

*I'm guessing, it was in the 1990's, the first time I ever laid eyes a Leatherman. Up until then, we just carried a pocket knife, but then the Leatherman came on the market. It's a little bit bigger than a pocket knife, but it meant that wherever you were down the paddock, you had:*

- *pliers;*
- *screw drivers;*
- *file;*
- *a little saw*

*But a genuine Leatherman was pretty expensive. And so, all these copies were being produced (nowhere near as good)... And I think someone may have even given me an elcheapo copy... But the day came when that elcheapo got thrown away, because I'd saved up to buy myself the real thing...*

*And the real thing, was so much better. The copy was weak. It really couldn't do what it was supposed to do. It was a shadow of the real thing.*

....

And spiritually, Jesus did something similar. Jesus did away with a copy, and established the real thing.” And, this is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The **Old** Covenant, was the old way of doing things / the old religious system. It was the agreement that God had made with His people (after He rescued them out of slavery, in Egypt).

And worship under the Old Covenant, was all based on the priesthood and the sacrificial system. And **under** the Old Covenant, the religious system had evolved (or maybe **devolved**) into (something along the lines of) “You can only know God, if you have Him taught to you, by the experts in “The Law””...

But, the Old Covenant:— it was only ever meant to be, a temporary thing. It was something that was always bound to this earth, and it could only ever be a shadow – a shadow of what was to come – a shadow of a heavenly reality.

And so, back in the day, the High Priests carried out this role of mediating between man and God. And it required all the legalities of the religious law – they had to sacrifice bulls and sheep and goats at the altar.

Now, originally, the altar was in the Tabernacle (a tent). And then when the Temple was built, the gifts and sacrifices were then made at the Temple. And this continued, right up until **after** the time of Jesus. But, it did come to an end. The Temple was destroyed in 70AD and the Old Covenant temple sacrifice, has never resumed....

Now, when Jesus walked this Earth, the temple still stood, and the sacrificial system continued. It was corrupt, but it continued.

And yet, Jesus never took on the role of the High Priest. There was no point in Him doing that. **His** priesthood would not be carried out in a tent/building... These things are but a shadow...

Jesus serves at what is referred to as “**the true tent**” – **the tent that the Lord set up.** – in the heavens, at the right hand of The Lord God Almighty.

So,,, ,, why was a **New** Covenant even needed? Simply because the old one didn’t work. It was only ever a shadow of the Covenant that was yet to come. And when we get to Chapter 10, we’re going to realise, that a major failing of the Old Covenant, is that it could never set a person free from their guilt... And so it was hopeless, compared to the New Covenant.

And, even the concept of there **being** a New Covenant, isn’t something that suddenly pops-up (out of the blue) in the New Testament.

In fact, a fair lump of today’s reading, was quoting the prophet Jeremiah. (31:31ff), which is pretty strange really, because this is a message of hope (joyous hope),,, but, Jeremiah (if you know Jeremiah):– he was known as “The weeping prophet”. Most of Jeremiah’s prophecies were generally pretty gloomy.

- The people were evil;
- They’d turned away from God; and
- the Day of Judgment was coming for them...

**That** was the message that God had given Jeremiah to proclaim...

- And Jeremiah would weep for the People of Israel, as God would weep for His people, because God didn’t **want** to have to bring judgment upon them...

And yet, in this context of pending Judgment and suffering, chapters 30 & 31 of Jeremiah (this weeping prophet), introduce an amazing, glorious hope... — a new covenant.

And I want to tell you: if, when you read the Scriptures, you are left with a picture of suffering and judgment and doom and gloom, the odds are, you haven't read enough of it – you haven't read the whole story... The Gospel, is Good News (that's what the word "Gospel" means)... And even in the context of judgment, there is some very good news. Even in the context of judgment, there is a wonderful hope for the future.

Now, for the people Jeremiah was preaching to, they didn't get to see the pinnacle of this hope. It was too late for them. The New Covenant, would come through Jesus. And that in itself, is a warning. We can enter the New Covenant, until the Day of Judgment arrives, and then it will be too late...

Anyway, within the Old Covenant, was a promise of God, "I will be your God, and you will be My people". But, it was a conditional covenant. The promise included conditions: "if you turn away from me and disobey my commands, you will be subject to judgment."... And the people Jeremiah preached to, bore that judgment. They **had** turned away from God, and God had sent prophet; after prophet; after prophet, urging them to come back to Him,,, but they would not... Until finally, because of their great disobedience, and because they refused to repent judgment came upon them, and their enemies besieged the city, and carted them away into captivity...

And the **hope** of Jeremiah, is there are better times coming. There will be a **New Covenant** (a **better** Covenant)...

Anyway, the Old Covenant failed, because God's people, didn't keep it.

V9 spells out the tragedy:

For they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I showed no concern for them, declares  
the Lord.

You see, The Lord won't **make** you follow Him. He wants a people who choose to follow Him. And we can choose to follow Him, or we can choose to turn away from Him. And if I choose to turn away from God, that ain't God's fault... – that's on me...

But the thing is, if you **know** God – if you really, really **know** Him, you're not going to turn away from Him.

And the big difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, is with the Old Covenant:– it had devolved into knowing God, by being taught about Him... But, the **New Covenant**, is about “relationship”.

Here's a fact:

**I cannot teach you**, into becoming a Christian. And you **cannot learn** your way into becoming a Christian...

Being a Christian, is about “relationship”. It is having a relationship with a living Christ. It is having a relationship with your Heavenly Father. It is communing with the Spirit of God...

It's **not** about learning “facts” about God – it's relational...

Listen to this: V10

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour

and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'  
for they shall all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.

<sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more."

By the time of Jesus, the teachers of the Law, had taken God's beautiful Law – this instruction for Godly living, and they had legislated it into something so complex, that brilliant lawyers

would argue about what it meant... What hope, did any ordinary person have, with that???

BTW, did you know this prophecy in Jeremiah, is poetry???<sup>i</sup> (A lot of prophecies are.) Do you know how you can tell? With most versions of our bibles today, if the text is indented, that's because (in the original language) it's either poetry; or it's a song...

And that's important, because poetry, conveys more than information. Poetry conveys feelings. And poetry uses word-pictures, to convey a meaning. It's not literal – it's poetic...

*And so, when God says:*

**I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts**

*that doesn't mean when a surgeon opens up a Christian, to do open heart surgery, he's going to say "Oh look, there's the 10 commandments written on his heart" ...*

It's poetry... And the whole point of this poem, is "We do not have to struggle, to know the complexities of religious law."

What it doesn't mean, is "We don't need Bible teachers any more..." His word is clear on that... In every generation, God raises up Bible teachers to help us to understand His word... But you don't need me, for you to know God, because it's all about "relationship".

It's about "knowing". We know God.  
We know:

- the ways of God;
- the love of God; and
- the mercy of God.
- His ethics;
  
- what pleases God;
- what makes Him grieve...

How do we know these things about God? Because, it's all about relationship. And, the more intimate we are, with God, the **better** we will know Him/His ways...

And when we genuinely know God, the religious Law is done away with. V13 speaks in terms of how it's **obsolete**; it's **growing old**; it's **ready to vanish away**...

And so, the old religious Law:– that's gone... But the thing the Law was supposed to promote – a manner of Godly living (which is part of knowing God) – well, that hasn't passed away. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Not one skerrick of the Law is going to pass away – I've come to fulfil it.

So, if we know God, and know His ways, (not because of academic/Legal knowledge, but because of our relationship with Him), what does that look like? What does a relationship with God look like???

Well, it's the sort of relationship – a closeness of relationship, that is only possible, because of a total, complete, forgiveness...



*Have you ever had a relationship with another person, but then something happened. You mightn't even know what happened, but the other person finds a reason to dislike you. They may blame you for something; They may believe, you've done something wrong, and you may have...*

*And the relationship has never been the same since.*

*And as much as you work on the relationship/love the other person, and try to get on good terms with the person again, you know the relationship's not the same as it once was. You're always walking on egg-shells, and even though they tell you, they've forgiven you, you can feel the judgment...*

*There's an awkwardness...  
Have you felt that?*

I suspect this is probably why Jesus gave some pretty hard-hitting teaching on our need to forgive each other. In fact, He went as far as to say, something along the lines of "God will not forgive you, if you do not forgive our brother from the heart.<sup>ii</sup>"

The sort of relationship God wants to have with you and me, and the sort of relationship He wants us to have with each other, is a relationship where there are no barriers – where there is no record of wrongs.

In Jeremiah, the poem gives us a picture of complete forgiveness.

God says:

<sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more."

Do you 'get' this? Our relationship with God, is not because we have done no wrong. It's because, in the mercy of God, He **forgives** us, our iniquities...

And His forgiveness is so thorough/complete, He chooses to remember our sins no more...

Is that because God's getting old and starting to get a bit forgetful? No. It's because He is merciful...

When we enter into this New Covenant with God, we confess our sins, and in His great mercy, He washes us clean, and the forgiveness is so complete, that if we come to God and say, "God, remember that sin I confessed to you last week..." and He says "Nope"....

There is no record of wrong...

And in this state of forgiveness, we're ready to go further with God. In the New Covenant, The Lord takes us on a journey to holiness. As we live in this genuine relationship with God, we come to know Him. Because we live with Him, day by day, we know Him.

We know:

- His ways;
- His love;
- His mercy;

- what pleases God;
- what makes Him grieve...

And His ways, become our ways. (You know the saying, “You get like those you live with.”) His ways, become our ways. Part of being in relationship with God, is He moves in. How does He write His law on our hearts? He lives in our hearts – The Holy Spirit, living within.

And as the Holy Spirit lives in God’s people, His ways, become our ways... The Law of God **will** be in our minds/written on our heart... – it’s a poetic picture of Godliness within...

That, is the power of the New Covenant. That, is why the Old Covenant, could only ever be a shadow.

And so, the Old Covenant has passed away. We now have a genuine relationship with our Heavenly Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord, and it is so, so good. As V6 said, it’s much, much more excellent...

**But** it’s only more excellent, if we have it...

That’s the thing with a covenant. It’s a committal. Marriage is a covenant. But unless you are married, there is no covenant between a man and a woman. And so, there is no commitment.

A covenant is something you intentionally sign up to, and stick with. The Old Covenant failed, because the people of Israel **didn't** continue in the covenant.

And just like that, being in relationship with God, can only come through faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ, we have freedom from guilt, and we know Him...

Do you know Jesus? If not, is it time to get to know Him?

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,  
We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We thank You, that we live  
in the age of the New Covenant.

We thank You,  
that Jesus died, so we may be forgiven.

And we confess our sin to You.

Lord, forgive us,  
for our unrepentant, unforgiving hearts.  
Forgive us, for not listening to You,  
and for not following You.  
Forgive us, for when we have served "self",  
instead of serving You.

Forgive us, for our evil thoughts,  
and our vile actions.

Forgive us, for our harsh words,  
and our worldly cravings and lusts...

And Lord, we thank You,  
that when we confess our sins to You,  
You are merciful,  
and You forgive us to the uttermost.  
And the forgiveness is so complete,  
You remember our sins no more.  
You keep no record of wrong.

Lord,  
we want to know You.  
We want to truly know You.  
We surrender ourselves to You,  
and we pray that You would live in us.  
And that Your ways, would become our ways.

for Your Glory,  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> NIV & KJV identify it as poetry

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 18:21-35 & Matthew 6:14-15