

“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. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “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.

³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘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.” (NIV 84)

Theme: The New and Better

1. The Old Covenant Condemns
2. The New Covenant Saves

It might come as a surprise to those of you who are younger, but newer isn't always better. Many people over 20 will say that the music when they were growing up is far superior to the music being put out today mostly because of a lack of originality and musical ability. It used to be that many things like appliances were built to last, and if they broke down, you were able to fix them yourself. But things are made with cheaper material now. And you can't fix them yourself, you need to call a repair man, but even then, it's probably not even worth money—you might as well buy a new one. New laws and regulations are passed on a regular basis, but they often cause more problems than they were meant to fix. Newer isn't always better.

But—and this might come as a surprise to many older people, newer usually is better. There is a reason why new things are made on a daily basis. Styles change, the old gets rundown, technology advances, and safety requirements improve.

Today we'll talk about something old and new—The Old and New Covenants. The New is far superior to the Old. So much so that the Old is made obsolete by the New.

The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. They were oppressed by the Pharaohs and the other Egyptians. So God sent plagues upon the land. The last one, the death of the firstborn and the Passover, forced Pharaoh to finally allow the Israelites to leave. And when Pharaoh changed his mind after he saw all of his free labor walk out of the country, he went after them. And when it seemed as if they would all be captured or killed, God drowned the world's most powerful army in the Red Sea. God saved the Israelites.

He gave the Israelites their freedom. And now he was leading them to take control of the land of Canaan—the Promised Land. He gave his people food and water throughout their time in the wilderness. He guarded and protected them against their enemies, and won victories for them in times of war. The Lord gave the Israelites everything. Not long into their time in the wilderness, the Lord entered into a covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. This was the Old Covenant—given through Moses and was based on the laws and commands that he gave through Moses. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. A covenant goes like this: If you keep your end of the bargain, I'll keep mine. But if you fail to keep it, the deal is off and you will have to face the consequences.

God explained to the Israelites this covenant many times. In Deuteronomy 28 we read, **If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God...However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.** In other words, if you obey these commands you will be blessed and live, but if you do not obey them I will punish you and you will be condemned.

And of course we know what happened. The Israelites threw it all away. When they got into the Promised Land they failed to fully defeat and drive out the pagan countries from their land—even intermarrying with them. Soon they fell into the worship of false gods. They rejected the one true God and failed to obey his commands. And so God punished his children for rejecting him. By the time of Jeremiah, Israel, the Northern Kingdom had already been destroyed by

Assyria. Jeremiah warned the leaders and people of Judah again and again that they would be taken into exile if they did not turn from their sinful ways.

And make no mistake, we are no different than the Jews. If it would have been us, we would have done the same thing. That's the thing with the Old Covenant. It condemns. Not because of some major flaw in the covenant itself, but because of a major flaw in those who are to be keeping the covenant—us. Because of our sinful nature we aren't able to keep God's commands perfectly. Try as we might, numerous times a day we fail to obey his commands. We can't live up to the level of perfection that God demand of us in the Old Covenant—we can't hold up our end of the bargain. And so we deserve to be punished—to be condemned for eternity.

We see, then, that the Old Covenant condemns. A new one is needed.

And that is exactly what the Lord promised. The Lord was faithful to his people, but they weren't faithful to him—they went after other gods. They failed to keep their end of the agreement. So what did God do? He promised to lead them back from exile after 70 years. And, looking further into the future, he also promised to usher in a New Covenant, which would make the Old Covenant obsolete. The New Covenant is the opposite of the Old. The Old demanded that we keep God's commands, and if we didn't we would be punished. But the New Covenant is that Christ kept all of God's commands perfectly for us. We don't have to worry about trying to obey God's commands but failing. Because Christ's perfect life is credited to us. The Old Covenant condemns, but the New Covenant saves. For it is the agreement that he has saved us through his life, suffering, and death. And this New Covenant comes to us through the gospel and is received only through faith in him.

And it's hard to talk about the New Covenant without also mentioning the Lord's Supper. Remember how Jesus said about the cup, **this is my blood of the New Covenant**. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives us his true body and blood—the very things he shed on the cross to usher in the New Covenant. So in the Lord's Supper we receive the forgiveness of sins.

Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant. Jesus, as our High Priest is the Mediator of the New Covenant. The Writer to the

Hebrews is comparing Jesus to the High Priests of the Old Testament when he said, **the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.**

But what did most of the Jews do with Jesus? They rejected him. They failed to believe in him as the Promised Messiah. They had been waiting for Christ to come for thousands of years, but when he did come they didn't want anything to do with him. They handed Jesus over to be crucified. He suffered much at the hands of the chief priests and teachers of the law. And where are they today? Where are the children of Israel today? No longer the children of God. That New Covenant that God had so graciously made with them—they didn't want any part of it.

What about you? What is God's New Covenant to you? At times we may treat it as the Jews. Not that we reject Christ outright like many of the Jews did with his New Covenant, but it's often that we don't seem to care all that much. We know God's grace, we see this gift he has given us in his son, but we often pass by the gospel without giving it much of a thought. Like the Israelites who failed to drive out the pagan countries around them and soon began to join in their sinful practices, we like to hang out and be friends with unbelievers. And before you know it the things of this world become more and more important, God and his word become less important—less a part of your life; and you begin to join in their sinful practices. We act as if Christ and his gospel are really not all that important.

But we see again what the New Covenant is. The bottom line of the New Covenant is explained at the end of our text. **I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.** We are wicked, miserable sinners. And yet the Lord forgives us. He releases us of our sins, he wipes them away. He paid the price for our sins on the cross as he suffered their eternal consequences in our place. Through the blood of Christ we have been made clean and pure.

And he won't again remember our sins. Not that God can't literally remember anything that we have done wrong. Of course that is not the case, he knows everything we have ever done—he never forgets. And yet, by his grace, he doesn't hold them against us. We won't be condemned for what we have done wrong. He won't bring them up years down the line, looking for retribution or payment. As far as he is

concerned we never even committed those sins because he has declared us not guilty.

That is the New Covenant—the new agreement God made with his people. Just the fact that God would enter into an agreement with us—so that he would have to keep it, is a gift of his grace. And the agreement he made is this—that he will send his son to live a perfect life for us, to suffer and die in our place, and rise from the dead to give us the sure hope of eternal life. And it is through faith in him that we receive this wonderful gift through no work of our own. This one-sided agreement, a unilateral covenant is a big deal. We do care about it.

So don't turn aside from this New Covenant. Embrace it, run toward it. In these remaining days of lent, and beyond—follow after Christ and the New Covenant, the forgiveness of sins, of which he is the Mediator. Get into the Word daily. Receive the Lord's Supper. And through faith in him your sins will be forgiven and they will be remembered no more.

Sometimes new isn't better. But that is not the case here. We couldn't hold up our end of the deal so the Old Covenant does nothing but condemn. But the New Covenant does not depend on us. Christ kept the law perfectly for us so that we would be saved. Through him the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is ours. Amen.