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Hebrews 8:13.

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THE
NEW
COVENANT



The Scriptural perspective
that redefined the relationship between
God and His children

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The New Covenant

«By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear». Hebrews 8:13.

There is probably no one in the Christian Religion who isn't familiar with the New Covenant. After all, it is generally believed that all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ stands under its benefits.

“The Old Covenant was for the Israelites only. The New Covenant is for Christians” is often heard. This clearly leads to conclude that Christians know what is talked about when the topic comes up to dialogue.

Now, because the commitment to the New Covenant is scarcely mentioned within the Christian environment, it is appropriate to write about it. Surely, this will provide valuable support for those who want to consider that the Scripture says about the topic.

Although the content of this study is short, it will open a new perspective for its readers, leading them towards new Scriptural interpretation about this topic. Let's begin our journey.

The first mention of the New Covenant

The first mention of the New Covenant, in the Holy Scriptures, is brought up on Jeremiah 31:31-33, which says:

“The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people”. Jeremiah 31:31-33

The Covenant between God and Israel at mount Sinai was ruling by the time when the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed these words. That covenant is also known as either: The first covenant, the first alliance, or the old testament.

The function of the first covenant filled up all requirements, because it was designed for a specific time, for a specific culture, for a specific people. According the Most Holy, there was nothing omitted, missed or forgotten. Everything Israel must know was included in there, either blessings and cursings; thus, obedience or disobedience were paid accordingly.

Why a new covenant? Did Jeremiah's words mean something to Israel? Did they understand the message? Did they keep themselves awaiting its fulfillment? It seems none of these questions can be positively answered.

Since the first covenant was designed to fit in Israel's requirements, why is a new covenant mentioned by Jeremiah? To answer the question, Paul, in Romans 8:3A declares:

“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature...”

Yes! Although the law in the Old Covenant was powerful as it was designed by God, its power was nullified because Israel was unable to obey it. This “sinful nature” refers to Israel living in the flesh, struggling day after day with the impotency to obey what they were commanded.

Thus, the law, being the foundation of the Old Covenant, became weak, ineffective and irrelevant because it could not accomplish its purpose. That purpose was to provide Israel with happiness, wealth, health, protection, and unlimited benefits; however, as the Scriptures show, the results were the opposite. Dead, due disobediences, surpassed the expectation against blessings, and the situation became irreversible.

It seems the prophecy declared by Jeremiah did not impact Israel positively. The way they behaved regarding their obedience to the first covenant in the following centuries, shows plenty of incompetence and indifference.

Failing to obey the covenant meant Israel was to be put to death. Notwithstanding, God never fails; He had promised their forefather Abraham his offspring would be special. Thus, He was ready to accomplish His promise providing them with another way to soften their struggles; that way was the New Covenant.

What is a covenant?

In order to understand the reasons for the New Covenant, it is essential to keep in mind that a covenant is a legal agreement, which is effective when two people convene to be subject to specific clauses. When both sides agree to those clauses, the agreement is confirmed and becomes a legal document; none of the parties can brake it without being subject to penalties. Thereafter, both are legally tied one another.

In regard of God and the Israelites, the reason for the first covenant is clearly expressed in Exodus 19:5-6:

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”.

Israel accepted the proposal, and became God's possession. Therefore, every action from God, or from Israel, should be strictly according to the covenant. Obedience entitled Israel to demand all the blessings they were promised. In the other hand, disobedience entitled God to demand obedience and to proceed to execute punishment.

No one else but Israel within the covenant

God's words, and Israel's response show that the Old Covenant was made exclusively between them. Exodus 19: 5-6 clearly shows it. Both were tied by a common legal agreement sealed with blood. All

other nations were excluded; therefore, no commitment between God and gentiles existed. That's why blessings and salvation did not exist for gentiles (pagans or heathens), and obedience from them did not exist to God.

This clearly shows that the popular expression mentioned above is correct when declaring that the Old Covenant was exclusively for Israel. God ordered Israel to avoid idolatry, to avoid dishonoring their parents, to avoid transgressions to the Sabbath, and so forth. He never ordered the gentiles to sanctify the Sabbath, to honor their parents, He never ordered the gentiles to avoid idolatry. Etc. No other nation but Israel received God's blessings and the Ten Commandments.

A glimpse of Jeremiah's prophecy

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah". Jeremiah 31:31.

If proper attention is paid to these words, the conclusion becomes easy to achieve: Those days would have been fulfilled in the days when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared on Earth, which means some five hundred years later. Yes!, at the appointed time a new covenant should be made between God and the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Now, it is critical to understand that both: the Old and the New Covenants were made between God and Israel. Therefore, the claims that the New Covenant was for the gentiles redeemed by Jesus Christ, have no foundation because the prophecy utterly states that New Covenant should be made between God, Israel and Judah, not between God and the gentiles.

It is important to keep in mind the unchangeable character of God to understand that, although Israel was disobedient, He continued keeping the promises He made to Abraham, and that such promises will endure as long as the present world endures.

The apostle Paul, in Romans 11:1 says that God hasn't cast away His people. Moreover, in Romans 11:7 says that those who rejected the Good News (Gospel) were put by God under spiritual blindness and suffering of the flesh, however, blindness and suffering does not mean rejection. God does not brake His promises made to Abraham.

Truly, the New Covenant was designed to be different in several critical points, among them are:

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts".

In the Old Covenant God's law was written on both sides (front and back) of two tables of stone (Exodus 32:15). In the New Covenant this same law should be written in their mind and heart as stated by Hebrews 8:10:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people".

A careful reading of Jeremiah 31:31-33 does not reveal new or different laws, but the same ones. The law was not changed or modified in the New Covenant; those commandments written on tables of stone should be written in their minds and hearts.

The annulment of the Old Covenant in behalf of the New one

was only an invigoration of the Decalogue, keeping, this way, His promises alive. Thus, New Covenant does not mean change, or modification of His laws, just a renovation of those given at Sinai.

The role of the Ten Commandments

To refresh the mind of the readers, the following text are the Ten Commandments as found in Exodus 20:3-17:

«3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

6 but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Ex. 20:10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

Ex. 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Ex. 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Ex. 20:13 "You shall not murder.

Ex. 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Ex. 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Ex. 20:16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Ex. 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."»

These are the Ten Words proclaimed by God from mount Sinai; these, at the appointed time, were written in the mind and heart of the Israelites willing to accept Jesus Christ and His sacrifice in the Calvary.

The importance of accepting these commandments is rendered in Exodus 19:5-6:

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

What does "if you obey me fully and keep my covenant" mean? That's the necessary question to be answered.

Following His proposal, God met Israel at mount Sinai where He proclaimed the Ten Commandments.

In hearing God's proposal, the Israelites proceeded without delay to declare full acceptance by saying:

“We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”

Exodus 24:7.

Thus, the Ten Commandments became the clauses by which the covenant was concerted. Thereafter, every matter regarding the relationship between both parties should be considered on the basis of the clauses (or laws) of the covenant.

Again, when Jeremiah says that the laws will no longer be written on tables of stone but God “will put His law in their minds and write it on their hearts”, he speaks about the same law given at Sinai; Hebrews 8:10 is a clear reference.

The Ten Commandments are just the same laws embodied in the New Covenant given to the Jews who accepted the holy sacrifice made on the cross.

Remarkable advantages of the New Covenant

“But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.” Hebrews 8:6.

The step forward, taken by God, was done to enhance the forthcoming New Covenant with aspects not included in the Old one. This means the New Covenant should not only allow Israel to continue as God's people, but His law should no longer be engraved on tables of stone but in their mind (spirit) and hearts (soul).

Nevertheless, the best enhancement ever made was the participation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the great absent in the Old Testament, but became the great present in the New.

With the Holy Spirit in their minds and hearts obedience to God should be easier than it was in the Old Covenant. The New Covenant does not require personal efforts to obey God because the Holy Spirit provides strength to make obedience easier.

With plenty of satisfaction, apostle Paul declared to King Agrippa:

“And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today.

This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.” Acts 26:27.

Why this text is called up?, to see Paul testifying about the multitude from all twelve tribes of Israel who embraced the New Covenant. By the end of the first century John was revealed 144.000, —12.000 from each Israelite tribe as first fruits of the Gospel. The acceptance of the Gospel entitled them to receive the Holy Spirit as Acts 2:38 states:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is present in the New Covenant, and provides God's people with:

a- Advocacy: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” 1 John

2:1.

b- A Counselor, Teacher and Reminder: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26.

c- Yearly sacrifices no longer necessary: “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.” Hebrews 10:1.

The New Covenant came to stay longer than the Old one. It came to stay as long as the humankind lasts. And it was designed to provide Israel with better alternatives and better benefits. With a special source of power to ease their abiding in God without fears of death as in Christ they did not transgressed the Law neither were in danger to be put to death.

Different procedure of acceptance

The way the Israelites accepted the Old Covenant was totally different than the way they accepted the New. Observe this:

“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.” Exodus 24:7.

As this rendering shows, the Old Covenant was collectively accepted by the people in a single act. They declared their commitment by saying: “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey”.

The procedure to accept the New is totally different as it is not a collective action but personal. This is made between God through Jesus Christ and every single person.

Whoever decides to accept it must come before God in true contrition and repentance, showing remorse for all offences, and showing clear desire to renovate soul and spirit to become a member of His family.

In the New Covenant nobody speaks in behalf of others but every one speaks in his/her own behalf.

When the apostle Peter addressed the multitude gathered in Jerusalem, his point regarding what to do to obey God was very specific. Acts 2:37-40 says:

«When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ».

This shows at least five specific steps:

a- Repentance and baptism is personal. This means no one can repent and baptize in behalf of others.

b- The crowd was “cut to their heart”, which means they were touched deeply.

c- They asked what to do.

d- They were told to repent.

e- They were told to be baptized each one in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins.

It appears these five steps are a logical order to restore the good relations with God. Failing to comply exposed the person to loose the coming Kingdom of Christ and to be listed for punishment on the judgement day where negligent rejections will be charged and paid.

The apostolic writings show the vast majority of Israelites rejected the New Covenant. Until now, they continue living within a nullified by God scheme of justification —The Old Covenant.

There were relatively few Israelites (144.000) who made the change, leaving that obsolete scheme to enjoy all benefits offered by God through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant.

The multitudinary acceptance realized at Sinai no longer would take place again; the loudly “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey”. Was replaced by a solemn respectful: “I will do everything the LORD has said; I will obey”.

More benefits of the New Covenant

As a matter of fact; transgressions to the New Covenant imply death as it was with the Old Covenant, however, there is a remarkable difference between both covenants, one worth to be noticed: Repentance for transgressions is now available while in the past it was absent. In fact, Jesus Christ advocates in behalf of His children to clean them from sins as it is written:

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”. Hebrews 7:25.

In the New Covenant, offenders are acquitted and declared faultless before God.

Death, as penalty for transgressions, applies only if transgressors opt to get it by leaving in the flesh instead of living in the spirit. Punishment, in the judgement day will be effective for those determined to obey impulses of the flesh, after all:

“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”.

Romans 8:8.

In the Old Covenant the opportunity to repent was absent, in the New Covenant is present.

In the Old Covenant fear was the main feeling because any transgression (as there were many), demanded to comply with specific requirements of the Law; failure to comply put transgressors to death. This is different in the New Covenant because fear have been replaced by confidence, without the rigidity of the penalties for transgressions.

While in the Old Covenant the Israelites were given a calendar of holidays for their rejoice, in the New Covenant, no calendar with specific dates to celebrate exists, neither a command to rejoice. The Holy Spirit sets the difference as an unstoppable power of happiness for the soul.

In the New Covenant, rejoicing in God does not come by way of commandment but spontaneously, from the heart. Thus, the dryness of the soul was changed by rivers of joy.

Well, up to this time the content of this study has been regarded to Israel; mentioning benefits and responsibilities involved in their

agreement with God, what about the gentiles? Surely that’s the question this study cannot avoid as all nations are involved in Jesus Christ’s salvation. Let’s see it under the following subtitle.

The gentiles and the New Covenant

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”. John 3:16.

During the Old Covenant salvation was exclusively for Abraham’s offspring; as it has been said before, God did not take other nations but Israel in a tide relationship by which He became their God and they became His people. No compromise linked God to the gentiles, neither the gentiles were compromised to obey Him.

But the time came when the whole mankind was given, with Israel, equal opportunity to become God’s people. There is no exception, every one can access the New Covenant by accepting the holy sacrifice on the cross. How this works? Let’s take a look:

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—

remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”. Ephesians 2:11-16.

What are these verses saying? Is their content conclusive to assure the gentiles can access the benefits of the covenant originally tailored for the Israelites? Is their content enough to make clear that the gentiles can be legally accepted by God? Yes to both! Paul’s words are the most comprehensive declaration regarding the position the gentiles acquire when they accept the reconciliation proposed by God to them.

Verses 11-12 is a reminding to the redeemed gentiles that in the past they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, with no hope, and without God.

Verse 13 categorically says that now that they are living in Christ, they are no longer far away of Israel and to the covenants of promise.

It is critical to understand this meaning, as it shows the role of the New Covenant, and what God expects from the gentiles.

It is necessary to pay attention to this as the key element to ensure every gentile redeemed by Christ fits within Paul’s words, and have full understanding of what happens when gentiles accept Jesus Christ as personal savior, otherwise, the acceptant acquires a legal compromise by which has no previous notice.

When gentiles accept Jesus Christ as savior, and accept to become a member of God's family, they tie themselves to the New Covenant which must be obeyed without hesitation and without amendments. The keeping of the Ten Commandments is accepted when gentiles accept the New Covenant by accepting Jesus Christ as savior. This is the meaning of Paul's words!

This is why gentiles are no longer aliens, no longer strangers to the covenants.

Verse 14 enlightens this issue:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier".

The long-forbidden relationship with the gentiles ordered to Israel in the Old Covenant stopped its function. No more barriers to keep both segments of humans separated by enmities concerning worshipping God.

The convergence of both resulted a new body, a very special one which for Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:32 is called the "church of God".

"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God —".

The church of God was built multicultural, no racial preferences, or special treatments for a nation were included. Moreover, the name church of God clearly shows how, in Jesus Christ, all humans lose their cultural, ancestral, regional and racist identity to conform a new body. Galatians. 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus", shows how the spiritual transformation takes place in Jesus Christ when the barrier of separation is destroyed.

This "barrier" consisted of all ritual laws God gave to Israel for personal justification. Those laws, in Jesus Christ, became obsolete as the one and only sacrifice He made on the cross took primary importance. In the new scheme of justification Jerusalem and the Temple are no longer taken as the center of worship.

Paul clearly says that when gentiles accept Jesus Christ, they jointly participate with the Israelites, of the covenants of promise, whose words undoubtedly mean they are committed, like the Israelites who accepted Jesus Christ, to accept and obey all the clauses of the Covenant, because in Christ gentiles are no longer aliens to the New Covenant. The Ten Commandments, as given at Sinai, abide in the mind and souls of the gentiles too.

About the Theology of salvation

Christian Theology, regarding the good news of salvation, points out to Jesus Christ's sacrifice, declaring that accepting Him entitles the acceptant to enjoy everlasting life; while this is true, the critical point by which that promise becomes effective is omitted, that is, the submission to the clauses of the New Covenant —The Ten Commandments.

In fact, no one can accept Jesus Christ as savior and in the meantime reject God's Covenant. According Paul's words, accepting Jesus Christ and submitting to the New Covenant is one single unit, not two independent.

Do you remember that at Sinai God offered to take Israel special people (Exodus 19:6)? Do you remember the requirements to make that offer effective (Exodus 19:5)?

The same happens when Christ's sacrifice is accepted, because everlasting life becomes real to everybody only by accepting the covenant's Law.

Therefore, it is necessary for the Theology of salvation to emphasize the whole plan of salvation, otherwise, "What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted." Ecclesiastes 1:15. Yes, what is lacking cannot be counted, neither before God nor before men.

Are the redeemed gentiles free from the Law?

Well, if the question is made without a proper understanding what the topic deals about, it leaves the person short of notice, and the answer could be either yes or no. But everything is clear if proper explanation is given. Let's take a short, closer look.

There are two main groups of laws: Moral, and ritual. Moral laws exist since humans were created. Ritual laws started after Israel was concerted by God through the Old Covenant.

Moral law's utterance is to preserve humankind from self-destruction. Ritual laws were given to Israel to keep them justified from some kind of transgressions.

The apostles' writings tend to show the moral law as basis to achieve high standards of good living, which in the meantime, enables them to sustain healthy communion with Him. Concerning the meaningful value of the moral law, Paul, in Romans 7:12, says:

"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good".

However, when the topic is regarding the ritual law, his view is totally different: Observe Galatians 5:4:

"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. "

By considering these verses concerning the two different aspects of the law, the answer to the question in the subtitle above may be easier to achieve.

The Ten Commandments are moral rules with no rituals for justification added, and clearly identifies how His children love God:

"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome." 1 John 5:3.

Welcome everybody to the New Covenant!

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