



**A Simplified Look at a
Complicated Belief**

Part III

The New Testament

Session 20

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Part 20 – The New Covenant and Baptism

A Reminder of the Old Covenant

The Bible tells us that God wants to have a real relationship with people. His relationships are always based on promises, and He can always be trusted to do the things He has promised. God's main aim throughout history has been to have a people who will live in the place He has prepared for them under His rule enjoying His blessings

The way God has done this has been through covenants, which are special agreements with a group of people based on promises.

This “Old Covenant” was given in three stages:

1. Abraham (2000 BC) – God gave three promises to Abraham, who was the fore-father of the nation of Israel:

- a. That his descendants would possess the land of Canaan (Palestine)
- b. That he would have many descendants who would be a great nation
- c. That all nations on earth would be blessed through his descendants

2. Moses (1440 BC) – the nation of Israel received the Law of God, which showed them three things:

- a. Moral laws – showing them what is right and wrong
- b. Ceremonial laws – rules about how to worship God by making sacrifices
- c. Civil laws – rules about how to govern the nation of Israel

3. King David (1000 BC) – God added an additional promise, that David’s family would be kings forever.

For their part, the nation of Israel had to respond to the Covenant in faith and obedience. The Old Testament is the story of how sometimes they did this and at other times they did not.

The New Testament is the Old Testament Covenant fulfilled in Jesus

The Old Covenant was fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah:

1. He was the descendant of Abraham who brings blessing to people of all nations

2. He fulfilled the Law of Moses
 - a. He was perfect and sinless, keeping the moral laws

 - b. He was the one sacrifice for sins forever, fulfilling the ceremonial laws

3. He was the descendant of David who will be a King forever

As a result, followers of Jesus have a different kind of relationship with the Law than Israel had:

a. Moral laws – the standard of right and wrong has not changed, as it is based on God’s unchanging character, but Christians do not try to become holy by obeying a written set of rules. Instead we have a new power inside that enables us to do what is right and to avoid wrong

b. Ceremonial laws – we no longer need to make sacrifices to worship God, as Jesus died as our perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-28) and Christians no longer need to be circumcised or to avoid certain foods

These laws were signs pointing forward to Jesus and now that He has come they are no longer needed

c. Civil laws – these laws were intended specially for the nation of Israel. Christians must be good citizens of whatever State they live in

The New Covenant promised and established Jeremiah's vision of a New Covenant

In around 600 BC, God gave a vision to the prophet Jeremiah. He foresaw a day when a new relationship with God would be possible – a New Covenant. He wrote about this in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

This New Covenant would not be like the Old Covenant which the people of Israel had broken but under it:

1. God's Laws would be written on the minds and hearts of His people
2. God would be their God and all of His people would know Him in a personal way
3. God will forgive their wickedness and never again remember their sins

Jesus instituted the New Covenant, which is sealed with His blood

Jesus spoke about this New Covenant on the night before His death

²⁰ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.

-Luke 22:20 NLT

Jesus was claiming that the New Covenant promised 600 years earlier by Jeremiah was about to begin, and that it would be established because of His death on the cross.

31 “The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. 32 This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.

33 “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

-Jeremiah 31:31-34 NLT

Key Questions:

- What is the relationship Christians have with God like?

- Do Christians have to follow the Old Testament Law?

The Epistle to the Hebrews

We believe Hebrews was written for Jewish Christians who lived in Jerusalem.

The author of Hebrews does not name himself. Paul has been suggested as the author by some scholars, but the true author remains anonymous.

Hebrews was written before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Best guess is late 64 CE or early 65 CE

Its purpose was to exhort Christians to persevere in the face of persecution.

The central theme of the epistle is the doctrine of the Person of Christ and His role as mediator between God and humanity.

Jesus fulfilled the New Covenant as its High Priest, Sacrifice and Mediator

The book of Hebrews takes up the theme of the New Covenant. It was written to Jewish people who were deciding whether to follow Jesus or to stay in the Jewish religion. The writer compares the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.

In Hebrews 8:10-12 he quotes from Jeremiah chapter 31. The letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as:

i. The High Priest of the New Covenant – Jesus is the One who made the sacrifice for sins that makes it possible for them to be forgiven (Hebrews 8:1-6). Jesus is a better High Priest than the High Priests in the Old Testament, because He is actually present in heaven before God, and is alive forever to save us.

ii. The sacrifice of the New Covenant – Jesus was also the sacrifice that was made to bring the New Covenant into place. He offered Himself up as a sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 9:11-14). Jesus was the perfect sacrifice that paid for all sins once for all because He was sinless and He was both God and man.

iii. The mediator of the New Covenant – A mediator is a person who brings two people together. Jesus brings us into a new relationship with God on the terms of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15, 24-28). He is alive forever to ensure that this relationship lasts, and He will come again in the future to take us to live with God.

The promises of the New Covenant for Christians

This Covenant depends on God's promises to us and what He has done for us, not what we have done for Him. In Christ, the three promises of the New Covenant are true for every Christian:

1. God's laws in our minds and hearts –

This promise speaks of the work of the **Holy Spirit** in our lives. He changes us from the inside out (Romans 12:2). He makes our minds more like Jesus' mind so that we begin to think more like Him, and He makes our hearts more like Jesus' heart so that we begin to desire the things God wants. This is the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. So, instead of trying to keep a set of written standards like the Old Testament Law in our own power, Christians seek to be filled by and led by the Holy Spirit who gives us power to obey the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

2. All people will know God personally –

All Christians can know God in a personal way as our Father. Unlike the people of Israel in the Old Testament, we do not need priests to stand between God and us. Instead, we can come into God's presence through Jesus. So, when Christians pray we are promised that God will hear us, and will answer our prayers in the way that He sees to be best. As Christians we have a personal, living relationship with God.

3. Our wickedness forgiven and our sins never remembered again –

Because Jesus has taken the punishment for our sins and paid the price for their forgiveness, we can never be found guilty of our sins or punished for them. We are declared not guilty before God because of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

The sign of the New Covenant – the Lord’s Supper (also known as “communion” or “breaking of bread”)

Every covenant has a sign to remind the people with whom it is made about the promises God has given them, and the sign of the New Covenant is the Lord’s Supper.

19 He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.” **-Luke 22:19,20 NLT**

In I Corinthians 11:23-34, Paul taught the church in Corinth about the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper reminds us that our faith is only in Christ, that His death is our only hope of salvation, and that we need to keep living in obedience to Him.

Water Baptism

The Lord's Supper is one of only two things (sometimes called "ordinances") that Jesus specifically commanded Christians to do (in addition to loving one another!)

Baptism was practiced by John the Baptist as a sign that the people who he baptized had repented of their sins and wanted to follow God's ways. Jesus told His disciples that they should baptize all new Christians.

Different churches have different views about baptism (especially whether babies of Christians can be baptized and whether the person should be immersed in water or sprinkled with it).

Most Christian denomination's believe that only the baptism of people who have personally believed by immersion fulfills the biblical pattern.

Baptism is a very powerful picture of what God has done in a person's life (see Romans 6:3-14 for Paul's teaching on this):

a) Going under the water is like dying with Jesus – the person has become a true follower of Jesus, taking up their cross to follow Him (Matthew 18:24-26). They have died to their own selfish ambition and have accepted Jesus as their Lord, promising to follow Him always. Their sins have been forgiven because of the death of Jesus.

b) Coming up out of the water is like being raised to new life with Jesus – the Christian has entered into a new, living relationship with God. The Holy Spirit has come to live in their life to give them power to live for God, making them spiritually alive. From now on they will live for Jesus, making obedience to Him their first priority.

Although baptism is not necessary for a person to become a Christian, and it is only an outward sign of the spiritual reality of what God has done, it is expected by Jesus as an act of obedience and a sign to the whole world that the person now belongs to Him. Christians are only baptized once. If you are a Christian, why not be baptized?

Key Lesson: Christians receive the promises of the New Covenant through Jesus

Jesus made a New Covenant with those who trust in Him – through it our sins are forgiven forever, we know God personally, and God changes us by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. There are two things Jesus commanded Christians to do: baptism (becoming a witness to Christ) and the Lord's Supper (a regular way to remember Jesus).

