

The New Covenant has been launched

- Christians are totally released from the old

Three types of covenant:

(i) Law covenants

(ii) Mutual covenants

(iii) Generosity covenants

- The Babylon captivity was needed because the Mosaic Law covenant had totally failed

- A new generosity covenant of permanent blessing with Gentiles grafted into Israel

- Brought into being via the priestly ministry of Jesus

The essential ingredients of any covenant

1. Covenants have promises

2. Covenants have an oath

We are coming towards the end of a section in Hebrews that runs from 8:1 to 10:18. The main point that our writer is making is that Christians are totally released from –and indeed thrust out of – the old covenant because Jesus has introduced a new covenant. Jesus is now the one-and-only high priest over the people of God. Tabernacle ritual is fulfilled in him. His death upon the cross and entry into heaven has terminated the covenant with Israel via Moses. The long-predicted ‘new covenant’ has been launched and is now being administered by Jesus.

Now Hebrews goes back to the text already quoted^{□1}, although he does not quote it so fully as before. In 10:16 he quotes Jeremiah 31:33; and in 10:17 he quotes Jeremiah 31:34. We must remember what we may know about ‘covenants’ from the Bible. They are promises that have been made legally secure by the taking of an oath. There are three kinds (or three groups) of covenants. (i) In the law-covenant, the junior partner takes the oath. The ‘old covenant’ with Israel via Moses was this kind of covenant. (ii) There are mutual covenants when both parties take an oath. This kind of covenant is not used to illustrate the relationship between God and his people (although marriage is sometimes used as a picture of that relationship and marriage is a mutual covenant). (iii) The most important kind of covenant for the Christian is the generosity-covenant when a benefactor takes an oath to bless someone junior to himself. The ‘new covenant’ is of this kind.

The prophet Jeremiah predicted the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, and the subsequent captivity in Babylon. The exile was needed because the law of the Mosaic covenant had totally failed to bring permanent blessing to Israel. However, Jeremiah envisaged a future day when God would bring blessing upon Israel in a ‘new covenant’ brought into being by God. The ‘new covenant’ is made with ‘the house of Israel and the house of Judah’^{□1}. Everyone was Jewish who was involved in the Day of Pentecost. Subsequently it became clear that gentiles were to be grafted into God’s Israel. The church inherits Israel’s promises not because the church has **replaced** Israel (a faulty way of speaking, in my opinion) but because gentile believers have been **grafted into** God’s Israel.

It is these new covenant blessings that are being brought into being via the priestly ministry of Jesus the Son of God. Our writer says: ¹⁵*And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,* ¹⁶*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds*¹⁷– he then adds, *‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’*. ¹⁸*Where there is forgiveness of these sins and lawless deeds, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

We notice our writer’s doctrine of Scripture. The words of Scripture are the witness of the Holy Spirit. God uses them to speak today (he says ‘bears witness’ not ‘bore witness’).

Let us remind ourselves of the essential ingredients of any covenant.

1. **Covenants have promises.** In the case of the ‘new covenant’ our writer tells us of two of them. One of them is the new heart and the new mind given to each of God’s people. The new covenant promises the importation of a renewed mind and heart. It begins in what we call ‘regeneration’ or ‘new birth’ and grows as we hear God’s voice. A yet more foundational blessing is the forgiveness of all sins.

2. **Covenants have an oath.** In the case of the ‘new covenant’ God has given an oath to Abraham (he will have an indestructible seed) and to Jesus (he will never cease to be our priest). He offers an oath to us. We shall ‘inherit the promises’ that God gives to us concerning life, godliness and ministry, especially at the point after diligent faith when he swears to us about the purposes that he has for us.

□1 see 8:8-12

□1 Jeremiah 31:31

3. **Covenants have beneficiaries**

4. **Covenants of generosity are unconditional once the oath has been taken**

5. **Covenants of generosity may be given as a reward**

6. **Covenants may have covenant-signs**

7. **Covenants are made on the basis of the sacrifice of blood**

• **No further need for any sacrifice for sin**

• **Nothing beyond the blood of Christ**

• **The blood of Christ is enough**

3. **Covenants have beneficiaries.** In the case of the 'new covenant' the blessings come upon all believers and are intensified by our faith and patience.

4. **Covenants of generosity are unconditional once the oath has been taken.** In the case of the 'new covenant' oaths have been given to Abraham and Jesus. These foundational matters cannot be lost. Yet we may receive our oath also, and after that our inheritance is sure and certain.

5. **Covenants of generosity may be given as a reward.** The basic relation of the believer to Jesus is purely a matter of grace. Yet the full inheritance involves works of faith. Our writer will soon say, 'Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward...You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.' The receiving of the covenant-oath will reward our persistent faith.

6. **Covenants may have covenant-signs.** This aspect of the matter is not mentioned in Hebrews.

7. **Covenants are made on the basis of the sacrifice of blood.** The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and its presentation to God in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of all the blessings of the new covenant. Christians are involved in this covenant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It was inaugurated by the death of Christ. Although it involves membership of God's Israel, gentiles are grafted into the 'tree' of God's true people so they inherit by faith the promises made to Abraham. They participate in God's one and only plan for his people. They expect security now, inheritance soon and after-death inheritance eventually. The 'hope of our calling' and the 'inheritance' of the promise (which is not the same as the basis of the promise in forgiveness and justification) is ahead of them.

Full forgiveness of every kind of sin is part of the new covenant promise. It implies that there will be no **further** need for any sacrifice for sin. The law could not forgive **serious** sins, and so attempts at finding a perfect sacrifice were constantly made. But the new covenant is based on such complete forgiveness that it implies the old covenant with God via Moses is no longer needed. ¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these sins and lawless deeds, there is no longer any offering for sin. There can be nothing **beyond** the blood of Christ. In the days of the Levitical priests there was something beyond them. Their sacrifices were inadequate and so something greater was needed and was looked for. I wonder what the priests thought of David's psalm¹¹⁰ when he predicted a new great high priesthood. What did they think of him when he said, 'You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering'^{51:16}? There was something beyond the Mosaic sacrifices, but there can be nothing beyond Jesus' sacrifice. The blood of Christ is enough.

¹¹⁰ Psalm 110

^{51:16} Psalm 51:16



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