17 - 23 March 2024 God’s new covenant

# **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

# **New International Version**

**31**“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
    “when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
    and with the people of Judah.
**32**It will not be like the covenant
    I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
    to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
    though I was a husband to[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+31%3A+31-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-19724a)] them,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+31%3A+31-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-19724b)]”
declares the Lord.
**33**“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
    after that time,” declares the Lord.
“I will put my law in their minds
    and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
    and they will be my people.
**34**No longer will they teach their neighbor,
    or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
    from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the Lord.
“For I will forgive their wickedness
    and will remember their sins no more.”

Bible notes

Following their time in the wilderness, the people of God settle into the ‘promised land’. Their success at living as God’s people is mixed, with periods of faithfulness to God and periods when they go astray. Through the prophets God calls them to return to living their covenant relationship with God.

Close to 500 years after being set free from slavery, the land splits into two kingdoms, a divided people. A couple of hundred years later, having persistently ignored the warnings to turn back to God, the northern kingdom is captured by Assyria, the ruling superpower of the time, and is no more. Little over 100 years on, the much smaller southern kingdom is also ignoring warnings to turn back to God from, among others, Jeremiah. Jeremiah pronounces God’s judgement on the remaining people of God, which will lead to their capture and exile at the hands of Babylon, the current ruling superpower. However, Jeremiah’s message is tinged with hope and promise. After the judgement and exile will come restoration. When God’s people, in exile, turn back to God, God will make a new covenant with them.

This covenant, described in today’s reading, will be characterised by a close relationship with God. It will not rely on a knowledge of God mediated to the people by a few, or passed on through the stories of God’s past interactions with them. It will be a new covenant, a covenant for this people, the current and future people of God. At its heart is the promise that ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (v.33). Some 500 years later, despite a return to God and from exile, the promise has not been fully realised and some of the people of God look for this being fulfilled in Jesus.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

When you buy a stick of rock at the seaside it’s easily identifiable. Running through it is the name of the place to which it belongs: ‘Blackpool’, ‘Hunstanton’, ‘Brighton’. Wherever you break the rock, however much or little you eat, at every point it has its identifying feature. In the new covenant, God says that God’s law will be within people, written on their hearts – running through us like the name in a stick of rock. What do people see in us that identifies us as who – and whose – we are.

**Questions for reflection**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |   |

**Questions**

* What ideas and beliefs are at the core of your being?
* What does God’s promise ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people’, mean to you?
* How might having God’s law written on your heart be freeing?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

#### **A prayer of thanksgiving**

Response after each line: Thanks be to God.
We sing praises to God:
For the richness and variety of life…
For the diversity of creation, earth, sea and sky…
For a multitude of animals, birds and fish in the seas…
For water to drink and quench our thirst…
For crops to grow and food to eat…
For ancestors, family, friends and neighbours, near and far…
For hands that have guided us and pointed the way for us…
For promises given and kept and beyond measure…
For the suffering and passion of Jesus for our sakes…
For the love of God within our hearts…
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Thank you, God, for each and every one of your amazing people, every one of them unique. We go out joyful, knowing that your love is always there for us and reaches to every place and part of the whole world, and all the millions and billions of people, in every generation. May that inspire and encourage us to be loving to all whom we meet in our day-to-day living.
**Amen.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**.**