

# 6. The New Covenant

***The New Covenant would do something no other covenant had done – it would change the “hearts” of the people. It promised spiritual regeneration to all its recipients. The covenant was made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah and legally established by the precious shed blood of Christ at Calvary. The New Covenant will be fulfilled when Israel comes into a right relationship with God at the Second Advent. But the blessings of the covenant are ministered to believers today through a personal relationship with the Mediator. We know the joy of forgiveness of sins and have received a new nature which delights in the word of God.***

## An Introduction to the Covenant

- References to the New Covenant are sprinkled across the OT and NT. The *primary passages* are Jeremiah 31.31-34 and Hebrews 8.6-13; 10.14-18. NT references to the “new testament” (covenant) include the “blood of the new testament” in relation to the cup at the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26.28; Mark 14.24; Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.25), Paul describing himself and others as “able ministers of the new testament” in contrast to the Law (2 Corinthians 3.6) and the Lord Jesus as the “mediator of the new testament” (Hebrews 9.15; 12.24).
- There are OT passages which use very similar language to Jeremiah 31 but do not specifically use the term “new covenant”. These include Isaiah 59.20-21 (“my covenant”) and Ezekiel 36.26-27, “I will give you a new heart” and “I will put my spirit within you” [NET]. There may be a further hint of this spiritual regeneration in Hosea 2.19-20, “thou shalt know the LORD”. See also Ezekiel 11.18-20 and Deuteronomy 30.6.
- Ezekiel 34.25-30 refers to a “covenant of peace” which some suggest is synonymous with the New Covenant. It is preferable, however, to see this as a fulfilment of promises God has already made in the Abrahamic, Land and Davidic covenants. The blessings include security, safety and prosperity in the land as well as re-gathering Israel and installing David as king (Ezekiel 37.21-28). All will be enjoyed by those regenerated under the New Covenant.
- In Hebrews, the New Covenant is *contrasted* with the Mosaic Covenant. It is called the “**second**” covenant (8.7) – not something second-rate in *quality*, but second in *time*, being revealed roughly 1000 years after the Mosaic covenant was inaugurated. It is also a completely “**new**” covenant in *quality* and *type* – not merely the “old” Mosaic covenant slightly altered and masquerading in disguise!
- Hebrews also speaks of the New Covenant as “**better**” (8.6) in its *terms* – which are unconditional and one-sided, hence the covenant is “**eternal**” (13.20). God says, “I will”, not “thou shalt”.
- Though this “second” covenant replaces the “first” Mosaic covenant (8.13), it provides the spiritual foundation for the other divine covenants to be fulfilled. Abraham was promised *soil* (developed in the *Land Covenant*), a *seed* (re-affirmed in the *Davidic covenant*) and *spiritual* blessing in *salvation* for “all nations” (confirmed in the *New Covenant*).

## The Importance of the Covenant

- The former covenants had one fatal flaw – they left the **heart** of man untouched (cf. Genesis 8.21). Every Israelite was a beneficiary of the covenants with Abraham and David, but not all were born-again. They were in the covenants *nationally* and *legally* but had no personal relationship with God through faith. It was external religion.
- A fundamental change was needed. Under the New Covenant, God would *change the heart* – internal regeneration!
- Every person who participates in the New Covenant is **born-again**. God will produce a new creation, with his Son at the head. Every member of the new economy will be spiritually regenerated. There will be no nominal members.

## The Intimation of the Covenant

- Jeremiah 31 is the *promise* of a New Covenant which would be legally established and inaugurated at Calvary.
- In context, Jeremiah 30-33 constitutes a distinct section traditionally known as Jeremiah's “Book of Comfort”. The prophecies were given at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s first invasion of Judah (606-605BC). Israel was under divine discipline due to their failure to keep the Mosaic covenant. However, the New Covenant graciously promised that God would ultimately *re-patriate*, *restore*, and *regenerate* his people.
- Jeremiah 31.31 says “Behold, the days come”. What days? Israel will have a time of trouble (Jacob’s Trouble, the Tribulation) and be saved *out* of it (30.7). Once brought out, the New Covenant will be made. These are therefore “the days” when Israel is brought back to the land as a *regenerated* nation just prior to the millennial reign of Christ.
- The New Covenant will be made with “the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (31.31), later referred to as “the house of Israel” only (31.33). The nation will be *reunited*.
- The New Covenant is not the Mosaic covenant renewed. It is “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers” (31.32). It would *replace* the Mosaic covenant and make it old (Hebrews 8.13).

- This New Covenant will never be broken because it depends entirely upon the faithfulness of God. Israel could only be cast off (rejected) as a nation before God “if the heavens above could be measured or the foundations of the earth below could all be explored” (31.37 NET). Given the observable universe is presently calculated to be approximately 93 billion light years in diameter, accurate measurement is not likely anytime soon!

### The Ingredients of the Covenant [Jeremiah 31]

- The New Covenant basically provides *four* great spiritual blessings.
- **1. Regeneration** [v.33]. “*I will put my law in their inward parts, And write it in their hearts.*” God would create a new people from the *inside* out – this is an internal *transformation* and *regeneration* by the power of the Spirit (Ezekiel 36.26-27). The word of God would be in their *minds* (so as not to forget it) and written on their *hearts* (so as to love it) – a contrast to the Law of Moses which comprised external commands written on unyielding tables of stone.
- This describes the reception of a new nature that would desire and delight in doing God’s will. The new convert thus becomes a lover of God’s word. Do we have an appetite for His word? A longing to feed upon it?
- **2. Relationship** [v.33]. “*And will be their God, And they shall be my people.*” In the past, and because of their idolatry, God had to call His people “Lo-Ammi” meaning “*you are not my people, and I am not your God*” (Hosea 1.9). But in that day, they will be restored to “Ammi” status and declared “*the sons of the living God*” (Hosea 1.10). Through happy devotion and obedience to the word of God He would delight in owning them as his people (Jeremiah 7.23). Likewise, believers today are the *children* (belonging to the family) and *sons* (status) of God.
- **3. Revelation** [v.34]. “*And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For they shall all know me, From the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord.*” Under the Law there was always a need for a priestly intercessor who stood between God and men. But under the new arrangement there will be no human intermediary – every believer will know God and enjoy direct access to His presence.
- This therefore describes a *personal* (not second-hand), *intimate* revelation of the Lord to every believer. John mentions this privilege in *1 John 2.13*: “*I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*” Young in the faith as they were, the ‘little children’ had still come to know God in His character as Father!
- **4. Remission** [v.34]. “*For I will forgive their iniquity, And I will remember their sin no more.*” The New Covenant provides a definitive answer for sin. Under the old covenant, sins were constantly brought to mind (remembered) by repeated sacrifices. Now God will “never no never” (*double negative*, Hebrews 8.12) remember our sins again.
- The word “remember” is not a question of memory, but a *judicial* term – God will never hold believers to account or take action against their sins because they were judged at Calvary.

### The Inauguration of the Covenant

- The old covenant was inaugurated by the blood of animal sacrifice (Exodus 24.4-8; Hebrews 9.18). Likewise, the new covenant has been ratified on the basis of blood – the precious blood of Christ (Matthew 26.28).
- Though the New Covenant was only *promised* in Jeremiah 31, it has **now** been enacted and established. Hebrews 8.6 reads, “*He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established [nenomothetētai] upon better promises.*” The Greek word ‘established’ is a *perfect passive* tense meaning ‘to law down in law’. The New Covenant is no longer a promise, it has been passed into law by the blood of the covenant victim – Christ Himself.
- This has made the first covenant “obsolete”. Hebrews 8.13: “*Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear.*” Gooding says, “*The temple was still there in AD 64 when this letter is likely to have been written. Six years later the Romans would destroy it and the priesthood would be gone forever, and the sacrifices were gone forever.*”
- The Hebrew believers were completely *forgiven* (Hebrews 10.14-18). On what ground? Not the ground of the animal sacrifices of the old covenant! But on the basis of the *once forever* sacrifice of the New Covenant! See Hebrews 9.14.

### The Inclusion of the Covenant

- As the *first* (Mosaic) covenant was made with Israel, so this ‘second’ covenant was also promised to the same people – “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31.31). Though the covenant has already been established (at Calvary), Israel will not enjoy its full benefits until their national salvation at the second advent of Christ. *Romans 11.27*: “*For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*”
- However, a host of considerations suggest that the blessings of this covenant are not limited to and *exhausted* by Israel alone – believers participate in these blessings today. The New Covenant is the legal basis of a new economy (administration) which God introduced at Calvary. It contrasts the Mosaic economy which could never take away sins.
- First, God promised the *physical* aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant (as amplified by the Land and Davidic covenants) exclusively to Israel. However, the *spiritual* blessing aspect (amplified by the New Covenant) was to include “all nations” (Gentiles). See Galatians 3.14, the “blessing of Abraham” and “the promise of the Spirit through faith”.
- Second, the OT does not say that *only* Israel will participate in the New Covenant, or that the covenant is for Israel alone. In Hebrews 10.15-16, the Holy Spirit is a witness “to **us**” that the New Covenant promise of the forgiveness of

sins is presently enjoyed in our experience! It should be noted that the writer to the Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 verbatim in Hebrews 8. However, when he quotes the passage again in 10.15-17 the reference to Israel and Judah is dropped. Instead, the Holy Spirit is a witness “to us”, thus we can take to ourselves the language of 10.16-17 which quotes the *first* and *last* blessings of Jeremiah 31.

- Third, Christ is the **mediator** of the New Covenant. Thus, a believer’s participation in the blessings of the New Covenant is not because they belong to Israel, but because they have a *personal relationship* with the mediator of the covenant. The link is not a *national* link, it is a *spiritual* link with the risen Christ at God’s right hand.
- Fourth, Paul described himself as a **minister** of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3.1-11). The apostles were competent “servants of a new covenant” (3.6, NET). Paul did not preach the old commandments engraved on stone as a means of salvation! Instead he preached the cross. It was this message and the power of the Spirit that engraved Christ on their hearts of flesh (3.3). David Gilliland says, “*If a minister of the old covenant ever comes to preach, terminate his contract! If we preach the ten commandments, either as a way of salvation or way of life, we become ministers of the old covenant.*” A new economy (arrangement) has been introduced. Sins cannot be forgiven under the old!
- Fifth, believers now keep the **memorial** of the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 11.25). *Luke 22.20: “This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood, which is shed for you.”* Every time we take our portion from the cup, we appreciate it represents the sacrifice of Christ which took *away* our sins (Matthew 26.28) but brought *in* all the blessings of the New Covenant. What He *brought in* is always greater than what He *took away*!
  
- In conclusion, the New Covenant is **not** made with the church because Christ is the Head of the church which is His body, and a man does not make a covenant with his body. Rather, individual believers are *beneficiaries* (and *partakers*) of its blessings. This does not fulfil or exhaust the covenant – it will be fully realised when Israel comes into a right relationship with God at the Second Coming of Christ.
- In all this, two errors must be guarded against. **1.** There are not *two* new covenants – one for Israel and one for the church. **2.** The church has not *replaced* Israel as the people with whom the New Covenant is made. This is the error of Replacement Theology.