

SUKKOT – NEW AND OLD COVENANTS

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Tonight we want to talk about the Covenants. I am sure you have heard the terms old covenant and new covenant. A lot of people think that the Old Testament is the same of the Old Covenant. And that the New Testament is the New Covenant. And that we as Christians are under the New Covenant, therefore the Old Covenant and the Old Testament don't apply to us. This line of thinking is based on incorrect understanding of what Scriptures say about covenants.

Now it is true that Yeshua initiated the New Covenant, and we are living in this period now, but exactly what does that mean, and how is it related to the previous covenants? That's what we need to look at.

First of all, let me clarify something about what we commonly call the Old Testament. (Incidentally, I prefer the term Hebrew Scriptures, since I don't like the word Old because it could be taken to imply it is no longer applicable). The Old Testament is NOT the same as the Old Covenant. The Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, contains a description of various covenants, including the new covenant. Furthermore, when people talk about the Old Covenant, I am not sure what is even

Let's start at the beginning and look briefly at the Covenants that YHWH makes with His people.

First of all what is a covenant? It's a promise... an agreement really, between two parties. Marriage is a covenant... an agreement between two people to enter into a relationship together. Both make promises to one another, and both agree to certain responsibilities or obligations. This is same as the covenants that are made between the Father and His people - starting with the covenant he made with Abraham, back in Genesis.

YHWH'S COVENANT PROMISES WITH ABRAHAM

It is really an oversimplification to say God made a covenant with Abraham. What YHWH did, was make a series of promises to Abraham. The covenant wasn't just a single promise or a one-time event – it was a series of promises, made over many years, in which YHWH gave more and more clarity to Abraham regarding their covenant relationship. I want to read these promises and show you how over time, each set of promises gave more focus... gave more definition to the covenant relationship YHWH was establishing with Abraham and his offspring.

Genesis 12:2–3 YHWH calls Abram out of Haran, tells him to Canaan.

And I will make of you a **great nation**, and I will bless you and make **your name great**, so that you will be a blessing. I **will bless those who bless you**, and **him who dishonors you I will curse**, and in you all the **families of the earth shall be blessed**."

Genesis 12:6–7 He goes to Canaan in obedience and gets another promise,

Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "**To your offspring I will give this land**." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Now, is this a totally different promise, or is it further detail on the previous more general promise? Before, God told Abram I will bless you, I will make you a great nation... but how will he do that? Now God gives a bit more detail. He says I will give **this specific land** to Abraham's **offspring**. But what really does "this land" include? We don't know that. Abraham doesn't know that... yet. Later, after Abram and Lot split, God gives another promise to Abram:

Genesis 13:14–16 Here God gives more definition to what “this land” includes. And he gives more definition about Abram’s offspring.

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

But the problem was that even after many more years went by, Abram had no offspring. So he figures YHWH must have meant to fulfill his covenant promises through his household.. his servants.

Genesis 15:3–5 More definition – your natural offspring shall be your heir –MANY descendants

And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Then later still, is the time when there is that traditional covenant ceremony... where the animals are cut in half and the blood drained into the trench between the 2 halves.

Genesis 15:17–21

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

Was this a new covenant? No. Was it a new promise? Not really. Once again, further definition was given to the previous promises. YHWH gave even more clarity to what land would be given. Specific boundaries were given, for the first time.

Interesting that up until this point, we really have had no commitments required of Abraham. God made promises, but no rules or commands were given to Abraham to obey. However I would suggest that implicit in God’s promises was the expectation of obedience to God’s direction. If Abram had never left Haran to go to Canaan as God directed, would God have blessed him with land of Canaan? I don’t think so. Implicit in these promises was a willingness to obey the directions of YHWH.

But now, finally, after all these covenant promises had been made, we have something else added. Another responsibility of Abraham. A sign to show who Abraham belongs to - -who he has made a covenant with, to obey, to follow.

Genesis 17:5–11

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every

male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

Now, even after all this, Abraham still has a problem. No natural offspring yet. So he takes matters into his own hand, and tries to help God out, and takes his servant Hagar and they have a son named Ishmael.

Genesis 17:18–19

And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

Was this a new promise? No. But YHWH clarified that his covenant promises would be fulfilled through Isaac and not Ishmael.

YHWH’S COVENANT PROMISES WITH ISAAC

So far, all these covenant promises have been made to Abraham. Much later, we read that God makes renews this covenant with Isaac directly

Genesis 26:3–4 Covenant promise to Isaac

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

Is there anything new here? Not really...It is the same covenant, EXCEPT that these promises are now made to Isaac and not Abraham, and not Ishmael.

YHWH’S COVENANT PROMISES WITH JACOB

Later, Isaac has children. Twins. Jacob and Esau. And we find that God makes a covenant promise to Jacob.

Genesis 28:13–15 Covenant promise to Jacob

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Once again, is this a new covenant? No. It is the same set of promises made over time to Abraham, just with the further definition that it is through Jacob, and not Esau that these promises will be fulfilled.

YHWH’S COVENANT AT SINAI

Fast forward 400 years. Jacob and his family have been in Egypt... they have become slaves, but they have multiplied into huge numbers. Of course.. this was part of the promise! And YHWH delivers them out of Egypt, using Moses as their leader, and brings them to Mt Sinai where makes a covenant with them.

The question is, is this covenant at Sinai something totally new and different, or is it just another extension of the covenant promises made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now giving further definition and clarity to the offspring of Jacob?

Exodus 19:5-6

Now therefore, if you will indeed **obey my voice** and keep my covenant, **you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples**, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

YHWH says to Jacob’s offspring, if you obey me, you will be my treasured possession. In other words, I will be your God, you will be my people, just like he promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Slightly different wording, but the promise is the same. Instead of talking to an individual about their future offspring, YHWH is now talking to the offspring, saying he will make them into a holy nation, set apart as His very own treasured possession. But he emphasizes, you must obey me... as a nation... just like your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob obeyed me.

What about the promises of all the land he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Deuteronomy 4:1

“And now, O Israel, **listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them**, that you may live, and go in and take **possession of the land** that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

There are to be given the promised land – the land of Canaan – the very land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – IF they obey His commands.

Read on...

Deuteronomy 4:6-7

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this **great nation** is a wise and understanding people.’ For what **great nation** is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

He is saying, you will indeed be a “great nation”, the very words that he promised Abraham, but you must keep my commands.

Do you see how the Sinai covenant is not really a new or different covenant from the ones God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Like all the previous ones, this covenant just gives further definition to what had been originally promised to Abraham.

So YHWH gives his Torah to the people, and they agree to keep His commands and obey them.

Of course they fail miserably at that... and now God has a problem. Or rather his people have a problem. YHWH has made a covenant with His people, and he loves them and wants to bless them, but they can’t seem to hold up their end of the covenant. Something has to change.

Fortunately there is more to the plan. It involves the Messiah and what is called the new covenant. But is it really new? Or it is just further definition of what His plan was from the very beginning, from his first promise to Abraham?

NEW COVENANT PROMISED

The Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) speaks the day when a “new” covenant will be established:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah**, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I

will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for **they shall all know me,** from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. **For I will forgive their iniquity,** and I will remember their sin no more.”

What do we learn about the New Covenant? First it is made with Israel and Judah... in other words, with the offspring of Jacob. the same people the previous covenant promises were made with. But it will be different... how? The previous covenant was broken... the implication is that the new covenant will not be broken. Why? because this time YHWH will write his Torah on their hearts. In other words, not on the stone tablets like before, but on their hearts, so they will truly desire to keep his Torah. And he says at that time they will ALL know me, and He will forgive their sins.

Notice two more things - first of all, does he say he changed his Torah? Did he imply anywhere that his laws and commands have in any way changed, to make it easier for people to obey? No! He says I will write my Torah, my law, upon their hearts. In other words, His solution to the problem of having disobedient people is not to change His laws, but to change people's hearts.

Lastly, notice that at least some aspects of the new covenant are not yet fulfilled. We still need to teach other the Truth. Not all of us, and not all of Israel, know Him. So while we know (or we'll soon see) that some aspects of the new covenant have been implemented, the total fullness of the new covenant is not yet here.

Another similar prophetic passage that seems to be talking about the New Covenant is in Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 36:24–28

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I **will give you a new heart,** and **a new spirit I will put within you.** And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Here we see that YHWH promises to give his people “ a new heart” which will cause them to keep his laws. And we see that He will do this by putting his Holy Spirit within his people.

Again there is no indication that any of his laws or commands will change... only that his Spirit will change the heart and cause His people to keep them.

Also note that once again, just like in Jeremiah, the promise is that YHWH will forgive the sins of his people. But HOW will He do that? This is where the Messiah fits into the picture of the New Covenant.

YESHUA AND THE NEW COVENANT

Do you remember the words of Yeshua at that Passover meal, when he took the bread and broke it with his disciples, and said this is my body given for you? And then he took the wine and poured it, and said:

Luke 22:20

This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood.

Just like the blood of the Passover lamb saved the people from the plague of death in Egypt, the blood of Yeshua, the only one to have never sinned, to have never broken God's Torah, was the

perfect and complete sacrifice needed to cover our sins. His Torah didn't change, but now, through Messiah, we have a way to be forgiven once and for all time.

Hebrews 8:6

Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

Hebrews talks about the Messiah as being the mediator of the new covenant, and says it is a better covenant, based on a better promise. Why? because Torah points out that we are always sinning and in need of forgiveness. With Messiah's sacrifice we see that forgiveness has been given once and for all, past present and future.

So we see that the New Covenant was initiated by the death and resurrection of Messiah, according to Luke, and that according Hebrews the Messiah is the mediator of the new covenant. But it is the new covenant fully implemented? Does all of Israel know Him? Do we have need to teach one another about Him? Is His Torah truly written on the hearts of all his people? I don't think so. And I think is why we see in Hebrews that it is a process...

Hebrews 8:13

In speaking of a new he makes the first obsolete. And what is **becoming obsolete** and **growing old** is **ready to vanish** away.

The process of the new covenant being fully implemented is apparently not instantaneous.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now what about the Holy Spirit? That was also a big part of the prophesy in Ezekiel concerning the new covenant. Of course you know the Spirit was given at Shavuot... Pentecost. And who was the Spirit initially given to? Jews or Gentiles? Jews... just as we are told in Jeremiah, that the covenant would be with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Acts 2:2-4

And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

2 Corinthians 3:3-6

And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the **Spirit of the living God**, not on **tablets of stone** but on **tablets of human hearts**. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be **ministers of a new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit.

Paul is clearly referring to Jeremiah and Ezekiel here, linking together new covenant, the holy spirit, tablets of stone, and tablets of human hearts.

GENTILES "GRAFTED IN"

So how are Gentiles brought into this new covenant?

Well, it all started with a man named Cornelius – a Gentile. A Roman soldier. He and His household heard the news of Messiah and believed, and were filled with the Holy Spirit, just like the Jews were at Shavuot.

Acts 10:44-47

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And

the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

And for the first time, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Gentiles who believed in Messiah. And the new covenant, writing the Torah on the hearts of people, was now spreading to include Gentiles as well as Jews.

Later Paul would write to the Gentile believers in Rome, about them being grafted as wild branches onto the olive tree, which is Israel:

Romans 11:17–21

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

So it is clear that Gentiles who believe in Messiah are grafted in to Israel. Paul makes the same point in a different way in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:18–19

For through him [Messiah] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Gentiles, through Messiah and the Holy Spirit, fellow citizens with Israel. We are wild branches, grafted in, a part of the new covenant that YHWH has made with Israel.

What was the original promise made to Abraham? Do you remember the very first promise ever made to him?

***Genesis 12:2–3* YHWH calls Abram out of Haran, tells him to move away to the land of Canaan.**

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Just how would all the families of the earth be blessed through Abraham? Was Abraham ever told that? No. Was Isaac told that? or Jacob? or the people at Sinai? No! Something that was clearly a part of God’s plan from the very beginning was never revealed. But now, as we see aspects of new covenant being fulfilled, we can see that it is through the Messiah, a descendant of Abraham, that all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The new covenant is not a covenant with Gentiles. It is a covenant with Israel, just an extension of all the other covenant promises God made with Israel. Gentiles get to be included with Israel, but cause of our faith in Messiah, the one who imitated and mediates the new covenant. We are filled with His Spirit, who writes his Torah on our hearts... the same Torah he wrote on the tablets of stone, but now he gives us a heart to want to obey. Because He loves us, and He has already forgiven us for our disobedience.