

The Prophecy of a Better Covenant

Hebrews 8:7-13

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, October 16, 2022

Good morning. You guys hear me, okay? Before we begin our sermon today, I want to say a few words about a recent event that's happened in our town. As many of you are aware, we did just have some recent school board elections. And anytime we do that in Chilliwack, it's kind of a surprising thing for a lot of us because the two sides are so polarized, aren't they? One side is standing for conservative values that many of us are familiar with. And I was trying to find a good way to put this, but the other side is standing for things that you wouldn't even mention in a coffee shop a generation ago because it's so dark. And when that happens, the town for many of us believers, we get really afraid when we get nervous, because we wonder where all this is heading in Chilliwack. And I was reminded, I mentioned this to our men's Bible study yesterday. But I was reminded of the story with Esther, when Mordecai told her that the Lord has put you here for such a time as this. Friends, we believe God is sovereign. And what that means is that the church is here at this time, at this moment, in this day, to address this dark and dying world, Amen. It's not random. You are not here randomly. You are here to be salt and light. You are here to be a city on a hill, you are here to be the bulwark of the truth, you are here to be a shelter amidst the storm, and you have to act like it at all times, in all ways. In fact, if you think about the image of salt, one thing salt does is it gets into a wound and it heals it. Now it hurts, it's very uncomfortable, but it's there for a good purpose; that is why you are here in this society. Light as well, light shocks you doesn't it; if you go into a dark room, turn the light on, it startles you for a moment. You are here to startle this culture. And as you do that the Lord will be glorified and honored by it, Amen. I just wanted to say that because you have no reason to be afraid, you have no reason to be worried. Your God is bigger than all of this.

And with that said, please open up your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. And we're looking at a book and talking about a group of people, the Jews who lived in a very dark world, didn't they? And they lived in a very, very decrepit culture, it was worse than ours, if you can believe that. And God sustained them in the same way he would sustain us. And as we're coming to our passage for today, I told you last time, I've been thinking of different ways to introduce our text to you. So, I want to do that today. I did it last time with a question. Since we've been talking about the history of Israel, and the history of the covenants in the temple and the sacrifices, I thought it would be good to start our time off by asking you something related to all that. So, that's what I did last time. And I want to do it again here. Because here's our question for this morning, as we're getting into our passage and getting our minds around the subject. If you were a Jew living at this time in the first century, and you wanted to worship God, what would you do? Where would you go? I ask you that because as I said, last time, you're not Jewish this morning. I don't have to tell you that I don't think anyone in this room is Hebrew, not to my knowledge anyway. So, when you want to worship God, you understand it's a very straightforward thing. You just have to pray. And when you want to praise him, it's very simple, you just get down on your knees and do it. These people didn't think like that back then, not initially anyway. They approached it in a

different manner. So how did they respond when they wanted to honor God? And the answer is that they did it by going to the temple. They would do it by traveling to the great sanctuary the Lord had commanded them to build for Himself in Jerusalem, that is where His presence was. If you are taking notes, and you just want to write this verse down, Exodus 25:22 says that is where I, the Lord will meet with you from above the mercy seat, and from between the two chairs above which are upon the Ark of the Covenant. In other words, God did not just meet with Israel anywhere, He did it there. And He did not just talk to them from any place, He did it from the ark that was located in the temple. So, if you wanted to deal with God as a Jew, that's where you had to go. Which the Jews would do three times a year, by the way, during what is known as the "Pilgrim Feast," where every Jewish male in the nation was expected to come to the temple to celebrate and meet with God on the days of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Interestingly enough, the Feast of Tabernacles is being held right now in Israel, and today's the last day, so it's wrapping up as we speak. They would also go to the temple when they sinned and wanted forgiveness, they would make sacrifices for that purpose. They would go to the temple when they wanted to dedicate a baby to the Lord, they would do it if they wanted to be healed of something. Some of the priests would go to the temple when they accidentally killed someone and wanted their life to be spared; because it was used for all kinds of things, but the greatest thing was worship. That was where God promised to be with his people; so, that is where the Jews would go. I also need to point out that by the time the book of Hebrews was written, the temple is in its third phase of operation. It has been torn down and rebuilt several times. So, the building we're referring to hear is not the original one. First one was built by Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, then the next one was rebuilt several centuries later, when the Jews returned to the land under the leadership of Zerubbabel, but it was very small. And due to their limited resources, it wasn't much to look at, so, it was added on to later by Herod the Great.

History tells us that Herod took about 80 years to complete it. He started it in 20 BC, and he finished it around AD63, just seven years before the Romans came in and wiped it out. If you have ever read the Gospels, and you read about the times the Jews wanted to stone Jesus in the temple, and they picked up rocks, I've often wondered where did the rocks come from? They came from the construction; they were still building it. And it looked like this when it was finished, we've got a PowerPoint here, with some images for it, the first one here, this is the temple the Jews would have been looking at it this time in the first century. This picture is from a model that was constructed by an Israeli professor named Avi Yonah, who was asked to build it in honor of a young man who died in one of the wars that Israel fought. And it took him several years to complete it; but when he did, they put it in the Holy Land hotel in Jerusalem. Then later on, they moved it to a museum, which is where the picture is taken from. But when you look at this, and this model's bigger than this stage, it's a very large one. But when you look at it, you get a sense of what Jerusalem was all about, don't you? It was all about the temple. The whole thing was built around this one great building, you can see the houses behind there, you can see the walls around the city behind that.

I have already talked about what it was like to approach the temple. So, I don't want to go into that here. Other than to say Jerusalem was 2300 feet above sea level. So, it was hard to get to because it was uphill all the way. And the temple was even taller. It was located on a place called Mountain Moriah, which was not really a mountain, it's more like a big plateau that was 36 acres in size, making this one of the largest temple grounds in the world. This was twice the size of Trajans forum in Rome, was very impressive, you couldn't look at it without taking your breath away. And it was designed with a series of courts that surrounded it like a fortress. First, you had the court of Gentiles where the Gentiles could worship; and you can see that one in this large section around the temple building there that large open area, then there was the court of women where the Jewish women could go, that is a smaller one that's walled in there in the center. As you can see, there was an enormous barricade that blocked off the court of Gentiles from the court of women in order to keep the Gentiles out. Then finally, once you pass through all that, you came to the court of men and the court of priest which housed the actual temple building itself, and that's what I want to talk about for just a second because we did not have time to get into that last week. You cannot see this in the picture but that was actually a very large courtyard. The court of priests could hold several thousand people at once. But it was strange to look at it because there wasn't much in there, it was a very open place. The first thing you would come to was several large slaughter tables on your right, where the priests would put the animal on that was brought to be sacrificed. And then to the left of that was the altar made out of brass that was 40 feet long, 40 feet wide and 15 feet high. You imagine sacrificing an animal on a 15-foot-high altar? And the way it worked is that the priests would spend all their time going back and forth between those two places. They would spend all their day running to-and-fro between the altar and the slaughter tables like workers on an assembly line because they would place the animal on the slaughter table and cut its throat and drain the blood into a bowl. Then they would go to the altar next to sprinkle the blood on top of it, before going back to the table to skin the animal, cut it up and lay the pieces back on the altar to burn. They would just do this over and over again. The temple was set up in such a manner that there were 60 priests who served for two weeks out of the year. But they because they couldn't do it for longer than that because it would wear them out; so, they would serve on two-week rotations. Then to the left of the altar was a brass laver where the priests would wash their hands in, and we don't have the dimensions of that, but it was very large and in the center of all that right behind was the big temple building. If you go to the next slide, the temple looked like this; this is a close-up picture of it. It was so beautiful that one eyewitness said it was the whole joy of the whole earth; It looked like a snowcapped mountain. This doesn't do justice to the full glory of it, but the temple was made out of limestone that was covered in gold at parts and it faced East, which made it beam in the morning sun as it came up. If you've been to Jerusalem, you'll know the sun is very powerful in that part of the world. So, Herod position the temple in such a way it would take full advantage of it. It was 30 feet wide, 90 feet long and three story's high. And we don't know how much gold Herod used, but he was never very stingy with his building projects. And to be honest, the next part of the building is the one that we don't have a lot of information about if you go to the next slide. Because the only ones who could ever go inside the temple were the priests, but from what we could tell the inside look like this, this was the floor plan.

The temple itself had two rooms inside of it, one was called the Holy place, which contained several objects like the table of shewbread, several short rectangular tables that would hold 12 loaves of bread that represented the 12 tribes of Israel; it also had the gold lampstands in there, which gave light to the temple because there were no windows in it, no source of illumination other than that, and then further in there was an altar of incense, which filled the temple with fragrance and then the next room was the Holy of Holies. In between the holy place, and the Holy of Holies was a curtain that was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide and so heavy that they said it would take a team of horses to pull it apart. But the interesting thing about that part of the building is that you couldn't go in there. That was the one part where no priest could go other than the high priest on the Day of Atonement, one day out of the year. And it's even more interesting in the first century, because at this time in history, there was nothing in there. It was completely empty, because the Babylonians had taken the Ark of the Covenant, when the First Temple was destroyed; so, if you walked in, there was just a barren room.

There is a funny story of the time the Roman General Pompey went into that place after capturing Jerusalem and he was shocked because he found it empty. And he said, "what kind of God is this that the Jews worshiped? You can't even see Him." But the Ark was originally a small wooden chest overlaid with gold, had two statues of angels on top of it and inside the ark was the copy of the 10 commandments, a golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod to demonstrate that this was what's in God's heart: this is what He thinks about, He thinks about Israel and His people and their history. But the reason I give you all that background is because when the Jews thought of God, this is what they thought of. Or at least when they thought of worshipping Him, this is what they thought of. They wanted to get as close to the Ark as they could, they wanted to get as close to the Holy Place as was possible; even today if you go to Jerusalem, there's no Temple there, but the Jews go to the Wailing Wall because that's as close as they can pray to the Temple place. It was a very cherished thing to them. And let me ask you one more question here, as we're introducing this, and that is this ask you this last time, but how would you like to go back to that now? After hearing all that history, how many of you would like to return to that way of doing things when your worship and go back to thinking about a room you can't see an Ark you can't touch and a Mercy Seat that's not available anymore because the Babylonians took it away. Sounds awful, doesn't it? And with that in mind, I want to read our passage for today because it sheds light on this. If you look in Hebrews chapter eight, this is our text for them this morning. And if you look in verse seven, this is our focus for today, it says,

For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says,

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord,
When I will effect a new covenant
With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;
Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
On the day when I took them by the hand
To lead them out of the land of Egypt;

For they did not continue in My covenant,
And I did not care for them, says the Lord.
“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
After those days, says the Lord:
I will put My laws into their minds,
And I will write them on their hearts.
And I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.
“And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen,
And everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
For all will know Me,
From the least to the greatest of them.
“For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more.”

When He said, “A new *covenant*,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

We'll stop the reading there. But just to summarize what he's saying, we could look at verse eight, where it says, “behold, days are coming, when I will affect a new covenant with the house of Israel.” Now, what does that mean? It means that day is coming when God will give them a covenant that will be different from all that stuff I just told you about. A day is coming when the Lord will give them something that is better than the temple, better than sacrifices, better than the Ark of the Covenant, and all the things they couldn't see. Because verse 10 says, “He will put His law into their minds.” That means He will put it inside of us, He will place all those objects of worship and all the things they represent in here and not out there anymore, which will make it accessible by the way. I mean, the problem with the Ark was it wasn't always accessible, you couldn't get to it, you could get close, but you couldn't get there, especially if you were Gentile, but not anymore. And it says he will ride it on our hearts as well; that means He will cause His law to be part of you, so that you won't have to travel to Jerusalem to worship God and go to the Temple, you can just do it wherever you are. Let's be honest, we take that for granted nowadays, don't we? We hear that and say, “well, of course you can worship God wherever you are,” but they wouldn't have said that; this is a new thing in history.

In fact, I told you before the word covenant, it comes from a Hebrew word that means to shackle or bind someone, because that's what a covenant was designed to do - it bound your name with someone else's. And the idea here is that God loves us so much that this is what He did, He bound himself to His people; one way in the Old Covenant, and another way in the New. And the difference is that the one you have now is better. Because in this covenant, God has taken all those outward ceremonies away, so you can just come to Him, you don't have to go through the courts anymore, you don't have to approach the slaughter tables, you don't have to think about the shewbread and lampstand, and incense and all those

other things. You can praise God right where you are in this room and Chilliwack British Columbia, can we say Amen to that? Isn't that encouraging? And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

So, let's look at this with five characteristics of this New Covenant. So, if you're taking notes, we're just going to walk through this passage one piece at a time and see all these wonderful things God has given us now as it relates to the people of Israel, as it relates to us, now. But in Hebrews eight, we're going to look at five characteristics of this New Covenant. The first one is that it is new. The first characteristic of the New Covenant that we'll look at this morning is that it is new, which means it's different from all the other covenants that have come before. All the other covenants were good, the Old Covenant was righteous and holy and all those things. But, this one is separate from that. And if you look in verse seven, it says this, it says,

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them. He says,

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will affect the new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

If you notice in here, the passage says that for finding fault with them, the Lord decides to give a New Covenant. In other words, the reason the Old Covenant didn't work, the way the way it could have is because the Lord found fault with the people, not with the covenant, see that? The reason it didn't save them all is not because the promise didn't do what it was supposed to, the promise was fine. The issue was the people couldn't keep it. You read the history of Israel, you notice is just one long mistake after another ,right? It is just one constant act of disobedience, which is why the Lord promised them a new one, when it says, "I will affect a new covenant." And that should have caught your attention right away because the Lord says, "I will do this." You could even circle that in your Bibles or put a star beside it, not Israel, but God, not the Jews, or Yahweh plus the Jews working together, but Yahweh Himself all on His own. It will be a one-person job. You can see this phrase, "I will" repeated seven times in this passage, because it says in verse eight, that "I will affect a New Covenant" and then in verse 10, "for this is a covenant I will make with them" and then also in verse 10, "I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts and I will be their God." And then down in verse 12, for "I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" you get the picture. God says "I will, I will, I will do this." This New Covenant is all about me, me, me, me to the point it doesn't even mention Israel's responsibilities in here. You read the Old Covenant, there were huge portions that talked about the blessings and cursing if they obeyed or disobeyed and their responsibilities and what was expected of them; and this one guy just keeps talking about Himself. The reason he does this is because the ancient world had two types of covenants back then, they had a conditional covenant, which was based on the condition that both parties kept it, both sides did their part to uphold the promise. A lot of covenants were made that way back then. They also had one that was known as an unconditional covenant, where one party just kept it all by themselves on the basis of grace and mercy. And that's what this is. This is God's unconditional covenant that He is offering. This is a very encouraging

reminder here because the Jews really did have a hard time keeping the Old Covenant. They messed up a lot, but the Lord says, even then, "I will now take care of you" because this salvation will not be based on works, it's on grace alone.

To give you some more background on this, if you look in verse eight, you can see that the passage is in quotation marks, starting in verse eight, where it says, "behold, days are coming," that quotation goes all the way down to the end of verse 12 and it comes from Jeremiah 31; which was given right before the Babylonians took over Jerusalem. And the setting for that is important because once they did that, and once the Babylonians took over the city, they tore everything down, including the temple, and all the objects in there like the altar, and the bronze laver and the gold lampstand, and a table of shewbread and the ark so the Jews couldn't keep the old covenant anymore. Once the Babylonians did that it was over, there was no way for them to follow it. So, it would have left a question in every choose mind, and that is, what do we do now? Has Yahweh abandoned us? Does He even care? And the answer Jeremiah gives on the front end of that before it even happens is that yes, God cares about you, because He's going to give you a New Covenant that's not based on those things anymore. It will be founded on God's sovereign promise alone. When He calls this a New Covenant here, it can mean a lot of things. It can mean the New Covenant is new chronologically, it's new in respect to time because it's more recent and current than the previous one. It can also mean that it's new comparatively because when you put the Old Covenant and New Covenant side by side, you can tell they're not alike. There are some similarities, but they're very, very different. It can also mean it's new disruptively because it's new in the sense that it's going to form a complete break with the way things used to be.

You guys understand you're in the New Covenant, so you guys don't bring a goat with you to sacrifice when you come to worship on Sunday? Well, there's a reason for that, because the two things are different, it is its own separate thing. But whatever the case, this is a truly amazing promise God gave to Israel, here, only a few verses into it and you can learn so much just from looking at the first one. But let's go on to talk about another characteristic of this New Covenant and that is that it is internal. So, the first one is that it's new, and different, and original, from the previous covenant that the Jews once had. But a second characteristic of it is that it's internal, which means that it occurs inside of you. We have already talked about this a little bit, but we need to say more. Because as you go on further into this, you're going to see the author use a lot of Old Testament images in here that you might not be familiar with, because you are a Gentile, and you didn't grow up learning all this stuff; but these Jews did. They were very familiar with this kind of language. And if you look on in the passage, says in verse eight,

for finding fault with them, he says, Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will affect the new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my law into walls into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts.

Now as you get into this part, you can tell this is the second time it says God will do something in the passage because He says in verse eight, “behold, days are coming, says the Lord when I will affect the New Covenant” and then down in verse 10, He says, “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel.” The reason He says this, again is to emphasize the fact that this is unconditional, it is not up to Israel to keep it. Because verse nine says very plainly, that the Jews did not continue in my covenant. In other words, they did have a responsibility to keep the old covenant, but they failed. And the Lord did tell them to obey it, but they didn't because the Lord in verse nine says, took them out of it by the hand, lead them out of Egypt, and they sinned against him. Which is why verse 10, says that in His kindness, God will give them something better, by putting His law into their minds. That means you'll set this New Covenant up in such a way that you can't get away from it now, because He's going to put it deep within you. The previous law was out here, this one will be in here. The previous commandments were written on tablets of stone, this one will be written on the human heart. Nothing more personal to you than your heart, isn't it? Nothing is closer to you than your soul. That is where the New Covenant is going to be held now so that God would not have to tell them to keep the law, they'll just do it, and He will not have to command them to obey under threat of punishment only, but it will happen, coming out of their insights. In fact, if you were to translate verse 10, literally into Hebrew, He would say that God would put His Torah within them. The word laws is plural, in this translation, but it's singular in the book of Jeremiah, to demonstrate the Lord would not put just a few laws into them, but the whole thing. He's not just going to put the parts that they're comfortable with, but He's going to put the parts they're uncomfortable with too. You guys can relate to this. You know, this is like when you got saved, you started to do things you didn't like to do before, didn't you? Some of you hated reading the Bible before you became a Christian. You hated it; now you love it. You get up at 5:30 in the morning to read the Bible, don't you? And before some of you hated praying, it was the most boring thing in the world; now you love praying. Before you hated going to church, you were like the kid who said he had a “drug” problem because his mom “drugged” him to church every Sunday. “Drug” him there Sunday morning, “drug” him there Sunday night. Now, some of you want to go to church even when people tell you can't do it. Why? God did that. That is why the Lord put that in your heart. He renewed your soul. He gave you a new birth.

To be honest, the book of Jeremiah doesn't give a lot of details about this. It just kind of says this as part of the passage and moves on to some other things. But there's another text that does, we read it earlier in our service. But let me read Ezekiel 36 to you. Ezekiel 36:26, says a little more about this New Covenant. Now Jeremiah gave Jeremiah 31 before the Babylonians came in and destroyed Jerusalem, Ezekiel gives this covenant promise afterwards; see the importance to that, like bookends to that catastrophe. And Ezekiel 36:26, says,

it's not for your sake, oh Israel that I'm about to act, but for my holy name. And when I do, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your

flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

If you notice, in that one, Ezekiel says under the New Covenant, the Lord will do the work of regeneration because He will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. That is not an improved heart, that is a new one. That is not just a better heart, it's a completely different one than anything you've ever had before. Christians aren't a better creation from the world we're a brand new creation, aren't we? We are totally different. That is why we're salt and light; that's why we're cities on a hill. And also in Ezekiel it says He will do the work of transformation, because He will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. He will take the dead soul out of your chest and replace it with something that lives and breathes and moves for God. And He will do the work of conversion because He will cause you to walk into His Statues, but it will all be possible because of the Holy Spirit. We don't always talk a lot about the Spirit today. But when you do a survey of the Bible, you find the Holy Spirit does several things in relation to this New Covenant. I looked it up this week, and I came across a list that said that under the New Covenant, in the Church Age, the Holy Spirit does these things: He calls us and seals us and regenerates us. He guides us and indwells us and baptizes us. He fills us, He helps us, He comforts us, He convicts us of sin, He gives us a spiritual gifts and He unites us to Christ so that we are one in the same; Christ is in us, we're in Him.

But it all goes back to this, this is what it looks like, for God to write his law upon your heart. One thing about writing law in your heart is when the law is written on your heart, you can see it, right? You can tell. When He puts his Torah within you, it just comes spilling out. And this is so important because under the Old Covenant, the law spent a lot of time dealing with external things. It said a few things about the heart, but not a lot. So, the Jews got the impression, the wrong impression that so long as you did the outward stuff, you were okay. And as long as you kept the law hourly, and you ate, right, drank, right, dressed, right went to the temple, you're on your way to heaven. It's not true. It didn't work that way at all. The thing God is interested in most of all, is your heart. I will never forget the time an old man told me, the greatest mistake he made in parenting was in dragging his children to church when they didn't want to go. And I knew the guy pretty well so I could say this to him, but I said, "brother, I think the greatest mistake you made was dragging your children to church when you didn't want to go. Because if you would have wanted to go, don't you think it would have worn off on them." That's what the New Covenant is about. This is when God works in His people's life in such a way that they want to go to church.

Which brings us to another characteristic of this covenant. And that is that it's universal. So, it's new, it's internal but a third one is that it's universal, which means it's for everyone who believes, and not just a select few. And this might be the most surprising thing we're going to read about this morning because if you remember the Old Covenant was it was a very exclusive thing. It was set up with a hierarchical system built into it. So the Levites were closer to God than the people, the priests were closer to God than the Levites, the high priests were closer than everybody. So that they looked at faith like a ladder

ascending to heaven, with some people on top and everyone else at the bottom. But now look at what this passage says, if you look in verse 10 it says,

for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days says the Lord, I will put my laws into their minds. And I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone is brother saying know the Lord, for all will know me, from the least, to the greatest of them.

I want to dive into the back half of that passage here in just a moment; but before I do that, I do need to explain some of the top part of it because when it says that “I will be their God” that may sound strange to you, because you read and you wonder, well, why does He say that? I mean, who else’s God would He be? But He said that because at this time in history, Israel was very confused on this, they were caught up in the worship of idols, and they were bowing down to the Baals and the gods of Molech, and all those kinds of evil things. And so, the Lord says, and He's come now into the New Covenant to put a stop to all that because under this one, He won't just be a God, He will be your God, your only God so that the Israel will love him and no one else. And it says, “they shall be my people” and that's a reciprocal thing there because the phrase, “I will be their God” means God will give Himself to Israel. And the phrase “they will be my people” means Israel will give themselves to God, wholeheartedly. There will be no halfway in, halfway out anymore with this. They will be all the way in and when they do it says, “they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, everyone his brother saying know the Lord, for all will know me.” When it says they won't teach, that doesn't mean there won't be any teachers under the New Covenant. It means God will be so close to His people that you won't have to teach them from scratch. There will be some knowledge of God built into them from the least to the greatest. That means from the from the biggest Jew down to the lowliest Gentile, from the greatest priest down to the smallest pagan who gets converted. They didn't understand all of this at this time, but the Gentiles coming into the church will be revealed to them later on. And if you read the book of Acts, you can tell it shocked the Jews. In fact, I just told you that how the temple was set up with a court of Gentiles on the outside of it but I didn't tell you that archeologists have found a sign in the ruins of the temple that used to hang over the wall that divided the court of Gentiles from the court of women, which said this it says “no stranger is to enter past this barricade, whoever is called doing so will himself be responsible for his upcoming death.” In other words, we will kill you if you pass this line. As a Gentile, if you go past this wall, you're going to die. In fact, the Romans had an agreement with the Jews that said they would let them do it. There were times when there was an Antonia Fortress of Roman soldiers on the outskirts of the temple, there were times they would often stop the violence. But they said on that condition, they won't. Because that's how the Old Covenant was set up, there was an in crowd and there was an out crowd. There was the haves, and there was the have nots, they didn't believe it was possible for a gentile or a lowly worker to know God, like a priest. Couldn't do it, too much of a gap. Now this passage says not anymore.

Under the new covenant, God is available to anyone who believes on the same terms; which means you don't have to step down on your spiritual ladder when you become a Christian, you step off of it, and you throw the ladder away, which we forget, don't we, sometimes? Before we're too hard on the Jews on this issue, let's be honest, we often act the same way. We tend to put up a hierarchical system when we come to church, with the pastor up here and the elders down here and the deacons down below it, way down below by the way, just kidding. We put the old people up top and the middle-aged people down below and the young families down below that, no offense, but we say what do they know? Or we glance around and see you has a John MacArthur Study Bible and we do it with that. We look around and see who's reading from the NASB Bible and we do it with that. We scan the room and see who has short hair and no tattoos and nice respectable clothes and good well-behaved children. The problem here is that the passage is telling us that all that's over under the New Covenant now. We shouldn't be scanning the room saying who's better than who and comparing each other. Please hear me out, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with having a MacArthur Study Bible, that's fine. Nothing wrong with having short hair or whatever. It is wrong when you judge people who don't. We have people in our church who just got saved, they don't even know who John MacArthur is. They've never heard of a guy, it's all right. We are all on the same level with this. We are just a bunch of rotten stinking sinners saved by grace, Amen. We're just a bunch of nobodies God chose to bring into this covenant and we have to remember that and be humble.

Which brings us to another characteristic of the new covenant and that is that it's merciful. A fourth characteristic of this new promise in the passage is that it's merciful, which means it's full of God's kindness and forgiveness. As the author comes to the end of the quotation here, what he says next might not strike you as important, but it is because the passage from Jeremiah doesn't stop here in verse 12. It actually goes on to talk about other things; you can read Jeremiah 31 when you go home, but the reason the author stops it at this point is because once he mentioned the issue of forgiveness, he doesn't have to go further because that's what the New Covenant is all about. It is about the free and sovereign mercy of God because verse 12 says under this, "for I will be merciful to their iniquities." That means completely merciful or entirely merciful. This New Covenant is based on nothing but mercy all the way. You don't earn it, you don't deserve it, you don't work for it, the Lord just gives it to you freely out of the goodness of His heart. The verse also says, "and I will remember their sins no more." That is a double negative in Greek. So, it could be translated like this, and I will remember their sins no, not ever, not ever, ever, ever, ever, ever again anymore. In fact, when it says that I will remember their sins no more - that's an interesting statement, because the truth is that God remembers everything doesn't He? God never forgets. He has a perfectly omniscient mind. So, this isn't intended literally. Instead, it means that God will not hold your sins against you anymore, or place them over your head, because their forgiveness that this covenant offers will be so perfect, He will treat you as if you have never sinned at all. Which would have been surprising to the Jews, again, this is another thing that would have been unusual for them, because they knew what it took to get mercy under the Old Covenant. You had to kill something. And they understood how you would get forgiveness under the law, something had to die. You had to take an animal to the priest, he would put it on the slaughter table, kill it and put it on the altar. To the

point that one historian named Josephus said that on certain feast days, like Passover, there was so much blood at the temple, that the priests legs would have sunk knee deep into it. And that's probably an exaggeration, but there's other ones who said it would have made the Kidron brook run red with blood and that was probably true, because after the priests killed the animals and cut them up, they would take the bodies or the parts that weren't burned, and drag them to the backside of the temple, and drop them off at a valley called the Valley of Gahanna, which would just be covered in bodies. And it would stink and they'd have to light it on fire because that's how Mercy was found back then. That is how you were forgiven. But here it says, Now under this covenant, I will remember their sins no more. That means if you've sinned 1000 times and you're in Christ, God won't remember it. If you've sinned a million times, and you're in Christ, He will offer forgiveness. You need to repent, you need to see the gravity of the sin, you need to see how serious it is, but if you do those things, the Savior will forgive you. You won't have to kill an animal for it, you won't have to bring the blood to the altar, the blood of Christ takes care of it all. And when can we just stop here and say, aren't you grateful for that? Isn't it a good thing that the blood of Christ takes care of your sins, because how could you be saved without it? I mean, how many animals would you have to kill? If you think about it, say like this, you didn't become a Christian by going to the temple and bringing an animal to the priest. Do you know how you became a Christian? By the mercy of God, that's all. And you didn't get saved by going to the Ark or going close to the Ark, drawing near to the Mercy seat, all those things in the sanctuary, do you know how you got saved? You got saved by His grace alone. You didn't come to faith by being circumcised and keeping the Jewish Sabbath and changing your diet and keeping the food laws, then how did it happen? It happened by love alone. To highlight this, I really love the word mercy. It is the same word that was used by the tax collector in Luke 18, when he was praying next to the Pharisee and he said, "be merciful to me, Oh, God, the sinner." And the reason he did that was because that man knew there were no amount of sacrifices in the world that could pay for his sins, no amount of bloodshed that could atone, he was just really bad. You're the same way. You are in the same predicament. And yet God has shown mercy on you, and we can say Hallelujah to that.

In his commentary on Hebrews, John MacArthur tells a story of the time a man came to one of those old-fashioned tent revivals a day after it was over when everyone was tearing it down. And he asked a worker there, "what do I have to do to go to heaven?" And the worker said, "well I'm sorry, you're too late." The man said, "what do you mean, I'm too late, you saying I'm too late to go to heaven." And the worker said, "no, I'm saying you're too late to do something to get there, the work has already been done. Jesus has died on the cross. Now to be saved, you need to trust in Him." That is where salvation is found. And it brings you to one more characteristic of this New Covenant. It is a wonderful passage isn't it, it's encouraging. And just to review these other ones, that the first one is that it is new, the second one is that as internal, third, it is universal, fourth, it's based on mercy, because the work has already been done. Our Savior has already died for us. It is a good thing to live on this side of the cross.

And it brings you one more characteristic of it, and that is that it makes the first one obsolete. A final characteristic of the of the New Covenant to add to all of this is that it makes the first one obsolete,

which means it makes it unnecessary anymore. Because if you have all of this, why would you want to go back to that. And as you come to this final verse here, you can tell this is the conclusion of it all. Because the author has finished his quotation from the book of Jeremiah. And now it's time to summarize it. And he summarizes it this way in verse 13. He says,

when He said, a new covenant, He has made the first obsolete, but whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old, is ready to disappear.

Now, that may be hard to follow when you read it. But the author says that because he's giving you his final thoughts on the New Covenant, by reminding you that when you call something new, it automatically makes the previous thing old and undesirable. I mean, this passage in Jeremiah is quoted from the Old Testament telling you there's a new one and something new is better in this sense. When you get a new car, it makes the former one old, when you get a new house, it makes the previous house old, when you get a new job, it makes the other one less attractive and appealing. It is the same way with covenants. Because it says that when He set a New Covenant, He's made the first one obsolete. And the word obsolete, it's from a Greek word that refers to something that's become worn out and tired with the passing of time. That is what's happened to the Old Covenant, now that the new one has come, has become worn out now, not because it's bad, but simply because you don't need it anymore. Once Christ has come, He has fulfilled all that. The rest of the verse says, "but whatever is becoming obsolete, and growing old, is ready to disappear." Which is a little bit mysterious, but the phrase becoming obsolete refers to the fact that at this time, these words were written in the book of Hebrews, the Old Covenant had become obsolete, and it was becoming obsolete. It had become old and tired and worn out already, but at the same time, it's on its way there. Because the temple was still standing, the Jews were still making sacrifices, the priesthood was still carrying out its functions in Jerusalem at this time, so a lot of Jews thought the Old Covenant was going to last forever, things would always be the same. But the point the author's making here is that no, it won't. Because it won't be too long after these words were written that the Romans would attack Jerusalem in AD70, and raise the temple to the ground and at that point the Old Covenant would be over in every sense of the word.

You can go to Jerusalem today and you can go down the bottom of the Temple Mount, they've excavated to the first century streets, and you can walk along the sidewalks, and see the place where the Romans threw stones off the top of the temple and cracked the sidewalk, you can walk on the cracks. And those cracks are a reminder to you that the Old Covenant is finished. It is all thrown away. So, the reminder here to these Jews, is that you don't want to be too caught up in this now. You don't want to make too much of an emphasis of it. You need to put your mind on higher things. As one pastor said the book of Hebrews is an interesting book for this reason, because it was written by a Jew to the Jews in order to tell them to stop being so Jewish. Because the Gospel had come among them and the Messiah had arrived and so they need to learn how to start leaving the old things away. God still had a future for the Jews. And there was a covenant that was included in the covenant in a sense, but all the ceremonies are gone now.

If you want to get theological about it, you could say the New Covenant was introduced to Israel by John the Baptist, and it was ratified by Christ's death, and it was confirmed by the resurrection already. All those things had happened at this time in history. Then it was further corroborated by the day of Pentecost and affirmed by the Council of Jerusalem, and it was put into practice as the Holy Spirit sent missionaries out to reach the nations. And it was further established as the apostle started planting churches in places like Galatia and Ephesus and Philippi. And Gentiles like you and me started coming into the fold. The Lord started saving outcasts that He had never touched before. But the point here is that the people in this book had already witnessed all of that and seen it with their eyes and they needed to realize what it means. It means that whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. I don't know about you, but I find it so strange that some Christians today still want to get caught up in all those old ceremonies. I talked to a man years ago who told me that they were calling his church, the synagogue, and his pastor, the priest. I said, "really, I said, you know, what synagogues were for? They were because God was judging the people because He destroyed the temple, that's what the synagogues came from. So, you want to go to a house of judgment every Sunday." I find it odd that they want to follow all these things when these people here were told not to do it anymore, or not to put the emphasis on it. If they didn't have to do it, you don't have to do it. It was over for them, it's over for you because it was becoming obsolete.

And if I could summarize our passage this morning with one thing, I think I could do it with another question. I started off with a question earlier, but I think it'd be good to close with one. We have been talking about some heavy stuff and it's always good to try to make things as simple as possible. So, let me just ask you a simple question: Are you in the new covenant today? Let us forget all the heavy things for a moment and all the doctrinal issues that we've talked about, but let me just ask you, have you experienced personally, all the wonderful things Jeremiah is talking about in this passage? Not up here, but in here, in your heart? Has God not just changed your theology, but has He changed your soul, so you can tell that there's a difference there? I could ask you like this: have you been born again? Has the Holy Spirit ever come into your life and written His law upon your mind and put his Torah in your heart and remove your heart of stone and replace it with the heart of flesh? Because the rest of this stuff won't mean a hill of beans without it. He won't matter if you've never experienced that. Lady once asked George Whitfield, "Mr. Whitfield, why do you keep saying that we must be born again?" To which Whitfield replied "because dear woman, you must be born again." Can't go into heaven with a dead soul. You have to have a live one. Do you have that this morning? And have you been forgiven as a result? Has God told you that He will remember your sins no more, if you haven't, you can. And if you've never experienced that forgiveness like this, it can be yours for the first time today if you trust in Jesus Christ. If you do that, you can worship God wherever you are. You won't have to hop in your car and go to Jerusalem. You don't have to go through all those courts anymore and approach the slaughter tables and go to the altar and come to the temple and fix your eyes on a room you can't see and an Ark you can't touch and a mercy seat you can look at. You can praise Him right where you sit. Will you do that this morning? Let me close us in a word of prayer and thank the Lord for His goodness.

Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for giving us a New Covenant this morning and the ramifications and all the implications of this we can't flesh out today. But we are so encouraged by what you've given us to your prophet, Jeremiah thousands of years ago. All these things were written before Christ even came and that blows us away, Lord. But we don't want to just look at these things from a distance. We don't want to be just hearers of the word we want to be doers of it. And so, Lord, I do pray for those who were here this morning that these things would penetrate their hearts and show them that they need to experience this on a personal way. We don't want to be outside of these promises we want to be inside of them. We don't want to look at them from a distance and say, "oh, how wonderful" we want to change as a result. So, Lord, I pray you would do that for us. Lord, we do live in a dark world. But we can be light in the midst of that. And we do live in a dangerous time. But we can be cities on a hill. But that all happens as we trust in Christ and become new creatures. Lord, I pray for any who have not experienced that they would know that all this is possible for them. The Forgiveness is possible, the new life is possible, the changed heart is possible, but it all comes from Jesus. Lord, would we have higher thoughts of Him as the book of Hebrews has given us higher thoughts of Christ? I pray that it would continue to do so and that our lives would change, and our worship would change accordingly. May He be glorified, we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.