

The New Covenant By Richard Willetts

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Forward

Believers the world over are extremely happy about living in a New Testament or New Covenant period where the restrictions and ceremonial regulations of the Old no longer apply; but rather grace abounds, salvation is free and is offered to all, regardless of race or culture.

It is universally accepted that Yahshua, hours before His death, instituted a New Covenant, a monumental event which together with His death put an end to many Old Testament ceremonial obligations; but did that event simply mark the beginning of a new era – one of freedom and grace? Certainly Yahshua's work and sacrifice opened a door whereby Jew and Gentile alike could share in the promises of Yahweh in one Body. On this promise the whole of the Christian world sees itself as not only being in the era of the New Covenant but as full participating members.

The questions, however, that many sincere believers are asking today are, *“Does everyone who professes faith in Yahshua or the ‘born again’ experience automatically enter into the Covenant? Or are we to believe that entrance to the Covenant requires steps of personal commitment beyond the initial steps of salvation? And if one enters the Covenant what exactly does one come into?”*

The New Covenant is a much talked about subject in Christian circles yet many have misunderstood the heart of it. A proper understanding of the biblical concepts of covenant is helpful in grasping the significance of the New Covenant. This booklet has been written to assist you in this. In exploring the realm of covenant, it looks at some of the principles and elements of covenant, as well as the purpose and outworking of some specific biblical covenants. The New Covenant is our primary consideration and it is hoped that as you study the facts presented you will appreciate a little of the wonder of Yahweh's purposes and plans for our lives. May the heavenly Father enrich and enlighten you in your reading.

The Editor.

Principles of Covenant

We live in a world where a person's word carries little value, vows can be easily broken and promises are often not kept. In my own country one in three marriages end in divorce, where people who stood before Yahweh and man promising to stay together until death find any number of excuses, valid or otherwise, to find another partner. Yahweh is not like this, He says: "*I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.*"¹ He always remembers what He has promised and is ever faithful to His word.

Throughout the Scriptures we see Yahweh making binding agreements with individuals, groups and nations that are intended to last forever; promises which are never to be revoked. Such covenants are a central theme in scripture, telling us much about the heart and character of the Almighty. The whole Bible, in fact, is split into two covenants: The Old Covenant Scriptures (Genesis to Malachi), and The New Covenant Scriptures (Matthew to Revelation). Yahweh attaches great significance to His covenants. The psalmist tells us that He never forgets His covenant.² Indeed, such is the importance of this topic that it would be fair to say that a failure to appreciate the consequence of covenant in the divine economy results in failure to understand the framework of our faith. Yahweh's over-riding purpose in making covenants with us is the building of a relationship with people that He loves; it is borne from a desire that springs from His own heart of love for mankind.

Covenant is a legal as well as a biblical term, which involves the setting up of a binding agreement between two or more parties. The key words in the Bible for covenant are, in the Hebrew, *berith* referring to the act or rite of the making of a covenant and also to the standing contract between two partners, and *diatheke* which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew work and means "testament".

Various verbs are used in connection with *berith*. The technical term for instigating such an agreement is *Karat berith* meaning literally to cut a covenant. This refers to the ancient Middle Eastern rite of cutting an animal with the forming a treaty or covenant. Such treaties were of two types: (1) a treaty of equals in which two parties are called *brothers* or (2) a vassal treaty between a great king or conqueror and a minor king. The idea of a covenant relationship between a god and a king or a god and his people is well attested throughout the history of ancient Middle East, and would be clearly understood by the Israelites with regard to Yahweh's relationship with them.

Let us now look at some of the principles under which Yahweh's covenants are made.

The first point to note is that all Yahweh's covenants are **instigated by Himself**. Entering into the close ties that covenant affords is a desire that springs from the heart of the Almighty. It is an expression of His nature and of His great love for humanity. Yahweh is an Elohim of covenant; He is also an Elohim of love and His covenant is a covenant of love.³ This principle is at the very heart of Yahweh's covenant with humanity.

A second important feature of Yahweh's covenants is that they are **everlasting**, continuing from generation to generation.⁴

In all of His covenants He makes **promises**. Some of these are **unconditional** such as those made in the covenant between Yahweh and Noah, when He promised never to destroy the whole earth again by flood.⁵ No stipulation was attached to this vow. It still holds good today and a rainbow was set in the sky as proof of His intention. When He cut

¹ Ps. 89:34

² Ps. 111:5

³ Deut. 7:7-10

⁴ Gen. 9:16; 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 105:10

⁵ Gen. 9:8-17

a covenant with Abraham He promised him and his descendants a land that would stretch from the river Euphrates to the great river of Egypt.¹

This promise, too, is unconditional and the fact that a Jewish nation exists today is evidence of Yahweh's faithfulness to His Word. When Yahweh cut a covenant with the children of Israel at Sinai, He promised them a unique blessing, that out of all nations they would be His treasured possession.² But attached to this promise were certain conditions; they had to obey Him fully, and He proceeded to spell out in detail exactly what this would entail. The people were given a choice, and they chose to enter into covenant relationship, saying, "*We will do everything Yahweh has said.*"³ This then was a **conditional** covenant.

The fact that all covenants are accompanied by the shedding of blood brings an important principle into focus. Yahweh's covenants are **blood covenants**; they are made legally binding by blood.⁴ The practice of *blood covenants* goes right back to the dawn of the human race, when Yahweh sacrificed an animal to make a covering of skins for His erring children,⁵ and evidence of blood covenant rituals are apparent in many ancient tribes throughout the world, although in some places it has degenerated into a very grotesque, almost horrible, rite. A typical method practised by the native tribes of Africa, by the Arabs, by the Syrians and by the Balkans is as follows: Two men wishing to cut covenant come together with their friends and a priest. First they exchange gifts indicating that all the one owns belongs to the other should he so desire. Next they bring a cup of wine and the priest makes an incision in the arms of both men, and their blood is allowed to drip into the same cup. The wine is stirred and the blood mixed, then the cup is handed to one and he drinks part of it. He hands it to the other party who drinks the rest.

When Yahshua took the wine on the eve of Passover and said "*This is my blood of the covenant...*",⁶ this is probably the picture that the disciples would have had. They would have understood His inference exactly.

Another important feature of covenant in the Middle East was **the partaking of a covenant meal**. When Isaac made a treaty with Abimelech, king of the Philistines, they ate a meal together and swore an oath the next day.⁷ Similarly, when Yahweh cut covenant with Israel at Sinai, the seventy elders of Israel went up with Moses and Aaron and ate and drank in the presence of Yahweh.⁸

Part of the ongoing covenant regulations between Yahweh and Israel involved the eating of certain meals at festival times. There is a peculiar bond of fellowship when one sits down with another to eat such a meal. It can have a deep spiritual significance, as in the case when Yahweh sat down in the upper room with His twelve disciples and broke bread.

The cutting of covenant in ancient times would mean that a weak party could be preserved by a strong one. It might also be used for instituting an irrevocable business partnership, or purely for reasons of love and devotion. This leads us onto a sixth principle of covenant – **it must never be revoked**. The famous 19th century missionary to Africa, Dr Livingstone and his friend, Mr Stanley, claimed that they never knew of a single instance where a blood covenant had been broken. In Africa if one should *break*

¹ Gen 15:18

² Exod. 19:5-6

³ Exod. 19:8

⁴ Gen. 8:20-22, Gen. 15:9-21

⁵ Gen .3:21

⁶ Matt. 26:28

⁷ Gen. 26:28-31

⁸ Exod. 24:8-11

covenant, his own mother or wife or his nearest relatives would seek his death. No person could live in Africa who broke the covenant – the very ground he walked on would be cursed. Here we see the seriousness of entering into a covenant. When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he broke Yahweh's everlasting covenant.¹ As a result, death came into the world² and the ground was cursed.³

Thus we also see that **cursings and blessings** are an integral part of covenant.

In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, we find that wonderful blessings from the Almighty are promised to the children of Israel if they will be careful to obey His covenant laws: long life, prosperity, peace, health and victory. Also recorded are the terrible cursings that will pursue and overtake those who fail to obey: failure, famine, disease and defeat.

We now come to the last principle of covenant that we want to consider: when we come into this type of relationship with Yahweh, we can expect to be **tested**. Adam was tested in the garden by the serpent and failed. Abraham was tested by Yahweh when He commanded him to offer up his son. His loyalty was proven and as a result he entered into the covenant blessings.⁴ The people of Israel were tried in the wilderness and a whole generation was destroyed because of their rebellion.⁵ The purpose in Yahweh testing participants of the covenant is not that He wants to enjoy the spectacle of their failure but that their lives might be purified and their relationship with Him deepened.

The Old Covenant

Although the topic of this booklet is the New Covenant, we have majored so far on covenants made in the Old Testament, and rightly so, because without a correct understanding of the *Old* we cannot begin to appreciate the *New*.

To grasp the depths of Yahweh's intentions with regards to covenant, the most exciting and far-reaching of all the *covenants of promise* is that made through Moses with an entire nation at the foot of a burning mountain – Sinai. It was here that Yahweh engraved the *Ten Words* into tablets of stone. These ten commandments were a declaration of His own character and His expectations of His covenant people.

“...be holy, because I [Yahweh your Elohim] am holy.”⁶

Through a series of breathtaking signs and wonders He delivered an entire nation from the hands of an oppressive superpower. He parted the Red Sea and drowned all their enemies, leading the children of Israel forward with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He miraculously supplied them with water in the desert and food from heaven. In His own words, He “...*carried...[them] on eagles' wings*” and brought them to the foot of the mountain which was all aflame.⁷ It was here that He made His proposition to a people that He had just delivered from the bonds of slavery; a proposition that revealed Yahweh's true intentions: a plan for their lives which went far beyond deliverance from Egypt and acquiring a land of their own.

¹ Hos.6:7

² Gen. 2:17

³ Gen. 3:17-18

⁴ Gen. 22:1-18

⁵ Num. 14

⁶ Lev. 11:44

⁷ Ex. 19:4-5

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“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”¹

The reply was: *“We will do everything Yahweh has said.”²*

This was a bold statement, indeed, for anyone to make, and circumstances later bore witness to the fact that the children of Israel constantly failed to keep their promises. They became idolatrous, being drawn away into the pagan practices of their neighbours. Oppression and injustice became rife among them, although their periods of disobedience were interspersed with religious revivals that brought the people back to their once exalted position.

In the light of the often unhappy history of the children of Israel, were they wise ever to have entered into a covenant relationship with the Almighty in the first place? To argue that they were not, is to do despite to Yahweh’s mercy and His keeping power. It was not a trick by the Almighty to ensnare a people to obligations they had no hope of keeping. The response of those Israelites was made **by faith** not in their own ability, but in Yahweh’s ability. There is no other way to walk in covenant with the Almighty – **faith is the key**.

An important point to note about the old covenant was that in spite of the people’s shortcomings it was always **maintainable**. Yahweh instigated a precise system of sacrifices and an order of worship, which ensured that in instances where people did sin, they were able to offer blood sacrifices to atone for their wrong-doing. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest, after sacrificing a bullock for his own sins and those of his family,³ would slaughter a goat for the sin offering of the people.⁴ Once a year he would enter into the most holy place of the tabernacle to sprinkle blood on the altar before the Ark of the Covenant, where the presence of Yahweh dwelt.

Then a second live goat called a *scapegoat* was brought forward. The High Priest laid hands upon the goat and confessed all the transgressions of the people. The goat was then led away into the dessert bearing the sins of an entire nation, and left there to die.⁵ Such was the mercy of Yahweh that He would look down upon a dying goat and not count the sins of His people against them.

Through this act, the impurity of an entire nation was atoned for, as if it had never been. They were declared clean from all their sins.⁶ In this way, a covenant relationship could be maintained between Yahweh and His people.

Whilst such a sacrifice, repeated year after year, could cover the sins of the people it could never make its participants perfect.⁷ This highlights a deficiency under the old covenant - the blood of bulls and goats could not change a person on the inside. He could have his sins forgiven, but the power of the sinful nature would not be destroyed, his tendency to sin would remain. Therefore, the standard that Yahweh required of His people was **never attainable**, but through the institution of a sacrificial system, the covenant relationship was always **maintainable**.

Yahweh’s intention has always been that He should have a holy people. The command He gave to Israel gathered at the foot of Sinai *“...be holy because I [Yahweh*

¹ Lev. 16:15

² Ex. 19:8

³ Lev. 16:11

⁴ Lev. 16:15

⁵ Lev. 16:20-22

⁶ Lev. 16:30

⁷ Heb. 10:1

your Elohim] *am holy*” has in no way been watered down or diminished today.¹ Yahweh does not change. It is for this reason that Yahweh sought to improve on the foundation of the Old Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the legal system instituted at Sinai was only a shadow of the good things that are to come - not the realities themselves².

Yahweh promised, through the prophet, Jeremiah, that the days were coming when He would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah. This would not be like the covenant made with their forefathers when He bought them out of Egypt, which had been broken.³ This covenant would be based on better promises. Instead of the law being written on tablets of stone to be learnt and referred to, it would be written in the hearts of people so that their inclination would be to keep Yahweh’s laws. Their knowledge of Yahweh would not be of a distant God sitting in His glory on top of a mountain all aflame, but of a personal God, one whom they would all know for themselves from the least to the greatest of them.⁴

Under the Old Covenant, the most holy place of the tabernacle, where the presence of Yahweh dwelt, was accessible only to the High Priest, and that but once a year. Under the New Covenant, however, a way is made for everyone to come into the presence of the Almighty.⁵ This is a better covenant based on better promises. By calling this covenant new, Yahweh implied that the first had been made obsolete, “...and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”⁶

**“Holiness is better than morality. It goes beyond it.
Holiness affects the heart. Holiness respects the motive.
Holiness regards the whole nature of man.”**

Charles Spurgeon

A Better Covenant

The book of Hebrews, written primarily to Jewish believers familiar with the demands and customs of the Old Covenant, seeks to bridge the gap between the *Old* and the *New*. The key word that re-occurs some thirteen times in the epistle is *better*. The Greek word behind the English translation is *kressis* which literally means “stronger” or “more powerful”. This beautifully sums up the nature of the New Covenant with regard to its superiority over the Old - it is more powerful in its ability to transform and to keep those who enter into it provision.⁷

In what way then is the New Covenant a *better* covenant? The New Covenant is better because it grants us a **superior hope**. It is the hope of drawing near to Yahweh for all who believe - not just the selected few.⁸ This implies coming into a personal relationship with Yahweh and gaining a personal knowledge of Him.⁹ We see the

¹ 1 Pet. 1:15-16

² Heb. 10:1

³ Jer. 31:31-32

⁴ Jer. 31:33-34

⁵ Heb. 10:15-22

⁶ Heb. 8:13

⁷ Heb. 7:22; cf Heb. 8-10

⁸ Heb. 7:19

⁹ Jer. 31:31-34

relationship, in type, with the seventy elders who went up Mount Sinai and ate and drank in the presence of Yahweh.¹ This hope offers the guarantee of being made perfect before Yahweh,² *“for the law made nothing perfect.”*³

Moreover, this hope does not only last for this life, but extends into the age to come. Our hope is an expectation of a glorious city, an eternal dwelling place,⁴ the New Jerusalem,⁵ where we shall abide forever. The New Covenant is based upon **superior promises**. Yahweh committed Himself to writing His law not on tablets of stone but on our very hearts. He has promised to forgive our iniquity and remember our sin no more.

This promise can become a reality under the New Covenant because it is brought into effect by a **superior priesthood**. Under the Old Covenant, the descendants of the tribe of Levi were commissioned to serve as priests and ministers in the tabernacle. It was their responsibility to offer the various sacrifices stipulated in the law. The most important of these was the one offered, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, by the High Priest himself, for the sins of the people. The High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant is none other than the Son of Yahweh, Yahshua the Messiah. Yahshua's ministry as High Priest is far superior to that of a High Priest under the Old Covenant because it was derived from a higher order than that of Levi. For an understanding of the nature of this higher order, the writer to the Hebrews points to an obscure Old Testament character named Melchizedek the king of Salem and priest of Yahweh, a man without beginning of days nor end of life.⁶ Such is the importance of this man that Abraham, the father of the entire Israelite nation (including his descendant Levi), on encountering Melchizedek offered him a tenth of his income. The Old Covenant law requires that the Levites, being the priestly tribe, should collect a tithe from the people,⁷ yet here we see Abraham, heir of the covenants of promise, father of the faithful, a forbear of priestly Levi, recognising this king of Salem as being greater than himself. In response Melchizedek blessed Abraham, thus acknowledging his own superiority, since in scripture the lesser is always blessed by the greater. Melchizedek represents an entirely different priestly order from Levi – a greater and more perfect one than that which served in the tabernacle under the Old Covenant. Whereas the levitical priesthood was comprised of mortal men and, therefore, the death of the existing High Priest required a successor, the priestly order of Melchizedek represents a new type of priesthood where the priest is immortal and therefore indestructible.

Yahshua is just such an High Priest, whose origins are of old and who cannot be destroyed by death. Just as Melchizedek came carrying bread and wine,⁸ so Yahshua, on the night before Passover, cut the New Covenant with His disciples with bread and wine.⁹

In rising from the grave He qualifies as a High Priest, forever, after the order of Melchizedek.¹⁰ It is a High Priest after this order that is able to be the mediator of a new and better covenant.

The Old Covenant was maintained by a system of animal sacrifices that had to be repeated year after year. The New Covenant is, again, more excellent in this respect because it is based on a **superior sacrifice** which, once offered, need never to be

¹ Exod. 24:9-11

² Heb. 10:14

³ Heb. 7:19

⁴ Heb. 13:14

⁵ Rev. 21:1-4

⁶ Heb. 7:1-3

⁷ Heb. 7:5

⁸ Gen. 14:18

⁹ Luke 22:19-20

¹⁰ Ps. 110:4

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repeated. Not only is Yahshua our High Priest, but He also offered up His own life, as an atoning sacrifice, through death on a tree.¹ Whereas the High Priest entered the tabernacle once a year by means of the blood of goats and calves, Yahshua entered heaven, itself, by offering up His own blood. Unlike every other human being Yahshua was without sin. His offering was, therefore, a perfect one – perfect on two counts: firstly, His blood, being both divine and sinless, was powerful enough to take away the sins of humankind and guarantee the devil's ultimate destruction, and secondly, that through it we are made holy once and for all, without any need of a further sacrifice.

Since all Yahweh's covenants require the shedding of blood, Yahshua's blood is the blood of the New Covenant.² This blood speaks on our behalf in the presence of Yahweh. It is through this blood that we may enter the most holy place to the mercy seat of Yahweh, where His presence dwells.³

All this leads on to what is, perhaps, the most staggering of all the provisions of the New Covenant. Under this relationship with Yahweh, we are enabled to be partakers in a **superior experience**, that is the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist promised his followers that while he himself baptised in water, there was coming One more powerful than he who would baptise them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.⁴ Under the Old Covenant certain ones may have experienced an anointing of the Holy Spirit that would come upon them from time to time. That which Yahshua purchased at Calvary for us is far superior. We are able to be born of the Spirit,⁵ a unique and permanent transformation of the inner man, and we are endued with power from on high, the infilling of the Holy Spirit,⁶ which enables us not only to work the same miraculous works of Yahshua, but also, to be like Him in character and conduct. We can experience, continually, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.⁷

The New Covenant Introduced

At the time of Yahshua's earthly ministry, the morale of the people of Israel was very low. The country was overrun by the Romans and the vitality of worship in the early days had been replaced by a religious formalism. The temple itself, the focal point of Jewish worship, had become, in the words of Yahshua, "*a den of thieves*". Opportunist traders and money-changers capitalised on the compulsory sacrificial system by charging pilgrims to Jerusalem exorbitant prices for their service in the very grounds of the holy site.

The people were longing for Messiah to come and for the right of self-rule to be returned to them. They yearned for political and spiritual freedom. The ministry of Yahshua had been a mystery to most. Whilst some believed Him to be the Messiah, others declared Him only to be a prophet. Those who believed Him to be the Messiah were expecting Him at any moment to declare Himself king. But this was not Yahshua's purpose at this time. He had come declaring a spiritual kingdom not a political one. He continued where John the Baptist had left off, urging the people to repent from their sins and hypocrisy. Because His ministry came in an unexpected form, only a few were able to

¹ Heb. 9:25

² Luke 22:20

³ Heb. 10:19-20

⁴ Luke 3:16-17

⁵ John 3:1-8

⁶ Acts 2:4; Acts 10:44-47

⁷ 2 Cor. 13:14

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receive Him; He was rejected by the majority and for this reason they plotted against Him. Yahshua was a man with a heavenly mission; one that had been foretold by the prophets. According to Isaiah, Yahshua was to bring back Jacob and to gather Israel to Yahweh. And, as if that was too small, He was also to be a light to the Gentiles, bringing Yahweh's salvation to all the peoples.¹

Yahweh had promised in Jeremiah that He would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah. This was the appointed time for the prediction to be fulfilled. As was the case with the birth of Yahshua a great fulfilment of prophesy was set to take place in an obscure setting where it would go completely unnoticed by the majority. Yahshua sent His disciples ahead of Him into Jerusalem to find an upper room where He could eat the Passover. The meal eaten by Yahshua with His disciples, commonly called *The Last Supper*, is generally believed to have been the Passover meal eaten on the night of the full moon on 15th Aviv. We suggest the meal spoken of in the gospel was eaten a day earlier, before the lambs had been slain in the temple, which would indicate that rather than being the traditional Passover meal as described in Exodus chapter 12 verses 1-13, it was a Passover festival offering called the *Haggigah*. This was an animal sacrificed in the temple and eaten as part of a Passover festival by the pilgrims on the night of their arrival at Jerusalem, as specified in Deuteronomy Chapter 12 verses 6 and 7.

It was in a dimly lit upper room that Yahshua, knowing that His time had come, reclined at the table with His twelve apostles. This night was for Yahshua a climax of His three and a half years ministry with His disciples. Even from the day of His pre-existence Yahshua had looked forward with great desire and expectancy to this key event in redemption's story. Yet His heart, though glad, was also filled with such great sorrow for He was about to pray the highest price to bring into reality the pledge he was about to make, and the man who would betray Him to His murderers was seated at the same table. The disciples sensed both the tension and the expectancy that hung over the small gathering. Perhaps they had an inkling of some great prophetic fulfilment, which they did not understand:

*"I tell you the truth one of you will betray me."*² Yahshua said, and the hearts of his disciples were filled with sorrow.

Then Yahshua took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples. *"Take and eat, this is my body."* The disciples fixed their gaze intently upon Him. What did He mean? What was He saying? Yahshua took the cup of wine from the table, gave thanks and offered it to them. *"Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*³

The disciples were familiar with the covenant for it was that that made their nation unique; they were also familiar with the prophesy of Jeremiah. Yahshua's words regarding the New Covenant must have struck their hearts like a bullet for they understood the implications.

*"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."*⁴ Notice that unlike the covenant made at Sinai, Yahshua does not require any verbal response from His disciples, neither does He suggest that forgiveness of sins is in any way dependant on an agreement between two parties; Yahshua is offering His disciples a new covenant, the promises of which are **unconditional**.

¹ Isaiah 49:6

² Matt. 26:21

³ Matt. 26:27,28

⁴ Jer. 31:33-34

We see in this gathering all the elements of covenant mentioned in the first chapter. We have a promise – the forgiveness of sins, it is a covenant instituted straight from the heart of Yahweh.¹ It involves the shedding of blood and the partaking of a covenant meal; it involves both blessing² and cursing³ and it caused the hearts of those entering into it to be tested and tried.⁴

As the ratification of the New Covenant Yahshua was pledging to His loved ones His own body and blood, and in some mystical way was making them partakers of His own body. Yahshua promised His disciples at this time they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. This promise of the utmost importance with regard to having an understanding of what took place that night. Yahshua was mirroring Israel under the old covenant, which was founded on the twelve tribes of Israel. What He was effectively doing was bringing a remnant representative of Israel into the New Covenant ushering in a new era, a whole new relationship between Yahweh and His people. That evening and the event that took place was pivotal, for that which the prophets predicted 600 years previous was being fulfilled. This small select band became one with Yahshua that night in a very unique way; they became part of His body and New Covenant Israel was born. The cloud of divine revelation was moving on and only those whose hearts were prepared would be able to be partakers of this New Covenant. Those in Israel desiring to be in covenant relationship with Yahweh would now first have to accept Yahshua as the Messiah. The stone that the builders rejected turned out to be the most important of all.⁵ There could surely now be no turning back.

Desiring to show them the full extent of His love, Yahshua rose from the table and taking a towel and a bowl of water, began to wash the feet of His disciples, feet covered with grime from the dusty road of Galilee. This action was completely baffling to the disciples. Why was their master, the One they followed, performing the lowly task of a servant?

*“Do you understand what I have done for you?... You call me Teacher and Master, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Master and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*⁶ Yahshua had come not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. This is covenant love.

Yahshua demonstrated that love not only by humbling Himself before them in this way, but by pledging to lay down His life for His friends. This was, and is, the Spirit of the New Covenant. Yahweh’s covenant is a covenant of love and Yahshua demonstrated that love as never a man has. That same night He sweat drops of blood in agonising prayer, and later His blood was shed in the auditorium when He was whipped until the flesh hung off His back; and finally He was nailed to the stake where He laid down His life. This is covenant love. Yahweh promised that under the New Covenant He would write His law in the hearts of His people. Yahweh’s law is the law of love – love towards Yahweh and towards our fellow man. In dying for us, Yahshua drank of the cup of Yahweh’s wrath⁷ in order that we might have a lasting and personal relationship with the Almighty and enter into the New Covenant. This is the New Covenant instigated in the upper room with patriarchs of New Covenant Israel, and ratified with Yahshua’s own blood.

¹ Luke 22:15, John 8:2

² Luke 22:29,30

³ Luke 22:22

⁴ Luke 22:38

⁵ Matt.22:42

⁶ John 13:12-14

⁷ Isa. 51:22

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Coming into the New Covenant

We have ascertained that the New Covenant is greatly superior to the old and was initiated by Yahshua in the upper room and was later ratified by His own blood. We will now address the issue of how we, in this day and age might become participants in this New Covenant.

First of all we should remember that this covenant has been made by Yahweh entirely unconditionally. It is not like the Old where the continual existence of the covenant was dependant on the faithfulness of both parties: Yahweh and the people. Under the Old Covenant fault was found with the people who refused to obey,¹ even though Yahweh was faithful to His part of the agreement. It was this fact that prompted Yahweh to declare Himself a faithful husband who had been effectively cheated on.² Through the prophet Jeremiah Yahweh resolved to do things differently by making seven statements of intent, seven *I will's* which would remain intact regardless of the short comings of any individuals. This covenant can and will last forever. This **does not** imply that we can live our lives entirely as we please and still expect to enjoy the blessings of a covenant relationship; what it **does** mean is that the door to a covenant relationship remains open to any individual regardless of the wilful disobedience of another. It also implies, more importantly, that there is a wonderful keeping power in the New Covenant that gives it's recipient the divine ability to obey.

If we desire to be partakers of the covenants of promise, it is not sufficient merely to know and understand the principles on which the covenant is based. The scriptures reveal definite steps that one must take in order to enter into the provision. These steps can be likened to the journey and series of miraculous events that brought the children of Israel out of ancient Egypt where they lived as slaves, to the foot of mount Sinai where they made covenant with Yahweh. Indeed this account of deliverance is a picture of Yahweh's salvation. Just as Israel was delivered out of Egypt's bondage, so we, too, need to be delivered out of the kingdom of darkness. When we are born into this world we are born in a state of sin. Mankind is ruled by the power of his sinful nature and is under the tyranny of the evil one. We are in the state that the bible terms as being "*dead in [your] transgressions and sins.*"³ Yahweh decreed death on the first-born of Egypt because of Pharaoh's destruction of newly-born Israelite babies and his persistent refusal to let Yahweh's people go, despite the fact that Yahweh had brought the world's prevailing superpower to its knees through a series of disastrous and miraculous plagues. At the time of the full moon in the month of Aviv, Yahweh sent an angel of death over Egypt. The only way to escape the terrible judgement was to take and kill a perfect lamb of one year in age and sprinkle its blood over the doorpost and lintel of the house. When the angel saw the blood, he would pass over the house and the first-born son would be saved. Yahweh's provision for salvation has not altered. We, too, need the blood of the perfect Lamb of Yahweh, Yahshua the Messiah, applied to our lives in order to enter into the provisions of the New Covenant.⁴ Scripture tells us that in order to have this blood applied to our lives we must take two steps. The first is repentance. This is the first response Yahweh requires from any sinner who desires to be saved from sin. It is a willingness and a determination to turn unconditionally from sin. This was the message that John the Baptist received from heaven in order to prepare the people of Israel for their long awaited

¹ Heb. 8:8

² Jer. 31:32

³ Eph.2:1

⁴ John 1:29

Messiah.¹ The second step is to believe in the One whom Yahweh sent. Yahshua died, was buried and rose from the grave after three days and nights. We must have faith in the fact that, because His blood was shed in this way on our behalf, we are now able to receive His righteousness – our sins are forgiven and our guilty conscience is cleansed; we are set free from the law of sin and death.

When the Israelites were finally allowed to leave Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart and sent his chariots in pursuit of them. At the Red Sea they were trapped, with the sea in front and the pursuing army behind; it seemed that their annihilation was a certainty. Once again Yahweh worked a mighty miracle, turning the sea into dry land in front of them. When all had safely reached the other side, Pharaoh's army entered the sea, which had walls of water on either side. Yahweh looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud and caused the wheels of the chariots to fall off. He then commanded Moses to stretch out his rod over the sea and the water flowed back, utterly destroying Israel's enemies. Paul likens this event to the third and fourth stages of entry into the New Covenant.

*"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"*²

There are two types of baptism available to us in the new gospel era: baptism in water (in the sea) and baptism in the Holy Spirit (the cloud). This is further highlighted by the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost, when the people asked what they should do: *"Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of [Yahshua] so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*³ Furthermore John the Baptist declared that Yahshua would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire.⁴ Instructions about baptisms, along with repentance and faith in Yahweh, form part of the elementary teachings about Yahshua as outlined in Hebrews 6:1-3.

On the night before His death, Yahshua broke bread with His disciples. Like Melchizedek of old he brought out bread and wine. On breaking the bread, He gave it to His disciples and said, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me"*⁵ Taking the cup He said, *"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."*⁶ The words *"...do this in remembrance of me"* indicate that Yahshua intended the sacrament of breaking of bread and drinking of wine to be performed by His Covenant Body.

The significance of what transpired that night in the upper room in Jerusalem cannot be over emphasised. This was an act that Yahshua greatly desired to perform.⁷ Gathered with Him were the twelve apostles of the Lamb, whose names would form the foundation of the holy city, the New Jerusalem.⁸ Like the birth of Yahshua, this, too, was an obscure setting for a mighty fulfilment of prophesy. Yahweh had forewarned that He would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah and this was the prophetically appointed time for this mighty act of Yahweh to be fulfilled. Those in attendance in the upper room, aware of the principles of the Old Covenant, would have understood, at least

¹ Matt. 3:1-12

² 1 Cor. 10:1-2

³ Acts 2:38

⁴ Matt 3:11

⁵ Luke 22:19

⁶ Luke 22:20

⁷ Luke 22:15

⁸ Rev. 21:14

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in measure, what Yahshua was saying and doing. The bread and the wine had a special symbolic meaning to them – this was a covenant service.

The practise of breaking bread was continued by the early church both at Jerusalem¹ and in the Gentile churches.² It was a declaration of their allegiance to Yahshua and to each other. (N.B. We should make a distinction between Acts 2:46, in which believers broke bread in their homes, a reference to a fellowship meal, and the *apostolic* breaking of bread in verse 42, which implies the same memorial service that Yahshua introduced in the upper room.³) In partaking of the one loaf, believers recognised themselves as being part of the one body of people, the Body of Messiah, His Covenant Bride.

To summarise, we have mentioned five specific activities or experiences: repentance, faith, baptism in water and the Holy Spirit and participating in the bread and wine. At which point can we say we have entered into the New Covenant? The answer is that at any and every point mentioned, we are participating in the blessings of the New Covenant; it is the grace of Yahweh that brings an individual into an awareness of his sinful condition and his need to repent and it is at the hour that he first believes that his sins are forgiven. At baptism, these sins are washed away and he receives the power of a new life. Yahweh pours out His Spirit on us to empower and equip us for service and we can enjoy covenant fellowship with Yahshua and with each other through the breaking of bread.

What about making vows; do these form part of the New Covenant? In scripture we see many examples of covenants that were accomplished by vows. David and Jonathan were bound together in a covenant of loyalty and friendship; Israel promised at Sinai that they would do all that Yahweh required of them. Paul made a vow to Yahweh that required him at one time to shave his head.⁴ Yahweh can at any time require anything He wishes and we may choose to give it to Him. There can be great benefits in verbally committing some part or all of our lives to the Almighty. Though these verbal commitments can be prompted and blessed by Yahweh from time to time, they must never be confused with the cutting of the New Covenant by Yahshua in the upper room. This has already been activated and cannot be added to, or taken away from.

Walking in the New Covenant

We consider that walking in the New Covenant and fullness of all its provision is the greatest blessing and challenge any person can face this side of eternity. It is something that should be treated with seriousness and dignity. From the bond of covenant springs that which has always been the desire of Yahweh's heart, a covenant people, this was His intention when He made covenant with the Israelites. He desired to elevate them above the other nations of the world.

*"... You will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."⁵ Peter affirms this truth as relating to Yahweh's people under the New Covenant. *"But you are a chosen people, a royal**

¹ Acts 2:42

² 1 Cor. 11:17-33

³ see Vine's Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words p147-148

⁴ Acts 18:18

⁵ Exod. 19:5-6

priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to [Yahweh], that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into the wonderful light."¹

What sort of people, then, ought we to be? In the first instance walking in the New Covenant implies that we should be a committed people. Old Covenant Israel committed themselves without reservation to their God, *"We will do everything Yahweh has said."*² Our attitude must be that of a disciple; we must deny ourselves; take up our cross and follow Him.³ Our allegiance to Yahweh must be total. Nothing should divert us from our chosen path. We should be committed not only to Him but to His work, believing and standing upon the great promises of Yahweh. This is what Yahweh requires from the life of one who, by means of redemption, has all the blessings of the New Covenant available to him, but he requires more. The attitude that is consistent with Yahweh's covenant goes beyond mere obedience. Firstly He tells us in Hosea 6:6 *"For I desire mercy not sacrifice..."* Here the word 'mercy' (Heb. *hesed*) is better rendered 'love'. This word *hesed*, which is very difficult to translate into one English word, describes a particular quality that Yahweh looks for in an individual. *Hesed* means literally 'covenant love' or 'covenant solidarity'. It speaks of a consistency and constancy of love that is exhibited by Yahweh Himself. It is a brand of love, devotion and faithfulness that can only be found within the bonds of covenant. Yahweh is not interested in just the outward signs of covenant relationship but also our attitude of heart. We should love Yahweh with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Secondly, He wants His covenant people to be a communal people, bound by a spirit of love and unity. Under the Old Covenant, Yahweh created a people with common laws and cultural identity all of their own. The Old Covenant law stipulated that they should not only love Yahweh with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, but also that they should love their neighbour. Under the New Covenant we see an enhancement of these principles. After the resurrection when the believers came together in Jerusalem soon after the day of Pentecost, they were together and had everything in common. *"Selling their possessions and goods, they gave every one as they had need."*⁴ This is the Spirit of Covenant. It breaks through all social and ethnic barriers through the creation of one family. Peter exhorts us to *"love each other deeply."*⁵

Thirdly, we should be a consecrated people. This implies being set apart and holy, *"...just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."*⁶ All this can be summed up in one command: *"...let us also walk in the spirit."*⁷ Yahweh has given us of His Spirit to help us, teach us to guide us. *"Because those who are led by the Spirit of [Yahweh] are sons of [Yahweh],"*⁸ we should not be controlled by the desires of our sinful nature, but should allow our mind, words and actions to be controlled by the Spirit of Yahweh who lives in us.⁹ As Paul points out, *"...we have an obligation."*¹⁰

The forth and final requirement placed upon a new covenant believer is the partaking of a covenant meal. When Yahshua broke bread with His disciples in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion, He did not intend this ceremony to be a *one-off* event. He told them: *"...do this in remembrance of me."* This command of Yahshua's was also revealed

¹ 1 Pet. 2:9

² Ex. 19:8

³ Matt. 16:24

⁴ Acts 2:44-45

⁵ 1 Pet.4:8

⁶ 1 Pet.1:15

⁷ Gal. 5:25 A.V.

⁸ Rom. 8:14

⁹ Rom. 8:9

¹⁰ Rom. 8:12

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to Paul who in his letter to the Corinthian church gave certain directives as to how this remembrance service should be conducted.¹ The point to note is that this covenant meal was an on-going requirement for Yahweh's New Covenant people.

*"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do proclaim [Yahshua's] death until He comes."*²

We see, from the above scriptures, that this is not an event to take lightly, and a person should examine himself with regards to his relationship with Yahweh and his covenant brother before partaking of it. Failure to do so could mean that one would be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Yahshua.

We can draw from our understanding of covenant as so far discussed, to identify a number of facets to this memorial celebration. Not only is it a time to look inwards at ourselves, it is also a time to look around us at our relationships with our brethren, whom form part of Yahshua's Congregation, which is His body. It is a time to look backwards to when Yahshua offered His own body and blood for us, and also a time to look forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb³ when Yahshua will again drink of the fruit of the vine with the saints.⁴

The Blessings of the Covenant

So far we have looked at the demands that a covenant relationship with Yahweh places on an individual, but let us not lose sight of the glorious inheritance that can be ours. Attached to the covenant are many blessings, some of which we have already touched upon. Through the blood of the covenant we have access to them.

*"If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then [Yahweh] your God will keep his covenant love with you, as he swore to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land – your grain, new wine and oil – the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you. You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your women will be childless, nor any of your livestock without young. [Yahweh] will keep you free from disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you."*⁵

Here, Yahweh promised not only material prosperity for His covenant people Israel, but a wonderful quality of life, where they would continually experience the blessing of the Almighty. This blessing would set them apart from all other nations in the world. In the New Covenant, Yahweh promises to **provide** us with all we need in a material sense. Yahshua instructed His people not to worry about what they should eat or what they should wear for Yahweh knows what we need. If we set our hearts on the kingdom first, all our everyday needs will be met.⁶ The blessing of Yahweh under the New Covenant will cause us to prosper. *"And [Yahweh] is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."*⁷

This passage shows us that Yahweh wants us to have all we need, not so that we can indulge ourselves, but so that we will be equipped for every good work. The implication

¹ 1 Cor. 11:17-35

² 1 Cor. 11:26

³ Rev. 19:9

⁴ Matt. 26:28-29

⁵ Deut. 7:12-15

⁶ Luke 12:22-23

⁷ 2 Cor. 9:8

here is that our lives are already given over to the service of Yahweh and His gospel. As we continue to serve Yahweh for the cause of the gospel we will find that He provides us with everything that we need to carry on this great work.

Yahweh also promised freedom from disease to His covenant people. It is the will of Yahweh that His people should be in **health** in their bodies, their souls (will, mind and emotions) and their spirits.¹ So often we can fall prey to the negative influences of this world, yet the blood of Yahshua was shed in the garden of Gethsemane, at the whipping post and at the cross in order that we might receive divine healing and wholeness.²

Under the New Covenant, Yahweh is concerned with all aspects of our lives. If we fall sick, we should call the elders of the church to pray for us, anointing us with oil. The prayer offered in faith will make us well, and also if we have committed any sin, it will be forgiven us.³ Here we see the full extent of Yahweh's covenant in providing both for our physical bodies and our spiritual condition.

We read in Hebrews that the New Covenant is superior to the old because it is based on better promises. Under the Old Covenant, Yahweh revealed His standard of righteousness, the Law of Moses. The people responded by saying, "*We will do everything that [Yahweh] has said*", but they were dogged by defeat, never being able to attain fully to this standard. Under the New Covenant, we are not made righteous by our own efforts. Our **righteousness is a gift from Yahweh**. Through His substitutionary sacrifice we receive forgiveness from past sin⁴ and become heirs of the righteousness that comes by faith.⁵ This righteousness is a gift in that it is effected by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. A divine seed is implanted in our lives when we repent from sin and have faith in Yahshua, the divine seed of a new nature that does not sin, providing we live under its influence.⁶ The blood of the New Covenant, Yahshua's blood, is so powerful that it grants us a standing in the presence of the Father identical to that of Yahshua with regards to sinlessness. We need have no sense of inferiority since Yahshua has cleansed us from sin through the shedding of His own blood.⁷

Through the New Covenant the law is written in our hearts and the power and influence of sin in our lives can be forever broken.⁸ It is in this context that the New Covenant is far superior to the Old; whereas the Old Covenant ensured continued forgiveness for those offering sacrifices in repentance and faith, the New Covenant deals with the sinful nature of a man to destroy within him the very desire to sin and the power of sin, enabling him to live a holy life in the measure of truth the Father has revealed to him. In this way we are **sanctified and made holy**.⁹

Yahweh promised His Old Covenant people Israel that they would be the head not the tail¹⁰ and that their enemies would come at them in one direction and flee from them seven.¹¹ In the same way because of His New Covenant blessing, Yahshua has promised to go with us as we take the message of the kingdom to the four corners of the earth.¹² Just as Yahweh fought against the enemies of Israel, so He fights for us against the

¹ 3 John 2

² Isa. 53:5; 2 Pet. 2:25

³ Jas. 5:14-15

⁴ Jer. 31:34

⁵ Rom. 4, 5:17

⁶ 1 John 3:9

⁷ Heb 10:19-22

⁸ Jer. 31:33

⁹ Heb. 10:29, 1 Cor. 6:11

¹⁰ Deut. 28:13

¹¹ Deut. 28:7b

¹² Matt. 28:18-20

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principalities and powers of darkness¹ that would seek to rob us of our effectiveness in walking in righteousness, peace and joy, and in advancing His kingdom in the lives of other people. Through our covenant relationship with Yahshua, we can learn to appropriate the authority that Yahshua had over sin, sickness, demons and death when He ministered on earth. In these areas Yahweh's covenant people can be a **victorious** people.

Being a part of a covenant people means that we have the benefit of brothers and sisters in the faith who will stand with us in our walk with Yahshua no matter what. We are **members of Yahshua's body**, a group of people held together through the bonds of covenant love to be Yahweh's dwelling place on the earth, a temple made of lively stones. He will work on our lives, moulding and fashioning us until we, as Yahweh's chosen people are able to fit together into one glorious whole – *"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to Yahweh."*² The prophet Jeremiah declared that when Yahweh finally made a New Covenant, it would be with the house of Israel and Judah. This might raise questions from a gentile such as myself "What then does this covenant have to do with me?" Paul explains to us that in Yahshua the dividing wall between Jew and gentile, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, is broken down and Yahweh has made one body out of two separate entities.³ Through the blood of Yahshua, those who are born Gentiles are no longer foreigners and aliens, but **fellow citizens** with Yahweh's people and members of His household.⁴ This is a profound mystery and a wonderful blessing of the New Covenant; through this covenant we Gentiles as *"wild olive branches"* have been grafted into a *"cultivated olive tree"* that already exists, which is **Yahweh's Israel**.⁵ The Old Testament prophet Isaiah made a similar prediction:

*"And foreigners who bind themselves to [Yahweh] to serve him, to love the name of [Yahweh], and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."*⁶

This is not to say that Yahweh has finished with His dealings with Old Covenant Israel. They have only *"experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in."*⁷ Yahweh's ultimate plan is that the remnant of the Jewish people will be saved.⁸ Yahweh's gift and His call are irrevocable. Our destiny is inextricably linked to Yahweh's plan for the end of the age regarding His ancient people, the descendants of Abraham.

All these benefits are for those who are able to appreciate the fullness of what Yahshua purchased for us when He shed His blood – the blood of the new Covenant. The best, however is yet to be. *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind can conceive what [Yahweh] has prepared for those who love Him."*⁹ Only in eternity will we appreciate all the fullness of Yahweh's covenant blessings.

In conclusion, we can see that the covenant is an ancient rite with a heavenly origin. Yahweh's desire is that He should have a covenant people peculiarly His own. Through the New Covenant both Jews and Gentiles are able to partake of His richest blessings if

¹ Eph.5:11,12

² 1 Pet. 2:9

³ Eph. 2:11-15

⁴ Eph. 2:19

⁵ Eph. 2:19

⁶ Ro. 11:24

⁷ Isa. 56:6-7

⁸ Rom. 25-27

⁹ 1 Cor. 2:9

we are prepared to pay the price. Measure the cost against the rewards and decide how you will respond to this indissoluble truth.

Bibliography

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