

Let us turn to the book of Jeremiah. We are studying Jeremiah this morning---as we have been for many months now---and we've come to chapter 31. We take that chapter this morning: the ***NEW COVENANT***. And though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned once in this chapter, we could hardly have a more appropriate chapter for Whitsunday. And indeed, that is not an accident. I've been pushing you fairly hard over the last few Sundays, taking two chapters at a time so that we could come to this chapter on this Sunday morning. Jeremiah 31:

*“At that time,” says the Lord, “****I WILL BE THE GOD OF ALL THE FAMILIES OF ISRAEL, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”***

*Thus says the Lord: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an* ***EVERLASTING LOVE****; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again, I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel. Again, you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again, you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samar′ia; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call   in the hill country of E′phraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.’”*

*For thus says the Lord: “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘The Lord has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.’ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail, together; a great company, they shall return here. With* ***WEEPING*** *they shall come, and with* ***CONSOLATIONS****I will lead them* ***BACK****, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and E′phraim is my first-born.*

*“Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands afar off; say, ‘He who* ***SCATTERED*** *Israel will* ***GATHER*** *him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. Then shall the maidens rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their* ***MOURNING*** *into* ***JOY****, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness,” says the Lord.*

*Thus says the Lord: “A voice is heard in* ***RAMAH****, lamentation and bitter weeping.* ***RACHEL IS WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN****; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not.”*

*Thus says the Lord: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded,” says the Lord, “and they shall come* ***BACK*** *from the land of the enemy. There is* ***HOPE FOT YOUR FUTURE****,” says the Lord, “and your children shall come* ***BACK*** *to their own country. I have heard E′phraim bemoaning, ‘Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for thou art the Lord my God. For after I had turned away, I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was* ***ASHAMED****, and I was* ***CONFOUNDED****, because* ***I BORE THE DISGRACE OF MY YOUTH.****’ Is E′phraim my dear son?  Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore, my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,” says the Lord.*

*“Set up* ***WAYMARKS*** *for yourself, make yourself* ***GUIDEPOSTS****; consider well the highway, the road by which you went.* ***RETURN****, O virgin Israel,****RETURN*** *to these your cities. How long will you waver,
O faithless daughter? For the Lord has created a new thing on the earth:****A WOMAN PROTECTS A MAN****.”*

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I* ***RESTORE*** *their fortunes: ‘The Lord bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!’ And Judah and all its cities shall dwell there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish.”*

*Thereupon I* ***AWOKE*** *and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.*

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to* ***PLUCK UP*** *and* ***BREAK DOWN****, to* ***OVERTHROW****,* ***DESTROY****, and* ***BRING EVIL****, so I will watch over them to* ***BUILD*** *and to* ***PLANT****.” says the Lord. “In those days they shall no longer say: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone shall die for his* ***OWN*** *sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a* ***NEW COVENANT*** *with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband,” says the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord: “****I WILL PUT MY LAW WITHIN THEM,*** *and* ***I WILL WRITE IT UPON THEIR HEARTS****; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for* ***THEY SHALL ALL KNOW ME****, from the least of them to the greatest,” says the Lord; “for I will* ***FORGIVE*** *their iniquity, and I will* ***REMEMBER their sin NO MORE****.”*

*Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name: “****If*** *this fixed order departs  from before me, says the Lord,* ***then*** *shall the descendants of Israel cease  from being a nation before me forever.”*

*Thus says the Lord: “If the* ***HEAVENS*** *above can be measured, and the foundations of the* ***EARTH*** *below can be explored, then I will cast off all the descendants of Israel for all that they have done,” says the Lord.*

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when* ***THE CITY SHALL BE REBUILT*** *for the Lord from the tower of Hanan′el to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Go′ah. The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the Lord. It shall not be uprooted or overthrown any more forever.”*

The beginning of Jeremiah 31 is about: *"I will turn their mourning into joy."* With the young people at any rate, that will strike an immediate chord. So, I'm going to ask four of them to come and give us that chord at the microphone. We're going to sing a chorus three times. ***FIRST*** time, we'll let the four young people sing it (come right out wherever you are). The ***SECOND*** time, we shall sing it ourselves, seated---while we get to know it if we don't know it---and the ***THIRD*** time, we shall stand and sing it all together. It's right at the bottom of the second side of the bulletin---number five:

*Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing for me.*

*Thou hast put off my sackcloth.*

*Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing for me and girded me with gladness.*

*To the end my glory may sing praises to thee, and not be silent.*

*Oh Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever.*

 Sing it for us and we'll join the second time.

***Singing (2 Minutes)***

***Chapter 31 is a Watershed in Jeremiah***

Now Jeremiah chapter 31 is a ***MOUNTAIN PEAK***---it's a ***WATERSHED*** in the book of Jeremiah. Everything has been building up to this, and everything will flow from it. But we're right on the mountain peak. We're right at the watershed. In fact, I think we're probably at the very ***HIGHEST*** peak of the ***OLD TESTAMENT***, and the point where we are ***NEARST*** to the ***NEW TESTAMENT***. Indeed, this chapter is ***ABOUT*** the New Testament, for the word *'covenant'* and the word 'testament' are the identical word---they're the same word. And Jeremiah says, *"There's going to be a* ***NEW*** *Testament."* And he was saying this 400 years before it came. But he said, *"I can see the Old Testament is a flop. There's got to be a* ***NEW*** *one. The old one isn't working, there's got to be a* ***NEW*** *one."* And so, this is the peak of Jeremiah's book of the Old Testament. It's the nearest he got to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so, we're really going to climb the mountain this morning. And it's gonna be quite a climb. But the view from the ***TOP***, I'll guarantee will be worth it.

***Our God is Unique: He is a ‘Family’ God***

Verse ***ONE*** is, in a sense, the ***LINK*** between chapter 30 and chapter 31. And since Jeremiah didn't bother with chapter headings---but somebody rather naughtily put them in later---see it as the connecting link. It summarizes 30, it summarizes 31. Look back into chapter 30, verse 22. It says, *"And you shall be my people, and I will be your God."* Now verse one of chapter 31, *"I will be the God of all the families of Israel, l and they shall be my people."* Now look on to verse 33, the end of verse 33 -- *"I will be their God and they shall be my people."* Let's begin with this theme. It's the ***THREAD*** running through. ***"I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY WILL BE MY PEOPLE."*** I want to begin by making this simple statement: Our God is ***UNIQUE*** among all the gods that have ever been worshiped, because our God is a ***FAMILY*** God. He's a family God.

Now I say ***FOUR*** more things to get that point across to you. ***FIRST***, he's a ***FAMILY IN HIMSELF***. There are three of him. And he was a family before there was anyone else. He always has been a family God...in himself. ***SECOND***, when he made men, he put ***MEN IN FAMILIES*** so that they might be in ***HIS IMAGE***. And he is the Father after whom every family on earth is named. Whether that family is spending today in church or at Brighton by the sea, they are named after him. They are a copy of him. He's a family God, and ***EVERY*** family is a ***COPY*** of him. That's why the more godless a nation gets, the more its family life breaks up. You get the message. ***THIRDLY***, he therefore, in a particular way, wanted to be the God of the ***FAMILIES OF ISRAEL***. And that's what he describes himself as in verse one: *"I will be the God of all the families of Israel."* And he wants to be the God of all the families here. But ***FOURTH***, the thing that he's aiming at in all this...because all earthly families come to an end, whether they are Jewish or Christian or not Christian at all ... all earthly families are broken up sooner or later by death. Why then has he put us in families only to break them? The answer is because his ***ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE*** is to have ***ONE FAMILY***...one family. And so, he puts us in families here that we might learn what a family is like, to prepare us to be part of his family forever. And the ultimate ***OBJECTIVE*** is that God should have ***ONE FAMILY*** with ***MANY SONS***. He's so enjoyed having one son that he wanted more. And so, he's the ***FAMILY GOD***. And the object of the whole exercise---the grand theme of scripture---can be summed up in these words: "I will be their God and they will be my people." We'll be one big family together. And these very words come up again at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation. When the new heaven and the new earth are displayed, God says, *"I will be their God. They shall be my people."* That will be the new home for God's single family.

Now, have I made the point that our God is a family God? I could have spent a few more hours on it, but that'll do. Now, it is very remarkable that right through this chapter, Jeremiah describes the relationship between God and Israel in ***FAMILY*** terms: ***FIRST*** of all, as a ***LOVER*** with a ***VIRGIN***; ***SECOND*** as a ***HUSBAND*** to a ***WIFE*** and ***THIRD*** as a ***FATHER*** to ***CHILDEN***. There's a progression of thought there, but it's all in ***FAMILY*** terms.

When God first made an approach to Israel, he came as a ***LOVER*** to a ***VIRGIN***. Then he ***MARRIED*** Israel. That's what the word ‘***COVENANT’*** means... a marriage is a ***COVENANT***. You put a ring on as a token of the vow and ***COVENANT*** made, 'betwixt me and thee', to use the old-fashioned marriage wording. It's a ***COVENANT***. And he ***MARRIED*** them. And the marriage took place on the top of a mountain called Sinai in the triangular peninsula of land between Egypt and Palestine. And there on Sinai he married them, and he became their husband. And they took VOWS to each other. And Israel ***BROKE*** her vows and ***BROKE*** the marriage. And therefore, God also ***BROKE*** it. And it was right that he should. ***SHE*** broke it, so ***HE*** did. And he ***BROKE*** that ***OLD*** marriage up. That's why Jeremiah realized there had to be a ***NEW MARRIAGE*** between the same parties -- a ***NEW*** start, a **NEW** basis, ***NEW*** conditions, a ***NEW*** proposal if you like. And that's the ***THEME*** of this whole chapter.

But then Jeremiah moved so easily from lover and virgin, through husband and wife to a ***THIRD*** family picture: *"I am a* ***FATHER*** *to Israel. Ephraim is my* ***SON****. How long will you be a faithless* ***DAUGHTER****?"* And there's a ***FATHER'S*** heart beating through this chapter. And it's when you think of a ***FATHER'S*** heart that you get nearest to God. If you want to understand how God feels then understand how a ***FATHER*** feels. For example, we'll come to a very poignant and tender verse where God says, *"I feel like a* ***FATHER*** *whose* ***SON*** *is so rebellious that the* ***FATHER*** *has had to turn him out of the house."* And you need to do that, some of you parents. Now, I know parents---Christian parents---who've had to do it with rebellious children. And God had to do it with rebellious Israel. And you know what God says? He says this: he says, *"You know, every time I speak against my child, it goes through me like a sword."* You got the feeling? A ***FATHER*** who knows he's got to throw the ***SON*** out. A ***FATHER*** who knows he's got to deal with the rebellious nature. And yet everything he says against his own child brings back tender memories of the time when he dangled that child on his knee. Do you get the feeling? This then, is the "***FAMILY*** " feeling that runs through this chapter. It's God ***SEEKING*** a family. It's God ***YEARNING*** for children who are ***REBELLIOUS*** and who will not be a family. It's God having had to throw them out of their home. It's God having had to discipline them. But it's a God who ***WAITS*** with open arms for the ***PRODIGAL*** to come back. And Jeremiah 31 is nearer Luke 15 than any other chapter in the Old Testament.

Again and again, we will catch echoes of the story of the prodigal son. Here, it's a whole ***PRODIGAL*** ***FAMILY***: sons and daughters; and they've gone away into Babylon into ***CAPTIVITY***, and it's their own silly fault. They did not like their own ***LAND*** because they did not like their own ***LORD***. They were interested in ***FOREIGN*** lords. They didn't want to accept the God of their parents. And so, they ***REBELLED***, and they went to a far country because they had already gone there in ***HEART***. They had already accepted foreign gods. So, God said, "*Well, if that's what you want, go and live in a* ***FOREIGN*** *land. But remember, I'm always* ***WAITING*** *for you to come back."* That's the ***FATHER'S*** heart. Well, I've set the scene.

***History and Geography Are Important in This Chapter***

Can I now give you just a little bit of ***HISTORY*** and ***GEOGRAPHY***, just for three minutes, just to set the scene? Let me draw an ***IMAGINARY PICTURE***. At its greatest extent, the kingdom of Israel, under King David, was about the size of Wales, or a little larger. There were 12 tribes in different parts of it. And for three reigns, they were all under ***ONE KING***: Saul... David... Solomon. And those three kings reigned over all 12 tribes. Then, when Solomon died, there was civil war, and they ***SPLIT***. Ten tribes stayed in the north; and since they were bigger than the little two who stayed in the south, they kept the name "Israel" to themselves. So, the two tribes in the south got called "***JUDAH***," because the biggest one of the two was Judah. And the other one (just north of them) was the tiny little tribe of Benjamin. So, they were both called "*Judah*." Are you with me? Ten tribes in the ***NORTH***--- ***ISRAEL***. Two tribes in the ***SOUTH***--- ***JUDAH***. And if you try and unravel the next few years of history, you've got a job on! Read through the second book of Kings, or the Chronicles, and just try and sort out who was king where. It's almost impossible! You really have to do some hard work to see it.

Then, the ten ***NORTHERN*** tribes began to misbehave so badly, and get away from God so much, that God finally sent a big, foreign power from the east, called *'Assyria'*, and he took away the ten tribes into captivity in Assyria, and left the two called 'Judah'--- Judah and little Benjamin.

Now here's the interesting thing I want you to take very careful note of -- because it's going to be ***IMPORTANT*** later. On the ***BORDER*** between the north and south (when there were ten up here and two down here), the one (tribe of Israel) immediately ***NORTH*** of the border was ***EPHRAIM***--- one of the two sons of Joseph. And the one (tribe of Judah) just ***SOUTH*** of the border was little ***BENJAMIN***. And the thing that those two held in ***COMMON***, was that they were both out of ***RACHEL'S WOMB***, and therefore very closely ***RELATED***. And one was gone, and one had stayed. And right on the border -- or just south of the border -- was a place called ***'RAMAH'*** .... Which is now called *'Ramallah'* .... Which is now the borderline between Jews and Arabs .... ***AND*** where all the trouble has been in the last few weeks. You've seen it on the television. *'Ramah'*, or *'Ramallah'*. ***'RAMAH'***--- that is where Rachel was buried, on the border between her two descendants: ***EPHRAIM*** and ***BENJAMIN***. The present tomb of Rachel (outside Bethlehem) is ***NOT*** the original tomb. It was at Ramah. Rachel's tomb today is simply venerated in her memory, but it was at Ramah, north of Jerusalem---five miles north---on the border.

So, there was Rachel's tomb, on the very border at Ramah, and half her children---Ephraim---had gone! And Jeremiah...who was born in the little tribe of Benjamin just below that, in a little village called *'Anathoth'* (just outside Jerusalem) ...Jeremiah realized that the rest of her children were going to go too, if they went on behaving as they did. And he could almost begin to hear Rachel ***WEEPING*** in her grave--- that her ***CHILDREN*** were ***NO MORE***. You're beginning to get the feel.

Now that's enough history and enough geography. The key word in this chapter, or the key phrase is ***'HOPE FOR THE FUTURE'***. It occurs at the beginning of verse 17. *"There is* ***HOPE*** *for your* ***FUTURE****,"* says the Lord. *"There is hope for your future."* Even though they've been turned out of home .... Even though they're rebellious .... Even though the Father has had to turn His face against them .... *"There is* ***HOPE*** *for their* ***FUTURE****,"* says the Lord. And the ***KEY WORD*** in chapter 31, is a word of three letters, which you may not have noticed as I read. It occurs about seven times. How many noticed ***ONE WORD*** that really gave the key that unlocks the chapter: Three letters. The most common word in the English language (almost)... The little word ***'FOR'***. ... **F**... **O**... **R** ...

Why is there ***HOPE*** for the ***FUTURE***? Listen: "***FOR*** *there shall be a day when watchman will call" .... "****FOR*** *I am a Father to Israel" .... "****FOR*** *your labor shall be rewarded" .... "****FOR*** *as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still" .... "****FOR*** *the Lord has created a new thing on the earth" .... "****FOR*** *I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish" .... "****FOR*** *they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" .... "****FOR*** *I will forgive their iniquity"* .... There are some pretty good reasons for ***HOPE***, aren't they? Do you see the key word ***'FOR'*** unlocking the whole chapter? Why do we have a, "***HOPE*** for the ***FUTURE***?" ***FOR*** these reasons: ***FOR*** He is a FATHER.... ***FOR*** He will ***FORGIVE***.... ***FOR*** He will do ***NEW THINGS*** .... ***FOR*** God is ***GOD***! And so, that little word ***'FOR'***... If you underline your Bible and mark it (I hope you do), then just put a little ring around that word ***'FOR'*** wherever it occurs. It ***UNLOCKS*** the whole of God's truth to us this morning.

Right, I've finished my ***INTRODUCTION***. Let's go right onto the ***FIRST SECTION***. There are ***THREE*** things I'm going to talk about this morning. Number ***ONE***: A ***REJOICING REMNANT***. Number ***TWO***: ***A CONTRASTING COVENANT***. And number ***THREE***: ***A PERMANENT PLACE***. And the most ***IMPORTANT*** one for you this morning is the ***MIDDLE*** one.

***Part One: A Rejoicing Remnant Returning Home***

Let's take the ***FIRST*** 26 verses: ***A REJOICING REMNANT***. It's just full of ***HOPE***! But do you remember what I told you -- that the Hebrews always thought ***BACK TO FRONT***? Actually, it's we who think back to front. They think front to back. But, since most of us... You know, we always say, "Everybody else is wrong way around." And, "They write backwards," we say. Actually, they could say ***WE*** do!

But, in fact, the ***HEBREWS*** always talked from ***EFFECT*** to ***CAUSE***. They looked at the ***END*** before the ***BEGINNING***. They looked at what would ultimately happen, and then said what would lead up to it. And this is what throws a lot of Westerners in Bible study--- because we think the other way. We like to see what began it, and what resulted. Don't we? But I tell you why the ***HEBREWS*** thought like this--- because ***GOD*** thinks like this. ***GOD*** is the God who knows the ***END*** from the ***BEGINNING***. And God always works ***BACKWARDS***. He knows where he is going. He knows what he's going to do. And then he works backwards from it. He knows the ***RESULTS***, so he looks at the ***CAUSE***!

And therefore, in this ***FIRST*** section of *'A Rejoicing Remnan*t', their ***HOMECOMIMG*** and their merry-making is mentioned ***FIRST***; and their ***DEPARTURE*** and their weeping, is mentioned ***SECOND***. And I hope that won't throw you. I'm going to take them in the order of the Bible. But if you find it a bit difficult, just reverse them, and think of them the other way around. He's going to talk about the ***MERRY MAKING*** when they ***GET BACK***, and then he will describe the ***MOURNING*** when they had to GO. Got the picture?

Now I want you to notice that this is all about ***EPHRAIM*** and ***JACOB***. Jeremiah is still living in the two tribes in the south. They have not gone yet. The ten in the ***NORTH*** have ***GONE***, including their cousins, Ephraim (same descendants of Rachel). They've GONE. And so, Jeremiah is thinking primarily, *"What is happening to those ten tribes that have gone?"* Now, you'll hear the ***WIERDEST*** and most ***INCREDIBLE*** stories as to what has happened to those ten lost tribes. Look, I'll tell you what's happened to them: God knows where they are, and God will bring them back. And you don't need to worry your head about any complex theories about where they went, and the coronation stone, and the holy grail -- or anything else. The simple fact is that Jeremiah said, “***GOD WILL BRING THEM BACK*** *to 'this country'---those 10 tribes.”* And ***'JACOB'*** is the word used by the prophets from now on. They no longer use *'Jerusalem'* or *'Judah'*. They now talk of ***'JACOB'***, meaning all 12 tribes. God will bring all 12 back. And in the book of Revelation, you find that all 12 are there--- 144,000 of them, 12,000 from each tribe---they're all there. He brings them back. So that we're talking about the ***NORTHERN*** 10 tribes from verses 2 to 22. And from verses 23 to 25, there's just a little bit about ***JUDAH*** coming back as well, just to keep them in the picture.

So, we're thinking about the ***NORTHERN*** 10 tribes. And Jeremiah says, *"One day they're going to* ***COME BACK****. And what a day that'll be. There'll be singing, there'll be dancing, there'll be praising."* (I want you to notice how all that goes ***TOGETHER***). *"There will be prosperity. They will plant vineyards. They'll eat of the fruit. There'll be wine. There'll be oil, music, dancing, wine, oil, worship, praise."* It's all of a ***PIECE***. You've got to go to Israel to get this thing put together. We tend to separate these things out so much and have this, not that, but oh, this is a picture of ***LIFE*** and its ***FULLNESS***--- the God who has given us all things freely to enjoy. And so, here is wine, oil, music, dancing---the ***LOT***, in one package deal.

And Jeremiah said, *"One day God will bring them back."* Why? *"Because I love them with an everlasting love."* That's why. Other parents may turn their children out and let them go, but not God. God turns them out and loves them and says, *"Therefore, I'm faithful to you. I can't let you go. I can't say goodbye. I can't see 10 of my 12 children taken away from home. Know that it's right, know they've deserved it, and let them go. But* ***I STILL CAN'T STOP LOVING THEM****. And those who* ***SEEK ME*** *in the wilderness for rest, they'll* ***FIND ME****. They'll find me because* ***I LOVE THEM****."*

I've told you before about a mother who once said to me about a rebellious son who left home and never contacted her again. She said, "How...how much longer should I pray for him? I've prayed for him..." I think she said, "12 years." She said, "I've prayed for him every day. How much longer should I pray for him?" And I said, "Mother, can you stop?" She said, "No!"

(God says*)"I've loved you with an* ***EVERLASTING*** *love."* So, you can't stop loving your children while there's ***HOPE*** for the future. And so, the quality of ***GOD'S*** love is ***EVERLASTING***. That is the symbol (as you know) of a ***RING***. It's a symbol of something that has no end. That's why we put it on. But you know as well as I do that human love is not always everlasting. In fact, one of Cliff Richard's pop songs that got into the charts a year or two back was: *'I Will Love You Forever Today'*. And that just summed it up. But God says that without the last word--"I will love you ***FOREVER***." Not, "I love you forever ***TODAY***." In other words, "I might have cooled off tomorrow; or in 10 years’ time I may have got the 10-year itch." No, God says, *"I will love you* ***FOREVER****, forever. Therefore, I've got to be* ***FAITHFUL*** *to you. I've got to go on* ***WAITING****. I've got to go on* ***HOPING****. And every time I speak against you, I remember you. And it cuts me."* Very tender.

*"Israel is to be the* ***CHIEF*** *of nations."* Notice that---not the largest, not the mightiest, but the ***CHIEF*** of nations. *"You are the apple of my eye*," he says, *"I'm gonna bring you* ***BACK****. I'll bring the blind* ***BACK****, the lame* ***BACK****, the pregnant* ***BACK****. I'll bring you all* ***BACK****. I want you here enjoying yourselves. I want you singing. I want you making music. I want you dancing. I want you enjoying yourselves as my* ***FAMILY****."* And that's God's ***HOPE*** for them. That's the merrymaking. And ***JUDAH*** (the two tribes in the south) and ***ISRAEL*** (the 10 tribes in the north) will be ***TOGETHER*** in Jerusalem. They'll say, *"Come let us go to Zion. Let's get together and praise Him."*

 Now that's the future merrymaking on their ***RETURN***. And it's exactly what happened in Luke 15. When the ***PRODIGAL*** came back, there was music and dancing. That's only meet. *"It is right that we should make merry,"* says the Father. And if you criticize music and dancing before the Lord, then I say to you, "It is ***RIGHT*** that we should make merry, if we've got the ***RIGHT*** things to make merry about---it's ***RIGHT***."

***Part Two: Mourning at Their Departure to Babylon***

But now let's come to the ***SECOND*** part, which is the ***MOURNING*** part at their ***DEPARTURE***. You know when the ***PRODIGAL*** set off for the far country, I wonder what his ***FATHER*** looked like at the time--it doesn't say. Wonder what his ***MOTHER*** felt at the time--doesn't say. Doesn't even mention the mother. But you see the Hebrews thinking---backwards to us forwards to them---goes back from the ***MERRY MAKING*** of the ***FUTURE*** ***RETURN***, to the ***MOURNING*** that took place at the ***DEPARTURE***. And here we have one of the most ***EXTRAORDINARY*** things in the Bible. I'm going to come back to it in a moment and explain it, but let me just say a little about it now. Jeremiah ***SEES*** something. He sees the children of Rachel being led past her tomb in chains. Now he's seeing not only ***EPHRAIM*** in the ***NORTH***, but ***JUDAH*** in the ***SOUTH***. He's not only seeing Ephraim---one of her descendants---but Benjamin the other...his own tribe. And they are being led in ***CHAINS*** from the tribe of ***BENJAMIN***, and they're being led ***NORTH***, away over to **BABYLON** now---not Assyria; Ephraim was taken to Assyria. Now ***BENJAMIN*** is being taken to ***BABYLON***. Forget the historical details if you're confused. But here is a group of men and women in chains, and they are being led ***NORTH*** away to ***EXILE***, knowing that they may never see their homeland again in their lifetime. They're leaving and they are passing the ***TOMB***. And suddenly from within the tomb, there comes the sound of a ***WOMAN*** ***SOBBING***---a woman who has been dead and gone for hundreds of years; and she's sobbing. And they hear it from the ***TOMB***.

Now in a moment you will discover...I'll give you the clue now...you'll discover that Jeremiah wakes up and it is a ***DREAM***. But in his dream, he ***SEES*** the prisoners going past the tomb. He ***HEARS*** the dead woman in the tomb weeping and sobbing, mourning for her children because now the ***LAST*** of them has ***GONE***. And a dead mother's heart is broken. *"A voice in Ramah. Rachel weeping for her children."* It's all in a dream. But Jeremiah can see it vividly. And God says, *"Don't weep, Rachel. Dry your tears up. Your* ***TRAVAIL****,"* that's the word, *"your* ***LABOR*** *is* ***NOT*** *in* ***VAIN****."* In other words, *"You didn't bring these children into the world in VAIN. It's all right, it's all right. I'm gonna bring them* ***BACK****. I'm gonna bring them* ***BACK****."* Do you see this? The dead woman is told to ***STOP CRYING*** because God is gonna bring her children ***BACK*** to their country.

He ***CAN'T*** let them go. He says, *"It's* ***MY*** *son, it's* ***MY*** *daughter, not just* ***YOURS****, Rachel. It's* ***MINE****. And I'm gonna bring them* ***BACK****. So, don't weep for them* ***GOING****."* In fact, God says to Rachel, *"It's all right, because in the far country they'll come to themselves."* Isn't that an intriguing phrase. The translation I read was that Ephraim in exile in the far country will say, "*Thou has chastened me. And I was chastened like an untrained calf. Bring me back, that I may be restored for the Lord my God. For* ***AFTER*** *I had* ***TURNED AWAY, I REPENTED****. And after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh. I was* ***ASHAMED*** *and I was* ***CONFOUNDED****, because I bore the disgrace of my youth."* The literal translation of the second phrase in verse 19 is this. Listen: *"And after I was made to know myself, I was* ***ASHAMED*** *and bore the* ***DISGRACE OF MY YOUTH****."*

It may happen to my children. It may happen to yours. They may ***GO AWAY***, and they may deserve to. And they may ***REBEL***. And one day they will come to the ***DISGRACE OF THEIR YOUTH***. They will be ***INSTRUCTED***---they will get to know themselves. And it was when the prodigal son came to himself.... you see, as long as he thought about getting away from others, things were fine. But when he came to himself, he said, *"I'm going* ***BACK****."*

You got the ***MESSAGE***? There's the ***PRODIGAL*** son and daughter. When they come to themselves---when they realize what ***FOOLS*** they've been to leave the father's home---they'll get up and go ***BACK***. They'll be ***READY*** for home, and God will be ***READY*** for them. And he'll say, *"Return, Oh Virgin Israel. As often as I speak* ***AGAINST*** *you, I* ***REMEMBER*** *you. Therefore, my heart* ***YEARNS*** *for you. I will surely have* ***MERCY****."* Of course, you'll have mercy. When a prodigal comes ***BACK***, the parents run and fling their arms around their necks.

And so, Jeremiah---remember, he's in a ***DREAM***...he's asleep and he's dreaming all this---he sees the prisoners passing Rachel's tomb, Rachel weeping inside. And Jeremiah shouts after them in his dream...and he shouts after them. And he says to the prisoners, *"Set up* ***SIGNPOSTS*** *as you GO, and you'll be able to find your way* ***BACK****."* That's verse 21. *"Set up* ***WAYMARKS*** *for yourselves. Make yourself* ***GUIDEPOSTS****. Consider well the highway---the road by which you went---and then you can get back."* And literally he's shouting at them. *"Carve some posts and stick them in the ground behind you as you go,* ***SIGNPOSTS*** *pointing* ***HOME****".* I say to any young person here this morning who's just ready to get away from home and anxious to go, please set up ***SIGNPOSTS*** that point ***HOME*** as you go. And you'll remember the way back.

Then comes this strange verse, *"For the Lord has created a* ***NEW*** *thing on the earth. A* ***WOMAN*** *protects a* ***MAN****."* You still know what it means...or don't know? How many feel they know what it means now? The Lord has created a new thing on the earth: a woman protects a man. Still nobody. Right? I'm not going to tell you yet. I just want to pick up verses 23 to 25, and then I'll come back and tell you what it means.

So far, Jeremiah has been thinking largely of ***EPHRAIM***, his cousin tribe taken away to as Assyria. Now he thinks of ***JUDAH***. And he says to his own little two tribes---I don't know if he says it ***BEFORE*** they've been taken away or ***AFTER***, I just don't know. I think it was ***BEFORE*** for a reason I'll mention in a moment. But he sees that they're gonna be taken away too to Babylon. And he says, *"Judah, you're all right too---there is HOPE for your future too,"* because God says once more, they'll use these words in the land of **JUDAH**, *"Oh holy hill, Jerusalem.* ***JUDAH*** *will come back, and the* ***FARMERS*** *will come back, and the* ***CITIES*** *will come back and the wandering* ***SHEPHERDS*** *will come back to Judah."* And, if the shepherds had not come back to Judah, there would've been ***NO*** birth of Jesus, ***NO*** visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem when he was born. So, it did ***COME TRUE***.

***A New Covenant Must Come***

And then we come to this lovely verse, verse 25, and just hold this verse as a promise, *"For I will* ***SATISFY*** *the weary soul and every languishing soul I will* ***REPLENISH****."* That's for those who are weary of **RUNNING AWAY**---those who have gone where they think they can find life and found no rest... no peace. And God says, *"Come* ***HOME*** *and* ***REST****."* And Jeremiah woke up and it was all a ***DREAM***. It was all a dream... all a dream. But it was a ***DREAM*** that would come ***TRUE***...every bit of it. And I will now tell you what the phrase, *"The Lord has done a* ***NEW THING*** *in Israel: a* ***WOMAN*** *protects a* ***MAN****,"* means. Some years later after this very dream, Jeremiah and his fellow Benjaminites were put in chains together. And Jeremiah was taken ***PRISONER*** with his fellow tribesmen, the descendants of Rachel. And they were taken by the Babylonians ***NORTH*** along that road to exile. And Jeremiah was among them. And they came to Ramah...they came to Ramah. And they passed Rachel's tomb. And for some inexplicable reason---the reason is not given---for some inexplicable reason, the soldier in charge of Jeremiah came and took his handcuffs off and took his chains off and said, *"You can go back home."* And at ***RACHEL’S TOMB***, Jeremiah was ***SET FREE***. And he never was taken to exile, though everyone else was. Maybe you don't know your Bible well enough to know this happened. So, if you don't believe me, turn to chapter 40. The captain of the guard in---verse one of chapter 40---was a man called Nebuzaradan. The captain of the guard had let him go from ***RAMAH*** when he took him bound in chains. It is ***QUOTED*** in the gospels, it's quoted in the epistles, Romans, Hebrews. It's quoted again and again, this very next passage. God sees---and Jeremiah now sees---that God had ***to PLUCK THEM UP*** and ***BREAK THEM DOWN***. But that he's now going to ***PLANT*** them again and ***BUILD*** them again. And that he's going to have a ***NEW MARRIAGE CERMONY***. A ***NEW COVENANT.*** He's going to put the marriage together on a ***NEW*** basis, with a ***NEW*** proposal. And indeed, if a marriage does break up, the only hope of putting it together is a ***NEW*** proposal, a ***NEW*** basis. The old basis clearly was not good enough to hold it together. Therefore, there must be a ***NEW*** basis, a ***NEW*** thinking together of what kind of basis it's got to be on this time, since the first time it didn't work.

So, let's look at the ***NEW MARRIAGE***. It will be characterized by ***PROMISES***: "***I WILL***." Indeed, in verse 33 alone, ***"I WILL,"*** comes ***FOUR*** times. ***"I WILL*** make with the house of Israel, after those days, a covenant," says the Lord, ***"I WILL*** *put my law within them.* ***I WILL*** *write it upon their hearts, and* ***I WILL*** *be their God.* ***I WILL*** *forgive their inequity.* ***I WILL*** *remember their sin no more."* ***SIX*** times, ***"I WILL", "I WILL," "I WILL," "I WILL," "I WILL"...*** That's the word of a ***MARRIAGE***. It's not a contract...it's a ***COMPACT***, it's a ***COVENANT***. And let's look at it now. In other words, when God brought his people out of Egypt, He made a ***MARRIAGE*** with them. An ***OLD COVENANT*** through ***MOSES*** at ***SINAI*** was the ***OLD MARRIAGE***. Now that he's going to bring them back from Babylon, he will make a ***NEW COVENANT*** with them...a new covenant. Because the old one, they'd ***BROKE***---it didn't work---not because there was anything wrong with the ***COVENANT***, but there was something terribly wrong with the ***PEOPLE***.

***The New Covenant: Individual Responsibility***

So, the ***OLD*** marriage was ***NOT*** a sufficiently strong basis. So, God is going to make a ***NEW*** one. So, what kind of a new one does He make? Well, let me tell you. God says *"I'm gonna make this* ***NEW COVENANT".*** There are ***TWO FEATURES*** in it that are so important. Number ***ONE***, ***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY***. *"I'm no longer going to deal with you in the* ***MASS****. I'm no longer going to deal with you as a* ***NATION****. I'm no longer going to deal with you* ***TOGETHER****, even as* ***FAMILIES****. I'm no longer going to deal with you as father and son* ***TOGETHER****. I'm no longer going to lump you all* ***TOGETHER*** *and say, ‘Now you all* ***TOGETHER*** *obey me, or you all* ***TOGETHER*** *go into exile.’ I'm going to deal with you* ***ONE BY ONE****. I'm going to make a* ***NEW MARRIAGE*** *with the House of Judah and Israel, but it will be with every SINGLE person in it.* ***EACH******PERSON*** *is responsible for their* ***OWN*** *sins from now on."*

Now, this is a ***REVOLUTION***. Hitherto, you became a Jew by being into the ***NATION***. You were circumcised the eighth day, you were in the law, under the law you were dealt with your ***FAMILIES***. And if your ***PARENTS*** sinned, ***YOU*** suffered, ***YOUR CHILDREN*** suffered, and even to the ***FOURTH GENERATION***---you were all bound ***TOGETHER***. And when they were taken into ***EXILE***, there were ***INNOCENT CHILDREN*** going to be born in exile who were suffering because of ***THEIR PARENTS' SINS,*** and they would think it's unfair. But God says, "From now on, the marriage is on this basis: from now on, it's the people who eat sour grapes whose **OWN** teeth are set on edge. From now on, ***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY*** is the basis of the marriage. The new covenant is on an ***INDIVIDUAL*** basis. You are not to be dealt with as families or as communities or as nations, but ***ONE BY ONE***."

And ***CHRISTIANITY*** is a ***ONE BY ONE COVENANT***. And that is why we cannot believe in infant baptism, because that treats the family as a unit. Do you understand that the ***NEW COVENANT*** has to have believer's baptism: *"Repent and be baptized,* ***EACH ONE OF YOU*** *for the remission of* ***YOUR*** *sin."* It's got to be on a ***ONE TO ONE*** basis--- personal responsibility. And much as I would love to think that God would accept my three children because I and my wife are Christians, I know that in the ***NEW COVENANT*** it can't be done. It's got to be ***ONE BY ONE***. And ***BAPTISM*** is the sign of the ***NEW COVENANT***, not the old. ***CIRCUMCISION*** was the sign of the ***OLD***, so it was given to ***CHILDREN*** because they were part of the ***COMMUNITY***. But, in the ***NEW COVENANT***, ***BAPTISM*** is given to ***ONE BY ONE***, as ***THEY*** repent and believe and get right with God.

That's the ***FIRST*** thing in the New Covenant. It is ***ONE BY ONE***, *"Not my brother, not my sister, Lord, but it's* ***ME*** *standing in the need."* Nobody can do it for you. It's ***ONE BY ONE***. Even husband and wife can't do it for each other. If your wife's a Christian, husband, ***YOU'VE*** got to find God, or you'll be lost. Husband, is your wife a Christian? Your wife has to find God or ***SHE'LL*** be lost. Parents, are your children, Christian, that's fine. If they're not, they have to find God, or they'll be lost. God is dealing one by one---***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY***--- very important principle of the new thing. You can't ***BLAME*** your parents anymore. You can't ***BLAME*** society anymore. You can't ***BLAME*** the way you were brought up anymore. Each man shall die for his ***OWN SINS***. We live in a society that would love to say, "It's ***THEM*** to blame; it's ***SOCIETY*** to ***BLAME***. It's the way I was brought up that's to ***BLAME***." But I tell you, God holds every ***INDIVIDUAL*** responsible for his ***OWN*** actions. Nobody else's but his own. We are responsible ***INDIVIDUALLY***. That is the ***NEW COVENANT.*** We are not living in the ***OLD*** one anymore---when you can hide in the ***CROWD*** and be dealt with as a ***NATION***.

***The New Covenant: An Inward Religion***

The ***SECOND*** new feature of the ***NEW COVENANT*** is that it will not only be an individual responsibility to enter it, it will be an ***INWARD RELIGION*** and not an outward one. It will no longer depend on ***EXTERNALS***. It will no longer depend on the things ***OUTSIDE*** you: tablets of stone with the commandments inscribed on them, Temple, sacrifices, priests---it will depend on what's happening in here. And that's a big step forward. And that ***INWARD*** religion is composed of ***THREE 'Rs'***, if you like, that'll help you to remember them. It's composed ***FIRST,*** of a ***REVELATION*** of his ***PURPOSE*** within--- writing his ***LAW*** ***in your*** ***HEART***. It's composed ***SECOND*** of a ***RELATIONSHIP*** with his ***PERSON*** within*--- "They shall all* ***KNOW ME*** *from the least to the greatest."* And ***THIRD***, it is based on a ***REMISSION*** of his ***PUNISHMENT*** within--- *"Your sins, I will forgive and forget."*

Do you see the new covenant? And until **EACH INDIVIDUAL** has had his sins forgiven and gets to know God personally and has God's law written in his heart, he's ***NOT*** in the covenant. He may come to church, he may be in a family where there are Christians, but he's ***NOT*** in the ***NEW COVENANT*** if he has not ***HIMSELF*** entered into these three things. God says, *"You see, when I write my law up on the wall or on a block of stone, it doesn't* ***CHANGE*** *people's hearts."* You write up a rule, *"Thou shall not."* And what happens? I remember a student at Cambridge, he wanted to concentrate on swatting for exams. So, he put up a notice on his door, "*Silence! Swatting."* Can you guess what the others did?

Put a young man in a library full of books...hundreds of books... books that he... fascinating books. More books than he can ever read in a lifetime; and put in the middle one book on a shelf, "Not to be read by anyone under 21." And leave 'him alone in that library.

That's what happens when the law's written ***OUTSIDE*** you. Do you see? Your ***HEART*** stays the same and it ***REBELS***, "You're not gonna tell **ME** what to do. You're not gonna make rules and regulations for ***ME***!" And the heart ***REBELS***. And this is the parents' problem with children. We have so to bring up our children, that we write ***OUR*** laws in ***THEIR*** hearts, and they want to do it. Trouble is if you say now, "You've gotta be in by 10:30 tonight." If it's only written ***OUTSIDE*** them, it doesn't work, and relationships are destroyed. But if you can write it in their hearts, and they know that they're gonna cause anxiety to you if they're not back by 10:30, and if their ***HEART*** has the law ***WRITTEN IN***, it's all right, isn't it? Have I made my point?

So, God says, *"Look, I'm going to give you this* ***INWARD REVELATION*** *first, and I'll WRITE my laws in your* ***HEARTS*** *and you'll* ***WANT*** *to do them. It won't be a different law. It'll still be the 10 commandments. It'll still be the* ***OLD LAW****; but I'll write it in your* ***HEART****, and you'll* ***WANT*** *to keep it. And second, that will be based in its turn on a* ***PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ME****---because I can't write to you unless you know me. And so,* ***EVERYBODY*** *will know me. It won't just be a few priests, it won't just be a few prophets, but* ***EVERYBODY*** *in my people from the* ***LEAST*** *to the* ***GREATEST****."* And that's the way God always puts it in scripture. He ***NEVER*** says from the greatest to the least. That's how human beings talk. God always says from the ***LEAST*** to the ***GREATEST***. When Paul was talking to Agrippa, he says*, "Since the day I saw the heavenly vision, I've witnessed to both* ***SMALL*** *and* ***GREAT****."* Isn't that lovely? That's how God thinks, *"From the least to the greatest, everyone will know me."* And that, in turn, will be based on something else. You can't know God ***PERSONALLY*** until you've had your ***SINS FORGIVEN***. So, once again, Hebrew puts it ***BACKWARDS***---the ***LAW WRITTEN IN YOUR HEART***, based on the ***KNOWLEDGE OF GOD*** personally, based on the ***FORGIVENSESS*** of your sins. We would put it the other way round in our logic. So, I'll put it the other way round---get your sins ***FORGIVEN***. ***KNOW GOD*** personally and he'll write the ***LAW IN YOUR HEART.***

You see the New Covenant? It is an ***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY,*** and it is an ***INWARD RELIGION***, an ***INWARD RELATIONSHIP***. And that's the ***NEW COVENANT*** which will put things right. How did Jeremiah ***LEARN*** of this New Covenant? I think I know. He learned it because he had to ***LIVE IT***--- shut off from his family, unmarried, scorned by false prophets, opposed by the priests, imprisoned---and he probably wrote this chapter while he was in prison. All ***ALONE***, he had to learn that the ***REAL*** relationship with God is ***NOT*** through the ***COMMUNITY***. It's a ***ONE ON ONE*** in the ***HEART***. And so, he could see that what he'd had to learn to stand alone with God--- with an ***INWARD LAW*** in his heart telling him he wanted to serve God, ***KNOWING GOD*** personally, knowing his ***SINS WERE FORGIVEN***---he said ***THAT'S*** what's needed in the ***WHOLE NATION*** by every ***INDIVIDUAL*** within it.

And so, he said, *"Behold, the days are coming of a* ***NEW COVENANT."***And the last bit of the covenant is, God will ***FORGIVE*** and ***FORGET***, which is more wonderful. You'll never ***FORGIVE*** yourself for what you've done, because you can never ***FORGET***, right? And it's jolly difficult to ***FORGIVE*** other people because it's jolly difficult to ***FORGET***. But ***GOD*** has a wonderful ***FORGETERY***. He's got an almighty memory and he can switch his memory off because he's omnipotent. And he says, *"Once I've* ***FORGIVEN*** *your sin, I'll* ***FORGET*** *it. And then you can* ***KNOW ME*** *and be free to serve me, and* ***WANT*** *to do my law."* That means that one day when you get to God and he looks at you, and you say, "Oh God, you know, I remember what I did, and I'm so sorry about that, and sorry I did that." And God will just look at us in bewilderment and say, *"Did what? I don't remember you doing that."* Isn't that incredible? That's a ***MIRACLE*** that God should remember our sins no more.

***The New Covenant: An Eternal Duration***

The ***FINAL*** section I can do within three minutes. ***HOW LONG*** will this new marriage last? The answer is: as ***LONG as the UNIVERSE***! That's long enough. *"As* ***LONG*** *as the bits of the universe you see are there, so* ***LONG*** *will the descendants of Israel be there. As* ***LONG*** *as you can see the sun by day and the moon and stars by night, as* ***LONG*** *as you can see the oceans---as* ***LONG*** *as that---if those things go, then there will no longer be a nation of Israel. But as* ***LONG*** *as they're there, there'll be a* ***NATION*** *called* ***ISRAEL****."* Go even further---the things you can't see: *"Who can measure the* ***HEAVENS****."* Well, even modern science knows the universe is expanding so fast, we can't get to the end of it. *"When you can measure the* ***HEAVENS*** *and when you can explore the* ***HEART of the PLANET EARTH****, then the nation of Israel will cease,"* says the Lord. Well, we're further off than ever before. No man has been to the ***CENTER OF THE EARTH*** in spite of Jules Vern's vivid imagination. And no man has been able to measure the universe. And so, there's still a ***NATION*** called ***ISRAEL***. That's ***HOW LONG*** the marriage will last. And since every marriage needs a ***HOME***, there will not only be that security---as ***LONG*** as the universe---there will be a ***CITY***. And in a specific prediction, Jeremiah says the ***EXTENT*** of the city. He says, *"It'll be from here---this gate, the Hananeel Gate,"* sorry, that's in the northeast. It'll go along there. It'll go down here. It'll include the ***VALLEY OF HINNOM***---that'll be cleaned up and be included. But the ***DIRECTION*** which it will ***SPREAD*** will be ***WEST***. Extraordinary prediction. Because do you know that I have in my room upstairs, at this moment, a ***MAP*** of Jerusalem in which they have now passed a law making it a National Park, forbidding any further building around the city walls and turning the Valley of Hinnom into a garden as part of the National Park. And Jerusalem will develop ***WEST***. Isn't it extraordinary? Here we are reading words of 2,500 years ago, right?

Well, I'm going to ***APPLY*** it to you now. All this is for the ***JEWS*** in chapter 31. It's specifically stated: it's for ***JACOB***---for ***EPHRAIM*** in the North, ***JUDAH*** in the South---for the 12 tribes. So, where do ***WE*** fit in? The answer is: the 1st part of this chapter and the 3rd part of the chapter, ***WE DON'T FIT IN***! The return to the ***LAND*** and the rebuilding of the ***CITY*** is for the ***JEWS***. But I'll tell you where we ***DO*** fit in: ***WE*** got the ***NEW COVENANT*** before ***THEY*** did! That's where ***WE*** fit in. Agreed, when the New Covenant came, it was given to Jews first, and they passed it on to Gentiles very quickly. But the Jews as a ***NATION***---the house of Judah and Israel---***REFUSED*** it. They still haven't got it. And so, ***THEY*** were ***BROKEN OFF***, and ***WE*** Gentiles have been ***GRAFTED IN***. Read Romans 9 to 11: We've been grafted in, and their blessings have become ours. And we are in the New Covenant, and we are enjoying that new relationship with God, which the Jews don't. And the tragedy is, that when we went to the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem---the very headquarters of World Jewry---God was ***NOT*** there. It was ***DEAD***. It was ***LEGAL***. They were discussing the ***LAWS*** written ***OUTSIDE*** their hearts. There was no law IN their hearts. They were discussing rules and regulations about the Passover, and what kind of radishes you should eat and things like this. It was all ***OUTSIDE*** them. ***IT WASN'T IN THE HEART***. They were in the Old Covenant. And we felt sad for them sitting there in that Chief Rabbinate, listening to this poor Rabbi trying to work out the rules and regulations. We were just longing to say, "If only you'd let the Holy Spirit ***INTO YOUR HEART,*** He would sort these things out for you. He'd write the Law ***INSIDE*** you, and each would know the will of God." And that's the New Covenant.

And so, we've been grafted in. Brethren, sisters, when Jesus ***DIED***, He made the New Covenant ***POSSIBLE***. Remember, in ***WESTERN*** thinking order, there are ***THREE STEPS***: 1) ***FORGIVENESS*** ***of sins***, 2) ***KNOWING GOD*** ***personally***, and 3) ***WRITING the LAW in the HEART***. The forgiveness of sins and the forgetting of them came when Jesus shed His blood. The night before He did so, He said, *"This is My blood of the* ***NEW COVENANT****.”...* the New Covenant. And Jesus could see what Jeremiah never did see: That the New Covenant basis was one that ***GENTILES*** could ***PERFECTLY WELL fit into***, not just Jews. The New Covenant...its conditions are ***NOT*** Jewish. And I, as a Gentile, can enter the New Covenant: *"This is My blood of the New Covenant."*

***Old Covenant and New Covenant: Both Were Established on Pentecost***

But shall I tell you the ***DAY*** that the whole New Covenant was established?? ***PENTECOST***! Whitsunday was the ***DAY*** the New Covenant was ***ESTABLISHED***. Whitsunday was the DAY when all of them ***KNEW GOD***, when all of them had the Law ***WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS***! Because if you read the passages at 2 Corinthians 5, you get the impression (well, the clear statement) that, in fact, God ***WRITES*** the Law in his heart by the ***SPIRIT***. And then you're not living by the ***LETTER***, you're living in the ***SPIRIT***. And Whitsunday was the day that the New Covenant was ***COMPLETED***! It ***BEGAN*** with ***CALVARY*** in the ***BLOOD***. But it was ***COMPLETED*** on Whitsunday---when the Holy Spirit ***WROTE*** the law of God in people's ***HEARTS***. And they all knew---they ***ALL*** knew...120 of them...quite a mixed bag of men and women, young and old, men and women. They were there at nine o'clock in the morning and the Spirit was poured out. And Peter said*, "This is that which has been spoken of by the prophet Joel: ‘I'll pour My Spirit on all flesh. Young men...old men, men...women...maid servants.’ "* Doesn't matter what your ***CLASS***, what your ***AGE***, what your ***SEX***; you can ***KNOW GOD PERSONALLY***. His Spirit within can fill your heart with His knowledge. And do you know that Pentecost was the ***ANNIVERSARY*** of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai? Did you know that? That Whitsunday---Pentecost, the 50th day after Passover---was the celebration of the ***MARRIAGE*** at Sinai between ***GOD*** and ***ISRAEL***. And God could not have more clearly said, *"This is the* ***NEW*** *Marriage, this is the* ***NEW*** *Covenant, this is the* ***NEW*** *Relationship, this is the* ***NEW*** *Basis. I'm putting My Law* ***WITHIN*** *you.”* But it's the ***LAW OF LIBERTY***. It's the ***LAW OF LOVE***. It's the ***LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD***, which sets me free in Christ Jesus.

And so, on this Whitsunday, we just---well, I hope we just---want to shout ***HALLELEUIAH***! because of all this. This is the ***NEW*** Covenant. And if you're not in it...you may come to Millmead (Church) regularly, you may have your name in our membership roll...but if you are ***NOT*** in ***PERSONAL*** ***CONTACT WITH GOD***, and if He's ***NOT*** writing the Law in your hearts, you do not belong to the New Covenant people of God. And if you do, and if you ***KNOW*** that your own personal sins have been ***FORGIVEN*** and ***FORGOTTEN***...if you're able to say, "I don't need to go to someone who knows God, I can go to Him ***MYSELF***, I ***KNOW*** Him," and if you know that when you're in a problem, you don't need to look up a book of rules and regulations---you ask Him to write His will in your heart and that His Spirit will do so---then you ***KNOW*** what Jeremiah was talking about! Lonely, elderly, Jeremiah---probably in prison---and yet, he knew a ***PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD***. And he knew that if only ***EVERY*** individual in the nation could have that, that the ***WHOLE NATION*** could be renewed and could live in peace and prosperity, and there could be singing and dancing and wine and oil and happy faces.

Let us pray: *"Oh God of Israel, how we thank You we are not under the Old Covenant, because we know we'd break it, and You'd have to throw us out. But thank you Lord, that we're in the New Covenant and that what You forgive, You forget---even if nobody else forgets. And that You have invited us to know You as 'Abba', 'Daddy', 'Father'. And that on this day we remember that You first gave Your Holy Spirit to write the Law in people's hearts, and they wanted to do Your will. And Lord, we thank You that Pentecost was not the last day You did this, but that You've been doing it every day since. I want to thank You for those members of this congregation I know are just longing to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and filled, and I know that You will answer their prayer and bring them fully into the New Covenant. Lord, I pray for every member of this congregation--- whether they're a member of the church or not, or just visitors---that they may know the whole of Your New Covenant---and not just the forgiveness, but the relationship, and that inward revelation, so that as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And You have Your family. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen."*

The Hymn number 234---

*Holy Spirit, Truth Divine;*

*Dawn upon this soul of mine,*

*Word of God and inward light,*

*Wake my spirit, clear my sight; ......*(Note: This is an *inward* hymn)

*Glow within this heart of mine.*

***INWARD***, light. Inward... inward. Let me have it right here, ***WITHIN***. Whoever receives Holy Spirit power, has a spring of living water welling up ***WITHIN***... within!! The ***INWARD RELIGION*** and the ***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY***.

234 Let's Stand and sing.

***Singing*** (2.5 minutes)