



“Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

Covenant

Central Truth: God has eternally committed himself by covenant to believers.

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Topic: New Covenant.

The Bible is a record of God's activity in entering a blessed redemptive covenant with mankind. (That is particularly amazing in view of Bible teaching on the depravity of the whole human race.) The structure of the Scripture indicates that the revelation is built around two great covenants: the covenant of law and the covenant of grace. We refer to those two divisions as “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament,” remembering that testament means “covenant.”

A study of the covenant in biblical revelation is very helpful. An understanding of it will reveal the more clearly what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We can rejoice in this study knowing that God has committed himself eternally by covenant to those who trust Jesus. Rejoice as you read!

The lesson comments will center on the idea of covenant, making no attempt to interpret the lesson text. Look for references to covenant there. Notice how Jesus is the mediator of the covenant of grace (verses 1-6). An understanding of covenant will magnify the Lord Jesus.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE COVENANT

A covenant is an agreement or pledge binding each of the parties to mutual obligation or reward. In the political arena, it might be a treaty between nations. In the economic world, it might be a contract between two

business people. In family life, it might be a marriage contract. In a court of law, it might be an oath taken by a witness.

There are 254 references to covenants in the Word of God. (There are 229 in the Old Testament and 25 in the New Testament.) Some were covenants between man and man as the covenant between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:44-54) or between David and Jonathan (I Samuel 18:1-4). Other covenants were between God and man. A bilateral covenant placed an obligation on each party, else the covenant would be broken (Exodus 19:5). A unilateral covenant was God's commitment to a course of action, without a requirement for a person to respond (Genesis 9; 12:1, 2; II Samuel 7).

There are many covenants in Bible records. The primary ones are God's covenant with Adam (Genesis 3:15), Noah (Genesis 9), Abraham (Genesis 15), Israel (Exodus 19, 20), and David (II Samuel 7:23:5). An understanding of the principles of those covenants helps us to appreciate what Jesus did for us.

II. THE MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT (Hebrews 8:1-6)

A. He is exalted. Jesus is now “*on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hebrews 8:1). He completed His redemptive ministry on earth, making possible the covenant of grace; then He returned to the throne of God whence He had come (Ephesians 1:20, 21). As the one who seals the covenant between man and God, He is exalted above, man and equal to God.

B. He is in heaven. There He is “*a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle*” (Hebrews 8:2). The tabernacle on earth was but a picture of the real tabernacle in heaven (Hebrews 9:9). Men could minister in the tabernacle on earth in fulfillment of the temporary covenant of law. Only God himself can minister in the tabernacle in heaven in fulfillment of the terms of the covenant of grace. He is our Mediator and He represents us there (Hebrews 9:24).

C. He is our sacrifice. Every priest was ordained to offer sacrifices. Hebrew priests who descended from Aaron offered animal sacrifices in remembrance of sin, but those sacrifices could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus Christ, our High Priest, offered His own precious blood and presented it in the tabernacle in heaven. He did not need to repeat His sacrifice. “*By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*” (Hebrews 10:14).

D. He is superior. He has a more excellent ministry which enables Him to mediate a better covenant, which contains better promises (Hebrews

8:6). Look at the description of Jesus through the adoring eyes of the apostle John (Revelation 1:11-18). There in heaven at the right hand of God, all persons and powers in the spiritual realm are subject to Him (I Peter 3:22). Praise God for Jesus, our Mediator.

III. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE COVENANT (Hebrews 8:7-9)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:7-9 identify “*the house of Israel*” and “*the house of Judah*.” Does that mean that Gentile believers are excluded from His covenant? Not at all.

Read Romans 9:6-8, 25, 26 and learn that “*Israel*” does not include all Jews but does include some who are not Jews. God's offer of the covenant of grace is not only to those who have Abraham's blood in their veins by physical descent; but who have Abraham's faith in their hearts by spiritual birth. Galatians 3:5-14, 26-29 teaches that God's covenant with Abraham and his “*seed*” (note the singular number) did not mean national Israel but Jesus Christ. Therefore, if the faith of Abraham is in your heart, you are in the covenant of grace and heir to all the promises it contains. The covenant made in Genesis 15 deals not with a nation or a land inheritance but with a spiritual blessing. That is what we have in Jesus. Glory!

IV. THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT (Hebrews 8:10-13)

Three great spiritual blessings come to those who enter the covenant of grace which God offers in Jesus Christ.

A. Those in the covenant know God (Hebrews 8:10, 11). Think about that! One will know God personally, intimately, and increasingly. And knowing God, he will have everlasting life (John 17:3). The law of God is written in his mind and heart so that no one need introduce him to the Lord (Jeremiah 32:40). What a life to live! How blessed is the person who enjoys it.

B. Those in the covenant fellowship with God. That is what God means in saying, “*I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*” (Hebrews 8:10). He will be to us all we ever need or want in a God, and we shall be all He desires in His people. God has called us into the fellowship of His Son (I Corinthians 1:9). The more we know about God's revelation of himself, the more we will enjoy fellowship with Him (I John 3:3). With sin removed and God and the believer rejoicing in one another, the fellowship

will be indescribably sweet.

C. Those in the covenant will have forgiveness of sin. God promises, *“I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”* (Hebrews 8:12). Jesus had that in mind when He instituted the Lord's Supper with these words, *“This is my blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins”* (Matthew 26:28). The redemption we have through His blood (Ephesians 1:7) places us in the covenant of grace. Only those who are saved are in that covenant.

God's greatest covenant was not the covenant of law He made with Israel when He brought her out of Egyptian bondage. It is the covenant of grace which He made with himself before the foundation of the world. The covenant of law binds national Israel to God and is conditioned on obedience. The covenant of grace binds spiritual Israel to God and is conditioned only on God's love and mercy. Think about that! Are you in the covenant of grace?

V. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE COVENANT (Hebrews 8:13)

The covenant of grace is far better than the covenant of law. (That is the major theme of the epistle to the Hebrews.) Its superiority is evident. Grace is superior to law. Heaven is superior to earth. Eternity is superior to time. Reality is superior to symbol. The covenant of law deals with law, earth, time, and symbol. The covenant of grace deals with grace, heaven, eternity, and reality. How privileged the Christian is to be in the covenant of grace through Jesus Christ.

Review the book of Hebrews and notice how superior the Christian way is. It is a better revelation (1:1-4), a better hope (7:19), a better priesthood (7:20-28), better promises (8:6), a better sacrifice (9:23), a better possession (10:34), a better country (11:16), and a better resurrection (11:35). You have the best God has to offer when you have Jesus Christ. Do not feel like a second-class person because you cannot share a covenant of law with national Israel. You are blessed far more by the covenant of grace by which you are a member of spiritual Israel and an heir to every promise God made through believing Abraham.

VI. THE SUMMARY OF THE COVENANT

All the covenants of the Old Testament were but examples of the great covenant of grace confirmed in Jesus Christ. Under the surface of Old

Testament revelation there runs the thread which we afterwards recognize as the covenant of grace. Here are five things to be said about that great covenant.

A. It was planned of God in eternity. *“His own purpose and grace. . . was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”* (II Timothy 1:9). It was in the covenant that He has *“chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . . having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 1:4, 5).

B. It was revealed to Abraham in the Pentateuch. Genesis 15:1-21 records the revelation of the covenant to Abraham. That is the same covenant which Galatians 3:16 says is ours by faith in Jesus Christ. Made with Abraham’s *“seed”* (who is Christ), we enter it by faith in Jesus.

C. It was explained to Jeremiah in the prophets. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:13 and applied to those who trust Jesus. The covenant does not have to do with a nation and land inheritance, according to Jeremiah, but with forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God.

D. It was confirmed by Jesus in the Gospels. He took the cup at the institution of the Lord's Supper, and stated clearly that by His blood He was confirming the new covenant of grace (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:19, 20). His sacrifice procured *“the blood of the everlasting covenant”* (Hebrews 13:20). Jesus is *“the mediator of the new covenant”* (Hebrews 12:24).

E. It is entered by penitent believers upon their repentance from sin and personal faith in Jesus. It matters not whether you are Jew or Gentile. You become a child of God through faith in Jesus. He makes no distinction between Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free. All who are in Christ are one and share the privileges of the blessed covenant of grace (Galatians 3:26-29). Praise the Lord!

“He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure” (II Samuel 23:5). He has promised, *“My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips”* (Psalm 89:34). You may claim those statements as foundations for your faith. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a partner with God in the covenant of grace.

Questions

1. What is a covenant?
2. How do we use covenants in business, law, and the home?
3. What is a bilateral covenant with God? a unilateral covenant?

4. How is Jesus the “mediator of a better covenant”?
5. What covenant did the “new covenant” replace?
6. What is “national Israel”? “spiritual Israel”?
7. What blessings are provided in the covenant of grace?
8. How is the new Covenant superior to the old covenant?
9. What fivefold summary can you give of the new covenant?
10. How does the Covenant idea strengthen your faith?