect believers	The <i>Extent</i> of the covenant
BUT	God's people largely rejected it	God's people will largely embrace it	The <i>Effect</i> of the covenant

3. The THIRD Question: *So what is it that's new about the new covenant?*

So far, we've been focusing mainly on *what isn't new* about the new covenant. And what we saw, first of all, is that *the benefits of the new covenant* aren't something that are new; for the Lord doesn't just forgive sin and change His people in the new covenant. God forgave His people and changed them in the old covenant as well. Neither is *the content of the new covenant* anything new, since both the

⁴⁷ We referenced Jeremiah 6:13 and 8:10; but another passage where we see the same principle is Jeremiah 44:11-14, 27-28. Here, the Lord is addressing the people through Jeremiah; and though He has clearly commanded them not to flee to Egypt (in order to escape from the hand of the Babylonians, as their captivity was imminent), He knows many of them will not listen, but will flee to Egypt regardless, in order to seek safety and refuge in Pharaoh (rather than in the Lord). And so, as the Lord addresses them through Jeremiah, He tells them: “Behold, I am going to set My face against you for woe, even to cut off *all Judah*. And I will take away the remnant of Judah who have set their mind on entering the land of Egypt to reside there, and *they will all meet their end* in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword and meet their end by famine. *Both small and great will die* by the sword and famine. . . *So there will be no refugees* or survivors for the remnant of Judah who have entered the land of Egypt to reside there and then to return to the land of Judah, to which they are longing to return and live; for *none* will return *except a few refugees*.” (44:11-14). Notice how emphatically the Lord declares over and over again in this passage that they will *all be cut off* and *perish*. And yet look how the Lord qualifies it at the end: “. . . *except a few refugees*.” And the same truth is repeated once again in 44:27-28: “Behold, I am watching over them for harm and not for good, and *all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt will meet their end* by the sword and by famine *until they are completely gone*. *Those who escape the sword will return out of the land of Egypt to the land of Judah few in number*. . .” So in both passages, the Lord declares that *all* will perish. But then immediately we're told that “all” doesn't mean every single individual, for there would still be a few who would escape. And so, “all” and “both small and great” here in Jeremiah 44 is clearly meant to signify the great majority, rather than every single individual. It's the same principle in Jeremiah 31:34: Jeremiah's not saying that it was a mixed multitude in the old covenant but that in the new every single individual among God's people will know Him. That's not a responsible way to interpret Jeremiah's own usage of the phrase “from the least of them to the greatest of them” (cf. again 6:13 and 8:10). No, what Jeremiah's saying is that in the new covenant, the tables would be turned. This is also confirmed by what we read in 31:28, where we're told that in the old covenant, the Lord “watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster. . .” God didn't always do this in the old covenant (cf. 1:10), but on the whole. And in the same way, the Lord will not only build up and plant in the new covenant, but on the whole, for Revelation 2-3 teaches us that He also sees fit at times to pluck up new covenant churches when necessary; as also branches in the new covenant that bear no fruit He sees fit to cut off and throw into the fire (John 15:2,6). So here in verse 28, we see the same principle in relation to the old covenant, that we do in verse 31 with the new: This isn't an absolute contrast but a comparative one. There were both believers and unbelievers in the old covenant, and there will be unbelievers also mixed in with the new covenant church (v30). But in the days of the new covenant, God will cause those who know Him to be *the many* rather than *the few*. What we're guarding against in this section is the notion that in the new covenant, God has abolished the distinction between the visible and invisible church. Some hold to the view that the old covenant church was made up of both true believers (the invisible church) as well as empty professors (included in the visible church but not part of the invisible church), but that in the new covenant, the only members of the church are true believers. We know simply from experience this isn't true, but some are confused about what else Jeremiah could be saying here; and this is why an understanding of this text is so crucial. The truth is, the Lord has in no way done away with the distinction between the visible and invisible church in the new covenant. Again, Jeremiah's not saying that whereas the old covenant church was made up of a mixed multitude, the church of the new covenant would be limited only to elect believers; the contrast doesn't have to do with *the extent* of the covenant but *its effect*.

old covenant and the new are comprised of both the Law and the gospel. It's not as though the Law is what was written in the old covenant, whereas the gospel will be written in the new—but that a new covenant would be made in which that same Law would be written, though in a different place. And lastly, *it's not the extent of the new covenant* that's new, as if the old covenant extended corporately to a mixed multitude, but the new is just limited to elect believers. For even in the new covenant church there will be mixed in among God's people some who *eat the sour grapes, and die for their iniquity*. So, when Jeremiah contrasts the old and new covenants, he's not telling us the new would be different than the old because forgiveness would be new. Nor is he saying the new would be different because God writing His Law on the hearts of His people would be completely new. Jeremiah's not telling us the new would be different than the old because redemption and gospel mercies would now replace the Law. Nor is he saying the new would be different because now God will only deal with individual believers as opposed to dealing with His people collectively, as a whole. And, just in case you may be wondering, Jeremiah's not telling us the new would be different because now we won't need teachers anymore (v34); for not only has the Lord clearly appointed some as pastors and teachers in the new covenant church (Ephesians 4:11-12), but we're also called to teach one another (Colossians 3:16).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ On the meaning of verse 34 about teaching, Roberts notes: “The word *not* here, is not a simple and absolute negative, as if hereby the new covenant excluded all human teaching; for that is most repugnant to new covenant doctrine. . . But it is rather a comparative. . . importing, that the former teaching under the old covenant should be comparatively as no teaching at all. . .” (Roberts, p1343). And again, Roberts writes: “Hereby God intimates, that under His old covenant, His people were taught to know Him, by human instruction for the most part, they had comparatively very little of His immediate divine instruction, because His Spirit was very sparingly given till Christ's glorification. But under His new covenant, the knowledge which His federates should have of God should be more divine; God himself would more immediately teach them, 'All their children should be taught of God.' (Isaiah 54:13 with John 6:45). Not that God ever intended by this promise to lay aside all human teaching, public or private, under His new covenant; for God commands and calls for such teaching frequently and vehemently now under His new covenant administration: Ministers must teach the Church and people of God, publicly (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). Parents must teach their children, and Christians must teach one another, privately (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 3:13). But under the new covenant His people should have more of the Spirit of God poured forth upon them, and more teaching immediately from God, than under the old covenant. . . Moses face was veiled. . . All was under a dark veil. But now under the new covenant. . . the veil is done away . . . and we all with unveiled open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image. . . Notable is that of our Savior's, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things that ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them' (Luke 10:23-24). Hereby (as Calvin observes) Christ intimates, that God has shined out more fully by the doctrine of the gospel than formerly. In like sort Christ says, 'He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John [the] Baptist' (Matthew 11:11), who yet excelled all the Prophets. John [the] Baptist in his office was more excellent than all the Prophets, and surpassed them in understanding, and yet says Christ, 'the least professor and witness of the gospel is greater than he.' This is not only referred to their persons, nor ought only to be restrained to them, but rather to the clear and plain manner of teaching, which is found in the gospel. . . 'Now we have received. . . the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God' (1 Corinthians 2:12). . . Under the old covenant the federates were as children under age (Galatians 4:1-4); brought up and instructed in rudiments and first elements of divine doctrine. . . they had but an imperfect and child-like understanding of God and divine things; they understood as children; they were but alphabetarians in knowledge. . . But under the new covenant the federates are as grown men come to maturity, put up to a higher form and harder lesson, having a more ripe and complete knowledge of God. . . They have such an anointing as teaches them all things (1 John 2:20,27).” (Roberts, pp1404-07). And Calvin also observes of Jeremiah 31:34: “the Prophet does not wholly deny that they would teach one another, but his words are these, 'They shall not teach, saying, Know the Lord'; as though he had said, 'Ignorance shall not as heretofore so possess the minds of men as not to know who God is.'” (Calvin on Hebrews 8:11). And Calvin again notes: “Here is mentioned another difference between the old and the new covenant, even that God, who had obscurely manifested himself under the Law, would send forth a fuller light, so that the knowledge of Him would be commonly enjoyed. But He hyperbolically extols this favor, when He says that no one would have need of a teacher or instructor, as everyone would have himself sufficient knowledge. We therefore consider that the object of the Prophet is mainly to show, that so great would be the light of the gospel, that it would be clearly evident, that God under it deals more bountifully with His people, because its truth shines forth as the sun at noon-day. The same thing Isaiah promises, when he says that all would become the disciples of God (Isaiah 54:13). This was indeed the case also under the Law, though God gave then but a small taste of heavenly doctrine; but at the coming of Christ He unfolded the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so that under the gospel there is the perfection of what had been begun; for we know that the ancient people were like children, and hence God kept them in the rudiments of knowledge; now, as we are grown up, he favors us with a fuller doctrine, and he comes, as it were, nearer to us.” (Calvin on Jeremiah 31:34). Ligon Duncan draws out the meaning of Jeremiah 31:34 from 1 John 2:26-27, as he writes: “What is one of the fundamental differences, John says, between those Christians who have continued to abide in the Apostolic teaching and those who have left the teaching of the Church to go back to this Gnostic era? Those who remain are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and hence, *taught of the Lord*. Now, what is he picking up on? Jeremiah's promise that from the least of them to the greatest, they will not need a teacher to teach them the law of God, it will have been written on their hearts by God, Himself. . . Now does that mean that John doesn't need to teach them anything? No, he wouldn't have written the book, if he hadn't had to do that. He is speaking at a much more fundamental level, of the spirit of discernment which is gained only by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.” (Duncan).

God forgave His people in the old covenant. *But the newness has to do with how, and in what way He does so now in the new covenant.* For again, whereas in the old covenant there was a *promise* of forgiveness—it's the new covenant that provides the actual *payment*. The Lord forgave His people in the old covenant, but He did so on credit. The bulls and goats, whose blood was shed under the old covenant, only had value in that they pointed forward to Christ. They were only shadows—but He is the substance. In the same way, God wrote His Law on the hearts of His people in the old covenant. *But the newness has to do with how, and to what degree He does so now in the new covenant.* For though the Lord did this in the old covenant, it was on a much different scale, and to a much smaller degree. For under the old covenant, it was *the few* that were truly changed—but it's *the many* that will embrace the covenant from the heart in the new. And whereas the Lord wrote His Law in the hearts of His old covenant people, but *in a smaller proportion*—He will now do so *on a much greater scale*.

So, what is it that's new about the new covenant? As other theologians have said, it's not *the nature* of the new covenant that's different from the old—but it's *administration*. It's not *the essence* of the new covenant that's being contrasted with the old—but it's *form*. It's the same Covenant of Grace. The old covenant is no less about Jesus and the gospel than the new. But in the new covenant, Jesus and His gospel are set forth with such clarity, that *the knowledge of God* among His new covenant people will almost be to such a degree that they won't need any teaching—in comparison with the old. Indeed, if the clarity of gospel knowledge in the old covenant was as a candle—it will be like the sun in the new. And in the new covenant, *the forgiveness* that Jesus ushers in through the blood that He shed on the cross is as different from the old covenant as a picture is to reality, or as a shadow is to the substance. Indeed, all the pictures and shadows of the old covenant are worthless on their own, for though they promised forgiveness—they never actually purchased it. Lastly, in the new covenant, *Jesus now writes His Law in the hearts of His people* and pours out His Spirit upon them in such an unprecedented measure and to such a greater degree that it's incomparable with how He did so in the old covenant. Indeed, the old covenant included God's Law written internally on hearts; and the new covenant also includes God's Law written externally on the pages of our Bibles—but the difference is that whereas so few were changed in the old that it was marked and characterized by the external writing on stone, now so many are being changed in the new that it is marked and characterized by the internal writing on our hearts. Again, it's the same Covenant of Grace. The new covenant doesn't differ from the old in its nature or essence. The way it differs is in how, and in what way and degree it's administered.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Francis Roberts summarizes the differences between the old and new covenants in a succinct way when he writes: “These new covenant promises are so expressed, as virtually to contain in them, the agreement and difference between the old and new covenant, yea the preeminences of the new above the old. This agreement, difference, and preeminence may thus in brief be evidenced, from the words of the covenant: *I. The agreement between the old and new covenant*, for substance of them, is expressed in two particulars especially, [namely] 1) In the sum and glorious abstract of the covenants: ‘I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.’ This is the sum of both old and new covenant in express terms. 2) In the Laws of this covenant promised to be written in their hearts: ‘And I will give my Laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.’ What Laws? Even the same Moral Laws which were given for a covenant to Israel at Mount Sinai, which was the old covenant. God does not say (as Calvin excellently observes), ‘I will give another Law’; but I will write my Law, [namely] the same which was anciently given to the fathers. . . *II. The difference also between the old and new covenant* is here purposely expressed, and this, more generally, and more particularly: 1) More generally, in those words, ‘I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. . .’ Here the Lord plainly declares in the general, that He would make a new covenant with them, which should be another manner of covenant, a very different covenant from that old covenant. 2) More particularly, He states this difference in three points expressly, as Calvin has very well noted: A) In the inscription of God’s Laws: In both old and new covenant there is a writing of God’s Laws; but, in the old covenant they were written in tables of stone, in this new covenant upon the fleshly tables of their mind and heart. *That*, was only a literal and ineffectual writing, that showed duty but gave no ability; *this*, is a spiritual and efficacious writing that affords ability for the required duty. B) In the instruction of the federates: In that old covenant they had mostly a human instruction, and that but in principles of the knowledge of the Lord; they were *alphabetarians*, children under age, capable only of elements and rudiments. But under this new covenant the generality of the federates have a more than human, even a divine teaching promised them touching the Lord, they are come to age, shall be put up into a higher form, and have in sight into higher mysteries. C) In the ablation or taking away of sins: In the old covenant there were many sacrifices for expiation of sin which were repeated every year, every day, being unable to take away sin, but rather becoming renewed remembrances of sin, year by year, day by day; but in this new covenant, Christ by that one sacrifice of himself once offered, and never to be repeated, has purged away the sins of His elect forever, so that they shall need no more sacrifice for expiation, and that God will remember them no more. *III. The preeminence of the new covenant also above the old*, does stand in all those three points of difference fore-expressed; in all which this new covenant far excels.” (Francis Roberts, *Mystery and Marrow*, pp1365-66).