

A New Covenant

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
—*Jeremiah 31:31,33*

A covenant is a contract or agreement between two parties. The expression “new covenant” in our opening text implies there was an “old” covenant. This was the Law Covenant, which God gave to the nation of Israel, through Moses, at Mount Sinai. (Exodus chapters 19-24; Heb. 8:13) The Apostle Paul explains that the many features of the Law Covenant were a “shadow of heavenly things,” and of “good things to come,” under a future New Covenant.—Heb. 8:5; 10:1

The New Covenant promises have their origin in the Abrahamic Covenant, in which God promised Abraham, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 22:16-18) The Apostle Paul tells us that “four hundred and thirty years” later, God gave the Law Covenant to Israel. (Gal. 3:15-17) Then he rhetorically asks, “Why, then, was the law [covenant] given at all?” He answers, “It was added because of transgressions until the

Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”—
vs. 19, *New International Version*

The Law Covenant was “holy, and just, and good,” and given by God so the Jewish nation might realize their own fallen and imperfect condition, that “sin ...might become exceeding sinful,” and to show they were unable to justify themselves before God. (Rom. 7:12-14; 3:20) Elsewhere Paul explains, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Gal. 3:24) The Law Covenant was to prove to Israel the need for the atoning blood of a Redeemer, Christ and his shed blood, in order to be justified before God.

Sacrifices on the Day of Atonement

When God gave the Law Covenant to Israel, precise instructions were also given on how to build the Tabernacle, along with directions concerning the offerings to be made there. On the annual Day of Atonement, sacrifices were made which required the shedding of blood.—Leviticus chapter 16

First, the “bullock of the sin offering” was slain by Aaron, to “make an atonement for himself, and for his house.” Its blood was taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled “upon ... and before the mercy seat ... seven times.” (Lev. 16:11-14) This pointed forward to the willing sacrifice of the perfect man Jesus, “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) Elsewhere, Paul states that “without shedding of blood is no remission” of sins.—Heb. 9:19-22

The consecration and spirit begetting of Jesus at the River Jordan, and subsequently his death and resurrection, were a guarantee that in God’s “due

time” the long-promised blessings under the New Covenant would become a reality in the Messianic Kingdom. Paul writes, “By so much was Jesus made a surety [Greek: pledge or guarantee] of a better testament,” or covenant. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place.”—Heb. 7:22; 9:12; 10:10

The Apostle Paul assures us that Jesus is the promised seed of blessing. He writes, “To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”—Gal. 3:16

Sacrifice of the Lord’s Goat

A second sacrifice was made on Israel’s annual Day of Atonement. It was the “goat of the sin offering, that is for the people,” whose blood was also taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled “upon ... and before the mercy seat,” like the bullock. (Lev. 16:15) The sacrifice of the goat represents the “living sacrifice” of the faithful followers of the Lord during the present Gospel Age, who are “not conformed to this world,” but instead are daily striving to “be transformed” by the renewing of their minds, and “to determine what God’s will is—what is proper, pleasing, and perfect.” (Rom. 12:1,2, *International Standard Version*) The sacrifice of the faithful consecrated followers of Christ is only acceptable to our Heavenly Father because of the merit of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, pictured by the sacrifice of the bullock. As Paul explains, God has “made us accepted in the beloved [Jesus Christ]. In whom we have redemption through his blood.”—Eph. 1:6,7

There were many different sacrifices that God instituted with Israel under their Tabernacle arrangement in the wilderness. However, there were only two sacrifices whose blood was brought into the Most Holy and sprinkled on and before the mercy seat. These were the sacrifice of the bullock and the sacrifice of the Lord's goat, both on the Day of Atonement.

Understanding the symbolic meaning of these two sacrifices has been one of the great "mysteries" of the Bible. It teaches that the promised seed of blessing is composed of many members. (Eph. 5:23-32; Col. 1:26,27) "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:27-29) Paul also states, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."—I Cor. 12:12

Training of New Covenant Ministers

Christ Jesus, along with his body members, will bring blessings to all the families of the earth under the terms of the New Covenant. Paul explains, "Who has also qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant." (II Cor. 3:6, *ISV*) Our preparation that is occurring now will, if we are faithful unto death, qualify us to be associated with Christ in administering the New Covenant to natural Israel and eventually to all mankind. This preparation is by God's Holy Spirit, having his law "written in our hearts," in our lives and our conduct. Hence we realize, "By ourselves we are not qualified to claim

that anything comes from us. Rather, our credentials come from God.”—II Cor 3:2-5, *ISV*

The Apostle also explains how the body members of Christ are developed and proven during the present age under a special feature of the Abrahamic Covenant. This feature was pictured by Abraham’s wife Sarah. (Gal. 4:22-31) Sarah was a “free woman,” Abraham’s real wife, who after many years of barrenness bore Isaac, the seed of promise. In God’s arrangement, the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant was to produce and develop the seed of blessing. This seed would be used to bless all the families of the earth.

In the closing verses of Genesis chapter 24, we are told how Isaac, who in symbol represents Christ, married Rebekah, who symbolically represents the body members of the Christ, the church. Verse 67 states, “Isaac was comforted after his mother’s [Sarah’s] death.” Sarah represents the feature of the Abrahamic Covenant that is operative during the Gospel Age—the development of the seed of blessing, the “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) Hence, her death implies the end of the Gospel Age, after which, the New Covenant will begin to be operational in Christ’s kingdom.

A City Whose Builder Is God

The promise of a better day was given, starting from the time when God first began dealing with Abraham. The Apostle writes, “By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath

foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”
—Heb. 11:9,10

In the Bible a city is often symbolically used to represent a government. For example, the actual city of Jerusalem represents the government of Israel to the Jewish people. In the foregoing verses, we are told that this city, or government, that Abraham looked for, was to have “foundations,” that is, strength, stability, and permanency. These foundations are God’s holy principles of “righteousness and justice,” “lovingkindness and truth.” (Ps. 89:14, *American Standard Version*) The only builder who could give these qualities to such a kingdom is God.

Along these lines the Apostle John wrote, “I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2) Then the following verses give a beautiful description of the work to be accomplished by this kingdom, which will function under the terms of the New Covenant.—vss. 3,4

Mediator of the New Covenant

The word “mediator,” meaning a go-between or reconciler, is used in the Bible only in connection with a covenant between two parties. Moses was the mediator of the Law Covenant, and was a type or picture of Jesus, the mediator of a new and better covenant. Paul writes that Jesus “obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” (Heb. 8:6) Here a comparison is made with the Law Covenant, under whose terms the nation of Israel was required to perform perfectly all the requirements of that

covenant in order to receive justification and life. However, because of their fallen condition, the nation was not able to keep those terms. Therefore, no one was able to attain life.—Rom. 3:19,20

The Apostle continues, “If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault, ... he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Heb. 8:7,8) The first covenant, the Law Covenant, was a measure of a perfect man’s ability to keep it. Only Jesus was able to fulfil the Law Covenant, because he alone was perfect.—Matt. 5:17,18

The Law Covenant was unable to permit its mediator, Moses, to act on behalf of each transgressor and make provision for them to eventually perform perfectly. This was because Moses himself was imperfect. Neither did this covenant have any provision to eradicate evil influences, which were a great deterrent to keeping all of its requirements. Thus, because of the imperfection of the people, of Moses, and many outside evil influences, a different covenant was required in order to bring the people into full and lasting harmony and favor with the Heavenly Father.

Concerning the making of the New Covenant, the apostle states: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” (Heb. 8:9) The New Covenant will be able to reconcile fallen mankind back into harmony with God

during the Messianic kingdom, because it will have a better mediator, Christ and his body members, the church. (Heb. 8:6; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30) Together “the Christ” will be sympathetic “priests,” administrators of the New Covenant.—Heb. 2:11, 16-18; Rev. 20:6

The Apostle Paul states: “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” (Heb. 8:10) At that time, “they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:34

Prior Events

When the Law Covenant was inaugurated at Mount Sinai there were thunders, lightning, a thick cloud, the loud sound of a trumpet, smoke, and the mount quaked greatly. (Exod. 19:16-18) The Apostle Paul writes, “so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.” (Heb. 12:18-21) Each of these natural elements has a symbolic meaning. Just as these fearful sights and sounds preceded the establishment of the Law Covenant, likewise, a great time of trouble on earth will precede the inauguration of the New Covenant.—Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:1-11; Rev. 16:18-21

The fulfilment of Bible prophecies and signs of the times indicates that this period of great trouble

is drawing upon us. It is being manifested in “thunders,” calls for justice, along with rumblings of dissatisfaction; “lightnings,” flashes of truth and revealing of unrighteousness; a “thick cloud,” growing trouble and discontent; the “sound of a trumpet,” demands for rights, both real and imagined; “smoke,” resulting from the symbolic fire of destruction from anarchy; and an “earthquake,” removal of human social, financial, and religious institutions not in harmony with God.—Hag. 2:6,7; Heb. 12:26,27

Moses was absent from the Jewish nation, having gone up into the mountain to commune with God, while the mountain was clothed with smoke and shook. This suggests, in symbol, that when the last members of the body of Christ will have been proven faithful unto death and resurrected to the divine nature, then will come the climax of a great time of trouble, such as earth has never yet experienced. (Matt. 24:21) Thankfully, those days will be shortened, and the kingdom, under the righteous rule of Christ, will be established in the earth.—vs. 22

Earthly Representatives

The Scriptures inform us that God will have human representatives on Earth to administer the New Covenant. These will be the resurrected faithful and holy ones who lived prior to Jesus' First Advent, from Abel until John the Baptist. They will serve as “judges,” and as “princes in all the earth”—human leaders to assist mankind.—Matt. 11:11; Luke 13:28; Isa. 1:26; Ps. 45:16

The Apostle Paul lists by name some of these faithful ones, adding, “these all, having obtained a

good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:1-40) These men and women of God suffered greatly for serving the Lord faithfully. Yet, they were not heirs of the spiritual seed of promise. Although they received “a good report through faith,” each went down into the grave, until the time when Christ and his church would be complete and the New Covenant inaugurated. These Ancient Worthies will be resurrected “perfect,” as Adam was in the Garden of Eden. With their perfect minds and abilities, they will be examples and instructors of the people.

A Faithful Remnant

In addition to the Ancient Worthies, God’s holy prophets foretold that there will be a faithful “remnant” of Jews. These will be among the first beneficiaries of the blessings of the New Covenant. (Isa. 30:19; Ps. 107:6,28) Through the Prophet Isaiah, God tells us that this “remnant of Jacob [Israel]” would return “from the four corners of the earth.” (Isa. 10:21,22; 11:11-16) Also, through the Prophet Jeremiah, God declares that there would be a gathering of this faithful remnant, and they would “dwell in their own land.”—Jer. 23:1-8

This faithful remnant of Jews will eventually turn and cry unto the Lord for deliverance, not trusting in political accords with other nations, nor in human military might. Then, at that time, the Lord will deliver them. (Isa. 30:15,18,19; Zech. 14:1-3) The Prophet Zechariah wrote, “Thus saith the LORD; I ... will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem:

and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth,” and it will “be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, ... and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing. ... These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.”—Zech. 8:3,6,12,13,16

Continuing, the prophet states: “Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. ... In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men [representing all the nations of the earth] shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” (vss. 22,23) Thus, beginning with a faithful remnant of Israel, together with the instruction of the Ancient Worthies, a way of reconciliation back to God will be available for all people.

The Prophet Ezekiel informs us that God would gather “the remnant of Israel” and give them not only “the land of Israel,” but also “one heart” and “put a new spirit,” his spirit of righteousness, within them. (Ezek. 11:17-20) Finally, the Prophet Micah describes the blessings of the New Covenant as being like “dew” and “showers” which will flow out to all mankind. He writes, “The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.”—Mic. 5:7,8

Sealed with Jesus' Blood

In the book of Hebrews, the inauguration of the Law Covenant is given as an example of how the New Covenant will be inaugurated. The apostle points out that a covenant with God, such as the Law Covenant and the New Covenant, must be sealed with blood. "For where a covenant exists, the death of that which has ratified it is necessary to be produced; because a covenant is firm over dead victims, since it is never valid when that which ratifies it is alive. Hence not even the first [the Law Covenant] has been instituted without blood." (Heb. 9:16-18, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) Jesus' death provided the merit, or value, for the blood which will seal the New Covenant.

On the night when Jesus instituted with his disciples the Memorial of his death, he gave the cup, inviting them, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:27-28; Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25) Here Jesus indicated that his death would provide the value or merit to inaugurate, in due time, the New Covenant.

Partakers of Jesus' Sufferings

The disciples were invited, as have been each subsequent consecrated follower of the Master throughout the Gospel Age, to drink of the cup, symbolizing the acceptance of the merit of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. Based on this, they have been given the privilege of becoming "partakers of Christ's sufferings." (I Pet. 4:13; II Cor. 1:7) They are "justified by faith" in his blood as their Saviour. (Rom. 3:24; 5:1,9) These then have the opportunity

to be “dead with him,” that they might “live with him,” to “suffer” with him, that they might also “reign with him,” as “kings and priests.”—II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev. 20:6

The Apostle Paul explains, “The cup of blessing, for which we bless God,—is it not a participation of the blood of the Anointed one? The loaf which we break,—is it not a participation of the body of the Anointed one? Because there is one loaf, we, the many, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf.”—I Cor. 10:16,17, *Diaglott*

In the book of Hebrews the Apostle continues, “When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats ... and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament [covenant] which God hath enjoined unto you.” (Heb. 9:19,20) In this typical picture, the blood of “calves and of goats” represents the sacrifice of the Christ, the Head, and his body members.

The Apostle Paul then adds, “Thus it was necessary for these earthly copies of the things in heaven to be cleansed by these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves are made clean with better sacrifices than these.” (vs. 23, *ISV*) The “copies”, or pictures of reality under the Law Covenant had to be cleansed and purified with animal sacrifices—bulls and goats. However, the “heavenly things”—the New Covenant and its arrangements—are made clean “with better sacrifices.” These better sacrifices are those of Christ and his church.

The Mediator of the New Covenant will be the resurrected and glorified “Christ” class, Jesus the

Head along with all his body members. Therefore, their mediatorial work of reconciling God and mankind, under the New Covenant, cannot begin until the last member of the body of Christ has been proven faithful unto death.—Rev. 2:10

We see, then, that the purpose of the New Covenant is for the reconciling of mankind back to God. This arrangement was provided at a great cost, by the willing sacrifice and death of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. (John 3:16,17) The New Covenant will thus demonstrate the love and concern of our Heavenly Father for all his human creation. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out."—Rom. 11:33 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

FEBRUARY 5—"This is the will of God [concerning you], even your sanctification."—I Thessalonians 4:3 (Z. '99-4 Hymn 198)

FEBRUARY 12—"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."—James 1:4 (Z. '93-295 Hymn 95)

FEBRUARY 19—"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unfaithful nothing is pure; but both their mind and conscience are defiled: they profess to have known God, but by their works they renounce him, being abominable and disobedient, and as to every good work worthless."—Titus 1:15,16 (*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) (Z. '99-214 Hymn 130)

FEBRUARY 26—"Rejoice in the LORD alway: and again I say, Rejoice."—Philippians 4:4 (Z. '03-7 Hymn 235)