

A New Covenant

(For sermon on 5th December- 2021)

Before we begin: What is a covenant? And what covenant has God made with His people, Israel, in the Old Testament? Think of Abraham (Genesis 12); Moses (Exodus 19); and David (2 Samuel 7).

Dictionary definition: a formal and serious agreement or promise or a formal written agreement between two or more people, businesses, countries.

Bible definition: literally means cutting. When God made a covenant (cut a deal/agreement) with Abram that He would bless Abram with a son (Isaac) in Genesis 15, to seal the deal, God told Abram to bring a heifer, goat, ram, dove and pigeon. Abram cut the animals in two and arranged halves opposite each other; then God put Abram into a deep sleep; and God sealed the deal by passing between the halves of the animal, in the form of a smoking pot and flaming torch. Why did God do this? God was reassuring Abram of His promise of descendants, land and blessings made in Genesis 12, with a visual presence and the idea was the deal was sealed with blood – so it was like the two parties would walk between the halved animals and say “may this be done to me, if I do not keep my promise”. However, in this case there was a big difference, God alone passed between the halved animals and the covenant deal was sealed by God alone. The covenant agreement didn’t depend on Abram, only on God; everything depended on God. God was saying in essence, He would give His life if His promise was broken. There could be no greater encouragement to believers because God is eternal and can no more break a promise than He can die!

The covenant God made with Moses was also a blood covenant which required blood of a sacrificed animal to be sprinkled on the tabernacle. In the Mosaic Covenant, the blood of animals served as a covering, or atonement, for the sins of the people. The animal’s life was given in place of the sinner’s life. There was however a requirement of obedience – see Exodus 19:5-6 - ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites – And Deuteronomy 28 says there will be blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

The covenant God made with David, promised that David’s lineage would last forever and that his kingdom would never pass away permanently (2 Sam 7:16). As there is no king or throne of Israel, we have to understand that someone from the line of David will again sit on the throne and rule as king. This future king is Jesus – see Luke 1:32-33 - promised that David’s lineage would last forever and that his kingdom would never pass away permanently (verse 16). Obviously, the Davidic throne has not been in place at all times. There will be a time, however, when someone from the line of David will again sit on the throne and rule as king. This future king is Jesus

Before reading the passages from Jeremiah below: what is the **context** of the book of Jeremiah?

The Book of Jeremiah was written between 630 and 580 B.C.

The Book of Jeremiah records the final prophecies to Judah [the Southern Kingdom of Israel), warning of oncoming destruction if the nation does not repent. Jeremiah calls out for the nation to turn back to God. At the same time, Jeremiah recognizes the inevitability of Judah’s destruction due to its unrepentant idolatry and immorality. Jeremiah foretells that Judah will be taken off into exile to Babylon (Jeremiah 20:4-6 and Jeremiah 24; 25 and 27); but Jeremiah also foretells that after seventy years of Exile in Babylon, God will bring Judah out of exile (Jeremiah 29:10).

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

1. What does God promise to make in verse 31?

*God promises to make a **new covenant**.*

2. When will this new covenant be? And who with?

In the coming days, in the future; at an unspecified time.

With the people of Israel and the people of Judah. That is, God's people.

3. Why is God making this new covenant in verse 32?

They broke the old covenant (Mosaic) which required obedience. The people were unable to fully keep the 10 commandments.

4. What picture of the relationship between God and His people is used? And what does that suggest?

The picture given is a marriage relationship. God is the husband and the people are His wife. This relationship suggests faithfulness. God has always been faithful in this marriage but the people (as the wife) have been unfaithful; i.e., committed adultery.

5. How will this covenant be different in verse 33?

This covenant will be different in that God will act and put the law in their minds and write

6. What does God mean by "**I will put the law in their minds**" and "**write it on their hearts**"? (cf. 2 Cor 3:3, 6)

*The law will no longer be external, the new covenant will bring an inner transformation. This inner transformation will be through God's **Holy Spirit**.*

7. What is the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant? (Reading Hebrews 8:1-13 and Hebrews 9:1-22 will help)

The new covenant brings a new relationship with God. Those connected to God have a personal close relationship with God, rather than a corporate.

The most significant contribution which Jeremiah made to religious thought (v34) was his insistence that the new covenant involved a one-to-one relationship of the spirit. When the new covenant was inaugurated by the atoning work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, this important development of personal, as opposed to corporate, faith and spirituality was made real for the whole of mankind. Henceforth anyone who submitted himself consciously in faith to the person of Christ as Saviour and Lord could claim and receive membership in the church of God.

There is also still the promise of forgiveness (I will remember their sins no more). In the new covenant this is achieved by the blood of Jesus rather than the blood of animals.

Hebrews 8:1-13:

- *We have a greater High Priest in Jesus (perfect in every way)*
- *He serves in the true and greater tabernacle in Heaven*
- *Jesus' ministry is a superior*
- *The old covenant had a problem – people could not achieve perfection (Heb 7:11, 18) – only Jesus can do that*
- *Therefore, the old covenant is obsolete.*

Hebrews 9:1-22

- *The old covenant only allowed the High Priest to enter the Most Holy Place once per year – through this the Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.*
- *Whereas in the new covenant – Jesus went through a greater tabernacle in Heaven – He entered the Most Holy Palace through His own blood (perfect and sinless) and His once and for all sacrifice achieved not just a covering over of sins but an eternal redemption*

Read Jeremiah 33:14-17

8. What promise will God fulfil in verse 14? (cf. Jeremiah 29:10)

God's promise is a promise of restoration. Back in Jeremiah 29:10 God promised to restore Judah from exile after 70 years. God is saying this day of restoration is coming.

This promise of restoration – fulfilled in part under Ezra and Nehemiah, fulfilled in whole with the completion of the new covenant – these promises were a remarkable contrast to the present state of destruction in Judah and Jerusalem.

9. What future promise does God make in verse 15?

God promises a righteous person (branch) from King David's family tree. This is in line with the promise of 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic covenant.

10. Who is this righteous branch? (cf. Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5)

This righteous branch is of course Jesus.

*Isaiah 4:2 - In that day the Branch of the LORD will be **beautiful and glorious**, and the fruit of the land will be the **pride and glory of the survivors in Israel**.*

*Isaiah 11:1 - shoot will come up from the stump of **Jesse** [David's father]; from his roots a Branch will **bear fruit**.*

*Jeremiah 23:5 - "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, **a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land**.*

11. How is this righteous branch described in verse 16?

He will be a Righteous (right with God and approved by God) Saviour

12. What promise does God make through Jeremiah in verse 17? How is this possible when there is no King or Throne of Israel now?

That King David will never fail to have a man [descendant] on the throne of Israel.

Only possible, because Jesus is a forever King of a forever Kingdom.

Read Luke 1:29-33

13. How does this passage relate to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Jeremiah 33:14-17?

The angel tells Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a son whose name is Jesus (which means Saviour) and He will have David's throne and reign forever. All promises made by Jeremiah.

Read Luke 1:67-75

14. Who is Zechariah talking about and how does it relate to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Jeremiah 33:14-17?

Zechariah [John the Baptist's father] – says that the coming baby Jesus:

- *Will redeem His people – the restoration promised by Jeremiah*
- *He will be a horn of salvation – salvation promised by Jeremiah*
- *From the house of David – as promised by Jeremiah*
- *He will continue the covenant promise God made to Abraham -*

Read Luke 22:14-23

15. How does this passage relate to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Jeremiah 33:14-17?

In this passage, Jesus shares the Last Supper with His disciples. As he shares the bread and wine – and raises the cup – He inaugurates the new covenant – which is a blood covenant – saying this covenant is sealed by His blood – which He will pour out on the cross – for the forgiveness of sins.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3 for our response

Our response to Jesus, the Righteous Branch, the author of the New Covenant is as follows:

- *Remember we have all those previous champions of faith as spectators from Heaven cheering us on as we live out our faith (v1) and face trials, persecutions and struggles*
- *We must throw off anything that hinders or distract us from following Jesus – and throw off the sins that try to entangle us (v1)*
- *Keep running our race of faith (like a marathon) with perseverance (v1)*
- *We must fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer (of the new covenant) and perfecter of our faith – He is our example to follow – God has begun a work in us, that Jesus will finish (or perfect)*
- *Jesus didn't consider the cross to be joy – but He looked past that horror – to the everlasting joy of Heaven – we must do the same – look past the tough times of this life – and look forward to the eternal joy of Heaven*
- *If we consider what Jesus went through to establish this new covenant of forgiveness and eternal life; we will not be discouraged but encouraged that we are following in Jesus' footsteps and as Paul wrote in Romans 8:17 – we share in His sufferings in order that we also share in His glory*

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His rescue plan in sending Jesus the author and perfecter of the New Covenant.

Additional Challenge: The Gospel of Luke has 24 chapters. If you read one chapter every day starting on 1st December, you will have read the whole story of Jesus by Christmas Day.