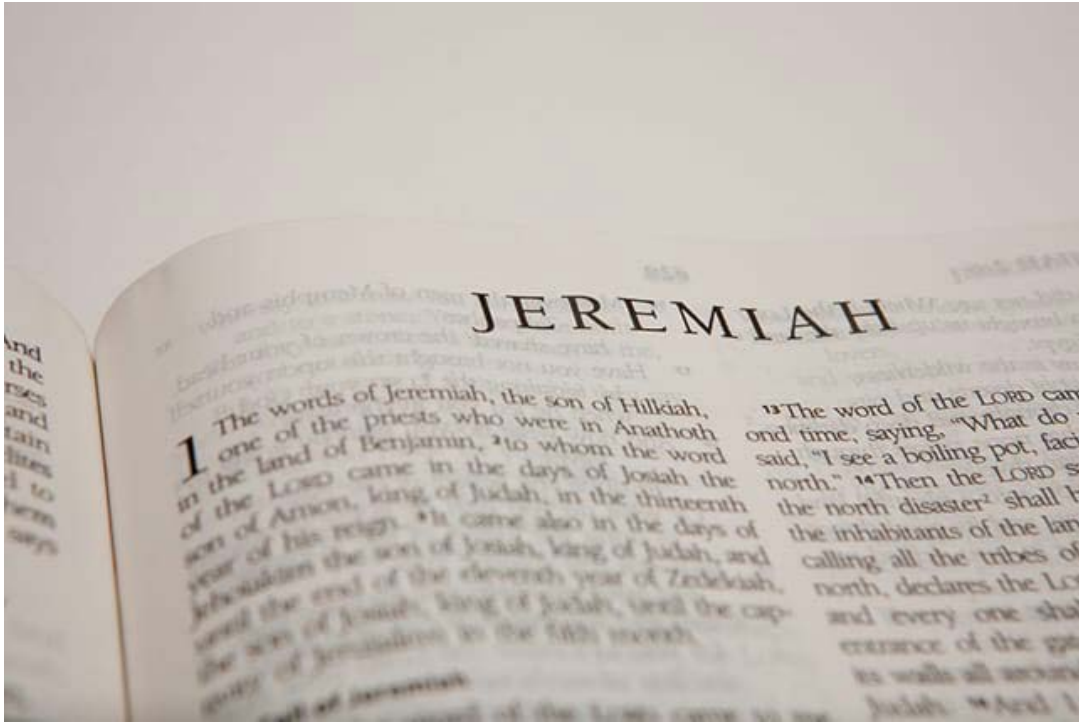


THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH
A NEW COVENANT
JEREMIAH 29-31



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

A New Covenant: Jeremiah 29-31

A New Covenant: Jeremiah 29-31
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Introduction to Jeremiah 29-31

We see another side of Jeremiah's ministry, as this section consists of words of comfort, encouragement, and hope for those who have gone into exile in Babylon.

God has not forgotten His people, whom He loves with an everlasting love. Nor has He forgotten His Word. Israel may forsake God, but God will never forsake His chosen people. Jeremiah writes to the captives to encourage and instruct them, and to advise them of God's plan for them for a future and a hope.

That future plan is bound up in a new covenant which God will make with His people. This new covenant will be further development of the old, but this one will reach to the souls of God's people, and renew their hearts in love for Him.

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1 Future Hope, Present Duty

Pray Psalm 126.6.

He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Sing Psalm 126.6.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

They who in tears of sorrow sow
and cast their seed on every hand,
with joy shall reach their heav'nly home,
and bring the harvest of their land.

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 29.1-14.

Prepare.

1. To whom did Jeremiah write this letter?
2. What was his message to them?

Meditate.

We recall that Nebuchadnezzar made three assaults on Jerusalem – the first when Jehoiakim was king, the second when Jeconiah ruled, and the last as Zedekiah continued his futile resistance against the Babylonian king. At the time Jeremiah wrote this chapter, two deportations had already occurred. A substantial group of the best of Jerusalem and Judah's population were already under the yoke in Babylon.

We can perhaps imagine how those people must have felt. Confused. Uncertain. Out of sorts as to how to maintain their religious lives, how to care for their families, and what to do for work. The temptation would have been great to just sulk and sit about, doing nothing, waiting for the captors to tell them what to do next.

He instructed them to build homes and gardens, to marry and give their children in marriage, and to work at increasing the population. They were also to seek the peace of the city where they were captive and to pray to God for its wellbeing (vv. 5-7). They must not listen to the naysayers among them (vv. 8, 9), but instead should begin looking ahead to the day of return, seventy years in the future (v. 10). For God still had great plans for His people, a plan for peace and hope (v. 11); they would demonstrate their belief in God by preparing for and working diligently toward that day of return.

And above all, they must seek the Lord (vv. 12-14). That is, individually and as a community, they must resume the disciplines of prayer, worship, and hearing the Word of the Lord that made them His holy people in the first place. God promised to be found by them, even in their time of difficulty, as long as they continued to seek Him earnestly.

As the Lord would come again to deliver the captives back to their home, so He will come again to take us unto Himself in glory. Yes, the times we live in can be difficult and filled with uncertainty. But we must get busy – building communities, nurturing the young in the faith, creating a distinctly Christian culture, living according to the Law and Word of God, and seeking the Lord diligently, individually and together, day by day.

Jeremiah's message to the captives in Jerusalem is a prototype of the New Testament, and a portent of the new covenant we will see in this section of Jeremiah's prophecy.

Reflect.

1. Why did Jeremiah instruct the captives in Babylon to "get busy"? What were they to do?
2. How is this letter a prototype of the New Testament?
3. What work have we been given to do while we await the Lord's return to take us home?

And the prophet Jeremiah, when predicting the captivity that was to befall the ancient people of God and giving them the divine command to go obediently to Babylonia and thus serve their God, counseled them also to pray for Babylonia, saying, "In its peace you will have peace"—the temporal peace that the good and the wicked together enjoy. Augustine (354-430) City of God 19.26

Help me today, Lord, as I work in my Personal Mission Field, so that I...

Pray Psalm 126.1-6.

These are difficult times – times of uncertainty and struggle. But we are not without hope, nor are we without work to do. Commit your day to the Lord, to sow in faith for the harvest He will bring in His time.

Sing Psalm 126.1-6.

Psalm 126.1-6 (Truro: [*Shout for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

When God restored our fortunes all,
we were like those who sweetly dream.
Our mouths with joy and laughter filled,
made Him our constant song and theme.

Then the astonished nations said,
"The Lord has done great things for them!"
Indeed, great things our God has done,
Whose Name we praise, Amen, Amen!

Restore our fortunes, Lord our King!
Let grace like flowing streams prevail.
All they with tears of joy shall sing
who sow while yet they weep and wail.

They who in tears of sorrow sow
and cast their seed on every hand,
with joy shall reach their heav'nly home,
and bring the harvest of their land.

2 End of the Road

Pray Psalm 75.9, 10.

But I will declare forever,
I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.
“All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off,
But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.”

Sing Psalm 75.9, 10.

(Galilee: [Jesus Call Us](#))

As for me, I will declare it: Evermore to God be praise!
He abases all the wicked, but His righteous ones He saves!

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 29.15-32.

Prepare.

1. How did the “prophets” who were in Babylon respond to Jeremiah’s letter?
2. What judgment did God issue against the false prophets?

Meditate.

Not everybody who had been taken into captivity to Babylon was happy to receive Jeremiah’s letter. Specifically, it seems the false prophets who had been carried away there resented what they regarded as Jeremiah’s intrusion onto their “turf.” Were they not prophets just like Jeremiah?

Well, no. Those who had denied Jeremiah’s warnings of judgment while they were yet in Jerusalem continued to deny them even while they were in captivity. They kept telling the people that all their troubles would be over in just a little while, then they and all the temple furniture would be returned to Jerusalem. Jeremiah said that they should prepare for a long exile, and the false prophets in Babylon wanted him silenced (vv. 27, 28).

God would openly and publicly bring His judgment against these prophets, thus vindicating *His* Word against theirs, and reinforcing Jeremiah’s message to the exiles (vv. 15-23). The lies and sinful ways of these false shepherds had brought them to the end of the road. Even as they were being carried away to Babylon – just as Jeremiah had prophesied – they continued living lawless lives and preaching soothing sentiments rather than the hard truth of God. And God had had enough.

When the letter came to Jerusalem demanding that Jeremiah be rebuked (vv. 27, 28), God spoke through Jeremiah condemning Shemaiah, the writer of the letter, “because he has taught rebellion against the LORD” (v. 32).

Those entrusted with the ministry of God’s Word must not tell people what they think will make them feel better, or what will make them popular with those to whom they preach. They must preach the Word of God, exposing sin, calling for repentance, warning of judgment, and holding out the hope of deliverance and renewal for all who hear and obey the Lord. Jeremiah did this. The false prophets did not. So for them, Babylon was the end of the road.

Reflect.

1. God has entrusted His Word to each one of us who knows Jesus Christ. What does He expect of us?
2. How can we know when a teacher of God’s Word has ceased teaching truth?

3. What can you do to make sure you aren't lead astray by false teaching?

Jeremiah announces a special prophecy, but in confirmation of his former doctrine. His object is still the same, to prevent the captives, as they had begun, to listen to flatteries, and to make them feel assured that they were to bear their exile till the end of seventy years. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Jeremiah 29.20

No matter how hard, no matter how difficult, Lord, help me to receive and obey Your Word, so that I...

Pray Psalm 75.1-8.

Praise God for His mighty works. Thank Him for all His goodness. Rest in His judgment over all the world.

Sing Psalm 75.1-8.

Psalm 75.1-8 (Galilee: [Jesus Calls Us](#))

We give thanks, Lord, we give thanks for Your all-glorious Name is near!
Men Your wondrous works declare, Lord; let all living creatures hear!

When you choose the time of judgment, You will judge with equity.
Then the earth and all within it by Your hand no more shall be.

Warn the boastful, warn the wicked: "Do not boast or raise your horn!
Do not raise your boastful voices; do not speak with pride and scorn!"

Neither east nor west nor desert shall exalting bring to man.
God is Judge, He puts one down and makes another one to stand.

For the cup of judgment foams in Jesus' sovereign, holy hand.
He has mixed it and will pour it out on every wicked man.

3 The Yoke Broken

Pray Psalm 115.1-3.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where *is* their God?”
But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Sing Psalm 115.1-3.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 30.1-24.

Prepare.

1. What did God promise His people?
2. What would they do when that promise was realized?

Meditate.

The question arising from this passage is, “Who is ‘David their king?’”

God told Jeremiah to write this message in a book. With all the false prophets among the people in captivity, working to lead them astray, God wanted His Word made permanent and easy to distribute, so that all the captives in Babylon would have hope (vv. 1-3). The people were suffering now, but a day of salvation lay just ahead, when the yoke of captivity would be broken from off them, and they would “serve the LORD their God, and David their king” (vv. 5-10).

The people of Israel had been scattered among many nations (v. 11). But God was with His people, and He was going to judge all those nations (v. 16), and set His people free from wherever He had sent them, so that they could return to their land.

Yes, what the people of God were experiencing for the present was difficult (vv. 12-15). But they needed to remember that they had brought this on themselves by their rebellion against the Lord and His Law.

But the day was coming when God would “restore health” to His people (v. 17) and bring them back to their dwelling places (v. 18). When that happened, the people would celebrate with thanksgiving and joy, and God would glorify them before the nations (v. 19). Then they would become His covenant people, His “congregation”; and they would resume their calling of multiplying and ruling in the earth (vv. 20-22).

“In the latter days” this would all come to pass (v. 24; cf. Acts 2.14-17). “David” would be established as King of Israel at that time; but this would not happen immediately after the return of Israel to the land. For no king sat on the throne of David following the return from exile. The coming seed of David, for Whom the

faithful looked and longed, would be realized in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect.

1. God promised to “glorify” His people. What did He mean by that?
2. To what does verse 22 refer? What is the meaning of this “slogan”?
3. Why was it important that Jeremiah write this in a book?

“I shall raise up David their king for them.” Christ the Lord brought fulfillment to the prophecy. He sprang from David according to the flesh, and he no longer shepherds only Israel but all the nations. Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), On Jeremiah 7.30

Jesus, You are my King, and today I will serve You by...

Pray Psalm 115.4-18.

Call on King Jesus as your help and shield for this day. Devote all your activities to Him and for His glory.

Sing Psalm 115.4-18.

Psalm 115.4-18 (Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Idols made by men's own hand – ever to Your Name be glory –
see nor hear nor understand – ever to Your Name be glory!
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;
all those who serve them fall, but unto Your Name be glory!

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

4 Arise, and Let Us Go

Pray Psalm 122.1-4.

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go into the house of the LORD.”
Our feet have been standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem is built
As a city that is compact together,
Where the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD,
To the Testimony of Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.

Sing Psalm 122.1-4.

(Nettleton: [*Come Thou Fount*](#))

I was glad when they said to me, “To the Lord’s house let us go!”
Holy City, let our feet be firmly planted in your soil.
Jesus builds His Church forever, where His people sing His praise!
As Your Word decrees forever, we will thank You all our days.

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 31.1-6.

Prepare.

1. Why did God promise to renew His people?
2. How would the people react when He did?

Meditate.

We can’t help but feel momentum building in this section for some new work of God on behalf of His people. In chapter 29, God promised His people a future and a hope, and told them He had plans for them to realize this. In chapter 30 God declared that He would bring His people back from captivity to serve Him once again, that they would give Him abundant praise and thanks, and that He would glorify them. Then He restated the motto which is closely associated with His covenant: “You shall be My people, and I will be your God” (30.22).

The same ideas recur in our passage for today. God promised to be “God of all the families of Israel,” and assured them that “they shall be My people” (v. 1). He reaffirmed His eternal love for His people (v. 3), and He promised that the nation would once again be rebuilt (v. 4). Then there would be dancing and celebrating, and planting and harvesting aplenty (vv. 4, 5). And then the watchmen would call the people to assemble to their God, to worship Him on Mt. Zion (v. 6).

Sounds like old times. But not quite. Not old times, but better times, as we shall see. As the captives began to settle into their “new normal” in Babylon, God reminded them of His old and unchanging promises, and of the covenant by which He had bound Himself to them. He did this so that they would not forget, and to encourage them to long for a day of renewal in Him. He will continue to nurture this sense of anticipation on the part of His people as chapter 31 proceeds, until at the end, He surprises them with the promise, not of covenant renewal, but of a new covenant altogether.

And the key to it all is verse 2: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness – Israel, when I went to give him rest”, says the Lord. They who had disobeyed, rebelled, and abandoned God found grace nonetheless. And so it is with us. All our wellbeing, hope, and abounding joy are the result of God’s grace. That was so in the Old Testament, and it is so in the New Testament. God’s covenant and all the blessings that come to us through that covenant are by His grace, manifested especially in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Reflect.

1. What did God mean by saying that He loves His people with an “everlasting love”?
2. Why must our relationship with God depend entirely on His grace? What is our duty in the face of that grace?
3. Worship is central to our renewed relationship with God (v. 6). Why is that?

*Yea, he says, I have loved thee with perpetual love. God then here shews, that the redemption, by which he had exhibited a remarkable proof of his mercy, was founded on the gratuitous adoption which was not for one year, but perpetual in its duration. We thus see that he reproves the detestable blasphemy of the people, and intimates that adoption was the cause of their redemption. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Jeremiah 31.3**

Thank You for Your everlasting love, O Lord; help me to show my love for You today as I...

Pray Psalm 122.5-9.

Thank the Lord for His peace, His promises, and His Presence as you go forth to serve Him today.

Sing Psalm 122.5-9.

Psalm 122.5-9 (Nettleton: [*Come Thou Fount*](#))

On the throne of David, Jesus sits to judge the nations all.

As our holy peace increases, we are safe who on You call.

Grant us peace, Lord, by Your favor, for Your people’s sake we pray.

For the Church’s sake, O Savior, we will seek Your good today.

5 Satisfied with His Goodness

Pray Psalm 27.11-14.

Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.
Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD!

Sing Psalm 27.11-14.

(Joanna: [*Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*](#))
Lord, teach us; Lord, lead us because of our foes!
Hear, Lord, when we plead for release from their woes.
Had we not believed all Your goodness to see,
Our heart sorely grieved and in turmoil would be.

Wait, wait on the Lord; persevere in His grace.
Hold fast to His Word; seek His radiant face.
Be strong, set your heart to abide in His Word;
His grace He imparts; therefore, wait on the Lord.

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 31.7-14.

Prepare.

1. What did God promise His people in these verses?
2. What did God do to accomplish this?

Meditate.

Our text looks forward to a day of ransom and redemption (v. 11). The people of God are to be wrested from the hand of the one who was stronger than they, and returned to their land with joy and prosperity. He Who scattered them will gather them to Himself, and shepherd them by His everlasting love (v. 10), for God is their Father, and they are His people (v. 9).

The goodness of the Lord motivates this action, and it constitutes the richest blessing to which God brings His people (vv. 12, 14). God would not allow His people to languish in captivity. He would return them to their land from all the nations to which He had sent them. He will save them and gather them to His goodness (v. 7), and they shall come with rejoicing at His command.

In the short term, Jeremiah was restating the promise to those captive in Babylon, that God would return them to their land at the end of seventy years. But the ultimate redemption promised in these verses – the jewel in the crown of God’s goodness – will be for a later day. For God’s people need to be saved and ransomed, not only from all their physical maladies and constraints, but from their sins and rebelliousness.

Only a work of redemption can accomplish that, and this will be for a later day, when Jesus comes to take His place on the throne of David.

Reflect.

1. How would you explain the goodness of the Lord to an unbelieving friend?
2. How do you experience the goodness of the Lord through the course of a day?
3. What does it mean to have your soul “be like a well-watered garden”?

He adds, and they shall flow together to the goodness of Jehovah, to the wheat, vine, and oil. This mode of speaking, common among the Prophets, ought to be specially noticed. They describe the kingdom of Christ in a way suitable to the comprehension of a rude people, and hence they set before them external images; for when Christ's kingdom is the subject, mention is made of gold, of silver, of every kind of wealth, and also of great splendor and of great power, for we know that what is beyond and above the world cannot be immediately comprehended by the human mind. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Jeremiah 31.12

Help me to seek Your Kingdom today, O Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 27.1-10.

Contemplate the beauty of the Lord. Seek His face, and the glory revealed there. Call on Him to guide you in His way for this day.

Sing Psalm 27.1-10.

Psalm 27.1-10 (Joanna: [*Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*](#))

Lord, You are our Light and our Savior most dear!
You guard us with might; therefore, whom shall we fear?
Though evil surround us, our enemies fall;
No harm shall confound us when on You we call.

One thing we request but to dwell with You, Lord.
Your beauty to test and to think on Your Word.
In trouble You hide us secure in Your grace;
No foe may o’erride us: We sing of Your praise!

Hear, Lord, when we cry and be gracious, we pray!
Lord, do not deny us Your favor this day!
Our help, our salvation, though others may fall,
Preserve our good station when on You we call.

6 The Promise of the New

Pray Psalm 132.13-18.

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
“This *is* My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
I will also clothe her priests with salvation,
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
There I will make the horn of David grow;
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”

Sing Psalm 132.13-18.

(Finlandia: *Be Still My Soul*)

God dwells among us, and He will forever,
to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior,
and made us His eternal resting-place.
His foes are banished from His presence ever,
but we shall reign with Him before His face.

Read and meditate on Jeremiah 31.15-40.

Prepare.

1. What hope did God hold out for His people?
2. What is new about the new covenant?

Meditate.

This is a somewhat longer passage than we typically consider, but we do this in order to show how prophesy sometimes works.

Here it is clear that the words of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon are like a telescope or spy glass. Pull the glass to one length, and you can see more clearly what lies immediately ahead. Pull the same glass out to its full extent, and you can see further still.

In the short run, God again promises to return His captive people to their land, and to bless them with all the promises of His covenant. Their weeping will end, and their patient work will be rewarded. God hears the groaning of His people and their cries for restoration (v. 18), and He will answer His “pleasant child” and return them to their home (vv. 19, 20). He calls them to remember the way by which they came to Babylon, because by the same way, He will take them back again (v. 21). Then their land will abound with the blessings God promised for His covenant people as far back as Moses and Abraham (vv. 23-30).

But this is just in the short term. In the longer term, these blessings are but the down payment on richer and more glorious blessings to come, when God establishes a “new covenant” with His people (vv. 31-40).

Readers of the New Testament are cued up to read this entire passage for the long term by opening verses, which we know Matthew applied to the slaughter of the innocent children in Jesus' day (vv. 15-18). For his purposes, Matthew included only verse 15; the weeping mothers of Rachel would have clung to the promise of verses 16-18, that a day was coming when they would see their children once again. They could not have understood completely what this meant, but they would have held fast to this promise of a future hope.

God promised a new covenant for His people. They would not be able to break this covenant, as they repeatedly did the old one, because God would write it on their minds and hearts, renewing them in His Law and all His Word and – as Ezekiel points out (36.26, 27) – giving them His Spirit as well. This new covenant will become the means of truly knowing the Lord and realizing forgiveness of sins (v. 34). We recognize this as pointing forward to Jesus and His work of redemption.

But notice: God refers to this new covenant using the same motto we've seen over and over in reference to the old covenant: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (v. 33). The new covenant is really the same covenant God has given from the beginning, only this time administered in such a way as to ensure the union of God with His people in bonds of eternal life and love.

Reflect.

1. What does God do to internalize His new covenant in us? Why is it important to understand this?
2. How can you see that the new covenant is really a further development and extension of the old covenant?
3. Why would God combine prophecies people would live to *see* with those yet far off in the future? Does He do that with us? Explain.

Here is what it is that God is keeping for the good alone, though it is he who has made them good. Here is what it is. Our reward has been very briefly defined by the prophet: I will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will be their God. He has promised us himself as our reward. Augusting (354-430), Sermon 331.4

Thank You, Lord, for the new covenant; help me to live as Your covenant child today as I...

Pray Psalm 132.1-12.

Thank God for His covenant with David, now fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Devote yourself to live within His promises and blessings for the day ahead.

Sing Psalm 132.1-12.

Psalm 132.1-12 (Finlandia: *Be Still My Soul*)
Remember, Lord, we pray, in David's favor,
the hardships he endured, the oath he swore,
the vow he made to Jacob's mighty Savior:
"I shall not enter through my palace door;
I shall not sleep, nor slumber my eyes favor,
Until I make a dwelling for the Lord!"

The word throughout the chosen nation spread,
to Ephrata, and in the fields of Jaar:
"Now let us go," the faithful people said,
and worship where our Savior's dwellings are!
Around His footstool let our worship spread;
come, gather to Him, all from near and far!"

Arise, O Lord, come to Your resting place;

A New Covenant: Jeremiah 29-31

Your holy presence meet with us in might.
Clothe us with righteousness in Jesus' grace,
and we will shout to Your divine delight!
For David's sake, turn not away Your face,
but look upon us in Your holy light.

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:
"One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,
and He shall keep My cov'nant evermore,
and walk within My testimonies ever,
thus He shall ever rule as Israel's Lord."

7 A Future and a Hope

Pray Psalm 86.10-12.

For You *are* great, and do wondrous things;
You alone *are* God.
Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify Your name forevermore.

Sing Psalm 86.10-12.

(Andrews: *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*)

For You are great, You wondrous deeds do;
You are the only and sovereign Lord.
Teach me Your way, let me give heed to,
with all my heart, Savior, all Your Word!
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me,
praise Your Name forever, Lord!

Review Jeremiah chapters 29-31; meditate on Jeremiah 29.11-13

Prepare.

1. How did God describe His plans (thoughts) toward His people?
2. What were they responsible to do?

Meditate.

The history of God's people throughout most of the Old Testament was not one of seeking the Lord. Not purely, at any rate. The allure of pagan religion and false deities was just too much for the people of God. They kept their worship of God, but they also set up worship sites for the various gods of the surrounding nations, on high hills, under large trees, in valleys, and on rooftops.

The people were abandoning God Who had saved and blessed them, and cutting themselves off from His covenant promises. Prophets in every generation warned them against such rebellion, but there were plenty of false prophets reinforcing their bad behavior with bogus teaching. With each passing generation, the abandonment of God became worse and worse, until in Jeremiah's day, God let the people have what they wanted, and made them slaves of a foreign power.

But though Israel frequently gave up on God, God never gave up on His Word. He had made precious and very great promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David; and He would keep His Word. He loved the people of Israel with an everlasting love; so, even though He was sending them off to seventy years of captivity in Babylon, God was already working toward the next phase of His good plan for His people.

God promised to return the people to Jerusalem and the land of Israel, and to give them faithful shepherds to care for them as He would. He was preparing a new covenant for them, which those who entered into it would realize the promises of God in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1.20). By His Spirit, God would write His Law on their hearts, and He would send a new King to reign over them for righteousness, peace, and joy.

All that God required of His people was that they should seek Him. This meant they would need to turn away from all false gods and schemes of men, take up His Word and promises, worship God only, and bring all their burdens to Him in prayer. By doing so, they would show that they trusted and loved the Lord, and that they were willing to obey His Word. And as they sought Him, God promised to make Himself known to them as the loving Father and King He had always been.

God's Word and promise to Israel remains for us today: If we will seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him by seeking the Lord Jesus Christ, and finding Him, we will realize everything we need for full and abundant life.

Reflect.

1. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to seek the Lord?
2. What happens when we are not diligent in seeking the Lord?
3. How can believers encourage one another in this work of seeking the Lord with all our heart?

*By the word seek, he means prayers and supplications, as mentioned in the last verse. And Christ also, exhorting his disciples to pray, says, "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." There is no doubt but that he speaks there of prayer; he yet adopted various modes of speaking, derived from the common habits of men. But to seek, when we feel the need of God's grace, is nothing else than to pray. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Jeremiah 29.13**

Help me to seek You throughout this day, Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 86.1-9.

Seek the Lord in prayer, and call on Him to renew Your soul, fill you with gladness, and sustain you through the challenges of the day ahead.

Sing Psalm 86.1-9.

Psalm 86.1-9 (Andrews: [*Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*](#))

Bow down Your ear, O Lord and hear me;
I am afflicted and much in need!
Rescue my godly soul, be near me;
save me, O God, all my crying heed!
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me,
all day long I pray and plead.

Lift up my soul, fill me with gladness;
Lord You are good, You will soon forgive.
Show me abundant lovingkindness;
let all who call on You ever live.
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me,
heed to my poor pleading give.

When in my trouble, Lord, I call You,
You answer me; there is none like You!
There are no works like Yours, and all whom
You have created shall worship You.
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me,
all shall glory give to You!

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What can you do to improve your work of seeking the Lord?
2. God will not share our hearts with other diversions or distractions. What can we do to make sure that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength?
3. How does Jeremiah's letter to the captives in Babylon (Jer. 29.1-14) instruct us in our day?
4. What's "new" about the new covenant God promised? How can you see that this new covenant is a continuation and development of the old covenant?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Jeremiah 29-31? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.