

THE NEW COVENANT

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I. Introduction

- A. [Turn in your bibles to Jeremiah 31.]
- B. Continuing a series of messages on Biblical Covenants.
- C. Last Sunday – the Davidic Covenant.
- D. Today: the New Covenant – the last of the major biblical covenants we'll be covering in this series.
- E. The most important of the major biblical covenants because it secures eternal salvation.
- F. An extensive topic which we'll only be covering in overview form this morning.

II. The New Covenant

- A. Words of Jesus
 - 1. During the intimate occasion of the last supper – mere hours before His crucifixion.
 - a) And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke [it], and gave [it] to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave [it] to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Mt 26:26-28)
 - 2. How would the words of Jesus have been understood by His listeners?
 - a) The New Covenant. A specific covenant which should be known by His listeners.
 - (1) Jesus always spoke within the context of an understanding of the Scriptures—the Old Testament.
 - b) Jesus assumed a knowledge of passages in the Old Testament.
 - c) A passage in Jeremiah 31 is the only place in the Old Testament where the phrase "new covenant" occurs, and it is explicitly connected with the forgiveness of sin.
 - d) This passage provides the key to understanding what Jesus was referring to—a biblical truth He held His listeners responsible for being familiar with.
- B. Prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-37)

1. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day [that] I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. "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 in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts [is] His name): "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, [Then] the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the LORD. (Jer 31:31-37)
2. Stipulations
 - a) Future to the time of Jeremiah: after the fall of the southern kingdom to Babylon (605 BC).
 - b) Made with the "house of Israel and with the house of Judah" -- the entire nation of Israel, divided into northern and southern kingdoms at the time of the prophecy.
 - c) Contrasted with the law, given at Mt. Sinai: the Mosaic Covenant given specifically to Israel, a covenant which they broke.
3. Not according to the Mosaic Covenant
 - a) Unilateral – based in the unconditional promise made to Abraham that "in you all families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).
 - (1) The Mosaic Covenant was bilateral: Israel agreed to uphold God's law in order to keep the covenant.
 - b) Unbreakable – ultimate fulfillment will cannot be thwarted by the faithlessness of the nation.
 - (1) God's Spirit will bring about fulfillment through the conversion of individual Jews – "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (v. 33).
 - (2) At the time of fulfillment there will no longer be a need to teach individual Israelites to know God. Every living Jew will know God.¹
 - (a) "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (v. 34).

¹

For more on how God will bring this about, see Eze. 20:37-38.

- (b) In the very next chapter of Jeremiah
- i) 'Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. 'They shall be My people, and I will be their God; 'then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. 'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jer 32:37-40)
- (c) Ezekiel saw this same conversion of Israel by God's Spirit
- i) "For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do [them]. "Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. (Eze 36:24-28)
- (d) Paul reminded the church at Rome of this promised conversion of the Jews²
- i) For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this [is] My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:25-27)
- c) Supersedes the Old, Mosaic Covenant
- (1) The writer of Hebrews indicates that the Mosaic Covenant has become obsolete because of the inability of men to keep the law.
- (a) For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. . . [Quotes Jeremiah 31] . . In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:7-13)
- (b) Called a "better covenant" because it was established on "better promises" (Heb 8:6)

2

Paul gives a two-part composite citation in 11:26b-27 from the Septuagint of Isaiah, the first from Isaiah 59:20-21a (Rom. 11:26-27a) and the second from Isaiah 27:9 (Rom. 11:27b). While there are some differences between the Septuagint Paul quotes and the Hebrew text discussed in the previous section, none alters the conclusions reached in that discussion. R. Bruce Compton, "Dispensationalism, The Church, and the New Covenant" in the Detroit baptist Theological Journal (DBSJ) 8 (Fall 2003), pp. 26-27. <<http://www.dbts.edu/journals/2003/Compton.pdf>>

4. God's provision for sin.
 - a) "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (v. 34)
 - b) Compare with Paul's words: "This is My covenant with them when I take away their sins" (Rom. 11:25-27).
5. Continuance of the nation of Israel guaranteed.
 - a) Attested by the continuance of the sun and moon (dual witness).
 - (1) Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. (Rev. 12:1)
 - (a) Clothing (of the sun) speaks of *protection*.
 - (b) Moon under her feet speaks of *support*.
 - (2) To destroy Israel requires first removing the sun and moon.
 - (3) Immeasurable dimensions of the heavens and unsearchable nature of the foundations of the earth (dual witness).
 - b) Fulfillment requires the continued existence of Israel.
 - (1) It appears from other passages that the national conversion of Israel will only come after the fullness of Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25), ultimately at the 2nd Coming of Christ in preparation for Israel's role in the Millennial Kingdom to follow.
6. Unbreakable by Israel's disobedience
 - a) Attested by the dual witness of heaven and earth.
 - b) Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the LORD. (Jer 31:37)
 - c) Why such an extreme statement?
 - (1) Israel's history, both before and after Jeremiah, of continued disobedience to God.
 - (2) The coming crucifixion of her own Messiah!
 - (3) The claim by others, heard within Christianity even now, that the nation of Israel has forfeited and been cut off from these promises.
- C. Ratified, or confirmed by the shedding of blood
 1. As early as Leviticus, the connection between blood and atonement was made by God
 - a) 'For the life of the flesh [is] in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it [is] the blood [that] makes atonement for the soul.' (Le 17:11 cf. Gen. 9:4)

2. Like the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, the New Covenant was ratified by blood – the blood of God's perfect Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ.
 - a) The writer of Hebrews indicates that the blood of Jesus redeems those found guilty for violating the law, the Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 9:13-15).
 - b) The similarity between the statements of Moses and Jesus.
 - (1) When ratifying the Mosaic Covenant:
And Moses took the blood, sprinkled [it] on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words." (Ex 24:8)
 - (2) When ratifying the New Covenant, Jesus said:
"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Mt 26:28 cf. Heb. 10:12-14)
3. The sign of the covenant – the Lord's Supper?
 - a) Paul underscores the memorial nature of the Lord's Supper
In the same manner [He] also [took] the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink [it], in remembrance of Me." (1Co 11:25)

III. Gentile Participation In The New Covenant

A. Old Testament

1. The promise given to Abram that, "through you all families of the earth shall be blessed" hints at the wider application of the New Covenant than merely Israel.
2. A common theme of the Old Testament, the dual ministry of Jesus to both Israel and the Gentile nations, is identified by Isaiah
 - a) "And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb [to be] His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Thus says the LORD, The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, To Him whom man despises, To Him whom the nation abhors, To the Servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, Because of the LORD who is faithful, The Holy One of Israel; And He has chosen You." Thus says the LORD: "In an acceptable time I have heard You, And in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You As a covenant to the people, To restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; (Isa 49:5-8)

B. New Testament

1. The question of Gentile salvation in Acts (Acts. 15:7-10).

- a) If the New Covenant is made with Israel as Jeremiah indicates, how is that believing Gentiles receive its benefits?
 - b) How do you and I, believing Gentiles, appropriate the forgiveness promised by the New Covenant?
2. We know from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, that we have been made, "ministers of the new covenant" (2Cor. 3:6). Since we are to minister or serve in relation to the New Covenant, we must also participate in its blessings.
 3. Furthermore, our participation in the Lord's Supper is said to be in remembrance of the forgiveness of sin obtained through our trust in the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood upon the cross (1Cor. 11:23-26).
 - a) Participation in the Lord's Supper is equated with communing with the body of Christ and being a recipient of the redemption which He provided on the cross.
 - (1) The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, [though] many, are one bread [and] one body; for we all partake of that one bread. (1Co 10:16-17)
 4. We also know from the writer of Hebrews that Christ, our Lord, is mediating the New Covenant of which we, as gentiles, are beneficiaries in this present age.
 - (1) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:13-15)
 - (a) The blood of Christ is contrasted with the blood of bulls and goats which sanctified and purified the flesh under the Mosaic Covenant.
 - (b) Unlike animal sacrifice, Christ's death is efficacious for redemption on behalf of all those who are called—which includes all the redeemed, whether Jew or Gentile.
 - (c) (Notice once again, as we discussed several sessions ago, that the Mosaic Covenant provides the basis for recognizing our transgression. Law keeping can never reconcile us to God because it serves to witness our inability to keep the law and underscores our nature as law breakers.)
- C. Who Participates in the New Covenant?

1. All people who believe in Jesus Christ for the redemption of their sin, presently participate in the benefits of the New Covenant, but the covenant is not fulfilled by our participation.³
2. Fulfillment awaits the future, when Israel is turned to faith in Christ—to share the same faith we have even now in Jesus.
3. It is only then that stipulations of the covenant given by Jeremiah (31) find fulfillment.

IV. Summary - Relevance Of The New Covenant Today

- A. There remains more to come!
 1. In regard to Israel.
 2. In regard to the stipulations.
 3. Means of fulfillment: a work of the spirit of God.
 4. Therefore, Christians should have:
 - a) An expectation that God will work in the hearts of the Jews to bring about fulfillment – in spite of times of extreme disobedience which may intervene (e.g., the crucifixion).
 - b) An expectation that God will preserve Israel as a nation in order to bring future fulfillment of the covenant as specified by the prophet Jeremiah and others.
- B. Believers are ministers of the New Covenant.
 1. We are to be about offering men participation in the New Covenant by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin.
 2. The Mosaic Covenant, the law, brings condemnation in that it identifies our sin and our inability to satisfy God by our own motives and behavior. The New Covenant brings life and is superior to the law.
 - a) Paul contrasts the Mosaic Covenant, the law, with the New Covenant.
 - (1) [God] made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. (2Co 3:6-10)

³ For an excellent discussion of the various views concerning the church's relationship to the New Covenant, see R. Bruce Compton, "Dispensationalism, The Church, and the New Covenant" in the Detroit baptist Theological Journal (DBSJ) 8 (Fall 2003): 3-48. <<http://www.dbts.edu/journals/2003/Compton.pdf>>

- (2) Paul calls the Old Covenant a "ministry of death" and "ministry of condemnation" because it certifies that men, as sinners, are worthy of death. We will never win the world to Christ through condemnation – that is *not* the ministry of the Christian.
 - (3) Paul calls the New Covenant the "ministry of righteousness" because it is only by trusting in Jesus that we obtain righteousness before a perfect, holy God.
 - (4) Although the law was glorious, but brought death through our inability to keep it, the New Covenant is said to exceed it in glory.
 - (5) The Old Covenant was transitory: the New Covenant continues in perpetuity.
3. Yet, frequently we hear or see Christian ministries which focus on the "ministry of death" which major in condemnation. Although knowledge of sin is an essential component of the gospel presentation, it only sets the stage for the more glorious New Covenant truth of forgiveness found in Jesus. The ministry of the believer must extend past condemnation to redemption.
- C. The significance of the shed blood of Jesus.
- a) The New Covenant does something no other biblical covenant does: it provides for the complete and permanent remission of sin!
 - b) This fact makes the crucifixion the most important "transaction" in history.
 - (1) On the cross, Jesus ratified the New Covenant, or "New Testament."
 - (2) Our sin was placed on Jesus, His righteousness was made available to those who place their faith in Him.
 - c) This is the "good news" which the Bible calls the "gospel."
 - d) There is only one way to participate in the New Covenant. He alone is the "mediator" or One standing between God and man in relation to the Covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
 - (1) Participating requires placing one's faith in redemption provided by confirmation of the covenant by the body and blood of Jesus.
 - e) Concerning His ratification of the New Covenant, Jesus said:
"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this [Man] give us [His] flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. (John 6:51-56)