

GOD'S PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT

Leader pages on pp. 128-131

THE POINT:
GOD PROMISED A NEW,
ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34; LUKE 22:14-20

Jer. ^{31:31} "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.

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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.

³⁴ 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. "For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin."

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Luke ^{22:14} When the hour came, he reclined at the table, and the apostles with him.

¹⁵ Then he said to them, "I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves.

¹⁸ For I tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ **And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**

²⁰ In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Covenant (v. 33)—This word introduces the new covenant that God would establish. What follows is an explanation of the differences between the old and new covenants.

Forgive their iniquity (v. 34)—The term for forgive *salach* refers to

forgiveness, release, or pardon. It is used only of God, for God alone can forgive sins.

Until . . . the kingdom of God (v. 16)— Jesus referred to the great banquet at the consummation of history the "Marriage Feast of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-9).

HOW IS THE PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT SIGNIFICANT IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER?

Old school verses new school-which is better? From music to dances and even clothing styles, the debate between the generations is ongoing.

- We might laugh at that statement while reminiscing about our most recent dance battle with our kids. Even so, many of us prefer something new to something old:
- We prefer driving a new car to driving an old car.
- We prefer to live in a new house rather than in an older house.

- We prefer new clothes to hand-me-downs.
- We prefer the latest hairstyles to ones from a few years ago.
- We prefer taking a new job rather than continuing in the job we currently have.

Newness wears off quickly. A new car loses its new car smell and before we know it, there is a scratch or ding. New clothes become last year's fashion, and hairstyles also come and go. Indeed, a few years later, when we view old pictures, we can't believe we ever dressed that way or wore such hairstyles! And we may tire of a new job as quickly as we grew tired of our old one.

However, God has promised us something new that will last forever: an unending relationship with Him that begins when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. Fads and trends will come and go, but the new life God offers us will never fade. The abundant life Jesus offers us begins when we choose to trust Him (John 10:10).

Unlike No Other// Jeremiah 31:31-32

Bible interpreters have often called Jeremiah 30–33 “the book of comfort” or “the book of consolation.” Jeremiah prophesied during the southern kingdom of Judah's last days. He reprimanded God's people for breaking His covenant, and warned them that if they failed to repent, they were headed for exile in Babylon. Sadly, God's people did not turn back to Him, so He brought the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon against Judah. The Babylonians conquered Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed the temple (Jer. 39). It was one of the darkest hours in Old Testament history.

However, Jeremiah also announced that the defeat of Judah was not the defeat of God! God's purposes would move ahead, as He still had good plans for His people.



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The prophet announced a new covenant God would establish with His people. This covenant was unlike previous covenants, yet it built upon those previous covenants.

Interestingly, Jeremiah announced that God would make this new covenant “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (v. 31). The reigns of Israel's first three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—featured a united Israel under each of these kings. However, following Solomon's death in 930 BC, the kingdom divided into two. The northern kingdom continued using the name Israel, while the southern kingdom took the name Judah. Israel sinned against the Lord and received God's judgment at the hands of Assyria in 721 BC. Judah persisted another 135 years before it fell to Babylon in 586 BC.

But despite this historic division, Jeremiah announced a new covenant in which God would bring His people from Israel and Judah back together into one nation.

Note the expression “the LORD's declaration.” It occurs in each of the four verses we are studying from Jeremiah 31. The prophet was stressing that the message he brought was directly from God. He was not communicating his own wishful thinking of things that he hoped God would do one day. God was promising, in no uncertain terms, that this new covenant would come!

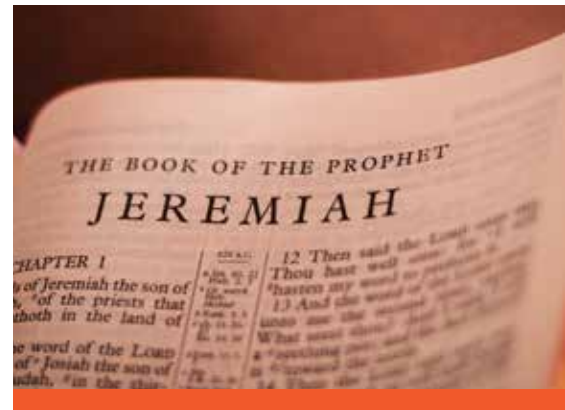
This new covenant would differ significantly from the covenant God had made with Moses and the people when He brought them out of Egypt (v. 32). The people had journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai; there, God communicated His commands to Moses and the people agreed to follow them (Ex. 19:1-8).

The people broke God's Sinai covenant time and time again despite God's faithfulness. Nevertheless, God's purpose would persist, and He would establish a new covenant unlike previous covenants.

WHY WAS THERE A NEED FOR A NEW COVENANT? HOW IS GOD'S NEW COVENANT A FULFILLMENT OF HIS PREVIOUS COVENANTS?

Written on Our Hearts // Jeremiah 31:33-34

Jeremiah had cited the people's failure to live up to the former covenant (v. 32). He now highlighted how His new covenant would shape His people's relationship with Him. Note how this time, Jeremiah referred to the covenant as only “with the house of Israel” (v. 33) instead of “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” as he had in verse 31. He again stressed the unity God's new covenant would bring.



DIGGING DEEPER THE WEeping PROPHEt

The book of Jeremiah is the longest Prophetic book in the Bible and Jeremiah's life is more fully described than the other fifteen writing prophets.¹⁷ Jeremiah is the prophet of the “word of the LORD” (1:2). Of the 349 times the Old Testament (OT) uses the phrase “thus says the LORD,” Jeremiah accounts for 157 of them.¹⁸ This prophetic word that Jeremiah spoke was more than an objective revelation from God to the nation; God's words were to be joy and food for Jeremiah's own soul. Jeremiah's best-known passage is the new covenant text in 31:31-34. It is the largest OT text quoted in the New Testament (NT) (Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16-1), but arguably better than any passage it links God's ancient promises to Eve (Gen 3:1), Abraham (Gen 1:1-3), and David (2 Sam. 7:16-19) with NT assurance that God in Christ grants believers new hearts, salvation, and fellowship with Him. Jeremiah had a difficult message to deliver to his beloved Judah. Even though he loved Judah, his love for God was greater and was the source of his obedience.

How have you learned to obey God even when His message has been difficult?



God declared four key aspects of His new covenant:

- He would put His teaching within His people.
- He would write it on His people's hearts.
- He would be their God.
- They would be His people.

The apostle Paul in the New Testament highlighted how many people in Old Testament days lived as if God's commands were something external to them. That is, they were written only on stone rather than in the hearts of the people (2 Cor. 3:7-8). However, God's new covenant stressed the internalization of God's teaching.

Many people who grow up in Christian homes first learn about God from their parents. Their parents instruct them in God's ways, and children see their parents live out their faith. Yet, the children have a responsibility to one day take on the Christian faith as their own. It must become something within them as well, not merely something they see their parents practice.

The words, "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (v. 33), stress the personal relationship God would have with His people in those days. They would follow God more faithfully because God had written His words upon their hearts and minds. His words would be part of them, and their lives would flow from His instruction.

Here are some ways we can better internalize God's word and commands. Perhaps you can think of others.

- Regular Bible reading
- Spending time in prayer
- Regular fellowship with other believers, both in corporate worship and in a small group setting.

Jeremiah again stressed how God's new covenant would change how His children lived in relationship to Him. The new covenant would feature personal knowledge of God by everyone in it. Commitment to God's covenant included a personal relationship with Him.

Finally, God declared, "I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin" (v. 34). Under the new covenant, we will live in forgiveness, fully committed to God in heart and mind. The word translated "remember" contains the nuance of acting on what is remembered. Thus, the Lord was stressing that He would no longer remember His people's sin. That is, He would never take it into account again. The new covenant would feature complete forgiveness.

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER FROM THE NEW COVENANT?

Established by Jesus's Blood // Luke 22:14-20

The hour had come for Jesus and His disciples to celebrate the Passover. The Jewish festival of Passover commemorated God's deliverance of His people from the Egyptians. Thus, Passover recalled God's salvation and redemption of His people. The Jewish people celebrated it as an annual observance (Ex. 12:24-27).

Jesus instructed His disciples to partake of the Passover wine together and told them He would not drink of it again until the kingdom of God came (vv. 17-18). By His declaration, the Lord linked His coming suffering on the cross with Jeremiah's words from six centuries earlier.

As we observe baptism and the Lord's Supper, we celebrate our participation in the new covenant. At

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the same time, we will not experience the complete fulfillment of the new covenant until Jesus returns and sets up His eternal kingdom.

In many ways, the new covenant is a fulfillment of the covenants given to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David. All **comprise a solemn agreement between God and His people, highlight God's blessing and the human responsibilities, and point to a future kingdom God will establish.**

Yet, the new covenant stands as the fulfillment of all the others.

- In Jesus, the serpent's head is crushed and the power of sin is broken (Gen. 3:15).
- In Jesus, Abraham's descendant, blessing comes to the world (Gen. 12:3).
- In Jesus, God's righteous standard required by His commands is completely satisfied (Rom. 3:21-22).
- In Jesus, David's descendant, God will establish David's eternal kingdom and throne.
- In Jesus, we live with eternal forgiveness (Rom. 8:1).

WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DO WE CARRY AS PARTICIPANTS IN JESUS'S NEW COVENANT?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, originated from Jesus choosing the unleavened bread of the Passover meal to represent His physical body and the cup reinterpreted as the blood sacrifice made by Jesus for the remission of sin (Luke 22, Matthew 26).¹⁹ When and how communion is observed varies between church congregations. Many Black churches observe communion on the first Sunday monthly while others may have it more regularly or even during a mid-week service. Jesus, however, did not give a specific day or number of times one should partake in the Lord's Supper. He simply said, as often as you do it, do it in remembrance of Him. (1 Cor. 11:25). Holy Communion is just that—Holy. It is a sacred time set apart to commune with God and reflect on the sacrifice of Christ. "The phrase as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup emphasizes that the solemn remembrance of Christ's death is a corporate declaration of "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2) until he comes again."²⁰

Biblical Truth: Communion is the believer's chance to reflect and give thanks for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What are some practical ways we can reference the Lord's Supper in our churches?

LIVE IT

How do we keep our focus on the covenant of Christ in the midst of a fallen world?

Old school vs. new school may be up for debate. Comparisons may also be made of the covenants God established with Noah, Abraham, and David. But, under the new covenant established by God through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and can live in the fulfillment of God's promises. Ponder Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Jesus's words in Luke 22:14-20. Then respond to the following items:

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- **God has established a new covenant unlike previous covenants.** How do you see each of God's covenants build toward the new covenant through Jesus Christ.
- **The new covenant features forgiveness and the freedom to live fully committed to God in heart and mind.** What does total commitment to God mean for you? Ask Him to identify areas in your life where you're not fully committed to Him.
- **We enter the new covenant with Jesus when we trust in Him and in His completed work.** Have you put your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Spread the gospel to others.

DAILY READINGS

1. ALL IS NOT LOST // JEREMIAH 31:31-32

In Jeremiah 11:17, the prophet declares that the houses of Israel and Judah face disaster. They rightfully face punishment for worshiping idols and living in sin. People today deserve God's rebuke. We worship idols in the form of money, fame, and possessions. In Jeremiah 31:31, God declares that a new covenant is coming, and this is great news. All is not lost because God declares that He will forgive iniquity and not remember sin. The new covenant is great news for us because mankind moves from breaking God's covenant to experiencing forgiveness.

The great news is that God desires an intimate relationship with His creation.

2. THE ULTIMATE HAND OFF // JEREMIAH 31:33-34

If you have watched a relay team run in the Olympics, you have seen a hand off. The current runner meets up with the next runner and passes the baton. As the new runner begins to run his leg of the race, the previous runner's part in the race ends. In these verses, God is speaking to the days ahead and wants us to know that He plans to put His teachings on the hearts of man so that all will know Him. Great things are in store for those who love God. When we accepted Christ, we received the baton to run the Christian race. "... let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb. 12:1-2). Get ready for the coming of the Messiah.

Take the baton and share the good news with today's generation.

3. CHRIST DID IT // HEBREWS 9:15

In the Old Testament, sacrifices atoned for sin. Imagine families and individuals carting their bulls, rams, and turtledoves to the temple. Under the old covenant, the children of Israel lived through a predictable cycle of committing sin, suffering

consequences, repenting, and sacrificing for the atonement of sin. With the priests, sacrifices and the shedding of blood took place regularly. The writer of Hebrews explains that Christ offered Himself once as a "sacrifice for many" and brought salvation. Christ did what no one else could do.

Under the new covenant, Christ's sacrifice brings forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation.

4. PLAYING FAVORITES // JOHN 3:16; ROMANS 5:8

My siblings and I often joke about who is the favorite child. We sign Mother's Day cards, "Your favorite." Once, my brother set my mother's ringtone to say he was her favorite. Sometimes we act as though we are God's favorite. We look down on other people or see our relationship with God as better than others. God doesn't play favorites. In John 3:16, it is written that God loves the whole world. In Romans 5:8, we learn that Christ sacrificed His life for us while we were still sinners. I will never know if my mother has a favorite. But we should understand that God's love is available for all mankind. Sin is the great equalizer. We are all in need of the blood of Christ to save us.

God knows our worst, and Christ still chose to die for us and offer us eternal life.

5. GOD'S PROMISES ENDURE TO THE END // PSALM 111:1-10

In this 6-week study, we have examined how the children of Israel continually fell into sin. We acknowledged our sinfulness and struggle to keep God's commands. Despite man's sin, God has not given up on mankind. In the New Testament, Jesus came to forgive sin and offer eternal life to those who believe in Him. Now, it is time to praise God for His promises. Psalm 111 is a reminder of God's goodness and character. He is righteous, and His works are "splendid and majestic." God is truth and justice. We can trust Him. If we follow His instructions, we will find wisdom.

Believe that God has redeemed His people and that His covenant is for eternity.



Standing on the Promises of God

BY MARK CROSTON, SR.

Promises—we make them, and we break them. Many of our lives have been hurt by broken promises. Broken promises diminish our trust, our relationships suffer, and our hope is hindered. However, even in our brokenness, God keeps His promises, and we are safe to put our hope in Him.

The Book of Joshua reminds us of this. By chapter 12, Joshua had led the nation of Israel on thirty-one successful campaigns, conquering Canaan, the Promised Land. They have just a few territories left to conquer.

First, **Be Blessed by the Promises of the Past.** When we read Judges 12, the names are a list of all the kings and places God had sent the

nation out to battle and each time, he gave them victory. The king of Jericho one, the King of Ai one (or the way we would count “two”), the king of Jerusalem three all the way to . . . the King of Tirzah thirty-one kings in all. Each one is a promise made and kept.

We too have promises from God. He promised: Never to leave us, one; A home in heaven, two; To hear our prayers, three—and the list goes on. In fact, there are 8,810 promises from God to man in the Bible. 1 Kings 8:56 reminds us, “. . . Not one of all the good promises he made through his servant Moses has failed.”

Second, **Be Encouraged by His Promises**

Today. Joshua 13 reveals three important things about promises.

- **God's Promises Cannot be Hindered by Age.** Read Joshua 13:1.

Moses was 80 when he went to Egypt to lead Israel out of bondage. Abraham was 100 when God blessed him with a son. Elizabeth was “well stricken in years” (just like a woman not to tell her age) when God used her to give birth to John the Baptist. Old age cannot hinder God's promises, and neither can youth.

David was a teenager when he defeated Goliath. Solomon was a child when he became Israel's wisest and wealthiest King. Josiah was 16 when he led the nation back to God in revival. Young or old. . . you're just the kind of person God's got some promises waiting for. “. . . for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

- **God's Promises Cannot be Hindered by Assignment.** Read Joshua 13:2-13.

This passage describes the land East of the Jordan as it was to be divided among the tribes of Manasseh, Ruben, and Gad. The problem with the land as it was originally assigned is that it was occupied by the Avvites, Canaanites, Amorites, Gebalites, and others. Their assignment meant their one nation would have to go to battle with over 31 nations.

What is your assignment that you think you cannot handle? Math or motherhood; reading or righteousness; sickness or sanctification? We must remember that when we are on God's side we cannot be hindered.

- **God's Promises Cannot be Hindered by Assets.** Read Joshua 13:14.

The Levites were the tribe of the Priest of God in Israel. They had no inheritance because they were to live off the offerings brought to God in worship. They had no inheritance to remind us that we are to live by faith. They had no inheritance on earth to remind us that our true inheritance is in heaven.

They had no inheritance because even if you have nothing, you have all you need with God. He will supply your needs.

Third, **Be Fortified by God's Promises for the Future** Read Joshua 14:10-12. Caleb and Joshua were two of the twelve sent out by Moses 45 years earlier to survey the land. Unlike the other ten, Caleb and Joshua brought back a good report saying, “We are well able to take the land.”

God gave Joshua a leadership assignment. God gave Caleb a promise. Caleb is now 85 years old. The time for his promise has now come due. Caleb knows that God keeps His promises. He believes God will still give him the strength and courage to do the impossible.

When you know God keeps His promises, you can face any obstacle with confidence. You will stop sitting on the promises and start standing on the promises.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail. When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.

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