

THE NEW COVENANT

CONFUSION AND CLARIFICATION

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INTRODUCTION

The idea that the New Covenant was designed for the Church of Jesus Christ is a major misunderstanding in Christendom. Initially this misunderstanding grew with the early “Imperial Church” (about 325 A.D.). The Greek and Roman churches presumed that once national Israel was set aside, all the prophetic promises to Israel were transferred instead to Christendom. “The Church,” they teach, becomes “The True Israel.” This false teaching comes under the heading called “Replacement Theology.” Most of Christendom has lived under this delusion for the last seventeen hundred years. It is no wonder that ritualistic Christendom has also taken it for granted that some of Israel’s holy services should be modified and practiced by the Church. The prophetic promise to Israel of the New Covenant is one very important item which has been stolen from Israel and theologically transferred to Christendom’s treasure chest. Even most conservative, evangelical Christians, though not part of the Roman error, are erroneously taught that they are living under the New Covenant. This is partly due to some honest misunderstandings concerning several passages in the Gospels and the Epistles.

BIBLE DIVISIONS—AN ILLUSTRATION

On the basis of this general misunderstanding our Bibles have been divided into two sections. They are labeled “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament.” The Church of course falls under the “New Testament” listing of Scriptures. Please remember that the inspired writers of the Scriptures did not make these divisions. Like chapter and verse divisions, the two main divisions were made by later publishers of the Scriptures. All these were made in order to make the reading of the Bible easier and more convenient for referencing. *In many ways this may be handy and helpful*, but at the same time they are sometimes erroneous and confusing. The producers of many modern translations of the Bible often feel the necessity of regulating the chapter and verse indicators to less obvious places in the printed text because of some of the more obvious errors in certain chapter and verse divisions that had been done in the past.

The same caution must be taken about the use of the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament.” The “Old Testament” of course has reference to the Old Covenant Law of Moses. Yet the Law of Moses did not actually come into existence until after some twenty-five hundred years of Biblical history had transpired. That means that all the book of Genesis is most certainly not under the Old Covenant. Neither is the book of Job which takes place in the vicinity of the times of Abraham. From the book of Exodus until the death of Jesus Christ is only some fifteen hundred years in Biblical history and this is the precise time that the Old Covenant was in effect. Of course this does involve all the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, if we remember that Jesus Christ was born and raised under the Old Covenant Law system (Galatians 4:4,5), then we can see that the four Gospels, themselves, can be placed under the Old Testament as well.

True enough, under Christ's ministry they were anticipating the New Covenant to be established with the coming reign of the Messiah. However the Messiah was rejected and the Messianic Kingdom was not set up and, as we shall see, the promised New Covenant was never established. The promised Messianic Kingdom along with the New Covenant was postponed till a later date of Israel's final restoration.

Actually the present Church Age is parenthetical in nature. It was not foreseen by the prophets and was a "mystery" time period revealed through the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-7). The Church Age does involve a spiritual Kingdom (John 18:33-39; Rom. 14:17; Col.1:13, etc.). Christendom usually totally confuses this spiritual Kingdom with Israel's prophesied physical Kingdom. The Church Age, sometimes called "The Age of Grace," more properly falls under the blessings guaranteed for Gentiles within the Abrahamic Covenant promises (Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:13-25, etc.). The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, has to do with the preliminary events leading up to the establishment of the New Covenant Kingdom Age. Therefore, for clarity's sake, the best way to describe the Bible is simply by the designations "*The Hebrew Scriptures*" and "*The Greek Scriptures*."

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE NEW COVENANT ?

The specifics of the New Covenant are clearly spelled out in Hebrews 8:7-13, which is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. So now let us read the actual specifications of the New Covenant as given by Almighty God through the inspired prophet and through the inspired apostle who wrote the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 8: v:8 "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,
v:9 not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My Covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.
v:10 FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT that I will make with the house of Israel AFTER THOSE DAYS, says the Lord. I will put My Laws in their mind and will write them on their hearts; and I will Be their God, and they shall be my people.
v:11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none of them his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.
v:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Now we here have the actual New Covenant contract before us. We need not try to bend or distort it out of shape. It means exactly what it says—and the specifics are very plain—note the following:

1.) The New Covenant is made with a very specific people, "The house of Israel and the house of Judah." There is no mistaking who they are! It is specified as the very same people who had the Law Covenant made with them! This means flesh and blood Israel! Now the apostle Paul warns us today to "Give no offense, either to the JEWS, or

to the GENTILES, or to the CHURCH OF GOD” (I Cor. 10:32). This means that in God’s sight there are three basic peoples in the world. The JEWS are made up of “The house of Israel and the house of Judah”; the GENTILES are all the other peoples in the world; the CHURCH OF GOD is made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles who are baptized into Christ as “One New Man” (Eph. 2:15; I Cor. 12:13, etc).

Now, the New Covenant is NOT made with the GENTILES, nor is it made with the CHURCH OF GOD! It is made only with flesh and blood “ISRAEL.”

2.) The specific time of instituting the promised New Covenant is “After those days” (v:10). In the context of Jeremiah 31:31 is the promise that in the future God will bring back Israel’s captivity—“I will bring back their captivity” (Jer. 31:23). And again, “I will watch over them to build and to plant” (Jer. 31:28). So it is clear that after God brings back the captivity of Israel, He will establish the New Covenant with them! Now what “captivity” did God have in mind? It cannot be the Babylonian captivity because that only lasted 70 years and the New Covenant was never established after a remnant of Jews came back from that dispersion. However, in 70 A.D. the Roman armies totally destroyed the Israelite nation, and the capital city of Jerusalem, and the Temple mount. The Jews were led into captivity all over again, being dispersed all over the world and have remained such for nearly 2000 years. In 1948 a remnant nation was established with no fully recognized capital and no Temple, as of yet. So the actual time of the establishment of this New Covenant is yet pending.

Of course THE CHURCH OF GOD has no captivity or dispersion, nor do the GENTILES as such. Therefore, there is no “*after those days*” for them.

3.) The specified action of the New Covenant is two-fold: first, God will take away the “sin” and “unrighteousness” of the nation of Israel; then God will place His Laws into their “hearts” so that they might obey them.

The result of this two-fold action spells out three things: first, the national salvation of Israel; and then, the fact that the Law will once again be established under a New Covenant management by which the nation will operate; and finally, that God will once again be their God and Israel will once again be God’s people.

4.) The specified effect of the New Covenant being established will mean that there is no longer a need to evangelize their neighbors or their family members because “all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.”

Obviously this never happened after Christ died and rose again from the dead because the Church Age, beginning in the book of Acts, is characterized by the greatest evangelism ever known on earth till this time.

WHEN WILL THE NEW COVENANT BE ESTABLISHED ?

As noted above, the New covenant will be established “after those days,” meaning after Israel’s restoration. In addition, according to the divine revelation given to the apostle Paul, which he shares with us in the book of Romans (Rom. 11:16-27), this Covenant will be established AFTER the present time of Gentile “out-calling.” By the

metaphor of a tree, Paul gives a clear example of the breaking off of Israel from a place of nearness to God and the grafting in of the Gentiles. He exhorts the Gentiles to not boast or act haughtily against Israel, but remember that God can just as well break the Gentiles off and graft Israel back in again. Then notice carefully what Paul reveals—

- Romans 11: v:25 “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
- v:26 And so all Israel SHALL BE SAVED, as it is written:
‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Israel);
- v:27 *For this is MY COVENANT with THEM, when I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’ (Isa. 59:20,21).”*

Consequently, this revelation from the apostle Paul tells us precisely when the New Covenant will be established in relationship to the present age. It will be established AFTER the present age wherein God is dealing primarily with the “out-calling” of individuals from Gentile peoples. (There are many other evidences of the future establishment of the New Covenant, but these should suffice for the present purpose.)

WHAT ABOUT CERTAIN “NEW COVENANT” PASSAGES IN THE GREEK SCRIPTURES ?

Hebrews 8:6

Some have argued, “Doesn’t it say in Hebrews 8:6 that the New Covenant ‘WAS ESTABLISHED’ by Christ!” Yes, it does say “was established.” However, Hebrews 8 is quoting the whole of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the words “was established” in verse 6 are qualified in context as having reference to the New Covenant being “established UPON BETTER PROMISES” at the time Jeremiah gave the prophecy. In other words, the New Covenant was established upon better promises than the Old Covenant was. It most certainly is not saying that the New Covenant was put into effect or “established” by Christ for this Church Age. In quoting the whole of the prophecy the people of the Covenant are clear, the time of the Covenant is clear, the results of the Covenant are clear, and nothing should be changed or modified.

Hebrews 9:15-20

Some have argued, “Does not Hebrews 9:15-20 say that Christ is ‘the Mediator of the New Covenant’ and that it goes into ‘force after men are dead,’ so that since Christ died the new Covenant has gone into effect.” Yes, it does say that Christ is “the Mediator of the New Covenant” and that a covenant “goes into force after men are dead.” However, this is still not saying that the New Covenant “has NOW gone into force.” The passage is simply saying that Christ’s death is the basis for the establishment of the New Covenant. The author of Hebrews argues that such covenants require the shedding of blood as did the Old Covenant and that Christ’s shed blood is the basis for the

establishment of the New Covenant. Therefore, the New Covenant could not have gone into effect until some time after Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant, died.

If one remembers that this Age is parenthetical in nature, no one would know how long a time would pass after the death of Christ before that Covenant would go into effect. As we have seen, the New Covenant cannot go into effect until after the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in” and after the restoration of Israel.

In the context of the book of Hebrews, it is repeatedly evident that the inspired writer is focusing upon Israel’s hope of “the world (inhabited earth) to come” (Heb. 2:5). He is assuring the Hebrew believers that though the Law “is now ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13), God has not canceled out His promises to flesh and blood Israel. Therefore, “*the world to come*” is precisely when the New Covenant promises will be fulfilled. (See also Hebrews 9:28; 10:13; 10:37 & especially 12:22-28.)

I Corinthians 11:17-34

It is argued that since the apostle Paul passes on to the Corinthian church the Lord’s Supper, which wine represented “the new Covenant in Christ’s blood,” it must have meant that the New Covenant is in effect for this Church Age. In this connection it is also argued that Christ instituted a “new supper” at that last supper before He died.

Now it just so happens that the last supper Christ partook of was “*The Lord’s Passover Supper*”—see Luke 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13 & 15. This supper was never designed for Gentiles nor for the Church of God. In fact there were clear prohibitions against uncircumcised Gentiles being present for that supper. At that supper Christ took the wine and spoke of it as representing His blood, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). In the immediate context (Luke 22:16 & 18) Christ twice explains that this supper will “be fulfilled in the Kingdom” at which time Christ, Himself, would eat it again with them. In other words the New Covenant is a vital part of the future Kingdom of God for the nation of Israel.

Now, during the book of Acts the Jewish members of the various congregations still observed the Lord’s Passover Supper as they did most of the Mosaic Law (Acts 21:20-25). The fault of the Corinthians was that some of the Jewish brethren in the assembly had also on occasion mingled the Lord’s (Passover) Supper with the assembly’s love feasts in a divisive manner. Thus, Paul rebuked the assembly for allowing this to happen. He instructed them in the holiness of that supper so that they would never mingle it again even in the midst of drunkenness and gluttony.

*In Acts we have a Transition
Out of Judaism Into pure Christianity*

Most of Christendom fails to recognize the importance of the transition period in the book of Acts. All Bible teachers realize that there was some kind of a transition out of Judaism into pure Christianity during the book of Acts time frame. However, the exact nature of it and the magnitude of it are never specified and remain blurred in their minds. Some teachers even go so far as to condemn the apostles, including Paul, for still

observing the Law of Moses until late in the Acts period (see Acts 21:20-25). However if one realizes that the Jewish converts were never told to stop the practice of the Law until after the conclusion of the Acts period (in the book of Hebrews), one will better understand what was happening.

The principle of *progressive revelation* to the early Christian community is most important. The night of His betrayal, Christ told the disciples “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). “However,” Christ added, “when He the Holy Spirit has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit progressively guided the early church. The Holy Spirit directed Peter to go to the first Gentiles, which meant a break on this subject from the Law of association with Gentiles (see Acts 10 & 11:1-18). It is not until the middle of the book of Acts, at the first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), that Gentiles are clearly told they are exempt from the practice of the Mosaic Law system (Acts 15:13-29). The Jewish believers are not specifically told this until the book of Hebrews is addressed to them.

In addition to the Jewish believers still observing the Law during the book of Acts time period, so it is also a fact that they were still expecting the possibility of the Israelitish Kingdom with its New Covenant being established (see Acts 1:6; 3:19, etc.).

Like the Law observances that were “*passing away*” (II Cor. 3: 7,11 & 13), so the “Lord’s Passover Supper” with its New Covenant promises would also be passing away in their practice. The “meats and drinks and various baptisms” practiced under the Law system were only “imposed until the time of reformation (i.e., the close of Acts)” (Heb. 9:10). In the book of Hebrews they are told “Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to *vanish away*” (Heb. 8:13). For a more detailed explanation see my three studies on the Lord’s Passover Supper, especially the one on I Cor. 11 — [www.SeparationTruth.com /carnal ordinances](http://www.SeparationTruth.com/carnal_ordinances)).

What Does It Mean That The Apostle Paul
Was An “**Able Minister Of The New Covenant**”?
As stated in II Corinthians 3:6

It has been generally understood that since Paul says they were “able ministers of the New Covenant” this would mean that the New Covenant was in effect for the church today! It is true that Paul says this, but the conclusion that the New Covenant was in effect for the church today does not automatically follow. Paul could also very effectively teach the Law (see—I Tim. 1:7-9; Galatians 3:19-25; 4:21-31 & Romans 7:1-25), but that most certainly does not mean that the Old Covenant Law is in effect today. We are seeing that the same is true of the New Covenant.

The answer to this question involves three primary areas of enquiry. They are the following: 1) What, and to whom, was Paul’s “calling” as a minister of Jesus Christ?; 2) What specifically is the New Covenant?; and 3) In what sense is Paul an “able minister of that Covenant”?

First, as to Paul’s calling. Paul’s primary calling was to the Gentile peoples. Many Scriptures establish this—see as examples Acts 22:21; 26:17,18; Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 3:1; I Tim. 2:7 & II Tim. 1:11. However, this does not mean that Paul had nothing

to say to the Jewish people. On the very first occasion of Paul's calling mentioned in the book of Acts it very plainly says—"for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL" (Acts 9:15). Notice very surely that Christ had something for Paul to say to the Jewish people. This is one of the very direct reasons why I believe that the apostle Paul most assuredly wrote the letter to the HEBREW believers. There are clear internal evidences in the book of Hebrews that scholars have noted for centuries proving the human writer of the book is Paul. In addition to these reasons is the statement from the apostle Peter (who wrote to the Jews of the dispersion (I Pet. 1:1) that Paul also wrote an inspired letter to them (II Peter 3:15, 16). All admit that the writer to the Hebrews was well-versed in the Law system. Whom could Christ better select to write the letter to the Hebrews than the "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philip. 3:5)?

Secondly, as to the particulars of the New Covenant, it is in the book of Hebrews that we find the primary teachings about the New Covenant. All the particulars are there: the people of the Covenant, the time of the Covenant, and the effects of the Covenant. The writer (Paul) was certainly an "able minister of the New Covenant."

Thirdly, this, of course, is the sense in which Paul was an "able minister of the New Covenant." He expounded on all its particulars in the book of Hebrews and also his comment in Romans is essentially helpful in placing the time of the Covenant as it relates to the present Age of Grace.

The whole context of II Corinthians 3 is Paul's contrast of the past ministration of the Law with the present ministration of the Spirit. Under the New Covenant the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon the nation of Israel—see Ezek. 36:26,27 & Joel 2:28, etc. Therefore the New Covenant lends itself to the contrast Paul is using because the very same Spirit that will be poured out under the New Covenant is the Spirit that is now in operation during this age of Grace.

What Paul is doing in II Corinthians 3 may be likened to what Peter did on the Day of Pentecost when he spoke to the Jewish people (Acts 2). Peter likened Joel's prophecy to the present outpouring of the Holy Spirit which took place at Pentecost. Bible students have known all along that nothing prophesied in Joel was actually FULFILLED at Pentecost. And conversely, nothing that happened at that Pentecost was actually prophesied by Joel. What then was Peter saying? Simply, that what has happened there on the Day of Pentecost was the SAME Holy Spirit that Joel spoke of. We could translate it, "This is that Spirit prophesied by Joel" (Acts 2:16). Never did Peter say that the prophecy of Joel was "fulfilled" at Pentecost. So it is in this case of II Cor. 3. Nothing prophesied about the New Covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures was fulfilled in what Paul teaches about the Holy Spirit in II Cor. 3. Conversely, nothing that Paul says about the Holy Spirit in II Cor. 3 was prophesied under the New Covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, it is of course the same Holy Spirit.

The present ministration of the Holy Spirit was unprophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless it is the same Spirit that will be poured out under the New Covenant. Therefore Paul could say that they "are able ministers of the New Covenant—NOT of the LETTER (the Law) but of the SPIRIT." Then Paul continues to enlarge upon the contrast between the Law and the Spirit.

In Finality

Paul would state before the last gathering of Jews he met, when he came to Rome in chains, these words, “*For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain*” (Acts 28:20). That hope is the New Covenant Kingdom hope which is peculiar to the nation of Israel and is vouched for in the death and resurrection of their Messiah. Like the earlier generation of Jews, in the main, this group also rejected this good news. Consequently, this will be the final recorded time Paul would speak to a group of Jews these words. Likewise, this is the final time Paul would say—

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it” (see Acts 13:46; 18:6 & 28:28).

The book of Acts closes. After the two years Paul spent there, the inspired book of Hebrews was composed and sent to all Jewish believers. That book glorified the Lord Jesus Christ and gave the Jewish believers their own *direct* liberation papers from the Mosaic Law system. Now, coupled with Romans, Galatians and the other Prison Epistles, both Jew and Gentile believers could walk together outside the Law system in pure Christianity. A few years later Jerusalem and the Temple were totally destroyed.

REFERENCES

All the prophecies, definitions and qualifications concerning the New Covenant were expounded upon in the Hebrew Scriptures—

Isa. 54:7-17; 59:20,21; 61:2b-9; Jer. 31:31-40; 32:36-44; 50:4,5; Ezek. 11:17-20; 16:60-63; 20:37; 34:22-31; 36:24-28; 37:21-28; Zech. 9:10-17 & Mal. 3:1.

The only new information about the New Covenant that is added in the Greek Scriptures is that Christ’s shed blood is the basis upon which the New Covenant will be established. In addition, it will be fulfilled in the Kingdom after this present age of the “out-calling” of the Gentiles—

Matt. 26:28,29; Mark 14:24,25; Luke 22:16-20; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 11:25-27; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:15-22; 10:15-18.

THE END