

Jeremiah 31: 31-34. **The Covenant Upgrade.**

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 WEB Translation

31 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: 34 and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

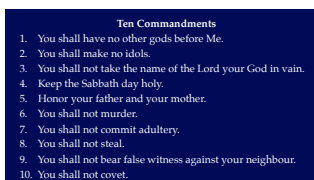


Intro:

We are social animals made for relationship, but relationships can be hard work, *very hard work!*

The Bible has many stories about how the Lord God Almighty, creator of the universe and sustainer of all that exists, called people into relationship with himself. It's the story of the creator wanting to love his creation through men and woman created in his image. This was never going to be easy and actually became more challenging over time.

- God created and provisioned Adam to be his friend along with Eve in the garden. You know that what happened from there on through to Noah was all down hill.
- God called Abram with Sarah to walk in faith for the new thing he would do through them and their descendants. This was hard on God, man and woman alike. Humans had to learn the ways of faith over fear and manipulation.
- Then perhaps 400 years later, this God of Abraham and Sarah worked in their descendent Moses to draw this family of tribes descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to himself by rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. Through Moses he shaped the relationship as a covenant in the wilderness of Sinai.



Two weeks ago we looked at the terms of that covenant between YHWH and Israel in the 10 Commandments as found in Exodus 20.

My message that day was to stress that God's Law as given in these commandments are personal instructions to people belonging to God, called into relationship through obedience of faith. I sought to make clear that these instructions were the first basis for faith providing the opportunity to personally respond to the Lord God Almighty in the way we live our lives. The 10 Commandments were a first opportunity to say 'Yes' to God in a way that shapes us as his people in the world among other peoples who do not acknowledge God or observe his instructions.

I finished with an invitation for people who may have only ever observed the 10 Commandments as rules to receive them as God's personal instructions to them to be observed in the faith of obedience.

Context:

We now move forward 800 years after Moses and things are not going well by any measure. As a people that became a nation and then two kingdoms, Israel and Judah have stumbled forward, flourished and then degenerated badly. In this time the prophets of YHWH convicted, challenged and reminded them that they exist and flourish in their land on the basis of their covenant with YHWH. Faith in the Covenant and the 10

Commandments is what made them a people and bound them to God Almighty. When they ignored this, everything would come apart and they would lose the land and their very existence as a people.

The prophet Jeremiah described this as a marriage breakdown because Israel had been adulterous and unfaithful to YHWH.

In the Covenant YHWH had taken this pathetic little people and covenanted to love them as his own with them observing the covenant requirements given in the Law of Moses represented in the 10 Commandments.

In Jeremiah's time it all fell apart and there was very little left to show for the covenant between YHWH and Israel represented by the remaining rump kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom had already been broken up a century before with its people taken to exile in Assyria and now Judah was assimilated into the Babylonian Empire and its population was also marched off into exile.

This was a disaster 800 years in the making. Israel ceased to be a nation with a land, a temple and was being dissolved into the peoples of the Babylonian empire which itself would be cut up and splintered within another empire. So what was YHWH, the God of the Covenant, going to say now?

Is this the end of God's involvement with any chosen people for all time or what?

Text:

Now we are ready to hear this message from Jeremiah and as you hear it I want to pick up what YHWH is saying: [Jeremiah 31.31-34 –WEB]

Jeremiah 31.31-34
Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh:

Jeremiah 31.31-34
I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: ³⁴ and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: ³⁴ and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

Q: What do you hear God to be saying through Jeremiah around 600 BC to a people more or less finished and ready for the scrapheap of history?

A: Let's open it up promise by promise:

Jeremiah 31.31-34
1. Yahweh says he will make a new covenant.

- 1) Yahweh says he will make a new covenant
 - a. So as the jilted disappointed husband of Israel, The Lord God is lining up to do it all again!

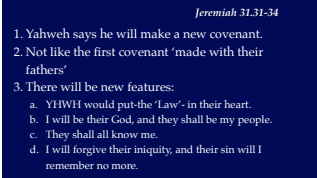
Jeremiah 31.31-34
1. Yahweh says he will make a new covenant.
2. Not like the first covenant 'made with their fathers'

- 2) Not like the first covenant 'made with their fathers' through Moses which they broke even though YHWH was like a faithful husband.
 - a. This covenant will be different.
 - i. Hear the shift from being a covenant made through patriarchy – ¹

¹ I have always found it ironic that gender-neutral versions of the Bible such as the NRSV and also the NIV lose this polemic note by referring to 'ancestors' instead of 'fathers'. This is ironic!

3) There will be new features:

- a. This time, in this new covenant, YHWH would put his instruction to his people -the 'Law'- in their inward parts, in their heart.
- b. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- c. They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know Yahweh"; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.
- d. I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.



It so happened that after my previous message on the 10 Commandments two weeks ago someone wrote to me saying the 10 Commandments as found in Exodus 20 needed modernization as terms like 'idolatry' and 'coveting' were seen as obscure.

The Lord of the Covenant did provide an upgrade and this message from Jeremiah was the first announcement of Covenant 2.0.

YHWH was not giving up on his Covenant. What he was going to do was install it differently.

Covenant 2.0 would not be conveyed through the male leadership of the people. It would not be reliant on priests or teaching institutions. Instead, God was giving notice that his plan was to install his instructions inside each member of his people, in facilities they all have: the heart and the mind.

In IT terms the Old Covenant (1.0) was supported by a centrally accessed data base interpreted by priests and scholars while the coming New Covenant would be individually installed in each and every person as an informed individual.

The first covenant had been set out on stone tablets as received by Moses and despite the clarity of its language and directness of the instruction, and despite all the supporting institutions, generation upon generation of Israelites had not been faithful to it. It had been hit and miss.

This is the human tendency:

Information will not do it no matter how well presented and formatted it is.

Knowledge is not enough.

- We all know the health risks of smoking, drug use, inactive lifestyles, too much sugar etc.
- We all know that dangerous driving -such as texting at the wheel-, pornography and cursing are bad.
- We know that gossip and slander is wrong.

But they happen, even among people who know they are bad, wrong and sometimes fatal.

So many people need to learn the hard way because simply believing what they are told doesn't happen.

The standard human way to cope with this is manipulation.

The parent, the government or the church will structure the environment or the economy in such a way that doing the wrong thing costs so much people will give up thinking about it while doing the right thing has a tax rebate or an ice cream associated with it. This sort of benign manipulation is very strong in the Netherlands.

In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses spelled out the economic sense of compliance with the Law by saying obedience would ensure living long and prospering in the land but this was not convincing in the long term. As YHWH was seeking obedience of faith there would not be divine manipulation to coax the people of Israel towards faithfulness to the God of covenant. Something better had to happen but it would not come cheap. Still living by the 10 commandments is good for all concerned and a recipe for good living.

This pre-release notice of Covenant upgrade from Jeremiah was not an isolated one. The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed something similar: Hear this from Ezekiel 36 (ESV)

²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Ezekiel 36:24-27
 "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put 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."

God was promising his people a new heart with his Spirit to guide in a covenant upgrade.

Another pre-release message of coming covenant upgrade came from the prophet Joel in chapter 2 (ESV):

²⁸ "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Joel 2:28-29
 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit."

Q: What were the prophets saying about the promised Covenant 2.0?

A: God was going to shift the communication environment and dynamic to somewhere inside each human being, to the place where he could speak directly to the human spirit at the center of our consciousness.

Good instruction being given to a heart of stone is wasted and does not bring about faithfulness. Good instruction being spoken within a heart of flesh will be heard. There is then a better chance of faith. As everyone has a heart all those open to this, whatever their social standing, gender or race would be in line to enjoy this.

Application:

So at a low point in God's outreach through the people Israel, YHWH promises again and again through his prophets that he will commit himself anew to his people by speaking into the human heart of all who will listen.

So when did this happen?

This is what God achieved in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ in whom the Law of Covenant 1.0 was fulfilled and upgraded to a better Covenant.

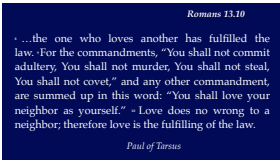
Jesus described it this way: (Matthew 7.12 –ESV)

Matthew 7:12
 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."
 Jesus in Sermon on the Mount.

¹²"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

In saying this Jesus formed the golden rule to say when you positively love others the way you wish to be loved, then you are fulfilling the Law of Covenant 1.0 and the prophets who spoke about it.

St Paul described the upgrade from Covenant 1.0 to 2.0 this way in Romans 13 (ESV):



⁸ ... the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

So this is what it all comes down to:

When God writes his love on a receptive human heart, a heart of flesh and not stone, that heart will guide and instruct a person in the way of God. It will be God’s Law of love guiding from within. That is what Jesus taught and what he made possible in reconciling people to God through his cross and resurrection by the work of his Spirit.

It’s all determined by what happens inside. That is where God reigns.

Covenant 1.0 featured stone tablets and a stone temple while Covenant 2.0 established in Jesus features an empty tomb and a church made of living stones with God’s Spirit within.



The Lord God of the Covenant began pre-release publicity about this 600 years before it came to being in Jesus Christ. That is the distinctive of Christianity where God meets people in their hearts and renews them by transformation of their minds on a journey of faith. It's the way of living where righteousness is established in love rather than by conformity to a set of rules carved in stone.

Conclusion

Now that has been an interesting bible study, but what does it mean to us here today?

Let me ask a diagnostic question:

Q: Have you ever done something because you heard or read God in your heart?

Can you relate to the famous words of John Wesley whose heart was at one point ‘strangely warmed’ and he knew God’s saving love as never before after many years of study and ministry?

If the answer is ‘No’: If you have no story of hearing God in your heart and living by that, even in the smallest most tentative way then there is good news and bad news.

The bad news is that at best you are most likely at best living by Covenant 1.0.

So many People are more Christian-influenced that actually Christian as Covenant 2.0 provides for.

The good news is that God is waiting at the door to come and write on your heart and speak in your inner being in ways that could really change you forever.

This requires us to open our hearts and live from there. It requires that door to the heart to open which might take freeing up rusty hinges or such.

Living by Covenant 2.0 is normal Christianity as Jesus provided for.

Living by Covenant 1.0 is sub-normal Christianity and has more in common with Sharia than the Sermon on the Mount.

Where do you think you are?

The acid test is whether you can talk about it.

Can you tell yourself or others when and how you heard or ready God in your heart and trusted?

Let’s pray: