

# ***The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant***

## ***The New Covenant***

Lesson #10 for June 5, 2021

Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 5:17-28; 27:51; Hosea 2:18-20; Isaiah 56:6-7; Hebrews 8:7-8; 10:4.

1. So, what was the big difference between the new covenant and the old covenant? Is the new covenant really new? Have the conditions of acceptance by God been changed in any way? Wasn't God's love demonstrated clearly all the way from the days of Adam and Eve to our day?
2. What parallels do you see between the old and new covenants? How is the law involved? Hebrews 8:6 suggests that the new covenant is a "better covenant." What does that mean? Is there any relationship between the "high priestly ministry" of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and His covenant of grace? Notice these Scriptures about the new covenant.

**Hebrews 8:6:** But now, **Jesus has been given priestly work which is superior to theirs**, just as the covenant which he arranged between God and his people is **a better one**, because it is based on promises of better things.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Hebrews 8:6). New York: American Bible Society.<sup>†</sup>

**Jeremiah 31:31-34:** <sup>31</sup> The LORD says, "The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the **people of Israel** and with the people of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, **they did not keep that covenant.** <sup>33</sup>The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: **I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup>None of them will have to teach his fellow-citizen to know the LORD, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the LORD, have spoken."—*Good News Bible.\**<sup>†</sup> [Could we study the plan of salvation without mentioning *sin?*]<sup>‡</sup>

3. Several things should be apparent from these verses. (1) God is the one who instigates the covenants. (2) It is His law that is being talked about. (3) What kind of relationship is God talking about? (4) Is it possible for God to literally put His law in our "hearts" (our minds)?
4. What was the problem with the old covenant? The old covenant was based on the promises of the people and not the promises of God.

**Exodus 19:8:** Then all the people answered together, "We will do everything that the LORD has said," and Moses reported this to the LORD.—*Good News Bible.\**  
[That was before God came down on Mount Sinai. Compare Exodus 24:3,7.]<sup>‡</sup>

5. The new covenant is based on God's promises. The old covenant failed because almost immediately the Israelites broke their promise to God.
6. Technically, we are not talking about a new covenant, but rather **a renewed covenant.**
7. But isn't there a contradiction in Jeremiah 31:34?

Even though the Lord says that He will write the law on our hearts and place it within us, He still stresses that He will forgive our sin and iniquity, which violates the law written in our hearts.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study*

*Guide\** for Sunday, May 30. [We will always be free.]<sup>‡</sup>

8. In Romans, Paul suggested that our conduct tells something about our relationship to God and His law.

**Romans 2:15:** Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

9. Jesus expanded that idea to a greater degree in the portion of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5:17-28. These were massive expansions of the original laws.
10. Is there any hint in either of these passages or the surrounding messages that the law has been done away with? What are people trying to get rid of? The consequences of sinning!
11. Jeremiah lived in the days when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem three times and, finally, completely destroyed it. But, the ideas he expressed in Jeremiah 31:31-34 were not new at that time. Hosea lived in the final days of the northern kingdom of Israel—about 120 years before Jerusalem was destroyed.

**Hosea 2:18-20:** <sup>18</sup> At that time I will make a covenant with all the wild animals and birds, so that they will not harm my people. I will also remove all weapons of war from the land, all swords and bows, and will let my people live in peace and safety.

<sup>19</sup> **Israel, I will make you my wife;**

**I will be true and faithful;**

**I will show you constant love and mercy**

**and make you mine for ever.**

<sup>20</sup> **I will keep my promise and make you mine,**

**and you will acknowledge me as LORD.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

12. What parallels do you see between Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hosea 2:18-20? Notice the references to marriage, faithfulness and obedience, love and mercy, promises, recognition of God as Lord, etc.
13. It is interesting to notice, historically, that the times when God's people were in the greatest troubles were the times when He sent the most prophets! Why do you think that was? Have we had any prophets recently? Is it because we are doing so well spiritually?
14. While Jeremiah was prophesying from Jerusalem, Ezekiel was prophesying from Babylonia where he was in captivity. Notice his comments, and compare them with Jeremiah's.

**Ezekiel 11:19:** [The Sovereign LORD said:] "I will give them **a new heart and a new mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart.**"—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*††</sup>

**Ezekiel 18:31:** [The Sovereign LORD said:] "Give up all the evil you have been doing, and **get yourselves new minds and hearts.** Why do you Israelites want to die?"—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*††</sup>

**Ezekiel 36:26:** [The Sovereign LORD said:] "I will give you **a new heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart.**"—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*††</sup>

15. So, what needs to happen to get a new, obedient heart? Is it just our choice? Or, do we

need to do something? One needs to have a relationship to accomplish these things.

The Lord will provide “ ‘a heart to know that I am the Lord’ ” (*Jer. 24:7, RSV*). He will “ ‘take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh’ ” (*Ezekiel 11:19, RSV*), and will give “ ‘a new heart’ ” and “ ‘a new spirit’ ” (*Ezekiel 36:26, RSV*). He also says, “ ‘I will put My Spirit within you’ ” (*Ezek. 36:27, NASB*). This work of God is the foundation of the new covenant.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, May 31.<sup>§</sup>

16. So, there is much evidence in Scripture that **God—the Holy Spirit—is the One who can actually make that change in our hearts**. What, if anything, do we need to do? If someone were to ask you **how to make that change**, could you give an answer?
17. One of the issues when talking about *covenants* is to understand who was involved. In the Scriptures themselves taken literally, it is almost always the people of Israel who were involved with God. But, **there are repeated references suggesting that God wanted to include everyone, not just Israel and Judah**.

**Isaiah 56:6-7:** <sup>6</sup>And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,

to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,

and to be his servants,

all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,

and hold fast my covenant—

<sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful in my house of prayer;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

**for my house shall be called a house of prayer**

**for all peoples.**—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.\** (1989).

(Isaiah 56:6-7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.<sup>†</sup>

18. Paul who was once a “Pharisee of the Pharisees” was very clear that although the covenant was originally made with the children of Israel, **everyone who is willing to accept God’s conditions can be considered a “descendant of Abraham”!**

**Galatians 3:28-29:** <sup>28</sup>**So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.** <sup>29</sup>**If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.**—*Good News Bible.\*†* [Do we believe that? What is involved?]<sup>‡</sup>

19. Do those verses suggest that God still accepts sinners on the same basis as He did long ago?

20. One of the huge questions is **whether the main issue is our past sins or our future behavior?** Why do you think Jeremiah 31:33-34 is repeated at least partially in several places in the New Testament? Notice the following:

**Hebrews 10:17-18:** <sup>17</sup>And then he says, “I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer.” <sup>18</sup>**So when these have been forgiven, an offering to**

**take away sins is no longer needed.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Hebrews 8:10,12:** <sup>10</sup> “Now, this is the **covenant that I will make with the people of Israel in the days to come**, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their minds

and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people....

<sup>12</sup>I will forgive their sins

and will no longer remember their wrongs.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

21. After the resurrection of Jesus and His return to heaven, the initial group of followers were all Jews—as far as we know. Even though Jesus had told them so, it took a while for them to recognize that they were supposed to reach out to Gentiles as well. Paul went to great length in Romans 9-11 to discuss how God feels about the Jews. See especially these verses in Romans 11.

**Romans 11:5-7,13-24:** <sup>5</sup>It is the same way now: there is a small number left of those whom God has chosen because of his grace. <sup>6</sup>His choice is based on his grace, not on what they have done. For if God’s choice were based on what people do, then his grace would not be real grace.

<sup>7</sup> What then? The people of Israel did not find what they were looking for. It was only the small group that God chose who found it; the rest grew deaf to God’s call....

<sup>13</sup> I am speaking now to you Gentiles: as long as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I will take pride in my work. <sup>14</sup>Perhaps I can make the people of my own race jealous, and so be able to save some of them. <sup>15</sup>For when they were rejected, the human race was changed from God’s enemies into his friends. What will it be, then, when they are accepted? It will be life for the dead!

<sup>16</sup> If the first piece of bread is given to God, then the whole loaf is his also; and if the roots of a tree are offered to God, the branches are his also.

<sup>17</sup>Some of the branches of the cultivated olive tree have been broken off, and a branch of a wild olive tree has been joined to it. **You Gentiles are like that wild olive tree**, and now you share the strong spiritual life of the Jews. <sup>18</sup>So then, you must not despise those who were broken off like branches. How can you be proud? You are just a branch; you don’t support the roots—the roots support you.

<sup>19</sup> But you will say, “Yes, but the branches were broken off to make room for me.” <sup>20</sup>That is true. They were broken off because they did not believe, while you remain in place because you do believe. But do not be proud of it; instead, be afraid. <sup>21</sup>God did not spare the Jews, who are like natural branches; do you think he will spare you? <sup>22</sup>Here we see how kind and how severe God is. He is severe towards those who have fallen, but kind to you—if you continue in his kindness. But if you do not, you too will be broken off. <sup>23</sup>And if the Jews abandon their unbelief, they will be put back in the place where they were; for God is able to do that. <sup>24</sup>**You Gentiles are like the branch of a wild olive tree that is broken off and then, contrary to nature,**

**is joined to a cultivated olive tree. The Jews are like this cultivated tree; and it will be much easier for God to join these broken-off branches to their own tree again.—Good News Bible.\*†**

22. The interesting thing to note about all this is that salvation is always by **faith** in God who will forgive our sins and give us new hearts to become more like Him. Do we believe those very important words? If so, we need to understand the basic issue of faith.
23. The key to the whole relationship with God is faith, belief, confidence, or trust. In the original Greek language used in the New Testament, all of these English words came from the same Greek word.
24. Based on all of Scripture, a biblical definition of *faith* stated so well, so many times by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

***Faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be. [We cannot say “will be” because we remember the story of Lucifer!]**

***Faith* implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. [See Acts 16:31. Compare Romans 14:23.]**

***Faith* also means that, like Abraham, [Genesis 18:22-33] [Job, (Job 42:7-8)] and Moses, [Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25] God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?”—[Sentence in brackets was also stated parenthetically many times by Dr. Maxwell. *Job* and Bible citations in brackets are added. Dare we ask questions?]<sup>‡</sup>**

25. Does surrendering to Him in faith and obedience make us worthy? If so, how do we surrender to Him? **It means making choices every day to ignore or set aside our own preferences and, instead, choosing God's plan for our lives.**
26. In the Bible Study Guide, there is considerable discussion about God's forgiveness. God is forgiveness personified. He forgave even the soldiers who were nailing Him to the cross! (Luke 23:34) The issue is not what He is going to do about our past sins because they are a part of history that cannot be erased or changed. God is offering us help in living better lives in the future. **He is not as concerned about our past record as He is about how we will live in the future. Only legalists are consumed with their past records!**
27. Right from the gates of the Garden of Eden, God was trying to make it very clear to humans and all beings in the whole universe that sin leads to death. (Romans 6:23) Sin pays its wage: Death. **God does not need to add anything to the consequences of sin to make them worse.** So, how are things different for us in our day?
28. While the old sanctuary system demonstrated that sin leads to death, the life and death of Jesus answered the questions and disproved the accusations of Satan in the great controversy. It gives us incontrovertible evidence that sin kills while God's mercy gives life.

29. So, what are we supposed to learn from the Old Testament system of sacrifices?

**Hebrews 10:4:** For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [Why did they offer sacrifices for so many years?]<sup>‡</sup>

**Hebrews 10:11:** Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifices many times; **but these sacrifices can never take away sins.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Romans 8:3:** What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like sinful human nature, ***to do away with sin.***—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [Italic type is added for emphasis.]<sup>‡</sup>

30. **What we need is not just the forgiveness of past sins, but also the elimination of sin altogether! We need a change in our attitudes and our future behavior.**

31. So, what is Christ actually doing now in the sanctuary in heaven?

**Zechariah 3:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him. <sup>2</sup>The angel of the LORD said to Satan, **“May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire.”**

<sup>3</sup> Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. <sup>4</sup>The angel said to his heavenly attendants, “Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing.” [Can God do that?] Then he said to Joshua, “I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear.”

<sup>5</sup> He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua’s head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Daniel 7:9-10:** <sup>9</sup> While I was looking, thrones were put in place. One who had been living for ever sat down on one of the thrones. His clothes were white as snow, and his hair was like pure wool. His throne, mounted on fiery wheels, was blazing with fire, <sup>10</sup>and a stream of fire was pouring out from it. There were **many thousands of people there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session, and the books were opened.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

32. Seventh-day Adventist theology has stated that we are now in the time of the “pre-advent judgment.” The verses above give us a good idea of what is happening. It seems that Jesus says to His attendants: “Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing.” That does not seem to suggest some complicated High Priestly action. Jesus simply “deals with sin.”

33. Are you willing to accept the idea that **God has dealt with sin**? What does that mean? What does Jesus’s “ministering His blood in heaven on your behalf” mean? If this is suggesting that it is God, the Father, who needs to be persuaded to accept us and let us into heaven, that is pure paganism! That is what pagans did to try to influence their “gods.”

**John 3:16:** “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**John 16:25-27:** [On His last night with His disciples, Jesus said:] <sup>25</sup> “I have used figures of speech to tell you these things. But the time will come when I will

not use figures of speech, but will speak to you plainly about the Father.  
<sup>26</sup>When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and **I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf,** <sup>27</sup>for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†‡</sup> [Italic type is added for emphasis.]<sup>‡</sup>

34. Are we suggesting that Jesus was wrong when He made these statements? God forbid!
35. **The entire onlooking universe is observing the judgment scene; they all need to see the evidence and to be convinced that it is safe to live next door to us for eternity. That is what is happening in the judgment.**

Does God turn from justice in showing mercy to the sinner?—No; God can never dishonor His law by suffering it to be transgressed with impunity. Under the new covenant, perfect obedience is the condition of life. If the sinner repents, and confesses his sin, he will find pardon. Forgiveness is secured for him by Christ’s sacrifice in his behalf. Christ has paid the demands of the law for every repentant, believing sinner.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* June 28, 1905, par. 4. Compare *God’s Amazing Grace* 138.4.

36. We have had considerable discussion regarding what it means to have God’s law written in our hearts. What are the implications of that?
37. **If God’s law is “written on our hearts,” it suggests that we will naturally want to obey.**

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And **if we consent,** He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that **when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 668.3.<sup>†</sup> [Is this the criteria for heaven?]<sup>‡</sup>

38. **The great controversy over God’s character and government cannot successfully come to a close until all of Satan’s accusations and questions have been dealt with.**
39. We humans have broken our covenant with God many times in the past. Is it possible that we who are living so far away from the Garden of Eden at the end of this world’s history could actually maintain our relationship with God?
40. Could what Ezekiel said still be true?

**Ezekiel 11:19-20:** <sup>19</sup> [The Sovereign LORD says:] **“I will give them a new heart and a new mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart. <sup>20</sup>Then they will keep my laws and faithfully obey all my commands. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†‡</sup>

41. Think of all the accusations that Jesus made against the Pharisees, frequently calling them hypocrites, even quoting Isaiah in that respect. What would He say about us? Way back before the Sinai covenant was first ratified, Moses had some very pointed questions to discuss with God.

**Exodus 5:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> Then Moses turned to the LORD again and said, **“Lord, why do**

**you ill-treat your people?** Why did you send me here? <sup>23</sup>Ever since I went to the king to speak for you, he has treated them cruelly. **And you have done nothing to help them!**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Exodus 6:1-9:** <sup>1</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you are going to see what I will do to the king. **I will force him to let my people go. In fact, I will force him to drive them out of his land.**”

<sup>2</sup> God spoke to Moses and said, “I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup>I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as Almighty God, but I did not make myself known to them by my holy name, the LORD. <sup>4</sup>I also made my covenant with them, promising to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they had lived as foreigners. <sup>5</sup>Now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians have enslaved, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup>So tell the Israelites that I say to them, ‘I am the LORD; I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians. I will raise my mighty arm to bring terrible punishment upon them, and I will save you. **I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the LORD your God when I set you free from slavery in Egypt.** <sup>8</sup>I will bring you to the land that I solemnly promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am the LORD.’ ” <sup>9</sup>Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him, because their spirit had been broken by their cruel slavery.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

42. How do you understand the following quotation?

Still bearing humanity, he ascended to heaven, triumphant and victorious. He has taken the blood of his atonement into the holiest of all, **sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat** and his own garments, and blessed the people.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*,<sup>\*</sup> July 25, 1901, par. 4.<sup>†</sup> Compare *Signs of the Times*, April 19, 1905, par. 4; *Review and Herald*, November 13, 1913, par. 11.

43. Is there really sprinkled blood in the most holy place in the sanctuary in heaven? Or, do all these interesting metaphors mean something “larger”? What is the “big picture”?
44. What advantage do we have over the people in the times of the Old Testament, and even over most of those in the times of the New Testament that might help us to maintain our covenant relationship with God?
45. We have some knowledge of the great controversy and understand something of what the whole issue was about, God’s character and His government, as opposed to Satan’s accusations and questions.
46. Understanding something of the basic issues in the great controversy should help us. Shouldn’t it?
47. Are we willing to accept God’s free gift by allowing Him to have time in our busy schedules to influence our hearts and minds according to His will?
48. Why was it so hard for people to accept God’s covenants in the past? Is it any easier today?

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Last Modified: April 23, 2021

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