

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

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Dear Reader

As we stated in Newsletter 97-2, many — probably the majority — of dear believers believe the Church is in one way or another simply an extension of Old Testament Israel and thus under the covenants God made with Israel. Thus they look for the earthly promises made to Israel. Therefore, there is great vagueness as to the heavenly calling and future, if any, for the Church, and a general belief that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation, to be judged at the judgment of nations (sheep and the goats, Mt.25:31-46). So there often is uncertainty as to their eternal security since many foresee and fear this future judgment which (they think) they must pass before being blessed along with Israel in the Millennium. These *Covenant Theologists* (so-called) completely miss the unique heavenly calling of the Church. They don't see that the Church began at Pentecost (Acts 1) when Christ, it's heavenly Head, was in heaven and the Holy Spirit had come to earth to indwell it collectively (1 Cor.3:16; Eph.2:22). The covenant theologian also fails to understand that the Church will be taken to heaven by means of the Rapture before any of the Tribulation judgments fall on the earth (1 Thes.4:13-18; Rev.3:10).

Yet several verses in the New Testament sound as if the Church, even when recognized as unique to this present dispensation and having its beginning at Pentecost, somehow is under or connected with the New Covenant. The following article by Leslie M. Grant, no stranger to the readers of the Assembly Messenger, concisely gives us a brief study of the covenants of Scripture, and then shows that the Church is apart from all covenants, past, present or future (except that all mankind comes under the blessing of the first one). We will see that the Church is not under the New Covenant; however, it comes under the *blessings* of that covenant (2 Cor.3)

Brother Leslie does not discuss what others call the Edenic covenant (Gen.2:16), the Adamic covenant (Gen.3:15), the Palestinian covenant (Dt.30:3) and the Davidic covenant (2 Sam.7:16). He states that these are never called "covenants" in Scripture, so we have no right to assume them to *be* covenants. He states that every promise of Scripture — and there are many — should not be taken as a covenant. Those that are called "covenants" follow.

## THE CHURCH — BLESSED WITHOUT A COVENANT

### THE NOAHIC COVENANT

The first covenant in scripture was established by God with Noah and with all mankind, including us, as well as with animals and birds (Gen.9:8-17). So it is still true and in force. It stated that God would never again send a flood to destroy the earth. A covenant is a binding contract, usually requiring certain actions by the two parties of the contract, but in this case nothing was required by men, animals and birds. It was an absolute promise on God's side. This was a covenant by the Creator in connection with His creation. After this, God's several covenants pertained to Israel, as Romans 9:3-4 plainly teaches. It says, "... my countrymen after the flesh, who are Israelites, *to whom pertain ... the covenants ... and the promises.*"

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

This first of Israel's covenants was given directly to Abraham and is first seen in Genesis 12:2, "I will make you a great nation ... and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed." "I will make My covenant between Me and you" (Gen.17:2). And God added to this in the same chapter, "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be

God to you and your descendants after you. Also I will give to you and your descendants after you, the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (vv.7-8). The promise of Genesis 12:2 is reconfirmed in Genesis 22:18, “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This is quoted in Galatians 3:13-16) as we will see shortly.

The descendants to whom God promised all the land of Canaan can only be the nation of Israel. The promise is absolute and unconditional. God cannot break His covenant, nor did He lay upon Israel any conditions to perform, for it to become effective. He did require all males to be circumcised, however (vv.10-13), which teaches the cutting off of the flesh; in other words, that the flesh — the natural man; man in his sinful nature — has absolutely no part in this covenant. Man can add nothing to it, nor take anything from it. But failure in circumcision did not negate the promise, neither did Israel’s failure to keep the law (Gal.3:17-18). Israel will see the promises made fulfilled completely in the Millennium.

## **THE SINAITIC OR MOSAIC COVENANT**

In Exodus 19:5 another covenant is made with the nation Israel in the desert of Sinai. In this case the Lord instructed Moses to tell the gathered children of Israel, “... *If you will indeed obey My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.*” This covenant is in great contrast to that given to Abraham, for it is *conditional on Israel’s obedience to the law*, and therefore not “an everlasting covenant.” Only if Israel obeyed the law would they be a special treasure to the Lord, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (v.6).

Why did God make such a covenant after He had made an unconditional one? Because Israel, in fleshly, vain self-confidence, considered themselves *deserving* of God’s promises and therefore expected to receive them on the basis of their good works. Very well: God then gave them a covenant of law, that of the ten commandments (and much more), to test this confidence in their own goodness and self-righteousness. Israel had boasted, “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do” (v.8). The Lord would show them by their experience with law that they as people in the flesh, people with a sinful nature, couldn’t by *works* please God and thus deserved nothing but judgment. “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom.8:8).

Although they broke the law, and therefore broke this covenant, this did not at all annul God’s previous covenant with Abraham, as Galatians 3:16-18 shows. The Abrahamic Covenant still stands, for it is *everlasting*, and not dependent on Israel’s obedience. Yet that covenant can be fulfilled only in Christ, for, as we saw earlier, it was made to Abraham and his *seed*. “He does not say, And to seeds as of many, but as of one, And to your seed, which is Christ” (Gal.3:16). While Abraham would have many descendants, yet the blessing would come through the one seed, Christ. Because Israel as a nation, rejected the blessed Lord of glory, they forfeited all title to God’s promise. Therefore, when the remnant of Israel is brought back to the Lord eventually, when the Lord Jesus appears at the Mount of Olives after the great tribulation judgments, and they “look on Me whom they pierced” (Zech.12:10) and are saved in a day, they will claim no title to the covenant, but come only as “objects of mercy” (Rom.11:31-32, JND), virtually on the same ground as Gentiles. In this marvelous way, God will show His overruling power and grace in fulfilling His covenant to Abraham. Wonderful is the wisdom of His ways!

## **THE NEW COVENANT**

Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks of a new covenant — also an “everlasting covenant (Jer.32:40-44; Isa.61:8) — that God will make, *also with Israel and Israel only*, in a future day. It will not be like that of Exodus 19 which Israel broke, for it will not be conditional on their obedience. Therefore, it is consistent with the covenant made with Abraham.

In bringing Israel to their true Messiah on the basis of the new covenant, God will “put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts” (31:33). He will “put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me ... [and] do them good ... [and] plant them in this land [and] ... bring on them all the good that I have

promised them” (32:40-42) . This is the precious reality of new birth. What a change will take place in that nation, a change that results in great blessing on earth for them. God has planned and decreed it; and we shall soon rejoice in seeing Israel fully blessed through this new covenant as we reign with Christ over the earth in the Millennium. Just as God’s covenant to Noah, so this one will be absolutely God’s promise, with nothing required from others at all.

## **WHAT OF THE CHURCH?**

But what of ourselves, the Church of God? Are we under a covenant? No, not at all. The covenants pertain to Israel (Rom.9:4). *As Gentiles, we were total strangers to the covenants of promise* (Eph.2:12). While Israel had a hope because of the covenants, we had no hope. Such was the misery and wretchedness of our condition before Christ came.

The fact that we had no covenant to depend on in any way, makes all the more marvelous the further fact that we individual Gentiles are saved by absolute grace, becoming members of the body of Christ, the Church or Assembly, in which the exceeding riches of the grace of God will be displayed for the ages to come (Eph.2:7). Just as Ruth had no claim in Israel because she was a Moabitess and yet became the wife of Boaz (Ruth 4:9-10), so today we have been introduced into the pure grace of God apart from any covenant being made with us.

Yet we now partake of all the *blessings* of the new covenant before Israel receives any blessing under it. We have been born again. The Lord is our God and we are His people. Every person who comprises the Church knows the Lord. Our sins have been eternally forgiven. Our heavenly inheritance and home are secured. The Lord does us “good” always. We are eternally secure: no true believer departs from the Lord. Note these are the promised future blessings to Israel in the references above, from Jeremiah 31-32 and Hebrews 10:16-17. But more than this, our blessings go far beyond the new covenant, for we are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph.1:3). Read that first chapter of Ephesians which enumerates many of these additional blessings we enjoy even now! This is certainly marvelous grace!

Israel will receive her blessings on earth, but ours are of a far higher and more precious character. These blessing are not merely promised us; we have them *now*, in Christ. As to the future, the Lord will make the Church to be His bride and wife (Rev.19:7-9; 21:9), without any covenant being involved. The only title to this is, not that God promised it, but rather that God has extended wonderful, sovereign grace to those who were once “without God and without hope in the world” (Eph.2:12).

## **WHAT OF OTHER NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES?**

When the Lord instituted the Lord’s supper, He said “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt.26:28); and this is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:25. The Lord said this to Jewish disciples to make them realize that the new covenant, though not yet accepted by Israel, must have blood shed to make it effective, and in this case the blood of the Lord of glory. Israel will benefit by this only when they receive Christ (which the remnant will do by sovereign grace), but when this verse is quoted in 1 Corinthians 11, it shows that *believers* now receive the *blessing* of the new covenant. The Corinthian Christians were never under a covenant, *but were blessed because of the value of the blood of the new covenant*.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul writes that God “also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Though Israel is not yet blessed under the new covenant, but is still clinging to the law, the apostle Paul had the wonderful privilege of ministering the new covenant even to Gentiles. This certainly did not mean that he put Gentiles under the covenant, but that he ministered the *blessing* of the new covenant to Gentile as well as Jewish believers, that is, the fact that now God puts His laws in people’s minds and hearts rather than writing on tables of stone. Again this

enforces the plain truth that, though the Church is not under a covenant, yet it receives right now all the blessings of the new covenant. This was not all that Paul ministered, but what he ministered was consistent with the new covenant.

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes reference also to the new covenant. Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who would be acquainted with the covenants made to Israel. Speaking of the Lord being “made a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb.7:21), verse 22 says, “by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” This better covenant is the new covenant, and the fact of Jesus having come shows Him to be the *surety*, the absolute assurance of the covenant yet to be made with Israel. Though believers now have all the blessings of the new covenant, this does not do away with the fact that Israel will yet have them.

Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes from Jeremiah to confirm that Israel will indeed be blessed by that new covenant, and that since Jesus has come, the first covenant is becoming obsolete (v.13). Why does Israel still cling to it? These verses confirm that this new covenant is still future and is for the house of Israel and Judah. The Lord has not made it yet with Israel, but the basis for it has already been secured in the death of Christ.

Hebrews 8 also insists on the fact that Christ as the exalted High Priest is the Mediator of the new covenant (v.6). A mediator is a middleman, one who can stand between two who generally are far apart and have a meaningful and helpful relationship with both. We believers in the present age or dispensation have recognized this risen, exalted Priest, the only Mediator between God and men. And we, the Church, long before Israel will recognize Him, have been blessed in close relationship to Christ in heaven. Though Israel’s future blessings will not be in heaven, yet when the new covenant is to be fulfilled to them, they will realize that the Mediator of this covenant is not a high priest according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb.7:21), a type or picture of Christ in resurrection and exaltation. Thus it will be emphasized to Israel that it was necessary that their Messiah should suffer and die, and be raised again in glory, so the new covenant could become effective. We thank God for such a Mediator today, and Israel will rejoice in a coming day in this wonderful Great High Priest.

Finally, Hebrews 13:20-21 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, though Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.” When the new or everlasting covenant has done its work in Israel and has blessed Gentiles too, it remains “everlasting.” When it is spoken of in this way, it means that the *results* of the new covenant are everlasting. In eternity, no one will be the subject of promises anymore, but will be the recipients of the *fulfillment* of promise. However, it is not simply the covenant that is emphasized here, but “the blood.” Just as the covenant under law was established by the shedding of the blood of animal sacrifices, so the new covenant is established by the shedding of the blood of Christ. For eternity we shall adore the Great Shepherd of the sheep who has not only died for us, but is risen by virtue of His blood being shed. Thus, in adoring Him, we shall never forget the wonderful value of His blood.

## CONCLUSION

Do we not marvel at the great wisdom and the great grace of God in the way He has seen fit to order all these things? On the one hand, believers of the present age are humbled to the dust in realizing that by nature we are not entitled to the least of God’s mercies, for we were at one time “without God, without hope in the world,” being sunk in a pit of sin and guilt, deserving only judgment. On the other hand, we marvel at the amazing kindness of God in reaching out to lost, hopeless sinners, apart from any previous promise, to bless us with eternal riches.

Also, as to Israel, how marvelous is God’s pure grace in the way in which, after that nation had rejected the One Mediator who came to fulfill God’s promises to them, God will yet turn them back and bless them according to His unconditional promise. They then will fully realize that they too deserve nothing from God,

but will be blessed in spite of their failure. Well might Paul declare in Romans 11:36, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

L. M. Grant

**NOTES:**

Bob Costen and I would like to remind you that we publish signed letters to the editor, *written in Christian kindness*, making comments on or questioning doctrinal points in the Assembly Messenger. Our mailing address is The Assembly Messenger, c/o Roger P. Daniel, 22240 Morley Ave., Dearborn MI 48124-2127

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