

It is important for the Christian to understand how we are to live under the New Covenant and what the relation is to the Covenant to Abraham and the Mosaic Covenant. The consequences are significant. To wrongly rely upon the law, puts one's very salvation is at stake. If we neglect the law as part of the Word of God, we may miss seeing Jesus Christ and may not fully understand the heart of God. But a proper understanding puts us on the path of understanding the mind of Christ and living out the will of Christ both by His Spirit.

1. **Definitions**

A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties. The covenants of God are His unilateral promises in which the other party may or may not have conditions to fulfil. The NT likens the covenant to a Last Will and Testament. In the OT they were similar to a certain type of treaty.

2. **The Abrahamic Covenant**

- a. God made certain promises to Abraham which He later confirmed directly with Isaac and then with Jacob. This covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became the guarantee of ultimate blessing to Israel.
- b. There are three major elements (*cf.*, Gen. 28:13-14). God promised (1) to give the land to the descendants of Abraham as an everlasting possession, swearing upon Himself alone (Gen. 15:7-21), (2) to greatly multiply his descendants, and (3) to bless all peoples on earth through Abraham.
- c. God gave to Abraham circumcision a sign of His covenant with him. This separated Jew from Gentile (*cf.* Ephesians 2:12) and became figurative for the condition of the heart, i.e., circumcised of heart.
- d. God's promise of blessing to all people through Abraham and his offspring is important for understanding our life as Christians under the New Covenant. (*Cf.* Galatians 3.) God's blessings were given according to promise and not simply physical descent. Having faith like Abraham is essential. Furthermore, the one Offspring (or, literally, Seed) through whom all peoples will be blessed is Jesus Christ. Those who place their faith in Jesus and what He has done, are placed in Christ by God, and are blessed as the heirs of Abraham. Faith is essential in our relationship to God (*cf.* Hebrews 11).

3. **The Mosaic Covenant**

- a. The Mosaic Covenant or the "Old Covenant" was given by God through His servant Moses to the people of Israel and was added onto without annulling the Covenant to Abraham (Galatians 3:17-18).
- b. Certain major elements are summarized in Exodus 19:5-6. (1) The Lord promised that Israel would be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (2) The people were required to obey, a response out of love to love (*cf.* Deut. 6:5). (3) The way of life in which to express this whole-hearted love was detailed in the law which God gives to the Israelites, Ten Commandments (or the "Two Tablets of the Testimony") and the Book of the Covenant, composed of moral, civil, and ceremonial regulations.
- c. As a sign of this covenant they were to observe the Lord's Sabbaths (Exodus 31:12-18; see also Lev. 26).
- d. The weakness of the law helps us understand our life as Christians under the New Covenant. It did not help a person live by the standard which it gave, nor did it provide forgiveness when one failed. The law could not change their hearts and cannot change ours. It was not and is not a solution for our basic spiritual needs.

4. **The New Covenant**

- a. The New Covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31:31ff to the nation of Israel for the time when the Messiah would come and rule.
- b. There are three important elements: (1) The law is written on the heart implying a lack of dependence upon an external law and an internal ability to understand the law (*cf.* 1 Cor. 2:11-16). (2) There is personal intimate knowledge of God by all those with whom the covenant is made. (3) There is forgiveness of sin.
- c. These provisions of the New Covenant required something totally new: a sacrifice that was adequate to take away sin, a righteous standing that allowed fellowship with God, and a changed heart. It was the death (and resurrection) of Jesus Christ that made these things possible. His blood, the blood of the covenant, was for the forgiveness of sin (*cf.* Matthew 26:26-28). Those who believe become children of God, receive the Spirit of God, and have their hearts changed (*cf.* Ezekiel 36:26-27).

5. **The Church and the New Covenant**

Though the New Covenant was promised to Israel, both Gentile and Jewish believers today benefit without being under the Mosaic law.

- a. God temporally took Israel out of the place of favor or privilege when they rejected their Messiah (Romans 11). Never-the-less there are those among Israel today who have received Jesus as Christ, their Lord.
- b. At some point in the future Israel will be restored as a nation and God will do a work in their hearts. The New Covenant will be fulfilled in its entirety at that time.
- c. In the meantime God has created something new. Out of both Jew and Gentile God has created one new man (Ephesians 2:11-22), the Body of Christ. By faith in Christ believers today are placed in Christ, the One Offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:25-29), and receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, as the circumcised of heart.
- d. Believers today are neither under the bondage of the Mosaic Covenant nor have they a freedom to indulge themselves (*cf.* Galatians 5:1, 13). We are to keep in step with the Spirit who dwells within us. As we look at the Word of God we are guided by the Spirit of God to understand the heart of God.

By being in Christ, the Offspring of Abraham, we benefit now from the New Covenant, having new hearts and a personal knowledge of God. A proper life grows naturally out of a heart in tune with God (and His Word). Christianity is not a religious form we choose, or a cultural option, or a family tradition, but a work of God in which our very hearts are transformed.