

Lesson 54: Chapter 7: Overview of the Covenants: Part Six: The New Covenant

We come to our final part of the overview of the covenants. We have been taking our lead from the statement in the confession from the beginning of paragraph 3, 'This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament.' Our final installment is an examination of the New Covenant. To rehearse we have shown how God in eternity past before creation made an agreement, where the Son would fulfil a work on behalf of a sinful people to make them holy and blameless children. This is called the CoR/pactum salutis, and our confession speaks of it this way in the middle of paragraph 3, 'and it [the CoG] is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect.' God then created and made Adam to be a legal head/federal representative and put him under probation in the Garden of Eden. If he obeyed he and his offspring would be confirmed in righteousness and rewarded with eschatological life, if he disobeyed he and his offspring would experience condemnation and death. But God did not judge the world in Adam, instead He made a promise to raise up a Son of Adam, a warrior-king who would go to war with Satan and overcome him and deliver us from the effects of sin. So the world that should have come to an end continued, but instead of God ruling it in a theocratic way where all sin would be annihilated, He allowed the world to go where believer and unbeliever would live side by side under common grace. The sin of mankind got worse in this state of affairs and God poured out the flood. The flood as a judgement of God against sin put the promise in jeopardy, so God made the Noahic covenant, a covenant with creation, a non-salvific, gracious covenant to stay His final judgement while maintaining the creation order. The next major development was Abraham, where God chooses a man through whose family He will bring the promised Saviour. God makes a unilateral covenant with Abraham, where God makes a self-maledictory oath and walks through the pieces, making the promises and taking the punishments to ensure that the promise of Gen. 3:15 will come to pass. God makes promises to Abraham of land, offspring and blessing as a first level typological fulfillment pointing to the new creation, Christ and salvation. This promise is confirmed to Isaac, to Jacob, and by the end of Genesis Abraham's offspring are in Egypt. What now will come of the promise of land, offspring and blessing? Paul tells us in Gal. 3:19 that God added the law of Moses to the promise to Abraham. We looked at the MC as a typological legal oriented covenant where people were saved by grace through faith on the basis of the CoG, but that there was a works principle added that determined life and blessing in the land by obedience to the conditions of a conditional covenant. Differing from the AC the MC was bilateral. It held out the promise of physical death and physical exile from God's land for disobedience. We all know the sad story of Israel's history through the period of the judges, how they were sinful, plagued by defeat, they would repent, God would raise up a deliverer, and the cycle would repeat. Then came the time of the kings.

If we are to understand the nature of the new covenant we need to understand how the MC failed to bring about life in the land, and how it prepared the way for a new and better covenant. Turn to Hebrews 8:7-12, 'For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers

on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.'

Hebrews is quoting from Jeremiah 31. Due to the constant failing of the kings, God raised up the prophets as covenant prosecutors. They spoke for God to the kings and the people calling them back to faithfulness to the terms of the MC threatening them with the curses of the law if they continued in their disobedience. The prophets highlighted social evils like the rich oppressing the poor and the corruption of justice, as well as religious evils like idolatry and trusting in other nations to save them from their enemies not God. The prophets promised punishment and exile, but also looked forward to a day of restoration. That day of restoration was cast as a new and greater exodus and was spoken of as a new covenant to replace the old in Jer. 31:31-34; as an everlasting covenant not temporary Is. 55:1-5; as a covenant of peace and not one of God warring in righteous justice against the sins of His people, Ezek. 37:26. So imagine it, you are a Jew, you have been cast out of the land due to the sins of the kings and the sins of the people, and are sitting like Daniel in Babylon. You are under the weight of the curses of the law because of disobedience. But God made a promise to Abraham; God made a promise to David, what will become of those promises? God for the sake of His name and showing that He does keep His promises will not restore Israel from exile because she is good, but because He is good. So imagine yourself reflecting on the prophecies of a better day, a new covenant prophesied by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You return from exile to Israel, and you hear the ministry of the post-exilic prophets of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, and they promise a time of an outpouring of the Spirit, of a glorious rebuilt temple, or a reinstalled Davidic King, and a purified priesthood. You would feel frustrated, perhaps even full of doubt because you cannot see the fulfillment of God's promises. You have a puny temple, a Davidic king who is only allowed to rule of the greater foreign powers at be allow it, Israel is subject to the nations rather than blessing the nations, so you realize that now is not the time of the better new covenant, it must still be future. You are clear that your hope is not in the MC, that no one can keep the MC, that you need another king like David who will keep the law and bring Israel into the fullness of the promises God has made.

Now imagine you are alive when John the Baptist is preaching. And he is announcing that the kingdom of God is near, that time when the promised king will reign for God and bring the various promises to past. He announces a king. Jesus is that King, He stands up in the synagogue and says that the prophecies of an anointed one are fulfilled in Him, Luke 4:18-19. He demonstrates His power over satan, sin, death, sickness, even the weather, being able to produce food miraculously. He appoints 12 apostles like the 12 tribes to establish the foundation of a new people from all nations. He gives teaching for a new people in the Sermon on the Mount. And just before He dies on the night of that final Passover as He institutes the Lord's Supper, what does He say? Luke 22:20, 'And

likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.' Here we can clearly see is the inauguration of the NC, and it is established by Jesus shedding His blood for us.

Let us note what Christ accomplished to establish the NC, and then compare the OC with the NC. Each one of us is born in Adam, born condemned with a criminal record under the CoW; we add to this state with our own sins heaping up our guilt. We cannot keep the law, it acts as a mirror to highlight our sins. We try to keep it and all that happens is that we multiply our failures completely incapable of even one pure deed or thought. But God promised salvation to sinners, God made a gracious promise to Adam when he was incapable, the promise of one born of woman who would overcome satan. Christ was born under the same law that condemns us, given to be a representative. He does two key things. Firstly, He kept the law, he fulfilled all its requirements, He loved God and His neighbour without fault, rendering to God an obedience that would secure the rewards promised to Adam in the CoW. This is the part many miss out and forget, there yet remains a promise of rest for obedience and Christ secures it for us by His obedience just as Adam lost it for us by his disobedience. But secondly, He also gave His life as a ransom to pay for the sins we have done and the laws that we have broken making amends for the punishment that a righteous judge must pour out upon us. Christ was not only our lawkeeper, but the ransom for our lawbreaking. By His active and passive obedience He fulfills both the requirements and the penalties of the CoW. Because of His finished work salvation is not by works like for Adam, it is by grace alone through faith alone. To add works to faith would be to deny that the CoW is fulfilled by the Last Adam and that we have to somehow fulfill it ourselves, impossible! We are no longer under law as a covenant of works; we are no longer under the Mosaic law as a typological republication of the CoW; we do have the law written on our hearts, but it no longer stands as conditions that need to be met for life and blessing but as a gift from God as part of the NC out of which a life of holiness flows, not for salvation but from salvation. Holiness is part of the life of those who are saved not because our life depends upon it, but because God's grace enables and motivates obedience in the hearts of those who are born again. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, He has finished His trial, He is beyond probation, and we are beyond probation in Him.

Let us return to Hebrews 8 and consider the newness of the NC. We see in 8:9 that God says that the sort of covenant will be different in kind to the one He made at Sinai, the one that Israel could not keep, 'not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.' If we return to the time of the exile and note the problem that Israel had, it was inevitable that Israel would break the covenant. God was very gracious in making a way for sinners to be saved by grace through faith, but He also added the law in order to heighten our sense of our own inability to keep the law. What we needed was a covenant like the one God made with Abraham that was unilateral not bilateral, that did not depend upon our keeping it, but where God pledged to keep the conditions Himself. Jesus Christ did this on our behalf.

Not only did we obtain a better kind of covenant, we also obtained a covenant where God would ensure that everyone in it was saved, v10-11, 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will

be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.' Ezekiel 36:25-27 says the same thing, 'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.' One of the great problems with the OC was that we see elect and non-elect, regenerate and unregenerate both put into the same covenant. God drew the lines of the covenant community around a family and a nation that descended from that family, setting apart that family until the promised Saviour would arise from them. Even if there were some under the MC who obeyed, if the king sinned they all suffered. The remnant like Daniel were subject to the curses that fell on the disobedience of the many unregenerate who did not obey God. God's solution is to ensure that everyone in the NC will be regenerate. We see this in the various descriptions. A mind not forgetful of God's laws; laws written on the heart; the Spirit given to each one, each one knowing God personally; each one having their sins forgiven; even the forceful language of God causing us to walk in His ways. Now technically the NC is not secure because we will be obedient, it is not our obedience that will make us secure but Christ securing it on our behalf. But it is important to note that every member of the NC will be regenerate, will walk by the Spirit, will be obedient, will have their sins forgiven and will know God. This is important to stress because we must not guarantee the holiness of the members of the NC by the conditions of the NC, the integrity of the NC and its ability to save is secured by our head not by us. Perseverance, sanctification, good works are all fruits of the CoG not conditions.

This agrees well with the changes that John the Baptist introduced when he did not offer the baptism into the kingdom of the coming Messiah on the basis of what family you belonged to, but a baptism of repentance. We see that there is a change in the doctrine of adoption between the OT and the NT. Israel experienced the adoption as sons Paul says in Rom. 9:4, but this is different to the adoption of the NC, John 1:12-13, 'But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.' For this reason we do not see the generation of children born to believers as part of the NC. They are no more holy than unbelieving spouses, they do not bear the realities of the sign of baptism, the household baptisms of the NT always have marks of regeneration and faith accompanying them, and it is an interpretation of silence to insert infants there.

Let me end with a quote from Dr. Chris Caughey's book *The Tale of Two Adams*: 'The New Covenant is about what Christ has done for us. He has done nothing less than completely accomplish what the first Adam failed to do. The Last Adam has not only passed His covenantal probation, but He has earned the right to dwell in the Heavenly Kingdom of God. He is the first human being to enter into that ultimate Kingdom. In that sense, He is the firstfruits of the New Humanity—the New Creation people of God (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

This is why the entire Bible is about Christ from Genesis to Revelation. The first man Adam had all the revelation He needed in the creation around him (including himself as the image of God) and in the specific command God gave him about what not to do ("Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"). All he needed to do was obey as the subordinate king under the Great

King. But because he didn't obey, and because he plunged us into a helpless condition of sin, we need another Adam—a New Adam—the Last Adam—to accomplish God's Kingdom-purpose for us.

Because Adam failed, Jesus is the ultimate Seed of the woman who has prevailed—suffering first on the cross, but then entering into His glory (Gen. 3:15). Far better than Noah, Jesus has saved God's entire household because He is the vessel in whom we safely survive God's wrath (1 Pet. 3:20-22). Far better than Abraham, Jesus Himself is the promise that Abraham only hoped for (Rom. 4; Gal. 3; Heb. 11:8-19). Far better than Isaac, Jesus was the truly righteous man (as well as truly God) who could be not only our human sacrifice, but also our living redeemer (Heb. 11:17-19). Far better than Jacob, Jesus did more than dream about the Heavenly character of the promised land (Gen. 28:10ff.), He ascended into the Heavenly Promised Land (Ps. 110/Mk. 16:19). Far better than Jacob's son Joseph, Jesus has ascended to the right hand—not of Pharaoh, but of God Almighty—and has received that name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). Far better than Moses, Jesus was not just a servant in God's house, but He is the Son over God's house (Heb. 3:1-6). But more than that—though the Law came through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17). He is not only the ultimate Prophet who has come down from Heaven to proclaim that He Himself is the Good News (Acts 3:19-23)—not only the ultimate Priest who has ascended into Heaven itself after offering Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:21-28)—not only the ultimate King who now reigns in Heaven at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:29-36)—the Last Adam is also our federal, covenant representative. Whereas Adam's one act of disobedience as our representative earned sin, death and condemnation for us, so the Last Adam's one act of obedience as our representative earned righteousness, life and justification for us (Rom. 5:12-21). This is the clearest evidence for covenant theology: either Adam or Christ is your federal, covenant representative.' P175-176.