



Post Tenebras Lux Covenant Theology...

The New Covenant...

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Last week, I spent some time trying to demonstrate that the covenants were progressive. I tried to show that they were linked like stair steps one after another building to the climax of all that God promised to accomplish for His people. That is not to say that all of the component parts of the one great covenant of grace were exactly the same. There were elements of continuity and there were elements of discontinuity. There were things that were the same under the various covenants or dispensation of the covenants and there were things that were different.

No place is that more obvious than under the Mosaic covenant. Part of that was related to the nature of the Mosaic covenant and part of that was related to the nation's misunderstanding of the covenant. One of the inherent problems of the Mosaic covenant was the sinfulness of the people. They were commanded to obey God's law and were promised that if they did so, they would be blessed with all manner of spiritual and material blessing. But the sinfulness of the people was an inherent problem under the Mosaic covenant. While the law of God was given as a rule for their behavior, it was also given by God as an instrument to drive them despair of confidence in themselves and was intended ultimately to cause them to throw themselves on God's mercy.

We know that such is true from the words of many biblical writers but especially from Paul.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:11**...Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "**The righteous will live by faith.**" ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "**The man who does these things will live by them.**" ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "**Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**" ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Now, the fact that the law did not bring about the full blessing of God's chosen people does not mean that the law was flawed or even worse that the law was evil. The problem was not in the law but in the hearts of those to whom it was given.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:7**...What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "**Do not covet.**" ⁸ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ¹³ Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Now, I want to make two points here. First, that the law needed to be internalized was understood to be true from the very beginning.

^{NIV} **Deuteronomy 30:5**...He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

That the law needed to be internalized, was made obvious by our Lord in His stern rebuke of the Pharisees.

^{NIV} **Matthew 23:27**..."Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Now, the notion that God would circumcise their hearts meant that one-day God would internalize their obedience. It meant that one-day, God in His kindness would reach down and change their hearts. It meant that one day God would do all that was necessary to redeem His people.

The children of Israel knew and understood that external obedience to the law was inadequate. They also knew that even external obedience was impossible. They knew that they lacked the inherent ability to obey God's law. They knew that from the ceremonial sacrifices that filled their eyes and they knew it from the smell of burning flesh. Still, they had the promise of God that one day He would change their hearts.

^{NIV} **Ezekiel 11:19**...I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

It is a promise that is repeated over and over.

^{NIV} Ezekiel 36:24..."For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

But no place is the promise of God to evoke a change, to evoke a transformation more clear in the Old Testament than in the book of Jeremiah. There, God promises to institute a new covenant. It is a covenant that will not be dependent on their obedience but will in its fullness actually change their hearts and induce obedience.

And they needed a change because their hearts were wicked and they were locked in the endless cycle of disobedience, deliverance and disobedience all over again.

^{NIV} Jeremiah 13:22...And if you ask yourself, "**Why has this happened to me?**"-- it is because of your many sins that your skirts have been torn off and your body mistreated. ²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

But in Jeremiah, God promises the internalization of all that He sought to accomplish in them.

^{NIV} Jeremiah 31:27..."The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of

animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD. ²⁹ **"In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'** ³⁰ **Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes-- his own teeth will be set on edge.** ³¹ **"The time is coming,"** declares the LORD, **"when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.** ³² **It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,"** declares the LORD. ³³ **"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,"** declares the LORD. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** ³⁴ **No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,"** declares the LORD. **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**

Secondly, I want to make the point that the new covenant was not different in the sense that it was completely separate from the covenants that had been made before. God's law was still at the forefront. It was not a different law that would be written on their hearts; it was the same law. It was new only in the sense that it was a new form or dispensation of that which God had already promised.

God was about to fulfill all that He had originally promised Adam, Noah, Abraham and even Moses. This new covenant was not a complete reversal of all God had promised to the fathers. Rather, it was the fulfillment of all God had promised.

Now, where was that promise fulfilled? We have a couple of hints early on. The first has to do with a prophecy regarding Rachel and her children given earlier in Jeremiah 31.

^{NIV} Jeremiah 31:15...This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."

Amazingly, that same prophecy is referred to again in Matthew's gospel when Herod killed the innocents at Bethlehem.

^{NIV} Matthew 2:16...When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

I imagine that the first Jewish readers of Matthew gospel were able to make the connection immediately to the idea of the new covenant when they read Matthew 2.

But the idea is further enhanced by the promise of the coming of the Lord.

^{NIV} Jeremiah 31:21..."Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns.

²² How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The LORD will create a new thing on earth-- a woman will surround a man."

Jeremiah reminds the people to set guideposts to return to the Lord but the real promise is that the Lord is returning to them. They would have known Isaiah's promise.

^{NIV} **Isaiah 40:1**...Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: **"In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.** ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

That is why John the Baptist's preaching was so important. He was connecting the two events.

^{NIV} **Matthew 3:1**...In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."** ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: **"A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him**

But the passage that removes all doubt is Luke 22.

^{NIV} **Luke 22:20**...In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.**

Christ makes clear that He is the fulfillment of the promised new covenant.

And the fact that Christ is the mediator of the new covenant is one of the principle points of the book of Hebrews.

^{NIV} **Hebrews 8:8...But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** ¹³ By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

In fact, I think it is right to say that Hebrews 8-10 really makes up one long continuous commentary on Jeremiah 31. Not only does the writer to the Hebrews explain that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant, he actually breaks down the various parts of Jeremiah 31 and explains them in relationship to the new covenant and we will talk more about that next week.

But now because it has been requested, I want to take a minute or two and talk about eschatology and end time events. There is a sense in which I am reluctant to talk about eschatology or end time events at all. I have no interest in Y2K or

any similar kind of thing. But a question came up last week and I thought I might try to answer it in at least a cursory way before we go on in our study.

The question was, **“What do I think of the series of end time books that currently proliferate the shelves of Christian bookstores, books like LaHaye’s end time series and the like?”**

The truth of the matter is that I don’t read them. It is not because the stories are not interesting or even because the writing is poor. I can’t comment on that one way or the other simply because I have never read them. I don’t read them because they have as an underlying tenant the idea that there are two people of God. They hold, as a basic principle, the idea that the Jews were saved by another means than the church. That is not always clearly stated but it is there as an underlying principle. They also hold that the promises made to Abraham and to the nation of Israel are distinct and separate from the promises fulfilled in Christ. Let me see if I can put it this way. One of the principle reasons they hold to an idea of a future millennial kingdom and so on is because they want to see the promises made to Abraham come to a literal fulfillment.