

SEMINAR 3

THE NEW COVENANT: An Introduction

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But 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. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. – Hebrews 8:6-7

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: – 2 Timothy 3:16

THE DIVIDING LINE

For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. – Matthew 26:28

For anyone who has ever read the Bible, when you turn to the page just before the first chapter of Matthew, what you see are three words boldly written, "**THE NEW TESTAMENT**".

According to Strong's dictionary, the word Testament means "disposition, arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid, the last disposition which one makes of his earthly possessions after his death, a testament or will. In the Bible, the words "Covenant" and "Testament" are used interchangeably.

We must learn how to read the Bible and interpret it again. We must be read it through the lens of redemption. This is something the church must learn. A new hermeneutic (system of interpreting scripture). When we read a passage in the Old Testament, how should we interpret it? A theological interpretation means we interpret the Old Testament from our New Testament theology. We must keep in mind that Jesus the dominant subject, and principal interpreter of scripture. All scripture is centred on Jesus Christ. The Lord is the foundation for right interpretation [Luke 24:27].

It is noteworthy that the New Testament Apostles made considerable changes in how the Old Testament and especially the prophets were to be understood. For them, the coming of Israel's Messiah changed everything! Here are some guidelines for scriptural interpretation that should be helpful.

1. Everything changed with the arrival of Jesus.
2. No passage can be applied to a covenant that no longer exists.
3. No passage can alter or diminish the character or ministry of Jesus.
4. No passage can be interpreted as 'literal', if it points us to a conclusion different than what the New Testament Apostles wrote.
5. No passage can be eliminated, because it is found in the Old Testament. Correct interpretation is necessary, not dismissal of the passage.
6. The Prophecies of Jeremiah's, and Ezekiel's New Covenant has now come to pass through the cross of Jesus. Therefore, all Old Testament types, shadows, signs, promises and prophecies are fulfilled in Christ and through his body, for the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth.

When you look throughout the New Testament, the Apostles reinterpreted the OT scriptures and prophecies in the light of what Jesus has done. Jesus Christ is the perfect hermeneutic of the scriptures.

The Law as Prophecy

All the Prophets and Law prophesied until John... – Matthew 11:13

This verse reveals a few things.

1. The Law is Prophecy (the Law prophesied)
2. The "Law and the Prophets" stopped prophesying when John emerged on the scene. The proper interpretation of the Prophetic books started with John's emergence.
3. John's ministry began the interpretation of the Law (behold the Lamb of God) and the Prophets (he declared he was to come in a Matthew 3:7 - that is the destruction of the temple- he said it was imminent)
4. From number 1, the real (main) purpose of Law was not really for moral instruction, but a Prophecy of the Messiah.

Paul's asserts that Moses and the Prophets prophesied about Christ. [Acts 26:22-23]

After John emerged, the right interpretation could begin. But much more, Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection changed everything. Now scriptures must be interpreted in the light of His Passion. By His death burial and resurrection, He initiated and ratified the New Covenant.

COVENANT

A covenant is "a binding agreement between two or more parties." According to Vine's Expository Dictionary, the Hebrew word berith translated to the word covenant means "to divide or cut in two". It can also be compared to the verb dividing the parts of an animal referred to as "the victim" [Genesis 15:9-10, 17]. From the arrangement of the dividing of the parts of the victims came the expression "to cut a covenant."

In the Ancient Near East, entering a regular covenant was a sacred ceremony that included several steps. The parties involved in the covenant ceremony exchanged their robes, symbolically demonstrating that they were all that they were to each other. They exchanged their belts—the belt that held their armour together—Then they cut the covenant. Usually, the act of cutting a covenant involved two parties dividing an animal, say a bull (referred to as the victim), through its middle. Both halves of the animal were placed opposite each other with a narrow walkway in between. Then they walked from the outside of the animal with their backs facing each other and proceeded on to walk through the middle of the "victim."

In this covenant, each half of the animal represented the two parties entering into the covenant. They swore to each other that they would not deal falsely with each other and that if anyone reneged on the oath, the lot of the "victim animal" would become theirs by God.

In conclusion of the covenant rituals, they gave each other the covenant terms, after which they would eat a memorial meal that included a celebration. These "covenant terms" were placed in a box next to a depiction of their local deity in a room (This is similar to the Ark of the Covenant). Finally, they planted a memorial that stood as a reminder of their covenant.

The Bible is really about two Covenants. [Galatians 4:21-31].

THREE TYPES OF COVENANTS

In the Ancient Near East from where we get a lot of Biblical thought, there were three kinds of covenants. Getting an understanding of the various kinds and knowing which kind of covenant we have can be liberating and life changing for us.

Kinship: An agreement between two equal parties with a few stipulations or requirements. Marriage, selling property, business agreement...

Vassal: A king would make a promise to his subjects, or a treaty between kings would be that depended on obedience to specific terms. You can think of this covenant as a conditional promise.

This is an obligatory covenant.

Grant: Unlike the Vassal covenant, a Grant covenant requires no action on the part of the beneficiary except acceptance. This is a promissory covenant.

God initially offered Israel a Grant Covenant, but they rejected it and ended up with a Vassal one. Slavery may have affected their minds. What you go through can sometimes affect and inform your choices. As much as it is possible to not enjoy the full benefits of this covenant, it is an unconditional promise given from one party to another.

IMPORTANT EVENTS & GOD'S COVENANT JOURNEY [ADAM TO ABRAHAM]

- God wanted a family on earth therefore He created mankind. [Genesis 1:26-28]. After man disobeyed (in what is known as the Fall – the first rebellion) God cut another covenant with man – The Edenic Covenant [Genesis 3].

- The Lord sent a flood to the earth because of the angelic and human rebellion (second rebellion) that created the Nephilim, due to the wickedness [Genesis 6:5] that was now domiciled on earth [Genesis 6-8]. At the end of the flood The Lord cut a covenant with Noah and by extension mankind – Noachic Covenant. [Genesis 9]

- The nations again rebelled (third rebellion) against the Lord which led to the disinheritance and the dividing of the nations. [Genesis 11; Deuteronomy 32:8-9 ESV]. After the event of Genesis 11, The Lord found a man, Abraham and cut a covenant with him – Abrahamic Covenant [Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-20].

THE OLD COVENANT

Through Abraham's descendants, He found the nation Israel (as part of His promise to Him) whom He gave the Law (The Old Covenant – Mosaic Covenant). The Covenant that God wanted to inaugurate through Moses is especially significant because in it, God promises to make Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" [Exodus 19:6].

Israel was to be God's light to the Gentile nations around them. Israel could not accept that Covenant and they received a downgrade. A Covenant that was primarily known by the Law. The type of covenant the Lord originally offered Israel was a grant covenant, but they rejected it and settled for a vassal covenant. Because they could not stay faithful to this covenant, they suffered all types of consequences.

Something we must understand is that the Covenant was not for God, it was for man. God does not break His Word, man does. God is Love; Love at its purest form, Love is faithful, Love does not fail [1 Corinthians 13].

FOUR THINGS ABOUT THE OLD COVENANT

1. The Content of the Old Covenant (the Law) is Found in the first Five Books of the Bible that deal with Israel's history.

The entire content of what was referred to by the ancient Hebrews as "the Law" was contained in only five books of the Old Testament: But it is really limited to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Ten Commandments are not the entire Jewish Law, but neither is the whole of the Old Testament part of that Law.

The Old Covenant is divided into three categories:

a. The Moral Law

The moral law is comprised of the Ten Commandments.

1. The first purpose of the moral law was to give Israel a template for living.

2. The Law was to distinguish them from all other nations. If they walked in obedience to the law that He had given them, then they were guaranteed to remain blessed [Deuteronomy 28:1-14]

3. It foreshadowed the bearing of sin by Christ, the perfect High Priest Who was also the perfect sacrifice [Hebrews 9:11-28].

b. Shadow Christology [A shadow of Christ]

Christology is a branch of theology concerned with who Jesus is. It focuses on the nature and work of Jesus, including the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the relationship between his human and divine natures. Jesus was given several titles in the early Christian writings, including Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, and Lord; all of which were derived from Hebrew scripture.

c. The Social Law

The third section of the Law dealt with dietary regulations, sanitation rules, and instructions on how to properly care for land and crops. The Lord fulfilled this, as did the first -the moral laws.

He fulfilled the moral and social laws through His perfect life, but He fulfilled the shadow Christology through His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven to sit at God the Father's right hand.

2. The Old Covenant was Given to Israel Only.

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel. – Exodus 19:3

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.
– Romans 3:19

3. Christians are not Under the Old Covenant (or the Mosaic Law).

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. – Romans 6:14

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. – Galatians 2:19

Seeing that we are Gentiles and not Jews, we are not under the Jewish Law (the Jewish believer is also dead to the Law – Romans 7:1-4). Jesus Christ fulfilled that Law for us with His earthly life and on the Cross. We are no longer bound by it. He earned our righteousness, won our salvation, and merited our grace. We did nothing but accept everything by faith.

4. The Old Covenant had Weaknesses.

Why was the Old Covenant (Law) was put aside? The Law was faulty and has Limitations. The Law was faulty in that it was weak and unprofitable

Though there were rewards and blessings with obeying the Law, within the context of God's eternal plan, keeping the Law did not justify the people in the Old Testament. The Bible is clear that salvation has always been by faith alone, and the promise of salvation by faith that God had made to Abraham as part of the Abrahamic Covenant still remained in effect [Galatians 3:16-18].

It is worthy to note that The Mosaic Law that was to be a schoolmaster pointing the way towards the coming of Christ [Galatians 3:24-25]. The Law would reveal to people their sinfulness and their need for a Saviour. The Mosaic Covenant is also referred to as the Old Covenant [2 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 8:6, 13] and had to be replaced by the New Covenant in Christ

THE PROBLEMS WITH OLD COVENANT [THE LAW]

The Law was added to earlier promises made by God, not to replace those promises, but simply to guide us as a tutor who will lead us to the Messiah [Gal. 3:1–24] but it was not without fault.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. – Hebrews 8:7

A. It Cannot Justify.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and

not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. – Galatians 2:16

B. It made no one perfect

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?... For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. – Hebrews 7:11,19

C. The Law could not give life. It gave death instead.

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. – Galatians 3:21

On the same day when the Law was finalized through the writing of the tablets, three thousand people died. By contrast, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was given, three thousand people were saved. This is one of the contrasts between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, between the covenant the people desired, and the covenant God desired.

This is why the apostle Paul wrote, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” [2 Corinthians 3:6-7]

D. It was a type and shadow of the real thing

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. – Hebrews 10:1

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. – Hebrews 8:5

E. The priests were mortal and could not save to the uttermost

The Law could not save the adherents forever because the priests were mortal.

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them – Hebrews 7:24-25

F. The high priests were frail men with weaknesses

G. The sacrifices could never take away the sins of the people – Hebrews 10:11.

The sacrificial system of the Old Mosaic Covenant with all its detailed laws could not save people, and hence did not take away sins [Hebrews 10:1-4]

H. The law was weakened by the flesh; hence it became powerless – Romans 8:3

It is not that there was any problem with the Law itself, for the Law is perfect and was given by a holy God, but the Law had no power to give people new life, and the people were not able to obey the Law perfectly [Galatians 3:21].

The Law tried to produce life from the outside in, but the weakness of the Law was in the flesh.

I. It veiled God to the people.

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. – 2 Corinthians 3:14-15

Moses appealing to the Abrahamic Covenant [Exodus 32:13]

J. It Cannot Supply the Holy Spirit.

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?... He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? – Galatians 3:2,5

K. It Cannot Produce Miracles.

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? – Galatians 3:5

The ability to work miracles by the power of God's Spirit does not come by adherence to the Old Covenant or by the works of the Law. As we preach and teach God's Word, He will respond by pouring out His Spirit and confirming the Word that is preached with signs and wonders following (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:4; Acts 4:30). This privilege has been given to everyone that will believe in the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-18; John 14:12).