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**8 – Jeremiah 32:40: New Covenant Promise of  
Eternal Security**

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**Introduction**

Jeremiah 32:40 reads:

And I will make an eternal covenant with them  
that I will not cease pursuing them to do them good and  
will put reverence for me in their hearts so that  
they don't turn aside from me.

This is found in the same new covenant context as Jeremiah 31:31-34, strengthens the good news of complete forgiveness in Jeremiah 31 by promising the perseverance of believers in their faith. Because Jeremiah 32:40 is not quoted in the NT, many Christians may be unaware how relevant this passage is to their walk with the Lord. It contains several promises about the new covenant providing assurance to our faith. First, it asserts, along with other texts, that the

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://hcsb.broadmanholman.com/crossmain.asp>; The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* was translated by 100 international translators for the Holman Bible Publishers, the oldest in America. Holmyard is also the author of three articles for *Bibliotheca Sacra* and other theological articles.

new covenant is eternal. Second, the content of God's covenant involves two promises: God will not stop caring about those who are part of it, and they will not stop following God. These realities of the Christian life bring comfort to born-again believers struggling to know that their relationship with God is secure.

**A. Jeremiah 32:40 Refers to the Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Before Christians can apply Jeremiah 32:40 to themselves, they need to be sure that it refers to the same covenant that Jeremiah 31:31-34 does. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is identified with the new covenant Jesus inaugurated by the author of Hebrews (Heb 8:8-13; 10:16-17), but what about Jeremiah 32:40?

Both Jeremiah 31 and 32 were part of the joyous prophetic promises of Jeremiah 30-33, called by some the Book of Consolation. The Book of Jeremiah prophesied the coming destruction of Israel by the Babylonians and Israelite exile to Babylonia. Most of its prophecies involve dour warning of judgment and impassioned pleas for repentance with little expectation of compliance. Romans 7 teaches that man naturally rebels against God's law, which stirs him to sin. The history of the chosen people bore witness to this reality, and Jeremiah lived when the curses of the Mosaic Law fell especially hard on Israel's disobedience. While most of Jeremiah's writing focuses on punishments overtaking Israel and the surrounding nations, there are some promises of a future when things would be very different (e.g., Jer 3:14-18; 23:5-8; 24:4-7; 29:10-14; 30:1-33:26; 46:27-28; 50:4-5, 19-20). The hopeful verses share a post-exilic reference, but it is hard to be more specific about the timing.

Jeremiah 30:3 has a refrain found throughout the Book of Consolation (and earlier in 29:14): God will restore the nation's fortunes (30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26). The Israelites will repossess their land, and God will break the enemy's yoke (Jer 30:3, 8). His people will serve a Davidic king after they return from the land of their captivity (30:9-10), while he brings destruction on the nations that held them captive (30:11). God will judge Israel (30:12-15), but afterwards they will be his people, and he their God (30:16-22).

Jeremiah 31:8 speaks of God bringing the remnant of Israel back from the northern lands where they would be sent into exile. God will bring consolation to them as he restores them (31:9). He will watch

over them as a shepherd (31:10). His people will have joy, dancing, and abundance after they return from the enemy's land (31:12-14, 16). Jeremiah looked forward to an era when the nation of Israel would never cease to exist and would never again be uprooted or demolished (Jer 31:36, 40).

In chapter 32 Jeremiah's purchase of a field just prior to the Babylonian Captivity was an enacted prophecy that Israelites would return from exile to repossess their land. God promised that he would re-gather his people from all the lands where he had banished them (Jer 32:37). They would live in safety as his people, and he would give them one heart and one way so that they would always fear him, resulting in good to them and their descendants (Jer 32:38-39). Verse 40 promises an eternal covenant with the Israelites so that they will never turn away from God. The juxtaposition and content of Jeremiah 31-32 show that the same situation is in view and the same restoration to divine favor. So the "new covenant" of 31:31 corresponds to the "eternal covenant" of 32:40.<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah 33 continues with glorious promises to be fulfilled after the punishment that the Chaldeans would wreak on Jerusalem and Judah. God has hidden his face from Jerusalem but will heal it (Jer 33:6). He will purify it from all its wrongs and forgive them all (33:8). The city will bear a name of joy, praise, and glory before all the world's nations (33:9). God will fulfill all his good promises to the houses of Judah and Israel (33:14). There will be a Davidic king again and will always be a Davidic king (33:15, 17). Jerusalem will be called "The Lord Our Righteousness" (33:16). God's promises about David and Israel can no more be broken than can his covenant that day should succeed night (33:19-26).

Jeremiah mentions this eternal covenant one more time in 50:5. The context is the destruction of Babylon and the return of Israelites and Judeans from apparent captivity to seek the Lord their God in Zion (Jer 50:3-5). The two groups join in an eternal covenant "that will not be forgotten." Jeremiah may make the same sort of contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant contained in

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36; The Anchor Bible* (NY: Doubleday, 2004): 519. Barbara Aland et al., eds. *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994): 891, gives Jer 32:40 as the source of an allusion or verbal parallel at Lk 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25; and 2 Cor 3:6. These texts mention the new covenant.

31:31. Moses had warned Israel not to forget the covenant they made with God at Sinai (Deut 4:23), and God later repeated the words (2 Kgs 17:38). In both cases the danger was idolatry, and Moses also associated idolatry with forgetting God (Deut 8:19; cf. 6:12; 8:11, 14). Jeremiah repeatedly declared that Israel had forgotten its God (Jer 2:32, 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; 23:27), and the next verse, Jeremiah 50:6, implies the same thing. Ezekiel, Jeremiah's contemporary, made the identical point (Ezek 22:12; 23:35). If this new covenant will not be forgotten, it is probably because God's people will retain a reverence for their God that he has placed in their hearts (Jer 32:40).<sup>3</sup>

### **B. This Eternal Covenant Applied to Christians**

The passage of time revealed that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 was not inaugurated until Christ's death in the first century A.D. Christians should be aware that Jesus brought the new covenant (Lk 22:20; Heb 12:24). Israel's rejection of Christ was prophesied (e.g. Isaiah 53) and did not thwart God, who used the occasion to extend the new covenant to the Gentiles (Rom 11:11-12, 31). He built the Church on a faithful remnant of Jews.

However, Gentiles participated in the new covenant through Christ in a mystery: OT revelation did not clearly reveal this participation would occur. This fact suggests that the focus of the new covenant prophecies remains the permanent restoration of Israel to the Lord in an unbreakable, eternal covenant. The prophecies of Jeremiah 30-33 have so far had only a partial realization in the covenant Jesus inaugurated since most of these promises remain unfulfilled.

God has not restored the fortunes of Israel in the way foretold, though his people are back in their land today. Israel as an entire nation and people still needs to turn back to God and Christ. God has not yet made an everlasting covenant with the entire nation, and there is not a Davidic ruler over it. The Israelites don't all know the Lord. They don't all dwell in safety. Jerusalem does not bear a name of joy, praise, and glory before all nations. Since God's goals do not fail, Jeremiah 30-33 to a considerable extent still looks to the future. All Israel will one day be saved because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:26, 29).

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 376.

Yet already Jews and Gentiles together participate in this new eternal covenant if they put their trust in Christ. Participation in an eternal covenant through faith makes this covenant different than prior eternal covenants. The Noahic (Gen 9:16), Abrahamic (Gen 17:7), and Davidic (2 Sam 23:5) covenants are eternal. They are perfect for their purposes and without any need to disappear. Generally speaking, any descendant of Noah, Abraham, or David was a participant in the respective covenant named after his forefather.<sup>4</sup> Participation was through bloodline, not faith. The innovation of an eternal covenant entered through faith alone seems a significant change. Salvation has always been a matter of relationship to God through faith, but participation in the covenants was not so.

“Covenant” is a critical word in the Bible, occurring 297x in the NIV.<sup>5</sup> In the ancient Near East covenants were formal agreements like treaties that mapped out the relationship between two parties or nations. They described duties that bound the covenant partners, so “covenant” was a relational word. But when a covenant partner was a nation, an individual was under the covenant simply because he belonged to a particular nation. Jeremiah’s new covenant is different in that while it concerns an entire nation, broadened even to include Gentiles, each person under the new covenant has this status solely through his personal relationship with God.

Though it is wonderful to share in an eternal covenant by simple faith in Christ, faith seems something that might vanish as easily as it comes. Is participation in the new covenant as permanent as participation in prior eternal covenants entered by bloodline? What if someone’s faith in Christ were to cease? Would he or she forfeit the eternal salvation, the covenant promises? Is there an objective basis for assurance that our participation will be as permanent as the covenant is?

Those participating in the new covenant should expect to enjoy its features designed to make it unbreakable for the Israelites. Remember that God planned the new covenant to remedy the defect in the Mosaic covenant that the Israelites broke (Jer 31:31-32). The

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<sup>4</sup> There were a couple of exceptions to the Abrahamic participation when the men would have been patriarchs apparently providing a poor model for one reason or another. Neither Ishmael nor Esau was included (Gen 17:19-21; 27:36-37; cf. Rom 9:8-13).

<sup>5</sup> *New International Version.*

standard Hebrew term for “eternal” (*owlam*) does not describe the Mosaic covenant. God never promised those participating in it that it would always endure. The NT explains that because of sin the Mosaic covenant lacked the power to enable people to fulfill God’s righteous requirements but the blessings of the new covenant overcome this inadequacy (Rom 8:1-4). God did not call the Mosaic covenant eternal, for he knew it was a temporary measure until Christ came (Gal 3:22-25). The fact that the new covenant is eternal indicates that it is competent to accomplish its purpose, which is foremost to ensure that those participating in it are faithful to God (Jer 32:40; 31:31-32).

When the author of Hebrews introduced Jeremiah 31:31-34 to describe the covenant Jesus had inaugurated, he focused on this potential lack of a faithful bond between the Israelite and God as the fault of the old covenant requiring a new one (Heb 8:7-12). He said that when God spoke through Jeremiah of a new covenant, he made the first one old, and what was old and aging was ready to disappear (Heb 8:13). Hebrews also calls the new covenant an eternal covenant (Heb 13:20); this idea can come from Jeremiah 32:40 and similar OT passages. An eternal covenant is one that needs no improvements.

Hebrews 3:14 states that we have become sharers in Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm until the end. So Hebrews expects that a Christian will retain his faith in Christ until the end of his life. There are also passages in Hebrews that warn about the consequences of failing to maintain trust in Christ (Heb 2:1-4, 3:7-4:11, 6:4-8, 10:26-31, 12:14-29).<sup>6</sup> These warning passages suggest to Roman Catholics and Arminian Protestants that a Christian can lose his salvation.<sup>7</sup> Did the writer of Hebrews believe that individuals could be saved and then lost again?

It would be surprising if he thought a person could lose his salvation since he uses Jeremiah 31 so prominently and draws such attention to the fact that the new covenant replaces the old for the very reason that the old did not protect people from breaking it. The

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<sup>6</sup> Lee Gatiss, “The Function of the Warning Passages in the Structure and Argument of Hebrews,” *The Theologian* (2001): [www.geocities.com/the\\_theologian/content/bible/hebrewswarnings.html](http://www.geocities.com/the_theologian/content/bible/hebrewswarnings.html).

<sup>7</sup> For Catholic views, see [www.ourcatholicfaith.org/reasons.html](http://www.ourcatholicfaith.org/reasons.html) (section 129); [www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/LOSS.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/LOSS.htm) (search under “Heb. 6:4-6”); for Arminian Protestant views, see [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/22-13.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/22-13.htm) (search under “Heb. 6:4-6”); [www.fwponline.cc/v21n1bkreview1.htm](http://www.fwponline.cc/v21n1bkreview1.htm) (search under “Hebrews 6:4-6”).

warning passages may be like Jesus' parable of the sower (Matt 13:3-23), describing people whose outward participation in the things of God may not amount to salvation. Jesus depicted people who heard God's word and failed to understand it, guard it, or make it a top priority. Likewise Hebrews addresses people whose outward identification with God's people was not necessarily whole-hearted.

Scholars believe the letter went to Jewish believers tempted to return to Judaism and forsake Christ.<sup>8</sup> If such people did forsake Christ, they would be like those in whom the word of Christ never took healthy root so that it could bear the harvest of salvation (Matt 13:3-23, Heb 6:7-9). Such people have not entered the new eternal covenant with God. They never entrust their lives to God in Christ, whatever their initial enthusiasm may be, and that is how the blood of the new covenant becomes effective in someone's life (Rom 3:25).

Those who do entrust their lives to Christ should know that the faith he made possible did not really come easily. If God had felt able to accomplish new covenant realities sooner, he probably would have instituted the covenant earlier, since the old one had a defect. The incarnation had to await the proper time (Gal 4:4); a great deal of historical preparation was necessary. Christ revealed the love of God at a depth never before seen, undergoing a brutal death for our sakes. He revealed the grace and truth of God in a way Moses did not (John 1:17). His cross brought spiritual changes in the kind of relationship individuals have with God. A way for human beings to enter the holy of holies, God's very presence, did not exist before Christ created it (Heb 9:8, 10:19-20).

Jeremiah prophesied this changed relationship between man and God. Jeremiah 31:31-34 shows that the strength of the new covenant is the closeness it produces between the Israelites and God. God would put his law in their minds and write it on their hearts, with the result that he would be their God and they would be his people. Everyone under the new covenant would know him (Jer 31:34). Many other new covenant passages in Jeremiah 30-33 indicate the same realities (e.g., 30:9, 11, 21; 31:1, 3, 6, 9-10, 12, 18, 20; 32:38-39, 41; 33:3, 6, 8-9, 11, 16, 22), none more so than 32:40. This verse should create confidence that the new relationship is not going to vanish, but

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Barker, gen. ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985): 1857.

those who know God will continue to do so, because knowing God and Jesus Christ is eternal life (John 17:3).

### **C. God’s Pursuit of Us under the New Covenant**

After speaking of the new covenant as eternal, Jer 32:40 shows how God planned to implement the covenant so we would not break it. God promised he would not turn away from us. He would not reject those under this covenant. The Hebrew reads literally: “I will not turn away from after you.”<sup>9</sup> The picture is God following the human covenanters, and the idea may be illustrated by Jeremiah’s contemporary Ezekiel. He also wrote of the eternal covenant God would bring to the Israelites: “But I Myself will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an eternal covenant” (Ezek 16:60). Ezekiel described the institution of this covenant particularly in chapters 34-48, and in chapter 34:11 God pursues after Israel as a Shepherd: “For this is what the Lord God says: See I Myself will search for My flock and look for them” HCSB.<sup>10</sup>

This is how God works in the new covenant Jesus brought. Jesus said of himself, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (NIV). Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd calling the sheep by name, leading them, and seeking the lost (John 10:3-4, 11; Luke 15:3-7). While this was true to a certain extent under the Mosaic covenant (e.g., Psalm 23), it is apparently even more the case under the new covenant. For Jeremiah 32:40 describes new conditions that evidently did not fully obtain under the old covenant. Ezekiel 34:11 poses a contrast with the way things were formerly done. The divine rule under the new order would be much more personal and intimate, no longer made ineffective by faulty human rulers (Ezek 34:7-10).

Jeremiah 32:40 says God will not cease following those under the new covenant for the purpose of doing them good. The verse uses the plural “them” to describe the Israelites, and if they are not to fail, he will probably have to deal with them on an individual basis. This is how the new covenant Jesus inaugurated describes God as working. It

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<sup>9</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*: 520.

<sup>10</sup> *Holman Christian Standard Bible*.



was actually good for the disciples that Jesus returned to heaven (John 16:7), for only after he died for our sins could the Holy Spirit be given to us (John 7:39). The Spirit dwells within each Christian (John 14:17), guiding the believer (Rom 8:14) and making his body a temple (1 Cor 6:19). It is by the Spirit that we call God “Father” and know we are his children (Rom 8:15-16). The Spirit is to stay with us forever (John 14:16), and God has promised never to leave or forsake us (Heb 13:5). The intense interest of God in the welfare of each believer is taught throughout the New Testament. Their sins have been forgiven (1 John 2:12). They do not have to fear God abandoning them, in part because God promises that he will always pursue after those under Jeremiah’s new covenant so as to do them good.

#### **D. God’s Renewal of Our Heart to Fear Him Forever**

Jeremiah 32:40 also promises that we will not “turn aside from” the Lord. The Hebrew for “from” is literally “from upon” and suggests phrases like “from beside,” “from attendance on,” “from attachment to,” or “from companionship with.”<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew verb for “turn” is different than the one used for God pursuing us earlier in the verse, but in both cases there is companionship in travel.<sup>12</sup> God promises to enable those under the new covenant to be in fellowship with him throughout their lives.

Earlier verse 38 repeats an OT refrain declaring God’s intent that the Israelites be his people and he be their God (cf. Zech 8:8).<sup>13</sup> This intention appears at the time of Moses (Lev 26:12), and Jeremiah referred the words back to that time (Jer 7:23; 11:4). Jeremiah did not think of this refrain in mere outward terms, but as involving Israelites with a heart to know God who return to him with all their heart (Jer 24:7). In the Book of Consolation Jeremiah repeats this refrain four times of the new covenant era (30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38), one of them being in the new covenant passage quoted by the Book of Hebrews

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, n.d.): 759, s.v. *ʿowlam*.

<sup>12</sup> Lundbom thinks repeating the idea of reverence (fear) from verse 39 may allow stress on two correlative ideas of turning away (*Jeremiah 21-36*, 520).

<sup>13</sup> When God sent the northern kingdom into exile, he denied that this refrain was true for it (Hos 1:9).

(Jer 31:33 in Heb 8:10). Ezekiel also often repeated this divine intent (Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 27).

Jeremiah 32:39 adds that God will give everyone one heart and one way to fear him “all the days,” that is, all their lives. If everyone would know God (Jer 31:34, quoted in Heb 8:11), it is natural that they would have unity. The way God gives such a heart is stated in the new covenant passage: by putting his law in their inward parts and writing it on their hearts (Jer 31:33, quoted in Heb 8:10 and 10:16). The outcome is good for them and their descendants (Jer 32:39).

God, by this knowledge of him and heartfelt appreciation of his will, creates reverence, or literally “fear,” of him in our hearts (Jer 32:40). The Hebrew word for “fear” was much broader than the English word, encompassing notions of awe and piety. This was not a new idea with God. At the institution of the Mosaic covenant, after God spoke to the people on Mt. Sinai, he said: “If only they had such a heart to fear Me and keep all My commands, so that they and their children would prosper forever” (Deut 5:29 HCSB).

What could not be achieved under the old covenant can be achieved under the new because someone close to God as a result of trusting Christ for eternal forgiveness will have a reverence that prevents him from turning away from the Lord. This is something of what Jesus taught in the parable of the sower. Those in whom the word of God takes firm root do bear fruit (Matt 13:8). Such good soil in the parable is a host for the seed of God’s word without hardness, rocks, or weeds that would prevent healthy growth. God always addresses us by his word, and did so under the old covenant, yet the message changed with Christ’s coming (cf. John 1:17) and brings better, surer results (Heb 7:19, 22; 8:6).

Some may protest that the promise God will never forsake us (Heb 13:5) comes from the old covenant (Deut 31:6). What if we grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30)? Will God turn and become our enemy as he did under the old covenant (Isa 63:10)? David feared that God could take the Holy Spirit from him (Ps. 51:11). Could that happen now? If we reject him, won’t he reject us (2 Tim 2:12)? Someone truly under the new covenant will not reject him because God will place a reverence for himself in that person’s heart (Jer 32:40).

All Christians should understand how that happens because of their personal experience of it. As those poisoned by sin, we looked to

Christ dying on the cross for our sin, and we saw the remedy that brings healing (John 3:14; 1 Pet 2:24). We understood that Jesus as God's Son became a human being to bear voluntarily the weight of our sin, when he had committed none. In each life this is a one-for-one exchange, since Jesus' life had infinite value. Christians could not help but admire and then love the Savior who first loved us this way (1 John 4:19). The one born of God does not continue to sin because the seed of God's word remains in him (1 John 3:9), and because Jesus himself guards him so that Satan cannot harm him (1 John 5:18; Jude 1).

### **E. The Inwardness of the New Eternal Covenant**

Jeremiah 31:31 is the only OT verse that uses the words “new” and “covenant” in the same verse, but scholars understand Ezekiel to have predicted the same covenant.<sup>14</sup> Ezekiel speaks of a future eternal covenant, referring to the same circumstances of divine judgment on Israel for breaking the old covenant that Jeremiah does (Ezek 16:59-60). God will send the people into exile, but he will bring them back to their land once again, establishing an everlasting covenant.

Ezekiel also puts great stress on heart changes that come with this restoration of Israel. He does not use the word “covenant” in Ezek 11:16-20, but mentions that God will give the people one heart (11:19; cf. Jer 32:39). He will put a new spirit in them, removing their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19) so they might follow his statutes and ordinances (11:20; cf. Jer 31:33). The Israelites will be his people, and he will be their God (Ezek 11:20).

Ezekiel 16:59-62 adds that in the time of this eternal covenant the Israelites will remember their ways and be ashamed of all they have done. God will make atonement for all of it, they will know that he is the Lord, and they will live in a state of continual humility because they recognize how wrong they have been. This is quite like the repentance after sin that God wants in those who come to Christ (Acts 2:38).

Ezekiel 37:26 mentions the eternal covenant and calls it a covenant of peace. God will set his sanctuary among the Israelites forever and dwell among them. He will be their God, and they will be

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<sup>14</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 520; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 428, note 118, and 420, note 127.

his people (v. 27). Ezekiel 34:25 earlier introduced this covenant of peace in the context of restored Davidic rule and the refrain of being their God while they are his people (Ezek 34:23-24, 30). Ezekiel 36, in this new covenant context, develops the ideas of Ezekiel 11. When God re-gathers the nation from exile, he will sprinkle clean water on them and cleanse them from all their impurities (vv. 24-25). He will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them, replacing their heart of stone with a heart of flesh (v. 26). He will put his Spirit within them, causing them to follow his statutes and ordinances (v. 27).

Many believe that Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand that Jesus was alluding to Ezekiel 36 when he spoke of the need to be born of water and the Spirit if one was to enter the kingdom of God that he brought (John 3:3, 5). Jesus' and Ezekiel's words share the concepts of water and the Spirit, plus the idea of a new person. To enter the kingdom of God one must be cleansed, and water baptism pictures that spiritual reality. It also pictures Spirit baptism. Ezekiel quotes God saying that he will put his Spirit in people. If Jesus thought of that in speaking of being born of the Spirit, the new birth involves having the Spirit within in the new covenant sense.

The apostle Paul contrasted the old covenant with the new (2 Cor 3:6-18), calling the new covenant a ministry of the Spirit (v. 8). The old covenant because of its defect was a ministry of death (v. 7), but the Spirit produces life (v. 6). In this context he alluded to Ezekiel 36:26, describing the Corinthian converts as a letter "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh (v. 3, HCSB). So the apostle equated Ezekiel's eternal covenant with Jeremiah's new, eternal covenant and understood the force of the new covenant as the Spirit that God would put in the believer.

David longed for a pure heart and renewed spirit after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps 51:10), but the permanently indwelling Spirit brings these more deeply than was possible under the old covenant. There is a union between God and man by the Spirit living within (John 14:20) that makes a person a new creature. It gives a new birth, a life that wasn't possible before Christ had obtained redemption. It is the life of Christ within (Gal 2:20) through the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). Because of this divine union a person can be confident that Jeremiah

32:40 will be true in his case: God will follow after him, and he will follow after God.

#### **F. Wider OT References to the New Eternal Covenant**

The new eternal covenant of Jeremiah 32:40 and 50:5, referred to again in Ezek 37:26 and called a covenant of peace (cf. Ezek 34:25), also appears in Isaiah as “My covenant of peace” (Isa 54:10 HCSB).<sup>15</sup> God long before had promised “My covenant of peace” to Phinehas; it would be “a covenant of eternal priesthood” to him and his descendants. The peace was between God and Phinehas (Num 25:12-13). While the covenant with Phinehas is a different covenant, it indicates that Isa 54:10 speaks of peace between God and Israel.

One reason for identifying the covenants of peace in Ezekiel and Isaiah is the circumstances in which they are promised. Israel in Isa 54:10 is under judgment as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is compared to a wife rejected and abandoned in her youth. God has hidden his face in an outburst of anger but will have compassion on her with everlasting kindness (Isa 54:6-8). God compares this restoration to the Noahic flood in that he will never again be angry with Israel (54:9). Jerusalem will have glory and security (54:12-14). All Jerusalem’s sons will be taught by the Lord so that their peace is great (Isa 54:13). Jesus quoted this verse with respect to his ministry (John 6:45), but the complete fulfillment is still for the future, just as with the new eternal covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

Ten verses later Isa 55:3 uses the term “eternal covenant” of a future covenant that God will make with Israel. Presumably it is the same one mentioned in Isa 54:9-10, which would be as permanent as the Noahic covenant. The verses between the two uses of “covenant” give more promises (54:11-17) and then invite the people to enjoy the blessings of this eternal covenant God would make with them (55:1-3). God equates the substance of the covenant with the kindnesses, or faithful acts of love promised to David. This word “kindnesses” appeared earlier at Isa 54:10, where it was likewise identified with the covenant.

So the time of Isaiah’s future eternal covenant will include fulfillment of promises in the Davidic covenant of a Davidic king for

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<sup>15</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 437-38.

the nation. This is the same promise that will be fulfilled under the eternal covenant as described by Ezekiel (Ezek 34:23-25; 37:25) and Jeremiah (Jer 30:9; 33:17, 19-22, 26). These Davidic promises were evidently messianic, for they have never had any other fulfillment, and Jesus came as the Messiah, announcing a new eternal covenant.<sup>16</sup>

Isaiah elsewhere speaks of a future covenant related to the Messiah. Isaiah 42:6 identifies the Servant figure with a covenant for the people.<sup>17</sup> The NT identifies the Servant with the promised Davidic king (Acts 8:32-35).<sup>18</sup> So the covenant embodied in the Servant according to Isa 42:6 evidently involves the mercies promised David (Isa 55:3).<sup>19</sup> The NT identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of Isa 42:6 (Luke 2:32; cf. Isa. 49:6). Isaiah 49:8 again speaks of the regal Servant as the embodiment of this covenant that would bring the restoration of Israel. God would comfort the people and show them his compassion (Isa 49:8-13). More glorious promises like those in Jeremiah's Book of Consolation follow in Isa 49:15-26. The apostle Paul quotes Isa 49:8 to say that the day of salvation promised there was being fulfilled in the ministry he had from the Lord Jesus (2 Cor 6:2).

Isaiah 61:8 speaks of the new eternal covenant that brings restoration to Israel after captivity and mourning. It promises everlasting joy (Isa 61:7), fame among the nations, and blessing and rebuilding within the land (Isa 61:4, 9). Isaiah 61 does not explicitly mention the Servant, but it is obviously about him. The Servant often speaks in the first person, as does the person introduced in Isa 61:1. The Spirit is on this person as he was on the Servant in Isa 42:1. This one frees the captives from prison, as does the Servant (42:7; 61:1).<sup>20</sup> So the Messianic hope again is linked with the eternal covenant.

Jesus Christ quoted Isa 61:1-2 as applying to himself, identifying himself with the Servant figure of Isaiah who proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19). But he stopped reading Isa 61:2 just

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<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, 440, for the possibility that the second person singular address in Isa 55:5 is to the Messiah; the address to the nation earlier and later uses the plural.

<sup>17</sup> The Servant is a prophetic person appearing in numerous Isaianic passages, including 42:1-7; 49:1-12, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12. These are often called the Servant songs.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 8:32-35 quotes Isaiah 53, which is part of a Servant passage beginning with mention of him in 52:13. Acts identifies this figure with Jesus, whom the NT identifies as the promised Davidic king.

<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 44-66*, 438-39.

<sup>20</sup> In Hebrew there is a noticeable similarity of vocabulary between the two verses.

before the words “day of vengeance” because he did not proclaim the day of God’s vengeance during his incarnation. The person in Isa 61:2 does proclaim the day of God’s vengeance. God himself elsewhere is described as bringing this day of vengeance where nations are crushed (Isa 63:4, 6). It is the same eschatological time when God rescues Israel from enemy nations in Jeremiah 30:11, 20. There is more to the prophecies of Isaiah 61 than has yet been fulfilled, since the time of Israel’s restoration is also the time of God’s vengeance on the nations.

Isaiah 59:15-21 portrays this time of divine wrath against the nations and may mention the new eternal covenant.<sup>21</sup> Verse 20 mentions a divine Redeemer who will come to Zion in the last time, and God’s covenant with the Israelites is that his Spirit and words seen in Isaiah would never depart from the mouths of Isaiah’s descendants from his time onwards. If God is looking forward to the new eternal covenant, he promises that his working among the Israelites will not cease until the covenant comes and the Redeemer with it. Romans 11:26-27 quotes Isa 59:20-21 when foretelling God’s ultimate salvation of the whole nation of Israel. In the NT context the coming Redeemer would be the Lord Jesus in his return to earth (e.g., Matt 24:29-31).

#### **G. An Objection to Individualized Application of Jeremiah 32:40**

Jeremiah’s Book of Consolation, plus the settings for the new eternal covenant in Ezekiel and Isaiah, demonstrate a holistic outlook on future Israelite life. The prophecies concern all aspects of life: defeat of enemies, return from exile, rebuilding of cities, property, external security, spiritual renewal, and pervasive joy. This paper, concerned with eternal spiritual security, has tried to focus on the inward aspects of the new covenant as entailing assured spiritual changes (Jer 32:40) for those under it.

But what if someone bolts from under the new covenant? If one left the new covenant, then Jeremiah 32:40 could still be true for those remaining under it. God’s eventual intent to restore Israel could be fulfilled even if some particular Israelite defected from him, couldn’t it? The apostasy of a specific individual might not thwart the new covenant as long as the nation as a whole did not break it. So the only

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 531-32, see Isa 59:21 as promising a placement of God’s Spirit in the entire people so that they might all proclaim his word (cf. Num 11:29; Isa 32:15-17, 44:3-5).

necessary difference from the Mosaic covenant might be adjustments so that the entire nation does not violate the new covenant. Should we abstain from universalizing Jeremiah 32:40 to describe every believer under the new covenant? Perhaps it only shows an ideal for the whole people that can be unattained by some individuals.

One difficulty with this limitation of Jeremiah 32:40 is that human beings share so much in common. If one person under the new covenant can lose his faith in God, cannot all the people under that covenant lose their faith in God? Does not the possibility of some breaking the covenant put us back to the defects of the Mosaic covenant? Thankfully, the nature of what God covenants to do in Jeremiah 32:40 seems to block such a non-inclusive interpretation of the passage. God promises that he will not stop pursuing one under the covenant to do him good, and that he will place reverence for himself in that person's heart so that he never defects from God. Since this is the nature of what God covenants to accomplish, being under this covenant means that these promises become realities in one's life. God keeps his covenants and succeeds at what he attempts.

These promises about the relationship to God one has guarantee that one will not permanently bolt from under the covenant. The spiritual changes brought by this covenant as seen in the OT seem so irreversible that the major issue should be getting in on the new covenant more than staying in. If one does not stay in, it would have to be because he never completely got in at the start.

The NT uses dramatic language about life in the covenant that only deepens the OT indications that a permanent change has occurred. One gets into this relationship with God by a new birth of the Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5). Eternal life is given (Rom 6:23; John 3:36), and there is sealing with the Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph 1:13, 4:30).

Since the new covenant is intended to be unbreakable and is entered on an individual basis, it should be unbreakable at the individual level. Although texts such as the warning passages in Hebrews can be interpreted either of saved people who lose salvation or of people who may never obtain it, it seems best to understand them as warning against failure to become established in this faith. For once one is born again, God promises that he will complete the work he has started (Phil 1:6).



A true believer obtains eternal forgiveness of sins, so unless there is a commensurate level of seriousness on the human side, one should not assume that true faith exists. There can be enthusiasm for Christ that is short of saving faith. True faith is rooted and does persist. Paul, for example, was concerned that Christ truly be formed in his converts (Gal 4:19-20). They could fall from grace before being thoroughly established in it (Gal 5:4).

#### **H. Present and Future Covenant Fulfillment**

The new eternal covenant Jesus inaugurated was not exactly made with the political nation of Israel. Certainly the apostles represented the remnant of true, believing Israel, and we do not want to deny that Jesus made the covenant with his chosen people. But God's election now includes Gentiles. Jesus made one new body out of the two groups, Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:13-16). People come to God as Jewish or Gentile individuals with faith in Jesus and are included in the new covenant on that basis (Rom 3:21-22, 29-30).

Since we enter the covenant as individuals, the covenant promises must have individuals in mind. Since there is no Jew or Gentile in Christ (Gal 3:28), God must accept us into the new covenant as individuals. Jeremiah 32:40 cannot be a promise relevant to others under the new covenant but not to some particular individual under it, for God is entering the new covenant with this particular individual. The promises must apply to him, for they are promises God makes for those who enter the new, eternal covenant.

This perspective raises several questions. First, Jeremiah's new covenant has many eschatological elements. How can we be sure that any of them will be fulfilled in believers today? We can be sure of the ones that the NT specifies as relevant today, and it declares that the inward aspects of the new covenant are applicable now (Heb 8:10-12; 10:16-17). It is that specification that allows us to appropriate Jeremiah 32:40 to ourselves.

If God's new eternal covenant is with individuals, does that not contradict the OT implication that the new covenant is with God's chosen people Israel? Jeremiah speaks of God making this covenant with Israel at the time of their ultimate restoration, but now is not the time of Israel's ultimate restoration, and yet God has already implemented the new covenant. Is there going to be another new covenant for Israel later?

Another new covenant does not seem necessary or possible. All that will be required is that the individuals within Israel at that future time each exercise faith in the Lord Jesus. By their doing so, the nation of Israel will have done so. Not every Israelite will have to exercise faith in Christ, but the response to the gospel must be so overwhelming as to fulfill Paul's prophecy that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

At that time the entire prophetic vision about the new eternal covenant for Israel can be realized, even though the Israelites entered the covenant as individuals. Although in Christ there is no male or female (Gal 3:28), gender remains a reality on earth, and there are biblical roles for the man and woman (e.g., Eph 5:21-33). In the same way, despite there being no Jew or Gentile in Christ, these aspects of identity remain real on earth, and God may have a role for them in terms of politics and providence. Fulfillment of promises to Israel linked to the new covenant need not mean that the Church has disappeared, but merely that a considerable and important part of its membership will reside in Israel at the end of the age.

This reality that the new covenant is entered by individuals explains how God can make a new covenant with Israel in the end times even though the new covenant already exists. Fulfillment of Jeremiah's promises to Israel will only require a full participation by Israelites in the new covenant that already exists. It will be new to them, and to the nation in that sense. An attendant thought is that the early Church characterized the times they lived in as the "last days" (Heb 1:2, Acts 2:17, James 5:3), doubtless in part because the new eternal covenant had been inaugurated.<sup>22</sup> The OT prophesies that the ultimate restoration of Israel to God and the Davidic king will come in the "last days" (Hos 3:5), and the new eternal covenant passages in the OT promise that restoration.

### **Conclusion**

Jeremiah 30-33 foretells a new eternal covenant with Israel. It will be eternal (Jer 32:40) because it is unbreakable (Jer 31:31-32). It is unbreakable because each person under it will know God (Jer 31:34). He will put his law within each one and write it on his or her

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<sup>22</sup> The non-Christian Qumran community at roughly the same time also thought it was living under the new covenant, an eternal covenant, in the "last days" (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 473).

heart (Jer 31:33). He will be the God of these people, who will be his people (Jer. 31:33, 32:38). He will give them one heart and one way (cf. John 17:21-23) to fear him all the days of their lives (Jer 32:39). The substance of the eternal covenant is this permanent relationship with God that he himself guarantees; God will covenant to make it happen (Jer 32:40). He promises not to turn away from following the Israelites for the purpose of doing them good (Jer 32:40). He will place reverence for himself in their hearts so that they don't turn away from him (Jer 32:40).

This is the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated and that Christians enter through faith in Christ. Since we enter individually and know God, we can expect him to do whatever else the new covenant promises. He is the one who makes certain that we do not turn away from him. The NT charges us to be faithful but explains that God is working in us to accomplish his will (Phil 2:13). The new covenant reality of the Spirit dwelling within the believer (Ezek 36:27) gives assurance that God will fulfill Jeremiah 32:40 in each born-again person.