

The “New” Covenant –

The final covenant we want to consider is the “New” Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31. Many people grossly misunderstand this covenant for a number of reasons, but primarily because they pay little attention to the terms of the covenant. We will take some time to investigate this covenant in order to see how it fits into the pattern we’ve seen with the previous three covenants we’ve studied.

The first thing we need to consider is the word “new”. Is this really a new covenant. Let’s take a look at the word “new”. The Hebrew word is chadash (2319 שָׁדָשׁ) which means “new thing” or “fresh”, and in most cases where it is used, it indeed means “new”. But the word comes from the word “chadesh” (2318 שָׁדַשׁ) which means “renew” or “repair”. This is the same word from which we get the word “chodesh” (2320 חֹדֶשׁ) which means “new moon”. When you consider the “new moon”, you know that the moon is not “new”, it’s the same moon from month to month, but each month the moon appears to “renews” itself. Notice that all three words are spelled the same (except for the vowel points were added at least 1000 years after these words were originally penned). Thus, the reader must determine the meaning of the word by the context of the scripture.

If you read the entire chapter you will notice that the underlying theme is that of restoring Israel and Judah after they had been scattered. Recalling the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and of Deuteronomy 27 and 28, we see that because of Torah violations, Israel would be scattered, but in the later part of Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 30, Israel repents and is restored to the land by God. Thus the Jeremiah 31 passage portrays the fulfillment of the Sinai covenant stipulations. So, by looking at the context it appears that instead of a “new” covenant, this passage may be talking about a renewal of the covenant.

Some of the questions that are raised when studying the Jeremiah 31 passage include:

If the New Covenant is indeed “new”, what then happened to the “old”? We’ve seen that the old was a perpetual covenant, and that God would not annul the covenant with Israel. We also know (via the suzerain pattern) that death is the only thing that ends a covenant. So are there two covenants with Israel? Can we trust God when He said that the covenant at Sinai would never be annulled?

So far, the covenants God has made include a sign; the rainbow, circumcision, or the Sabbath. What is the sign of the New Covenant? Unlike the previous covenants we’ve studied, the text does not appear to include one.

Since the New Covenant is established with Israel and Judah, and requires obedience to the Torah (8451 תּוֹרָה), what is different about it and the Mount Sinai covenant, which was also established with Israel and Judah and required obedience to the Torah?

Does the Jeremiah 31 passage follow the nesting pattern of the previous covenants?

Since God expected Israel to circumcise their hearts, is writing the Torah on the heart something new? ¹ What about repentance and forgiveness of sin? They are both in the Mt. Sinai covenant as well.

As we consider these questions, we must also consider these facts:

¹ See Deut. 30:6

The language of the New Covenant passage indicates a “cutting” of the covenant. As we recall our previous studies, the term covenant pertains primarily to the “covenant victim” which was killed as part of the covenant process. If we find that a victim does exist, we might determine that this is indeed a “new” covenant.

There are a number of passages in the Apostolic Writings (the New Testament) that indicate the existence of a new covenant, primarily the one on the eve of Yeshua’s death where He proclaims “the New Covenant in My blood”.

We must also consider the background from which Jeremiah is prophesying. Israel and Judah (the kingdom was divided at this time) had both turned from God. They had refused to obey the terms of the covenant and as a result would be banished from the land and scattered to the four corners of the earth. This is the terms of the covenant as found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-29, the “blessings and curses” chapters. But in addition, Israel and Judah had corporately turned to idolatry. Jeremiah describes what had happened:

Jeremiah 11:6-11 ⁶ Then the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: 'Hear the words of this covenant and do them.' ⁷ 'For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, "Obey My voice." ⁸ 'Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but *which* they have not done.' " ⁹ And the LORD said to me, "A conspiracy (**treason, an alliance**) has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ "They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers." ¹¹ Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them."

As we look back to the Golden Calf incident, we see that 3000 died for their participation in making and worshipping the Golden Calf. As we recall, the Golden Calf was to be a representation of YHVH. Thus, the people were attempting to worship God through this idol. Never-the-less, this sin resulted in death as prescribed by the covenant:

^{NKJ} **Exodus 22:20** " He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

As Jeremiah points out, Judah was at that time making alliances with other nations and other gods which by definition is idolatry, and in regards to the covenant – adultery. Israel (the northern tribes) had also been guilty. Thus, in regards to the covenant, the punishment went beyond banishment; they would all be put to death. Israel’s only way out of this sure fate would be another Redeemer!

Now, let’s look at the New Covenant and consider these points:

The new covenant was not in existence in Jeremiah’s day – it was yet future.

The passage indicates a cutting of the covenant – a “karut beriyt”. Thus, we should see a covenant victim appear when the covenant is ratified.

The covenant is made with the house of Israel and the House of Judah. It does not pertain to any other people, thus those who claim to be ‘gentiles’ cannot be part of the covenant.

The covenant has provisions not found in the previous (Sinaitic) covenant God had made with Israel

Reading on, we see more specifics of the covenant. As we said earlier, it’s a future covenant. It is adopted “after those days”. The idiom “after those days” or “in that day” refers to the latter days, and more specifically, to the time of Jacob’s trouble. The Jewish people call this time “the birthpains of The Messiah” . Christians call it the “Tribulation”. Either way, it’s a time just prior to the (second) coming of the Messiah when world events

will cause the people of Israel and Judah to turn to God and cry out for a deliverer. Since the covenant comes into affect "after those days", then we can assume that this is the time when Messiah has arrived and has gathered Israel and Judah back, thus making them one nation again – just as they were when they crossed the Red Sea. Thus, the covenant is made with Israel collectively, not as a split nation. It is also a time when Israel (both House of Israel and House of Judah) have recognized their deliverer.

It will be a covenant that has terms that are different from those made at Sinai, and from the reference made to the fact that there was a marital relationship between God and Israel, it can be assumed that part of the difference will be how God interacts with His betrothed.

A large part of the stipulations - the terms of the covenant - are the same as the prior covenant, that being the Torah is still a major part of the covenant. Whereas before God wrote the Torah on tablets of stone that were placed in the Ark of the Covenant and thus out of site of the people, God will put his Torah in their midst (**7130 קָרַב** qereb), and wrote it on the hearts of all Israel.

We also see that the New Covenant language reverses the negative status Israel has with God. The book of Hosea prophesied that Israel would be cast off for a season, which indeed was and is the case. But chapter two talks about a covenant that God will make, a betrothal covenant rooted in righteousness and justice. God will extend mercy to Israel (as prophesied in chapter one) and Israel will once again be "My People".

Going on, we find that during this time, all Israel will know God, just as it says in Hosea 2:20. The English word "know" comes from the Hebrew word "yada" (**3045 יָדַע**), a word that has many meanings. It primarily means "know" as in "I know that 2 + 2 = 4". But another meaning is that of knowing someone intimately as when "Adam knew Eve". "Yada" is used in Hosea where God says "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD" (Hosea 2:20 - NKJ). Thus, as part of the New Covenant, the People of God will have an intimate relationship with Him. These people will know their God and see Him just as a woman knows and sees her husband. It is a relationship rooted in faith.

A couple of other items, though not directly found in the "new covenant" text, may also have a bearing on the covenant. One is found in verses 29 & 30, just before the Jeremiah 31 passage. In this text the analogy is made that up to that point in history, the deeds of the fathers have a bearing on the children. In essence God is saying that all Israel suffers for the deeds of a few, and as history shows, that was indeed the case with Israel. But "in those days" (the end time) a man's deeds will only affect himself. Thus, God will work with people individually.

Another passage is Jeremiah 32:40 where God says that because of the fear (awe and respect) Israel has for Him, they will never again turn away from Him. He promises to never cease from doing them good, and that he will plant them securely in the land of their inheritance. In effect, he takes the "if's" out of the covenant language thereby nullifying the curses associated with the Sinaitic covenant. It's similar to the trust God placed in Abraham after his willingness to offer his son Isaac.

Let's now look briefly at the Apostolic Scriptures in regards to the New Covenant, specifically Yeshua's statements before his death.

^{NKJ} **Luke 22:20** Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

It's been taught for centuries that by this symbol, Yeshua was taking the sins of the world upon Himself. Not to dispute this understanding, I believe there is more to this than what meets the eye. As you will recall, ancient covenant practices required the killing and dividing of a covenant victim, and in the most basic terms, the "beriyth", the covenant is the covenant victim. In the covenant with Abraham, the covenant victim was divided in half and God walked between the parts while Abraham was asleep. In the Sinaitic covenant, the bull was killed and half its blood was sprinkled on the altar and the other half on the people, thus symbolizing that the people had entered into covenant with God. In Yeshua's case, He's showing that He Himself would become the

covenant victim and that the blood of the covenant would be His own blood. Thus, everyone who drank from the cup that symbolized His blood was making a statement that He (Yeshua) made possible the ratification of the New Covenant, and not only that, but that they would internalize the covenant even to the point of dying as He died if they failed to live by it. Pretty serious stuff!

So is the New Covenant really new, or is it a renewal of the previous, Sinaitic covenant? Let's compare the Sinaitic covenant with the Jeremiah 31 covenant:

	Sinaitic Covenant	New Covenant
When Established	At Mount Sinai after Israel had been delivered.	In the last days when Israel is in deep distress and calls out for a deliverer.
Parties Involved	Israel and Judah	Israel and Judah, but applied individually
Purpose	To Establish the covenant with made with Abraham	To restore Israel back to "life" after they were banished and under the death penalty as per the terms of the Sinaitic Covenant ²
Covenant Victim	Oxen	Yeshua
Covenant Sign	Sabbath	Belief in Messiah Yeshua and the Observance of the Commandments ³
Intimate Covenant Relationship?	Offered, but rejected.	Yes – all Israel will "know" YHVH
Location of the Covenant Terms	Tablets of Stone in the Ark of the Covenant	Written on their hearts and posted in the midst of the people.
Duration	Forever	Forever
Requirements	God – establish Israel in the land . . . if Israel – is obedient to Torah	God – establish Israel in the land Israel – obedience to Torah
Violations	Many on Israel's part	No apparent violations
Still Valid?	Yes	Yes, to those who are partakers in it.

There again, is the New Covenant really New? I would have to say – YES! The Sinaitic covenant was a good covenant, but there were problems with the people, not the covenant. As a result, the priesthood was taken from the people and given to the sons of Levi. God was never able to develop the personal relationship with Israel that He desired and ultimately had to drive them out of the land. The New Covenant does not replace the Sinaitic covenant; it simply provides a way for Israel to be redeemed from the terms of the Sinaitic covenant. It requires a deeper commitment to the Torah, but comes with greater rewards – eternal life.

So what can we deduce from this study? YHVH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob works through covenants. He proposes an idea and the people have the opportunity to accept or reject the proposal. If they accept it, He expects them to follow through just as He is committed to follow through on His end.

We see that God's covenants are built within other covenants and are dependant on their continuity. Knowing man's shortcomings, God built into His covenant with Israel a means by which the covenant could be maintained even during times of rebellion. In His wisdom, He predicted Israel's rejection of the terms of the covenant and made a way for restoration.

² Deut. 30:19-20

³ John 3:35-36; 1 John 2:3-6

YHVH, our God, is an awesome God, who sees the end from the beginning because he has . . . "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live (therefore) turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"⁴

⁴ Ezekiel 33:11