

We Said Hello, Goodbye

The New Covenant Remedy for Difficult Loss and Transition

^{36:21} But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. ²² “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

^{37:26} 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. ²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 36:21-27; 37:26-27

We Said Hello, Goodbye

Last week on the way to church, as we pulled out of our neighborhood, a hot air balloon was hovering over the empty field only a hundred yards away, very near the

ground directly in front of us. With the changes happening in our church building situation, my mind was instantly transported back 50 years to 1976 and the very first time I remember going to Harvest Baptist Church — our current building. Yes, I've been coming with my family off and on to this place for that long.

I was six, and we were making the 25-minute journey from our new house on 136th and Lowell Blvd. through the then mostly undeveloped lands outside of Broomfield, Lafayette, Louisville, and Boulder to this little subdivision by the Boulder Country Club called Gunbarrel. On the way, we saw what must have been a dozen hot air balloons. The closer we came to the church, the closer we got to the balloons. They were landing in the open space just north of the building. The first time you see one of these balloons, let alone a dozen of them, it's a thing you will never forget.

My family spent what I'm guessing was [my first-grade year](#) at this church until they were ready to help plant a sister church much nearer the house in Broomfield. We were at that church for the next eight or so years, but in high school we returned to Harvest. As we walked in, it was no longer the old building that we were greeted with. They had

moved the parking lot from the back of the property to the front and built [this wonderful new sanctuary](#) that we sit in today. We decided after that visit to stay. I got involved in the youth group, went on mission trips, helped with VBS in the neighborhood, played Underground Church during all-nighters, even got to come up to this very platform and give a gospel presentation via the “wordless book,” likely on Easter, where I embarrassingly kept saying Jesus “[rosen](#)” [from the dead](#), for which I was relentlessly ridiculed henceforth and evermore.

When I went away for college, my family stayed at the church. I would return each summer, helping with college ministries during those months, including leading a group that went down to [Pearl Street](#) after Sunday morning church where we would go and read [John’s Gospel](#) on the Courthouse Lawn out loud just to see what would happen. And in that place, I assure you, *many* interesting things happened.

After taking a job as a youth pastor in another sister church down in Denver after being newly married, we returned to Harvest in the late nineties where we found a wonderful Reformed pastor named Robert Buchanan had

now taken the call. He drew, whether intentionally or not, a bunch of like-minded Reformed Christians, and we had a wonderful few years here building friendships and teaching Sunday School classes while I went to Seminary. The man was an actor in college and [a fantastic preacher](#). My favorite sermon I remember him doing was *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, where on this very platform he dressed, wig and all, like Jonathan Edwards and gave the most famous sermon in American history to a group of people, several of whom would not have liked its message.

That pastor ended up planting a church down in Castle Rock, and the new pastor that was called came via my father through yet another sister church down in Northglenn. This man, Sam Watne, was my pastor before coming to Harvest that first time, when I was between 1-6 years of age. A couple of years into Sam's ministry here, Harvest's elders laid hands on us and [sent a small group of us out to plant RBCNC](#).

We started this church in my father's house just off Haystack Mountain about six miles northwest of here. We moved into Longmont to a small church two years later, and then into Boulder itself three years after that. In 2011 we suddenly found ourselves in desperate need of a meeting

place, as the one we had been renting was tragically bought by the Muslims who gave us one week to relocate. We called up Sam who graciously said, “Come here!” We’ve been back in this Harvest building for the last 15 years.

Today will be my—and all of our—last week in it.

Now, I know that for some of you, today is a big deal, a sad day. For many of you, it just isn’t. Why should it be? Some are somewhere in between. Others might even be close to thinking, “It’s only a building. We’ll make new memories somewhere else. Let’s just move on.” I get that. Some of us are wired to not get too attached to physical things. We tend to tell ourselves — and the broader church has largely reinforced this for good and for ill — that only “spiritual” matters really count. But I want to gently suggest that this way of thinking can actually be a subtle form of forgetting that we are embodied creatures. It’s actually kind of Gnostic. God made us with hearts that form deep attachments to places — homes, churches, rooms where we slept, where we wept, where we rejoiced, where we were married, where we preached. These attachments are not childish. They are human.

For me, a particular song has helped me process big changes like this for decades. The first CD I ever bought was Phil Collins' *No Jacket Required* in 1985. At the very end of the album was a bonus track that wasn't on the cassette called, "We Said Hello, Goodbye." Although I liked the song, I didn't think much of it at the time. But three years later, as I was just about to graduate high school and was preparing to leave for college, that song came on the radio. Songs don't release three years after the album hits. This one did. It had a completely new context for me. Suddenly the lyrics hit me in a way they never had before:

*We said goodbye to a dear old friend.
And we packed our bags and left feeling sad.
It's the only way.*

That moment marked me. From then on, I decided I would play that song at every major transition in life. And I have. It wasn't morbid either. Right now, you might not be able to understand why, because those are pretty sad lyrics, but I'll show you why at the very end today.

Now, let's **take our minds off our own story** for a moment and **turn to Israel**. God gave His people a land. It was a Promised Land, an inheritance He swore to their fathers. He told them to conquer it, settle it, build homes and a temple, plant vineyards, and raise their children there for generation after generation. This wasn't just dirt. **It was home**.

As a people, they had lived in this land for centuries. Many families had occupied the same homes for hundreds of years. And when it was ripped away from them in exile, **their grief was deep and visceral**. They wrote songs like Psalm 137 because the loss of place hurt: "**By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion**" (**Ps 137:1**). Lamentations shows their personal cry, "**Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners**" (**Lam 5:2**).

God didn't rebuke them for loving the land he had given them. He understood. But amazingly, **he did more than just empathize**. This is *the Sovereign Lord* who can do all things. And this is *the Loving Lord* who does not forget his people or more importantly his promises and his name—even those he sends into exile because of their great sins and wickedness against him. **God gave a solution to his people** for the pain

of being forced from their home. What do you suppose that was?

You might be **tempted to think** that this solution was **to simply bring them back** to their land. But that was never the true solution to the loss. Their old homes were gone. They had to be rebuilt. They couldn't go back. Why, even the new temple itself caused the old men to **“weep with a loud voice when they saw the foundations of this house (temple) being laid”** (**Ezra 3:12**), though the younger men were excited and happy and couldn't understand what their problem with the older guys was (**13**).

A greater solution was needed. It was one that you might not think is related to such loss. But in the context of Ezekiel and his contemporary Jeremiah, this is precisely where we find their discussions of a **“new covenant.”** It was the New Covenant that God gave that became the ultimate solution to their forced tragedy.

The New Covenant

The New Covenant is a teaching found **primarily in two passages** in the OT. The first is **Ezekiel 36-37**. The second is

Jeremiah 31.¹ Before discussing it, I want you to see that in **the immediate context** of both is in fact the very thing we've been discussing—the loss of land or home or church. So I'm not making this up simply because it's our last Sunday in this building. That's all in God's timing.

In **Ezek 36:16-21** God explains why Israel went into exile – they defiled the land with their sin, so He ripped their home from them. The nations then profaned God's name, saying, “These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to go out of his land.” In **vs. 22** God says, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.” So you can see that **what comes next is the direct answer to our very discussion**. And what comes next? The promise of the new covenant.

The same is true in Jeremiah, which we will also look at today as the companion to our passage. Right before its new covenant passage (**Jer 31:31-34**), we read of **Rachel weeping**

¹ Other places that hints at it are: **Isa 54:10**, “My covenant of peace shall not be removed;” **59:20-21** (God's covenant with those who turn from transgression, with His Spirit and words remaining with them); **Hos 2:18-23** and God betrothing Israel to himself forever in righteousness, with the covenant formula “You are my people;” and **Malachi 3:1-4** and the coming of the “messenger of the covenant” to purify his people.

for her children (exile), followed by God's tender promise to bring them back (15-20). The very next verses talk about how God calls the exiles to return, even using the striking image of a woman protecting a man (Unheard of!) to show that something new and astonishing is happening. And then in the verses that are immediately prior to the new covenant promise, we learn about the restoration of the land, rebuilding of cities, and planting of vineyards (23-30). In other words, again, the new covenant is announced in the middle of God's promises to answer the problem of being forced away from the place they loved and called home.

Earlier Covenants

This won't be a full-on sermon on covenant theology. But in order to understand the New Covenant, you do have to understand something of the previous biblical covenants in order to grasp just why and how this covenant is new.

First, before time began, the three persons of the Trinity entered into what we call the Covenant of Redemption stemming theologically especially from Zech 6:13's "counsel of peace" between the persons of the Godhead. In this

eternal agreement, the **Father** gave the Son a people to save (**John 6:37-39; Eph 1:4**), the **Son** willingly agreed to become man, obey the law perfectly, and die in man's place (**John 5:36; 6:38; Ps 40:6-8**), and the **Holy Spirit** agreed to apply that salvation to God's elect. This is the fountainhead of all redemption — everything that happens in history flows out of this loving, intra-Trinitarian covenant (**Ps 110:1; Ps 2:6-8; Luke 22:29**). That includes all covenants that come in human history.

The first of these begins right at the beginning of time. God entered into what we call **the Covenant of Works** with Adam in the Garden. This was a simple arrangement: *obey me and live; disobey me and die*. Death was threatened upon disobedience but Life was promised upon perfect obedience (**Gen 2:16-17**) and thus it is sometimes called the **Covenant of Life**. God made this covenant with not just men, but angels and even the earth itself are under what Jeremiah calls it a covenant with the day and the night (**Jer 33:20, 25**), this we also call it a **Covenant of Creation**. Adam was our human representative. When he fell, we all fell with him (**Rom 5:12-19; Hos 6:7**). This Covenant of Works still stands over

every human being today: if you want eternal life by your own works, you must be perfect. None of us are.

Therefore, after the Fall, God made six more major covenants with his people in the Old Testament — what I call the **Gracious Legal Covenants**. These include the covenant with **Adam** from Mt. Eden (**Gen 3:21**), **Noah** from Mt. Ararat (**Gen 9:8-17**), **Abraham** from Mt. Morah, (**Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:2ff.**), **Moses** at Mt. Sinai (**Ex 19-24**), the **Levitical** priesthood from Mt. Apsis (**Ex 29:4-9; Num 25:10-13**; cf. TestLevi 2:5-6; 6:1-2), and **David** from Mt. Zion (**2Sam 7:8-16**). Each of them had elements of law (do this and you will be blessed in the land) but also elements of grace (God's unconditional promises looking forward to Christ).

These **six covenants** are tie together into two groups of three. The first three are made with the individual (Adam), the world (Noah), and the family (Abraham), while the latter are made with the prophet (Moses), the priest (Levi), and the king (David). They were all real, historical covenants, but they were also types and shadows **always pointing ahead to something greater**.

That something greater is announced in **Malachi 3:1s** and its “**angel of the covenant**” who would come to his temple instigate it. John the Baptist announces it and Jesus fulfills it (**Mark 1:2-3; Matt 11:10; Luke 7:27**). This something great is also highlighted in how God created the world in **six days** and rested on the **seventh**, he has given us **six** preparatory covenants in the Old Testament, and then, in the fullness of time, he gives us the **seventh** — the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ (**Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:24-28; Luke 22:20; Heb 8:8-13**). This is the covenant of rest, the covenant of peace, the covenant where God himself dwells with us and says, “**You shall be my people, and I will be your God.**” This is the covenant that answers the deepest longings of his exiled people — and of us today.

New Covenant Fulfilled in the NT

Now I want to turn to the NT and then Ezekiel and Jeremiah to understand just why this New Covenant is the solution to sad changes as we've opened with. I think it is important to start with **the NT reality** first. That way, there can be no question about when this covenant is fulfilled. I'll

start in John 1 and the calling of Jesus' disciples. Amazingly, **John has the baptism of Jesus** through the calling of the first disciples up through the first miracle (**John 1:19-2:12**) recapitulating Genesis one in that Jesus is baptized and calls his disciples through a series of **six days** all ending in a **seventh day feast** on a day of rest. This is so epic that scholars have called in the new creation week.² In doing this, John is signaling to us that Jesus is inaugurating the new covenant.

We move next to the moment that the new covenant was cut. **Covenants are "cut,"** in the old in the cutting of the animal and the **shedding and sprinkling of its blood** (**Gen 15:9-10; Ex 24:6-8**; etc.). In **John 1:29** at the beginning of that new covenant week when John baptizes Jesus and calls him the **"lamb of God."** But then, during **the Last Supper** we read, **"And likewise the cup after they had eaten, [Jesus said], 'This cup that is poured out for you is *the new covenant in my blood*'"** (**Luke 20:22**). This is a staggering claim. He is saying that everything Jeremiah and Ezekiel pointed toward is now being enacted through His impending death. The New Covenant is sealed in blood, just like the old covenants, but this time it is the blood of the Son-Lamb of God.

² **Leon Morris**, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 114-15.

Then we have Paul in [2 Cor 3:3-6](#) talking this way, “You [Christians] are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts... [God] has made us sufficient to be ministers of *a new covenant*, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Paul contrasts the old covenant (written on stone, external, and ultimately deadly because it exposes sin) with the New Covenant (written on hearts by the Holy Spirit). The New Covenant is not primarily about external rules but about internal heart change and the indwelling Spirit. This is why Paul can minister with confidence — the same Spirit that raised Jesus is now writing God’s law on the hearts of believers.

Finally, let’s look at [Hebrews](#). In what is the longest and most important New Testament discussion of the New Covenant. In [Heb 8:6–13](#), he argues that Jesus is the mediator of *a better covenant* ([vs. 6](#)), one that is superior to the old covenant. He then quotes Jeremiah: “*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 ... They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Heb 8:10–12). Notice, the “house of Israel” is applied to Christians in the book of Hebrews!

This is the heart of the New Covenant: *internalization* (the law on the heart), personal relationship (all will know the Lord), and complete forgiveness (sins remembered no more). Because this covenant is better and permanent, the old one is now “obsolete” and “ready to vanish away” (v. 13).

In Hebrews 9:15, the author ties this directly to Christ’s death and the Levitical covenant starts to be contrasted. “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” Jesus’ death doesn’t just forgive sins under the old system — it redeems people from the failures of the old covenant so they can receive the full inheritance of the new one.

Finally, in Hebrews 10:15–18, the author returns to Jeremiah and concludes: “The Holy Spirit also bears witness to us ... ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after

those days... I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.' Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin." Because the New Covenant provides once-for-all forgiveness, the old sacrificial system is no longer needed. Christ's single sacrifice has accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats could never do under the Levitical covenant.

New Covenant Promised in Ezekiel

With this in mind, let's turn to our two main OT passages. We will begin in **Ezekiel**. The most direct discussion is found in **Ezek 36:24-27** and **37:26**. The promise begins, "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land" (**Ezek 36:24**). This is something we saw last time that **Pentecost** closely parallels when you have Jews from every nation under heaven now appearing in Jerusalem at Pentecost just prior to the events that transpire from Peter's sermon.

What are those events? As he preaches, tongues of fire come down and the **Spirit came upon** Peter. At the end, it says they were "cut to the heart," asked what they should do

(Acts 2:37). Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (38). This is in direct fulfillment of the very next words of Ezekiel, which is why these Jews being gathered from all the countries to their own should be understood as being fulfilled at Pentecost.

Ezekiel says, “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. 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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:25-27). What was this receiving of the Spirit at Pentecost, or as it puts it other places, *the baptism of the Holy Spirit*? It is exactly what Hebrews 10 says, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with *our hearts sprinkled* clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). It was regeneration followed by the mark that God’s presence had come upon them and they were now to serve and obey God in his holy temple—water baptism.

Because Ezekiel doesn't call this a "covenant" in ch. 36, it is important in the discussion of Ezekiel to add **37:26**. "I will make *a covenant* of peace with them." That's where he finally calls it a covenant. And what does it say about it? "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" (**26**). "My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (**27**).

"I will be your God and you will be my people" is covenant language and other prophets use it. **Hosea 1:9** says, "Then the LORD said, 'Call him Lo-Ammi [Not My People], for you are not my people, and I am not your God.'" But then in **2:23** it reverses. "And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he will say, 'You are my God.'" This is the same promise Ezekiel is identifying. But amazingly—or not, if you understand your NT—Paul cites this to the Roman *Christians* where he includes Gentiles and Jews together as one people of God (**Rom 9:25-26**).

Throughout Ezek 35-37, all of the new covenant promises given to a people who lost their homes, their temple, their land are applied consistently by the NT to Christ's church. Why? Because of the last promise he gives that he will dwell with them. This is why Jesus is called Immanuel—God With Us, and he will save his people from their sin, exactly the prediction we find in that language only in this very part of Ezekiel of the LORD (Matt 1:21; Ezek 37:23). It is why the NT church is called God's temple.

New Covenant Further Elaborated in Jeremiah

That takes us to Jeremiah 31:31-34, perhaps the single greatest prophecy of this New Covenant in the OT—which is likely why Hebrews continually returns to it. Here is the passage:

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, 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.
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. 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.”

Jeremiah speaks of **coming days**, which we now know is our days according to Hebrews! He then says that **the LORD will make this new covenant** with the “house of Israel and the house of Judah.” We’ve seen throughout the context of the NT that this necessarily means the church today. For the church is the *Israel of God*, the *circumcision*, a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*, *Jews*, *sons of Abraham*, *the vine*, *the chosen people*, *God’s temple*, *the tribes of Israel*, *the new Jerusalem*, and *the bride*.

Term or Phrase	OT	NT
<i>Ekklesia</i> (church)	Deut 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:2-4; 31:30; etc.	Matt 16:18; Rom 1:1; etc.
The circumcision	Gen 17:10	Php 3:3 ³
A kingdom of priests and a holy nation	Ex 19:6	Rev 1:6; 5:9-10; 1Pe 2:9 ⁴
Jews	Gen 29:35; Ezra 4:12	Rom 2:29 ⁵
The Israel of God	Gen 32:28; Ex 1:7	Rom 9:6, 26; Gal 6:16 ⁶
Sons of Abraham	Gen 17:5	Rom 4:16 ⁷
The Vine	Hosea 10:1	Rom 11:13-17 ⁸
Chosen People	Isaiah 43:20	1Pe 1:9 ⁹
God's Temple	1Kg 12:27	1Pe 2:5; 1Co 3:16; Eph 2:21 ¹⁰

³ “We are *the circumcision*, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

⁴ “You have made them *a kingdom and priests* to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:10); “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1Pe 2:9); “You shall be to me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exod 19:6).

⁵ “But *a few* is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise [a play on the name Judah] is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:29); “And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘This time I will *praise* the Lord.’ Therefore she called his name *Judah*” (Gen 29:35); “Be it known to the king that *the Jews* who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem” (Ezra 4:12).

⁶ “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but *Israel*” (Gen 32:28); “But the people of *Israel* were fruitful and increased greatly” (Ex 1:7); “And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon *the Israel of God*” (Gal 6:16); “Not all who are descended from Israel are *Israel* .. Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people’” (Rom 9:6, 25).

⁷ “... 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” (Rom 4:16); “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:5).

⁸ “If some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree ...” (Rom 11:18); “Israel is a luxuriant vine” (Hos 10:1).

⁹ “You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession” (Deut 7:6); “I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people” (Isa 43:20); “But you are a chosen race” (1Pe 2:9).

¹⁰ “If *this people* go up to offer sacrifices in *the temple* of the Lord at Jerusalem...” (1Kg 12:27). “Do you not know that you are *God's temple* and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (1Co 3:16); “In whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into *a holy temple* in the Lord” (Eph 2:21); “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as *a spiritual house*” (1Pe 2:5). It is this idea of God's temple that we then find several other statements in the NT about how we offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2; Heb 13:16), offer prayers on incense (Rev 5:8), drink the offerings of suffering (Php 2:17); offer fragrant offerings of money (2Cor 2:14-16);

Tribes of Israel	Gen 49:28	Rev 7:4-8, 14:1-3 ¹¹
The new Jerusalem	Ps 116:19	Rev 21:2 ¹²
The Bride	Jer 3:8; Song of Solomon	Eph 5:25; Rev 21:2 ¹³

It says that this new covenant will not be “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.” This seems to refer especially to the Mosaic covenant, as Jeremiah then talks about the law written on the heart. So the Apostle explains, “This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void” (Gal 3:17). Jeremiah is teaching that the new covenant will not be like the Mosaic Covenant, not that

offer the fragrant aroma of the gospel ministry (2Cor 2:14-15); proclaim the priestly gospel (Rom 15:16), etc.

¹¹ “And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed” (Rev 7:4-8); “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Rev 14:1-3). “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel” (Gen 49:28).

¹² “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2); “In the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!” (Ps 116:19).

¹³ “Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2); “This is profound, and I am saying that it [a husband and wife] refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). “I had sent her away with a decree of divorce” (Jer 3:8; cf. Isa 50:1).

somehow the moral law no longer exists, but that *our* obedience to this covenant will no longer be the means of cursing or blessing for covenant-community promises. Rather, someone else will keep this covenant perfectly on our behalf, and it is through faith in *his covenant keeping* that blessings follow. This is the whole point of Hebrews' argument that the new covenant has come and that Christ is its representative head (more on this below).

Jeremiah then explains what this covenant will include. “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.” In this new covenant, God will save a peculiar people. The law will be written on their hearts.

But someone might say that even in the old covenant, some people had the law written on their hearts. Doesn't Paul say that even Gentiles had the law written on their hearts? (**Rom 2:14-15**). No, that isn't *exactly* what he says. He says that they have the “*works of the law*”, or as one translation puts it, the “*requirements*” of the law written on their hearts. That is, the law accuses them and defends them through their consciences. What law? The moral law. But the tablet remains the same as it was for Israel: *stone*. Their

hearts are stone. Ezekiel said the exact same thing. Thus Martin Luther concludes, “The knowledge of the work is written, that is, the law that is written in letters concerning the works that have to be done, but not the grace to fulfill this law.”¹⁴

But someone might say, “What about the saved Israelites?” An example might be King Josiah when it says that there was no king like him, “who 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” (2 Kgs 23:35). Also, the Psalmist says that the law of God is in his heart (Ps 37:31; 40:8). Don’t they have the law “written on their heart?” This isn’t technically the same thing as what Jeremiah is talking about either. No one doubts that OT saints were saved by God. When they were saved, they had new desires to actually want to keep the law of God. But Jeremiah has something more specific in mind.

The idea of the law written on your heart refers to *the place where the law is written and kept*. For the prophet, this is connected to the repository for the Ten Commandments: The temple. Remember, the Ark of the Covenant held the

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (2:14).

Commandments, and this was put into the Most Holy Place inside the temple. In the OT, God resided in the midst of the people in this special holy residence. The Commandments were put in there, and the people had to make copies of them and teach them to their children (**Deut 7:7-9**). They were saved by faith, looking to the forgiveness that was made available to them in the temple sacrifices which prefigured the once-for-all sacrifice of the Messiah.

In the NT, however, **the temple is transformed**. We just saw this in Ezekiel as well. It starts with Jesus who is the very temple of God (**John 1:14; 2:19-21**). When he goes away, he sends the Spirit and the Christian becomes a temple (**1Cor 6:19**), as does the entire church which is now made of “**living stones**” (**2Cor 3:3; 1Pet 2:4-5**). Thus, God no longer resides in a temple made by hands in one location, but in his church and saints scattered throughout the world. This refers to the Holy Spirit as is understood in a parallel passage in Ezekiel that we again just saw.

This is significant for understanding **the last part** of Jeremiah’s prophecy, “**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.” Though this can be understood in subjective terms (personal salvation), there is also something more going on here. “Knowing the LORD” cannot refer to the eradication of evangelism, preaching, teaching, and discipleship in the new covenant, because somehow the elect magically knows everything at birth.

It refers to the coming of Jesus in the flesh. This is made intelligible by the story of Samuel. It says that “Samuel did not yet *know the Lord*, and *the Word of the Lord* had not yet been revealed” (1Sam 3:7). What this means is nothing short of astonishing. The context is more than Samuel hearing a voice calling his name (“Samuel, Samuel”). It begins by saying that “*The Word of the Lord* was rare in those days; there was no frequent *vision*” (3:1). One does not hear visions. One sees them. Samuel finally figures out what is going on when “*the Lord* came and *stood*” before him (3:10). Voices do not stand. People do.

This is an appearance of none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, also called the Angel of the LORD. In the OT, Christ came to people too, but it was a select, rare group, but the rest of the people did not know the Lord via a sensory

saturated self-disclosure. As the Gospel of John says, “He was in the world [that is, the world of the OT], and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him” (John 1:10). They had to take these people at their word (and often they didn’t and got into big trouble for it).

Based on Samuel, who did not know the Lord until he stood in front of him, we can say that Jeremiah (who was himself called by the Word in a vision; cf. Jer 1, esp. vs. 9) is predicting the incarnation of Christ in the flesh. To “know the Lord” would no longer be to believe by hearsay, but as 1 John says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we looked upon and have *touched* with our hands, concerning the *word* of life—the life was made *manifest*, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life” (1Jn 1:1-2). For it is at this time that God revealed himself publicly to all flesh by human flesh. Notice how both John and Samuel speak about the Word and thus knowing God. This is why Jesus’ coming in human flesh is the beginning of the new covenant.

There is, of course, a personal part of this as well, for Jesus gave intimate knowledge of himself to his elect so that the

words of the prophecy, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” becomes applicable to those who trust in Christ by faith. While everyone now knows the Lord objectively through Jesus who “has made him known” (John 1:18). “We know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1Jn 2:3).

New Covenant Inaugurated

The NT tells us that **this new covenant is here today**. It refers to its being put into effect by the death-blood of Christ (Heb 9:16-18). Thus, the Lord’s Supper is “**the new covenant in my blood**” (Luke 22:20; 1Cor 11:25). Jesus’ new covenant speaks a better word than the old, even the covenant God made with Adam, Eve, and Abel, for his blood is better than theirs (Heb 12:24).

What’s so incredible and applicable today is that this becomes **the means by which God helps those who have or are suffering loss**—but only if they are in Christ. And if you are in Christ, then hear the point well.

In giving the New Covenant promises, God does not say, “I will simply bring you back to the same piece of dirt and the same temple.” He says something far greater. **He promises to make His home in them, wherever they are**. To how many Christians over the centuries, Christians who have lost

everything of the sake of the Name, has this been their rock of hope? The temple is no longer a building in Jerusalem — it is now His people, indwelt by His Spirit. And he never leaves or forsakes them. That doesn't mean the temple was unimportant. Surely, it was. The amount of money, time, and effort that went into making it was astonishing and God commanded it be that way. But it was never what the final hope was to be built on. When Christians suffer loss, this is a way we can cope that others lost and without hope for the next world cannot. For all they have is the physical thing they've lost. There is nothing beyond that in their hope. The best they can do is rebuild that which will again be lost to them at some point.

The [old covenant was always temporary](#) and shadowy, always pointing for the need for something better. Hebrew says this over and over. The same therefore is true of [our present physical existence](#), including all of the things God allows us to rightly love in this life, even calling some “home.” What is our life here, but a transitory migration from a temporary, sinful, fallen world to a permanent, glorified, perfected physical world to come? Abraham walked around not finding his great hope in a Promised Land, but in a city, whose foundations and builder was God.

This is why the New Covenant is especially a remedy to forced loss of home and worship: You can lose the building ... but you cannot lose the presence of God if His Spirit dwells in you. The new covenant is not like the old. You can be kicked out of a physical place... but you cannot be kicked out of the New Covenant if you are a believer united to Christ. The old system tied God's presence heavily to a location. The New Covenant ties God's presence to faith in Christ and the indwelling Spirit.

This is how a move from personal grief over losing a building (or a family member or pet or anything) to the New Covenant is so powerful. The New Covenant does not deny the pain of loss. Jesus himself died to bring it to us! But it does transcend it. God's answer to exile was never merely "return to the land." His ultimate answer was always "I will dwell in you, and you will dwell in Me — forever."

This, then, is the great comfort to any who suffer loss. "We are leaving this building today. But we are not leaving our true Home. Our true Home is Christ and the New Covenant community in whom He dwells by His Spirit."

Earlier I said that my putting on the Phil Collins song, usually when I'm leaving one place and going to another wasn't morbid so that I might wallow in what I'm leaving

behind. That's where the very next line, after he begins, "We said goodbye to a dear old friend ... feeling sad" comes in. He immediately changes direction.

*We said hello as we turned the key
A new roof over our heads, gave a smile
It's the only way, only way.
Turn your head, don't look back
Set your sails for a new horizon
Don't turn around, don't look down
Oh, there's life across the tracks
And you know it's really not surprising
It gets better when you get there.*

If a man who to the best of my knowledge has not yet submitted to Christ's kingship and salvation can nevertheless see clearly like that, how much more should we—who have these great hopes made more firm. Hopes given precisely in the context of suffering loss be able to realize that the Sovereign God has plans. Plans for where we've been. Plans for where we're going in the future. Plans, as Jeremiah says, "for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).