

THE NEW COVENANT
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REVISION TEST

1. What are the four types of covenant?
2. What are the four characteristics of covenants?
3. What is the main key to understanding covenants?
4. Name 5 biblical covenants
5. KLPs : What do you remember about the covenants covered in previous sessions (e.g. blessings, benefits, scope, conditions...) :
 - a) Mosaic/Sinai
 - b) Abrahamic
 - c) Davidic

HOMEWORK FROM LAST TIME

Compare and contrast the giving of the covenant at Sinai with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - parallels, similarities and differences?

If not done, do in groups as exercise for 5 minutes ...

[handout table with some sample answers]

INTRODUCING THE NEW COVENANT

Ask - where in the Bible?

Two main passages : Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-28

Both describe similar benefits and promises.

Jeremiah prophesied in Judah in 590BC, before the captivity and exile into Babylon. He saw that Israel were turning away from the Sinai covenant, and God gave him a new revelation of God's heart for his people - a New Covenant.

This promised four things :

1. God's law would be within his people, written on their hearts
2. He will be their God, they will be his people
3. Each one will know God for themselves
4. Their sins will be forgiven

[Note that this was not actually a covenant with individuals, but with the community of God's people - the phrase in Jeremiah 31:34 "... all ... from the least to the greatest ..." is an idiom meaning the whole community. The people of God as a whole will be characterised by their knowledge of God, their natural ability to do what is right, and their awareness of being forgiven redeemed sinners.]

Ezekiel prophesied during the exile in Babylon, and had the same message as Jeremiah - a New Covenant promising :

1. A new heart of flesh not stone - feeling
2. A new spirit -"my spirit within"
3. Cleansing
4. They will be his people, he will be their God

The key to this new covenant is in the relationship between God and his people - the starting point for all covenants (first of the four characteristics) - but this is much more personal and intimate :

His spirit within, knowing him, heart, feelings ...

EXERCISE (in pairs)

Jeremiah 31:32 has an interesting phrase when introducing this new covenant : "I will make a new covenant ... not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt..."

How does the new covenant differ from the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai?

DETAIL OF NEW COVENANT

We will look at the detail, under four headings :

- the **means** by which the new covenant is experienced
- the **method** God uses to deliver it to us
- God's **motive** behind making this covenant
- and a **mandatory requirement** for being able to enter the new covenant

THE MEANS OF THE NEW COVENANT - WHAT IS IT?

God promises to put his law in our minds and hearts :

- Mind = thoughts, attitudes, decisions
- Heart = feelings, emotions

His law is the ten commandments - the same as the original covenant made with Israel at Sinai - his requirements have not changed, but the means of ensuring that they are met have changed radically.

He promises a new heart of flesh not stone - this covenant is to be

- natural not artificial
- flexible not rigid
- living not dead

The aim is to be "naturally supernatural" - doing what comes naturally!

- Jesus said his will was to do the will of his Father (John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38)
- We are also described as having the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16)

Challenge - how much of our Christianity is stone and how much is flesh (living, feeling, hurting, bleeding, changing, growing...) ???

There is a natural growth cycle to reach this point, which is mirrored in the learning cycle, used by trainers :

Four stages :

- *Unconscious incompetence* - ignorance is bliss - problem, what problem? - don't know what you don't know
- *Conscious incompetence* - raise awareness of a lack of knowledge or skill, woe is me, I didn't realise how ignorant I was - now I know what I don't know
- *Conscious competence* - having started to learn I know I need to practice - carefully does it - how am I doing? - maybe I can do this
- *Unconscious competence* - built into natural approach - I did what?

[for example, learning to drive]

God wants us to get to the point where his law (torah, instruction for living) becomes part of our nature (not even "second nature", but first!).

Having his word in my heart means I do what he wants - naturally, without thinking about it - his will is my will

But how can we achieve this? Only for super-Christians?? No ...

THE METHOD OF THE NEW COVENANT - HOW TO DO IT?

Fortunately, God does not expect us to try to achieve this in our own strength :

- Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God lest any man should boast"

He has sent his Holy Spirit to help us - Ezekiel 36:27 "I will put my Spirit within you to move you to walk in my statutes and be careful to keep my ordinances"

Also in the NT : John 14-16, e.g. :

- 14:16-17 "another helper to be with you, even the Spirit of truth"
- 14:26 "the Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"
- 16:13-15 "he will guide you into all the truth"

We are called to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25) - our daily lives should be directed by what the Spirit leads us to do and say

Interesting to see the link between the law and the Spirit - it is God's Holy Spirit who helps us to keep the word of God - summarised in Isaiah 59:21

Also mentioned in 1947 prophecy from Smith Wigglesworth - "... When the word and the Spirit come together there will be the biggest movement of the Holy Spirit that the nation and indeed the world has ever seen..."

Did SW foresee the fulfilment of the new covenant, when people would give the Holy Spirit freedom to lead them into unconditional obedience to what God requires? Are we part of that??? Hmmm...

THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE NEW COVENANT - WHY DOES GOD OFFER THIS?

He has always wanted a people, his heart is for relationship, from Eden to eternity we see him reaching out to creation seeking relationship.

The purpose of each covenant we've studied is to cement and express the relationship between God and people - but people have always broken their side of the covenant.

God seeks a relationship of intimacy, belonging together, "I'm yours and you're mine"

A beautiful and moving expression of God's heart is found in Hosea 2:16-20 - engagement forever, to be characterised by righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness.

Engagement leads to marriage - see Revelation 21:1-7 - God's people dressed as a bride made ready for her husband, and a loud voice from the throne (God shouts in final victory - "At last!!"). What does he shout?

"My dwelling is with men (this is where I feel at home). He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and he will be their God..."

This is our eternal destiny - to be part of the fulfilment of the new covenant.

But note that there is no automatic right to be part of this people - we are currently disqualified through our rejection of God's covenant (we've broken the requirement laid down in the ten commandments). How can we get in?

THE MANDATORY REQUIREMENT TO ENTER THE NEW COVENANT

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel mention an essential detail of the new covenant - it requires forgiveness and cleansing. We need to enter the new covenant through the door of repentance - see I John 1:8-10. No exceptions to this!

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OLD COVENANT AND NEW

Important to consider this question.

There is clear continuity between the two - see for example the terms in Exodus 19:5-6 and I Peter 2:9-10

But the original covenant was given to the people of Israel. Even the initial expressions of the new covenant was also addressed to them, through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

So who is the new covenant for? Is it only for the people of Israel and Jews? Or is it for the church and Christians? What about us? Do we get a look in?

Four alternative positions - lots of discussion in Christian circles over centuries, starting in Jerusalem in about 50AD!!

1. Replacement theology says the church has **replaced** Israel as God's people. All the promises of the old covenant (and OT) now refer to the church, spiritualised where necessary. Israel is no longer God's special nation, but the church is now God's people, inheritors of the covenant promises.
2. An alternative to this is that the old covenant is no longer relevant since it has been **fulfilled** by Jesus. It is therefore history, and not for us today. Jesus brought in the new covenant, which is for the church. The OT is interesting background reading, but describes a prior covenant no longer in force. We need to concentrate on the NT, since this is where the current new covenant is detailed.
3. A third option suggests that the two covenants exist in **parallel**, with the old for Jews and the new for Christians. Both are current, and God recognises both. Jews can be saved through keeping the requirements of the old covenant, but Christians don't need to keep the law, as we are under the new covenant.
4. There is a fourth **unified** option, which sees a continuity between all the covenants of God. There is really only one covenant, which has been expressed in several different ways throughout history.

Can we decide between these options? See Romans 11, especially verses 17-24 - the olive tree picture.

There is one root, the true covenant with God. There are three groups of people, the natural branches broken off (unbelieving Jews who broke God's covenant and rejected Jesus as Messiah), wild branches grafted in (Gentile believers who are saved through faith in Jesus), and natural branches still in place or grafted back (Jewish believers in Jesus). We all belong together!

Not time to develop this here, but an important topic which affects our view of ourselves, the church, Jews, Israel, OT, NT etc.

CLOSING MEDITATION (two groups)

Our studies in the covenants have brought us a long way, from 2000BC to future eternity. Final exercise is to consider how far we've come from our starting point, using two NT passages to help us.

In two groups, spend 10 minutes considering one of the following : Hebrews 12:18-24, and Galatians 4:22-31.

In each group, spend five minutes in silent meditation, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Then have a brief discussion in your group and share your thoughts together.

Hebrews 12 - you have not come to ... but you have come to ...

Galatians 4 - Ishmael/Hagar/Sinai/old compared to Isaac/Rachel/Jerusalem/new

SUMMARY OF NEW COVENANT

New does not mean different - continuity of purpose and promise

As with all covenants, this one is a grace-gift

The new covenant is about hearts, an internal covenant

It comes about through a marriage of word and Spirit - his law in our hearts

God intends this to lead us to an intimate relationship of intimacy, engaged and ready for marriage

We are currently excluded, and can only enter through repentance

But God wants each one of us to experience the full benefits of this new covenant - as Peter said to the crowd in Jerusalem at the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promise is for you, your children, distant strangers, in fact everyone who God calls to himself." (Acts 2:39)

SERIES SUMMARY

Lots of info about covenants - a key biblical principle because it is how God operates

Key themes have been :
 grace, judgement and mercy
 Relationship and intimacy
 Continuity and destiny

God is continually offering a relationship of blessing and promise - he is a God who makes and keeps covenants. Will we accept?