

## The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–40)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/9/2020)

### Introduction

*“I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD”* (Jeremiah 24:7).

Jeremiah 30 opens with instructions for the prophet to write God’s words in a book, not for immediate application to those going into the captivity or to those remaining in the land. Rather, it was to be kept and read later, encouraging those who would return and rebuild after the seventy years were fulfilled. The main thrust of the revelation was introducing the new covenant with unconditional promises of mercy and grace. Jesus Christ would institute the new covenant at the Passover meal on the eve of His death on the cross.

### I. A Review

1. Jeremiah’s message of judgment was rejected and scorned.

Jeremiah was called to deliver a message of judgment to the covenant people that their covenant breaking exhausted God’s patience. In her rebellion against her Lord and her covenant obligations, Judah was obstinate, refusing to take correction and repent. He would subject the nation to the will of their enemies and expel them from the covenant land (Jeremiah 5:19; 6:10, 11).

The people would not listen or believe the word of Jeremiah. Worse, they received the false prophets, preferring their message of peace.

2. The Lord knew that the people had no heart to hear Him, much less fear, know, love, and serve Him (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4). In a pre-announcement of the new covenant, the Lord declared through Jeremiah that the LORD would give them a heart to know Him (Jeremiah 24:7). This promise provided the only hope for the remnant of the nation.
3. The Lord’s house would be forsaken to prepare for this change (Jeremiah 12:7, 8). Ezekiel 10 records the departure of the Spirit of the Lord from the temple (Ezekiel 10:4). The divine departure is confirmed by Jesus (Matthew 23:38).
4. God was shaking all things to establish an unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:25–29).

Hebrews 12 closes the apostle’s argument that the persecuted and suffering Hebrew Christians could not, for the sake of peace and security, return to Judaism. This text defines the problem and warns all new covenant saints, both Jewish and Gentile.

- a. *“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking (v. 25). Israel’s refusal to listen was the cause of His abandoning the old covenant and forsaking His house, the temple. Hearing and responding in obedience were necessary for the Lord to work through His people to accomplish His will and purpose.*
- b. *“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens ... indicates the removal of things that are shaken ... in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain”* (vv. 26, 27 citing Haggai 2:6).

*“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe [fear, the fear of God], for our God is a consuming fire”* (vv. 28, 29).

- c. Those who are given a new heart will evidence new covenant standing when they (1) hear and pay careful attention to the One speaking, (2) are grateful for receiving an unshakable kingdom, and, consequently (3) offer in the fear of God acceptable worship.

## II. New Covenant Characteristics

1. With whom does the Lord make this covenant? According to Jeremiah 31:31, the Lord promised to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. However, Hebrews 10:16–22, citing this passage, applies it to the house of God over which Christ reigns as great High Priest (v. 21).

The apostle exhorts believers to (1) “*hold fast their confession* [of faith in Jesus Christ] *without wavering*” (v. 23), (2) to “*consider how to stir each other up to love and good works*” (v. 24), and (3) for the purpose of their mutual encouragement, to stop “*neglecting to meet together*” (v. 25), particularly as they saw “*the Day*” approaching. The church is God’s tool to establish His kingdom through the gospel as a fold for His redeemed to populate the eternal kingdom.

2. The basic difference between the new covenant and the old is the *internalization* of the new—a new heart (regeneration). While the old covenant laid out the obligations and promises for the people, it provided no internal power to comply. Thus, Jeremiah cites four basic characteristics of the new covenant.
  - a. The internalization of the law (v. 33).
  - b. The assurance of personal relationship to God (v. 34).
  - c. The personal, intimate knowing of the Lord necessary to the relationship becomes *intuitive*, not learned (v. 34b).
  - d. The power of the personal relationship is great confidence due to the forgiveness of sins (v. 34).

## III. New Covenant Application

1. The prophets revealed the tension between the covenant people and their covenant Lord, Yahweh. That tension was obedience as it relates to and is defined by the *law* (John 14:15; Galatians 6:2).
2. Jesus summarized the law in two commandments (Matthew 22:37–40; Galatian 5:14). This is the heart and soul of the old covenant. “*You shall not be indifferent* [hate] *to your brother in your heart*” (Leviticus 19:17). The difference is ability to hear and obey.

Loving yourself is not a self-centered care for your own welfare. It is not looking after yourself first, pampering you flesh, and satisfying your carnal desires. Loving yourself is seeing yourself biblically and having the spiritual conviction and Holy Spirit-enablement to pursue His will for you.