

Covenant, New

A number of passages speak of the New Covenant (Deut 29:4; 30:6; Is 59:20-21; 61:8-9; Jer 32:37-40; 50:4-5; Ezek 11:19-20; 16:60-63; 34:25-26; 36:24-32; 37:21-28; Zech 9:11; 12:10-14; Rom 11:26-27; Heb 8:1-13; 10:15-18), but the main text is Jer 31:31-34.

The New Covenant, prophesied in the OT to be made with Israel, was ratified at the Cross and implemented as a replacement of the Mosaic Covenant. It is presently the basis on which anyone relates to God and it governs the life of all believers. The New Covenant provides for the yet future spiritual regeneration of Israel in preparation for the millennial kingdom. This is an unconditional covenant and is made between the Lord and the nation of Israel. The New Covenant, as stated in the OT passages noted above, is predictive of Israel's new spiritual condition that begins at the end of the Tribulation and continues into and throughout the Millennial Kingdom. The New Covenant is applied to the church (Matt 26:27-28; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor 3:6), because it provides the forgiveness of sins and a spiritual dynamic that is not just reserved for the nation of Israel.

Fruchtenbaum: *The announcement of the New Covenant in Jer 31:31 begins with a declaration that it will be a Jewish covenant, for it will be made with both houses of Israel (v31). It will be in sharp contradistinction with the older Mosaic Covenant (v32). Of the five Jewish covenants, the Mosaic was the only conditional one. Although God had been faithful in keeping His terms of the covenant, Israel had not been so faithful, resulting in the Mosaic Covenant being broken. For while the Mosaic Covenant showed the standard of righteousness which the Law demanded, it could never impart to the Jew the power to keep it. But that problem will be rectified in the New Covenant (v33) through regeneration, which will provide the internal power necessary to meet and to keep the righteous standards of God. The result of the New Covenant will be a total national regeneration of Israel (v34). Jewish missions and Jewish evangelism will not be needed in the Messianic Kingdom because every Jew will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. The sins of Israel will be forgiven and forgotten. While there will be Gentile unbelievers in the Kingdom, there will not be Jewish unbelievers in the Kingdom. To a man, all the Jews will believe.*

From the original covenant, its various confirmations, and its inauguration in the NT, a total of 9 provisions can be listed:

1. It is an unconditional covenant involving God and both Houses of Israel (Jer 31:31)

- a. It is not made merely between Judah and God or between Israel and God, but included both Houses of Israel; hence, it includes the entire Jewish nation: the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It should be noted that it is not made with the Church.
2. It is clearly distinct from the Mosaic Covenant (Jer 31:32)
 - a. It is not merely a further elaboration of the Mosaic Covenant, but it is distinct from it. It is ultimately to replace the Mosaic Covenant that was now considered broken.
3. It promises the regeneration of Israel (Jer 31:33; Is 59:21)
 - a. The key aspect of this entire covenant is the blessing of salvation, which included Israel's national regeneration.
4. The regeneration of Israel is to be universal among all Jews (Jer 31:34a; Is 61:9)
 - a. The national salvation is to extend to every individual Jewish person, and it is to be true through succeeding generations from the time that the initial regeneration of Israel occurs. Thus, during the Kingdom, the unregenerate people will all be Gentiles; in the entire period of the Kingdom, there will be no unsaved Jews.
 - b. That is the reason there will be no need for one Jew to say to another *know the Lord*, for they shall all know Him.
5. There is provision for the forgiveness of sin (Jer 31:34b)
 - a. The New Covenant will do the very thing that the Mosaic Covenant was unable to do. The Mosaic Covenant was only able to cover the sins of Israel, but the New Covenant will take them away. This is a corollary blessing to the blessing of salvation.
6. There is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:27)
 - a. The reason Israel failed to keep the Law under the Mosaic Covenant was that the people lacked the power to comply with the righteous standards of God.
 - b. The Mosaic Law did not provide the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; that was not its purpose. But the New Covenant will do just that, and every Jew will be enabled to do the righteous work of God. This is a blessing resulting from the blessing of salvation.
7. Israel will be showered with material blessings (Is 61:8; Jer 32:41; Ezek 34:25-27)
 - a. The Mosaic Law did provide material blessings for obedience, but for the most part, Israel was in disobedience because of her failure to keep the Law. However, such failure will not exist under the New Covenant.
 - b. Along with Israel's regeneration and empowerment to keep the Law, material blessings will be given by the Lord.
8. The Sanctuary will be rebuilt (Ezek 37:26-28)

- a. The Mosaic Covenant provided for the building of the Tabernacle. The Davidic Covenant provided for the building of the First Temple by Solomon. The New Covenant will provide for the building of the Messianic or Millennial Temple. This Temple will be a continual reminder to Israel of all that God has done.
- 9. Just as the Mosaic Covenant contained the Law of Moses, the New Covenant contains the Law of the Messiah (Rom 8:2; Gal 6:2)
 - a. Like the Law of Moses, the Law of the Messiah contains many individual commandments that are applicable to the New Testament believer. These commandments were given either by Jesus directly, or by the apostles. A simple comparison of the details will show that it is not and cannot be the same as the Law of Moses.

Four observations are worth noting:

1. Many commandments are the same as those of the Law of Moses. For example, nine of the Ten Commandments are also in the Law of the Messiah.
2. Many are different from the Law of Moses. For example, there is no Sabbath law now (Rom 14:5; Col 2:16) and no dietary code (Mark 7:19; Rom 14:20).
3. Some commandments in the Law of Moses are intensified by the Law of the Messiah. For example, the Law of Moses said: *love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev 19:18); this made man the standard. The Law of the Messiah said: *love one another, even as I have loved you* (John 15:12); this makes the Messiah the standard and He loved man enough to die for him.
4. The Law of the Messiah provides a new motivation. For example, the Law of Moses was based on the conditional Mosaic Covenant and so the motivation was: Do, in order to be blessed. The Law of the Messiah is based on the unconditional New Covenant and so the motivation is: You have been and are blessed, therefore, do.

The reason there is so much confusion over the relationship of the Law of Moses and the Law of the Messiah is that many commandments are similar to those found in the Mosaic Law, and many have concluded that certain sections of the Law have therefore been retained. It has already been shown that this cannot be the case, and the explanation for the sameness of the commandments is to be found elsewhere.

The New Covenant and the Church

We have seen how the New Covenant will be fulfilled for Israel in the future, but does this covenant relate in any way to the church? The New Covenant is mentioned a number of times in reference to the church in the NT (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:16,29; 12:24; 13:20).

The way the Church has handled these NT passages has been to teach that the Church has replaced Israel in God's plan, and assumed the covenants. Thus, the covenantal promises, they say, are now being fulfilled in, by and through the Church. It is obvious, however, that they are not being fulfilled literally, so they teach that the intent was for them to be fulfilled spiritually. But this interpretation requires an allegorical interpretation of the covenants, and requires ignoring the details such as the Land promises.

This view has rightly been rejected by those who accept a literal approach to the covenants and these have offered two other solutions. First, some writers teach that there are two new covenants, one made with the Church and one made with Israel. This view is not supported by the teachings of Scripture. Second, others have said that there is only one covenant but that it has two aspects, one related to Israel and one related to the Church. Yet nothing in the covenant seems to teach that there are two completely different aspects. Furthermore, even those who hold this view are unable to say which aspect relates to the Church and which relates to Israel.

The New Covenant appears to be the basis for the forgiveness of sins and a spiritual dynamic that is not just reserved for the nation of Israel. While there is one New Covenant, which will be fulfilled in the future with Israel, it is participated in relation to the doctrine of salvation by the church today. The Bible clearly teaches that God promised a New Covenant to His people Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-38) and that Jesus established the New Covenant through His death on the cross (1 Cor 11:25-26). The inclusion of Gentiles is substantiated by Jesus' statement in Matthew 26:28, enlarging the scope of the New Covenant when He says, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." Luke 22:20 records a similar statement when Jesus says, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Paul contrasted the Mosaic and New Covenants in 2 Cor 3:6-18. Under the Mosaic, there are the tablets of stone, the letter, a ministry of death, and fading glory. Under the New there are tablets of flesh (human hearts), the Spirit, a ministry of life, and surpassing glory. The first has passed away. The second is now reigning. Paul is a minister of this New Covenant, as the passage says, "who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). ***So it appears that the New Covenant applies to the current Church Age, even though none of the specific prophecies relating to Israel have been fulfilled under the New Testament application of the New Covenant to the church age.***

We see in Scripture that the Church has not replaced literal Israel in its relationship to the New Covenant, and the New Covenant is not being fulfilled totally in the Church today. Actually, the solution is not so difficult, for it is clearly explained in two passages: Eph 2:11-16; 3:5-6. This could be called the "partaker view." The point of these passages is that God made four unconditional covenants with Israel: the Abrahamic Covenant, the Land Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. ***All of God's blessings, both***

physical and spiritual, are mediated by means of these four covenants. However, there is also a fifth covenant, the conditional Mosaic Covenant. ***This was the middle wall of partition. Essentially, it kept the Gentiles from enjoying the spiritual blessings of the four unconditional covenants.***

For a Gentile to begin receiving the blessings of the unconditional covenants, he had to totally submit to the Mosaic Law, undergo circumcision, take upon himself the obligations of the Law, and, for all practical purposes, live as a son of Abraham. Gentiles, as Gentiles, were not able to enjoy the spiritual blessings of the Jewish covenants; hence, they were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. They did not receive any of the spiritual benefits contained in the covenants. ***However, when the Messiah died, the Mosaic Law, the middle wall of partition, was broken down. Now by faith Gentiles, as Gentiles, can enjoy the spiritual blessings of the four unconditional covenants. That is why Gentiles today are "partakers" of Jewish spiritual blessings, not "takers over."***

The concept of partaking is also found in Rom 11:17. The Olive Tree represents the place of spiritual blessings of the Jewish Covenants. The types of branches partaking of the blessings: natural branches, which are the Jewish believers; wild olive branches, which are the Gentile believers. However, the Olive Tree itself still belongs to Israel (v24).

The relationship of the Church to the New Covenant is the same as the Church's relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant, the Land Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant. The physical promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, as amplified by the Land and Davidic Covenants, were promised exclusively to Israel. However, the Blessing aspect, as amplified by the New Covenant, was to include the Gentiles. ***The Church is enjoying the spiritual blessings of these covenants, not the material and physical benefits.*** The physical promises still belong to Israel and will be fulfilled exclusively with Israel, especially those involving the Land. However, all spiritual benefits are now being shared by the Church. This is the Church's relationship to these four unconditional covenants between God and Israel. The blood of the Messiah is the basis of salvation in the New Covenant, and this was shed at the cross. The blood of the Messiah ratified, signed, and sealed the New Covenant (Heb 8:1—10:18). The provisions of the New Covenant cannot be fulfilled in, by, or through the Church, but have to be filled in, by, and through Israel. It is true that the Covenant is not now being fulfilled with Israel, but this does not mean it is therefore being fulfilled with the Church. Again, not all provisions go immediately into effect. The Church is related to the New covenant only insofar as receiving the spiritual benefits of the Covenant, such as the salvation benefit, but the Church is not fulfilling it. The Church has become a partaker of Jewish spiritual blessings, but the Church is not a taker over of the Jewish covenants. The Church partakes of the spiritual blessings and promises, but not the material or physical blessings.

Gentile Obligations as a Result of Receiving Jewish Covenant Blessings

The fact that Gentile believers have become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings places an obligation on them according to Romans 15:25-27. As Paul came close to ending his letter to the Romans, he spelled out his immediate plans. In verse 25, he explained why he could not come to them immediately. While he had expressed a long term desire to go to Rome in chapter 1, his desire was subject to his duty, which was to collect an offering and take it to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This special offering is spoken of elsewhere in 1 Cor 16:1-4 and 2 Cor 8-9. In v26, Paul named the contributors and the recipients of the offering. The Gentile believers of Macedonia and Achaia had given the money, which was specifically for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. In v27, Paul taught Gentile indebtedness to the Jews. He clearly stated that Gentiles are debtors to the Jews and then gave the reason for this: Gentiles have become fellow partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings. Earlier, in Rom 11, ***Paul taught that the Gentiles have become partakers of spiritual blessings, but these are Jewish spiritual blessings that are mediated through the Jewish covenants.*** The very fact that Gentiles have been made partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings has put them into debt to the Jews. ***According to this verse, the way they pay their indebtedness to Jewish believers is to minister to them in material things.***

Conclusion

If one attempts to say that the New Covenant is being fulfilled today, during the current church age, through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, then it would mean that we should not evangelize any more, that every Jew would be saved, and that we would have the Law of God written on our hearts (compare Jer 31:31-34). This is not the case within the church today. Therefore, it means that ***we are not currently experiencing the full impact of the New Covenant as described in the Old Testament.*** Postmillennialists, Amillennialists, Covenant Theologians, and preterists all believe that all aspects of the New Covenant are being fulfilled today. If such were the case then why do we have evangelism and have to teach people the Law? Jeremiah speaking the word of the Lord says, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:33b-34). Believers today simply do not fit this description. Further, the Lord is speaking about what He will do with Israel. Notice to whom the passage is directed: "'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD" (Jer 31:33a). This is certainly not yet a description of the Jewish nation as it exists today.

