



3

God's New Covenant

Key Theme

- God's plan of redemption was in place before time.

Key Passages

- Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 9:11–15

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Contrast the Old and New Covenants.
- Describe the change that happens when God saves someone.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Write on the board, "Why was the New Covenant necessary?"

- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student



Studying God's Word

God's prophet Jeremiah told the people about the New Covenant God would one day establish. It would be very different and much better than the Old Covenant in several ways.

- Go Before the Throne.

- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity: Jesus Is Better

Students will examine several passages in Hebrews that point to how Jesus is better than the Old Covenant.

- Student Guides

- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

God made a covenant with the children of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments, the tablets of stone, were the very essence of that covenant—the Old Covenant (Exodus 34:27–29; Deuteronomy 9:9–11). And the Sabbath was the sign of the covenant (Exodus 31:12–17), just as circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:9–14). This Old Covenant is also referred to as the Mosaic Covenant (because of Moses’s involvement).

The Old Covenant was meant to instruct the people how to live to the honor and glory of God. It included many laws the people were commanded to keep—not only the Ten Commandments but also specific laws on how to live with one another and with the nations around them. It included the exacting laws of worshipping God through Sabbaths, tithes, offerings, and sacrifices. God promised to make Israel a nation that He would treasure if they would obey His commands (Exodus 19:4–8). They failed . . . miserably. For this failure to keep God’s commands and worship Him alone, He had sent them into captivity.

As the time of the Messiah was drawing near, God revealed through Jeremiah a glimpse of the New Covenant that would be established between God and His people (Jeremiah 31:31). Jeremiah revealed that in this New Covenant, God’s law would be written in the minds and on the hearts of the people. The people would know God, and God would forgive them and no longer remember their sin (Jeremiah 31:32–34). This New Covenant, written not on stone but on the hearts of believers, was made possible only by Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Old Covenant through His perfect obedience and introduced the New Covenant by the shedding of His own blood so that sinners could be forgiven.

God made connections between the Old and New Covenants in the book of Hebrews. For example, the New Covenant is described as “better.” Jesus is a *better* deliverer than Moses (Hebrews 3:5–6); Jesus is a *better* High Priest (Hebrews 4:15, 5:1–3); Jesus is a *better* sacrifice (Hebrews 10:12–14); and the New Covenant is made with *better* promises (Hebrews 8:6).

More contrasts between these covenants can be found in the Scriptures. They include: the Tabernacle—earthly Tabernacle versus heavenly Tabernacle; the

sacrificial system—many sacrifices versus the perfect and final sacrifice; the mediator—temporary mediator high priest versus the eternal Mediator and perfect High Priest.

Covenant Contrasts in Hebrews Chapters 9 and 10

| Old Covenant | New Covenant |
|--|---|
| High priests who sinned and had to offer sacrifices for their own sins (Hebrews 9:7) | Jesus, the perfect, sinless, eternal High Priest (Hebrews 9:11) |
| An earthly Tabernacle made with hands (Hebrews 9:11) | A perfect heavenly Tabernacle not made with hands (Hebrews 9:11) |
| Offered the blood of bulls and goats to temporarily cover sin (Hebrews 10:3–4) | A spotless, perfect sacrifice to fully redeem people from their sin (Hebrews 10:12) |
| Sacrifices that had to be constantly offered (Hebrews 10:11) | Jesus’s perfect sacrifice offered once for all (Hebrews 10:12–13) |
| High priests as the temporary mediator (Hebrews 9:7) | Jesus Christ as the eternal Mediator (Hebrews 9:15) |

Jesus is the foundation of the new and eternal covenant. This covenant cannot be broken. Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaimed this New Covenant to the Jews about 600 years before Jesus would introduce it through His perfect, sinless sacrifice. Jesus Christ is the eternal Mediator between God and man. He was the final sacrifice made once and for all for the remission of sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). The blood of bulls and goats sprinkled by the High Priest would no longer be needed as a covering for the people (Exodus 24:6–8). The blood of Jesus Christ would serve as the blood of the New Covenant for all eternity. This New Covenant was confirmed by Jesus Himself as He passed the bread and wine to His disciples in the upper room:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the *new covenant*, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:26–28, emphasis added)

And so Jesus established the New Covenant between God and His people, promised through Jeremiah about 600 years earlier. The Old Covenant was

written in stone. The New Covenant is written on our hearts. The Old Covenant merely covered the sins of the people, requiring yearly atonement. The New Covenant promises that God will forgive the iniquities of believers (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

The New Covenant provides the opportunity for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It ensures that all who believe in Him, His death, and His Resurrection will be sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance and who empowers us to obey God (Ephesians 1:13–14).

Jeremiah spoke God's words to give the Jews in captivity hope of a better covenant. Today, we hope in Christ's finished work on the Cross, and we are sure of the ongoing ministry of Jesus as our High Priest and Mediator. This is the plan God ordained from eternity past. Our response, if we are in Christ, can only be praise, worship, and rejoicing to God that He has been pleased to forgive our iniquity and remember our sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The covenant God made with Israel at Sinai (Mosaic Covenant, Old Covenant) included conditions that would bring either God's blessing or His cursing upon the people (Leviticus 26). The history of the Old Testament reveals a pattern of disobedience on the part of Israel. When the people willfully rebelled and forsook the Lord, God brought upon them the curses—He remained faithful to His promises.

Leviticus 26 speaks about five stages of curses in response to Israel's disobedience, with each stage worse than the former: first, sickness and defeat by enemies (Leviticus 26:16–17); second, drought and famine (Leviticus 26:18–20); third, being overrun by wild beasts (Leviticus 26: 21–22); fourth, the sword, more pestilence, and more famine (Leviticus 26:23–26); and finally, and most severely, destruction of Israel's cities and exile from the land (Leviticus 26:27–39). All of this God promised to bring upon Israel for breaking His covenant (Leviticus 26:14–15). And throughout Israel's history, as we have been studying it, we see God being true to His promises, and punishing His people for their waywardness.

Jeremiah was the last major prophet appointed to call Israel to repentance and to covenant faithfulness—and to bring the message of judgment. The final

and ultimate curse would now come upon Israel—destruction of their cities and the Temple, and exile to a foreign land. But along with the terrible news of judgment was also good news of God's future New Covenant. That New Covenant, according to Jeremiah 31:31–34, includes writing God's law "in their minds" and "on their hearts." Every person will "know the Lord." And finally, the New Covenant includes the promise of forgiven sins. "For what the law could not do," Paul said, "God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

The exacting laws of the Mosaic Covenant were given to show that we can never perfectly obey God. In fact, Scripture clearly states that the Old Covenant—the laws that could not be perfectly kept—was intended to point to Christ. The Apostle Paul said that the Law was a tutor to lead us to Christ, but now that justification by faith in Christ has come, we are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Galatians 3:19–25). The Old Covenant has been replaced by a better covenant established on better promises (Hebrews 7:22, 8:6–7, 12:24). Only the Mediator of the New Covenant—Jesus—is fully sufficient to cleanse sinners from their unrighteousness, and His perfect sacrifice on the Cross is the only means to redeem a people for God's glory.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Precious Savior, what love you've shown to me, your child. Forgive me for sometimes taking what you did for me for granted. This lesson shows how your plan of redemption unfolded beautifully, step by step. I can barely imagine living as a Jew and making the journey to Jerusalem to watch as a priest sacrificed an animal for my sins. Thank you that because you came to be our sacrificial lamb, I don't have to do that. I've done nothing to deserve such love, nor could I ever earn it! Words cannot express my gratitude for the blood you shed for me. My sins are redeemed and I have a new life! Help me express the joy of living in the New Covenant to my students, that they would desire to have their sins forgiven and believe in you as their Savior. To you be the glory.



COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “Why was the New Covenant necessary?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Review

Refer to the History of Israel poster.

As we start our lesson today, remember that we are still looking at the period of 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity. Although we have already talked about the destruction of Jerusalem, our lesson today will deal with that topic. Just as Ezekiel was delivering prophecies to the captives, so Jeremiah continued.

- ? Who can recall how many phases there were in the Babylonian Captivity? *The captivity came in three phases: 607 BC when Daniel and others were*

carried away; 599 when Jehoiachin was taken prisoner; 588 when the Temple and Jerusalem were torn down and destroyed.

Throughout all of these events, God had been directing them toward a goal. God had made a covenant with Abraham, and He had made a covenant with Moses and the Israelites. Today, we are going to look at the foreshadowing of the New Covenant delivered to the Israelites to offer them hope during the years of captivity.



- Write on the board, “Why was the New Covenant necessary?”

Jeremiah 31:23–40

- You may wish to address the specifics of this prophecy in light of your church’s specific views on eschatology, but it is not necessary to do so to complete the lesson. In all views, Jeremiah is looking forward in history to the New Covenant.



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Jeremiah 31:23–40 together and look at the hope Jeremiah delivered. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? Since we just picked up in the middle of a chapter, what rule of Bible study did we break? *We failed to identify the context of the passage. We need to look backward to figure out where we are.*
- ? Looking at the previous sections of text, where should we look to see where this message starts? *Jeremiah 31:1 gives us a cryptic phrase, “At the same time.” 30:24 talks about “the latter days.” Looking further back, 30:3 gives us the context of the following passages. The days are coming when Israel will return to the Promised Land. Reading further, 30:7–8 seem to point further in the future to the Second Coming with the arrival of David—a Messianic reference.*

- ? **What is the main idea communicated in verses 23–30?** *God will restore the Israelites to the Promised Land at some point in the future.*
- ? **The idea of a new covenant is introduced in verse 31. When will this New Covenant come?** *It is only put at some point in the future, with no clear date.*
- ? **What is the New Covenant contrasted with? What is verse 32 referring to?** *This is a contrast to the covenant made with the people at Sinai after God had brought them out of Egypt.*

Let's go back and refresh our minds about that covenant, the Mosaic Covenant. Turn to Exodus 19 and listen as I read verses 1–8. *Read the passage aloud.*

Exodus 19:1–8

- ? **There are two kinds of covenants in the Bible: conditional and unconditional. Conditional covenants follow an “if ... then...” pattern. Unconditional covenants do not follow this pattern. Was this covenant conditional or unconditional?** *Verse 5 makes it a conditional covenant: If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.*
- ? **If you will recall, the Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant that God promised to fulfill. What was the essence of the Mosaic Covenant?** *According to passages like Deuteronomy 4:13, Exodus 34:28, and others, the Ten Commandments were the words of the Mosaic Covenant.*
- ? **Did the Israelites keep their end of the covenant?** *No, they constantly broke the commands God gave them.*

Back to Jeremiah 31, let's examine how this New Covenant is different.

- ? **What are the features of this New Covenant?** *God will put His Law in the minds and hearts of the people; the people from the least to the greatest will have an intimate knowledge of the Lord; their sins will be forgiven and remembered no longer.*
- ? **What is the contrast intended (though unstated) by stating that God's Law would be written on their hearts and minds?** *This is set in contrast to the laws being written in stone when the Ten Commandments, the tablets of the covenant, were delivered to the children of Israel.*
- ? **Are there any conditional statements in this New Covenant?** *No, all of its parts are declarations of what God will do to the people. This clarifies the meaning of verse 32: not according to the Mosaic Covenant.*
- ? **What is the purpose of verse 35?** *It is intended to demonstrate God's power and authority. God is asserting His character as the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe to establish the New Covenant.*
- ? **What is the purpose of the two “if” statements in verses 36 and 37?** *The literary device here is intended to communicate the surety of the continuation and fulfillment of the New Covenant. In modern language, we might use a phrase such as “when pigs fly” to communicate the same idea. Since these events will never happen, God's promise is sure.*
- ? **With whom is this New Covenant made?** *Verse 31 says the covenant will be “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”*

- ? **Verses 38–40 clearly point forward to a future time, but how far forward are they pointing?** *The end of the passage says that Israel will be established forever, so it seems this is pointing forward to a time that is still in the future. We know that Israel was reestablished after the Babylonian Captivity, but it was not so forever. Again, this is a passage that people with different end-times views would interpret differently.*

Discover the Truth

God promised the Israelites that He would give them an amazing gift. Rather than the conditional covenant of works of the Law that He had made with them at Sinai, God was explaining a New Covenant He would make with them in the future.

This should have been an amazing offer of hope for them. They knew that it was impossible for them to perfectly keep the Ten Commandments and the other laws God had delivered to them. Their sins had to be temporarily covered by the blood of bulls and goats, as we discussed with the sacrifices offered at the Temple. There was no permanent relief from their sinfulness, but a constant reminder that their sin debt was hanging over their head until the next Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. That would not be the case in the New Covenant.

OMNISCIENT

- ? **What attribute of God speaks to how much God knows?** *Omniscient—God knows everything, past, present, and future.*
- ? **Can God forget something and still be omniscient?** *No.*

In Jeremiah 31:34, God says, “their sin I will remember no more.” A common argument that skeptics use to attempt to discredit Scripture is to say that God cannot be omniscient and forgetful at the same time. But this is just another example of skeptics trying to discredit the Bible by taking the words in a wooden fashion rather than reading them in their own context and in the light of all of Scripture. God is not saying that He will actually forget about the people’s sin—He will not use the people’s sin against them in judgment. Elsewhere, God describes our sin as being as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12) and placed at the bottom of the ocean (Micah 7:19). All of this is accomplished under the New Covenant and only in Christ.





Jesus Is Better

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

The book of Hebrews is a very important text to help us understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the Old and New Covenants. Throughout the book, there are constant connections between the old and new.

In your Student Guide, you will find the Jesus Is Better activity. Take a few minutes to examine the passages listed to understand the connections and distinctions between the Old and New Covenants. *Assist the students if they need help.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Now that you have looked over some of the distinctions, let's talk about them. *Discuss the ideas presented in each passage. Each points to the New Covenant being a better covenant, especially in the person and work of Jesus.*

Hebrews 1:1–4 Jesus has a more excellent name than the angels.

Hebrews 3:1–3 Jesus deserves more glory than Moses.

Hebrews 4:8–10 Jesus offers a better rest than the rest of the Promised Land.

Hebrews 5:5–11 Jesus is a better High Priest.

Hebrews 7:18–19 Jesus is a better hope than the Law.

Hebrews 7:20–22 Jesus is a better surety of the covenant.

Hebrews 8:3–6 Jesus is a better High Priest and Mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises (not a conditional promise).

Hebrews 9:23–26 Jesus offers a better sacrifice than the High Priests.

This is just a sampling of the contrasts between the Old and New Covenants that are found throughout Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament. This should make your heart soar, knowing how much has been accomplished for you in Christ.

? **What is so special about the sacrifice that Jesus offered?** *Because Jesus is both God and man, His sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice and able to remove God's wrath. There was no need for a repeat performance since God was pleased with Christ's perfect sacrifice on the Cross.*

To summarize, Jesus offered a better sacrifice in a better tabernacle to seal a better covenant and secure better promises for those who are God's children.



READ THE WORD

Earlier, we said that the New Covenant described in Jeremiah was a covenant delivered to the nation of Israel. This promise was delivered about 600 years before Jesus came. So, does this promise and covenant extend to us? Let's turn to the book of Hebrews and read 8:7–13. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Hebrews 8:7–13

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What does this passage tell us about the two covenants?** *The first covenant had faults, so the second was needed. The first has been made obsolete so that the second can be in effect.*
- ? **Where does the bulk of this passage come from?** *It is quoted from Jeremiah 31:31–34.*

Matthew 26:26–28

Let us look to the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:26–28 for another connection to the New Covenant. *Read the passage aloud after the students turn there.*

- ? **What is the setting of this passage?** *Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the upper room on the night of His betrayal.*
- ? **What is the connection to the New Covenant?** *Jesus is setting forth the bread and wine as symbols of the establishment of the New Covenant. He explicitly states that the cup was His blood shed for the sins of many—the blood of the New Covenant.*

Linking all of these passages together, can we say that we are part of the New Covenant announced by Jeremiah? Yes. There is a clear connection made in Hebrews 8 where Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant announced by Jeremiah. It is sealed with His blood, and the bread and wine of the Last Supper are the signs of the initiation of the covenant.

Discover the Truth

All of those who are in Christ are part of the New Covenant. Six hundred years after Jeremiah had proclaimed that a new covenant was coming, Jesus Christ confirmed that His blood would be shed as the sign of the covenant. Just as Jeremiah had announced the forgiveness of sins, Jesus said that His blood would be shed for the remission of the sins of many people. The sins were not just temporarily covered, but paid in full. There was no longer a need for the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement—the perfect High Priest had offered Himself as the final atonement for God’s wrath against sin.

That is the amazing truth of the gospel—all those in Christ have their sins completely forgiven as they repent of those sins and trust in Christ’s finished work on the Cross! When God saves someone, He saves them from His own wrath against their sin. They go from being enemies of God in their mind because of their wicked works to being holy and blameless before God (Colossians 1:19–21).





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we have described in the past, God had a plan for the redemption of mankind from before the foundation of the world. That plan included the replacement of the old sacrificial system with a perfect sacrifice that would be offered once for all. There would be no more Tabernacle or Temple where the High Priests would act on behalf of the people, ministering daily in the Temple. Jesus completed the work and His sacrifice initiated the New Covenant. The blood of bulls and goats is no longer needed, but we can be partakers in the New Covenant because Jesus shed his blood for the remission of our sins.

This New Covenant is also connected to the heart of those who are partakers in Christ. As Jeremiah described it, the New Covenant involves a heart change. This change of heart is found in many other passages, as well. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah, also spoke of people receiving a new heart and a new spirit in a passage that parallels Jeremiah 31.

Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'" And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

Those were words of hope for the captives, but they would have to wait in captivity for the fulfillment of that promise and the initiation of the New Covenant.

Rather than looking to a covenant that was written on stone and required obedience to fulfill it, we can be partakers in a covenant that was accomplished in the work of Jesus, apart from our own works. This is the privilege of everyone whose sins are completely paid for by the work of Jesus on the Cross. A stony heart is replaced with a heart of flesh—a heart that has been cleansed from sin and dedicated to serve God in holiness. I hope that is true for each of you.

Ezekiel 11:17–20

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What is most intriguing about the study of these two covenants we have looked at today?** *Discuss various answers, reminding the students of the connections between the two covenants.*
- ? **Does this change in covenants contradict the doctrine of God's immutability, or unchanging nature?** *The doctrine of immutability talks of God's character, so there is no reason that a progressive plan including a New Covenant indicates that God's character has changed. God's character does not change even though His plans may seem, to us, to change. Because we do not know of all of God's intentions, we cannot say that God really changed His plans. Knowing that He knows all future events, we must trust that God had always intended to introduce a New Covenant, though it had not been revealed earlier.*
- ? **If the Ten Commandments were the essence of the Mosaic Covenant, what is the purpose of the Ten Commandments under the New Covenant?** *Several passages point to the use of the Ten Commandments as an indicator of the sinfulness of each person's heart. The commandments expose the fact that we can never obey perfectly, so the Law is a curse that points us to our need for a Savior. Acts 13:38–41; Romans 3:20, 3:28, 8:3, 10:4; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:5. The commandments help show us that our works can never save us, but Christ can. He has perfectly obeyed the Law on our behalf and His righteousness is credited to those who trust in Him.*
- ? **What are some different ways we, in the church, talk about the event of salvation? Why do we need to be careful using "church words" as we talk with others?** *Some common phrases include: get saved, receive Christ, trust in Jesus, being born again, etc. Many people will not understand what these phrases mean without explanation. "Get saved from what?" might be the response from many people today. We need to be careful to not use lingo that makes sense to us but really doesn't mean anything to those who do not know what the Bible teaches. More and more, people in Western cultures are unaware of what the Bible teaches about sin and salvation.*



MEMORY VERSE

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His kindness shown to us in providing a New Covenant.
- Praise God for His wisdom in providing redemption through Jesus.
- Ask God for boldness in proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in Christ.