

## **Jeremiah 30:1-31:40; Highlight: 31:31-34**

### **Introduction:**

Today's passage is so special that we heard it twice! Once from Jeremiah, once from Hebrews.

And if we opened our New Testaments, we could see it way more than twice. This passage--the promises made in it--are ones that the authors of the New Testament claim, because they are ones that Jesus himself claimed.

It's difficult to talk about this passage, for me, because as I was preparing I thought of, like, 4 different messages I could easily give, and I'm sure there'd be, like, other pastors who'd, harumph, "Only four, well. Hmm. Weak sauce!"

### **Clear:**

Let me be as clear as I can. In today's passage God promises that there will be a new covenant with Israel. It's not going to be like the Mosaic Covenant. It's going to be different. God says:

***"I will put my law in their minds  
and write it on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.  
No longer will they teach their neighbor,  
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'***

***because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,”  
declares the Lord.  
“For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more.”***

God promises that the Law, Torah, which was meant to guide God’s covenant People, these People who God has a marriage-like relationship with, full of obligations and promises, God will “put [God’s] law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” This “New Covenant” will move the obligations that mark God’s Covenant People, Israel, from external to internal. What marks the covenant people won’t be the law, but the law within them. Their way of life will be driven from inside, not outside.

We talk about the New Testament and the Old Testament all the time. Testament, as we use it here in this weird, unique way, is basically a synonym for “Covenant.” Christians are God’s People by way of the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant. The New Testament is the collection of books that bears witness to this New Covenant, and those books bear authoritative witness to Jesus, because Jesus is the one around whom the New Covenant was inaugurated.

The New Testament centers around Jesus death and resurrection in part because of Jesus’ own statement on what happened in his death and resurrection. We read in

Luke,

***“And [Jesus] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 2And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”*”**

This is foundational stuff. Jesus’ death inaugurated the New Covenant that Jeremiah looked forward to. His resurrection confirmed it. And when he sent the Spirit to any of us who trust in his death and resurrection, it’s the Spirit that marks us as Covenant People internally, a “law in our minds, written on our hearts,” which helps us to live up to our marriage-like obligations as Christians.

### ***Obligations & Paul:***

These obligations are huge, just like marriage vows are huge, but they are also super reasonable and warranted in the covenant-relationship we have with God. To be in this New Covenant relationship obligates us to a certain way of living. Which is why whenever Paul brings up this New Covenant language he uses it as a warrant for our ethical living.

So, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul quotes what Jesus just said, he uses it as a reason why the Corinthians

shouldn't have big communion parties where rich people feast and poor people don't get anything to eat. New Covenant People don't live that way; that's not Spirit-driven. In 2 Corinthians 6, when Paul quotes Jeremiah, he does it for the same reason: New Covenant People are supposed to act a certain way. We have received the promises of God--even when we Gentiles didn't expect to! And so, Paul says, "Therefore, since we have these promises...let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." So Paul wants to continually remind us: Our Spirit-guided, Christ-like behavior, which should naturally arise if we really trust in Jesus' faithfulness, it's a sign of our New Covenant membership.

The author of Hebrews will end up in a similar place, but not without making all sorts of points along the way.

And you know how some sermons are, like, meant to inspire, right? Meant to kindle some flame in us to act or live or do a certain thing. Today's isn't that. Today's is Bible Study. Because I want us to understand how the author of Hebrews--whoever he was, we only have guesses--how the author of Hebrews understands the way Jesus brought the New Covenant to the world. And, look, it's a little different from Paul's understanding, although not incompatible at all. Hebrews is a book we don't read enough from, and part of that, I think, is because the argument it makes is just so

culturally and historically removed from us it's weird.

Let's pray, and move forward.

### ***Prayer:***

### ***Hebrews:***

Some of Hebrews was read to us. We saw that it lifts up the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah almost in full. And I want to talk about why.

### ***Starting Block:***

The author of Hebrews--we don't know who it was, although his Greek is the best in the Bible--starts by telling us that "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." He's talking to Jewish Christians, Greek Jewish Christians, who had their quirks, one of which was that Moses was, like, especially awesome. Some educated, Greek, Jewish Christian elite minority.

From the get-go, we realize we're being persuaded here. Hebrews has a point: Back then, long ago, God did stuff: but now Jesus has appeared, who is, in some mysterious way, God. And the stuff he's recently done overwhelms the stuff done back then.

And really quickly Hebrews begins to talk about how Moses, who all we Greek Jewish Christians think is so great, because he brought us the Law & enables us to draw close to God, is second to Jesus, has to be because Jesus is God's Son, an heir in God's House, while Moses was simply a faithful servant in God's house. "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." House, here, is code for Temple: Jesus is as better than Moses as the God is to the Temple. Temple and Moses are great; but they don't have anything on Jesus and God.

Hebrews goes on to remind us that our ancestors maybe weren't as awesome as we remember them: they rebelled against God over and over as Moses led them out of Egypt. A whole generation of people died. And Hebrews is, like, creating tension, you know? "Man! My physical ancestors barely cut the mustard; I'm wishy-washy about this whole Jesus thing right now anyway. What should I do?"

We better, as Hebrews suggests, "pay greater attention to what we have heard,"--about Jesus--"so that we do not drift away from it." What we've heard, or even seen are these "signs & wonders and various miracles...gifts of the Holy Spirit," and all the things Jesus said & did.

And we quickly realize that H. is worried we are going to drift away, drift back to things that we had left behind: Moses and Torah and the rites and practices that kept me faithful to the covenant before Jesus showed up. Hebrews is scared we're going to turn away from this New Covenant stuff and run back to the Old Covenant stuff we know so

well. Hebrews makes it really clear: Pay attention to Jesus, pay attention to Jesus, because he's the only way to enter what he calls "the sabbath rest of God," something even our hero Moses was looking forward to.

The end of Chapter Four is just like, straight up warning:

***11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by...disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***

Oh God! I mean. Yikes! We proof text this passage to talk about how the Bible is important; Hebrews--I should just call him brews, "bruiser"--Bruiser used this verse to scare his audience into listening to him.

And so we're sitting here, with this mindset, feeling a little anxious and a little fearful, panicking, really, because we're going to have to give an account to God, and thinking about how we've been acting recently, and the temptation we've probably had to ditch this New Covenant life and take back up our Old Covenant Torah living.

### ***Complex Argument:***

And then, this promise of judgment ringing in our ears, H. goes into a really complex, beautiful--if you're a nerd--argument that in really lasts the rest of the book. Here it is:

### ***The Argument:***

Jesus is a high priest. We see this from the middle of Chapter four to the start of Chapter 5.

Jesus is a special sort of high priest; “A priest forever, according the order of Melchizedek.” (cf. 5:5-10ish) We’ll talk about this fella in a “zecond.”

Don’t forget that all God’s people came from Abraham; he’s our father, our “patriarch.” (cf. 6:13ff) Or as I like to call him, our “origin-daddy.”

Melchizedek was a “priest of the most high God,” to whom Abraham had to pay tribute; so he must have been more important than Abraham--because who pays a tithe to somebody less important than them?! (cf. 7:1-10ish) The answer is *nobody*, of course!

Plus, Melchizedek blessed Abraham; and who blesses someone less important than them?! (cf. 7:1-10ish) Again: nobody! Geez! We all know this! "It is beyond dispute the inferior is blessed by the superior," Hebrews says. Okay!

Plus, Levites--who descend from Abraham--sort of paid tithes to Melchizedek, too, since Abraham their ancestor did! (cf. 7:4-10ish) I mean, kind of! And Levites, of course are the ones the law depends on; the Temple System depends on. And so we who are kind of ready to bail on this New Covenant thing, we know that the Old one depended entirely on the Levites. So this is persuasive to us. And Hebrews makes it clear for us:

There are actually two “priestly orders”: Melchizedek’s--that priest who was better than Abraham, you know--and the Levitical one we’re all familiar with. But when Jesus showed up, the Levitical one we’ve been rolling with is out. It is simply no longer relevant. (cf. 7:11-16ish) And because of this, well, Hebrews calls up Psalm 110, which reads, “

***“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”***

And Hebrews goes on to talk about why the Old Covenant just can't stand anymore.

***18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.***

***20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:***

***“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”***

***22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.***

Are we all together so far? Earlier, he said that “For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a

change in the law as well.” That Old Covenant just doesn’t exist anymore; there’s a new High Priest, and a new Covenant, and the Law is, as Jeremiah would say, in us, not outside us.

But beyond this, Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is not only “priest” but also “sacrifice.” A one-time sacrifice, and a never-ending priest because he’s resurrected and in the presence of God! (cf. 9:23-28ish).

And because of this, the levitical, Temple-based system (“the law”) is, like, doubly-invalid: We don’t need anymore sacrifices or anymore Levitical priests; it’s a double-whammy. (cf. 10:1-11ish). The Old Covenant is not an option anymore; it’s doubly-negated. But we don’t have to get all anxious, and worried about how we’ll be pleasing to God & keep the relationship we have with God, because we’ve been forgiven and we’ve been given the Holy Spirit. (cf. 10:14-18ish)

And H. says that because of all this--we read in 10:19-25--because of all this, well, Hebrews says:

***19 Therefore, [brothers and sisters], since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is***

***faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.***

Hebrews throws every single thing he can at these Greek Jewish Christians to get them to realize that the Old Covenant is not just Old, but gone. It's been replaced entirely by the New Covenant, mediated by Jesus, who is God who is a High Priest better than the Old Covenant priests, who sacrificed himself and, now resurrected, just doesn't need to do all that stuff the Levites had to do. He is, as Hebrews puts it, "the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."

***Summary:***

So Jesus is a special sort of high priest; Don't forget that all God's people came from Abraham; he's our father, our "patriarch." (cf. 6:13ff) Or as I like to call him, our "origin-daddy."

So. Melchizedek was a "priest of the most high God," to whom Abraham, our forefather, had to pay tribute, who blessed Abraham our forefather. So he must have been more important than Abraham. Torah, the Old Covenant God made with Israel, it was arranged by Abraham's descendants, too, the Levites, and is maintained by them.

So there are actually two "priestly orders": Melchizedek's--

that priest who was better than Abraham, you know--and the Levitical one we're all familiar with. But Jesus is "A priest forever"--that is, undying--"according the order of Melchizedek." And those Levites? Even they sort of paid tithes to Melchizedek, by virtue of being Abraham's descendants. When Jesus showed up, and reasserted the priesthood of Melchizedek, established a New Covenant, the Levitical one we've been rolling with is out. It is simply no longer relevant. (cf. 7:11-16ish) And because of this, "Jesus [is] the guarantor [that is, sustainer, enabler] of a better covenant. That Old Covenant just doesn't exist anymore; there's a new High Priest, and a new Covenant, and the Law is, as Jeremiah would say, in us, not outside us.

And because Jesus died as a one-time sacrifice, but is a never-ending priest, on account of his resurrection, the Temple and Torah system is like, doubly-nullified. It's just not an option anymore for covenant membership. The New Covenant is all there is, and Hebrews audience, if they try to retreat to the familiarity of the Old Covenant, will find there's no "there" there.

### ***Compelling:***

Here's what I find really, really compelling:

By very different paths, both the author of Hebrews and Paul end up saying that this New Covenant ought to motivate our character. "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works," Hebrews writes. In another place we read, as Hebrews tries to calm down the anxiety he's caused his audience, "We are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have

shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (6:9-12).”

Paul and the author of Hebrews completely believe that this New Covenant isn't just a thing that Jesus happened to usher in, it's a thing that ushers us into a new way of being God's People, and the old way, the Old Covenant, is no longer a way anyone can follow.

God's promise through Jeremiah was realized in Jesus, and we are God's People. But God's People, partners in this New Covenant, are meant to be a certain kind of people who do certain kind of things.

### ***Conclusions:***

So many conversations on the relationship between the Old and New Covenants leave behind practical living and focus on mechanics of salvation. But Paul and the author of Hebrews inevitably end up in practical matters. To be New Covenant people is to become like Jesus who mediated, as Hebrews puts it--inaugurated, as Jesus himself put it--the

Jesus' death inaugurated the New Covenant that Jeremiah looked forward to. His resurrection confirmed it. And when he sent the Spirit to any of us who trust in his death and resurrection, it's the Spirit that marks us as Covenant People internally, a "law in our minds, written on our hearts," which helps us to live up to our marriage-like obligations as Christians.

And those obligations are Christ-shaped. Jesus is the heart of everything for us, you know?

I want us to be in awe that this promise of Jeremiah worked itself out in ways no one expected. I want us to realize how deeply gracious God is that we've been brought into this New Covenant relationship with God, marked by our trust in Christ and empowered by the Spirit to live New Covenant lives. But I also want us to see that living New Covenant lives is kinda the point. So...let's live them.