

The New Agreement



SABBATH—MAY 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 5:17–28; Hosea 2:18–20; Isaiah 56:6, 7; Hebrews 8:7, 8.

MEMORY VERSE: “This is what the LORD said, ‘The time is coming when I will make a new agreement with the family of Israel and with the family of Judah’ ” (Jeremiah 31:31, ERV).



He showed the box of soap to the other men and women there in the office.

A CARTOON IN A MAGAZINE years ago showed a top businessman in an office. The businessman stood in front of a group of other top business leaders. The man held a box of laundry soap in his hands. He showed the box of soap to the other men and women there in the office. The man told the men and women to look at the word “NEW” that was written in large red letters on the box. This word showed that the laundry soap was new. The man said, “The only thing new is the word ‘NEW’ on the box.” Everything else about the soap was the same.

For sure, God is **not** the same as this top businessman. God does not lie or trick us. At the same time, this story does help us understand something important about the new agreement. It is the same as the old agreement. So, the reason for the new agreement is the same as for the old agreement. The hope that the new agreement gives us is the same. So are the things in the new agreement that God asks us to do. Both agreements show us the mercy and loving-favor of God. The love of God for humans is stronger than any sin we ask Him to forgive or any mistake we make.

THE TIME IS COMING . . . (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34 and answer the questions below:

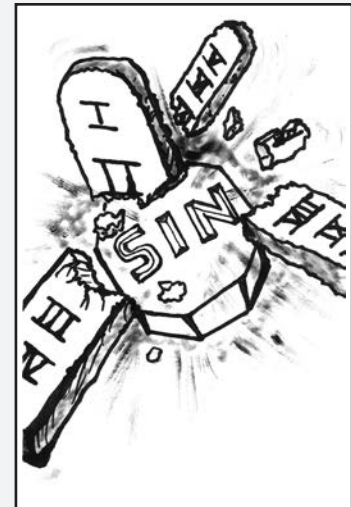
1. Who leads in the agreement?
2. What law is Jeremiah talking about? Whose law is this?
3. Which verses talk about the close, personal friendship that God wants to have with each one of His people?
4. What does God do for His people to make possible a close, personal friendship between Himself and them?

We can see that the “new” agreement is not much different from the “old” agreement that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai. So, what was wrong with the old agreement? Why did God need to make a new one if the old and new agreements are so much alike? The “old” agreement is not out of date. The problem with the old agreement is that it is broken.

The answers to the questions above show us that many parts of the old agreement continue to be part of the new one. So, the “new agreement” is really just the same old agreement from before that God makes new again. The new agreement completes or finishes the first one.

Look at the last part of Jeremiah 31:34. In this part, the Lord says He will forgive the sins of His people. The Lord also says that He will write the law on our hearts and put His law in our minds. At the same time, the Lord shows us that He will forgive us because our sin breaks the law that He writes in our hearts. Do these two ideas disagree with each other? In other words, can God write the law in our hearts when our hearts are full of sin and we have broken His law? If you answer no, explain why these two ideas are in agreement. What does it mean, as Romans 2:15 says, to let God write His law in our hearts? (Also read Matthew 5:17–28 to help you answer the questions.)

Look again at the verses for today. How can these verses help you answer someone who says we no longer need to keep the Ten Commandments (really, the Sabbath) in the new agreement? Do these verses really say that? How do the verses show that the law of God continues forever?



Sin breaks the law that the Lord writes on our hearts.

HEART WORK (Hosea 2:18–20)



God sends prophets, or special messengers, to announce to His people that He will continue to honor His agreement.

The first time we read about the new agreement in the Bible is in the book of Jeremiah. At the time, the southern kingdom of Judah is about to end. Then the Babylonians will make the people of God their prisoners. The Babylonians will soon carry the Jews far away to a different country. This is what is about to happen when God tells Jeremiah to announce His new agreement to His people before the Babylonians arrive. 150 years before this time, the special messenger Hosea also talks about another agreement (Hosea 2:18–20). Hosea talks about this idea at the time when the Assyrians are about to destroy the ten tribes of the northern kingdom.

Read Hosea 2:18–20. Compare what the Lord says to His people in Hosea 2:18–20 with what He says in Jeremiah 31:31–34. What word pictures do you see in both sets of verses? What do these verses tell us about the agreement?

The Bible shows us the sad history of the people of God. The people of God often reject Him and His plans. They fight against God. They refuse to trust Him. They do not show faith. They turn away from God and disobey His law. But that does not stop God from loving His people. God sends prophets, or special messengers, to announce to His people that He will continue to honor His agreement. The Lord will enter into an agreement with everyone who will turn away from sin, obey His law, and trust His promises.

Look up the verses below. True, they do not talk about a new agreement. But what do you see in these verses that shows us the important rules in the new agreement?

Ezekiel 11:19 _____

Ezekiel 18:31 _____

Ezekiel 36:26 _____

The Lord “ “will change their hearts. Then they will know that I am the LORD” ’ ” (Jeremiah 24:7, NlrV). The Lord will “ “remove your stubborn hearts from you. I will give you hearts that obey me” ’ ” (Ezekiel 36:26, NlrV; read also Ezekiel 36:27). This important work of God shows us what the new agreement is all about.

OLD AND NEW AGREEMENTS (Isaiah 56:6, 7)

“Some foreigners have chosen to follow the LORD. They do this so that they can serve him and love his name and be his servants. They keep the Sabbath as a special day of worship, and they continue to follow closely my agreement. So I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them happy in my house of prayer. The offerings and sacrifices [gifts to God] they give me will please me, because my Temple will be called [named] a house of prayer for all nations [people who live in different countries]’ ” (Isaiah 56:6, 7, ERV).

Jeremiah announces that God will make His new agreement with “the people of Israel’ ” (Jeremiah 31:33, ERV). Is Jeremiah saying that God will give the promises of His agreement only to people who come from Abraham and are born Jews?

No! That idea is not true. That idea also was not true in Old Testament times. Yes, God gave the Hebrew people the agreement promises. But God also gave His promises to everyone on earth, and not only the Jews. God invited both Jews and non-Jews to share in His promises. But first everyone must accept His agreement. Nothing has changed today.

Read again the verses from Isaiah written above. What do these verses say that people must do who want to serve the Lord? Does God ask us to do anything different today if we wish to serve Him? Explain your answer.

Paul says the new agreement is “better” (Hebrews 8:6, NIV) than the old one. (Read the study for Wednesday.) But the old and new agreements have the same parts. So, they are not really different. The same God in both agreements offers us the same way to be saved. He saves us by His loving-favor (Exodus 34:6; Romans 3:24). The same God in both agreements wants a group of people to belong to Him and accept His promises of forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12). The same God in both agreements wants to write His law in the hearts of His people. The people of God have a close personal friendship with Him (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). The people of God include both Jews and non-Jews.

The blood of Jesus joins Jews and non-Jews and brings them near to God. Jesus works to make the new agreement possible for everyone who believes in Him.



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“A BETTER AGREEMENT” (Hebrews 8:6, CEV)

The Bible truth taught by symbols in the Old Testament is shown for real in the life and work of Jesus.

Yesterday, we saw that the old and new agreements have the same basic parts. So, we understand that the two agreements are not really different from each other. Both agreements teach us that God saves us by our faith in Him. God forgives us because He loves us and not because of anything we do to earn His mercy. His forgiveness permits us to have a close, loving friendship with Him. Because of His forgiveness, we can give our hearts and lives fully to God in faith. Then He will help us to serve and obey Him.

Yes, the two agreements are the same. But the book of Hebrews says the new agreement is “much greater [better] than the old one” (Hebrews 8:6, ERV). Why is the new agreement “a much better agreement” (Hebrews 8:6, WE)?

What was the problem with the old agreement? Why did it “fail”? (Read Hebrews 8:7, 8 to answer the question.)

The problem with the old agreement is not the agreement itself. The problem is the people of God. They fail to have faith in the agreement (Hebrews 4:2). So, how is the new agreement better than the old agreement? The new agreement shows Jesus in a much better way. The old agreement shows Jesus by animal offerings. People brought these gifts to the temple and then killed the animals to show how Jesus will die to save us. In the new agreement, Jesus is both the Offering and the top religious Leader. He works to save His people by His blood. So, the gift of forgiveness God offers Israel in the old agreement is the same gift God offers us in the new agreement. But the new agreement shows the love of God for humans more fully. The new agreement also is better because the Bible truth taught by symbols in the Old Testament is shown for real in the life and work of Jesus (Hebrews 9:8–14).

What work did Jesus do? What does He do now? Jesus is the Lamb that was killed. He poured out His blood for our sins (Hebrews 9:12). He works as our religious Leader in heaven (Hebrews 7:25). He stands between us and the anger of God against sin. Jesus works to save us day and night.

Read Hebrews 8:5 and Hebrews 10:1. What word does the writer of Hebrews use to show the old plan of worship in the Old Testament? How does this word help us see that the new agreement is better than the old agreement?

THE RELIGIOUS LEADER FOR THE NEW AGREEMENT (Hebrews 10:4)

The book of Hebrews shows us that Jesus works in the temple in heaven to save us. Jesus is our religious Leader. The work that Jesus does in heaven for us is connected closely to His promises in the new agreement.

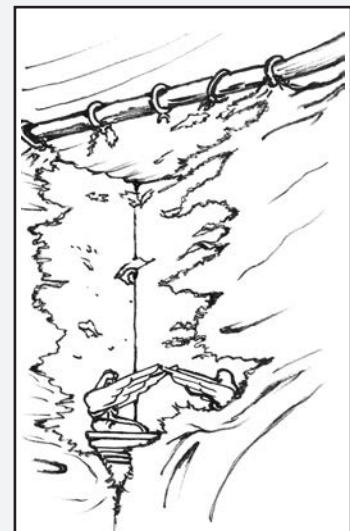
God also wanted His people under the old agreement to understand how He saves humans. So, God commanded Moses to build Him a special tent in the desert where His people may worship Him. Their worship will help them learn about the different parts of the old agreement. One of these parts is animal offerings. The people bring animal gifts to the religious leaders. The animals are killed. The religious leaders offer the blood to God as an offering for the sins of the people. These different parts of worship during Old Testament time show how Jesus saves us. Remember, these offerings are only symbols of the work Jesus does. The animal offerings and blood cannot save anyone.

Read Hebrews 10:4. Why does this verse say that we cannot be saved by any animals killed for our sins?

The animal gifts and the religious leaders who offer God the animal blood show the work that Jesus will do. Jesus becomes the Offering. His blood starts the new agreement. The blood of Jesus makes the new agreement legal. The old Sinai agreement and its animal offerings are finished. God Himself makes the real offering. Jesus, the real Offering, gives His life one time for our sins. His offering continues forever (Hebrews 9:26). After Jesus dies, His people no longer need to kill any animals for their sins. That is because the temple on earth does the job God planned for it to do.

Read Matthew 27:51. This verse tells us that the curtain in the temple on earth is ripped when Jesus dies. How does the ripped curtain help us to understand why the offerings in the temple on earth are no longer needed?

The Levites offer the animal gifts to God for the sins of the people. But when Jesus dies, there is no longer any need for the work the Levites do. Jesus finishes all the work. Now He offers His own blood in the temple in heaven (read Hebrews 8:1–5). This Bible truth is the reason for the promises God gives us in the new agreement.



The curtain in the temple on earth is ripped when Jesus dies.



“Jesus eats the bread and the wine with His followers.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Jesus eats the bread and the wine with His followers. By doing this, Jesus shows His followers that He agrees to be their Savior. Jesus also gives them the new agreement. Everyone who accepts Jesus will become a child of God. The children of God will share in everything that the Father will give Jesus. The new agreement makes these things possible. The new agreement also permits the followers of Jesus to have every blessing that heaven can offer in this life and in the life to come. The blood of Jesus makes this new agreement legal. As part of the new agreement, the followers of Jesus will eat the bread and drink the wine in the future. Then they will remember that Jesus died for each one of them. Jesus also died for all sinners everywhere on the earth.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 659, adapted.

“Does God turn away from what is fair and right when He shows mercy to the sinner? No. God cannot allow someone to break His law and not be punished. That will not honor the law. In the new agreement, God asks for perfect obedience. We cannot have everlasting life without perfect obedience. So, the sinner must confess his sins and turn away from sinning. Then God will pardon the sinner. Jesus died for the sinner. Through His dying, Jesus made it possible for God to forgive each sinner. Jesus did everything the law asked. Jesus did this for every person who turns away from sin and believes in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 138, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why is it better for God to write the law in our hearts and not only on two pieces of stone? Which will you remember better? The law written on stones—or the law written in your heart?
- ② We can be saved only because of Jesus. How do the old and new agreements teach this Bible truth?
- ③ Look at the second quotation from Ellen G. White in the study for today. What is “perfect obedience”? Why must we have it in the agreement with God? Who is the only Person who has lived a life of “perfect obedience” for us? Why does God accept this obedience in place of our lawbreaking when we confess our sins?

Summary: The new agreement shows us more fully the plan of God to save people from sin. We accept the new agreement by faith. Our faith shows itself in our obedience to the law of God. God writes His law in our hearts.

A CHURCH FOR SIGHTSEERS AND TRAVELERS

Benjamin Stan, the new pastor, is shocked when he shows up at the English-speaking church in the city of Bucharest. The language of this city is Romanian. Benjamin finds only three people in the whole church. All three are Romanian.

Three weeks later, Benjamin learns that one of those three members is leaving. She is a 21-year-old woman. Benjamin wonders why God led him to a dead church? He prays, “Why am I here, Lord? Help me to understand.”

While he prays, two American travelers walk in the door. Benjamin sees that travelers and sightseers need a place to worship when they are on vacation. This gives Benjamin hope. He keeps praying for his little church.

Two weeks later, Benjamin sees a man dressed in a suit and tie waiting outside the church. The man lives with his family in Poland, but he works in Romania. The man belongs to another Christian church. After the man studies the Bible, he wants to go to a church that keeps the Sabbath. Benjamin sees that there are foreigners who work in Romania but do not speak Romanian. Foreigners need a place to worship, too.

Several months later, Benjamin shares an idea with the two members in the church. Until that time, the church does not have a Sabbath School. Also, its hour-long worship program is held in the evenings. Benjamin suggests that they should hold Sabbath School and worship on Sabbath mornings. The two members are not happy with the suggestion. They go to Romanian churches on Sabbath mornings. They do not want to lose their time with friends. But Benjamin insists on the change. He tells the two members, “We do not come here to study English. We come here to study the Bible. We need to be a real church.”

Benjamin visits other churches and invites two teens and a 30-year-old man to help him with the new worship program. Benjamin also shares on Facebook the news about the new morning worship program. On Sabbath, 32 people show up.

“You should have seen the faces of the two members when those 32 visitors arrived!” Benjamin says. “They were surprised when they saw so many young people in the church.”

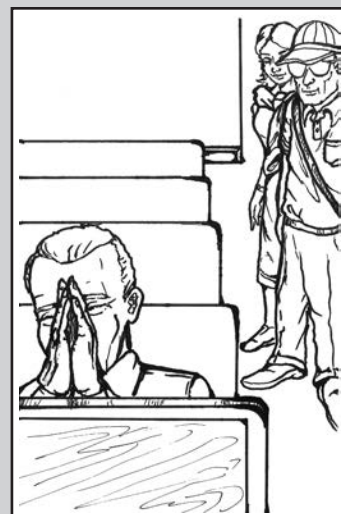
Several weeks later, the Polish man was baptized.

Today, Benjamin sees that his church is an important part of Bucharest. It has 26 members. Each week, between 30 and 50 people come to worship. Many of those people are sightseers, travelers, foreign workers, and students from different countries.

What happened to those three members who were at the church on the first Sabbath Benjamin was there? They are still a big part of the church. The young woman who left is now a church leader.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Benjamin wonders why God led him to a dead church. He prays, “Why am I here, Lord? Help me to see.”

