

Understanding the New Covenant

by Alan Martin

This sermon delves into the significance of the old covenant and the new covenant, drawing parallels between the contracts God made with His people. It explores the history of God's interactions with individuals like Noah, Abraham, and the nation of Israel, highlighting the challenges of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. The sermon emphasizes the need for God to inscribe His laws on our hearts in the new covenant, contrasting it with the struggles of the people under the old covenant.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31, Deuteronomy 6:4, Exodus 19:3, Hebrews 8:7, Romans 12:2

Topics: "Covenant Relationships", "Obedience and Disobedience"

Description

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Transcript

Because we are going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper today, I just thought I would tie the old covenant and the new covenant together, especially for some of those who may not understand all that the Lord's Supper signifies. First of all, that biblical word covenant, what does that mean? What is a covenant? We know our Bibles are divided into the Testament, there's another word way to describe it, Old Testament, New Testament, Old Covenant, New Covenant. But for us, I think the best understanding in our language for covenant is a contract.

There's an old contract that God made with his people, and there's a new contract. You need to understand that. And in a contract, there are conditions, there are stipulations for both sides.

In the old covenant that God made with the people of Israel, that occurred on Mount Sinai. God had worked with a certain family line from the time of Adam. From Adam's son Seth, who was born after Cain killed his brother Abel.

The line of Seth had men that knew God. One of the most famous ones was a man named Enoch, who walked with God. Enoch was the great, great grandfather of Noah.

Enoch was a righteous man who prophesied for a long time. Because it was during the days of Enoch, and the generations then, that the people on earth became more and more wicked. And Enoch would prophesy as a servant of God, predicting coming judgment.

And his son would listen to his father prophesy. Enoch's son was Methuselah. Methuselah was Noah's grandfather.

So Noah, the Bible says, that during the days when the violence filled the earth, and the thoughts of men's heart were wicked continuously, so much so that it grieved the Lord that he made men. But during this same time, Noah, who the Bible says was a preacher of righteousness, so he was carrying on like his great grandfather, and probably like his grandfather, preaching righteousness to the wicked world around him. And the Bible says that even though the entire world was filled with wickedness, and God was grieved that he had even made mankind, Noah found grace in the eyes of God.

Because he was an upright man, holy in his generation, who served the Lord in a complete way, that even the Scripture says he was a perfect man, righteous in the sight of God. And so God determined to restart over. The earth had become so corrupt, he was going to destroy most life on earth.

Most life that has the breath in its nostrils. Not necessarily the amphibious life, but all mammals. But Noah and his family found grace in the eyes of God, so God warned Noah, and told him what was coming, and gave him the means to prepare for the coming judgment.

That's the whole story about Noah and the Ark. And so God's covenant, working with this family line, down Noah's family line comes another man we're familiar with, a man named Abraham. And God revealed himself to Abraham, and called him to leave the civilization he was living in, in the Ur of the Chaldees, and become a nomad.

And God revealed himself a number of times through Abraham. Abraham had a wife. He was 75 years old when the Lord appeared to him when he was living in Ur of the Chaldees.

And the Lord told him that he was to come, follow him, leave your family, leave your civilization, leave your relatives, come to the place I'll show you. And the Lord told him, I'm going to make you a father of many nations. Well he had been married a long time because it says that his wife was barren.

She didn't have children. But he obeyed the Lord and he came into the land we call the land of Canaan, the Middle East there, where the nation of Israel and Palestine and those are today. And he lived there as a nomad a number of years.

And from the time that God promised him that he would bless him and make him a father of many nations, to the time he actually had a son with his wife Sarah was nearly 25 years. And it turned out to be a miracle child because God made him so long. The fact that Abraham was nearly 100 years old and that his wife was 90 years old and had not had a single child in 45, 50 years of marriage.

And that came forth Isaac, the child of promise, Abraham's son. And through the line of Isaac, Isaac and his wife Rebecca had a set of twins, Jacob and Esau. Remember, though, the two fins twins that fought together in the mother's womb.

Well, the Lord continued to work with the family of Jacob. And to the point where and in Jacob's life, the Lord revealed himself to Jacob and Jake. There was a there's an account in the Old Testament where

Jacob wrestles with an angel.

And the angel has to break the socket in almost paralyzed, paralyzed his his thigh in that sciatica there. And so Jacob leaves this wrestling with God permanently, slightly disabled. But his name is changed during that encounter from Jacob to Israel, Israel.

And that's where the head of the people of Israel comes from. And Israel had 11 sons. And but, you know, but you're probably thinking, but I thought there were 12 tribes of Israel.

That's right. Jacob had 11 sons or Israel had 11 sons. But his son Joseph had two sons and his two sons become part of the tribes of Israel.

So it's the other 10 brothers and Joseph's two sons formed the 12 tribes of Israel. And, you know, the story of Joseph, how through the through Joseph receiving and interpreting dreams and being hated by his brothers and sent down to the land of Egypt, they sold them. And he became a servant to the guard, the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, a guy named Potiphar.

And Potiphar's wife took a liking to Joseph and tried to get him to sleep with her. He refused, but he caught her. She caught him alone in the house one day.

She tried to get him, drag him into bed. He had to run. But when he left, she had hold of his coat.

And she realized in the situation she's in, she screams, makes a big theatrical presentation of what he was trying to do to her. And even though his master Potiphar had loved him and his entire house was blessed, he was filled with rage and had had Joseph thrown in a special prison, not just a regular prison, the prison where the Pharaoh's prisoners go. And it was through being in that prison.

Jacob B. Joseph meets the baker and the cupbearer and ends up interpreting their dreams. After several years still in prison, the cupbearer remembers when Pharaoh has this dream about this strange dream the Bible talks about that was letting them know a famine was coming. And Joseph ends up interpreting that dream to Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh makes him second in charge over all of the land of Egypt. And through that, during the great days of famine, Joseph's family and his brothers are forced to come to Egypt to buy food. And it turns out that God in his goodness had sent Joseph down to Egypt, even using his hatred and jealousy of his brothers, ends up saving the family.

And the nation of Israel, the 12 tribes of Israel, end up living in the land of Egypt. And that's where the book of Exodus starts. All of that was just the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

Exodus begins with the people of Israel had been living in Egypt 400 years. And long since they forgot about Joseph, the Egyptians forgot about Joseph. And they saw the people of Israel as a labor force.

And they forced them into slave labor. And for hundreds of years, the people of Israel were being enslaved and abused and mistreated by the Egyptians. And that's where the Lord appears to the person we know as Moses.

And Moses, as a servant and chosen of the Lord, is given dynamic authority and power walking with the Lord. And through that, you remember the story of the 10 plagues, where the Lord literally brings judgment upon Egypt. He humbles their gods, humbles their priests, humbles their people to the point where he

ultimately kills the firstborn.

A firstborn male from every house in Egypt. And at that point, the entire country is broken. And through that, the people of Israel leave with Egyptian jewels and money.

It's like the people of Egypt said, get out of here, take everything. We don't want you here. And suddenly, the people of Israel are now on a journey being led by Moses.

You remember the story of the Red Sea. They come eventually to Mount Sinai. And here is where the first covenant that we know of called the law.

The covenant of the law, where we get the Ten Commandments, where God himself descends onto Mount Sinai. And with his own voice declares the Ten Sayings. We call them commandments.

But actually, in the original language, they're just the ten words. God speaks. And what thou shalt not and what thou shalt do.

The things you should do and the things you shouldn't do. And that's when the people, literally hearing the voice of God, it sounded like thunder. And it shook.

It shook the earth. They were so terrified. They begged Moses to not have God speak to them anymore.

But said, you go. You meet with God. You listen to him.

You come back and tell us what he says. Because we're afraid we're going to die if he speaks to us anymore. And that is the story where Moses goes up and meets with God.

And we have the first covenant. The covenant of the law. It's called the law of God or it's also called the law of Moses.

What the people of Israel have considered their law from the time of the Exodus till now. And in this law, God, at this time that is, God makes a special covenant with the nation of Israel. And I want you to remember that.

We know and appreciate the ten commandments. But this covenant was with the nation of Israel. With the actual physical descendants of Israel.

The twelve tribes. He said, speak to the sons of Israel and say to them. And this is the covenant that God made with them.

He said to them, I will be your God. You will be my special people. That's the agreement I am making with you today.

I redeemed you out of the land of Egypt. And I've called you to myself. And I want to enter into a contract with you.

I will be your God. I will be your protector. I will be with you.

I will cause you to be blessed. I will make sure your cattle, your crops, your families are under my protection. You will enjoy a special favor.

I will give you my instructions. Instructions that will, if you follow, it will go well with you. There will be justice and righteousness and fairness for the foreigner, for the widow, for the orphan, for the poor.

You will be a people who are blessed. And my name will be made great through the relationship we have. If you follow my words, my instructions, it will go well with you.

And here's what I ask of you. That's the Lord's side of the contract to them. And here's the stipulations he asks of them.

First of all, hear, listen. That's number one. If you're going to be stubborn and you're not going to listen, you're not even going to get off on the right track.

You're not even on first base. You're going to strike out right there. Hear, O Israel.

Shema Yisrael. Adonai Eloheinu. Adonai Echad.

Hear, O Israel. The Lord is one. The Lord is our God.

He is one. And he told them, here's what I want. I want you to love me with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and all your might, and all your strength.

And I want the words that I'm speaking to you to be upon your heart and on your mind. I want you to make effort to remember them. Make things and bind them on your hands.

Make things and write them and bind them on your heads. Write remembrances for yourself on your doorpost so that when you leave your house and you enter your house, my laws will always be where you can remember them. Hear them.

Learn them. And be careful to do them. Because you don't understand that the nations that you're going into, the nations that I'm leading you into, the special promised land, the nations there have ideas about God that came from their own vain imagination.

They know there's something made this, but all of those nations have idols, images, that came from their own concepts. Concepts that they created on their own. And he tells them, I don't want you to ever make an attempt to make an image of me.

There is no way there's any image you could make could represent who I am. Don't you worship me like they worship their God. They do detestable things.

Things that I don't want you to do. Follow my instructions so that you don't conform your ways to the way they do things. And when you enter into the promised land and you see their temples and you see their idols, you be sure you smash them.

You destroy them because if you adapt their practices, it's going to corrupt you. And it's going to ruin you. And it's not going to go well with you.

And your life is going to become miserable. And it's going to be a violation of the contract we are having today. That's the arrangement.

That's the first covenant. And what's the history of that covenant? How did that actually play out? Those of you who read your Old Testament and know this people had a propensity to ignore instructions. The

people of Israel were famously stubborn.

And they they entered in the land of Canaan. And here they're given these beautiful, these beautiful laws of God. This wisdom of God.

These laws that are designed to protect the family. To bring order in society. Laws that are designed to even keep those who sit in authority in check and not abusing their power.

Laws that were designed to treat everyone with fairness. Laws that were good for men. That were good for animals.

That were good for crops. Laws that made provisions when you got poor. And you could even have your debts canceled.

I mean wonderful laws. And yet this people continually ignored them. And were drawn to conform to the practices of the nations that were around them.

What was God to do then? There was one. This isn't the provision that God had made. It's so important.

And you need to kind of understand this. Because this highlights the difference between that covenant and the new covenant that we celebrate. That we're a part of.

In that covenant there was one book of the law. One book. Moses wrote down what God spoke and put it.

One book and he gave it to the priest. And the priest put that book into the ark of the covenant. And they kept one copy of that book at the temple.

So how in the world is an entire nation of people supposed to learn and remember the things written. The stipulations of the contract of the covenant that's in that one book. God in His wisdom designed certain things.

He gave them so many ways to help them remember. The first thing He gave them something every week to remember. I'm the one who makes you holy.

I'm the one who made heaven and earth. What did He give them every single week to remind them who He was and who they were? The Sabbath. One day out of every seven you set aside and do no work.

And you remember. I am the Lord who makes you holy. I am the one who gives you strength.

I am the one from whom all your blessings come. And you use that day to remind yourself of my stipulations. Talk about my instructions.

You make sure you get them upon your heart. Because what they have to do is they have to talk about them. The priests have to teach them.

The fathers have to hear them, learn them, and pass it on to their children. It was their responsibility to get the instructions to their hearts and to their minds. And they continually fail to do so.

They didn't just have weekly reminders. They had monthly reminders. Every month they had a new moon celebration.

To remind them that God is the one who creates all the cycles on the earth. The four seasons and the turning of the moon. They're all His.

Every month they were to celebrate the fact that God is God, the creator of the universe. Not only did they have one every month. Quarterly, God made seven feasts.

Seven different feasts. Their year began. You know how their year began? Every single year.

Their new year began with the feast to remind them of where they started. As slaves in Egypt. It's called the Passover.

And that's actually the celebration that Jesus was celebrating with His disciples. At the Last Supper. It was the first of the year.

And He was honoring what the law said. That the 14th day of the first month of the year they would celebrate Passover. And did you know, unless you were born Jew, that you and I as Gentiles, we weren't even allowed to partake of Passover.

It wasn't for us. Now, if you wanted to join the Jews and you wanted to take part of Passover, you could. But you know what you had to do first? If you were a male, you had to get circumcised.

Not just you, but all your male sons and all your male servants. And then, if you chose to do that, you could partake of Passover. But you know what you did the rest of your life? You lived by the law.

You were a Jew now. You had become a Jew by faith. They called them a proselyte.

Devout proselytes, like we read about in the book of Acts. Many of those people became the first Christians that were devout Jews. Jews by choice.

Because they saw how good the laws were of the people of Israel. But for Gentiles, unless you did that, you couldn't even partake of Passover. But Passover was just one feast.

Then, what, a week, eight days after Passover, there's the Feast of First Fruit. On the Feast of First Fruit, here's what the Lord told them. They were to take some of the first grain of the year.

And before they started making any bread from that year's grain, they were to take this grain. And they were to wave it before the Lord. And you know what that was reminding them all? Where does my grain come from? Give us this day our daily bread.

Lord, you're the one who gives us our bread. You're the one who provides for us. You're the one who gives to us.

That was to remind them of that. He gave them so many helps to try to help them remember. Then there was, after that came the Feast of Week.

We call it Pentecost. Fifty weeks where, at this feast, the harvest time was happening. And there were great celebrations that took place during the Feast of Pentecost.

Then there was also the feast called the Day of Atonement. Where once a year, everyone was reminded that unless God gave you forgiveness for your sins, you would die. And on the Day of Atonement, the priest would bring out a special sacrificial animal and lay his head and transfer the sins of the people onto

the head of the animal.

And the animal was accepted as a sacrifice for the entire sins of the people. To picture them, to remind them that you need God's mercy in order for the covenant to continue to work. And then there was the Feast of Booths.

We call it the Feast of Tabernacles. Where they would actually leave their homes and they would live in tents. They would build their own tents to remind them of something.

Remember what it was reminding them of? How many years they spent in the wilderness, wondering. All of these things God did to help them remember. Remember.

Remember. Get my instructions. Remember my stipulations.

So that you can follow them. Because if you follow them, it will go well with you. And the history of these people, despite having all of those helps designed by God to help them learn and remember.

They still blew it continually. They would ignore. You know there were seasons since there was one book of the law where they lost it.

And then no one was reading it. See what would happen at these feasts when the men of Israel would go to the feast. They would read the law.

So four or five times a year the law was constantly being read. So I'm reminding you. It's kind of one of the things that we do here.

I hope to remind you of what God says so you don't forget. You don't want to be like that former people. Because they continually forgot the Lord.

And I think if you know your Bible, you know what was God to do. They started conforming to the people around them. They started worshipping other gods.

They started adopting their practices. They intermarried with their daughters. They became mingled among the people.

And they were mixing the things of God with the pagan practices all around them. And the Lord in His mercy would try to get their attention by raising up prophets. He would have a close relationship with their prophet.

And the prophet would love the Lord. And the prophet would go to the people and speak to them. And plead with them.

Listen. Look at what we've done. We've conformed to the nations around us.

We've abandoned the stipulations of the covenant. Let's return to the Lord. And the prophet would speak to them often.

And you know what the people did? Now you don't do that to me, do you? I don't see anybody doing that. But that doesn't mean you do it here. That doesn't mean it's not happening right here.

But Israel became a stubborn people. And when after speaking to them through the prophets and trying to turn them around for a long time. Then the Lord would get out His paddle.

And He had some pretty big paddles. He used either natural events. The Lord knows how to turn off the heavens and keep it from raining.

He would send drought. Not just drought. He would send plagues.

Blights. Mildew. Crop failures.

Livestock failures. Sicknesses. And when that didn't get their attention.

He would raise up another nation. And cause that nation to say, hey why don't we go down there and plunder the people of God. And God would use another nation like a paddle.

And paddle His own people. Sometimes, during the process, now and then. A man would raise up and recognize what was going on.

And a few people would listen to him. And they'd gather together and they'd humble themselves. And they'd return back to the covenant.

They'd confess their stubbornness and their waywardness. And God's blessing would come again for that generation. Sadly though, it didn't last.

That generation would just forget. And back to the conforming to the nations around them. You think the New Testament says without incidents that do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world? It's still a tendency of the people of God.

To conform to the pattern of the world instead of being transformed by the renewing of your mind. It's still a tendency. But the people of Israel became so corrupted.

And so polluted. And so disoriented. And so scattered throughout the rest of the world.

That finally through one of the prophets, God said, okay. This covenant is over. I'm going to make a new covenant.

And it's not going to be like the covenant that I made with the nation of Israel. When I brought them by the hand and delivered them from the land of Egypt. And I spoke to them from Mount Sinai.

Because their fathers and the people, they didn't remain in my covenant. They ignored the stipulations. So it's not going to be like that.

So I'm going to make a new covenant. And here's going to be my covenant with them. Now think about this first thing.

How were the stipulations supposed to be kept and learned and guarded? How were they supposed to? You had to hear. You had to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And then you had to do the things to help yourself remember.

You had to think about it. You had to make yourself remember, remember, remember. And they didn't do it.

So get to the first thing the Lord said about the new covenant. Here's the new covenant I'm going to make with them. I'm going to write my laws on their heart.

I'm not going to leave it up to you. And listen, I don't want you all thinking it's the preacher's job to get the law on your heart. Don't think like the people of the first covenant because they didn't do it either.

You can listen to me on Sunday and listen to your TVs the other six days of the week. That's not going to get the law of God on your heart. How does God write his law upon our hearts? And he said, I will write my law upon their hearts and I will write my law upon their minds.

And you know how God does that? He sends.

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