



## The New Covenant Pt. 3 Selected

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 8:1**...Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup> a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. <sup>3</sup> For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. <sup>4</sup> Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. <sup>5</sup> They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." <sup>6</sup> But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. <sup>7</sup> For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. <sup>8</sup> ¶ For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. <sup>10</sup> For this is the covenant that 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. <sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. <sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." <sup>13</sup> In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Now last week, I finally got to the point many of you had wanted me to get to for long time...I got to the point where I began a discussion of the differences between New Covenant Theology and Covenant Theology. That is, I began at last to talk about the different ways Reformed Baptists and Presbyterians look at the New Covenant. I started my talk using the text found in Hebrews 8, the place where the New Testament quotes Jeremiah 31.

I used Hebrews 8 to begin my discussion not because it is the only passage Reformed Baptists use to argue against Covenant Theology but because it is generally referred to by Reformed Baptists as the passage that once for all settles the matter about the radical disconnect between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant. If you do much perusing of the internet with regard to covenant theology you will see just how often Hebrews 8 comes up in the conversation and now you will understand why.

What I mean when I say that Reformed Baptists argue that there is a radical disconnect between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant is that they see no connection...no real connection between the Old Covenants and the New Covenant at all. What a number of Reformed Baptists argue is that the discontinuity indicated by Hebrews 8 is so strong that it means that the New Covenant has to be viewed in a radically different way than any of the preceding administrations of the covenant that none of the signs that went along with the previous covenants ought to be applied to New Covenant participants. In other words, they argue that while the earlier administrations of the covenant had attendant signs those signs have nothing to do with the New Covenant.

That is, they argue that while it is true that the Abrahamic Covenant had the eternal sign of circumcision and the Mosaic Covenant had its attendant signs... the Sabbath, Passover and circumcision picked up from its connection to the Abrahamic Covenant and implemented as a part of the descendants of Abrahams relationship with YHWH...the New Covenant is so new and so different than everything that went before that the previous signs are not only inappropriate but contrary to the point that the New Covenant is after all really "new".

What I have been arguing along the way and have argued in response is that the word "new" as it is typically used in Hebrew has the connotation of renewed more than it does anything else. I argued in response that when you see the word "new" you should probably think something like the new in "new moon" which is not actually pointing to a brand new moon but rather a new phase of the same old moon. What I have argued along the way is that the New Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant...are really pretty much the same thing. I have done that so many times that I am afraid I may have over saturated your ability to get my point.

You see what you have in Luke 2 is both Mary the mother of Jesus and Zechariah the father of John the Baptist saying pretty much the same thing and that is that the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 1:46**...And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown

strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of  
humble estate; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has  
sent away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his  
mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

And Zechariah continued the point...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 1:67**...And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and  
prophesied, saying, <sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and  
redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house  
of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of  
old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who  
hate us; <sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy  
covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we,  
being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup>  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

What you see in those two passages is both Mary and Zechariah saying, "Hey,  
this is that very thing that was promised." And the thing they are talking about is  
the birth and future ministry of Jesus. Now if that is true and they were right and  
they were right...then that means that the Abrahamic Covenant is not radically  
disconnected from the New Covenant but is instead just another way of saying  
the New Covenant.

That seems to be what Luke is arguing at the beginning of Acts...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 3:22**...Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me  
from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup> And it  
shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed  
from the people.' <sup>24</sup> And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and  
those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. <sup>25</sup> You are the sons of the  
prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to  
Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' <sup>26</sup>

God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

And that seems to be at least a part of what Paul is arguing in Galatians when he says...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 3:7**...Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

You see there is no argument in the New Testament that the Abrahamic Covenant is replaced by the New Covenant...in fact, the argument is just the opposite. The argument is that both Jews and Gentiles who come to Christ by faith are the true descendants of Abraham. And if that is true, then the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are pretty much the same thing. Of course, Reformed Baptists will argue back at me, "Aha, I got you because you just admitted that the true descendants of Abraham are those that come to God by faith." And I will answer back, "Aha, I got you because you go on to deny the giving of the covenant sign that Abraham applied to his children...circumcision...though the book of Romans says circumcision is a sign of the righteousness he had by faith."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 4:11**...He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup> and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

My point here is that the book of Romans says as plainly as it can that circumcision was a sign of the righteousness Abraham had by faith just as many Baptists are that baptism is and yet Abraham applied that same sign to his unbelieving children in anticipation of the act that he believed God would one day regenerate his children.

I also argued, in fact what I showed from the text, that the Old Covenant mentioned in Hebrews 8 and in Jeremiah 31 is just another way of saying the Mosaic Covenant. I argued that because that is what the text says.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 8:8**...For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

Now if you will remember back when we covered the Mosaic Covenant...I made a point back then that in a sense...the Mosaic Covenant was a republication of the Covenant of Works with Adam. That is, it had a works aspect to it. You see there was a binding aspect to the Mosaic Covenant. That aspect was that the nation of Israel had to obey the covenant in order to stay in the land...that is, they had to obey the laws of the theocracy.

What I was setting up way back then was the fact that they could not obey the laws of the theocracy and that was what got them driven out of the land. I was making that point back then because I had in mind the blessing of the New Covenant where the Lord proclaims this covenant will be different in that I will write it on their hearts...not so much that everyone will be a mature believer but

rather that the people of God will no longer have to fear God's rejection because the nature of the covenant that has been made.

Still the nature of the new covenant does not demand a complete break with what went before. In fact, if you back to the original context of Jeremiah 31 and look at what God says in Jeremiah 33 you will see that he will tie the keeping of the Davidic Covenant to the New Covenant. He will say, "In keeping the New Covenant I will certainly keep the Davidic Covenant."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Jeremiah 33:20...**"Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, <sup>21</sup> then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. <sup>22</sup> As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me." <sup>23</sup> ¶ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>24</sup> "Have you not observed that these people are saying, 'The LORD has rejected the two clans that he chose'? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. <sup>25</sup> Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, <sup>26</sup> then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."

Now I can't make this point strongly enough. If the New Covenant in Jeremiah did not claim to be a radical break with the Davidic Covenant or the Abrahamic Covenant but with the Mosaic Covenant alone perhaps it would serve us well to seriously rethink the attendant signs of the covenant.

Now I tried to make my observations and comments without viewing or thinking of our Reformed Baptist brothers as the enemy. And honestly I do not

think of them as the enemy at all. I was raised a Baptist myself...though not a Reformed Baptist. I am so grateful to the Reformed Baptist brothers that preach the gospel without compromise and preach it with a passion...men like Al Martin, Alister Begg, and John Piper. I cannot bring myself to think of them as anything other than genuine brothers and fellow laborers in the cause of Christ.

Still, I am making my comments as an ordained Presbyterian pastor so I am not completely neutral nor do I want to pretend that I am. I thought through this issue for a long time and I made decisions both for myself and for my family but that does not mean that I have been infallible along the way. I have not. My family will gladly put that notion to rest for any of you that doubt and my own personal decision has been that historic covenant theology offer the best overall interpretation of the biblical data and it satisfies the innate craving that parents have for their children to be connected to the God of their salvation. I think even the staunchest Reformed Baptists would have to agree is that there is a covenantal tendency in the heart of every believing mom and dad and that is why Baptists have such a strong desire to dedicate their children to the Lord. I would go on to say that when they do so they are only falling short of covenant baptism by failing to apply the sign contained in the water.

Now last week I raised the question, "Are we then simply stuck then these two different understandings of Hebrews and the New Covenant can never be resolved?"

Perhaps...perhaps we are. I do think we tend to bring our preconceived notions oftentimes to such arguments and I don't just mean that you Reformed Baptists do that when I say that. I mean I do it too.



Still, I think there is a way ahead. I think there are a couple of things that pose a possibility for resolving the impasse between the two views. Those two things would be to understand that there is both a now and not yet aspect to the New Covenant and that there is such a thing as apostasy.

Now let me take the first thing first...the idea that there is a "now and not yet" aspect to the New Covenant.

First of all when we read the passage in Hebrews 8 I think we have to realize that is a "not yet" aspect to the fulfillment of what is contained there.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 8:10**...For this is the covenant that 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. <sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. <sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

Now there is a sense in which the passage itself has a futuristic tone to it. You can see that from the repetition of the future tense "will".

After those days I will put my laws into their minds...

I will write my laws on their hearts...

And they shall teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother...for they shall all know me...

Now there is a sense in which the passage is fulfilled. It is fulfilled in the sense that we no longer need a mediator to speak the words of God to us. We now

have Christ Jesus as the mediator of the New Covenant and do not need a Moses or anyone like that as a go between. Jesus himself is our great high priest and mediator and is God to man and man to God. He has finally once and for all spoken to us by God and as God these words of salvation.

And yet, there is an aspect of the promises contained in this covenant that will never be fulfilled until that day the Lord Jesus returns and establishes the eternal state. It is true that the law is written on hearts and minds in one sense and yet there is also the truth and reality that the law of God is not permanently etched into our hearts and minds for we still tend to disobey it. Oh we are free from its condemnation in Christ and yet we are not fully free to obey it. And it is the same regarding the fact that many of our brothers and sisters...and yes even ourselves...still need to be taught. We do in fact know God but we know him as through a glass darkly. And in that sense the New Covenant is still waiting to be fulfilled. It is a present reality with a future fulfillment. It is a now and not yet. I think what Presbyterians will admit is that when that day comes there will be no need of the sacraments...there will be no need of signs or seals because we will have the living reality. We will know Him as He is because we will see Him face to face.

Secondly and more importantly I think. Covenant theology offers the best explanation for explaining the apostasy passages in the Book of Hebrews and elsewhere. Now you know and I know that there are a number of very difficult passages in the Book of Hebrews regarding falling away. Hebrews 6 is perhaps the famous of all.

When I was in seminary I had a professor, a professor named Jack Deere that used to say, "All questions your congregations will ask you will eventually lead to Hebrews 6. In fact, all questions everywhere eventually lead to Hebrews 6."

Here's the passage that he was referring to.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 6:4**...For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Now I used to think he was just trying to be funny but what I have discovered along the way is that he had a really good point. You see the various passages about apostasy or falling away must be explained. It seems to me that only three ways to explain them.

First, if a person is Lutheran and hold to baptismal regeneration they can simply say that a person who has been baptized and apostatizes, that is they no longer profess the faith, has indeed really fallen away from salvation. A Lutheran can say based upon their system that, "He really was saved. He really apostatized from the faith and is now really and truly lost." In other words, a person that apostatizes...apostatizes from the actual faith.

It seems to me a Baptist must say, "Yes, he made a profession of faith and has apostatized but he was not really a believer. He seemed real...his profession seemed real...but it wasn't and we can bear witness to that fact because he has not retained the faith he professed." In other words, a person that

apostatizes...apostatizes not from an actual faith but rather from a professed faith.

And then finally, a Presbyterian can say, "Yes he was raised or instructed as an actual member of the covenant community. He saw the sacraments administered. He heard the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit of God and yet he has thrown it all out because he has apostatized not from the faith but from the covenant of grace with which he was identified. He is of all men most miserable...he is a covenant breaker."

Now it seems to me that the Lutheran position has significant problems and those problems have to do with the doctrine of election. If God regenerates a person's heart doesn't that person stay regenerate?

It seems to me that the Baptist position has significant problems though admittedly not as significant as those holding the Lutheran position. But it has significant problems because the language seems to identify the person described as actually possessing something and actually losing something and not just falling from a profession.

Obviously then I think the Presbyterian view best takes into account what is happening in Hebrews...people have identified with God's covenant people through baptism and then have come to reject that relationship and the better mediator of the covenant and thus have been enlightened but have chosen to fall away. In other words they apostatized from the covenant of grace.

Now I think those two areas...the areas of the “now and not yet” and the issue of apostasy may help some of you who are trying to get settled on the matter to come to a conclusion...at any rate that is my prayer and hope for each of you.

Now let me pray and I'll give you a chance to comment or ask questions.