

# “A New Covenant”

January 2, 2022  
York United Ministries  
Worship Service at King City United Church  
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

## Prayer for Illumination

Heavenly Father, Holy Wisdom came to dwell with us in Jesus, filling our world with her light and life. May she also dwell within your word this day, that we may have intimate knowledge of your love for us, through the One who is close to your heart, Jesus Christ your Son. **Amen.**

## Scripture Readings

### Jeremiah 31:31-34

<sup>31</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says 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. <sup>34</sup> No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

This is the living Word of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

**<Reflection>**

Happy New Year, my friends in York United Ministries and beyond! We are at home now, but we know that God is still with us and accepts our worship. So let's keep worshipping and keep standing firm together even in the time of the pandemic. Although we are in hectic days, the New Year of 2022 came, and our life and faith started another chapter of life journey. And I'm very proud of the collaborative setting of YUM because we can support each other and create time and space for worship adaptively. Three boards and three congregations have boosted each other and have made us stronger. Since 2020, a quotation from Charles Darwin has become famous: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change." You've heard this somewhere else. And it is not wrong, especially for the unexpected and strange times. Furthermore even in the strange times, another new year has just started.

Interestingly, humans count their days and lives; we have had the chance to make plans, reflect on our past, and renew our lives. These skills allow humans to adapt throughout human history. In this respect, I'd like to share the word of God that

encourages us to reflect on our past and to plan our future adaptively.

Let's dive into today's passage from Jeremiah chapter 31. You might remember that I mentioned the Chapters of Consolation in the Old Testament. These were Jeremiah chapters 30 to 33 that I recommended you read them in December. Among the chapters that we read, among all the chapters in Jeremiah, and among all the chapters in the Old Testament, today's reading is the most critical passage according to some Old Testament scholars. Why is that so? Please pay attention to what I am saying.

If we point out one crux of the passage from Jeremiah chapter 31, it is of the New Covenant, the renewal of the covenant. This is like a renewal of the contract between God and God's people. "What? Was there a renewal of the covenant between God and humans in the Old Testament?" Yes, there was.

Before touching on this renewal of the covenant, we must comprehend that the Israelites understand the relationship with God as a relationship of the covenant. Covenant in Hebrew is **(B'riyt) ברית** , meaning, treaty, contract, agreement, alliance,

constitution, including covenant itself, but the original meaning is "cutting meat." When the food was not always enough in ancient times, cutting and sharing meat implied life-giving and life-sharing. That is, having meat is essential for survival. Sharing meat cannot be a dime a dozen in ancient times.

We can count the number of covenants between God and humans in the Old Testament. Those were eight covenants that God sets up in the thick Old Testament, and each and every covenant has its own stories and uniqueness, sharing traditional blessings from God. Where can we find the covenants in the Old Testament? When God declares the rules in Eden in Genesis chapter 2, when God promised Adam future redemption in Genesis chapter 3, when God set a covenant with Noah showing the first rainbow in Genesis chapter 6, those are the covenants by God in prehistory. After these covenants in prehistory, God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis chapter 12,<sup>1</sup> with Moses in Exodus chapter 34,<sup>2</sup> with the people of Israel in the land of Moab in Deuteronomy 29, and with King David in 2Samuel chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:1-2, 7. "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 34:10. "<sup>10</sup> (He said): I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the LORD; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

7.<sup>3</sup> How many covenants did you count? So far 7. Now, finally, the last covenant, which is called a "New Covenant," comes in Jeremiah, saying, "The days are surely coming ... when I will make a new covenant (**B'riyt**) **ברית** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."<sup>4</sup> As I mentioned, the keyword of Jeremiah is definitely "a new covenant," and this phrase appears here only time in the Old Testament. And Christ's crucifixion is known as the completion of Jeremiah's new covenant.

To sum up, the Old Testament has seven important covenants by God, and one final renewal of the covenant in Jeremiah, meaning the Old Testament includes eight important covenants. So then, are there any unique points in Jeremiah's new covenant other than the previous seven covenants? Yes, there are:

Jeremiah's new covenant is refreshing, not the same as other covenants. Of course, it has similar aspects with other covenants: God initiates the covenants, and those are given to humans that God chooses, like, "I'll be their God, and they will be

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<sup>3</sup> 2Samuel 7:11c, 13-14. "<sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings."

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 31:31.

my people." However, Jeremiah's new covenant indeed has outstanding aspects. I'll point out two things besides the social background of Jeremiah's proclamation was at the verge of Babylonian invasion. First, Jeremiah's new covenant is inscribed in the human mind, and God indicates the inscription method. God says in verse 33, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." So far, after prehistory, the covenants that God has given were inscribed in stones or books. However, this time of renewal, God intentionally indicates that the new covenant is of inner search. What does that mean? It means God wouldn't request our superficial and forced dedication, but rather our authentic inner dedication. It indeed touches our ground of spirituality. No fake or Hollywood actions in faithful devotion are acceptable. God's standard of the covenant seems to be higher.

Second, Jeremiah's new covenant has the power of healing by not remembering our sins. God says in verse 34, "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." This declaration on human sins opens the door of healing, not judgment or condemnation. So far, before the new covenant in Jeremiah, the seven covenants had revealed human weakness and wickedness in the long run. The Apostle Paul is not wrong when he explicates sin in Romans chapter 7 that "9 I was once alive apart from the

law, but when the commandment came, sin revived **10** and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me."<sup>5</sup>

Due to the law, humans recognize sins more, and that knowledge leads humans to feel guilty. Israelites knew they were not able to keep the law wholly. They could not find a way to completely keep the covenants, so they needed a new covenant, learning that the previous covenants had only revealed their unfaithfulness, sins, and shames. They needed healing, not judgment; they knew their behaviours could not save them from the power of sins. In the relationship between God and humans, God does not remember humans' sin and that may bring a fully integrated healing of humans. God clarifies that God wants the restoration and recovery of humans, the sinners. And Jeremiah's proclamation becomes to hint and prepare the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you know, my family members and I had a time of isolation due to the Omicron variant. No official PCR test showed that it was Omicron, but we assumed it was because my family members had common symptoms; fever, muscle ache, fatigue,

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 7: 9-10.

sore throats, etc. And now we all are fully recovered. But at the time of preparing this sermon, I was in the middle of significant pain from the virus. It was not that mild, actually. No medicine, no remedy, only hydration and sleep were needed. I felt somewhat perplexed that I couldn't find any medication for my disease. At the same time, I thought it was unnatural for me to prepare a new year's message of hope. Isn't it awkward and ridiculous to prepare a message of hope or a bright future by a person suffering from a disease? I tried and tried to change the passage and the topic for today, but I could not. I sensed the firm intention from God that I, as one of the most vulnerable people at the moment, must be the messenger of hope in the New Year, proclaiming God's new covenant.

Brothers and sisters, God wants to renew our spirituality throughout his new covenant in the New Year. God is initiating a new covenant with each and every one of you. God wants to keep you from suffering by resetting the newly modified promise. God wants to reconfirm the covenant not to reveal our sins and shames but to heal our body and soul. God, who showed a new covenant to Jeremiah, is knocking on your door with a new promise of healing, encouragement, and hope. Our new year is not convincing, and yet we are convinced that God will be our

God, and we shall be God's people. So let's inscribe the new covenant on your heart in the new year of 2022. Listen to God's voice; listen to God's promise through Jeremiah today. And don't forget – Jeremiah proclaims the new covenant in the most vulnerable times of Isarel.

Let us pray: O God! Be with us, be our God. Thanks for the renewed covenant with you, O God. Let us open our hearts and mind, and let us inscribe your promise on our hearts. Amen.