

# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Hebrews 8:1-7, 13

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 31

**PRINTED TEXT:** Jeremiah 31:31-37

## JEREMIAH 31:31-37

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.

35 Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the

ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.

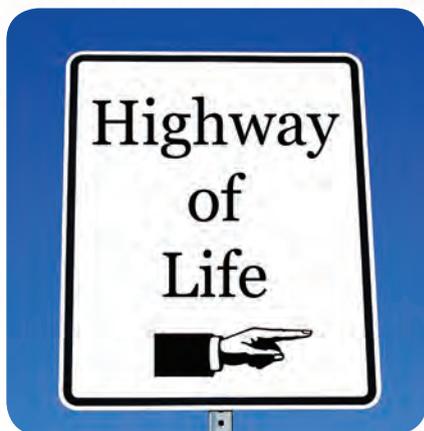


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## New Covenant Promised

The God of Israel was known as the one who kept His covenant (Deuteronomy 7:9; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4). This distinguished Him from the fictitious gods of other nations, who were fickle and might withhold blessings on a whim. God promised sure blessings in exchange for obedience to the clearly established terms of the covenant. Unfortunately, the kings and people of Israel and Judah frequently disobeyed, thereby violating the terms of the covenant.

31:31. The book of Jeremiah includes perspectives of the past, present, and future. The verse before us is clearly a look into the future. The promise of *a new covenant* might seem to have some reference to the return of the Jews from exile, since the covenant-breaking that led to their exile means that something has to change. Although God promises to establish this covenant *with the house of Israel, and . . . Judah*, the New Testament makes clear that Jeremiah's vision of the future extends far beyond the time of Jerusalem's destruction and rebuilding in the sixth century BC.

The term *new covenant* is found only here in the Old Testament, although the idea of a new or renewed covenant is found in other verses (see Isaiah 42:9, 10; Jeremiah 50:4, 5). *New covenant* is a key concept, and the verse before us is a key passage in connecting the Old Testament with the New Testament. At the last supper, Jesus used this concept to describe the significance of His coming death:

### KEY VERSE

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

“This cup is the new testament in my blood” (Luke 22:20; compare 1 Corinthians 11:25). In this sense, *covenant* and *testament* are the same idea.

32. Before God (through Jeremiah) explains the promised new covenant, He speaks of Israel's older covenant. This was the one mediated by Moses after God rescued the nation from slavery in Egypt. God upheld His side of this covenant, but the Israelites did not.

Jeremiah includes a beautiful way of describing how God originally intended this covenant relationship to be understood. The Lord is pictured as a faithful *husband unto them*, implying Israel to be His beloved wife. The point in the verse before us is that God has been a faithful husband in the covenant, but the Israelites have behaved like an unfaithful wife.

## New Covenant Described

33. Jeremiah returns to his discussion of God's covenant to come. In so doing, he shifts to an image of the future by telling the reader that he is passing along something that will be realized *after those days*. In that regard, he reveals the second of the Lord's “I will” promises: *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*.

These words describe a vivid contrast with the old law, which is written on stones and parchment (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13; etc.). God intended that the old law should make its way into hearts (Deuteronomy 32:46; Psalm 37:31; etc.), but that never seemed to happen for the vast majority of Israelites.

The third “I will” statement is seen here (compare Jeremiah 30:22 from last week's lesson). This is to be the essence of the new covenant as it was intended to be with the old. Under the new covenant, God creates a people for himself by writing His law on their

hearts and in their minds in calling them out of spiritual bondage to sin rather than out of a physical bondage in Egypt. He calls people into the marvelous light of knowledge of Him and relationship with Him (2 Corinthians 4:6).

34. What will personal relationships be like in the new covenant? Jeremiah presents a perfect state of affairs: no one is needed to teach a knowledge of the Lord because all (*from the least of them unto the greatest*) already have that knowledge.

This verse features the fourth and fifth “I will” statements of the Lord. Some students question whether it is possible for God to delete certain of His memories in order to *remember their sin no more*. We can better understand if we consider these two “I will” statements as parallel: for God, “forgiving” and “not remembering” are the same thing. He no longer holds our sins against us.

### New Covenant’s Permanence

35. Having contrasted the old and new covenants to explain how people will relate to God, Jeremiah now begins describing the new covenant’s permanence. Its permanence is based on the fact that the maker of the covenant is none other than the Creator of the universe. The phrase *the Lord of hosts* is the Hebrew expression “Lord of Sabaoth,” which literally means “the Lord of the heavenly hosts of armies” (see Romans 9:29; James 5:4). We are reminded here of the line “Lord Sabaoth, his Name, from age to age the same” from Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

To reflect on the creation of sun, moon, stars, and sea is to reflect on the eternal nature of God as Creator. Jeremiah also underlines the continuing orderliness of God’s creation. God is in control, even when our lives are chaotic and don’t seem to make sense.

36. The text notes the orderliness of God’s creation to undergird a promise: the likelihood of God’s abandoning *the seed of Israel* is as likely as His allowing the orderliness of nature’s patterns to vanish. It is like saying, “Just as you can depend on the sun continuing to shine, you can depend on me to remember Israel—and that is forever.”

37. The Lord’s commitment to Israel is now illustrated in another way. God promises that the day when humans are able to measure the *heaven above* and search out *the foundations of the earth* is when He will renege on His covenant relationship with *the seed of Israel*. We may think that such measurements are possible in our scientific, technological age. But if science has taught us anything, it is that the universe is impossible to measure and its size is beyond human comprehension.

When we read the new covenant promises in light of the eternity of God, the Lord Almighty, we have the complete picture of an eternal people of God. They accept His offer to write His laws on their hearts; they accept His promise of forgiveness of sins through Jesus. There will never again be a need to send God’s people into exile to punish them and cure them of sinful idolatry. The new covenant is the final covenant, and this is the covenant Christians embrace today.

## CENTRAL THOUGHT

The New Testament depends on the foundation of the Old Testament to make its claims. It is the sacrificial system of the old covenant that allows us to understand the atoning death of Jesus—a central doctrine of the Christian faith.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

### Covenant Contrasts

Read the lesson Scripture, Jeremiah 31:31-37. For each verse, indicate whether the text is describing the old covenant or the new covenant. In the chart, place an O for old covenant; N for new covenant.

Once you complete the chart, answer the questions below about the new covenant.

Verse	O or N?
31	
32	
33	
34	
35	
36	
37	

1. Who drew up the terms of the covenant?

2. Why was a new covenant necessary?

3. Where is God's law to be written under the terms of the new covenant?

4. What changes in the way people "know the Lord" under the new covenant?

5. What is the sign of God's assurance that He will keep His promises?

6. How does all this give you confidence?

### Covenant Cautions

1. What are the dangers of falling back into old covenant thinking, speaking, and behaving?

2. How can doing so damage our relationship with others? with God?

3. What can you do this week to renew your covenant relationship with God?