

- *The promise of a new covenant*

- *Pentecost*

- *Israel enlarged and extended*

- *The ingredients of God's promise*

1. To give us a spiritual understanding of his will

- *A progressive knowledge of God*

- *Justification – instantaneous*

- *But 'putting my laws in their minds' is progressive and takes longer*

- *Not so much the regulations as life in the power of the Spirit*

2. To give us an inner appetite for God's will

- *New desires and understanding*

3. To be our God

The covenant of law via Moses was a failure. Jeremiah said so hundreds of years before Jesus came. But God promised something new. 'I will make a new covenant...', he said¹⁰. It would begin with 'the house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah'. We remember how it began to be fulfilled. The people present on the Day of Pentecost were all Jews. God was keeping his promise to make a new covenant with 'the house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah'. The Day of Pentecost was (among other things) a day of restoration for Israel, a day of revival within God's long-established people. However, God's Israel was soon enlarged. The day came when it extended to people outside Jerusalem and hundreds of gentiles began to pour into the church. God's 'Israel' was opened to gentiles. Gentiles became 'fellow citizens with the saints'.

Our writer goes on to quote Jeremiah's statement of what the promises actually consist of. There are many ingredients to the promise.

1. **God promises to give us spiritual understanding of his will.** The quotation from Jeremiah's prophecy continues:

¹⁰*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.'

There will, in the people of the new covenant, be a progressive knowledge of God. It is indeed **progressive**. This is implied by everything that has been said in this letter to the Hebrews. The Lord Jesus Christ is enthroned to do the work of administering the new covenant. This implies that it is something that is continuously taking place. This does not mean that it takes time to become a child of God. 'Justification' is instantaneous. Our acceptance of God takes no time at all. Think of the story of the Philippian gaoler. He went from paganism to full membership of the Christian church in a very short time. But the promise that God's law will be put into our mind takes more time. It does not happen like a flash of lightning. Our justification is like a flash of lightning. So is the first 'quickenings' work of the Holy Spirit as he brings us to faith. But the total promise, 'I will put my laws into their minds', takes longer to be fulfilled, and Jesus is at the right-hand of the Father taking steps to see that it happens. What does it mean that God's laws are put into our minds? It does not refer to all of the 2000 or so regulations of the Mosaic system. Sometimes in the Old Testament 'law' or 'Torah' (as the Hebrew word has it) refers not so much to the regulations as to the deepest intention of the law (in which we are to delight and on which we meditate day and night¹¹). It comes down to the righteousness that the law was **pointing** to. It is the love-command of Leviticus 19:18b and its exposition in the New Testament. It includes (but goes further than) the morality of the ten commandments. It includes the kind of instruction we have in the Sermon on the Mount. The new covenant promise involves an understanding of what it means to live out the commands of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. **God promises to give us an inner appetite for God's will.** We might ask, 'What is the difference between God's putting his will into our minds, and writing it on our hearts?' The two words together 'minds ... hearts' refer to the many aspects of the inner life – the outlook, knowledge, motivation, appetite. It must include the idea that when we have newness of life by the Holy Spirit we **want** to do God's will. It is not that we do not **dare** to sin. Rather it is that we do not **want** to sin. We are given a new heart. We have new desires and spiritual understanding. This was something that the law in itself could never give us.

3. **God promises to be our God.** He says, 'I will be their God'. It includes the promise of God's presence, God's protection, God's provision. God will honour us. He will give us a sense of his reality. We shall feel that he is there

¹¹ 8:8

¹¹ Psalm 1

• Presence, protection and provision

4. That we shall be his people

• God's representatives

5. That there will be a community of people who all know God

• We must not think too individualistically

• A community with living faith – not nominal and legalistic religion

for us. He will provide for our needs according to the calling that he has put upon our lives. He will protect us, according to the plan that he has for us. It does not mean that we shall never have difficulties, but it means that the trials and troubles of life are caught up in God's good and perfect will for us and do not prevent his will being done in our lives. Our calling will be achieved.

4. **God promises that we shall be his people.** This is mainly a matter of representing him. We become like our heavenly Father and so he is seen in us. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God'¹. The peacemaker is like God and so he or she represents God and gets to be known as God's child. Being God's people means that we represent him before the world. We remind ourselves that this is progressive! Maybe we have not yet got very far in representing God. It is something that Jesus our heavenly high priest is wanting to do for us.

5. **God promises that there will be a community of people who all know God.**

¹¹'And people shall not be teaching, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, "Know the Lord", for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.'

We notice here that the new covenant promises are about a community. The old covenant was given to an earthly nation. The new covenant is given to 'a holy nation, a people for his own possession'¹. We must not think about the new covenant promises in too individualistic a manner. There are promises for the entire church here. The entire people of God are to be raised 'to ... the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'.²

In ancient Israel there were thousands of people who were born Israelites but were not in any way 'born again' (Nicodemus was one of them). The earthly nation **contained** true believers but (after the first generation) ceased to be a nation of believers. 'Nominal' faith in God became commonplace even among people who were quite wicked. This is what legalistic and nationalistic religion is like. Where you have state religion you have this kind of 'nominal' faith. But Jeremiah – quoted by Hebrews – envisages a day when all of this will change. By faith he predicts that there will arise a people who as a total community will know the Lord. It is part of the new covenant promise.

¹ Matthew 5:9

¹ 1 Peter 2:9

² Ephesians 4:13

		<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p> 
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