

COVENANT: Unpacking A Biblical Motif
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COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSITION

Jeremiah 31:31–34

- v. 31 - “House of Israel and House of Judah” - reunited people of God
- v. 32 – the people, (NOT YAHWEH) were responsible for breaking the covenant
- v. 33 – the new covenant supersedes the old covenant in the sense that the old is now fulfilled and its purpose achieved: “I will be their God and they will be my people.”
- v. 34 - “I will forgive...”

Letter to the Hebrews (unknown author, not Paul)

- 8:8-13 primarily quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, **but** adds new thought in verse 13
- 9:11-23 Because of what He has accomplished, Christ is called “the mediator of the new covenant” - “that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” v. 16
- Notice the terms: high priest, tabernacle, blood, sacrifice, and covenant. Each asserts what has taken place through Christ. The author of Hebrews is using the term “covenant” as one way among many of describing what happened through Jesus Christ.

The Last Supper Narratives (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

- The most obvious tie to older covenants is in the words “new covenant” which refers to the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Matthew 26:28 underlies this tie: the blood “is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” and “I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” It points to the binding nature of things established by God and based on the forgiveness of sins.

- The Eucharistic words refer to the “blood of the covenant” going back to Exodus 24:8. In Exodus, these words help bring the curse into effect; the people are identified with the victim, whose fate will be theirs if they sin. In the Eucharistic words, the emphasis is not on bringing them under the curse but rather of a sacrifice on their behalf. The real link is to the new covenant of forgiveness of which Jeremiah spoke.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the definition of a sacrament?

“A Sacrament is a sacred, or holy, act, instituted by God Himself, in which there are certain visible means connected with His word, and by which God offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us.” Luther, Small Catechism

- What are the “Means of Grace” and what does the phrase mean?

God has promised to come to all through the means of grace: the Word and the sacraments of Christ's institution. The grace promised to us includes the gifts of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the promise of eternal life with God.

- What are the benefits of the Lord's Supper? (Luther)

The words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin" show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.

- How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? (Luther)

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."