

GOD'S COVENANT RENEWED

CORE PASSAGE: JEREMIAH 17:5-8; 31:31-37

CONTEXT

Jeremiah was called to speak for the Lord in the waning days of the kingdom of Judah. Most of his messages warned of the coming judgment, which he witnessed with his own eyes, but a few promised hope for a ruined people. For a time, Judah was looking to put their trust in Egypt to fight the Babylonians, but Jeremiah's warning was to put their trust in God alone. In Jeremiah 17:5-8, which sounds like a psalm or proverb, the prophet addressed Judah's misplaced trust. And in Jeremiah 31:31-37, the prophet foretold the new covenant that God would make with His people to deal with their sin and ours once and for all.

KEY CONCEPT

A new covenant will establish followers of Jesus.

As you examine Jeremiah 17:5-8; 31:31-37:

- Understand that trusting in humankind leads to desert places without life.
- Dwell upon the promise that God will write His law on His people's hearts, call us His people, and forgive our sins.



TIMELINE

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Jeremiah Is Called as a Prophet
(Jeremiah 1)

SESSION STUDY: Jeremiah Prophesies Judgment on
Judah and a New Covenant (Jeremiah 1–38)

Hezekiah and Josiah Restore the Worship
of the Lord (2 Kings 18–20; 22–23)

Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is
Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)

Babylon Besieges and Conquers Judah, Deporting the People (2 Kings 25)

Daily Readings

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| ☐ Day 1: Jeremiah 1–10 | ☐ Day 4: Jeremiah 30–38 |
| ☐ Day 2: Jeremiah 11–20 | ☐ Day 5: Habakkuk 1–3 |
| ☐ Day 3: Jeremiah 21–29 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 92 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

THOSE WHO TRUST IN HUMANKIND ARE CURSED; THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD ARE BLESSED (JEREMIAH 17:5-8).

Underline all the truths about those who trust in humanity. Circle all the truths about those who trust in God.

5 This is what the LORD says: Cursed is the person who trusts in mankind. He makes human flesh his strength, and his heart turns from the LORD. **6** He will be like a juniper in the Arabah; he cannot see when good comes but dwells in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land where no one lives. **7** The person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence indeed is the LORD, is blessed. **8** He will be like a tree planted by water: it sends its roots out toward a stream, it doesn't fear when heat comes, and its foliage remains green. It will not worry in a year of drought or cease producing fruit.

These verses are structured more like a psalm or proverb than a typical prophecy we might read in the Bible, but they still hold prophetic truth. The curse that Jeremiah pronounced calls to mind the blessings and curses Moses put before the people before his death, his final warnings before the people entered the promised land (see Deut. 27–30). In Jeremiah's day, the people of Judah were experiencing the punishment associated with those curses, and Jeremiah called them to repent and to trust in the Lord.

Jeremiah compared two types of trees to emphasize the differences between trusting humanity and trusting God. First was the “juniper in the Arabah” to describe those who put their trust in humankind (Jer. 17:6). The juniper is a prickly, bushy shrub that grows in the desert, often found in rocky fissures.¹ It barely scrapes by in the arid landscape. Similarly, the people of Judah, leaning on their own power and foreign alliances, were parched and barely surviving.

LEADER NOTE: The reference to trees in this passage communicates truth about life and death. It is not simply that those who hope in humankind will wither but that they are actively pursuing death because they are pursuing something other than the Lord of life. This is the reality of God's punishment for sin that applies to every human being: those who follow their own sinful desires are destined for death. Alternatively, those who hope in the Lord are guaranteed eternal life, which is the promise of the gospel. Those who seek the Lord will receive everlasting life that is flourishing and beautiful.

What does godly trust in others look like compared to a cursed trust in others?

For the second tree, the image used to describe those who put their hope in the Lord is that of a lush, thriving tree planted near a water source. Verses 7-8 are very similar to Psalm 1. According to David, the psalmist, those who trust in the Lord are like a tree that prospers and flourishes by streams of water, but those who do not are like chaff and blown away (Ps. 1:3-4).

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

UNION WITH CHRIST: At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

Jeremiah 17:8 states that even when the heat comes, the tree planted by water does not fear but still flourishes. This does not mean that those who trust in the Lord won't experience suffering, but when they do, they can be unafraid and unmoved despite their circumstances. No matter what, they can be constant and faithful because their trust is in the One who is always faithful (Heb. 10:23).

LEADER NOTE: A false belief system that sometimes creeps into the church says that when you trust in God, you will not be harmed, nothing bad will happen to you, and you will receive material blessings. This "prosperity gospel" is a dangerous lie. This passage teaches us that those who trust in the Lord will receive blessing, but it is no promise of an easy life. Take Jeremiah, for example: Jeremiah struggled with his calling as a prophet but was faithful to the Lord, yet he is known as "the weeping prophet." He was not allowed to marry (Jer. 16:1-2), was beaten and put in stocks (20:2), was falsely imprisoned (37:15-16), dropped into a cistern (38:6), and forced to travel to Egypt with disobedient people after the destruction of Jerusalem (42-43). Like Jeremiah, we will face trials in this life, but the one who is rooted in the Lord will be able to persevere when circumstances are difficult.

How can you pursue the Lord now so that when trouble comes, you will be unwavering and strong amid trials?

THE NEW COVENANT BRINGS HOPE AND FORGIVENESS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE (JEREMIAH 31:31-37).

Highlight every instance of “the LORD’s declaration” in the passage below. Circle the promises God makes to Israel.

31 “Look, the days are coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

32 This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—my covenant that they broke even though I am their master”—the LORD’s declaration. **33** “Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days”—the LORD’s declaration. “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. **34** No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them”—this is the LORD’s declaration. “For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin. **35** This is what the LORD says: The one who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar—the LORD of Armies is his name: **36** If this fixed order departs from before me—this is the LORD’s declaration—only then will Israel’s descendants cease to be a nation before me forever. **37** This is what the LORD says: Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will I reject all of Israel’s descendants because of all they have done—this is the LORD’s declaration.”

Jeremiah prophesied the glorious promise of a new covenant, which would be established not because God broke His end of the deal but because God’s people could not keep up their end of the agreement. From the moment He brought them out of Egypt, God’s people consistently broke faith and pursued idols instead of God. They had failed to obey, earned God’s curses, and would soon be exiled from the land, but now God in His mercy was laying out new terms for their relationship.

Previously, God’s laws were written on stone tablets and on stone markers in the land, but in this new covenant, God’s law would be written on the hearts of those who belong to Him. This demonstrates a shift from the law being an external commitment that the people broke regularly to an internal commitment that showed a transformation of the heart.

LEADER NOTE: Jeremiah declared that one day all God's people will "know the LORD." Jesus said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). This kind of knowing refers to intimacy and closeness. This does not mean we no longer need to read and study the Word but that each believer will experience forgiveness and salvation.²

How does the state of our heart impact our obedience to the Lord?

This new covenant will also be for all the people, "from the least to the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34), including anyone despite their age, social class, or ethnicity. The New Testament confirms the new covenant is for all who repent of their sin and trust in the Lord (Heb. 8–10).

The new covenant ultimately displays God's forgiveness through Jesus. The old covenant offered forgiveness through sacrifices, but the new covenant provides forgiveness through one ultimate sacrifice—Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20). Jesus's sinless life and sacrificial death for sinners is the perfect display of God's willing forgiveness for our sins. And finally, God declares that this new covenant will be permanent. It will never cease to exist, nor will God's people.

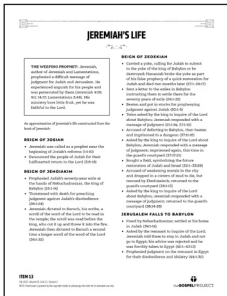
LEADER NOTE: God declared that if the "fixed order" of the sun, moon, stars, and sea could be removed from His control, only then would His people cease to exist before Him (Jer. 31:35-36). Essentially, this is God swearing by His own goodness and power. The only way that God's people can be removed from His new covenant is if God is no longer God, and that is impossible.

How has God proven to you that He will uphold His covenant with you?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The new covenant was established through Jesus, the Son of God, who was a substitute for the penalty of our sin. He fulfilled the law completely and writes the law on our hearts, and we are adopted as children of God. Through the new covenant, all who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior are saved as a free gift because of God's grace and mercy.

Notes



ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before the group arrives, write “I promise . . .” on a board. To begin the session, ask: “Has anyone said the words ‘I promise’ this week? If you are comfortable sharing, what did you promise?” Be prepared to share your own example, if applicable.

TRANSITION: Even if we don’t say the words “I promise,” we commit to things easily. Sometimes we make commitments but can’t follow through with what we’ve promised. That’s not the case with God. Even in Israel’s darkest time, His promise to them was of hope and faithfulness, and His promises are always backed up by His power over all creation. His promises are forever.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13: Jeremiah’s Life** and review it with the group. Say: “If ever there were a preacher who lived out his message, it was Jeremiah. A man who was both priest and prophet, Jeremiah lived before and during the time of the Babylonian invasion of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Many of his prophecies to God’s people were demonstrated through his life: he was threatened with death, jailed and bound, thrown into a pit, and forced to flee the king. His writings clearly show the sinfulness of the people of Judah, their promised destruction, and God’s unwavering commitment to them.”

RECAP

SAY: As you read our passages in Jeremiah this week, you probably noticed the definitive “declaration” of the Lord. He is God Almighty; He sets the standard for righteousness, and He chooses whom to bless and whom to curse. Because of His sovereignty, the Lord has the ability to make promises to Israel in the form of a covenant, whether for blessing or for cursing.

ASK: Speaking of blessed and cursed, how did God contrast two types of trees in Jeremiah 17:5-8? What was His promise for Israel in 31:31-34? Upon what did God guarantee His promises in 31:35-37?

TRANSITION: For our activity this week, we’ll look closer at the promise God made to His people—the new covenant even better than His old covenant with them.



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GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 108 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a table with the title “God’s New Covenant.” Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

God’s New Covenant Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. In the spaces provided, identify the ways the old covenant is superseded by the better new covenant.	
OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
(Jeremiah 31:32)	Jesus inaugurated and fulfilled this covenant for those who believe (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 9:11-28)
Laws written on tablets and monuments of stone (Exodus 31:18; Joshua 8:32)	(Jeremiah 31:33)
The Lord’s presence was experienced by a few and secluded in the tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-10)	(Jeremiah 31:34)
Impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4)	(Jeremiah 31:34)
Mediated by Moses (Exodus 24:3-8)	(Luke 22:20)

INTRODUCE: Point out that we will be hearing the phrases “This is what the LORD says” (Jer. 17:5) and “This is the LORD’s declaration” (Jer. 31:31) in our passages today. Emphasize that while the prophet Jeremiah communicated the messages, the words are the Lord’s, and they carry His divine power.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 17:5-8.

ENGAGE: Call for the group to identify several contrasts in this passage: for example, a cursed person (v. 5) versus a blessed one (v. 7); a person who trusts in humanity (v. 5) versus one who trusts in the Lord (v. 7); a tree in the desert (v. 6) versus a tree planted by water (v. 8). As a group, focus on the person who trusts in the Lord (vv. 7-8), noting the characteristics of that person. Record these observations on the board in a space separate from the activity.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Jeremiah 31:31-37 aloud.

Notes

ANALYZE: Focus on verses 31-34 and invite your group to work together to fill in the chart in their PSG with the ways the old covenant is superseded by the new covenant. Then task smaller groups of 3-4 to summarize each section of the chart with one or two words (ex. breakable vs. fulfilled; external vs. internal). After a few minutes, call for groups to share their conclusions. Point out God's unbreakable guarantee in verses 35-37, which is based on His eternal faithfulness to His people and His covenant.

DISCUSS: How do the characteristics of a person who trusts in the Lord (Jer. 17:5-8) relate to the new covenant that God has promised to His people?

DEBRIEF

How should we view these Old Testament passages as we live in New Testament times?

How can we as believers in Jesus find strength and hope in these verses?

SUMMARIZE

Pass out copies of **Pack Item 14: The New Covenant** and point to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants as you say: "God's chosen people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had abandoned Him and would be punished justly. But though they would be conquered and exiled, the Lord would always be faithful to His promise to be their God. Not only that, His new covenant would be even better. Through Jesus, God's Son, all who believe Him as Savior receive God's grace and mercy."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 109). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** Knowing what the law of God says is different than understanding and implementing the truth He provides. Often we can recite verses and tell Bible stories like we are telling what we had for lunch that day. Recitation and memorization are not bad practices, by any means, but faith, obedience, and relationship with God are more than merely head matters.

Why is it important not just to memorize Scripture but meditate on the words?

 **HEART:** God declared that the only way the new covenant will ever be broken is if He breaks it Himself. We know that God keeps His promises and will never break His covenant because of His perfect goodness, holiness, and trustworthiness. He never breaks a promise.

How should we respond to our sin in light of God's unbreakable new covenant?

COVENANT	KEY VERSES	KEY THEMES	KEY PROMISES	KEY COMMANDS
Abrahamic	Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 22:1-18	God's promise to Abraham	Land, descendants, blessing	Believe, obey
Mosaic	Ex 19:1-8; 23:1-18; 34:10-26	God's covenant with Israel	Land, law, blessing	Obey, love
Davidic	2 Sam 7:1-16; 1 Chron 17:1-14	God's promise to David	Land, descendants, blessing	Believe, obey
New	Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:1-13	God's promise to all people	Land, law, blessing	Believe, obey



HANDS: All religions besides Christianity have a list of things that you must do to earn favor with a god or deity. The beauty of the gospel is that we believe Jesus accomplished everything needed for us, and so we are called to repent of sin and trust in Him. We do good works because we love Him, not because He requires us to earn His favor.

How will you approach your good works and obedience in light of the new covenant Jesus fulfilled for you?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Put Jeremiah 17:7 on an index card and set it in a prominent place or make it your phone background. As you see the verse this week, reflect on your level of trust in the Lord.
- Meditate on the new covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Use that passage to lead you to worship God privately this week.
- Pray for the people in your life who do not “know the LORD” (Jer. 31:34), and look for ways to testify to Christ and His salvation.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 109 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

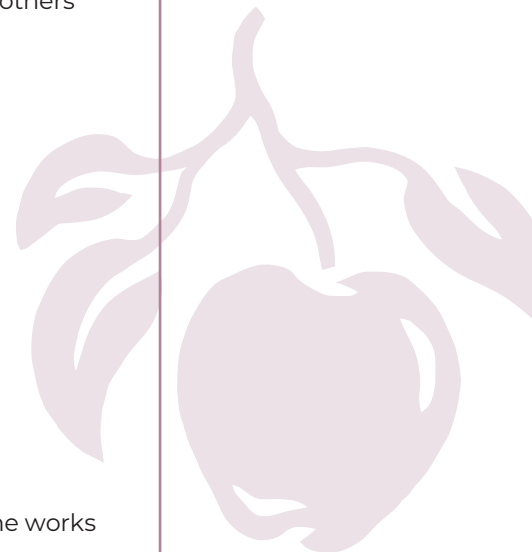
PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 92:1-5 with your group, thanking God for the works of His hands that have secured our salvation as part of His new covenant.

References

1. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Plants,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1714.
2. Fred Wood and Ross McLaren, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 16, *Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 263.

Notes



THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

By Matt Rogers



The theme of God's judgment is threaded throughout the Old Testament, but the notion of God's judgment makes many uneasy. Some neglect the Old Testament or falsely believe that the God it reveals is fundamentally different than the God of the New Testament. A consistent reading of the Bible reveals just the opposite—the themes of God's holiness and the just judgment for sin are established in the Old Testament to make clear the unique hope offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Case in point is the exile.

THE WARNING AND JUDGMENT OF THE EXILE

God warned Israel of the consequences of their idolatry all the way back when Moses positioned the people on the brink of the promised land in the first place. God warned that they would be judged should they rebel from the Lord once they inhabited the land: "You will become an object of horror, scorn, and ridicule among all the peoples where the LORD will drive you" (Deut. 28:37). Though the exile would not take place for generations, the warning was loud and clear and repeated. When God's judgment came, no one would be able to say that God was capricious in His actions.

The looming threat of the exile was a constant reality during Israel's time in the land. Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah spent years echoing these warnings to no avail. The people persisted in their waywardness, and God did just what He said He would do. He allowed pagan nations to crush Israel, destroy their land, and carry their people off into captivity. Perhaps the high-water mark of this judgment occurred when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and ransacked the Lord's temple (2 Kings 25). As an act of just judgment,

God removed His blessings of the land and the temple because He would not allow His people to mock Him with rampant idolatry (Ezek. 36:16-20).

THE GRACIOUS GOD OF THE EXILE

A number of themes emerge from the exile.

- First, God is just to judge humans for their sin. He is holy, and He has provided clear standards that must be obeyed. When people fail to honor Him as God, they are rightly judged.
- Second, God gives time to repent. While the final exile was swift, the time of warning was extensive. The people had ample time to repent from their idolatry and turn to the Lord.
- Third, God does what He says. We tend to apply this truth positively and reflect on how God keeps His promises to care, protect, love, and preserve His people—and we should. But we should also consider that God is faithful to keep His promises of judgment. He is not like the parent who threatens a punishment they never intend to enact. God does what He says.
- Finally, God gives grace. The Bible doesn't end with the exile. It's not the final word. The story continues with God bringing the people back to the land and ultimately undoing the exile through the salvation offered in Jesus.

The themes of God's holiness and the just judgment for sin are established in the Old Testament to make clear the unique hope offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE GRACIOUS GOD OF THE GOSPEL

The exile also has implications for unbelievers today. In the same way as with Old Testament Israel, God has given clear warnings about the just judgment due for human sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). This judgment is more than a physical exile from the land. It is death—physical, spiritual, and eternal death. God also provides time for unbelievers to repent. Sadly, as Paul wrote, many presume upon this time and believe that God has turned a blind eye to their sin and that He will not hold them accountable. Instead, they should see this time as an opportunity to repent (2:1-11).

A person who fails to repent of their sin will experience the reality of God's faithfulness in judgment.

Unbelievers should feel the burden to flee from the coming judgment because God will keep His word. As Paul warned the church in Galatia: "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh" (Gal. 6:7-8). A person who fails to repent of their sin will experience the reality of God's faithfulness in judgment.

Finally, God does give grace. However, this grace will not come from another offer of salvation on the other side of death like the grace seen after the exile. Instead, this grace is available now. God has provided a means of escape from the wrath to come through the work of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:7). Through faith in Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, sinners can be forgiven of their sins, made right with God, and promised an eternal inheritance with all of the saints that can never be taken away (Rom. 8).

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