

The New Covenant

Review:

- God has been telling one story from the beginning. He created mankind to live in this world in order to love Him, to serve Him, to love one another, and to cultivate and keep the earth. He gave us an ideal arena to do that in – the garden. They were to take the knowledge of God and the wisdom He had given them to extend the borders of the garden sanctuary [that place where God dwells with mankind] to the ends of the earth.
- That didn't last long. We have the fall into sin which affected man's relationship with God, man's relationship with one another, but also his relationship with the earth. The earth will now be filled with thorns and thistles so that "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread." We will now face pain in childbearing, and face even death as a consequence of our sin: "from the ground we came; from the ground we will return."
- God was not done with his plan of spreading his glory across the creation, so we entered into a covenant – the Covenant of Grace – with five administrations. He began that covenant with Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Moses, and finally with David.
- This Covenant of Grace is like a flower. As it blooms, it opens up we see more and more detail of how God is going to carry out his plan to redeem mankind and restore creation, and all of it to be glorified.
- What is essential to remember is the role Israel was to play in the story of redemption. Israel was to be a "missionary people." They were to live a life that was so different from their pagan neighbors, that they would show the value of knowing the true and living God.
- For example, God says to Abraham: "through you I am going to bless the world." The Jewish people were intended to be a blessing not simply to themselves, but to the entirety of the world.
- Under the Mosaic Administration of Grace, the Lord calls his people to Mount Sinai and tells them, "You are to be a priestly people, a holy nation." In the words of Jesus, they were to be "salt and light."
- However, they failed miserably. A filter when reading the Old Testament is to recognize the Jewish people, by and large, did not love the Lord. They did not embrace the covenant from their heart. (Moses, David, Solomon are the irregularities.) The history of Israel is they did not believe in the God who called them to himself. A filter through which to understand the Old Testament is that it is filled, generally, with people who are hypocritical. They had a religion of the lips, but not of the heart. Many were syncretists – "Yes, I serve the God of Abraham, but I also serve Baal, etc."
- Every once in awhile there are highlights of people when they turn to the Lord and actually love him and serve him. . . but they are the exception. Think about the wilderness generation. . .most of that generation died in disbelief. . . Think about the book of Judges . . .a cycle keeps repeating . . .local nations will rise against Israel, . .the Lord sends a deliverer, a judge . . .within a generation they turn back to sin. . . They then desire a king – one like the pagans . . .didn't work well under Saul . . .David is a bright light, but he's constantly fighting even with people within his own nation who don't want pure worship . . .his own family is divided against him . . .Solomon starts off very good . . .but he ends his life with a bunch of foreign wives in idolatry . . .The kingdom divides . . The whole northern kingdom refuses to believe God . . .God said his king would be Davidic . . They were not interested. . .The southern kingdom had some good kings, but they were the exception to the rule . . .like Josiah, Hezekiah . . .but throughout the story of the Old Testament the people do not embrace God from the heart . . .They are just like their neighbors.

- God sends prophet after prophet to the people saying to embrace Him from the heart and turn from their sin, but the people go their own way; then they go into exile.
- This is the setting of the book of Jeremiah. The people are in exile. They have failed in their commission to be salt and light.
- They face two crises:
 1. God promised to give them the land as an everlasting possession. Now they are “kicked out” of the land.
 2. What about that promise that David would have an heir and his kingdom would be eternal?
- When we come to Jeremiah, the last king of the southern kingdom – Zedekiah – is getting exiled to Babylon, and all of his sons (who would be heirs to the throne) are brought with him. King Nebuchadnezzar kills all of Zedekiah’s sons before him, and then plucks out his eyes.
- The Jews in exile wonder: “What about the promise you made in 2 Samuel 7. . .the promise you made to Abraham in the covenant treaty?” Something has to happen.
- Jeremiah calls it the new covenant. Ezekiel calls it an everlasting covenant. The other major and minor prophets sometimes refer to it as the covenant of peace.

Read Jeremiah 31:31 – 34.

Prophetic Telescoping – Prophetic Foreshortening (Refer to the New Covenant 12/7/25 handout)

- Analogy: from a distance the mountain peaks look two dimensional. . . like the mountains are on top of each other. As you drive toward those mountains and get to the first one, you realize what you saw in the distance could be miles and miles in between. There could be valleys between the ranges. . . a long distance between those peaks that seem close together.
- When a prophet in the Old Testament saw a vision, he saw it in two dimensional form. He saw the Messiah and right with that he saw a Messiah that would come and judge the nations. What he didn’t see was that the coming of the Messiah and the judgment of the nations would actually be a long gap in between the two.
- Examples: Isaiah 61:1 – 2; Luke 4:19; Zechariah 9:9 – 10; Isaiah 35:5 – 10; Luke 7:22.

Six Distinctive of the New Covenant (Refer to handout)

1. **Return of Exiled Israel to the Promised Land** (See Jeremiah 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26)
 - The people did return under Ezra and Nehemiah, but they weren’t in full possession of it. First the Persians . . . Greeks (or the Seleucids if you will) . . .by the time of the first century, the Romans. Yet it wasn’t everything God had promised it to be: “I will restore all the fortunes of the land.” Jesus expands on this: “The meek shall inherit the earth.”
2. **Full Restoration of God’s Blessing on the Promised Land** (See Jeremiah 31:38 – 40; 32:43; Ezekiel 37:12, 26)
 - The Lord says: “I will restore the earth itself. . . I will create all things new.” The curse that fell upon the earth will be removed. “Yes and not yet . . .”
 - Read 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:13, 14. The apostles were tapping into Old Testament realities that were promised with this covenant. The Holy Spirit that dwells in the heart of the Christian is a down payment, the beginning of the fullness of the inheritance we will have in the new heavens and the new earth. We are part of the new creation. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead: immortal and now in an “unkillable” body.

- We who are united to Christ by faith will also receive at the resurrection an eternal, “unkillable” body. Ezekiel 37: dead bones . . .when the breath of God came on them, life was given.
 - Other examples: when we see Jesus healing people, casting our demons, nature miracles like calming the storm, feeding the 5,000 . . .These are all pictures of Old Testament new covenant promises. I (Jesus) will take away all illness, all blindness, all deafness. . .I will push all evil out of creation. I will take away the curse. I will raise the dead. This is a foretaste, a picture, of what I will bring at the great resurrection of the dead.
3. **Divine Fulfillment of All Previous Covenant Commitments** (See Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:24 – 25)
- In the new covenant, God is bringing all of the previous promises together into one and will fulfill them all.
 - Jeremiah 31:33: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” The purpose of the law of Moses was “that you might live and flourish.” God will make sure that happens.
 - Ezekiel 37:24 – 25: (notice all the covenant promises contained in the passage) Covenant to David, Covenant to Moses, Covenant to Abraham. . . Has this been fulfilled? “Yes, not yet. . .”
4. **Internal Renewal by the Holy Spirit** (See Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40; Ezekiel 37:14)
- “I will put my law within them” ...the law will be the guide of the heart of the people who are associated with me.
 - “I will put the fear of me in their hearts” . . .trembling adoration of his goodness.
 - “I will put my Spirit within you.” Some people in the Old Testament did have the Spirit within them. The only way to believe in both the Old and the New Testament is to be reborn in the heart. Anyone in the Old Testament who had a genuine faith in God had the Spirit within them. David: “Don’t take your Spirit from me. . .restore to me your Spirit. . .”
 - But the vast majority of Jews didn’t believe in the Lord. For example, in the Parable of the Sower some people hear the word of God and reject it. Others respond: “I believe,” but as soon as trial comes, they bail, as we see throughout Judges. The third kind: no fruit, no repentance, no genuine love of the Lord. Fourth kind: some had the seed of the word deep in their hearts, had the fruit of repentance and genuine faith. . . Hebrews 11, the “The Hall of Fame” . . .they were genuine believers. . . but they were the exception.
 - What God is saying here is of the aspects of the newness of the covenant is that all of those I call to myself will genuinely love me, genuinely seek to walk in my ways. Has this happened? “Yes, not yet.” Look at verse Jeremiah 31:34 – prophetic foreshortening, prophetic telescoping – is crucial for understanding: “No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.” No need for exhortation, no need for warning, no need for discipline, no need for teachers. Yes, the New Covenant has come, but also not yet in its fullness.
5. **Full Forgiveness of Sins** (See Jeremiah 31:34; 50:20)
- Was there the opportunity for forgiveness of sin in the Old Testament? Yes. Examples: “Seek the Lord while he may be found.” “For with you there is forgiveness that you might be feared.”
 - What’s new? The offer of forgiveness was given to those in the Old Testament who genuinely loved the Lord. The means by which that forgiveness would be accomplished had not yet come. All of the animals, all the rituals, were intended to point beyond

themselves . . .the animal sacrificial system was pointing to the actual remedy . . . the true High Priest, the true Sacrifice, the true Temple of God had not yet come. When he would come, he would put an end to the need of the shadows.

- Forgiveness was an option in the Old Testament and given to those who genuinely loved the Lord. Redemption was applied, but it had not yet been accomplished in time.
- As the author of Hebrews says, the symbols did not accomplish what they pictured because they had to be repeated over and over again. As Christ has entered into the “tent not made with hands,” he is a priest that now sits down from his work; there is no need for this sacrificial atonement any more. . .it has been done. Yes, “God remembers their sin no more,” (Jeremiah 31:34).

6. Union of Israel and Judah (See Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 37:15ff)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” The people who had been fractured into two groups, God was going to bring them back into one people.

- Ezekiel is instructed to carry out a prophetic, symbolic act where he takes one stick and writes Judah on it, and another stick and writes Ephraim (the northern kingdom) on it, then puts it together. The Lord says that in the New Covenant he will bring the scattered and fractured people of God back together.
- Typically within reformed circles we understand this not as a literal bringing of the ten tribes of the north back with the two tribes from the south. The reason? Very few people even Jews of Jesus’ day think this is meant to be pressed to a kind of literalism. . .that those ten tribes that were dispersed under Syrian exile will one day be reunited with the two tribes of the south. Those ten tribes are considered lost to history. When God exiled those people in the north, they intermarried within the lines (which they were not supposed to do) and also married their pagan neighbors . . they became unequally yoked . . .by the first century they are what is called the Samaritans. . . a mix of Jew and pagan.
- What God is saying: I will bring the true Israel of God together into one people under this New Covenant. As we read the New Testament, the disciples tell us about the true Israel of God. A member of the household of Abraham is a description not of ethnicity but of your faith.
- Example: Paul addresses a multi-ethnic group in Rome (Romans 2:29) as the true Jews of God. . . the true offspring of Abraham because you believe in Abraham’s God. Jesus said to the crowd of ethnic Jews, “If you believed in Abraham’s God you would believe in me. You don’t believe in Abraham’s God . . .He’s standing right in front of you.”
- Galatians 3:7 – Paul is writing to people in modern day Turkey: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”
- Galatians 6:16 – You are “the Israel of God.”
- Revelation 3:9 – Jesus addresses a group in Philadelphia (in Turkey) as “those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not. . .”
- Even within the Old Testament if you were a Gentile, and you wanted to come into the faith, you would be considered a true Jew.
- God will bring all the true tribes of God back together under one head of David.

Summary:

God has told one story. While there is a “newness” to the New Covenant, it’s not entirely, completely new. He’s going to bring all of these promises together under one and bring them all to fulfillment.