

Covenant, part 3: the New Covenant

Recap

1 First session I opened up the whole theme of covenant, *berith*. We defined covenant as

- **An irrevocable, self-sacrificial commitment between two parties to mutual terms of agreement , sealed by a vow or oath.**

2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,2.5 We saw that there were many examples of covenant in the Scriptures, between men and men, but notably between man and God. These covenants are made on behalf of man by God, who promises, who vows to bless all the nations, especially through His covenant with Abraham.

3 We saw also that there are four elements to the rite of covenant – **3.1**sacrifice, **3.2**vow, **3.3**sign and **3.4**meal.

4 In the second session, we looked at the obligation which results from the making of covenant, contained in the Hebrew word *chesed*.

5 We looked at the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Sam.9, and that he was restored to his father's lost lands and adopted as David's son, all because of David's intent to do *chesed*, to do right by Jonathan's descendants, because of the covenant made with him in 1 Sam.18.

6 We saw that *chesed* is an essential part of God's make-up and character, and when in Ex.34.6, God reveals Himself to Moses in all His full glory or weight, He reveals Himself as *rich in chesed, self-sacrificial covenant obligation* and truth. **7** And the constant refrain of Israel throughout her journey is that the *chesed* of the Lord goes on forever, He is always faithful to His covenant.

The *Renewed* Covenant

8 I have a precious book, shown here, which I found in a pile of old clothes on Kibbutz in the north of Israel in 1978. It is a Hebrew Bible, or *tanakh*, but the reason it had been thrown away so unceremoniously was because of the last section of the book; the

8.1 *Berit Chadashah* – it has the new covenant , the New Testament in Hebrew.

The word *chadash* in Hebrew can mean both new and renewed; it is 'made new'. So the covenant we find in the New Covenant is not a brand new, disconnected basis of covenant, rather it is a renewal of the old, an update, an upgrade, a superceding. (Like a Covenant version 2.0 of the old one, a covenant 33AD, rather than a Covenant BC1500 version!)

Abraham's Seed

9It's important that we realize that the New Covenant is still unbreakably linked with the covenant with Abraham that we looked at last time.

Paul says of us that we are the descendants of Abraham by faith. Because we have received the promise, we are part of that blessing of all nations. The covenant with Abraham is still the activating agreement that all the others are based on. But that covenant has been modified, upgraded and deepened in its scope. In fact, the first one, with Israel, went very wrong, when Israel refused its terms, and started to act faithlessly with God, for her part.

10 God then promised, through Jeremiah and others, a new covenant; not one written on stone, like the commandments, but one written in hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Jer 31.31) This is what Jesus was about, to stop the failure and legalism of the old terms of the covenant. But God's heart was still the same – to bless all nations as the God of Abraham.

What Jesus does is He takes the key elements of the Old Covenant and updates them in Himself. We are looking then for the sacrifice, the oath, the sign and the meal, elements of the covenant making. And we are looking for the New Testament outworking of *chesed* and where we find that.

11 The Meal

In this covenant, the meal comes first, in many ways. But this meal is no ordinary meal . I talked about this covenant being an upgrade of the Old, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the Last Supper. Now there is discussion among scholars whether this was the actual Passover meal or not, and the timing of it is a question for debate, but to me **11.1** it is clear that what Jesus was doing was taking elements of the covenant meal of the Jews, celebrated each year as the commemoration of their salvation from Egypt, and extending them beyond just Israel to the nations, through the promise of His own sacrifice.

I can't go into all the intricacies of the Passover or Seder meal tonight. It is full of symbolism. **12** But on the Passover table lies a pouch or a cloth covering three unleavened *matzot* wafers. No one really knows why three – most scholars say they represent the patriarchs, Abraham , Isaac and Jacob. At a certain point in the meal, the middle one of these wafers is taken – Isaac, the son of promise – and is broken, covered in a cloth and hidden away, to be produced later and eaten by everyone. Just like Jesus would be killed, buried and would rise again. None of this would be lost on them.

13 It seems that this is the bread that Jesus takes, and breaks it and gives it to them, saying, take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. He changes the whole meaning of the act in the Passover meal, and makes it a new covenant act.

14 Then, on the table are several cups, four in fact.(sanctification, justice, redemption and praise.) Jesus in the story takes the first cup before supper (Luke 22.17) the cup of sanctification , and with this, He sets Himself apart for what God has for Him. Then, after supper, He takes the third cup (Luke 22.20) the cup of redemption, but the suggestion is that he takes the cup which normally stands undrunk, the Elijah cup or the Messiah's cup, and says, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, poured for the removal of sins for you and for many. Do this in commemoration of me.' Jesus has changed the meaning of Passover for ever. But it is still the covenant meal of God's people.

15 The sacrifice comes next; Jesus is crucified, most likely on the 14th Nisan, the day when the Passover lamb is slain. The whole event is full of meaning. And one thing to note- Jesus' body is not hewn in two, but something is – what is it? The veil of the temple. And we are told in Hebrews that his flesh is the veil – Hebs 10.20, a new and living way through the veil, torn in two, which is His flesh.

16 The oath comes at the end of the story;
I am with you, always, until the end of the age. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do – this is His promise, which cannot be broken. Whoever believes in me, will have everlasting life. All these are the promises made through that New Covenant.

17 And the sign is in His resurrection; Jesus, back from the dead, still carries the wounds in his hands and feet – they are not taken away; they are the marks of his covenant. And we shall have a body like His – that's the sign of this covenant. Resurrection life in Him. He is just the first sign of all.

And there is another seal, the Holy Spirit given to us as an earnest, a deposit on the eternal life to come (2 Corinthian 1.22 – arrabhon, pledge). He enables to call the Father, Daddy... and He is with us always.

Doesn't that thrill you? When the writer to the Hebrews says,

You have come...to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than Abel.

He is telling us that we have a part in this Jesus, we are his covenanted people, his friends. And this commitment to us, to you, is irrevocable, not negotiable. Why, not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done.

Chesed New Testament Style

18 And that is where this book comes in again, this battered old Tanakh with the Berit Chadashah. Because as I got so excited about *chesed* in the Old Testament, one day, a thought came to me. **18.1** What happened to *chesed* in the New Testament? It is such a key facet of the OT understanding of God's character.

Then, I had an inkling. I went the Hebrew translation of the NT in the back of my old book, where the word grace appears in English, and it knocked my socks off, because **18.2** I found that the translators of the Hebrew New Testament have used *chesed* everywhere that Greek *cháris*, grace is used! Think about that – we have had a concept of grace being the favour of God on a whim, out of His emotion, His love. But no, in the eyes of Jewish believers in Messiah, there is only one word which will explain this awesome self-sacrificial obligation of God, the word *chesed*.

19 Then something else made perfect sense; when we go to John 1.14, where we read that the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, we find the Hebrew translators fitting in a piece of the puzzle that makes me go Hallelujah! **19.1** Because , just like God's revelation of His nature to Moses in Ex.34, Jesus is rich in *chesed* and truth, *emet* – He is just like His Father, He has the attributes of God!

So, amazing grace is amazing *chesed* – the self-sacrificial obligation of God to us because of the blood sacrifice of Jesus the lamb of God on the cross, marked forever in His hands, feet and side in His wounds, and given to us in the covenant meal of bread and wine, each time we take it.

Conclusion

Can you see this now? This means that we come to Jesus never on the basis of our worth, our power to believe, or even our knowledge of Him. We come always on the basis of this covenant and the *chesed*-grace of God, embodied for us at the throne of

the God in the hands feet and side of our risen high priest, Jesus Christ, who is the satisfaction for our sins.

We come, then, in complete reliance on His provision, and in complete trust in His covenant and grace. We can ask because He has self-sacrificially bound Himself to our provision. We can come for healing, for deliverance, for relief, for refreshment, because of Jesus and His blood.

I want to sing a song the Lord gave me at the beginning of this year, which sums up this incredible gift of love in Christ and the story of the covenant fulfilled.

24 The blessing from Hebrews 13.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

Heb 13:21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

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Em D C G
20 To our forefather Abraham God made a vow
 Em D C D G
 Through his offspring to bless all the earth somehow,
 G D C B7
 Sparing Isaac his son, God provided a ram
 Em D C D Em
 Pointing forward to Jesus Christ, His perfect Lamb

Em C
Covenant wounds before the Father's throne
Am Em C
In the hands, feet and side of the Risen Son,
Em C
Covenant grace pouring from above –
Am D Em
How overwhelming the song of covenant love!

21 To His prophet Isaiah God revealed His plan
 To take all the weight of darkness in a single man;
 Without murmur to the slaughter comes the sinless Son
 To undo the traps of evil, freeing everyone.

22 On an awesome day at Calvary God gave His Son,
 On a shameful Roman cross His greatest work was done –
 Adam's sons and daughters paid for, ending evil's reign,
 So He rolled away the tombstone, and He rose again!

23 To John the beloved God unveiled the sight
 Of the host of heaven worshipping in holy light;
 Looking for a conquering lion, he beheld a lamb,
 Slain in sacrifice, God's vow fulfilled to Abraham.