

Jeremiah 11: The Days Are Coming

(Jeremiah 31:27-34)

I. Introduction

- A. In his book *The Bible Jesus Read*, Yancey tells about his brother's favorite verse
1. He attended a Bible college; they were often asked to share their "life verse"
 - a. After others quoted pious verses from NT, he shared **1 Chron 26:18** (KJV)
 - b. If he was in a particularly crabby mood, he might share **Psalms 137:8-9**.
 2. Yancey suggests that this illustrates our two basic problems with the OT
 - a. **First**, we often don't understand what the OT is saying
 - b. **Second**, when we do understand it, then we don't like it much!
- B. We do have a rather schizophrenic view of the Old Testament, don't we?
1. On the one hand, we recognize it as the Bible, God's word—it's important
 - a. Almost time to start a new Bible reading plan... and it will include the OT
 - b. We quote the OT, although what we do is mine it for usable nuggets
 - 1) Want to show that God hates divorce? We may quote **Malachi 2:16**
 - 2) If we need a verse to call us to worship God, we read **Psalms 100:1-2**
 2. But on the other hand, we can easily dismiss the OT if it gets inconvenient
 - a. What if the call to worship text we read from Psalms is **Psalms 150**?
 - 1) Can God be praised with trumpets, tambourines and choreography?
 - 2) But this just the OT, right? Yes, just like **Psalms 100** is just the OT!
 - b. Yancey is right, I think; we don't always understand the Old Testament
 - c. But if we run across something we don't like, we dismiss it as only OT!
- C. **Hebrews 8** argues that the OT covenant has been replaced by a new covenant
1. He gives **two ways** we can know the New Covenant has supplanted the Old
 - a. **First**, a "new" covenant implies something was wrong with "old" (**Heb 8:7**)
 - b. **Second**, having a "new" covenant means the other was "old" (**Heb 8:13**)
 - 1) Sometimes we prefer the old— "*They just don't make 'em like used to*"
 - 2) But if the old thing is flawed and there is a new thing—we want to new
 2. In between these two, the Hebrews writer quotes our text from **Jeremiah 31**
 - a. There would be a new covenant, and Hebrews says that it is all about Jesus
 - b. Let's look at Jeremiah's promise of new covenant (**Reading: Jer 31:27-34**)

II. The New Covenant

- A. Our text is part of a series of prophecies beginning in **Jeremiah 30**
1. God tells Jeremiah that this would be important— “*write this down*” (**30:2**)
 - a. Then he sets the time frame of the promise, “*the day is coming*” (**Jer 30:3**)
 - b. The exile would last 70 years (**Jer 29:10**), so this would be after that
 - c. He will repeat this promise of “*days are coming*” several times here
 2. Text begins with God’s promise to essentially undo the exile (**Jer 31:27-28**)
²⁷ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,”
 - a. Jeremiah’s message had been that God would tear down and destroy
 - 1) Jeremiah started with, “*Repent or else!*” It had become only, “*Or else*”
 - 2) As Jeremiah’s predictions started to come true, his message changed
 - b. Now he points to when God will “watch over them to build and to plant”
 3. This was the time of return from exile; it was also the time of a New Covenant
- B. The description of this New Covenant in **31:31-34** naturally breaks into two parts.
1. The **first section (31:31-32)** explains why God must make a new covenant
 - a. The imagery is that of marriage—God had divorced Israel (**Jer 3:8**)
I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries
 - b. That is the imagery here—God as the husband who was cheated on (**31:32**)
It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them
 - c. The new covenant would in effect be a remarriage of God to his people
 2. The **second section (31:33-34)** gives us the characteristics of new covenant.
 - a. **Heartfelt:** “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”
 - b. **Relational:** “I will be their God, and they will be my people”
 - c. **Informed:** “No longer will a man teach ... they will all know me”
 - d. **Redemptive:** “I will forgive their wickedness and remember sins no more.”
 3. This would be the New Covenant, and the Old Covenant would be just old
 - a. I think we often have a concept of the Old Law focusing on externals.
 - 1) Law stressed things like rituals and traditions, feasts and fasts
 - 2) The heart didn’t matter nearly as much as getting the ritual right.
 - b. New Covenant is about the heart and the Old focused on externals, right?

C. **Wrong!** That's precisely what prophets **condemned** in Israel ([Amos 5:21-24](#))

1. They wanted to focus on externals; what God really wanted was their heart
 - a. Remember what David learned from fall and restoration ([Psa 51:16-17](#))

¹⁶ *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.* ¹⁷
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
 - b. God simply was not focused intently on getting all the sacrifices he was due
 - 1) God doesn't need sacrifices; the cattle on 1000 hills are His ([Psa 50:8f](#))
 - 2) Sacrifice He wanted was their hearts; God looked at hearts in OT
 - c. Remember Micah's conclusion of what God really wants ([Micah 6:8](#))

⁸ *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*
2. Each of the characteristics of the new covenant, God wanted in the old too!
 - a. **Heartfelt:** "Write them on the tablet of your hearts" is Old Law ([Prov 7:3](#))
 - b. **Relational:** "will be my people and I will be their God" is from [Gen 17:38](#).
 - c. **Informed:** Promise of knowing God reflects Moses' prayer ([Exo 33:13](#))
 - d. **Redemptive:** David sang, "Remember not the sins of my youth" ([Psa 25:7](#))

D. **Point:** The New Covenant would not so much introduce radically new ideas.

1. No, the New Covenant would **fully realize** all God's promises in the Old.
 - a. The Old Covenant was flawed and broken because Israel broke it!
 - b. God gave them a perfect law, but His people were not a perfect people.
 - 1) Point of the Law was to show that we can't save ourselves ([Rom 3:20](#))
 - 2) And the Law fulfilled that function splendidly—it showed our failure
2. Tim Willis, in his book *Hear the Word of the Lord* puts it like this—

Jeremiah is not predicting that the Lord will do away with an inherently flawed Jewish covenant that involves an external, impersonal, works-oriented, business-like arrangement between God and humans. He is not predicting that God will put in its place a superior Christian covenant that involves — for the first time — internal devotion to God, a personal relationship with Him, the merging of His ways into our ways, and the full forgiveness of sins.

 - a. The Old Covenant had ended because of it was broken by sin ([Jer 31:32](#))

"they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.
 - b. But there would come a time of restoration—coming of a New Covenant
 - 1) In part, that promise was pointing to the return from exile
 - 2) In full, the promise of New Covenant was fulfilled in Christ
3. So the New Covenant makes possible what was UNREALIZED in the Old.
 - a. We have a personal, heartfelt and redemptive relationship with God
 - b. What God wanted all along—it is now possible only because of Christ!

III. Conclusion

- A. God didn't change from OT to NT; wanted sincere heart obedience in BOTH
 - a. He offers a relationship with Himself in the NT... but he did in the OT too
 - b. He required serious obedience and offers real forgiveness in both
 - c. God offers His grace in the New Covenant... and was gracious in the Old
- 2. So what makes the New Covenant new? *Baptism rather than circumcision?*
 - a. Well, I think that is an improvement, but that is not the real point!
 - b. The New Covenant is new because of Christ—the cross and empty tomb
 - 1) That is the point of Hebrews— a better high priest, a better sacrifice
 - 2) In Christ, the relationship God wanted in the OT is fully realized
 - 3) God came among us as one of us—our new agreement based on Him
 - c. The Law that we could never keep was kept perfectly in Christ Jesus
 - d. In the New Covenant, there is perfection—but only in what Jesus did
- B. Years ago, I taught a Bible class on “*turning the other cheek*” (**Matt 5:38-42**)
 - 1. One person in the class was adamant that we didn't have to follow that text
 - a. His argument was unique—one I have run into a couple of times since
 - 1) All that Jesus said and did was BEFORE the church began in Acts 2
 - 2) So the Sermon on the Mount was part of the OT— we aren't to follow
 - b. I stared blankly at him waiting for the punch line, but he was serious
 - c. All that Jesus said is part of the OT... and we don't follow the OT.
 - 2. Let's be clear—the Old Law with its sacrifices was nailed to the cross
 - a. Our covenant is a New Testament written in the blood of Jesus
 - 1) We can't save ourselves through Old Law rules and regulations
 - 2) To go try to justify ourselves by Law is to fall from grace (**Gal 5:4**)
 - b. There is a difference in the New Testament, and that difference is Christ
- C. But what God requires of us is very similar to what God required of the Jews
 - 1. What God wanted was their heart and their sincere obedience before Him.
 - a. They thought that they could give Him ritual and live as they chose
 - b. Do we try to give God worship and doctrine and then live as we choose
 - 2. What broke the first covenant was the willful disobedience of God's people
 - 3. I suggest that the same thing will break our new covenant with God as well!