****

**Lesson 7 - The New Covenant**

Imagine you make an agreement with someone. One thousand dollars for a very specific list of work to be done on your house: an entire remodel of your dining room. Both of you sign on the dotted line. After about a month of making excuses for not showing up, the person you contracted lets you know they won’t be able to finish the project. They tell you some personal things have come up, but they want to make sure that you fulfill your end of the bargain and pay them the one thousand dollars. You inform them (and rightly so) that the deal is off. They did not do their part, so you will not be paying them for their service. “I figured that’s what you’d say,” the disappointed worker says before hanging up.

We all get the concept that a deal between two people is off if one person breaks the terms of the agreement. So how did God respond when his people broke his deal with them? We mentioned in a previous lesson that the covenant with Moses was the only of the covenants we are studying that is conditional (i.e. people have to do something for God to do something). Unfortunately, Israel broke that covenant over and over. God would forgive, and they would break it again:

* Immediately after accepting the covenant, Israel turned around and began worshipping an idol ***just over a month later (Exodus 32)!***
* After entering the land, within one generation the people had abandoned God for idols (Judges 2:6-13).
* The book of Judges describes instance after instance of Israel abandoning God and then crying out to God and being rescued, only to turn around and abandon him again.
* Solomon broke the covenant by going after other gods (1 Kings 11:4-6), as did most of the kings who followed him in the north and in the south.
* Eventually, God allowed Israel to be taken captive by first Assyria, then Babylon as punishment for their rebellion.

***What can we learn from the fickleness of Israel’s faith? How do we avoid making the same mistakes they did?***

So if this was a conditional covenant, and Israel broke it over and over so that God eventually allowed them to be exiled, what happens next? What would do if you made an agreement and someone else broke it? Probably give up on the agreement and move on. But God refused to do that.

In fact, Paul states that God never even intended to save the world through the Mosaic Covenant. In Galatians he argues that the promise that came to Abraham that all the world we be blessed through him couldn’t be overturned by a covenant that said everyone had to join Israel to be blessed. So how does Scripture resolve all these tension points? Well, rather than quit on his people, God comes to them and makes another covenant. A new covenant.

**Read Jeremiah 31:31-34**

This covenant is absolutely incredible. God comes to his sinful rebellious people and tells them that his answer to their rebellion is to make them a new deal, one in which he will do all the work!

***What does this teach us about the nature of God? What does it teach us about his dealing with people?***

1. **The provisions of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)**

The New Covenant was a promise God made with Israel and Judah (the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel). There were three primary components to it:

***What are the three elements of the New Covenant? How would you put them in your own words?***

* **New heart to obey God’s law (33a)**

God promised that when he entered the New Covenant with them that his law would be written on their hearts. In order for true, lasting change to happen, God has to do an internal work. Simply giving somebody a list of rules to follow without the help of internal change is an endeavor that is bound to fail. The commands of the Old Covenant weren’t bad commands (or else Christ wouldn’t have kept all of them, see Matthew 5:17)

***If we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, teaching us and giving us a desire to follow God’s laws, why do we still sin?***

* **A renewed relationship with God (33b-34a)**

God had come to Israel and initiated a relationship with them by telling them he was their God and they were his people (Exodus 6:7). He then gave them his laws, not as a path to earning a relationship with him, but rather as a way of maintaining their relationship (Leviticus 26:12). In Hosea, God threatened to cancel his people’s special status with him (Hosea 1:9), but in the end he refused to cast them off forever and instead restored his relationship with them (Hosea 2:2, 23).

***How can these truths be a comfort to modern believers? How could these truths be abused?***

This renewal of a relationship also includes a deeper knowledge of God. This knowledge is a personal, practical, and experiential knowledge. Now everyone will know God, in the same way you “know” your closest friends. God’s greatest desire is that his people know him (Hosea 6:6; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Colossians 1:10; 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18).

***How do we make the knowledge of God the main pursuit of our lives? How would our lives look different if this was the case?***

* **Forgiveness of sins (34b)**

God promises, finally, that he will forgive the sins of Israel. The wrong that they have done in breaking the covenant would be forgiven them. Of course, those of us in the New Covenant era know that this points to and is only possible because of the work of Christ on the cross.

1. **The beginning of the New Covenant**

This great covenant that God had promised Israel has now come, at least in part. While we will look later at ways in which there is still more to come, the Bible teaches that the New Covenant has already begun.

***Ask your group when they think the New Covenant began.***

* **Jesus initiates the New Covenant**

When Jesus came, he inaugurated (or began) the New Covenant by his death on the cross. He announced the beginning of the new covenant during the last supper the night before he died (Luke 22:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:25). The author of Hebrews argues that covenants in Bible times must be enacted with a blood sacrifice, and for the New Covenant, that sacrifice was Jesus himself (Hebrews 9:18-26).

This is why we have the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the Old Covenant, i.e., the covenant that God made with Moses and Israel. The New Covenant is the covenant that Christ began and will one day be completed when he comes again. Understanding this distinction will help believers understand how the New Testament and the Old Testament interact with one another.

* **The Spirit expands the New Covenant**

Hopefully there’s been a question on your mind as we have been studying this topic: what about us Gentiles? If over and over this covenant is a covenant with Israel, and if we believe that there is still a distinction between Israel and the other nations, even in the church age, does the New Covenant apply to us?

***Why is it important to realize that the Old Covenant is made primarily with Israel? How do we know that is applies to us today who are not Israel?[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Paul answers that question for us in Romans. Gentiles originally weren’t a part of the covenant with Israel, but they were included later (Romans 11:17). In fact, when salvation went to the Gentiles, the church wasn’t entirely sure what to do at first (Acts 11:18). Scripture calls this a mystery – something that was not known in the Old Testament that God has revealed in the New Testament (Ephesians 3:4-6).

***How should we as Gentiles think about this? How did Paul encourage Ephesus and Rome to think about it?***

1. **The fulfillment of the New Covenant**

Again, I hope as we have gone through this study, you have noticed that there are a few holes. Not everything that is promised to Israel has happened, in fact, Israel has pretty much rejected this! Not only that, but along with the New Covenant we find promises over and over again in the Old Testament that when God restored his people and began a covenant with them that this covenant would be cause Israel to be restored to the land and be the international center of worship (Isaiah 2:1-3). So when will that happen? While of much of the New Covenant has begun, there is more to it that has yet to happen.

1. **Israel’s return to God (Romans 11:25-27).**

Paul has explained Israel’s hardening to the mixed audience of Rome, specifically the Gentiles, because he doesn’t want them to become arrogant and end up taking the same route Israel did. “If it can happen to Israel, it can happen to you” is Paul’s point in writing this section to them.

But Paul also wants his readers to know that this isn’t the final word for Israel. God isn’t done with them; they will still enjoy the blessings promised in Jeremiah 31 yet. One day Israel will see Christ, and they will mourn for him whom they have pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

***Why does it matter if there is a future for Israel (cf Jeremiah 31:35-36)[[2]](#footnote-2)?***

If God is a God who keeps his promises, how do we explain all the unfulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament? The answer is – they will still be fulfilled. God’s covenant with Israel, that he graciously allowed us to be a part of, will one day bring in the whole house of Israel. This is important, because it means we can trust our God to keep his promises, to Israel, and to us.

1. **God’s established rule (Revelation 20:4-10)**

Finally, God will fulfill the spiritual and the physical promises he made in the Millennium and then ultimately in the eternal state. Then we will all truly know God fully and intimately. Our hope is that the New Covenant has begun to be fulfilled, and that it will come in its entirety with no sin, suffering, or separation from God.

The fellowship lost in the garden will be completely restored. The serpent will be fully and finally crushed, and so we will ever be with the Lord. Abraham’s seed will be a blessing to the whole nation, and David’s seed will rule forever. The whole Bible is building up to this – a renewal of Eden, with mankind ruling under God, enjoying close, intimate fellowship with him and with each other. And all of it is through Jesus Christ. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that “all the promises of God in [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” As we read our Old Testaments, we are left wondering how God could pull off everything he said he was going to do. As we read our New Testaments, we are given the answer in one word: Jesus!

***What was the most helpful part of this series for you?***

***How has this series helped you see Jesus in the Old Testament better?***

***How can your life change as a result of what you learned from this overview?***

1. Some Christians argue that God fulfills the promises he made to Israel by things he does for the church. It is important to note that while God can expand who benefits from his promise, it would be wrong to think of him fulfilling a promise he made to one group by doing something for another group. In other words, if I promise my sister to pay give her $100, then I give it to my brother instead, I can’t say that I have fulfilled my word. The promises God made to Israel must be fulfilled to Israel, although we as Gentiles will certainly profit from them! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many will attempt to say these verses apply to the church, but the church is never described as “Israel” or as the “seed of Israel” anywhere in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament sees an ongoing distinction between the two (1 Corinthians 10:32). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)