

Promise and Mediator of a New Covenant

Printed Text · Isaiah 9:2-7

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EVALUATE Jeremiah's message about the new covenant; CARE about how the new covenant makes a difference in our relationship with God; and DECIDE to live in accordance with the law written on our hearts.

In Focus

After decades of marriage, Lamar and Joyce had weathered many tough times. After experiencing health challenges and lost revenue in their business during the Covid shutdown, the couple found themselves angry at each other—and God. One night, their arguments over finances led Joyce to declare she wanted a divorce. The words stunned both her and Lamar; at the beginning of their marriage, they committed themselves to never even utter that word.

'How did our marriage get to this point?' Lamar thought to himself.

Joyce had always been a rock of faith throughout their marriage, even when he had become preoccupied with expanding the restaurant chain. He was just now finding his faith again and to hear his wife utter those words out of her mouth was earth-shattering. Lamar left the house to clear his head. Giving up on their marriage was definitely not the answer.

The next day, Lamar got up early to pray about his marital troubles. Lamar realized he had taken his wife, and her faith in God, for granted, and now he needed to stop letting her shoulder the spiritual load alone and cultivate his own. After a while, Joyce came into his prayer closet with a piece of paper in her hand. It was their marriage vows. "When we got married, we came into covenant with one other—for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer. God dealt with my heart all night and reminded me that we have more to fight for than fighting each other. I am so sorry, please forgive me."

Today's lesson reminds us that forgiveness has the power to restore promises.

Keep In Mind

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. **Inward parts** (Jeremiah 31:33) qereb (Heb.) – Inner part, center and seat of thought and emotion
- B. **Iniquity** (v. 34) avon (Heb.) – Perversity, depravity, and guilt

Say It Correctly

Iniquity. ih-NICK-wih-tee

Captivity. cap-TIH-vuh-tee

KJV

Jeremiah 31:27 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

28 And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord.

29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

NLT

Jeremiah 31:27 "The day is coming," says the Lord, "when I will greatly increase the human population and the number of animals here in Israel and Judah.

28 In the past I deliberately uprooted and tore down this nation. I overthrew it, destroyed it, and brought disaster upon it. But in the future I will just as deliberately plant it and build it up. I, the Lord, have spoken!

29 "The people will no longer quote this proverb: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children's mouths pucker at the taste.'

30 All people will die for their own sins—those who eat the sour grapes will be the ones whose mouths will pucker.

31 "The day is coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.

32 This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the Lord.

33 "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

34 And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the Lord. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

The People, Places, and Times

Jeremiah. Jeremiah was born into a priestly family and called to be a prophet at a young age. His words were not accepted by the establishment in Judah. Considered one of the most revealing prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah's prophetic career prepared the Children of Israel for their imminent exile. His poetic words, graced by God's calling, offered both warning and promise to the Israelites. Jeremiah's words are regarded as an important part of the prophetic calling and trajectory of the Israelites and still resonate as important words for us today.

Pre-Exilic. The book of Jeremiah is a preexilic prophetic book, meaning that it was written prior to Israel's exile from the Promised Land. This is important to know as it helps us better understand Jeremiah's role as a prophet. It also helps us understand his prophecy of impending exile and the promise of a new covenant as reflective of the overarching themes of the text. Jeremiah's prophecy speaks into the future when God's new covenant would restore them to the Promised Land and empower His people to live for Him by writing His laws on their hearts. How can you experience rejection and persecution for proclaiming God's Word but still be counted as successful?

Background

The book of Jeremiah is prophesying the Israelites' Babylonian capture, period of captivity, and return to the Promised Land. In chapter 31, Jeremiah not only offers them the hope of freedom but also a new covenant that is more than just following rules; it is a covenant that changes the heart. This new covenant, Jeremiah explains, will be with them even when they are absent from one another and serve as a permanent reminder of God's grace and redemptive power.

When facing troubling news, how can we convince others there is hope for the future?

At-A-Glance

1. Payback for Disobedience (Jeremiah 31:27–30)
2. Restoration Through a New Covenant (vv. 31–34)

In Depth

1. Payback for Disobedience (Jeremiah 31:27–30)

Jeremiah talks about the days when God will repopulate the land of Israel and Judah. A re-population is needed because their sins will bring about God's judgment and punishment. Their idolatry and injustice will cause them to be conquered by the Babylonians and taken into exile. But after this, He would restore them. Their land would be repopulated and He would not allow them to be afflicted anymore. The Lord watched over them to discipline and afflict them in order for them to repent. In the coming days, when they are brought back from exile, there will be a different kind of watching; the Lord will watch over them to restore them and help them rebuild their broken nation.

God reminds them of a popular proverb about sour grapes. This proverb was used to explain how children suffered the consequences of their parents' disobedience. The Lord said that this dynamic would no longer be in effect. In the days when He brought Israel back, every person would pay for his or her own sinful ways. This means that He would treat each person's sin individually. A person's sin will be their own responsibility, and they will reap the consequences of their good or bad choices. When confronted with their sins, what excuses do some people create to justify their wrongdoing?

2. Restoration Through a New Covenant (vv. 31–34)

God's new covenant with Israel was unprecedented. He had made covenants with their ancestors in the past and recalls how the covenant He made with Israel had been broken. This happened in spite of God pursuing and loving them with the same force and intensity as a husband who loves his wife. The Children of Israel and Judah broke this covenant time and time again. By detailing how His people broke the old one, God shows the need for a new covenant.

While covenants with people like Abraham and Noah or even the Children of Israel had power, this covenant was a new development in God's relationship with His people. It required Israel to stop focusing so much on habitually following rules. Verse 32 says the new covenant would not look like "the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." God is noting that the covenant He had made then required spoon feeding the Israelites, giving one rule after another for them to follow and prove their love toward God. This new covenant, written in the hearts of people, is about a shift in attitude and proximity. God says no matter where you are, no matter what you do, His presence is with you in your heart. How can our relationship with God be restored so we can develop a new life of faithfulness?

Search the Scriptures

1. In what ways did the Israelites' perpetual disobedience affect their lives (Jeremiah 31:27–30)?
2. How was this covenant vastly different from the covenants God had made with the Israelites in the past (vv. 33–34)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Oftentimes we become so legalistic in our worship to God that we forget the ways in which He wants our hearts to be soft and open toward Him. How can we begin to shift our worship of God to less focus on rules and more focus on our hearts and attitude?

Liberating Lesson

In a world where rules matter, we can easily take a rigid approach to developing our relationship with God. We can begin to tout how much of a "better" Christian we are because we are in line with the rules and regulations of church and society. But when we take this approach, we run the risk of ostracizing and marginalizing people who might be new to the faith or have a different understanding of God. Jeremiah's prophecy was important because it helped shift social and cultural understanding of what it meant to be in obedience to God—obedience in the heart made for outward expressions of obedience.

Many times in our churches, we can mistake the outward expressions and appearances as a measure of what's going on in a person's heart. For example, if someone is dressed nicely in a suit or wears a big "church hat," then we assume that they are in a good place with God. We listen to how a person talks with certain religious tones and assume this is the way a holy person talks. This is not necessarily the case. God is more concerned about what goes on in the heart than these outward expressions. What examples do you see of people being judged prematurely based on their appearance or background?

Application For Activation

As followers of Christ, we are called to obey God, not just with an outward show, but with the right inner attitude. With this in mind:

- Compile a list of different outward signs of obedience, and next to them, write down the inward heart attitude that they are supposed to convey.
- If there is anyone with whom you need to make amends, call or write a letter in order to reconcile with them.
- Without using a Bible, write out several verses you know by heart, and then write down how God has used them to impact your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Jeremiah 31:27–34

27 Behold, the days come, saith the lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

Jeremiah continues his message from the Lord, relating His promises to the people. Here (vv. 27–34) he quotes the Lord. The exclamation “behold” (often translated as “lo,” “see,” or “look”) tends to add emphasis and assurance to what is being said. Here the Lord says to the people through Jeremiah, “Look!” as if calling them to pay attention to what He is about to tell them. The Lord’s promise to the people is that He will repopulate the houses of Israel and Judah with both the “seed of man” and “the seed of beast.” The Lord uses an agricultural metaphor of sowing seed to describe how He will replenish the land with people and animals (cf. Hosea 2:23). This metaphor is also used to describe scattering the people from their land (Zechariah 10:9).

28 And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.

In verse 28, the Lord assures the people of a total reversal of the calamity that previously befell them (both Israel and Judah) under His watchful eyes. Here, just as in the past when He watched the destruction of the people, the Lord will watch over them to ensure their rebuilding and replanting in their land. In the past, the Lord seemed to supervise the total destruction of the land as described by a number of action verbs—“pluck up ... break down ... to destroy, and to afflict”—but in the future, He will watch over them “to build, and to plant” them again in the land. The terrible loss of human and animal lives during the invasion of the land and the cities of the past (see Jeremiah 7:20) will be reversed in the future. Old horrors will be replaced with blessings to come.

29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

When all these things come to pass, the people would no longer have reason to complain or criticize

God's righteousness and justice, using the common adage "the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge," which they used during their suffering and exile. Unlike in the past when the people complained of being punished because of their father's sins, the future will be different (Ezekiel 18:1–4, 20–21). Instead, everyone will be responsible for his or her own acts. No more will the children pay for the sins of their fathers; nor will the fathers bear the brunt of their children's wrongdoing. But anyone who sins will be punished for his or her own iniquity since every soul belongs to God (Ezekiel 18:4).

31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.

The good news of the future is not restricted to improving the people's physical condition. The Lord promises to change His relational condition to His people. The change in relationship will focus on improving His "covenant" (Heb. berit, beh-REET) with "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Berit or "covenant" can also be rendered as "an alliance" or a "treaty between two people or a group of people"; it is more binding than a mere agreement between two people. The Hebrew verb used for "to make" a covenant is karat (Heb. kah-ROT), which in its simplest form means "to cut." This originally involved cutting of flesh (e.g., animals) and passing through the pieces. The implication of "cutting" a covenant was that whoever broke the covenant would be cut in pieces just like an animal. In some traditions such as the Igbo tribe of Nigeria, people made treaties by making a little cut in each person's finger and squeezing their blood into a cup of wine. The cup is then passed around from which each person drinks. It is strongly believed that whoever broke the covenant would die.

The Lord promises to make a new covenant with the people, which will replace the old one He had made with their forefathers when they left Egypt. The old covenant with Israel after the Exodus from Egypt refers to the Sinai covenant, also known as the Law of Moses. The problem with the old covenant is that the people did not keep it and therefore rendered it ineffective. Hence, the Lord finds it necessary to make a new covenant (see Hebrews 8:6–13).

Different translators have interpreted the phrase "although I was an husband unto them" in a number of ways. The word "husband" comes from the Hebrew word ba'al (bah-AHL), which can be rendered as a master, one who has dominion, husband, or married spouse. Hence the differences in interpretation, where other translations speak of authority and dominion or a reassertion of authority. The phrase refers to the people breaking the covenant. The word ba'al should therefore be interpreted with the idea of a "loving and caring" attitude of a husband towards his wife. The Lord uses the husband and wife metaphor to describe His loving relationship with the Children of Israel (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:16). Therefore, it makes sense to render this part of the verse as "my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them".

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The new covenant will not be the same as the old. The two have a number of differences and special features. First, while the old covenant was written on tablets of stone, the new covenant will be written in the heart; the material the covenant is written on and the content is markedly different. The tablets of stone are external, while the law written on the heart is internal (Psalm 37:31). Obedience to this covenant comes from the inside, not the outside.

This Scripture clearly states that the new covenant will not be the same as the old covenant God made with Moses (v. 32). The new covenant is what has been accomplished through Jesus as found in the New Testament (see Hebrews 12:24, 13:20). This promise points beyond the time of Jeremiah and the house of Israel; it points us to the New Testament and the Christian Gospel, fulfilled in Christ Jesus when He confirms: "This cup is the new testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). This covenant is for all those who will come to God through His Son, Jesus Christ—both Jews and Gentiles. The new covenant will bring about a relational restoration between the Lord and His people, which hitherto had been severed as a result of breaking the old covenant. Now, God says that He "will be their God, and they shall be my people."

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The second special feature of the new covenant is that because the Law would be written in their hearts, the people would have no need to teach others to know God. Until now the priests, scribes, and prophets were the custodians of the Law and so-called mediators of knowledge, but in the new covenant, the Law would be internalized in the hearts of God's people. This divine transformation of human nature will result in the personal knowledge and love of God from the least to the greatest. This means class distinction will be no more, and everyone will have equal opportunity and responsibility to know and love God. Consequently, their iniquity will be forgiven and their sin remembered no more. Just as forgiveness was incorporated in the old covenant (Leviticus 4:31, 35), forgiveness would become the cornerstone of the relationship. This prophecy is now completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ for all generations. Through Him we have forgiveness and the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us leads us and guides us into all truth (John 14:17, 16:13).

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Tuesday

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Wednesday

Jeremiah 31:10-14

Thursday

Jeremiah 31:15-20

Friday

Hosea 2:16-20

Saturday

Luke 22:14-20

Sunday

Jeremiah 31:27-34