

NEW and Improved!

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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based on a message from an unknown author

"Hay, what's new?" It's one of those questions we ask to jump start a conversation. What's new? New is different. New is exciting. New is full of promise. A fresh start. Free from the past. New clothes. A new car. A new job. A new coat of paint. Out with the old, in with the new. The latest style, the current fashion. New means shiny. Alive. Happening.

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." A new covenant. What's new with the new covenant? Is it new and improved? And what's wrong with the Old Covenant? Why do we need a new one? Why not just stick with the old?

Exodus 24 *Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ... Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken **we will do.**"*

Moses ... rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord.

*... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken **we will do**, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold **the blood of the covenant** that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

Leviticus 26 *"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ... And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*

*... "But if you will NOT listen to me ... if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but **break** my covenant, then I will ... visit you with panic, with wasting disease ... I will set my face against you ... and I will scatter you among the nations ... and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.*

Deuteronomy 27 *That day Moses charged the people, saying, "When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to **BLESS** the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the **CURSE**: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice:*

Deuteronomy 28 *"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God ... all these **blessings** shall come upon you ... Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle ... "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you.*

*... "But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these **curses** shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. ... Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground ... "The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.*

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Why a new covenant? What's wrong with the old? The problem with the old covenant is that it was broken. Smashed to pieces by Israel's repeated rebellion.

They broke the commandments, God's holy will for His holy people. Commands that set them apart unto God. They misused His name. They put work ahead of worship. They were rebellious, dishonoring their parents. Dishonoring their rulers. They murdered. They were sexually immoral. They stole property from the less fortunate. They told lies about each other, and gossiped, and slandered one another.

Why didn't God's people keep the covenant they promised to keep? Like us, the problem wasn't just in their *actions*, it was in their **hearts**. There was a problem in their hearts. Their hearts were restless, full of anger, lust, greed. They were never satisfied with God and all that He provided for them. They always wanted *more*. New and improved. And they were willing to do whatever it took to get it. As *many* ways as the old covenant *could* have been broken, Israel broke it.

The Scriptures describe Israel as a **wayward wife** who abandons her faithful husband. "*Though I was a husband to them,*" God says, "*they broke my covenant.*" Broke their marriage vows. God had taken His people by the hand. Brought them out of Egypt. Freed them from slavery. Fed them in the wilderness. He had walked with them in cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. He set up the tent, the tabernacle, to dwell with them. God was like a husband to Israel, and Israel was like a bride to Him.

Unfortunately, Israel was more like the runaway bride of the prophet Hosea than the faithful wife. She ran after her lovers. She fell into the arms of any god who promised something new and exciting. And so, the marriage between God and His people was over. The covenant had been broken; the marriage destroyed.

That's what *you* do when you sin. It's not just that you're breaking God's *law*, you're breaking God's *heart*. When you sin - in deed, in word, in thought - it's like you're running off with someone else. That's what your sin is like to God. It breaks His heart! It should break *your* heart as well.

As good as the old covenant was, *it wasn't meant to last forever*. It couldn't. Israel couldn't keep its end of the covenant. Neither can you. Spend a little time each day reviewing the ten commandments and you'll quickly see what I mean. Try loving God and loving your neighbor - in deed, in word, and in thought - always. Trying to follow all the rules and regulations in the world doesn't seem to help. Something else is needed.

It takes a *change of heart*. But how does that happen? How do you change your heart? You can't, any more than you can give yourself a heart transplant. God must do it. As Jesus put it to Nicodemus, you must be "born again." Born from above. *Born of God*. Your heart of stone must be broken, crushed by the hammer of God's law, so that He can give you a new heart. A heart that falls in love with Him.

In his devotional "My utmost for His highest" (March 12), Oswald Chambers writes, "*Peter began to say to him, 'See, we have left everything and followed you.'*" (Mark 10:28) Our Lord replies in effect, that abandonment is for *Himself*, and not for what the disciples themselves will get from it. Beware of an abandonment which has the commercial spirit in it - "I am going to give myself to God because I want to be delivered from sin, because I want to be made holy." ... Abandonment is not for anything at all. We have got so commercialized that we only go to God for something *from* Him, and not for *Himself*."

New hearts call for a **NEW COVENANT**, a new marriage, a new way of relating. Gone are the rules and regulations written on stone tablets. Instead God says, "I will put my Torah, my Word, in their minds and write it on their hearts." We have a tendency to play head against heart. God doesn't. He wants ALL of you - your thoughts, your feelings, your desires, your will. God claims your head *and* your heart with His Word.

He's going to put His Word in our heads to *conform* our minds and our thinking to His mind. He's going to write His Word on our *hearts* to shape our wills according to His will. His scribe, His secretary, is the Holy Spirit, who takes the Word and delivers it to us. His pen is the preached Word, the Word of forgiveness in Christ banging into your eardrums, delivering Christ crucified to you. God is literally putting **JESUS** in our heads, and Jesus on our hearts. And He does it through our ears by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word.

A new covenant means a **NEW RELATIONSHIP**. "*I will be their God, and they will be my people.*" "*Once you were not a people,*" said Peter. (1 Peter 2) "*Now you are God's people.*" "*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.*" Because of Jesus, we have identity. We know to whom we belong. We are the Lord's, and He is our God.

When we don't know our identity, when we don't know who we are or to whom we belong, we wander through life aimlessly, unfocused. We keep making wrong choices. We wander after other things, other gods, to find meaning and purpose, to find our identity. And we seek and seek and seek and never find. We go through life *lost*. God gives us an identity in Jesus. He permits us to say, "I belong to Christ. He is my God, and I am one of His. HE is my life. HE is my identity. As the Apostle Paul put it, *to live is CHRIST!*"

A new covenant means **A NEW WAY OF KNOWING GOD**. "*No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*" We no longer need to say, "Know the Lord," for the Lord has made Himself known to us. He has come to us in His Son Jesus. In

John 14 Philip says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father" Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

A new covenant means **FORGIVENESS**. "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." God will not remember our sins. Instead He remembers His Son, how He made Jesus to be sin for us, and therefore declares us free of sin, righteous because of what Jesus did for us through His death and resurrection. That's what He remembers. He remembers that we are *His*, and He remembers our sins no more!

"New and improved!" Too often, that phrase doesn't live up to its promise. It's only a slogan to get you to spend your money on something that's not really that different from the original. But when it comes to God's Covenant, NEW really is IMPROVED, for it's based on better promises. Not ours, but God's.

Hebrews 7 ... a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. ... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Hebrews 8 ... 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: (quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34) "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 ..." 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**.

As good as the old covenant was, it wasn't meant to last forever. It couldn't. And so, the rules and regulations that governed the Israelites under the Old Covenant, especially their ceremonial and civil laws, are no longer binding today. They were part of the Old Covenant. That covenant was broken long gone. Their marriage under the Old Covenant was beyond repair.

God has established a NEW covenant, a *New Testament*. What's new about the New Covenant? In a word, **JESUS!** Jesus is what's new. Never before had God done such a thing as become man, keep the Law perfectly, die under the Law, give His blood to establish a lasting covenant, and rise from the dead! As Jesus said concerning himself, "for this is **my blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:28) When you say JESUS, you're saying what's new of the New Covenant!

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2)