

The New Covenant (Part 2)

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says:

^{31:31} "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

⁹ ^{31:32} not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰ ^{31:33} For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹¹ ^{31:34a} And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

¹² 31:34b For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

Hebrews 8:6-13

A Most Talked About Topic

THE NEW COVENANT. In the Reformed world between Baptists and Paedobaptists, I can think of fewer topics that are discussed more often. This is because the new covenant has become the bulls eye for arguments and debates about [baptism](#) and [covenant membership](#). Sadly, though Jeremiah might legitimately be used to touch on this question in an after-the-fact way, it should be admitted by all that this passage has nothing to do with baptism. This is why, when I argue for credobaptism, I refuse to use Jeremiah's new covenant.

Nevertheless, people do, and today as we are looking at

the new covenant, we will ask some of the questions that are also asked in this debate. But because Jeremiah does not have baptism in mind, neither will we.¹ I don't want to answer modern questions today, but ancient questions. Only then can we understand what Jeremiah is talking about. Those questions would include, [who is the new covenant given to](#), and [what kind of people does it say that they will be](#)? While baptism in our own context may be a related question that shoots off of these answers, in the original context of Jeremiah and Hebrews, better questions would be [how do these people get this way](#) and [what does it mean for their lives](#)?

The Days are Coming

Let's start with the first question that arises in the passage. [When is Jeremiah's new covenant](#)? The text is found in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) and again in [Hebrews 8:8-12](#). The passage is a prophecy. "[Behold, the days are coming...](#)" ([Jer 31:31](#)). "[The days](#)" is an [eschatological](#) time frame. So

¹ For my views of baptism, I've written a whole book on the subject from a credobaptist, covenant theology perspective that never once refers to Jeremiah 31. It is called *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism*.

when are these days? In the six hundred or so years between Jeremiah and Hebrews, the passage is only used one time that we know of as far as the time frame is concerned. The Jews at Qumran by the Dead Sea believed that they were living in the new covenant 100-200 years prior to Jesus (CD-A VI, 18–19; 1QS I, 16, 18, 20, 24; II, 10).

But according to Hebrews and the NT, this was impossible. If we remember the way Hebrews began it said, “In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son...” (Heb 1:2). This is talking about Jesus *in the flesh*, and that didn’t happen in the days of Qumran. Because of Jesus’ coming, the main thing you have to know about the “when” of the new covenant is that what was future for Jeremiah is now **past for us**. The days are no longer coming when God will make a new covenant. The days are past. If this is true, then it means that this covenant is for Christians in a way that no other covenant in the Bible is. For we are under *this* covenant. Therefore, to understand it is of paramount importance for our lives, for this establishes our relationship with God.

CD-A *Damascus Document*^a
1QS *Rule of the Community*

I Will Make

The next thing that arises is **the maker of the covenant**. “... declares the **LORD** [Yahweh], when **I** will **establish** a new covenant...” (**Heb 31:31**; **Heb 8:8**). Who is Yahweh? Obviously, he is the God of Israel. But the God of Israel is Triune, not Unitarian. Of course, the covenant is with the Triune God. If you are in a covenant with God, then you are in a covenant with the Three Persons. But how might this work?

Speaking according to the Persons, the **Father** is the one who plans such things as covenants. The **Spirit** is the one who seals the covenant promises. The **Son** is the one who is particularly given a people as an inheritance, and this is covenantal language. The Father gives the Son the people of his choosing (**Deut 32:9**;² **Jer 10:16/51:19**;³ etc.) as part of an eternal covenant (**Luke 22:29**⁴). This “giving” to the Son

² “But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.” The context here is of Elyon (“the Most High”; vs. 7) giving the nations to the “sons of God” (vs. 8). In vs. 9, Elyon gives Israel to Yahweh (the Son). When we come to **Psalm 2:6** for example, the Son will then “ask” the Father for a greater inheritance, and the Father will give him “the nations.”

³ “Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.”

⁴ “Just as My Father has granted (*diatithemi*) Me a kingdom, I grant (*diatithemi*) you” (**Luke 22:29** NAS). The context is the Last Supper. Jesus is talking here about a covenant grant that

is understood in Jeremiah to be a marriage (Jer 3:1-11).⁵ Marriage language occurs in Jeremiah 31:32. “My covenant which they broke, although I was their husband.”⁶ As such, the Son is the one who has a special relationship with Israel, even as it is Christ—not the Father—who takes a bride in the NT. That bride is his Church (Eph 2:25; Rev 21:2). We will see just a little later how intimate this relationship between Israel and the Church actually is.

I Will Make

The way Christ takes his bride in the new covenant is by “giving himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), “an offering and a

he was given. Now, in his own blood, he grants a covenant (i.e. the new covenant) to his disciples.

⁵ This is contrary to Dispensationalism which sees the Father marrying Israel. No, it is the Son who does that. He becomes the husband. In the ancient world, no son presumed to just marry a woman. She had to be given to him.

⁶ The LXX has a couple of differences from the Hebrew of Jeremiah. Most notably “I was their husband” (31:32) becomes “I did not care for them.” (Other variants of the LXX read, “and I am the one who ruled among them” and “I was restraining them.” See George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007], 972). Hebrews follows the LXX in its quote of Jeremiah’s new covenant, with minor stylistic exceptions that are not worth noting here.

The word in Jeremiah for “husband” is *ba’al*, and is related to the name proper name of the god *Ba’al* (Lord). It can be translated as “lord” or “ruler.” However, most popular English translations (KJV, ESV, NAS, NIV, etc.) opt for “husband.” The LXX (above) translated it as something like “did not care” or “neglect.” This kind of idea certainly fits the idea that the LORD was their husband, but because of their actions, he no longer cared (i.e. he divorced her). It also fits with the idea of a Lord over Israel. Thus, it is a neutral translation.

sacrifice” (5:2), and “by his blood” (Rev 5:9). Oh, closely related the new covenant is to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus! To see how, we need to understand that the way covenants are made. The Bible says that they are literally “cut.” The Hebrew word is *karath* in Jer 31:31. This becomes the Greek *diatithemi* (“to grant” LXX; Jer 8:10; “to make” ESV; also *sunteleo* or “establish” in Heb 8:8 ESV; and *poieo* of “made” in 8:9 ESV.)⁷ In the old covenants, it is the blood of animals that *cuts* the covenant. In the new covenant, it is the blood of the Lamb of God when he dies on the cross. This is exactly what we “remember” when we take the Lord’s Supper and the “new covenant in my blood.”

Now, when a covenant is cut or established or made, that means that it has gone into effect. However, that does not necessarily mean that all of its blessings have gone into effect. For example, God cut a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. One of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant was that he would have a son and through that son he would inherit the world. However, Abraham does not actually have a son until many years after Genesis 15. So it took some time to realize that blessing. So let’s go back to the time

⁷ See also note 4.

frame again.

The prophecy where Jeremiah 31:31-34 occurs takes place within a larger context of **vv. 27-40**. This context is framed by **three specific things** that God says he will do in the future. Each is marked with the phrase “**Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD**” (vs. **27, 31, 38**).

- The Future Planting of God’s People in the Land (**31:27-30**)
- Future New Covenant with God’s People (**31:31-37**)
- Future Rebuilding and Permanence of the Holy City (**31:38-40**)⁸

The first section tells us that in Jeremiah’s future, God will replant his people in the Promised Land (**27-30**). When we remember that they are presently in exile in Babylon and then go to prophets after Jeremiah, we see that this was fulfilled in the OT. This replanting is not part of the new covenant *per se*, but it did mean that the new covenant was

⁸ The main parts of the Jeremiah structure here and below I take from Richard Pratt, “Jeremiah 31: Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,” *IIM Magazine* 4:1 (January 7 to January 13), 2002. http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/TH.Pratt.New.Covenant.Baptism.pdf. Though Pratt does a fine job of outlining Jeremiah, I do not agree with some of his application.

on the horizon.

The last section is a promise to rebuild Jerusalem so that it will last forever (31:38-40). Obviously, though they were rebuilding the temple after they returned from exile, that temple did not last, and the city was devastated in 70 AD. So this promise is yet to be fulfilled in its completeness. The Second Temple was a type, but not the reality. However, we have to see that this is part of the promise of the new covenant. It is the new covenant that will bring about a permanent Jerusalem. This promise is being presently fulfilled in a literal, albeit spiritual way. (Some want “literal” and “spiritual” to be opposites, but the opposite of “literal” can’t be spiritual, since the spiritual world literally exists). It is fulfilled in the meaning of words used to describe the recipients of the new covenant. This takes us back to our passage, which is the middle of these three sections of the larger context.

Declaration: The Covenant Recipients

So who are the covenant recipients? It is clear from history that the unfolding of the three parts of this passage

take place chronologically. The new covenant has been established because the Jews were brought back to their land. Our passage continues, “I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8). It might seem evident who this is talking about. Some think it is literal biological Jews only. Others think it is Christians and their infants. What is it talking about?

First, you have to see that Hebrews isn't applying this to the nation of Israel, but to the Church. Somehow, he has interpreted “house of Israel” and “house of Judah” as the Church. There is no other explanation for how he could apply the new covenant to the church unless this is what he was doing. So how can that be?

Judah and Israel: Jesus as Covenant Recipient

Here, we have to remember that covenants are always mediated by covenant heads. When God made a covenant with the world, he made it with Noah who represented the world. When God made a covenant with Israel, he made it with Abram who represented his people, and so on. We have

seen that Jesus is the one making the new covenant with his bride. We saw that he did this with his blood. But to have blood means that you are a human being. Gods don't bleed! But the God-man bled. It is this humanity of Jesus that becomes so important in a new way.

Jesus' death is the climax of three plus years of priestly ministry acted out to perfection (indeed, his entire life was one of perfect obedience). [Matthew](#) is a good example of how Jesus' life is set up to emulate Israel's life. Born from the stock of Jewish kings ([Matt 1](#)), he is a Hebrew of Hebrews. When he is two, a king tries to kill him, so he goes down to Egypt ([Matt 2](#)). He returns from Egypt and goes through the waters of baptism, as Israel was led through the Red Sea out of Egypt ([Matt 3](#)). He goes into the wilderness and is tempted for a period of "forty," but he obeys and does not fall into temptation ([Matt 4](#)). He goes up to a mountain where he gives the law, just as Moses went up the mountain and received the law ([Matt 5-7](#)). He comes back down and never disobeys his God, not even to the point of death on a cross ([Matt 8ff](#)).

The point Matthew is making is that [Jesus is True Israel](#). If Jesus is True Israel, then he is the True Recipient of the

new covenant. The new covenant is therefore that eternal covenant made before time now come to fruition in our own history. Jesus is being given the covenant of grace because of his perfect obedience and fulfillment of all the old covenants. Friends, if you want to know what “Israel” or “Judah” means, look no further. Until you come to accept that Jesus Christ is true Israel, you will never be able to understand what he actually did for the whole world. The new covenant won’t make any sense to you.

Judah and Israel: The Church as Covenant Recipient “in Christ”

Now, remember that in the OT, the house of Israel is called the **Vine** (**Isa 5:1-7**). But in the NT, **Jesus is called the Vine** (**John 15:1-5**). Why? Because Jesus is True Israel. But then Jesus says something amazing. *Any* who are branches in the Vine have abundant life. The idea is that **to be in the Vine is to be part of the Vine**. Christians have their life “in Christ.” To put that another way, they have their life “in True Israel.” Thus, the Church is actually what is being predicted by Jeremiah. Let’s look a little more carefully to see how.

Using a different metaphor, listen to what Jeremiah said earlier in his book. The prophet lumps the two houses in with all of the nations. They are no different in this respect: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh--Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 9:25-26). Circumcision is obviously hugely important for the covenant God made with Israel through Abraham. But if you do not have a circumcised heart, then to God, you are as good as a pagan. And this is found in the OT!

Just here, I want us to move ahead for a moment to Jer 33:33/Heb 8:10, and one of the promises found regarding the new covenant. “I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts.” “On their hearts” language is closely related to being circumcised in heart, and other new covenant prophecies confirm this. This idea of being circumcised in heart is found in Jeremiah 4:4, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your

hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.” This is in turn found in Deuteronomy. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:15).

But of course, it isn't possible for a man to circumcise his own heart. Moses told the people that it was in God's power to do so, but as of the end of Deuteronomy, he hadn't done it yet. “But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (Deut 29:4). God refused to do that in those days in order that the new covenant promises might come to us today. Moses foresaw this and prophesied, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). This is a new covenant prophecy.

Now let's think about Ezekiel. This prophet talks about the same new covenant, only he calls it a “covenant of peace” (Ezek 37:26-28).⁹ “I will sprinkle clean water on you,

⁹ “I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be

and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And 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” (Ezek 36:25-26).

Take all of this and come to the NT and suddenly you start seeing the fulfillment in the church. Listen to the language of being a Jew from this passage in Romans, “No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:28-29). This is what Jeremiah was driving at, and in the first part actually said. This is what Ezekiel was looking forward to as well.

But Paul is talking about the Gentiles being True Jews. This was in accordance with many prophecies. Isaiah puts it this way, “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into

my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” (Ezek 37:26-28). “Covenant of peace” is the language of the Phinehas priestly covenant. Ezekiel’s language here is completely temple focused, as is the ritual of sprinkling. See last week’s sermon for more on the priestly covenant and its relation to the new covenant.

Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance’ (Isa 19:23-25). This goes all the way back to the covenant promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations.

We have only looked at the prophecy of a new heart and circumcision, but this one idea can help us see why the NT uses all sorts of “Israel” language to talk about the Church. It calls us “true Jews” (Rom 2:29), “the circumcision” (Php 3:3);¹⁰ “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16),¹¹ “the temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16),¹² “Abraham’s children” (Rom 4:16);¹³ “the new Jerusalem” (Rev 21:2),¹⁴ “the bride” (Eph 5:25),¹⁵ “a kingdom of priests” (Rev 5:10; cf. Ex 19:6),¹⁶ and even the

¹⁰ “We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

¹¹ “And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

¹² “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”

¹³ “... not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

¹⁴ “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

¹⁵ See n. 14.

¹⁶ “You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:10); “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6).

term Ekklesia (Church) is straight out of the OT.¹⁷

Thus, when Jeremiah says that God is going to make a new covenant with the house of Judah and Israel, we have to understand the organic relationship between the nation of Israel and the church. The church is Israel “in Christ.” The first stage of the prophecy was with the nation of Israel—they were brought back to the Land. The second stage comes once the Gentiles are grafted into the vine, which is not the nation of Israel, but **Jesus Christ who is True Israel**. The nation is a type of Christ. This is why Hebrews can take a prophecy that seems to be for the nation only, and apply it to the church of Jesus. The NT everywhere sees the church as the eschatological fulfillment of national Israel. That doesn’t mean the biological people called Jews cease to be Jews anymore than Italians or Chinese cease to be those. It does mean that in Christ, all are one nation—there is no Jew or Greek (**Gal 3:28**).

Not Like the Covenant I Made With Their Fathers...

¹⁷ See **Deut 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:2-4; 31:10**; etc.

As we move ahead, and come to the meat of the new covenant. What will this covenant be like? What are its promises? We see that it is put first **negatively** and then **positively**.¹⁸ The negative statement says it will “**not**” be “**like the covenant that I made**” (**Heb 31:32; Heb 8:9**). The positive then gives us two/three verses of what it will be like (**Heb 31:33-34; Heb 8:10-12**). Let’s look at the negative statement briefly.

It says that it is, “**Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord**” (**Jer 31:32; Heb 8:9**).¹⁹ There are

¹⁸ The passage is woven together neatly into two parts, with each part containing two “declares the LORD” statements (Hebrews drops the fourth/last one, following the LXX). There is a declaration then a denial and then another declaration and an affirmation.

Negative Announcement of Covenant to Come (31:31-32)

Declaration (31:31) “declares the Lord” (31:31a)

Denial (31:32) “declares the Lord” (31:32g)

Positive Clarification of Covenant to Come (31:33-34e)

Declaration (31:33a,b) “declares the Lord” (31:33b)

Affirmation (31:33c-e) “declares the Lord” (31:33e)

¹⁹ We are exegeting Jeremiah which reads differently here than Hebrews. “... my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband” (Jer 31:32). Jeremiah’s focus takes him back to early in his book when he says that God sent Israel away by giving her a divorce (Jer 3:8). It is actually

two episodes that this could refer to. The first is [the Golden Calf](#) with Aaron, where we saw last week the Levites were ordained into ministry. The second is the [rebellion at Kadesh Barnea](#) where the spies refused to enter the land.

Hebrews has had the second in mind throughout the book (see chs. 3-4 and our exegesis of the warning passage of ch. 6). So this fits with the context of Hebrews. Scholars have argued that the Golden Calf episode was actually marked by a reprieve, forgiveness, but forgiveness that came in the form of a new covenant—the Levitical covenant—which offered restoration to the law breakers. This forgiveness is why we actually see Moses going back up the mountain to write the tablets (this time with his own finger) all over again after he broke them. (Hence, Deuteronomy 5 and the second listing of the Ten Commandments).

But the Kadesh episode was [the final straw](#) for that generation who, because of this great sin, were not allowed to enter God's rest. Even worse, they were disinherited in the form of an oath—a kind of anti-covenant which recalled Abraham's covenant that God then took away from that

through this divorce that God is then “legally” allowed to “remarry” the Gentiles, but amazingly they actually are then called “Israel” as we have seen above.

rebellious rabble (**Num 14:21-30**). Thus, someone has written:

The golden calf episode does not involve so much a rejection of God and his power and faithfulness as an attempt by the people to shape God into their own image. Much more is at stake in the spy story where the people repudiate the power and faithfulness of God to fulfill his covenantal promises. In seeking another leader to return to Egypt, they have renounced God and his covenant with his people.²⁰

So the covenant was “**broken**” by Israel (Jeremiah). They “**did not continue**” in it (Hebrews). The question now becomes, how did they break the covenant? The answer is two-fold, but the order is important. First, **they did not have faith**. Hebrews has been making this point for several chapters. Second, **they did not obey God**. They refused to do what he said. To return to what we said earlier, they did not have circumcised hearts, and so did not really want to

²⁰ D. T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 145; cited in Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 154. Also, Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 387.

obey him. Somehow, then, this becomes the antithesis of what the new covenant will be like. Somehow, the new covenant will not be like this.²¹

Declaration 2 and the Covenant Affirmations or Content

This negative view of the old covenant, which I've suggested in Hebrews has the Levitical covenant particularly in view, is followed now by a new declaration and a list of things that the new covenant will involve. It begins, “**For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Yahweh**” (Jer 31:33). The way it is now put is in a **positive form** rather than a negative one.

There are **three positive statements** and each is followed by **its own effect**. The first involves **the law** and its effect. The second involves **teaching the law** and its effect. The third involves **breaking the law** and its effect. Notice that

²¹ It is important to remember here that someone like Moses had faith (see Heb 11), and yet at Kadesh Barnea did not have faith (Num 20:12). He often did exactly what God commanded him (Ex 7:20 etc.), and yet did not obey him at Kadesh Barnea (Num 20:11). The point here is not to say that no one in the old covenant had their heart circumcised. Some did, and though they rebelled and were not allowed to enter the Land, they still were saved. We will see shortly that the difference between the new and old is not that in the old no one had their heart circumcised, but that some did. Now, something new is happening.

law is involved in the new covenant. It isn't that the new covenant is without law. I would argue that all covenants, by definition, involve law. For law is the "stipulations" of the covenant. Law is what you have to "do" in order to "keep covenant." Rather, the relationship of the people to the law through the new covenant is now different.

The Law and the Heart

The first thing we find about the new covenant is something we've already discussed. "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts" (**Hebrews 8:10**). Hebrews takes Jeremiah's "law" and makes it plural. Perhaps it does this so that you know it is talking about the actual commandments within the Torah.

Of course, this begs the question, "**Which laws?**" This is a difficult question to answer. Last week we saw that **Hebrews has in mind the ceremonial laws**. But would God write ceremonial laws on our hearts when he says that the ceremonial laws like washings and animal sacrifices are done away? Elsewhere, such as 2 Corinthians 3, it seems to be the Ten Commandments that are in mind. In that passage,

it talks about the Corinthians as actually being letters written by Christ, not on stone, but on flesh (2Co 3:2-3).²² Yet, some will make the same point even about moral law. We are not under law, but under grace. Why would God write these on our hearts now? That would seem to defeat the whole point of not being under law.

Here is my answer to which laws. First, simply put, it says that God will write the law(s) on our hearts. A blogger has said, “Anyone claiming to be in covenant with G-d under the New covenant has had the Torah written on their hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:31-33)! We cannot accept Torah being written on our heart and mind while summarily rejecting Torah as old & nailed to a cross.”²³ Whether this blogger understands how the Torah has been nailed to a cross is one thing, but the point being made is another—and it is correct. New covenant Christians was to keep the law.

As it regards the moral law, I don't see how you can read 2 Cor 3 and come away with an answer that doesn't at least

²² Is this an interesting allusion to how Christ is the one who originally wrote the letters on the stone on top of the mountain with Moses?

²³ Messianic Jewish Blogger ShaliachShalom, in a comment at: <https://standingonshoulders.wordpress.com/2009/05/31/where-did-the-term-old-testament-and-new-testament-come-from/>

include these. **The Ten** are now written on our hearts. Second, we have to realize that even **civil and ceremonial** law are kept in the church. But they are kept differently in the church than they were in the OT nation. Paul applies the “**do not muzzle the ox**” (civil law) passage to paying the pastor. He is taking an eternal moral principle and applying it in the NT economy. Paul also uses all kinds of ceremonial language and applies it to us with perhaps the most well known being, “**Offer your bodies as living sacrifices...**” (**Rom 12:1**). So it isn't that law ceases, it is our stance towards it that is different.

Our stance is now understood through the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. The law demands obedience. Jesus obeyed. The law promises life when there is obedience. Jesus was raised from the dead. He is the Law-Keeper. And by his death, God pardons are law-breaking because he is pleased with The Son. Therefore, the law no longer condemns us, because Jesus put that work to death on the cross. Now, we are free to obey the law not out of guilt or fear of punishment, but for another reason.

What might it mean to have the law written on your heart, and how would this be a new thing? Recall King

Josiah of whom it is said that he “turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses” (2Kg 23:35). Or David who says that the law is in his heart (Ps 37:31; 40:8). I see three possible differences in the new covenant from what we see here. One thing that is not different is if someone concluded that Jeremiah is predicting that finally, in the new covenant, people will be saved. No. David and Josiah were saved. They were regenerated by God, justified by faith, and they loved God’s law.

The first difference could be the people in the covenant. No longer is God keeping the writing of the law within the bounds of the nation of Israel and the elect within her. No, now he is extending it to Gentiles. Very importantly, the Apostle Paul does say something about the law in relation to Gentiles. He says that they “do what the law requires” even though they do not have the law and this makes them “a law to themselves” (Rom 2:14). He adds, “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (15). Paul’s “work of the law” is different from the law itself. The work of the law is to

condemn or show a person to be right in their actions. All men know God's law. But this is different from personally deeply longing to obey and do God's law. Gentiles know it and do it because they can't live with a dirty conscience as it were. But do they love God's law? If they are in the new covenant they sure do.

A second difference would be **the place where the law was kept**. In the OT, the law was "kept" on tablets of stone in a tabernacle of wood and gold. In the new covenant, the law is now "kept" in the people's hearts. This gets at the heart of the NT calling **believers "God's temple"** (see above). The Holy Spirit descends on the church at Pentecost, and the "place" of God's dwelling and thus, the law, thereby changes as well.

The third difference is **the number of people within the covenant that want to keep the law**. If this is correct (and Baptists and Infant Baptists disagree on this point), I believe it is very significant. God seems to be saying that he will write the law on the hearts of everyone who is in the new covenant. To see this better, we have to go to the second blessing of the new covenant. In the baptism debate, a main question is whether or not people who have never professed

faith in Christ will have the blessings of the new covenant (namely, infants).

Something is said at the end of this promise that may help us. “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” This is rich OT covenantal language that Jeremiah is drawing upon here. It means many things. Sometimes it means something similar to what it says here. To be God’s people is to have a heart to know that he is the LORD. (This actually combines the “law on the heart” with “knowing the Lord” which we will look at in a moment). Part of what this meant also was to repent when you broke his law. “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart” (Jer 24:7). When God becomes a person’s God in the new covenant, even when they disobey, they always return to him.

Yet, when God becomes your God, you must obey him. Jeremiah said earlier in his book, “This command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people’” (Jer 7:23; cf. Jer 11:4). Here, “they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsel and evil hearts” (24). They didn’t want to obey God, even

though they were in covenant with him. This is exactly why Jeremiah and Ezekiel say of the new covenant “I will give them one heart, and a new spirit ... remov[ing] the heart of stone ... that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20).

Part of being their God meant that he had **delivered them from slavery**. “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Ex 6:7). This deliverance was not only from (slavery) but **to (the land)**. “Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer 32:37-38). This deliverance also included **deliverance from sin**. “You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses” (Ezek 36:28-29). “I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in

faithfulness and in righteousness” (Zech 8:8).²⁴

God delivers and saves and is to be obeyed because he is king. God said that he dwelt among them as their king. But a curious prophecy says that there will be more one day. “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves” (Lev 26:11-13). We can see then that something in the new covenant includes the LORD walking around. It is talking about the Lord Jesus. He will be their God through his new covenant.

The Law and Teaching: To Know the Lord

In the old covenant, you clearly had some that were in covenant with God who were not elect, who died, and went to hell. How else can we understand Jesus calling the Pharisees children of the devil? The question in the baptism debate is whether or not this is also true in the new covenant.

²⁴ These things have an objective nature to them on the cross and a subjective nature to them when a person is supernaturally changed into a new creation.

Certainly, the language of this first promise leads us in the direction that today things are different. Perhaps the second promise can shed some more light on this question.

The statement is, “They shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’” (Jer 31:34). We will focus on “teaching” first. Under the old covenant, God sent mediators who would teach the law. Moses was the first, and this was followed by the priests whose job it was to teach the law, as Ezra did. Other teachers included the fathers who were to teach the children, “You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut 11:19). But even under the new covenant, we still have teachers. So this “teaching” isn’t merely helping people grow in knowledge. Rather, it is knowledge of a more basic kind.

The content of the teaching is to actually “know the Lord.” So the declaration is that they will no longer teach telling people to know the Lord. This will now be done immediately by the Holy Spirit. *He* will circumcise the heart and write the Commandments on us as living tablets of flesh.

The promise is, “They will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” “All” is an important word, for this is how the new covenant differs from the old.

Knowing the Lord also has a rich OT background and Jeremiah is drawing up it. First, like the laws on your heart, to know the Lord is to obey him. “They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD” (Jer 9:3). “For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’-- in doing evil! But how to do good they know not” (Jer 4:22). “Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD” (Jer 9:6). “Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD” (Jer 22:15-16).

But before this can happen, you have to have **Christ revealed to you**. This idea is actually found in the OT. “Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the

LORD had not yet been revealed to him” (1Sa 3:7). There is something objective about this knowledge. That is, it comes to a person from the outside, not the inside. In the OT, very few people know Christ in this way. They had to trust the prophets like Samuel who actually did know him and who spoke with him and talked to him. But in the NT, there is an objective sense in which everyone “knew the Lord,” because they could see him walking around all over Israel. He had followers, disciples, enemies, friends. He was physical, embodied, incarnated.

Now, today, he is no longer walking around. That is why it is so vital to tell people about him. That is why things like celebrating his death, burial, and resurrection can be so helpful. The NT roots these events in the physical, the tangible, the sensory, and in history. People can only come to an inward knowledge of the Lord Jesus if the first recognize his outward coming, even as Samuel did with the Angel and then the disciples did with Jesus. He has to be revealed to people. The new covenant is clearly a better revealing of Jesus than the old was.

But in the new covenant, *necessarily*, this external works its way into the internal. “The LORD will make himself

known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them” (Isa 19:21). Why are Egyptians sacrificing to him? Because they want to! Because they know him now.

We have seen how Jesus takes a bride. In the OT prophecies, to know the LORD is to be **married to him**. This is an intimate knowledge of husband and wife. “**I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD**” (Hos 2:20). To be married to him means that you have been **called and equipped by him**. “**For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me**” (Isa 45:4-5). Andrew once asked Jesus, “**How do you know me?**” “**Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you’**” (John 1:48). When you are called like this, you follow. “**I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me**” (John 10:14). Can you hear the language of the new covenant in Jesus’ words? Are you hearing his voice even now?

People who are called and equipped and married to the Lord **recognize his authority over them**. Pharaoh didn't. He said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (**Exod 5:2**). He didn't recognize Christ's authority, therefore he would not obey. So God did mighty works in Pharaoh's presence. Thus, people who know the Lord **recognize his mighty works**. "And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals" (**Jdg 2:10-11**). Is not the greatest work of all the resurrection of Jesus? "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth" (**Hos 6:2-3**).

In the "infant in the covenant" debate, sometimes people will say, "Yes, but there is the already/not yet of the covenant." I completely agree. There is. Not all of the elect are in the covenant yet. Because not all of the elect have yet believed. Nor have many of them even been born. Beloved,

you are not in the covenant until you believe upon Christ. You are to look to Christ alone for salvation, not to election. That is for your sanctification.

But this isn't exactly the claim being made by infant Baptists. They want to say that infants—whether they are elect or not—are in the covenant prior to faith through baptism. I just don't see any way of reading the language of “[knowing the LORD](#)” in the OT or NT that allows you to this conclusion. [To know the LORD is to be saved by him.](#) Sure, there is that external, objective knowledge of Christ that a person has to have. But true knowledge is the fear of the LORD. It is all of these things we have been talking about here. This is perhaps the main reason why Baptists love this passage so much when it comes to the question of baptism, even though the passage actually has nothing to do with baptism.

The Law and Forgiveness: Your Sins Are Remembered No More

The last thing promised in the new covenant is truly amazing. Earlier I said that [remembering](#) is part and parcel of covenants. This week I read a great “reminder” from

Desiring God Ministries that the reason why people grumble, complain, get angry, hold grudges, get bitter, and other things starts because they forget. “This is the blood of the covenant, do this in remembrance of me.” How can people who have tasted of this good salvation, who know the cost of their own sin to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who recognize the horrible depravity of their rebellion, even for a single moment act like this? Because we forget.

We must remember. Now contrast this with God in the new covenant. “I will remember their sins no more.” The declaration is that he will be merciful towards our iniquities. The promise is that he will remember our sins no more. This is because Jesus has mediated a better covenant. His sacrifice takes away sins once-for-all. In the old covenant, God kept remembering, because there was not a sacrifice that truly appeased his wrath. No animal, no matter how pure and spotless, was capable of truly substituting for your sin and mine. But the Lamb of God was. Where sins were once only covered, the sacrifices had to keep being repeated. But where the One Sacrifice of Christ is, there is no more remembrance of sin.

Of course, it isn't that God doesn't literally forget. It is

that he does not hold our sins against us. Nothing we do can ever sever his great love for us in Christ. For, the Father is perfectly satisfied in the obedience of his Son, and the Spirit has united us to the Son in perfect union so that when he looks upon us and our sin, God only sees the Righteousness of Jesus.

But you have to be in Christ to be in the new covenant. Beloved, trust in this Lord Jesus today. Confess him before men. Bow before him as King. Repent of your dark, secret sins, of those things you have been refusing to bring before his throne. Come to know the gracious benefits of Christ dead and risen. If he does not die, the covenant is not cut. If he is not raised, then the covenant holds no life. It is a dead covenant.

Come to see the beauty of the new covenant.

May the Risen Lord Shine upon your hearts and give you the warmth and love of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Comparing Jeremiah and Hebrews on the New Covenant

Jeremiah 31	Hebrews 8
<p>³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,</p> <p>³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.</p> <p>³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p> <p>³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'"</p>	<p>⁸ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,</p> <p>⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, [LXX] declares the Lord.</p> <p>¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, [Pl. follows LXX] and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p> <p>¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. [drop follows LXX]</p> <p>¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.'"</p>