

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 16: The New Covenant -- Jeremiah 31:27-40

Some passages of Scripture are so important that the New Testament cannot leave them alone. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is one of them. It is the longest single quotation of the Old Testament anywhere in the New, lifted whole into the letter to the Hebrews, where the writer hangs the entire argument of the gospel on it. When you read these few verses, you are standing at one of the great hinges of the Bible, the place where God announces that the old arrangement was never the end of the story, and that something new was coming, written not on stone but on hearts.

Listen to the promise itself. "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... my covenant that they broke" (31:31-32). The old covenant had a fatal weakness, and it was not in God; it was in the people, who could not keep it. So God promises a different kind of covenant, one that deals with the very problem that wrecked the first.

And here is the difference, the thing that makes it new. "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" (31:33). No longer a law on tablets outside us, demanding what we cannot do, but a law written inside us, on the heart, by the Spirit. And more: "They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (31:34). All knowing the Lord. Sins remembered no more. This is the gospel, promised six centuries before it came.

We must be clear about when this covenant began, because the whole weight of the New Testament rests on the answer. This is not a promise still waiting for a future earthly kingdom, a rebuilt temple, and the renewed sacrifice of animals. The book of Hebrews quotes these very verses and says plainly that in speaking of a new covenant, God "makes the first one obsolete" (Hebrews 8:13), and that by Christ's single offering "he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). The new covenant is in force now. It was sealed in the blood of Jesus the night before He died, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20), and we enter it through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ. As we open Jeremiah 31, we are reading the birth announcement of the covenant we live in.

Group Discussion: God promised a new covenant, "not like the covenant that I made with their fathers... my covenant that they broke" (31:31-32). What was the fundamental weakness of the old covenant that the new one was designed to remedy, and why could no amount of effort under the old arrangement ever solve the deepest human problem?

Personal Reflection: God promises, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (31:33). Where in your own life is God's law still something external that you obey

reluctantly from the outside, and where is it becoming something written within, that you love and desire from the heart?

Read Jeremiah 31:27–40

Study Questions

1. Read 31:27–30. God promises a day when “everyone shall die for his own iniquity” and the proverb about the fathers’ sour grapes setting the children’s teeth on edge will no longer be used (31:29–30). What does this teach about personal responsibility for sin, and how does it correct the idea that we are born guilty of someone else’s sin?
2. God insists that each person “shall die for his own iniquity” (31:30). Where are you tempted to blame your sin on your upbringing, your circumstances, or others, rather than taking honest, personal responsibility before God?
3. Read 31:31–32. God announces “a new covenant... not like the covenant that I made with their fathers... my covenant that they broke.” What does it reveal about both human weakness and God’s grace that He responds to a broken covenant not by abandoning His people but by promising a better one?
4. The old covenant failed not because God was unfaithful but because the people “broke” it (31:32). Where have you experienced the limits of trying to be righteous by external rule-keeping in your own strength, and what does that teach you about your need for grace?

5. Read 31:33. The heart of the new covenant is, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” What is the great difference between a law written on stone tablets outside us and a law written within on the heart, and how does this interior transformation come about in Christ?
6. God’s aim in the new covenant is a law written on the heart, not merely external compliance (31:33). What would it look like for obedience to flow from desire and love rather than mere duty in your daily walk with God?
7. Read 31:34a. Under the new covenant, “they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” What does it mean that every member of the new covenant knows the Lord personally, and how does this point to the priesthood of all believers and direct access to God through Christ?
8. God promises that all His people, from the least to the greatest, will know Him personally (31:34). Is your knowledge of God a living, personal relationship, or mostly secondhand information about Him, and what would deepen it into true knowing?
9. Read 31:34b–40. The climax of the new covenant is, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Hebrews quotes this very passage and declares that the first covenant is now “obsolete” and that by Christ’s single offering our sins are remembered no more (Hebrews 8:6–13; 10:14–18). How does the new covenant, established by the blood of

Christ and in force now in His church, fulfill this promise of full and final forgiveness, and why does this mean it cannot be a future arrangement with a rebuilt temple and renewed animal sacrifices?

10. Look back across this whole passage, from personal responsibility for sin, to the law written on the heart, to all knowing the Lord, to sins remembered no more. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus, the mediator of this new covenant, is writing His law on your heart and forming His likeness in you this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 8:6–13, which quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 and declares the first covenant “obsolete” because Christ mediates a better covenant; Hebrews 10:14–18, which quotes the promise “I will remember their sins no more” and concludes that where there is forgiveness, there is no longer any offering for sin; Luke 22:20, where Jesus says, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood”; Ezekiel 36:26–27, the promise of a new heart and God’s Spirit put within His people; 2 Corinthians 3:3–6, where Paul says we are ministers of a new covenant, written “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

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