

Jeremiah: Shaped by the Potter's Hand

Kenwood Baptist Church Fall Sermon Series

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November 2, 2025

TEXT: Jeremiah 31:27-37, 32:1-16



Good morning, Beloved. I want you to know right up front that I am absolutely off the charts excited about these passages, Jeremiah 31 and 32 together. I trust not in my skills of speaking but in the power of God's Word before us that you will leave this place moved by Jeremiah's final statement: *"Nothing is too hard for God."*

When I was a seminary student, one of my favorite professors, a senior scholar named Dr. Walter Kaiser, told a group of students that if he had only four passages from the Old Testament to explain the storyline of the Bible, he would choose Genesis 12, 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 53, and Jeremiah 31. In Genesis 12, we read God's promise to Abraham to reclaim the world through Abraham's descendants. In 2 Samuel 7, we read God's promise to David that one of David's descendants would reign forever. In Isaiah 53, we read the breathtaking passage of the Servant of the Lord who would carry the sin of the world. And in Jeremiah 31, we find the promise of a new covenant.

Jeremiah's ministry announces that God is going to act again in spite of our sin. Praise God. And that action will result in a new covenant that God makes with us. It's a breathtaking declaration. It almost seems too good to be true. And yet God, in His wisdom and His sovereignty, couples

with the announcement of the new covenant a concrete prophetic sign act that is absolutely stunning. Let's take a look at that this morning.

The Lord declares in Jeremiah 31:27:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares 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."

God is our Creator. He is the original gardener, the planter of life. Hope is expressed in Scripture in concrete terms of human flourishing. In Jeremiah 31:28, God says:

"And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant."

If you were with us in the beginning of fall, then this language should ring the bells in your mind of God's calling to Jeremiah. We saw this in Jeremiah 1:10 when God appeared to Jeremiah as a teenager and told him:

"See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

We see six infinitives of Jeremiah's job description, three word pairs, a progression. We saw at the very beginning that God's Word has a destructive quality to it that is for our good. God will pursue us and go after the idolatry in our hearts and seek to tear it down and get rid of it. Though that initially may seem frightening, it's actually for our good. God's Word also has a constructive quality that God will build up and plant and restore.

God had spoken to Jeremiah in his teenage years and asked him a question. In Jeremiah 1:11, we read:

"And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what do you see?' And I said, 'I see an almond branch [shaqēd].'"

Jeremiah had looked out and seen an almond branch. In Hebrew, the word is *"shaqed."* He saw the almond tree bursting into bloom, the first sign of hope in the spring. The almond tree is the first to leaf out, the first to bloom, blooming in late January or early February of the new year. And in Jeremiah 1:12, we read the Lord's response:

"Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching [shoqēd] over My word to perform it.'"



Shaqed is the almond tree, and the Lord says, *"I am watching [shōqed] over My word."* The Hebrew language is fantastic and has all these relationships of words and the participle form.

God alerts Jeremiah right at the beginning of his life. I just want to anticipate early in the sermon the first call to action at the end. I want to tell you upfront that we must trust the long work of God in our lives. God promises, and those promises are never reneged. They are never broken. God will never say, "I have a good plan for you," and then switch it out. His long purposes must be trusted.

For Jeremiah, hope begins to dawn in the letter that he wrote to the exiles. This hope is announced finally for us in a stunning form in Jeremiah 31:31-32:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband," declares the LORD."

God says, "I'm going to cut a new covenant with you." God will take the initiative. He says that "it will not be like the covenant that I cut with your ancestors." The covenant partners will be the same. God will be the same. But there is one crucial defect in the covenant made at Sinai. God says that the problem with that covenant which I made with you is that "you broke it." The only thing wrong with the covenant that God made with us at Sinai is that we were able to break it. This is the great sorrow and lament of Jeremiah's lifetime of ministry, his preaching and teaching, that the covenant God made, though He was our husband, we broke, we shattered. The covenant of Sinai proved to be breakable, and if it were up to us, that would be the end of the Bible. But it's not up to us, just as salvation is not up to us. In Jeremiah 31:33, we read:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

God will act in such a way that He will give or place His Word within us. He will write it on the tablets of our hearts. In Jeremiah 17, God had seen that the sin of the nation was written with an iron stylus on the heart. When we look within us, if we are outside of Christ, and we take an honest assessment of our own souls, we will see our sins written there. If we are pretending to be Christian, but are apart from Christ, and we look within, we will see that documentation of our transgression is inscribed. And God says He will act in such a way to remove that and place His Word there instead—the truth of His Word: *"I will put My law, My scripture, within you."* And God says, *"I will write it on your hearts."* The Torah will be within—upon our hearts. And God repeats the covenant formula: *"I will be your God. You will be My people."*

We might wonder: What does this mean for God to come and write the documentation of His

Word on our hearts? This imagery is interpreted for us in the next verse. In Jeremiah 31:34, God says:

“And no longer shall each one 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,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’”

God says, “Everyone will know Me, from the least to the greatest, from young to old, rich and poor, influential and insignificant; everyone will know the Lord.”

Now, I do not think this means that we don't get to have Bible study. At least, I hope it does not mean that. It means that we will as a people be renewed so that we will know God. And that's the great longing in Jeremiah. Remember in Jeremiah 9:23-24 when the Lord says:

“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight.”

God envisions and promises a coming day, not only where the covenant will not be broken, but where the covenant will be kept, and the people of God *en masse* will know Him and delight in Him and reflect His ways. They will see that what God loves, they love; how God acts, they desire to act. It's the most breathtaking promise in the entire Old Testament: God will act, and He will accomplish this. In Jeremiah's day, this might seem unbelievable. So God immediately makes this staggering promise of a new covenant, of an eternal binding relationship, one that will never be able to be broken.

When you and I promise things, we need to add to it because you and I prove ourselves not to be completely trustworthy. We have a whole set of things: We can use the pinky. I'm not sure what that really adds, but it can be added. We can add the little phrase “swear to God,” as though that somehow makes our word more reliable. We can add the oath formula “I'm telling you the truth,” which actually has the opposite effect because then everyone thinks, “Well, what have you been doing up until now?”

God, though, does not need to say, “I'm really telling the truth.” God, in fact, says something stunning. God says that His promise is fixed—so fixed that if the fixed order of the visible cosmos ends, then His promise will end. That seems pretty secure! God says a second variation of this oath, that if the heavens can be measured and the foundations of the earth can be fully explored, if you can reach the limit, then you can reach the limit of His love. And that's not possible. Even with all our technology, all our space telescopes, we have come nowhere near measuring the end of the heavens. God says that His promise is secure like this, an unlimited,

inexhaustible scope of God's mercy. We need to know this. We will never reach the end of God's mercy. It's a stunning promise. It's given on oath, and we rightly ask, and Jeremiah would be right to ask, "Lord, how can I know this is true?" Abraham had asked earlier, "God, how can I know Your promise is true? How can I be sure there is a good ending?" Is there a concrete sign, a down payment of hope?

When we turn to Jeremiah 32, we find this concrete prophetic sign. The scene is set in Jeremiah 32:1:

"The Word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar."

Zedekiah is the king of Judah. He becomes king when he is 21 years old, and he is a terrible king. His whole reign is summarized in one verse in 2 Kings. He gets three verses in Chronicles. These passages combined say he was a wicked king. It was his 10th year, and it was the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar. That means it's 587 BC. At this time, we are told that the army of the king of Babylon was surrounding the city of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 32:2, we read:

"At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah."

Zedekiah had rebelled against Babylon, and the Babylonians had come with the full might and fury of their army. Babylon had taken Judah and was closing in on Jerusalem.

Even as Nebuchadnezzar's army was closing in on Jerusalem, Zedekiah had taken Jeremiah and enclosed him under house arrest. The terrified king spoke to Jeremiah and asked him, "Why do you prophesy in this way? Why do you keep saying that the city is being given into the hand of the king of Babylon? He will capture it. Why do you keep saying that Zedekiah (that is, I) will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans, but will speak with the king of Babylon face to face, eye to eye? Why do you keep saying that Zedekiah will be taken to Babylon and remain there and that, though he fights against the Babylonians, he will not succeed? Why do you keep saying that?" In the moment, Jeremiah might have thought to say, "Haven't you been listening to what I've been preaching for 10 years?"

Zedekiah gives a summary of the consequences of sin and rebellion against God, the consequence that are very real in the life of the nation and of the king in particular, and yet the king is still wondering why. Sin is costly, brothers and sisters, and it will come to a point when you will not ask why. If you turn your back on God and refuse to repent, your life is going to become less and less coherent, and you may think to yourself, "I can turn it around when I need to," and you will not be able to. Remember when Jeremiah smashed the vessel and said, "It's

over. It's over." In the presence of the king, Jeremiah, like Jesus, does not answer the king's question directly. Instead, God's word comes to him again. In the court of the king, under house arrest, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 32:7, God said to him:

"Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.'"

Jeremiah must have been perplexed by this. "The word of the Lord came to me and said that your cousin is going to come and offer you his field," the field that is currently occupied by the Babylonian army. And he says that *"the right of redemption is yours."*

Redemption is one of the most important words in the Bible.

The Right of Redemption

Ge'ulah (גְּאֻלָּה) = *redemption*

Ga'al (גָּאֵל) = *to redeem*

Go'el (גֹּאֵל) = *the kinsman redeemer*

In Hebrew, the word is *"ge'ulah,"* redemption, the abstract noun. The verb is *"ga'al,"* to redeem, and the present participle *"go'el"* is a redeemer.

Hebrew is wonderful. I remember, as I was first learning Hebrew, when I made the discovery that in Hebrew verbs, the three-letter root of a verb generates abstract nouns and participles as agents in this very predictable way. When I realized this, my vocabulary suddenly tripled.

To redeem is to buy back. The act of buying back is redemption, and the one who does that is the redeemer. In Scripture, the land is allotted by tribal allotment. If you get into a situation where the land has to be sold because either you have fallen into debt slavery or, in this case, a foreign army has taken the land, then the land is lost. God makes provision for a redeemer to buy back that which has been lost and restore it to you. The obligation to do so falls on the next of kin. This is the plotline of the book of Ruth, where the next of kin acts as a kinsman redeemer. In the Bible, when you lose it all, whether from debt or sin or foreign invasion, then a kinsman redeemer comes and buys it back for you. This is one of the most crucial categories of redemption. Leviticus 25 is the chapter that narrates how this is to be carried out by the next of kin and provides that in the 50th year, the year of Jubilee, everything that has been lost is restored. Once every generation, the whole community experiences redemption.

In the Jewish community, there is a plan of reading through the Scripture. There is a one-year cycle and a three-year cycle to read through the Pentateuch. The Torah portion of that week is what young men and young women learn as part of their bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah ceremony.

They learn to execute a portion of the public reading from the Torah. With each Torah reading, there is a thematically related reading from the prophets called the *Haftarah*. And the *Haftarah* portion of Leviticus 25 about redemption is Jeremiah 32, the concrete act of redemption.

Hanamel comes and says, “Buy my field.” In Jeremiah 32:8, we read that when his cousin showed up and said this, Jeremiah said:

“Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.”

Remember that Jeremiah is from the small village of Anathoth, just a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. He bought the field and weighed out the money to his cousin—17 shekels of silver. A shekel is 11 grams. Seventeen shekels is less than half a pound. It's a tiny amount of money. Abraham bought the field and the cave to bury his wife, and he had paid 400 shekels for it 1,000 years before.

God tells Jeremiah to buy this field, and I want you to be stunned by this because I've been stunned by this. It's as if the whole world is falling apart. The Babylonian army is surrounding the city, and God tells Jeremiah, "Put \$5 down and buy your cousin's backyard." What would that mean? Jeremiah does it, which is a profound point of application for all Christians. Whatever God tells you to do, no matter how small it may seem, just do it.

Jeremiah signs the deed. He seals it with his signet seal. He gets witnesses. He weighs out the 17 shekels of silver, this tiny sum. In Jeremiah 32:10, we read:

“I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.”



The method for this transaction is to write the deed on a sheet of paper. The text is written twice, on the upper half and on the lower half, with a small gap between. The witnesses put their names on the outside of the sealed section, and the unsealed copy of the deed is just rolled up loosely so it's accessible for ready reference.

Jeremiah gives the deed to a man named Baruch, who will become a prominent figure in the narrative. He is mentioned here for the first time. He turns out to be one of Jeremiah's closest and most loyal friends, and it's because of Baruch that we have the book of Jeremiah. When Jeremiah gives the deed to Baruch, he charges Baruch in the presence of the witnesses. In Jeremiah 32:14, he says:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time.'"

The Dead Sea Scrolls were put in jars like this at a moment when the Roman army was filling the land. The community of the Dead Sea Scrolls wrapped up their books, their deeds, their copies of the Scripture, and put them in earthenware jars and hid them in caves. They lasted for 2,000 years in there. When they were opened, and the scrolls were taken out, it was found that some of the scrolls included the entire book of Isaiah.



Jeremiah wanted and needed for his deed to last just 70 years. "Put this in storage so that my grandchildren will know that there is a God who keeps His promises." In Jeremiah 32:15, we read:



"For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.'"

It's a concrete sign of hope. Jeremiah is being asked to enact the new covenant promise. That's what I came to see this week and I want you to see so clearly. Sometimes these things, like a new covenant, that are so true and deep and real can be abstract for us. God makes this promise of a new covenant: "I will forgive your sins. I will cleanse you from unrighteousness. I will write My Word on your hearts. I will bind you to myself forever." And we can strain our belief to think, how can that be true? My sin is too great. And God's answer to our incredulity is to pay \$5 for your cousin's backyard. He is saying, "That's how you know. And, by the way, I am the creator of the heavens and the earth, and I keep My promises."

When Jeremiah does this, he signs the deed and gives it to Baruch. Baruch takes it and sticks it into the clay jar. After Jeremiah had given the deed to Baruch, he bursts into prayer, and his first word of prayer is this exclamatory comment in Jeremiah 32:17:

"Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You."

The ESV renders it fairly, as just "Ah." It's like an abbreviated version of "Praise the Lord!" When God acts in a way that is so surprising and wondrous, Jeremiah says, "God, You are the Maker of the heavens and the earth, and though everything around me right now is absolutely falling apart and the Babylonians are at the gate, I am going to pay just \$5 for my cousin's backyard and put the deed in the jar and 70 years later they are going to open it, and You can be trusted. So, praise the Lord!" And then he says, *"You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You."*

Beloved of Christ, this is a verse that you must write on your heart. You need Jeremiah 32:17 written on your heart: *"Ah, Lord GOD! It is You who have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You."* Can you say that with me? *"Ah, Lord GOD! It is You who have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for You."*

Jeremiah 31-32 calls us to trust Him. Trust the long work of God in your life. What He said to you and whispered to you at the beginning of your following of Jesus, He remembers. He has a plan that is unfolding and can be trusted.

Jeremiah 31-32 displays for us in this concrete action that God is our Kinsman Redeemer. As Jeremiah's prophetic sign act points forward, a token of what is to come. The token is \$5 for your cousin's backyard. If that's the token, then what is the reality? The reality is the most profound truth of Christianity. The reality is that when you and I are sold and have lost everything and we look around for a kinsman redeemer, a family member to come and buy us back, and we see that none is available, none sufficient, God sends His one and only Son, made like us, calling us brothers and sisters. He steps in as our next of kin, functioning as our Kinsman Redeemer to buy us back, to restore us to Himself, to cleanse us from unrighteousness, and to declare to His disciples that Jeremiah's promised new covenant is here, and it is here in His blood. It is the greatest truth that the world has ever heard.

Who is like the Lord? There is no one. *"Nothing is too hard for You."* The New Testament writers unanimously affirm that Jesus told this to His disciples. Paul says, *"I received from the Lord what I delivered to you."* On the night that the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it. When He had given thanks, He said, *"This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."* In the same way, He took the cup and said, *"This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me."*

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ appeared as High Priest of the good things to come, that He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of His own blood, and secured eternal redemption. Therefore, He is the mediator of a new covenant. Praise God.

If you are here this morning and feeling lost, feeling like things are caving in around you, and you wonder: Is there a way out? The way out is to have the Kinsman Redeemer step in. There is no self-made rescue, but there is a divine, sublime rescue plan for Christ to do what we could not do, for Him to arrive and to fulfill this promise. Jeremiah made the smallest gesture that could be seen, coupled with this overwhelming promise. This morning you and I have the

reality. Jeremiah, in possession of the token of God's promise, declared, *"Ah, Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."* You and I, brothers and sisters, share in the reality of that this morning. If you have never welcomed Him into your life, just welcome Him in now and let Him buy you back. If the circumstances of your life seem extreme right now or extra difficult, let Him step in and fill your heart with a confident expectation that nothing is too hard for Him.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.