

“THE PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT”

Jeremiah 31:27-34 October 19, 2026

In 1970 through 1971, one of the highest grossing films of the year was **Love Story**, starring Ryan O’Neal and Ali MacGraw. The movie was widely popular here and internationally. It took home the top Golden Globe Awards but only won Best Original Score at the Academy Awards.

The film centers on the relationship between two young college students from very different sides of the track. In typical Hollywood fashion, they meet, they fall in love, there are family squabbles, they elope, begin a new life together, and experience hardship. Just as they are making future plans the girl is diagnosed with a terminal illness. She dies in a tearful ending leaving the audience weeping. It is a tragic Love Story. Love found and Love lost!

We could say the book of Jeremiah was a tragic love story too, with the emphasis on the tragic. It was written during the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah when there was great tension in the middle east between Egypt, and Babylon, the major power players. Smack in the middle of all this tension was the minor nation of Judah, the last surviving tribes of Solomon’s kingdom.

From 598 to 587, the Babylonians decimate Jerusalem, remove many of the high-ranking figures, and take them off in exile to Babylon. Jeremiah is left behind until he is carted off to Egypt. His writings tell the sad story of a prophet critiquing the sins of the people, yet longing for their welfare. Alas no one will heed his warnings. We feel the pathos of

the prophet as he pronounces God's judgment upon his disobedient people. What began as a love story has now gone horribly wrong.

The people lost everything and lived in a foreign land under the thumb of powerful rulers. There they would remain for 70 years. Deep grief, uncertainty, and depression, filled them. What were they going to do now? How were they going to move forward in faith, when the covenant with God had been broken by their sin? How would they relate to God on this side of exile? Into this tragic love story Jeremiah sends a few words of hope, a promise of a new future.

Lest you think this is some kind of doom and gloom sermon, fear not. It actually focuses on participating on God's new future.

I. FUTURE PLANS

We have several plants in the windows of our home. One of those plants is a **Money Tree**. Now contrary to its name, this plant has never made us any income. However, I am amazed at its resilience. There are so many times we thought our Money Tree was done for, including when we left it outside and the deer ate all the leaves. But low and behold, it rejuvenated, green and lively as ever before. Such is the power of life!

Jeremiah preaches, **"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord."**

Jeremiah is speaking to a people in captivity, 800 miles away, who think its all over, and telling them that God is building a future for them. They probably thought Jeremiah was nuts. Twice in this passage he uses the words, “**The days are surely coming, says the Lord**” meaning this new future is not some prophetic fantasy, but a sure promise of God. Notice too, that Jeremiah uses the words **house of** Israel and **house of** Judah, not the **nation of**. God is not making a promise of a new political nation, but of a people of God who will rise up from the devastation. Relational language is being used, which becomes even clearer in a few moments.

The point is, the future of renewal, replanting, and growing are not based on the people’s efforts but on the powerful life-giving word of God. It is those words; those promises we cling to and hope in this day. Even with all the alarming events taking place, the shrinking of Western Churches, and the violence around us. God promises to build and to plant his people. There is only one thing standing in the way of our participation; our faith in that promise.

II. EXCUSES

You heard about the man who complained to a friend, “**My wife is blaming me for ruining her birthday. I told her that is ridiculous, I didn’t even know it was her birthday.**”

The blame game has been going on at least since the Garden of Eden. People love to blame their parents, blame the church, blame their

boss, blame their ex, blame the situation, and blame the politicians. We even dare to blame God. How we love to pass the buck responsibility!

Well, so did the exiles. Apparently, a popular saying was, **“The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”** The people were blaming their parents and grandparents for their current predicament. There certainly was some truth to that. The leaders of the time acted poorly, failed to follow God’s commands, and refused to heed the prophet’s warning and advice. Worst of all, the people sought after other gods, abused the poor and ignored the covenant law. There were consequences for their actions, as there will be for our own nation and personal choices. But the Israelites were using the blame game as an excuse not to take responsibility for their lives, nor believe God’s word to them.

Jeremiah refuses to accept their excuses. **“But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of the one who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.”** Jeremiah does not deny the parents did wrong, but he clearly tells their children they are responsible for their own behavior and choices and most importantly, their response to God’s calling right now.

When I was in junior high school, my parents got divorces. At the time I never really understood the impact that event had on me and my siblings. I was a kid and didn’t know how to process my emotions and it caused me some relational and behavioral problems. Their divorce left scars. But as I grew older, I realized there comes a point when you have

to stop blaming your parents, practice forgiveness, and take responsibility for your own life.

Understand, I'm not trying to play junior psychologist here. I realize there are deep seated hurts and scars that have messed people up. There are people who have gone through hell and need help with healing. I don't want to belittle anyone's pain and struggle to be whole again.

My point is, its so easy to play the victim. When we do, we can get stuck in the past, stuck in resentment, stuck in fear, and so stuck in excuses that it keeps us from embracing a new future. We will never move forward if we keep playing the blame game.

Even though we have a compassionate God that hears our every cry, that longs to heal us, that does not mean God puts up with endless excuses. What we are doing is invalidating the promises of God. We are allowing our past to determine our future. We are making justifications not to try and not to believe that God has the power to transform our lives.

There is a little saying I found helpful that says, **"I choose...to live by choice, not by chance, to make changes, not excuses. To be motivated, not manipulated, to be useful, not used. To excel, not compete. I choose self-esteem, not self-pity. I choose to listen to my inner voice and not the random opinion of others."**

III. INTIMACY WITH GOD

Setting the matter of excuses aside Jeremiah describes the future God will bring about. **"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the**

house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand out of the land of Egypt, a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.”

Over the years there has been much debate about what this new covenant meant to the exiled people and to Christians. What exactly is new about it? Jeremiah essentially repeats the old covenant phrase, **“I will be their God, and they will be my people.”** I’ll get to that in a moment. What I want to point out is what God desired of his people, is a love relationship, both then and now. In fact, Jeremiah equates our relationship with God to that of a marriage. By the way, so did Jesus and the other prophets. Both the old and new covenants were not just some kind of business deal, a tit for tat relationship. You do this for me, and I will do that for you. God was after something much deeper than an ordinary contract. God was after their hearts. God was after a family. God was after a people committed to living in God’s presence and way.

Jeremiah writes, **“...for they shall all know me, ... says the Lord...”** In Hebrews, this knowing implies intimacy, the kind of intimacy and commitment between spouses. The real problem with the Israelites is not that they broke a few rules, but that they abandoned the relationship, which equated to Israel being an unfaithful spouse. They gave up on the Lord, went their own way, and mistreated people who were made in God’s image. God desired a love story, a people who would obey from the heart, not out of fear. Instead, this people divorced themselves from God and

created a tragic story. Something had to change, so they didn't keep repeating the same mistakes. A New Covenant was needed.

IV. HEART FAITH

Anyone who's worked with a **whiteboard** knows there's one cardinal sin to be avoided: drawing on the thing with permanent marker. Cleaning off lines drawn with official whiteboard markers is a breeze. One swipe of the eraser takes care of it. Those permanent-marker lines, though, are another matter. Manufacturers of whiteboards offer a proprietary cleaning fluid that takes care of those permanent-marker lines — not to mention the faint traces of the ghost-of-whiteboard-markers-past — but office workers have discovered a host of other substances that do the trick. These include:

Isopropyl alcohol, Peroxide, Hand sanitizer, WD-40, Hairspray
Toothpaste, Comet cleanser, The old-time homemaker's go-to household chemical: vinegar. And my favorite two - Coffee grounds and Bengay.

One has to wonder what sort of weird, trial-and-error process led to some of these discoveries — especially the Bengay and the coffee grounds — but there's some comfort in knowing there's a way to remove even the most permanent signs of a careless presenter's sin.

There are two problems with the **Old Covenant Law**. One it couldn't make a good heart, a heart that would love God. We know that all the laws and rules in the world couldn't make people obey them. No amount of punishment makes a stubborn heart turn to God. The other problem is sin. Sin is the permanent marker that stains our lives and strains our

relationship with God and others. No ordinary wiping is going to erase it. Our tendency is to avoid, run away, blame others, and choose substitutes for God, everything contrary to what God desired. The New Covenant is about God breaking this cycle and reconnecting with humanity.

Jeremiah said, **“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...for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.”**

God realizes that nothing will change unless there is a change of heart. An inner transformation must take place which results in people wanting to obey, seek, and love God. That is not going to occur naturally. So God takes two actions. **One**, God writes his Law of Life on their hearts, not on a stone, not on a whiteboard, but upon our souls. I believe this is the transformative work of the Holy Spirit who helps us to know God, seek God, and love God. In doing so, God is no longer someone out there in the cosmos but dwelling inside us. In fact, Jesus said, **“The kingdom of heaven is within you.”** And Jesus said, **“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”** Jesus is speaking about a spiritual reality such that we don’t have to search for God very far. For those who receive in faith, God is right here in our very hearts.

Secondly, God removes the barrier of sin. **“...for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.”** This is the work of Jesus the redeemer. He doesn’t use Bengay, but his very life’s blood to take away

the penalty of sin and erase that which was keeping our hearts far from God. Jesus bridges the gap and brings us into relationship with the living God.

The Old Covenant couldn't do these things because it depended on us holding up our end of it, which people have failed since the dawn of time. Keeping the New Covenant depends entirely on the grace and goodness of God. Please understand! This doesn't mean God is throwing his word out the window and substituting it with grace. This is not the religion of anything goes. Rather God has provided a way for us to live in harmony with his will and his word, with a new heart, and a new future, without our old excuses.

In 2003, David Bruce, interviewed **Tom Shadyac**, the director of **Bruce Almighty**, who just happens to be a committed Christian. During the interview Tom said, "There is a line in the movie that is significant to me — when Bruce tells God **"I just gave everyone what they wanted."** And God says, **"Since when does anyone have a clue about what they want?"** We think we want the house, the car, this certain relationship. We have no idea what we really want. What we really need is freedom, to be loved, and to love. It is often quite a journey getting us to that point."

Jeremiah reminds us that God has been writing a love story all along. The only question is do we want to be a part of it or are we going to keep making excuses. **Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, October 19, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Jeremiah 31:27-34

27 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast.

28 And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.

29 In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.