

THE NEW COVENANT – PART 3

ISRAEL THE FOCUS OF THE NEW COVENANT

- The NC was made explicitly with the nation of Israel

Jeremiah 31:31-34 ~ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant **with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. 33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “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. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will 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.”

- The fact that Jeremiah says the NC is made with Israel is clear for a number of reasons:
- First, Jeremiah says specifically the NC is made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”
- Second, Jeremiah says specifically that God will make this new covenant with the same people that he made the “old” covenant with
- The old covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) was made with the people that he brought out of the land of Egypt
- It was not the Gentiles who were delivered out of Egypt and it was not the Gentiles who were at Mt. Sinai to be party to the Mosaic Covenant
- Jeremiah is clear here that the nation of Israel alone is being referred to
- Third, Jeremiah was speaking of Israel at time when they were in captivity
- “At the time Jeremiah was prophesying, the northern kingdom of Israel had long since been overthrown and the people carried off into captivity by the Assyrians (cf. 2 Ki 17:5-6). By specifically mentioning both kingdoms in 31:31, Jeremiah no doubt intended to teach that both would exist in the future and would be united under the one covenant.”¹
- That both Israel and Judah would receive the benefits of the NC one day as one united entity is evident from Jeremiah 50

Jeremiah 50:4-5 ~ “In those days and at that time,” declares the LORD, “the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the LORD their God they will seek. 5 They will ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction; they will come that they may join themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.

- This focus on Israel as the primary addressee of the NC is also evident in Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 34:14 ~ I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

Ezekiel 36:22 ~ Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (esp. vs. 11)

¹ Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 113.

Ezekiel 37:15-28

- “In the various passages Israel’s restoration back to the land and rebuilding of Jerusalem are connected to the new covenant. These scriptures point with certainty to the fact that the new covenant will be made between the Lord and the nation of Israel.”²
- This was clearly the case in the opening pages of the NT where Israel was still the intended recipient of the provisions of the NC

Matthew 1:21 ~ She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

Luke 1:68, 77 ~ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people...⁷⁷ To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins

John 1:33 ~ I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’

John 3:3-6 ~ Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

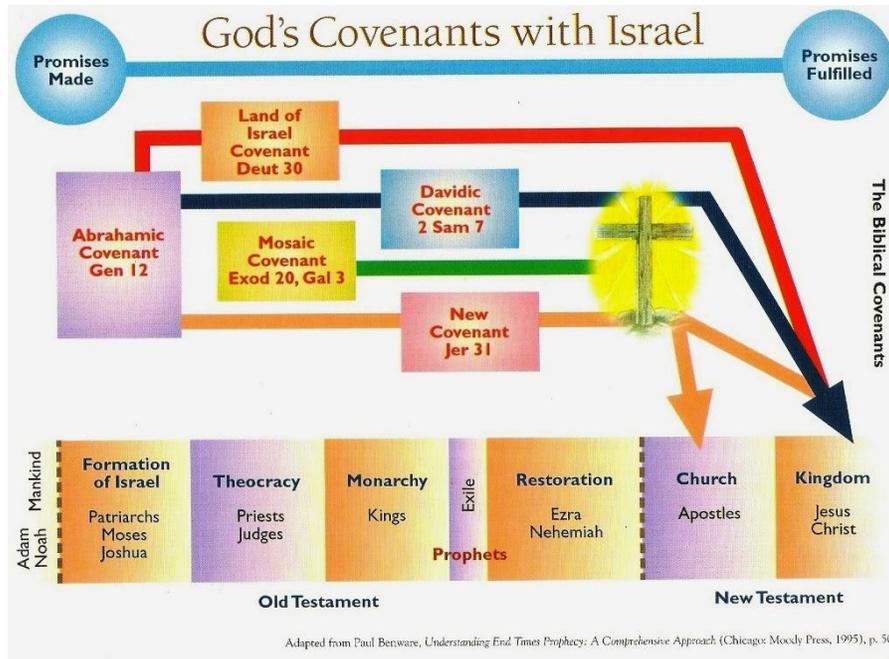
- Jesus confronted Nicodemus for being a teacher in Israel and not understanding this important point (John 3:10)
- “Christ presented Himself as a covenant to the nation. But...that generation of Jews rejected its Messiah, and so the Servant has not yet consummated the covenant with the nation. These covenant prophecies will ultimately be fulfilled with a spiritually revived Israel (Zech 12:10-14) in the Day of the Lord events which culminate in the millennial kingdom.”³
- So, since the NC was made with the nation of Israel, we must conclude that the final and complete fulfillment of it awaits the future millennial kingdom of Christ
- The NC will be fulfilled with Israel in the future when they will be regenerated, forgiven, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, given full knowledge of the Lord, and receive the material blessings associated with their return to the land

THE NEW COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- But the question must be asked, however: Where does the church fit into the new covenant? Does the church become a party to the new covenant?
- This is an important issue because at least six passages in the NT indicate that the church has some relationship to the NC
- After his ascension, Christ inaugurated the NC by pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33)
- That the church is connected to the NC is evident from the fact that the NT writers use the expression “new covenant” more often than the OT prophets did

² Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 68.

³ Larry Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” in *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Fall 1999, 265.



Luke 22:20

Luke 22:15-20 ~ And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in My blood.

- Before ascending to heaven, Christ cut the NC by his death and instituted the Lord's supper
- Christ speaks of the cup as the "new covenant in My blood"
- With their OT background, the disciples would have certainly connected "new covenant" with the passage in Jeremiah 31
- Just as the old covenant required blood for ratification of the covenant and cleansing of sins (Exodus 24:3-8), so does the New Covenant
- Jesus is connecting his imminent death and the shedding of his blood with the ratification of the New Covenant
- In the NC, it is Christ's own blood, rather than the blood of bulls and goats, that ratifies the covenant and provides for forgiveness of sins
- The NC, which was a prerequisite for the Kingdom Age, was instituted by Jesus' sacrifice
- Christ was the sacrificial Lamb who was to take away the sin of Israel and of the entire world
- Jesus' identification of the cup as a representation of the NC indicates that the covenant would take effect through his sacrificial death

1 Corinthians 11:25

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 ~ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant** in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

- Lest there be any question whether the NC relates to the church, Paul restates Christ's teaching about the blood of the NC in his communion instructions to the church at Corinth
- In this context Paul is dealing with problems related to the Corinthians' observance of the Lord's Supper
- Paul refers back to the scene of Christ in the upper room with the disciples, citing Jesus own words: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood"
- The following verse describes the significance of the Lord's Supper: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor 11:26)
- The wine was a poignant reminder of Christ's blood, without the shedding of which there could be no forgiveness from sin (Heb 9:22) and through which the NC was made

2 Corinthians 3:6

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 ~ Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a **new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- In verses 1-11, Paul is describing himself as a "minister of a new covenant"
- He goes on to detail the superiority of this new covenant to the Mosaic Covenant which preceded it: letter vs. spirit (vs. 6a), death vs. life (vs. 6b), glory vs. greater glory (vs. 7-11)
- The main point here appears to be the superiority of the ministry of the Spirit in the present age to what has come before and the boldness that this gives Paul in his ministry
- Paul's primary focus in 2 Corinthians 3 is the glory of the NC and the fact that, as an apostle, he is a minister of the NC to the church
- Paul's identification of himself as a minister of the NC suggests the reality of the NC's impact today

Hebrews 8:8

Hebrews 8:6-8 ~ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A **NEW COVENANT** WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH;

- The book of Hebrews is written to Jews who, after initially embracing Jesus as Messiah, are being pressured by non-believing Jews to return to the system under the old covenant, a system of priests and sacrifices
- To return to such a system at that time would be to "again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame" (Heb 6:6)
- A major theme of the book is the superiority of Christ to what has come before...he therefore *must* be embraced as the Messiah
- Hebrews 8 continues the argument, begun in chapter 7, of the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of the human priests descended from Aaron
- Hebrews 8:6 states that Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry than the priests designated by the Law, because Christ is the mediator of a better covenant enacted on better promises
- When the author cites Jer 31:31-34, he is not arguing that these things are being fulfilled...Rather, he is making the point that even the Old Testament predicted a superior covenant that would eventually make the Mosaic Covenant "obsolete" (Heb 8:13)
- The recipients of this letter needed to understand this so that they would not forsake Christ and return to the old system
- This shows that, while the physical and national aspects of the NC which pertain to Israel have not been appropriated to the church, the church today does share in the spiritual blessings of that covenant established by Christ's blood for all believers

Hebrews 9:15

Hebrews 9:11-15 ~ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the **mediator of a new covenant**, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

- This passage describes the necessity of death in making a covenant, for even the old covenant required blood for ratification and for cleansing of sin
- The blood of animal sacrifices under the old covenant cleansed only the copies of the heavenly things (i.e. the earthly tabernacle and its vessels of the ministry), but Christ's blood cleansed the heavenly things themselves
- Thus, Christ's sacrifice and ministry as a high priest are superior to those under the old covenant
- The references by the writer of Hebrews to Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant and to the change in priesthoods argue that the NC has present impact for God's people

Hebrews 12:24

Hebrews 12:18-24 ~ For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the **mediator of a new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

- This verse again affirms Christ as the "mediator of a new covenant"
- It appears in a context that is reminding the Hebrew recipients of the letter that they have come to something greater than what their forefathers came to at Sinai, a realm of greater spiritual realities
- In light of the superiority of these things, and especially of Christ as the mediator of a New Covenant, Hebrew Christians dare not go back to the old system
- No one could please God on Sinai's terms, but Zion is accessible to all who come to God through Christ
- So all these NT references to the NC indicate that the church has some relationship to the NC
- Additionally:
 - "The specific terms 'New Covenant' and 'everlasting covenant' do not exhaust NT references to the New Covenant. Clearly the provisions of the New Covenant are also operative beginning with the inauguration of the New Covenant on the Day of Pentecost...Actually, all the teaching about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament...is evidence that the New Covenant has been inaugurated."⁴
 - "The new level of forgiveness of sins promised in OT prophecies of the New Covenant also pervades the NT."⁵ Christ has done everything that needed to be done to deal with sin!
 - "The New Testament (covenant!) documents thus should be looked at as instruction on how to live out the New Covenant in the present age...[the] NT books plainly unfold the teachings of the New Covenant. Thus, not only the terms for the New Covenant but also the provisions of the New Covenant are highly visible in the NT. NT Christians benefit in marvelous ways from this covenant that was promised to Israel."⁶

⁴ Ibid, 266.

⁵ Ibid, 267.

⁶ Ibid, 267.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO THE NC

- So there is a tension when it comes to the fulfillment of the NC
- On the one hand, the NC was clearly promised to the nation of Israel
- On the other hand, the NT clearly demonstrates that the NC is operative and that members of the church are presently benefiting from it
- Thus, how does the church get to benefit from the NT that was made with Israel?
- The answer to that question has been answered a number of different ways:

The Amillennial Position	The Progressive Dispensational Position	The Revised Dispensational Position	The Older Classic Dispensational Position
The NC is completely fulfilled with the church; there is no future fulfillment with national Israel (the supersessionist view)	Since the NC was given to Israel for the purpose of blessing Gentiles, there is literal fulfillment of the spiritual blessings of the NC to all believing Jews and Gentiles in this present age, while the physical/national promises await fulfillment with Jesus' second coming	The NC will be fulfilled with Israel but the spiritual blessings of the covenant are applied to the church today (Fulfilled with Israel; blessings applied to the church – the non-supersessionist view)	The NC will be fulfilled in the future with national Israel; the church has no relationship to the NC There are two NC – one with Israel and another for the church

- The best solution is that the church participates in the spiritual blessings of the NC but the NC will not be finally fulfilled until Israel comes into a right relationship with God at the return of Christ
- The church does not participate in the land blessings and does not have the full benefit of the spiritual blessings because Christ the king is not yet here on earth ruling
- But the church does get to participate in the spiritual blessings of the NC provided by Christ
- This occurs by our union with Christ and baptism by the Spirit

Summary⁷

1. The church does not fulfill the new covenant given to Israel in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the other prophets. This is an eternal, unconditional, covenant which God has emphatically declared He will fulfill. He made the covenant with Israel, and he will fulfill it with Israel. He will fulfill it in connection with the second coming of Christ. In no way, can the church fulfill this covenant and cause Israel to be set aside.
2. The silence of the Old Testament prophets on the place of the church in the new covenant does not automatically rule out the church from having some sort of relationship with this covenant. Paul teaches that the church is a “mystery” and this means that the subject of the church, the Body of Christ, is not found in the Old Testament (Eph 3:3-6). Therefore, it should not overly concern us that the prophets do not mention the church in their discussions of the new covenant.
3. Provision for the blessing of Gentiles was made in the AC. The salvation and blessing of Gentiles were always part of God’s plan and concern. In the OT, the book of Jonah reveals much of the heart of God for the Gentiles. It is not surprising that, after the cross, Gentiles in the church are seen as the recipients of salvation and blessing because of the AC (Gal 3:14; Rom 11:11-20). Because the church receives blessings of the NC does not mean that Israel will not receive these same blessings, and more, in the future.
4. The church does partake in the blessings of the NC but not all of them. As members of the body of Christ, we are regenerated, indwelt, forgiven, and taught by the HS. These blessings, however, are unrelated to the

⁷ This section adapted from Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 72-73.

national promises having to do with restoration to the land and the blessings related to that land. Israel alone will receive those.

5. The church is related to the NC in the communion service. Since Jesus spoke of the NC (Luke 22:20), we can assume that he was referring to the covenant given in Jeremiah. It is safe to assume that the Jewish disciples would have understood him to be speaking of that prophesied covenant of salvation found in Jeremiah. Jesus said that it was his death that would institute this covenant.
- “The church, then, is a partaker of the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, enjoying regeneration, the forgiveness of sins, and the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The church is primarily Gentile in its makeup – those who have been graciously grafted in by God *until* their number is complete. Multitudes of Gentiles experience the wonderful blessings of the new covenant. But the church is not national Israel, the people with whom God made this covenant. The church does not and cannot fulfill the new covenant. Its fulfillment awaits the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. When He returns at the Second Coming, all the spiritual and material blessings promised Israel will be received.”⁸
 - We could summarize it this way...the New Covenant is⁹:
 - Promised to the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22–36)
 - Ratified by the Lord Jesus through His Death on the Cross (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:15–18; 10:9)
 - Inaugurated by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41; cf. Ezek 36:27)
 - Participated in by the Church in the Present Age (1 Cor 11:23-26; 2 Cor 3:1–18)
 - Fulfilled in the Nation of Israel at the Second Coming (Rom 11:25-27; cf. Isa 27:9; 59:21; Jer 31:31–34)
 - Examples of the church’s participation in the New Covenant¹⁰

Promised NC Blessing

Experienced by the Church

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Forgiveness of Sin
(Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:25, 33) | <p>Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 13:38
Eph 1:7; 4:32; Col 2:13; 1 Jn 2:12</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Transformation of Heart
(Ezek 11:19; 36:26; cf. Dt 30:6) | <p>John 3:3-8; Eph 2:5; Col 2:11-13
Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23 (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Indwelling Holy Spirit
(Ezek 36:27; 37:14) | <p>John 14:17; Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 6:19
2 Tim 1:14 (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22)</p> |

⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁹ Adapted from Matthew Waymeyer, Theology 3 Course Notes for The Expositors Seminary

¹⁰ Ibid.