

God Declares a New Covenant

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: The new covenant describes a time when God’s people would truly know, love, and obey Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Jeremiah 30–31

Laws are not new to us. Systems of laws have been utilized for millennia. In the United States, laws help guide and maintain our court system with the hope of “justice for all” being implemented effectively. But from the start of this nation, laws have been used to justify the unjustifiable. For example, the institution of slavery found a home in the land of the free. And when slaves were freed by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, Jim Crow laws were implemented by states and localities to institutionalize racism and segregation. These laws have since been deemed unconstitutional, but the effects of racism and segregation still linger. Laws can serve a good purpose, but in the hands of sinners, laws will always fail us, both for justice and for righteousness.



What are some rules or laws that fail to reflect the ideals of the people who implement them?

Group Time

Point 1: The new covenant is written on the heart (Jer. 31:31-33).

³¹ “Look, the days are coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—my covenant that they broke even though I am their master”—the LORD’s declaration. ³³ “Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days”—the LORD’s declaration. “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

In this passage in the Old Testament, Jeremiah spoke of spiritual renewal of the Israelites’ minds and hearts and of God remembering their sins no more—of a new covenant. God promised to cleanse His people, to do good to them, and to cause them to prosper. *But why a new covenant?* The problem in this relationship was not with God or with the old covenant He had made—it was in the hearts of the people. They could not reciprocate God’s love despite God’s faithfulness to them. Because of the **sin** of the people, the old covenant was broken and a new one was needed.



What are some ways God had demonstrated His faithfulness to the Israelites?

God promised a change in His people that would make them capable of a deep, rich, abiding love with the Creator of their souls. God would set His law within them and write it on their hearts, minds, and wills. The old covenant was written on stone (Ex. 31:18; 34:28-29; Deut. 4:13; 5:22) and scroll (Ex. 24:7). The new covenant would be written on the tender flesh of a new heart. There can be no loving obedience of the sovereign God apart from His grace-filled, transforming work on the heart.



Why is God’s grace necessary for us to have a relationship with Him?

Point 2: The new covenant brings about knowledge of God (Jer. 31:34a).

^{34a} No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them”—this is the LORD’s declaration.

During the time of the Mosaic covenant, the Israelites had a system to meet with God, but access to God’s presence was not available to all of His chosen people, only to the priests and the high priests. The high priest served as the mediator between God and the people so the people could know about God. The priesthood based on the old covenant, however, was filled with priests who could not remain in office because they died on account of their own sin. But God sent a new covenant priest—Jesus, a sinless Man who would die for the sins of others and rise again to everlasting life.

In the new covenant, everyone will “know” the Lord (Jer. 31:34a). This does not mean that Sunday morning sermons and Bible studies throughout the week are irrelevant. Instead, the word “know” means “experience intimately.” Fellowship with God requires peace with God because God cannot abide sin. The old covenant priest needed the blood of an animal to cover his sins. We must be covered by the blood of Jesus to “know” and experience Him. Every believer in Christ “knows” the Lord and has experienced His salvation and assurance of forgiveness of sin.

 What should we understand about God based on His covenant promise to make Himself known to all people?



Voices from Church History

“The teachers of the Word come and go, and others follow in the succession of those who pass away. But the sacred Scripture remains for all time without ever being abolished, until the time when the Lord shall appear at the end of the world. Then we shall have no further need for the Scriptures or for those who interpret them.”¹

—Bede (c. 672-735)

Point 3: The new covenant provides lasting forgiveness (Jer. 31:34b-40).

^{34b} “For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin.

³⁵ “This is what the LORD says: The one who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar—the LORD of Armies is his name: ³⁶ If this fixed order departs from before me—this is the LORD’s declaration—only then will Israel’s descendants cease to be a nation before me forever. ³⁷ This is what the LORD says: Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, will I reject all of Israel’s descendants because of all they have done—this is the LORD’s declaration.

³⁸ “Look, the days are coming”—the LORD’s declaration—“when the city from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate will be rebuilt for the LORD. ³⁹ A measuring line will once again stretch out straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn toward Goah. ⁴⁰ The whole valley—the corpses, the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Kidron Valley to the corner of the Horse Gate to the east—will be holy to the LORD. It will never be uprooted or demolished again.”

God is omniscient, “all-knowing.” So how can God be all-knowing and never again remember our sin? God can choose not to remember, that is, to bring, something against us. Instead of punishing us as we deserve for our sins, God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12) by placing them on Christ to be punished in our place. Christ has freed us from sin and death and reconciled us to God.

Christ as Reconciliation: Sin is an infinite _____ against an infinite God. Thankfully, God _____ His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ’s death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is _____ and renewed.

God untethered us from the bondage of sin so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. Furthermore, He grants us the privilege of participating in His grand design of calling others to Himself (Matt. 28:18-20). In the power of His Holy Spirit, God uses us to change the world for Him so that all the world will be holy to the Lord as people hear the gospel and believe. We find our motivation for this mission in the reality of God’s forgiveness and His unending faithfulness to His people (Jer. 31:35-37).



How does God’s Word empower us for the gospel mission?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Jeremiah 31:1-14

Hollywood has made billions of dollars off of good love stories. They've learned the way to our pockets is through our emotions. Journalists also have discovered that we love pouring over every detail of someone else's engagement and gorgeous wedding. Love captures us like no other emotion or feeling, but with love comes the potential for betrayal. Deep joy can cause gut-wrenching pain.

In these verses we read of God's faithful love; we listen as He calls His people to singing and dancing. But previously we are confronted with God's disappointment in His people. He exclaimed, "For my people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves—cracked cisterns that cannot hold water" (2:13). Israel abandoned and betrayed God (3:20). Recognizing the pain of such abandonment makes chapter 31 demonstrate God's faithfulness all the more richly.

God reminded His people that He had loved them with an everlasting love—despite their betrayal. So He called them to sing, shout, proclaim, praise, and say the greatness of His love. The greatest love story of all has been written by God, and His faithfulness is without end.



Voices from Church History

"Let us serve Him faithfully as our Master. Let us obey Him loyally as our King. Let us study His teaching as our Prophet. Let us walk diligently after Him as our Example. Let us look anxiously for Him as our coming Redeemer of body as well as soul. But above all, let us prize Him as our sacrifice, and rest our whole weight on His death as an atonement for sin. Let His blood be more precious in our eyes every year we live. Whatever else we glory in about Christ, let us glory above all things in His cross."³

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)



In what specific ways are you proclaiming God's faithfulness?

Day 2: Read Jeremiah 31:15-30

Like a prodigal son, Israel will return home. In this passage, Ephraim represents the ten northern tribes of Israel. Because God is a good Father, He will have compassion on His children despite their direct disobedience. God still yearns for His people to return because they are like precious sons and daughters in His sight. It's this kind of love that makes a home inviting. It's this warmth that tethers our hearts to God.

It must be noted that in the midst of their wandering, God disciplined His people like any good father would do (v. 18). A father who doesn't discipline his children is not a loving father at all but a father of chaos. God longs for His people to live good and satisfying lives that reflect His glory; therefore, He gives them boundaries. Psalm 18:19 reads, "He brought me out to a spacious place; He rescued me because He delighted in me." God gives us boundaries out of love, and because He knows what is best for human flourishing, He will correct us when we've veered off the path.



Why are God's boundaries actually the markers of a good life instead of rules or limitations against what makes us "feel good"?

Day 3: Read Jeremiah 31:31-33

We live in an age when we are bombarded with messages of "You can!" "Your destiny is yours!" and "You are in charge of this day." And certainly you are. No one is coaxing you out of bed besides the possible smell of delicious coffee brewing in the kitchen. But this message can subtly turn into a false gospel of "me."

Throughout the early church, we see a movement of God, one that has allowed us to have the Bible in our hands today. Men and women believed so deeply in the Messiah Jesus and His death and resurrection that many were killed as they carried the message and cast it forward into the next generation and onward to our own.

This certainly was not the case because they mustered up an "I will!" mentality. It was because they depended deeply on the movement of the Holy Spirit to flatten mountains and make paths through jungles. If we would follow in their steps, we must start first in prayer and follow up with dependency. *God* will fulfill His promises as we follow in obedience.



What are some ways God is calling you to be obedient today?

Day 4: Read Jeremiah 31:34a

Have you ever gone to a restaurant only to eat the most incredible dessert? You savor each bite and almost let it melt in your mouth, aware that this marvelous treat is something far too good to be eaten quickly. You quickly ask your server to give your compliments to the chef and timidly ask for the recipe. The chef walks out to thank you but then proceeds to explain that she only shares her recipe with her exclusive guest list (a list you will never get on because you don't have any of the necessary credentials).

The enjoyment of a dessert is a far cry from the significance of the new covenant. And the pain of disappointment for never learning a secret recipe would pale in comparison to never knowing the Lord. But the new covenant is new, in part, because it expands the boundaries of who's in. Believing Israel knew the Lord, some more closely than others, but through the priceless blood of Jesus, inaugurating the new covenant, all Jewish and Gentile believers share in the intimate knowledge of God. Regardless of our heritage or ethnicity, we have been invited into all the insight God has revealed to His people Israel. The recipe is ours!



What measures can you take today to get to know God better and to experience His presence?

Day 5: Jeremiah 31:34b-40

Jeremiah recounts words of assurance. Only God can measure the heavens. Only God can know the inner heat of the earth. As sure as the sun rises and sets, the survival of Israel, God's people, is as certain as the laws of nature that God has ordained. And this is not by their doing but a free gift handed to them.

The expression “because of all they have done” refers to Israel's evil deeds. Even their righteous acts are like filthy rags before the Lord (Isa. 64:6). In spite of them, God's love is assured. Israel is still His people and always will be. God's new creation, “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), has now been brought into existence through the miraculous birth, sinless life, and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This will always be the way to salvation—through the matchless love of Christ. It was nothing of our own doing. Instead, we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), and this leads us to bow in humility before God the Father, who seals our inheritance in Him forevermore.



In what ways does God's kindness through His Son, Jesus, lead you to repentance today?

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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