

# Jeremiah

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 July 1983

Preacher: Rowell, Peter

[ 0 : 0 0 ] turn to the 31st chapter in the prophecy of Jeremiah, reading verse 3. I shall speak as the Lord may help from verse 3 in chapter 31 in the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. You know that very often in these Old Testament prophecies there is an immediate fulfilment of the prophecy and a more distant fulfilment of the prophecy. As you read on through this chapter and you take it in the context of chapters 29 and 30, you'll realise that Jeremiah was directed by God to speak a word of encouragement, or indeed to send a letter of encouragement from Jerusalem to those who had already been taken captive away to Babylon. His fellow countrymen, many of them were already in captivity. These prophecies in this part of the book of Jeremiah then are directed to those who were already suffering, who were already in distress. It's always important to understand what the purpose of the prophecy is. And there can be no doubt, as you read through these chapters, you may afterwards look at them again, there can be no doubt that the purpose of this part of the prophecy of Jeremiah is to encourage. To encourage those who were suffering, those who were in difficulties, those who were obviously discouraged by their circumstances. The encouragement takes the form of promise regarding the end of that 70 years of captivity. The assurance that God will one day bring them back to their own homeland and establish them in their own cities. Once again they will be a great nation and the cities of that nation will prosper.

That then is the more immediate fulfilment of the prophecies of this part of Jeremiah. the principle purpose of these Old Testament prophecies. Because that is the principle purpose of the whole of the Old Testament.

And that purpose is to point forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to describe the glory and honour of his kingdom, and to comfort those who are spiritually minded in every age of the world's history, but especially in the Gospel age.

You only need to read through the epistle to the Hebrews to realise that the Gospel age, the age of the blessings of the covenant of grace, the age of the truly Christian church on earth, is the age to which the whole of previous history was moving forward.

[ 3 : 3 3 ] There were many glories in the Old Testament, but the glory of the new outshines the glory of the old. The old, in the epistle to the Hebrews, Paul says, is full of shadows. The new is the reality.

The old foreshadows the coming of Christ. The new reveals the Lord Jesus in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel. And I'm sure that as you read on in this particular chapter, you will realise that this part of the prophecy must have reference to the days of the Gospel.

Indeed, in Hebrews chapter 8, verses 8 to 12, the apostle takes up these verses from 31 onwards in this same chapter.

And he shows us that this is a description here in Jeremiah 31, verse 31, and following verses. This is a description of the privilege and blessing of God's people in the New Testament era.

The age of Jesus Christ. The time that stretches from his first coming to his second coming. Now, I am one of those people that believe that the purposes of God in the Old Testament revealed are purposes which point to the glory of Christ in his church.

[ 5 : 06 ] The glorious conquest of Christ in his kingdom. And that is why, of course, we pray in the words of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. You remember that in the later part of this chapter from verse 31 onwards, there is a description of what the apostle in Hebrews calls the new covenant.

And it is called the new covenant here in verse 31. The Lord says, I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Now, you take that in context of the Hebrews epistle, and it cannot be confined to the Jews as a nation.

The covenant blessings described here are made to the new spiritual Israel. The new spiritual Israel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic Israel.

And the New Testament Israel is the church of Jesus Christ. It is the number of his chosen ones. It is those who are made kings and priests unto their God, just as Israel was made a prince with God.

[ 6 : 25 ] These verses stress something of the difference between the Old Covenant and the New. The Old Covenant was broken by the unfaithfulness of the people. In that sense, it was a two-sided covenant. God's promises were undeserved in that Old Covenant.

God's promises were sovereign in the Old Covenant. But there was a requirement of obedience upon the part of the people in the Old Covenant, which they failed to give.

And so the Old Covenant was broken, which my covenant they break. God was not unfaithful, they were. I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord.

Now that is one reason why the Apostle in the Hebrews epistle stresses the greater glory of this New Covenant as compared with the Old.

[ 7 : 27 ] Because the Old, shall I put it in a simple way, the Old was breakable. The New is unbreakable. The New is founded upon better promises.

The promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. They are certain. There is no uncertainty. There is nothing that can alter or break the blessings and terms of the New Covenant.

This shall be the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts and will be their God and they shall be my people.

It was an inward and spiritual covenant in all its aspects. Whereas the Old Covenant had many external and national aspects to it.

Here in the New Covenant, God by his Spirit works in the hearts of men and women. He makes them his spiritual people.

[ 8 : 31 ] And they are taught by the Spirit. So in verse 34 we read, They shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me.

Every one of these Israelites of the New Testament meaning of the word, They shall all know him. Whereas in the Old Testament, not every Israelite knew the God of Israel.

That is not personally and spiritually. They knew him to be their national God. But there is a great difference between having a sort of national deity and having a personal relationship with the Lord.

Now the glory of the New Covenant is that every person involved in a New Covenant has a personal relationship with the Lord.

But my subject this evening is not so much that aspect of the truth, although it is involved in it.

[ 9 : 33 ] I want to come to this third verse, particularly this evening. Where the prophet says, The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

I feel that the first and principal thing I want to bring to you this evening is what I might call the biblical doctrine of reassurance.

Reassurance. I have a vague recollection that I spoke some while ago now here on the doctrine of Christian assurance, particularly.

If any of you can remember that, well then, this is a sort of development of that same theme. You see, in the Bible, there is this plain teaching regarding the believer's assurance, and also plain teaching regarding the believer's reassurance.

Now there are believers here. They look back this evening, perhaps, as I speak, to the time when the Lord first blessed them. The time of their first love.

[ 11 : 00 ] They knew certain things then. They were brought to a conviction in their own hearts regarding certain things at that time. For some, those convictions are more extensive and more clear than others.

But still, for everyone, in the time of their first love, there is a certain conviction and assurance. They know the Lord. They are experiencing his mercy and his grace.

For the first time in the way of salvation and of love. And they delight in it. It is a wonderful time. The time of our first love.

And mingled with that first love, there is of necessity a measure of conviction and certainty and assurance. Now I am not saying that at the beginning everybody has the full assurance of sins forgiven and of their relationship with the Lord.

Some do. Some don't. Some receive their pardon early. Some late, as one of our hymns puts it. But there is a measure of real persuasion in the beginning of the spiritual pathway.

[ 12 : 20 ] I don't see how it could be otherwise, do you? How could anyone say, I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, if they weren't sure there was a Lord Jesus Christ?

So in that very simple way you can see there must be some measure of conviction and certainty about the things that we say we believe.

And of course there is no salvation apart from faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is one of the elementary things, one of the great fundamental elementary things of our most holy faith.

I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But those days for some are distant.

And as you look back on more recent days, perhaps you are sad because there is not the same kind of warmth, of affection, not the same kind of conviction, not the same kind of certainty, of more recent date that there used to be earlier on in the pathway.

[ 13 : 40 ] There is need, then, of a reassurance, isn't there? You need God by his Holy Spirit to come and revive your spirit in such a way that once again you can say things like the Apostle said, I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

There is need of reassurance. But there is particularly need of reassurance when we get to those places in our lives and situations are difficult.

When we are brought into trial. Remember, Jeremiah was writing or speaking in his letter to those who were already suffering captivity in Babylon.

And there in Babylon they hung their harps on the willows and they couldn't sing the Lord's song in a strange land. And in fact, many of them forgot all about their homeland altogether.

They settled down and they never did return. But the godly down in Babylon were grieved. They were troubled. They were anxious about the future.

[ 15 : 00 ] They were deeply concerned about their own land which was the Lord's land. Their own city which was the Lord's city.

And if we come personally into times of trial, sometimes severe trial. If we come into times of disappointment, sometimes bitter disappointment.

If we come into times of affliction, sometimes extreme affliction. I believe that they are times when we need reassurance.

If we come into times of uncertainty, we need reassurance. I remember vividly, I hesitate to say too much about my own experience.

But it reminds me when I come to this part of the country. I was in Oxford at the time when the Lord was really bringing me into concern about the ministry of the word.

[ 16 : 02 ] And I felt at that time that I simply could not preach. I really felt I could not preach because I didn't know enough about the Bible, for one thing.

I didn't know enough about real spiritual experience, for another thing. And what was worst of all, I felt the need of that real certainty and assurance in regard to my own soul.

How can I be sure I know these things in a way which is necessary for a minister and a preacher to know them? And I believe one prayer meeting occasion, a minister spoke from these words very briefly.

It was made such a comfort and strength to me. You see, it was a time when I needed reassurance. It was a time when I needed God to make things clear to me.

I could not go forward in that pathway unless the Lord made the way clear. And this was the verse that the Lord so graciously used to tell me that he had been working in my life and he would.

[ 17 : 22 ] The Lord hath appeared. I felt he had appeared in my life. Under the blessing of this verse, by the Spirit's work within, I could see that he had appeared to me.

And then I felt that he appeared to me at that very time saying, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. And then pointed me back again to the past, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.

I say then, I say then, you need reassurance at special times in your life. I realize that this, for some, must surely be a time when they think often of the end of life.

You need reassurance, weakness, weakness, pain, repeated illnesses. These are God's voice, aren't they, to us.

Telling us that time is short. That is a time, surely, when we need reassurance.

[ 18 : 34 ] I find, you say, well you're fit and well. Well, friend, I find that the thoughts of dying, of the end of life, are thoughts which bring me at times into great concern.

How will it be then? And when those thoughts get hold of you, you may be young, you may be old, but when those thoughts begin to get hold of you, you need something definite.

Don't you? You need some reassurance. Or, if you've never had assurance at all, you need real, God-given assurance. Friends, it would be hard work dying with no assurance at all.

It would be hard work dying in the dark. God forbid that we should ever do that. God grant that all of us shall die in the light of his love.

We need reassurance, don't we? We don't know how it will be then. We don't know whether we shall have our faculties or not. We don't know whether it will be sudden or prolonged.

[ 19 : 49 ] None of us know that. But what we do know is that we need reassurance. We need God. Don't we? We need God to speak to us. We need God to deal with the fears that assail us. We need God to deal with the fears that assail us.

We need God to deal with the fears that assail us. We need God to deal with the fears that assail us. Well, it must have seemed to some of those who were down in Babylonian captivity that death stared them in the face and that they would never return to their own homeland.

They needed something suitable to their particular need at that time. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

This then is the assurance. First of all, there is reassurance in the memory of God's goodness in the past.

[ 20 : 53 ] Why is there reassurance in the memory of God's goodness in the past? Because, friends, we do believe, surely we do believe, in the doctrine of the preservation of the saints.

We do believe in what Paul said to the Philippians. He that hath begun a good working will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. God isn't a changeable, fickle God.

He doesn't love you one day and hate you the next. He may love you one day and chastise you the next. But he still loves you. Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.

It's not a case of whom the Lord hateth, he chasteneth. Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth. And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

[ 21 : 58 ] So the memory of what God has done for us in the past is to be a strong assurance and reassurance to us in the present because of the character of God who has done this.

We need to be reminded that our God changes not. Never does he change. Never does his love vary.

You sang a hymn, didn't you? That second hymn is entitled Conflict. This is a very suitable background, isn't it, to the subject tonight.

It's a hymn in which dear John Newton confesses his spiritual impotence. He says, I can't do these things. But it's a hymn in which he looks to God.

And he says in the last verse, Wilt thou not crown at length the work thou hast begun? And that's a rhetorical question.

[ 23 : 09 ] There's no uncertainty about the answer to that question either in Newton's mind or in mine or yours, is there? God has begun a work. He will finish it.

He will crown it. And with the will afford me strength in all thy ways to run. Now friends, that is the only answer to our human, our spiritual impotence.

God's strength. God's certainties. God's promises. God's power. God's holy character. God's love.

The Lord hath appeared. No man, no poor feeble man, but the Lord. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me.

The beginning of God's work in your soul was not the result of human endeavor. It wasn't because you made a terrific exercise of the will and you really strained every muscle, as it were, spiritually, and you did something.

[ 24 : 19 ] The Lord hath appeared. The Lord hath appeared. The Lord did it. He hath appeared of old unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

Therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee. But you'll notice in this verse 3, that the word saying is in italics.

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

Therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee. Now, I feel, friends, that there are two ways in which it is right for us to look at this verse.

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, that's what he said when he appeared of old unto me. He assured me and gave me to know his love. He said, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

[ 25 : 26 ] Well, he may not have said those actual words to you. But what he did for you, and the way in which he blessed you, was his way of saying, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

But then there's also this second way of looking at this verse. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me. And then, in the pause between that word and the rest of the sentence, there is this thought.

But we're in Babylon. We're in captivity. We're under God's chastising hand. We're in trouble. We're in difficulty.

What then? And the rest of the verse, then, is God's response. To those questions which seize upon our minds.

When we're in circumstances which produce that kind of questioning. And we begin to say in our hearts, if it was true that the Lord did deal with me like that years ago, when he began with me, if it really was his work, why am I like I am now?

[ 26 : 48 ] Again, in that hymn. You may be using the very words of the hymn to ask this question. Why am I like this now? I would but cannot love, though wooed by love divine.

My own dear wife was saying to me only the other night. She said, why am I like this? Why is it that I can't love the Lord? Why is it that I have no feeling?

And you may have other questions like that. Similar sort of question. You say, well, if the Lord has appeared in my life, and if he has dealt with me, why am I like this now?

And I think the particular problem that so many of us come into difficulties with is the problem of our feelings. Why isn't there that warm, loving response to the Lord Jesus Christ that there once was?

Writing to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, the Lord chides the church there that they had left their first love. And that's a great question.

[ 28 : 03 ] Why? It seems as though we've left our first love. How do you reply to people who say things like this?

How are we to answer this perplexity? I would but cannot love, though wooed by love divine. No arguments have power to move a soul so base as mine.

How do you deal with that? What do you do? Just turn away and say, well, poor old miserable Newton. And leave him to suffer.

Is that what you do? Is that what you do when it's like that in your own soul? You sink down in despair. Say, there's no hope for me.

Now, friends, the honesty of John Newton about his own personal experience is very attractive. And we have to be perfectly honest about our spiritual condition.

[ 29 : 14 ] No use pretending. It was no use me saying to my wife the other evening, oh, but my dear, you're mistaken. You do really love the Lord. It's just that you're not feeling like it at the moment.

Oh, friends, it goes deeper than that. These are real spiritual problems which cause great heart searching. And there must be an answer. Must be a satisfying answer to these things.

What is it? Well, as Matthew Henry says, I've lost the quotation. I wish I could find it. If anyone does find it, please let me know.

But somewhere, in Matthew Henry's commentary on the Bible, he makes a comment like this about our love to the Lord. He says, we shall never warm our hearts by the fire of our own love to the Lord.

We shall always warm our hearts by the fire of the Lord's love to us. So, what does that mean?

[ 30 : 29 ] It means that you may spend a long time looking within and saying, well, I don't feel like I want to feel. My heart doesn't respond in love to the Lord as I would have it to respond.

And you go on searching your heart and minutely examining your feelings every day. You know, friends, that is going to bring you lower and lower and lower. That is going to torment your spirit.

It is going to be an open door to the devil to confuse you. Now, don't mistake me. I said, be honest.

The hymn says, pour not on thyself too long. Be honest. Look at the situation. Assess the situation. But pour not on thyself too long.

Don't go on day after day after day doing this. Pour not on thyself too long, lest it sink thee lower. Look to Jesus. Kind and strong.

[ 31 : 31 ] Mercy joined with power. That's where to look. And it's the fire of his love that warms our hearts with love to him. Now, here we have it in this verse.

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me. But what about the situation now? The answer comes back from heaven. Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

And the Lord is really saying, consider him who bore such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your mind.

Look to Jesus. Consider him. Meditate often. Pray often. over his love. Over his love.

Over his sacrifice. Over the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of it. The Lord is saying, whatever your situation now, however unresponsive your heart, however cold and dead you feel, I have loved thee.

[ 32 : 40 ] Amazing, isn't it? Amazing grace. The Lord says, I have loved thee. I have loved thee. You could put emphasis on every verse, every word in this phrase, couldn't you?

I, the Lord, I have, most certainly I have. I have loved with a love which is unmeasurable.

I have loved thee of all people. I have loved thee with an everlasting love. That is the only love that God could love you with.

It is the love of the everlasting covenant. It is the love of the Father for his Son before the world began because there in covenant relationship is the Son and the Church.

One in Christ from before the foundation of the world. I have loved thee with that love. You know, if people say they love us, we believe them but we want them to prove it.

- [ 34 : 06 ] We want them to show it, don't we? There are times when we need them to show us that they love us. Words are not sufficient. Now how does God show us his love?
- He shows us his love in sending the Son of his love into this world to save sin. This, this is the love of God that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sin.
- God sold us this is the magnitude of his love. God sold us the world that he gave his only begotten Son. This is the love of God.
- And you see it in the heart of Jesus. You see it as he suffered and died on Calvary. You see him dying in your place.
- Suffering in your stead. I have loved thee with an everlasting love.
- [ 35 : 15 ] Therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee. Going back to that hymn again.
- Very helpful hymn, isn't it, for this sermon. Going back to that hymn, it speaks of how immovable we are, naturally speaking. How unresponsive we are.
- What makes the difference? Not that we sort of somehow bludgeon ourselves into activity. That's the doctrine of the Church of Rome, isn't it?
- You wear hair shirts and lay on beds of nails and try and be more spiritual by doing things like that. No, friends, neither is it a kind of emotional, mental torment that you put yourselves through trying to be what you're not.
- You see God in his amazing grace loving you from before the foundation of the world and sending his son to die for you and then by his spirit quickening you and moving your heart.
- [ 36 : 28 ] You begin to know again the moving of the spirit of God in your soul drawing you to the Lord in prayer and you cry. You see, that's what this hymn is doing.
- It's expressing the situation of a man who is being drawn to the Lord. Although he feels so prayerless and so cold, God is at work making him realize what he's like.
- God by his spirit is at work making him discontented till he finds that satisfaction which is alone in that intimate relationship with the Lord.
- With loving kindness have I drawn thee. There's a verse in Hosea chapter 11 which seems to me to expound the truth here very beautifully.
- Here, the prophet is speaking on the behalf of God. He's really speaking God's word. God is saying, I taught Ephraim also to go like a mother teaches a little child to walk.
- [ 37 : 44 ] I taught him to go taking them by their arms but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with the cords of a man with bands of love and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws and I laid meat to them.
- I drew them with the cords of a man with bands of love love. Now whenever God draws your soul to himself he does it through Christ Jesus and what is happening is it's the man Christ Jesus who has bound your heart to himself.
- It is the man Christ Jesus who has bound your heart with his love love. And so he cannot let you go and he will not let you go.
- Oh love that will not let me go. I hang my helpless soul on thee. Beautiful isn't it?
- I drew them with the cords of a man with bands of love. That's why I said the principle interpretation of these prophetic scriptures is to be seen in Christ.
- [ 39 : 11 ] Here is Christ drawing his church. Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.
- The apostle puts it like this in writing to the Corinthians. The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that if one died for all then were all dead and that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again.

One final word this evening. You will find this in Paul's epistle to the Romans. These so well known verses who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword as it is written for thy sake we are killed all the day long? We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[ 40 : 53 ] May God God and loan and loan or dead but he my blood of the blood or he could be hvis us who might... He could be the love of Godazon.

Give us a bit of love and be understood and to you by being out of heaven and having any support for us and having any payments to given us. Don't know let them B I am