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Covenant - The New Covenant: From Israel's Promise To An Everlasting Kingdom



By Dan Maines

The New Covenant: From Israel's Promise To An Everlasting Kingdom

Introduction

† One of the most important questions in fulfilled eschatology is this: If the New Covenant was promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah, does that mean the New Covenant belongs only to them?

† Scripture clearly says that the New Covenant was promised to Israel and Judah, but Scripture doesn't stop there.

† The promise came through Israel because God's redemptive

plan was being carried through Israel, but the purpose of that promise was always larger than ethnic Israel.

† Jesus established the New Covenant in His blood, the apostles proclaimed it to Jews and Gentiles, and the breaking down of the covenant barrier created one people of God in Christ.

† This is where eschatology becomes essential. The transition from the Old Covenant age to the fully established New Covenant order took place during the first-century period that reached its judgment and covenantal conclusion in AD 70.

† The question isn't whether Israel and Judah were named in the promise. They absolutely were. The question is whether Scripture teaches that the blessings of the fulfilled New Covenant remain restricted to Israel and Judah after Christ established it.

† The answer is no. What was promised through Israel became the everlasting covenantal reality of the kingdom of Christ, where people from the nations are brought near to God through Him.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, 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 which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord: "I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember."

† Jeremiah identifies the original covenant recipients as the house of Israel and the house of Judah. We don't need to deny

that fact or redefine those words to make our position work.

† But Jeremiah was announcing what God would accomplish through the coming Messiah. The promise was given within Israel's covenant history because Christ Himself would come through Israel (Romans 9:4-5).

† The New Covenant can't be separated from Jesus. Once the promised Messiah came, the question became who was united to Him, not who could trace a physical genealogy back to Israel (Galatians 3:26-29).

† Jeremiah's promise therefore tells us where the New Covenant promise entered redemptive history, but later revelation shows us the worldwide scope of its blessings.

Hebrews 8:6-13

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, to the extent that He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been free of fault, no circumstances would have been sought for a second. For in finding fault with the people, He says,

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will bring about a new covenant With the house of Israel and the house of Judah, Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers On the day I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care about them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel After those days, declares the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, And write them on their hearts.

And I will be their God, And they shall be My people. And they will not teach, each one his fellow citizen, And each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' For they will all know Me, From the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful toward their wrongdoings, And their sins I will no longer remember."

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† Hebrews directly applies Jeremiah's prophecy to the covenantal transition occurring in the first century.

† The writer didn't say the Old Covenant would remain alongside the New Covenant forever. He said the first covenant had become obsolete and was near to disappearing.

† That language is extremely important eschatologically. Hebrews was written while the Old Covenant order was approaching its final removal, and that removal was near, not thousands of years away (Hebrews 10:37).

† The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 visibly demonstrated the end of that covenantal world. The priesthood, sacrifices, temple, and genealogical system that belonged to that order could no longer function as God's covenant administration.

† The New Covenant isn't waiting for another future Jewish age. Christ is already its mediator, His sacrifice has already been offered, and His covenant doesn't return to the shadows that He fulfilled.

Luke 22:20

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood.

† Jesus didn't establish two New Covenants, one for Israel and another for everyone else. He established the New Covenant in His own blood.

† This means membership in the New Covenant ultimately centers upon Christ. The covenant can't be possessed independently of the One whose blood established it (Hebrews 9:15).

† The same Jesus who established the covenant commanded that repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

† Jerusalem was the starting point of the proclamation, not the

boundary of its destination.

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

† Paul couldn't make the point much clearer. In Christ, covenant standing isn't determined by being Jew or Greek.

† Gentile believers weren't placed into a separate inferior covenant. They were sons of God through faith in Christ and heirs according to promise.

† Notice Paul's language carefully. He didn't tell Gentiles that they had to become ethnic Israelites before they could inherit the promise. He said, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

† Christ is the determining reality. The promise reaches the nations through Him (Galatians 3:8, 14).

Ephesians 2:11-18

Therefore remember that previously you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision" which is performed in the flesh by human hands - remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, which is the Law composed of commandments expressed in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, in this way establishing peace; and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the

cross, by it having put to death the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

† This passage destroys the idea that Gentiles must remain permanently outside the covenant blessings promised through Israel.

† Paul openly says that Gentiles had once been strangers to the covenants of promise, but then he announces the change: But now in Christ Jesus those who were far away had been brought near.

† They weren't brought near by physical descent, circumcision, Torah observance, or becoming ethnic Jews. They were brought near by the blood of Christ.

† Christ made the two into one. Paul doesn't describe two covenant peoples permanently separated by ethnicity. He describes one new humanity reconciled to God in one body.

† Both have access to the Father through the same Spirit. That is New Covenant reality.

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

† Paul doesn't leave the Gentiles standing outside the door. They are no longer strangers and foreigners.

† They became fellow citizens and members of God's household. The old distinction governing covenant access had been removed in Christ.

† This also connects directly with fulfilled eschatology. God's dwelling place was no longer centered in the physical temple at Jerusalem. His people together became His dwelling in the Spirit (John 4:21-24).

† The earthly temple was approaching destruction while the true temple in Christ was being established. AD 70 didn't destroy God's kingdom, it publicly demonstrated the removal of the obsolete covenantal system.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer doesn't tell believers that they might someday come to Mount Zion. He says they had come to Mount Zion.

† This Zion isn't the geographical mountain of the Old Covenant system. It is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

† At the center of this heavenly reality stands Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant.

† This is why fulfilled eschatology matters. The New Covenant isn't merely a replacement document. It represents entrance into the heavenly kingdom reality established through Christ.

† The old Jerusalem was approaching judgment, while believers were being identified with the heavenly Jerusalem that couldn't be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-28).

Galatians 4:26-31

But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written: "Rejoice, infertile one, you who do not give birth; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For the children of the desolate one are more numerous Than those of the one who has a husband." And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is even now. But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave woman and her son, For the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the

free woman." So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.

† Paul identifies two Jerusalems and two covenantal realities. The Jerusalem of his day represented bondage, while the Jerusalem above represented freedom (Galatians 4:21-25).

† The inheritance wasn't secured by physical descent. Paul contrasts what was according to the flesh with what was according to the Spirit.

† The command to cast out the slave woman and her son points toward the removal of the Old Covenant order that was still persecuting the children of promise.

† This reached its historical covenantal climax when Jerusalem and its temple fell in AD 70. The earthly covenant center disappeared, but the Jerusalem above remained.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, that is, Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

† The New Covenant isn't temporary. Hebrews calls it the eternal covenant.

† The Old Covenant had an appointed conclusion because it was designed to lead to Christ. The covenant established through Christ doesn't have another covenant waiting to replace it.

† This is why we shouldn't take the fulfilled New Covenant and force it backward into an ethnic system that Christ fulfilled and surpassed.

† We live under the reign of the risen Shepherd whose covenant is everlasting. His kingdom doesn't expire, and His covenant doesn't need another replacement (Daniel 7:14; Luke 1:32-33).

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† Revelation brings the covenant story to its intended destination. The imagery is New Covenant imagery, New Jerusalem, the bride, God's dwelling, and God's people.

† Revelation doesn't end by restoring believers to the Old Covenant Jerusalem. It presents New Jerusalem as the covenantal dwelling of God with His people.

† This fulfills the movement seen throughout the New Testament from the earthly and temporary to the heavenly and everlasting (Hebrews 12:22-28).

† The New Covenant was promised within Israel's history, established by Israel's Messiah, opened to the nations through the gospel, and fully revealed as the everlasting kingdom reality of God's people in Christ.

Historical References

† Josephus records the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, including the burning of the sanctuary and the collapse of the city that had stood at the center of the Old Covenant world, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, chapters 4-6, and Book 7, chapter 1.

† Josephus wasn't explaining Christian covenant theology, but his historical account documents the first-century destruction of the temple system against the background of Jesus' warnings concerning Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24).

† Eusebius connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the judgments Christ had announced and recorded the tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the war, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, chapters 5-7.

† These historical witnesses don't establish our doctrine, Scripture does. They confirm that the Jerusalem, temple,

priesthood, and sacrificial world central to the Old Covenant actually came to its catastrophic historical end in the first century.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't live waiting for the New Covenant to arrive. We live in the reality Christ established.

† We don't need an earthly Jerusalem, an earthly temple, an earthly priesthood, or animal sacrifices to approach God. Through Jesus Christ we have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18).

† We don't become God's people through ethnicity. Our identity is centered in Christ, and everyone who belongs to Christ shares in the promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

† We live as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and members of God's household, with Jesus Christ Himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24).

† The New Covenant promise began within Israel's covenant story, but its fulfillment in Christ can't be imprisoned within ethnic boundaries that the apostles explicitly declared had been overcome in Him.

† The gospel still goes to the nations. People still come to Christ. People still receive forgiveness, reconciliation, and access to the Father through Him.

† We aren't living after God's covenant plan ended. We're living in the everlasting kingdom that God's covenant plan was designed to establish.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was the New Covenant originally promised specifically to the house of Israel and the house of Judah?

A: Yes. Jeremiah explicitly names the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). We shouldn't deny what the text says. The issue is whether the completed New Covenant remains ethnically restricted after Christ established it and brought Gentiles near through His blood (Ephesians 2:11-

18).

Q: Does including Gentiles mean they became ethnic Israelites?

A: No. Paul continues to distinguish Jews and Gentiles ethnically while declaring them one in Christ. His point isn't that Greeks became ethnic Jews, but that both received equal covenant standing in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:14-18).

Q: If Gentiles were strangers to the covenants, how can they participate in New Covenant blessings?

A: Paul answers that directly. They were once strangers, but now in Christ Jesus those who were far away were brought near by Christ's blood (Ephesians 2:12-13).

Q: What does AD 70 have to do with the New Covenant?

A: Hebrews says the Old Covenant had become obsolete and was near to disappearing (Hebrews 8:13). The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 historically removed the earthly system associated with that covenant age, while Christ's kingdom and New Covenant remained.

Q: Are we waiting for another covenant to replace the New Covenant?

A: No. Scripture calls it the eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20). Christ's kingdom is everlasting, and believers now belong to the heavenly Jerusalem and the kingdom that can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:22-28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13; Luke 22:20; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:11-18; Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews

12:22-24; Galatians 4:26-31; Hebrews 13:20-21; Revelation 21:2-3

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book 6, chapters 4-6; Book 7, chapter 1; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7

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