



Jeremiah 31:31-34

The New Covenant

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 we stand on one of the greatest mountain peaks in the Old Testament. It is the only reference to a "new covenant" in the Old Testament, and is no doubt the most significant of Jeremiah's sayings. The LORD God will write His law on the heart of the individual. It has been observed by many scholars that this is one of the most important passages in Jeremiah and contains "one of the deepest insights in the whole Old Testament." This passage finds its fulfillment only in the true believer in Jesus Christ and His covenant with sinful man.

A RADICAL CHANGE IS NEEDED

The nation of Israel failed to live up to the terms of the old covenant. It was impossible because of the radical depravity of man. Of course, it was never meant to bring salvation. The only person who ever lived up to the requirements of the law was Jesus Christ. Israel's problem was spiritual. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). The new covenant was required because of the sin problem. The context of chapter 31 is the children of Israel playing the blame game. Let's blame our parents for the mess we are in. They sinned and we are suffering. The LORD God declared, "Every one will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge" (v. 30).

Sinful, depraved man could not fulfill the divine commandment. However, in the fullness of time God Himself made the ideal life possible through His own provision of the Savior under a new covenant. There was no other solution to the depravity of man. The new covenant does not promise sinlessness, but forgiveness. We are saved sinners. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Jesus had this passage in mind when He instituted the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:28). The "new testament" literally means new covenant and is fulfilled only in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6ff; Hebrews 8:8-9:28; 10:16ff; Romans 11:25-26). Jesus was saying to His disciples that the new covenant predicted by Jeremiah was now being instituted. It describes His work of salvation.

What is needed is a change in the inner nature so that men are able to obey. God changes the "want to" in the inner man. "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (v. 33). He will write His "law" within them and in their hearts. It will be on their minds and will control their will. Moses' old covenant was written on a slab of stone (Exodus 31:18; 34:28-29; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22). What was needed was a change from the inside out in depraved sinful

5:22). What was needed was a change from the inside out in depraved sinful man. Man's sinful rebellious nature demands a radical change that only God can accomplish.

The background of this passage is the Mosaic covenant between Yahweh and Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:1-24:11). The LORD is sovereign God of the Covenant with Israel. The condition of the covenant was Israel's obedience to its laws. Obedience would bring blessings. Disobedience would bring chastisement.

CONTRAST THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

1. Yahweh guarantees the success of the new covenant. He took the initiative to establish the covenant. In contrast to "thou shalt not," and "thou shalt" are the words, "I will put," "I will write," "I will forgive." Israel couldn't keep the law of the old covenant. The law proved man was helplessly depraved and led him to the Christ. The old covenant proved man was a depraved sinner, guilty in the eyes of a holy God and unable to live up to the demands of the perfect law. The new covenant is a demonstration of God pursuing the guilty sinner until He has found him and ransomed him.
2. The new covenant is a covenant of sovereign grace. It accomplished what the law and the old covenant could never do. All will know Him, from the least to the greatest. This is not universalism because those who reject His offer of grace will be judged and spend eternity in hell.
3. The stimulus to keep the new covenant comes from within the person. God places His Spirit within the person through regeneration and the indwelling of His Spirit to enable him to *want* to keep the covenant. The Holy Spirit writes it upon the heart. Under this covenant people obey because they want to. God has changed the heart. Man is incapable of influencing a positive relationship with a holy God. He can not because he is spiritually dead. It is not the doing of sinful man. God changed the heart of man. "For the love of Christ controls us . . . " (2 Corinthians 5:14).
4. The new covenant is an intimate personal relationship with God. Every individual must have an experience with God to be included in this covenant (John 3:1-16).
5. The new covenant will last throughout eternity. This new covenant can not be broken. It is based upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a covenant in His blood which covers all our sins. "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
6. Salvation for the Jewish person will come only through the new covenant, not through the Mosaic Law. Jesus "came to His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). It was only after the Jewish people rejected Him that the gospel was taken to the Gentiles (Acts 10:15, 34-35; 13:46; 15:7-9).

A NEW COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

This new covenant is with Israel and Judah, the whole Jewish people (v. 31). Gentiles, according to the apostle Paul, have been grafted into the vine (Romans 11).

These passages speak of the nation as a whole turning to the Messiah. All Israel, not just a faithful few will see the salvation of the LORD. Isaiah, Jeremiah and the apostle Paul see the final and eternal restoration of Israel (Isaiah 59:20f; Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 11:25, 26).

The new covenant will not be complete until it embraces the people of the old covenant. The apostle stresses that a "partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25b-26a). It is a temporary hardening until the full number of the Gentiles to be saved. The promise God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob cannot be revoked. They are the eternal objects of His love. God has watched over Israel for 5000 years. He is faithful and He cannot break His promises.

Verse 34, tells us that each man will "know the LORD." The word "know" means an accurate first hand personal knowledge from observation. It will not be second hand knowledge, but an intimate personal experience of Yahweh. The word denotes the knowledge of two persons who are totally devoted to one another that affects the mind, emotions and volition.

A COVENANT FOR ALL BELIEVERS

From the prison cell Jeremiah set forth his final burst of song. Assured of the love of God he saw far beyond his prison cell in Jerusalem to the days of God's ultimate victory. Behold, the days are coming when there will be a new spiritual sense of direct relationship to God.

Jeremiah 31:33-34 is an exact description of the covenant under which the true Christian lives. It is the communion and walking in the Holy Spirit as a result of regeneration of the depraved sinner. It depicts the radical change of the sinner and his new relationship to Jesus Christ. Such a believer is abiding in Christ.

"By one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified." That is the position of the believer. That is where the relationship begins. Those who believe on Christ are cleansed by His precious blood and are brought into immediate fellowship with Him as a child of God. We live and walk and have our being in His presence. He abides, settles down and makes Himself at home in our hearts. We are living with the "new covenant" relationship and everything depends upon His sovereign grace.

God says He will place His law within the individual and will write it upon the heart. There will be the consciousness within the life of the Divine thought and will and purpose in that moment of reflection. These principles of the new covenant will be upon the heart. They will not be on tables of stone. "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (v. 33).

This is the whole argument of Hebrews 8:6-7. He then quotes these verses from Jeremiah 31 to argue his point. Jesus Christ "has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second." The fault was with the depraved sinners who were incapable of keeping the covenant with God.

How tragic that we still go seeking legalistic laws and regulations by which to live the Christian life. We have a higher standard. The law made nothing perfect. It still doesn't. It can't. Not even in the Christian's life. Only the Holy Spirit can do that by applying the living presence of Christ within us.

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The difficulty of our knowing what God would have us to do next at any time in our lives is the measure of our distance in fellowship from God. That is the measure in which we regard iniquity in our heart. The pure in heart see God. That is the condition of knowing Him and walking with Him. When we maintain fellowship with Him we have immediate illumination. The allegory of the vine in John 15:1-11 depicts this living relationship with Christ. This is our responsibility as believers (1 John 1:6-9). The knowledge of God is dependent upon a cleansed heart.

The new covenant will be a clear apprehension of the will of God by individual souls, without human meditation. The apprehension of the will of God will be possible through direct and personal knowledge of God on the part of all men. This knowledge will result from putting away of moral defilement. The result will be a clear vision of God.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Have you entered into that sweet privilege that is ours as His children? It is in communion of the Holy Spirit, wherein the law of God is written in the heart, interpreted to the individual directly and immediately in the hour of need. God speaks when we are in communion with Him. This great truth can be misapplied and abused. It does not mean to neglect or set aside God's written Word. This only proves those individuals do not know His walk or His final revelation in His written Word, the Bible. The Holy Spirit from the moment spiritual birth takes place puts a hunger for God's Word within the individual, writes it upon the heart, so they will be His people and He our God. It is an inner communion with God.

Have you as a believer asked Christ to reveal Himself within to you? Do you know His real abiding presence in your life? Are there times when His sweet indwelling presence breaks in upon you and He is so real to you that you could reach out and touch Him if it were humanly possible? When He has purged the heart of all known sin and you come into His presence He will reveal Himself to you as you have never known Him before.

This is a description of the covenant under which the Christian lives. It is a description of the communion with the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit interprets His word in the hour of need. I am to expect the Divine voice to break in upon my conscience as I read the Scriptures and pray. It is intimate fellowship, not through intellectual attainment, but direct, immediate, a consciousness which is independent of instruction by man, by meditation, quietness, silence. He waits until we are quiet enough to receive His words that He may make Himself known to us more perfectly. It is based upon His saving grace. Maintained fellowship is the condition for this immediate illumination of Him. The measure in which we regard iniquity in our heart determines our distance from Him in our illumination.

It is to know God personally in a mature, intimate knowledge of Him. It is not to know theology, or an orthodox creed, but to know Him and to abide in His presence and He in you. It is to know Him personally in a first-hand dealing with Him. I am not speaking of a highly ecstatic emotional experience. I am speaking of an intimate relationship with another. "They shall know Me." It is the inheritance of every believer, not a select few. It is a direct, immediate, conscious sense of His living presence. It is to come in the presence of another living person who knows us better than we know ourselves.

Do you know Him personally? We fail to know Him because we do not acquaint ourselves with Him. We do not avail ourselves to Him. We are not willing to sit quietly in His presence with the written Word of God. You can not know Him without spending time in His Word.

This is the covenant in which we are to live. Why are we afraid to sit in the quietness and silence and meditate on His great attributes? Why are we so prone to do all the talking instead of silently, actively *listening*? Then when we are in His presence we long to stay in it and not leave. So why are those occasions so rare? Why aren't we willing to flee there more often since we relish them? When we have an attitude of waiting and listening in His presence He comes. Oh how sweet and peaceful are those precious moments.

God waits until we are quiet enough to receive His word that He may make Himself known to us more perfectly. When we wait upon Him in stillness we find His law written upon the heart and we obey Him.

This is indeed that great New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

Title: Jeremiah 31:31-34 The New Covenant

Series: [Christ in the Old Testament](#)

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