Jeremiah 31:31 Yes, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

They had a deal! That’s right, the people of Israel had made a deal, a covenant with the Lord God. They made that covenant with Him at Mt. Sinai and then before the deal even had the dust settle on it, they flagrantly and openly broke it. No, in truth, they shattered the covenant!

I am sure you are familiar with the incident of the Golden Calf? These people had listened to the voice of God himself and then within a few days of Moses going to the top of the mountain at the call of God they began to put together the golden calf which they called their god! Make no mistake about it. Even though they gave this golden calf the proper name of God, saying it was god was absolute idolatry. They did this even though the very first command of the covenant was: “**You shall have no other gods!”** And again, make no mistake that first command of God was made clear by the words: **“You shall not make any carved image for yourself or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters of the earth. Do not bow down to them or be subservient to them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”**

That, dear people, is just one of many examples that could be given in this situation and concerning the people of Israel. Time and time again the Jewish people broke the covenant they have made with God. No wonder when speaking of the new covenant our text says, **“It willnot be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.”**

**“They broke my covenant!”** is the understatement of the year. It would be more accurate to say they despised, misused, abused, and held in total disregard their covenant with God. Worse yet, they were so deep into their sin that they didn’t even think they had done anything wrong! They considered themselves a righteous people, a people holy and pure. Why else would God lead them out of Egypt? Why else would God declare them his people and children? God just didn’t understand that they were simply trying to enhance their worship life, make it easier to envision their god. God needs to quit being so “Godly!” In truth, they, like us, are sinners, natural enemies of God and a people inclined to evil.

God’s reaction to all of this? God’s reaction is one of grace and mercy. God’s reaction is to promise help and deliverance, guidance and wisdom. God’s reaction is to promise a new covenant, a superior covenant, a covenant that mankind can’t break or shatter. And what a contrast will be found between those covenants, a difference that we need to grasp and understand.

Now, to make sure we understand we ask, “What was the first covenant that God was going to replace?” Our text tells us the answer when it says, **“It willnot be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt.”** God refers to the time He led his people Israel out of Egypt. He is referring to their coming to Mt. Sinai where they received the law of God, the very commands of God that covered their life from point to point. The first covenant is the covenant of the Law with his people. This covenant to which the people responded, **“All that the Lord has spoken we will do. We will obey.”** (Ex 24:7).

The sad part is that the people didn’t really grasp what they were promising. They saw and heard the Law, but they did not fully grasp that the law was there to show them the depth of their sinfulness. Had they truly grasped what God had said to them they would have responded with, *“We have heard your words. We see our sinfulness. We will cling to the promises of the Savior that your ceremonial laws proclaim.”* It is sad to realize that even their words ratifying this covenant of God were shallow.

Because as I pointed out earlier, they did not obey. Now, be careful what you think here. God understood the nature of this covenant. God had made this covenant conditional. The condition wasn’t that they should be perfectly obedient. The condition was that they were supposed to believe and trust in the Lord. So it is true, they did not obey the law. But who can? That is not why the Lord considered this covenant to be broken. It was much more serious than simple disobedience. The problem was that they rejected the whole reason and point of the covenant. They rejected the idea that God’s law was about sin and its horrors. They failed to grasp that God’s law, especially the ceremonial portion was about the Savior that God had promised, the Savior that would bring them forgiveness and life eternal. They ignored the truth that behind the law was the promise of God’s salvation by grace through faith.

Here is truly what God meant when He said that these people had broken the covenant. It wasn’t that they had messed up this or done that horrid thing. It was that they had rejected that their faith was to be in the Messiah. The Messiah was foreshadowed as the one to come and bring them forgiveness. By foreshadowed I mean that everything in their way of worship; from the setup of the temple, to the office of the High Priest, the office of Prophet, the sacrifices of animals and the rituals of their religious assembly all pointed to the coming Messiah. The Jewish religion was about a Messiah coming from God, who was God, who would bring them life and salvation through what he would do and accomplish. That’s what the covenant was about! Yes, even this conditional covenant was about the Savior and the grace and wonder of God!

Yet they did not keep this wonder of God’s Messiah, this backbone of God’s law in their hearts. Instead of using the Law to show their sins and lead to Christ they considered the law to be their salvation. So twisted and gutted of truth had the law become in their hands that despite the evidence, they considered themselves pure and holy, upright and just. They had broken the first covenant of God, refused its lessons and could not see the Savior it pointed to.

It is for this reason that God offers and gives this promise of a new covenant. It would be different. Listen to what this covenant would be, **“But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, “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 guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.”**

What beautiful words. The problem we have when we read this text is that we focus on the part that doesn’t make any sense to us. We hear the part of God putting his law in our mind and in our hearts and we think, “I don’t have that!” Then we panic and think that maybe we don’t really understand these words. All because we miss the heart and core of what is said here. The heart of this is found in the last line: **“for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.”**

Do you know when these words came true? They came true on the day of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. On that day, because Jesus lives, we understood and grasped who and what Jesus is. Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus is our redeemer, which means that through Jesus our sins are forgiven totally and completely. Here is the key. When forgiveness is won, when God erases from His memory our sins and no longer counts our evil deeds against us, then these words come true. Every day, these words are true in Jesus.

That is the whole point of Jesus’ coming. Jesus was going to suffer for us. Jesus was going to take upon himself our sins and pay their debt. Because of Jesus these words come true. God forgives our wickedness and remembers our sins no more. For this reason and in this reason we find God is in our hearts and God’s law is in us.

Don’t you know the Lord? What did Jesus say to us? **“I and the Father are one.”** Or again in John 14 Jesus said, **“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. If you know me, you would also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”** What did our words say to us? **“No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”** When you know Jesus you know the true and loving God who forgives you.

We can even talk of the impact of Jesus in our lives when the message of forgiveness and eternal life finally sinks into our hearts. As we believe in God’s gospel that Jesus is our Savior…the impact is awesome. The New Testament puts it this way: (Gal 2:19f) **“Indeed, through the law I died to the law that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”** Or we could also turn to Ephesians 2:8-10, **“Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.** There are literally hundreds of passages that could be quoted to show that in Jesus we are filled with the wonder and awe of God working in our lives to the glory of God.

All of this because God sent his Son Jesus to bring us the forgiveness of sin. Every sin committed is forgiven. And yes, understand, that even after you come to faith in Jesus you will sin, for no man in this world is sinless and holy in himself. Yet in Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we are counted before God as holy and pure. God in Jesus does not see our sins but forgives them through Jesus. Thus the words of Jeremiah’s prophecy come true.

Now you might say, “But this covenant is to be made with the house of Israel?” So it is, so it is! God’s Word declares, **“For this reason, the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham’s descendants—not only to the one who is a descendant by law, but also the one who has the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”** Because we have the same faith Abraham had, faith in the promised Savior and in the power of God, we are counted as offspring of Abraham…we are the House of Israel.

Isn’t this a wonderful text then? An Old Testament text that tells us about the forgiveness that the Lord our God will and does bring. It is the forgiveness that is sure and certain. It is a forgiveness that changed our lives and calls us to be new creatures before God. Creatures forgiven and filled with God’s love.

Jesus the Savior has come and has won the victory! This is the New Covenant of God. It is a covenant that makes no demands and has no requirements. It is a covenant that does not depend on works or ritual or ability. It is a covenant such as this world has never seen and known. It is the covenant of faith. To hear and believe the message of God’s one and only Son, who suffered, died and then rose to proclaim a new and certain deal with God. That deal that says, God has done it all. Salvation is by grace through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus, the Son of God has won for us. In Jesus all things are won. Amen.