

eDevotions for Growing Christians

www.growingchristians.org

XXXV-2 2007/2008

Jeremiah 31:31-34 & Hebrews 8:8-12

“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. ³²It 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. ³⁴No 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.”

Jeremiah 31: 35-37

This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name: ³⁶“Only if these decrees

vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” ³⁷This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.

Luke 22:20 & 1 Corinthians 11:25

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

2 Corinthians 3:6

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Hebrews 13:20

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

A NEW COVENANT BUT NOT A NEW ISRAEL

Introduction:

A number of Old Testament prophecies predict a future covenant that God will make with His people Israel. Several times it is called an “*everlasting covenant*,” and in Jeremiah 31:31 it is called a **new** covenant. The **old** covenant was the Law given by God through Moses. It was a conditional covenant made with the nation of Israel. Israel broke this covenant, but God in His grace declared that he would make an unconditional **new** covenant with His chosen people. Under this new covenant God promised His people that He would “*forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.*”

Old Testament Context of the Promised New Covenant:

When we look at the **context** of all the Old Testament prophecies predicting the future new and everlasting covenant, we see that the promise was given to **Israel**—that is, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Jeremiah 31 this new covenant is said to be made specifically with the “house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

In Jeremiah’s day, the people of God were no longer the united nation of Israel, but two nations—the “house” (kingdom) of Israel in the north, and the “house” (kingdom) of Judah in the south. The kingdom of Israel in the north had fallen to the Assyrians about 100 years before Jeremiah’s time, and the kingdom of Judah was just about to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies.

When Jeremiah said that the new covenant would be made “*with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,*” it would have been quite obvious to his audience exactly who he meant by these titles. The people who heard Jeremiah speak or read the prophecy he wrote would have clearly understood that the new covenant was being made with the **Jewish people**—the **literal** descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were the people who had broken the old covenant, the Mosaic Law, and these were the people who would now be encouraged with the promise of a new covenant.

Notice that the Lord guaranteed that the Jewish people would never be eliminated or cease to exist (v35-37). In these verses He used the continuous cycles of nature to illustrate the permanent status of the Jewish people as His chosen people, and He went on to compare the impossibility that He would ever reject them (even though they had sinned) with the impossibility of measuring the vastness of the universe! Those are pretty powerful statements about the permanence of His new covenant with His people Israel!

New Testament References to the New Covenant:

In the New Testament the “new covenant” is mentioned several times. When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (communion) He said, “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you*” (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul wrote that “*He has made us competent as ministers of the new covenant.*”

The other New Testament references to the new covenant are found in the letter to the Hebrews. The new covenant is described as “*a better covenant*” in Hebrews 7:22 and 8:6, and “*the eternal covenant*” in Hebrews 13:20. It is specifically called the “new covenant” in Hebrews 8:8 & 13; Hebrews 9:15 and Hebrews 12:24.

In all of these specific New Testament references a good case can be made that the new covenant is made with all believers—and not just the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After all, when Paul said to the Corinthians that they were “ministers of the new covenant,” he was speaking to Corinthian **Christians**, and the letter to the Hebrews was written to Hebrew **Christians**.

However, Jeremiah 31: 31-37 guarantees the new covenant to the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the Jewish people, and verse 37 states that they will **never** be rejected by God in spite of all they have done. In this **unconditional covenant** there’s certainly no idea of God replacing or redefining Israel—then, or at any time in the future.

Harmonization of the New Covenant Scriptures:

So how is this apparent inconsistency in the Bible to be explained? If the new covenant is to be made with Israel, as the Lord promised

in the Old Testament, why does the New Testament seem to apply the new covenant to all believers in Jesus Christ? Quite a wide range of explanations is given by theologians and students of Scripture. The most popular and prevalent explanation is that God has replaced literal Israel with the Church because of Israel's failures as the covenant people of God. The Church today is the New Israel. This way of thinking is known as "Replacement Theology."

Unfortunately, replacement theology has the serious hermeneutical (interpretive) problem of completely redefining the nation and land of Israel as given in the Old Testament. It is all allegorized to the "land of blessing" for the Church, the "new Israel." In addition, replacement theology flies right in the face of Romans 11, where a clear distinction is made between the Church and Israel. It is obvious from this inspired text that both Israel and the Church coexist at the present time. The teaching of Romans 11 is that Israel has been "set aside" only **temporarily**, until the spiritual restoration of "all Israel" (v.26) in the future. In the meantime, the Church is in the position of favor and blessing in God's program—but the Church has not replaced Israel. Israel is still Israel!

To explain the obvious problem of precisely who the recipients of the new covenant may be, some students of Scripture have proposed **two** new covenants. In this view, the first new covenant was made with Israel and the second new covenant was made with the Church. The problem with this proposed solution, however, is that there is no hint anywhere in Scripture of two new covenants. When the author of Hebrews referred to the new covenant in chapter 8, he directly quoted Jeremiah 31:31-37, the new covenant promise made with the nation of Israel, with no suggestion that a second new covenant was being added and instituted for the Church.

Another explanation for harmonizing the new covenant references in the Old and New Testaments is that the promise of the new covenant is **now** being fulfilled with Jews who have become believers in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. After all, Jewish believers are described as "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16 and the letter to the Hebrews was written to **Jewish** Christians. And could it not be that when the apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 3:6 he had the idea of ministering the new covenant to the Jewish people? We know that many, if not most, of the early Christians were Jewish.

Well, Jewish people who become believers today certainly come under the blessings of the new covenant, but in the **context** of the Lord's promises in Jeremiah 31, it's hard to envisage that believing Jews in the Church today are the complete fulfillment of what God had in mind when He announced His new covenant to Israel. He very specifically promised the spiritual restoration of the **entire nation**—the House of Israel and the House of Judah.

Furthermore, one of the reasons why the writer of Hebrews discussed the promises of the new covenant was to exhort and encourage the Jewish audience to whom he was writing. His Jewish readers would be exhorted not to drift back into placing their faith in the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism, which were all tied to the **old** covenant. Warnings against this danger run throughout the letter to the Hebrews. At the same time, the Jewish readers of Hebrews would be encouraged to know that the Jeremiah 31 promise of the new covenant was still valid as made to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though the blessings of the new covenant were now being extended to all believers.

And that brings us to the **best** way to harmonize the Scriptures dealing with the new covenant:

Extension of the New Covenant Blessings:

While the Lord commits Himself to keeping His promises with the people to whom He made His unconditional covenants, He is not bound or restrained from extending the benefits of His covenants to anyone He may choose. After all, He is God, and He can show His grace to **anyone** of His sovereign choice! The promise of the new covenant was given to Israel, and it will be fulfilled with the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when the Lord returns. However, the **blessings** of the new covenant have been extended to all believers today.

As for Israel, out of the present secular nation of Israel a group of godly Jewish people will not only return to the **Land**, but they will be restored to the **LORD**. This is the "godly remnant" mentioned as "all Israel" in Romans 11:26. It is with this godly remnant of Israel that the Lord will fulfill the promise of His new covenant, and they will receive its blessings.

The Church has not replaced Israel, but the spiritual blessings of the new covenant made with Israel have been extended to the

Church. All believers today have the "law of God written on their hearts" and know the Lord's presence in their lives.

Illustration of the New Covenant:

Here's an illustration to help us understand our relationship, as Christians, to the new covenant made by God with Israel.

Suppose I have a son, and I promise to give him a new car on his 18th birthday. An unconditional covenant to give a car has been made between me and my son.

On his 18th birthday, just as I promised, I present him with the new car—but I don't give him the keys! Why not? Because he failed Driver's Ed, disregarded the traffic laws and didn't drive responsibly. So I tell him that the car is his, but he will only get the keys at a future date, after he learns to obey the laws and drive properly and safely.

Meanwhile I have chosen to adopt another son. He has become part of my family—but I have never promised him a car on his 18th birthday. However, when he turns 18 he has studied the "Rules of the Road" and has proved to be a good and responsible driver, so I choose to give him a car—and the keys as well. He is able to enjoy the blessings of the promise I made to my older son.

In the illustration my covenant/promise to my older son is like the Lord's new covenant with Israel. I did not revoke or change the covenant in any way when I withheld the car keys from him—I only withheld the blessing from him **temporarily**. In the same way, the Lord has never revoked His covenant with Israel, but He has temporarily withheld the fulfillment until a future date when the Jewish people return to Him. Meanwhile, giving a car and the keys to my adopted son, even though I hadn't made the covenant with him, is similar to the Lord extending the blessings of the new covenant to all believers in Jesus Christ, even though the new covenant has not been made with the Church, and the Church in no way replaces Israel. This illustration of the car keys should help us appreciate the truth that there is a new covenant, but not a new Israel!



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Further Study:

If you would like information on how to purchase the set of CDs containing this teaching in audio or purchase other GCM material (books and talks on many books of the Bible), please go to our web store: www.growingchristians.org/cgi-bin/store/agora.cgi.

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34 years of "Devotions for Growing Christians" (without the "News" section) have been indexed by Topic and Scripture, and are available on our website: www.growingchristians.org.

Studies with "Dr. Dave" Reid:

Monday through Friday radio broadcasts in southeastern US: See daily schedule at: www.gnnradio.org

Each Sunday morning: Adult classes at Groton (CT) Bible Chapel.

- 1st Monday of month: 7PM Seminar, Faith Bible Chapel, Ashaway RI.
- Last Sunday of month: 6PM seminar, Terrill Road Bible Chapel, Fanwood, NJ.
- Wednesday evening: Bible study in our home.
- Tuesday: 7:15AM breakfast Bible study for men, Central Baptist Church, Westerly, RI.

Contact us at gcm@growingchristians.org for more information.

Bible Lands Study Tour:

We have 2 Bible lands study tours planned for 2008. Our tour to Israel will be May 16-25 and our Greece and Aegean Cruise tour will be May 24-June 2. There is a significant discount for tourists who sign up for both tours. Send for a brochure to the address below or go to <http://www.growingchristians.org/Tour2008.pdf>. Much more than a vacation—but no tests or student papers required! Both tours are about half filled at the present time.

NEW! Hermeneutics Book:

"Study to Show Yourselves Approved," by David R. Reid has just been published. It can be used as a course in biblical interpretation. Ideal for group or personal study. Nice Christmas gift for students of the Word. Available in our website store:

Financial Report:

The total costs for all aspects of Growing Christians Ministries from September, 2006 to September, 2007 was \$75,251. Praise the Lord, all of these expenses were covered by gifts and sales of tapes and CDs. We are very thankful for your support for this ministry.

There is no subscription fee for "eDevotions for Growing Christians," but we greatly appreciate your financial partnership with us. It is vitally important for maintaining all aspects of this ministry, which the Lord continues to bless and expand. Growing Christians Ministries, Inc. is a nonprofit ministry. Dave and Margie Reid do not take a salary, nor do they receive any remuneration from any area of the ministry. Contributions are fully tax deductible and are used entirely for the ministry. Receipts are mailed promptly. Contributions may be sent with your current mailing address to:

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If you're receiving this devotional letter though the mail, please help us save postage by sending your email address to us at gcm@growingchristians.org. We will not share or sell your address!

Feedback from the Ministry:

From the Philippines:

"I am here in search for God's truth and have received information by my visit to your website."

From South Carolina:

"I really appreciate the broadcasts of "Talks for Growing Christians" on my drive into work each morning. It starts my day off right!"

From The Ivory Coast:

"I thank you for the work which you make for the whole world. I am a young Christian with service to God located in Abidjan, Coast of Ivory."

From Illinois:

"This note is to express my personal gratitude for your study course, "Ready to Give an Answer: A Course in Christian Evidences." We used it for our mid-week Bible study. It was very helpful in building understanding and confidence regarding the issues that were discussed."

From Bahrain:

"We praise God for your ministries. Really it is very resourceful. May God bless you abundantly."

Family News:

This autumn has been unusually long and beautiful here in New England—spectacular foliage and warm days to enjoy it. Dave and Margie spent an afternoon kayaking on the Pawcatuck River with our friends, Frank and Anne Perrin.

Our Illinois granddaughters, Ingrid (11) and Kirsten (9), had a great time at youth retreats in October. We're very thankful for their church's emphasis on strong families, and on grounding young people in their faith.

Ingrid auditioned on cello for two special string ensembles at school—and she got into both! This is quite an honor for a 6th grader, and she's thrilled, even though it means she has to go to school early every morning for practice!

Connor (12) is now in Jr High. He has been playing lacrosse once again this fall, and starts hockey soon. Kirsten had a great soccer season—her team was undefeated, with a scoring record of 82 to 7! Jon (8) is now playing golf on "real" golf courses with his Dad and both his grandfathers. (He gets to tee off just a few yards farther along the fairway than the adults!) Little David (4) enjoys a variety of activities, especially ones that involve speed, like riding his razor scooter downhill.

Once again Dave enjoyed teaching for a week at Ecola Bible School in Cannon Beach, Oregon, in October, and will be teaching "on the road" again for two weeks in November, Lord willing. The first week is at Emmaus Bible College, for their Spiritual Emphasis Week, where he'll be speaking on "Decision-Making." He's looking forward to visiting with his Emmaus friends and colleagues again, and meeting new students.

The second week will be in Myanmar (Burma), where he will be teaching hermeneutics at Southeast Asia Bible College, followed by a weekend of speaking and teaching in Singapore. In view of the recent problems in Myanmar, we would especially appreciate your prayers for that week (the last week of November).

In between those trips he'll continue his regular schedule of preaching, teaching and taping "Talks for Growing Christians." We'll be celebrating Thanksgiving Day here in Rhode Island with Ron and Erica and their boys since Dave departs for Myanmar two days after Thanksgiving.

Once again this year we're looking forward to three Christmases—first in New Jersey with Catherine and Kirk and thier family, where Callie (15) will be singing in a Christmas Eve choir concert at church. Then we'll come back home to celebrate with our Rhode Island grandsons, and finally a week-long late Christmas in Illinois with David, Kari and their girls.

WE WISH YOU A BLESSED THANKSGIVING AND A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS SEASON!

