

THE POWER OF THE NEW COVENANT

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Context of Jeremiah 31—explain it by beginning with my discipline of Joy and Joe.

SCRIPTURE—Jeremiah 31:³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Richard Pratt, adjunct professor at Reformed Theological Seminary: The expression “the days are coming” in 31:31 also refers to the time when the exile would be finished and God’s people would return to the Promised Land. Isaiah 54:10, as well as Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26, describe this covenant as a “covenant of peace.” From the perspective of Old Testament prophecy, God would establish this covenant at the end of Israel’s exile with the arrival of the Messiah and the worldwide kingdom of God.

Meaning: The word “covenant” means an “agreement”.

❖ **Jeremiah 31:31**, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...

Observation: If you observe the covenants in the Bible—such as Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, even the New Covenant—it is **always God who took the initiation and not the people.**

- The New Covenant is the Last Covenant of God recorded in the Holy Bible.

Why the promise of the New Covenant?

PART I. THE FAILURE OF THE OLD COVENANT

A. THE GIVING OF THE OLD COVENANT

SCRIPTURE—Jeremiah 31:³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² **not like the covenant that I**

made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...

Deuteronomy 4:9-14 summarizes the giving of the covenant in Exodus 19:

- ❖ Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children— how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.' And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. **AND HE DECLARED TO YOU HIS COVENANT, WHICH HE COMMANDED YOU TO PERFORM, THAT IS, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, AND HE WROTE THEM ON TWO TABLETS OF STONE. AND THE LORD COMMANDED ME AT THAT TIME TO TEACH YOU STATUTES AND RULES,** that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.
- ❖ **Leviticus 20:22**, “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

B. THE BREAKING OF THE OLD COVENANT

SCRIPTURE—Jeremiah 31:³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, **my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.**

- ❖ **Jeremiah 3:20**, Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 7:21-26 summarizes the history of Israel’s disobedience to God’s covenant,

- ❖ Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’ **But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they**

did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

Again, Jeremiah 11:1-8 describes Israel's disobedience to God's covenant,

- ❖ The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: **Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you.** So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day." Then I answered, "So be it, Lord."

And the Lord said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: **Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart.** Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not."

Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright: Israel was not just an occasional disobedient child, or a sporadically (*sometimes*) flirtatious wife. They had shown a persistent, willful and incorrigible (*impossible to change*) determination to disregard the covenant requirements of Yahweh and an unstoppable downward drift towards, and sinking below, the levels of wickedness to be found among the non-covenant nations. The problem lay not just in their behavior, but in the source of their behavior—the attitudes and mentality that characterized them. In short, the problem was in their 'heart' and 'spirit'.

Application: The same is true about us. If God would not change our hearts, consider how rebellious and wicked our nature is!

C. THE ANNULMENT OF THE OLD COVENANT

SCRIPTURE—Jeremiah 31:³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...**

In these words, God expresses the annulment of the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Law), which the author of Hebrews confirms its fulfillment in Christ Jesus (the longest quotation cited of any Old Testament text):

- ❖ **Hebrews 8:6-13**, But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” **(cited from Jeremiah 31:31-34)**

v.13, In speaking of a new covenant, **he makes the first one obsolete**. And what is becoming **obsolete** and **growing old** is ready to **vanish away**.

⇒ **Obsolete**: No longer in use. But it served its purpose during its time.

Paul too confirms the annulment of the Old Covenant (Law) in the book of Romans:

- ❖ **Romans 7:1-6**, Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Note: The failure of the Old Covenant doesn't mean the Old Covenant itself was weak. It means that people were too weak and didn't have the ability to keep it.

Old Testament scholar J. A. Thompson: “They had not merely refused to obey the law or to acknowledge Yahweh's complete and sole sovereignty, but were incapable of such obedience.”

When people couldn't keep the Mosaic law, then why did God give the law?

- ❖ **Galatians 3:19**, Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions (i.e. to show the sinfulness of man), **until the offspring [Christ] should come** to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.
- ❖ **Galatians 3:24**, So then, **the law was our guardian until Christ came**, in order that we might be justified by faith.
 - **Guardian:** Not an instructor but supervising the child, like bringing the child to and fro from school.

Second Helvetic Confession (written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1562), Ch. 7; Sec. 4: This law was not given to men that they might be justified by keeping it, but that rather from what it teaches we may know (our) weakness, sin and condemnation, and, despairing of our strength, might be converted to Christ in faith.

Note: In the next sermon, we will see how Christ fulfills the New Covenant promise.