

# Spiritual Blessings



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## Words Of The Holy Spirit

(A series of occasional studies looking at various words used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures.)

*“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”. 1 Cor. 2:13 (NKJV).*

### Testament.

(Or should that be Covenant?)

By Athol Walter.

Most people in our society, even if they never open a Bible, are familiar with the terms ‘Old Testament’ and ‘New Testament’. These terms have been around for so long that it rarely occurs to us to question them or ponder their meanings. And just about everyone who calls themselves Christian would say that the Old Testament is all about the law given through Moses and Israel, and the New Testament is about the new work of grace through Jesus Christ, and is to do with the Church. We’ll consider the rights and wrongs of those statements later.

Strictly speaking, however, the word ‘testament’ is not a word used by the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

The titles of Old and New Testaments are not part of the original, inspired Scriptures given in Hebrew and Greek. By the beginning of the third century A. D., however, we find Origen, an early Church ‘Father’, writing of “the Divine Scriptures, the so-called Old and New Covenants”. The next step that brought these familiar titles into our English Bibles, came about when, late in the third century A. D., Jerome produced the Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate. In that translation, the Hebrew and Greek words for ‘covenant’, *berit* and *diatheke* respectively, were translated ‘testamentum’. The Hebrew part of the Bible was labelled the Old Testament and the Greek Gospels and epistles were called the New Testament (the Latin equivalents, of course.) When English translations of the Bible were made much

later, the Latin titles were translated as Old and New Testaments respectively. The problem arises because, for modern readers in particular, the word testament carries a very different meaning to the correct word, ‘covenant’.

Another problem comes about because many Bible readers, even if they understand that the word should be covenant, assume that the Old Testament tells of the old Mosaic Covenant, which ended with the close of the Old Testament, while the New Covenant commences with the opening of the Gospels in the New Testament. It is further assumed that, as I mentioned earlier, the Old Covenant belonged to Israel, but the New Covenant belongs to the ‘church’.

I am not naïve enough to think that, after nearly two thousand years of tradition, we can change the names of the two divisions of the Bible to Old and New Covenants, but it is a shame, to say the least, that the use of the word ‘testament’ in the place of ‘covenant’ has led not only to confusion, but has also shrouded some truth.

cont. p. 3.

*“The titles of Old and New Testaments not only lead to confusion, but also hide truth”.*

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*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3*



## President's Word

Greetings once again to our readers. The Berean Bible Fellowship has planned several meetings this year, with a few more in the pipeline, and I'd like to tell you about some of them.

If you've never attended any of our meetings, or it's been a while since your last one, we encourage you to pluck up the courage and come along. All our meetings (except the annual conference) are free. Be sure to check the column on page 12 which has the details about our meetings.

### Special Event - Brisbane

A weekend of meetings on April 4th & 5th in the Brisbane area has just been finalised. This is the weekend before Easter, and the new venue is the Griffith University, Nathan Campus. Peter Ward and I will be the speakers. See the advertisement on page 6 for more details.

### Special Events - Newcastle

Last year we had a very profitable and enjoyable day of Bible study at Charlestown Community Hall, and so this year we are planning two such days on May 30th and August 29th. The times and format are still to be finalised, but last year we met from 10.00am-5.00pm, and had three study meetings over the day, plus lunch and light refreshments. It may be a little different this year, but we will confirm the details in the next issue. In the meantime, please keep aside May 30th and August 29th, and plan to join us.

### Sydney Studies

Do you live in the Sydney, NSW Central Coast or Illawarra regions? Peter Ward has put together a very interesting programme of talks for 2009 on a diverse range of subjects, including the Sabbath, the Antichrist, Prophecies, Gifts & Rewards, Fasting, Tithing, and many more. Consider coming along on the 4th Sunday of each month, 3.00 pm, for a time of study and fellowship. Bring your Bible, bring a friend, and bring all your questions about those topics, too!

### Other Events

This year's annual conference will be held at Camp Toukley on September 19th, 20th & 21st, 2009. Registration forms will be sent out later in the year but we invite you to set aside those days for a weekend of Bible study and fellowship. The huge bookstall, complete with freebies and bargains, was very popular last year, and will be back again. Looking further ahead, we are hoping that Michael and Sylvia Penny

will be able to join us for 2010's conference and other meetings. Relevant dates and venues later when they are confirmed. Of course the BBFA continues to hold its regular meetings in Brisbane, Newcastle, Maitland and Sydney - see page 12 for details.

### Optional Subscription

Finally, you will notice that this issue has been sent out with an "Optional Subscription" form. We gladly send out our magazine FREE OF CHARGE to anyone who asks for it, which is why it is "optional". If you can't afford the "optional subscription", don't worry, you will still receive our magazine if you want it. This is just our way of providing you with an opportunity to help us should you wish to do so. The BBFA has no paid pastors or staff, and is run on a purely voluntary basis. If you would like to help us cover some of the costs of printing, posting and administration, we invite you to return that form with a payment, or simply visit our website at [www.spiritualblessings.org/donate](http://www.spiritualblessings.org/donate) to make a donation online.

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and our study of His Word.

*David Tavender.*

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## Editorial

I want to apologize to our readers because nearly all of this issue has been written by myself. I don't like doing this, for the one writer can become tedious. But as I had nothing from other contributors owing to various factors, I had to step into the breach. The words Testament/Covenant have been on my mind of late, and I hope that the studies on these words will be interesting and helpful. I would welcome your feedback on these subjects.

Our summer weather has been very hot this year. Bushfires in Victoria have not only burnt out large tracts of forest and farmlands, but have also destroyed hundreds of homes and many people have lost their lives. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all who have been affected by this tragedy. We pray that they will find strength and comfort in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A letter from a Pastor in India tells how he enjoys our magazine and uses the material in his own ministry. We pray that he, and others working 'at the frontline', will continue to know the Lord's presence and strength in their witness for Him.

I give thanks to the Lord for His presence, guidance and unfailing blessing. I pray that our readers will find 2009 a great year of opportunities for service. Remember that very important command of Paul concerning a faithful ministry:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing (or correctly apportioning) the Word of Truth." 2 Tim. 2:15.

Yours in His grace and love,

*Athol Walter.*

The word Testament makes us think of someone's 'last will and testament', and as we will see, this idea has coloured several translations in the New Testament. On the other hand, the word covenant refers to an agreement, usually made between two or more parties, involving obligations and conditions for all those concerned. The word contract is a modern equivalent to covenant.

The Greek word, diatheke, which was used to translate the Hebrew word for covenant, is indeed used in classical Greek to mean 'a last will and testament', but that's not the point.

### Some Rules Of Interpretation

There are two rules of interpretation that should always be in front of us as we study Scripture. The first is that many important Greek words used by the New Testament writers are translations of Hebrew words from the Old Testament. Therefore, rather than simply basing our doctrines on New Testament words, we should discover what the Hebrew words are that lie behind the Greek words. God has provided a bridge for us to cross in this respect, and that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that we know as the Septuagint.

The second rule is to study the way a particular word is used in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. Dictionary definitions, while important, must sometimes give way to usage, and coupled closely with usage is context. We will see, as we proceed, how these rules affect our interpretation.

As an illustration of what can happen if the first of the rules mentioned above is ignored, I would like to quote from the Lexical Aids provided in the NIV Key Word Study Bible. In the New Testament section dealing with Greek words of course, we have this:

"Diatheke: from diatithemi, to set in order, dispose of in an orderly manner. Testament, covenant. In Classical Greek it always meant the disposition which a person makes of his property in respect of death, that is, his testament. This is the meaning when used either in the singular or plural. The plural also means the testamentary arrangements of a person. It should be understood that the disposition of God becomes an institution of God. In the NT, it means a solemn disposition, institution or appointment of God to man (Heb. 9:16–18), to which our word dispensation answers adequately. ... Diatheke, translated covenant, gives the misleading idea that God came to an agreement with fallen man as if signing a contract. Rather, it

involves only a declaration of God's unconditional dispensation as given to Abraham in regard to Israel as a nation. .... The Siniatic diatheke to Moses, however, was a conditional dispensation or series of promises ... which God made for the Jews only if they obeyed." (Selected quotations, pp. 1605/6.)

Now we turn to the Old Testament Lexical Aids in the same book and this is what we find under the heading "Berit".

"Berit: covenant, determination, stipulation. Denotes a treaty between nations (Josh. 9:6ff), a covenant between individuals or friends (1 Sam. 18:3 et al), a compact between a monarch and his subjects (2 Sam. 5:3), or a marriage covenant between husband and wife (Mal. 2:14). ... Contracts were often accompanied by signs, sacrifices, and a solemn oath which sealed the relationship with promises of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience. The ancient custom of ratifying solemn covenants involved passing between the divided parts of a sacrifice (see Gen. 15:9)." (p. 1508.)

I certainly do not intend to criticize what are generally very helpful notes, but to my mind, the notes under diatheke, in the main, have missed the point. The writer of the diatheke notes should have consulted the berit notes! A look at either Vine's or Mounce's Expository Dictionaries would have helped as well.

Let's apply our first rule to diatheke. When the Hebrew scholars translated their Scriptures into Greek for the use of Hebrews living outside Israel who no longer understood Hebrew, they translated

the Hebrew word berit by the Greek word diatheke. Surely we can take it as read that they understood diatheke to have the same meaning as berit – namely, a covenant or agreement between two parties – and one only has to read what Paul has to say about the Old and New Covenants in

Galatians and Hebrews to see that he was thinking of covenants not wills. To import the idea of a 'last will and testament' into those passages, which we will come to, leads us onto the wrong path.

So, having established that the Hebrew word for covenant is behind the Greek word that, unfortunately, has been translated 'testament', we must discover the meaning of it. The basic thought behind the Hebrew word for covenant, is 'cutting', and in fact, the original Hebrew, when referring to the making of a covenant, literally says such things as 'to cut a cutting'. This certainly sounds strange to us, but it is graphically illustrated in Gen.

15 where the Lord told

Abraham to prepare a number of animals in a special way. He had to cut the animals into two pieces, placing them opposite each other. Then the Lord put Abraham into a deep sleep, and while Abraham was asleep, the Lord passed between the separated pieces of the animals to signify the ratification of the covenant. It is an important point that Abraham was not allowed to participate in making that particular covenant – a very unusual circumstance, by the way – but that is outside the scope of this study.

What is important for us to notice is that the making of a covenant in those ancient times involved the cutting of animals, and the passing of the contracting parties between the severed parts. The meaning of these actions was to emphasize the seriousness of the undertaking, the sincerity of the contracting parties to fulfill the obligations undertaken, and the implication that any defaulting on the part of either party would involve a similar cutting of their bodies – in other words, their death.

This idea of cutting is not as foreign to us as we might think, for even though it is a little old fashioned, we still sometimes hear of an apprentice being indentured to a tradesman. Look at the word indentured. My Concise Oxford Dictionary tells me that ‘to indent’ means 1) to make tooth-like notches in something; and 2) to divide a document in two halves with zigzag lines. This was the practice with the formal document outlining the conditions of an apprenticeship. The two halves, with the zigzag cutting, would fit together exactly, and so the genuineness of the contract would be established. These days, it is more usual for an identical copy to be made.

The next point we must notice is rather obvious, but still must be stated. The cutting of the animal victim that was used to ratify the covenant necessarily meant the death of the animal. Unless and until the chosen animals were killed and cut up, the covenant was not ratified. I hope these words make you think of various verses in the New Testament, but we’ll come to them a little later.

It therefore becomes obvious that the making of a covenant in ancient times was a very serious matter. Indeed, it still is, and many people find out the hard way that they should have read the ‘fine print’ and understood the penalties for defaulting before they signed the contract.

The Bible tells of many covenants made between people, both individuals as well as groups or nations, but we also read of covenants that God made with certain individuals and the nation of Israel in particular. It is not the purpose of this study to look at those various covenants, but rather, to understand the word itself, and then

see how that affects some of the Scriptural teaching on the subject. To summarize the meaning of the word covenant, I can do no better than quote from Ernest Streets who puts it like this:

“We are therefore upon quite stable ground ... and can say that in the Scriptures, a covenant is a singularly solemn and binding contract or agreement between man and man, or between God and man, the terms of which were attested and ratified by sacrifice.” (“The Covenants”, by Ernest Streets, p. 4. Open Bible Trust.)

### **But What Does It Mean?**

Now to the second part of our quest, which is to see how the Holy Spirit uses our word in the New Testament, and how the knowledge of the Hebrew word guides our understanding.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul refers to the Old and New Covenants, and makes some very pertinent comments about them. It is pleasing to see that the translators of the King James Version used the word covenant in chapter 3, as do later translations, but at this point, I must say that in Gal. 4, in speaking about children, sons and adoption, Paul is talking about the ancient practice of appointing a ‘son and heir’. This is the only instance in the NT where diatheke can mean a ‘testament’. I would still caution you, however, to remember the rules mentioned earlier, and in particular, to pay attention to the context.

Obviously, in Gal. 3, Paul contrasts the Old and New Covenants, which would be difficult to do if the Old is a covenant, but the New is a will or testament. There certainly are differences between the two, and the New Covenant is said to be better than the Old, but they are both covenants. I want to leave Galatians now and go to Hebrews, for it is in this epistle that the greater damage is done by importing the word ‘testament’.

### **Hebrews chs. 7 to 10.**

7:22 says, “By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” (NKJV). The AV has ‘testament’ here. This verse comes in the middle of a discussion of the superiority of the Lord Jesus over the Aaronic priesthood and the Law. I hope you have read all of it.

Ch. 8 opens with the statement that Christ fulfills the requirements of this superior High-Priesthood, serving in the true Tabernacle of Heaven, and not in the copy, i.e. the earthly Tabernacle. Then in vv. 6 & 7 we have this:

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would

have been sought for a second.” Ask yourself the question, “A second what?” It must be a second covenant, not a will or a testament, for then it would not be the second one.

From v. 8 to v. 12, Paul quotes from Jeremiah 31:31–34, where the prophet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesies about the NEW COVENANT that God will one day make with the houses of Israel and Judah. You will read the passage in Jeremiah 31, won't you? In fact, I urge you to read all of chs. 30 & 31.

The last verse of Heb. 8, v. 13, should remove all doubts from our minds that ‘covenants’ are the subject.

“In that He says, ‘A new covenant’, He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Ch. 9 continues with a description of various items and conditions that operated under the first, i.e. the old, Covenant. The point is made in vv. 7 & 8 that the High Priests of old went into the Holy of Holies only once a year and always with a blood offering. This fact signified that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest or revealed, while ever the Old Covenant was in force.

The next few verses speak of the limitations of the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Covenant. Then in v. 11, we see that Christ came as the High Priest of the good things to come. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood, He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

I earnestly hope you will carefully go through these verses and note all the ways in which the Lord Jesus and the work He accomplished as the true High Priest, is superior to the ministration of the Old Covenant. It is all very important, but I must move on to v. 15.

“And for this reason (i.e. the reason given in the preceding verse) He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, (so) that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

And this brings us to the heart of the matter. Vv. 16 & 17 are the central point of the argument, and it is here that the translators seem to lose their way. Even the NKJV and the NIV, which have been consistent in the use of ‘covenant’ so far, succumb to tradition and use ‘testament’. But I will quote the verses using the word covenant. Heb. 9:16, 17:

“For where there is a covenant, there must also of necessity be the death of the ‘one appointed’. For a covenant is in force after the appointed ones are

dead, since it has no power at all while the ‘appointed one’ lives.”

Yes, I am well aware that I will have to justify the words ‘the appointed one’, but let’s take it a step at a time. V. 18 continues the thought of 16 & 17, by saying, “Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.” The next verses describe how Moses ‘confirmed the covenant’ with blood when he mediated the covenant to the people, by killing some animals and sprinkling the book of the law and the people with the blood.

Here now is a most important question that I would have you think carefully about. If Paul is speaking about the New Covenant in v. 15 in contrast to the Old, and if he is also speaking of the Old Covenant from v. 18 on, and how Moses ratified the Old Testament with the blood of animals, by what rules of interpretation can we justify a sudden switch in vv. 16 & 17 from covenants to wills and testaments, and then back to covenants again in v. 18? Surely, surely, vv. 16 & 17 prove the most important point of the argument, that for a covenant to have force, it must be ratified by the death of a sacrificial victim. The Old Covenant was ratified and confirmed by blood, and so was the New Covenant. One major difference between these two covenants is that in the case of the New one, the Mediator of it was also the sacrificial victim, whose blood ratified it.

### Now for the term ‘the appointed one’.

The word translated ‘testator’ in Heb. 9:16 & 17, is ‘diatithemi’. It is given quite a number of meanings in the Lexicons, the first one being ‘to appoint’, and another one is ‘to ratify a covenant’. Remember what was said earlier about the importance of the way in which the Holy Spirit uses a word? So let’s have a look. I have put the word/s which translate diatithemi in bold type.

Luke 22:29. “I **appoint** unto you a kingdom, as My Father **hath appointed** unto me.” AV. (The NKJV has bestow.)

Acts 3:25. “You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God **made** with our fathers ...”

Heb. 8:10. “For this is the covenant that I **will make** with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord ...”.

Heb. 9:16, 17. “For where there is a covenant, (I can’t bring myself to type testament there!) there must also be the death of the **testator**. For a covenant is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the **testator** lives.” My Interlinear literal translation has ‘the one making the covenant’, instead of testator.

Heb. 10:16. "This is the covenant that I **will make** with them after those days, says the Lord ..."

The above verses give us every occurrence of 'diatithemi' in the NT. If we accept the Lexicon meaning, to appoint, in each of the above instances, we will be on the right track. The two occurrences in Heb. 9 seem a little strange in that suddenly a verb becomes a noun, but given that it is a noun in those two instances, the decision has to be made as to what noun will be used. If we stick with the thought of 'appoint', I think that the term 'appointed one' is a good first choice. It seems to me that most translators have been led astray by the word testament, which almost forces them to translate diatithemi as 'testator'. But if we will observe the rules of discovering what the Hebrew word is behind the Greek word, find out what that Hebrew word means, and then look at the way in which the word has been used by the Holy Spirit, we will be guided to the right interpretation. I think that the Interlinear literal translation, given above, is consistent with these rules and fits the context perfectly. I have one further suggestion, which is, that instead of 'the one making the covenant', we read 'the covenanting victim'. Paul's point is that the covenant was not operative until the covenanting victim, i.e. the one appointed to die to ratify the covenant, was slain. How marvellous it is to understand that the OT types and the arguments that Paul puts forward in Hebrews all point to and are completed in the death of the Lord Jesus on Calvary.

I would like to conclude this part of the study by repeating the verses from Heb. 9, using the correct

translations, and then follow up with several other very relevant verses.

Heb. 9:15–18: "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a covenant, there must also of necessity be the death of the covenanting victim. For a covenant is in force after death, since it has no power at all while the covenanting victim lives. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood."

Heb. 9:7 & 8: "But into the second part (of the Tabernacle) the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, ... the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first

tabernacle was still standing."

Heb. 10:19–22: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ..."

Matt. 27:50, 51: "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks split."

I hope that after all has been said, you will agree with me when I say that the title of this study should be "Covenant" and not "Testament"!

*"A covenant was not operative until the 'covenanting victim', i.e., the one appointed to die to ratify the covenant, was slain."*

## BRISBANE BIBLE STUDY WEEKEND

**April 4th & 5th, 2009.10.00am - 4.30pm each day**

Speakers: Peter Ward & David Tavender, presenting talks on a variety of dispensational and other Bible-related topics. Questions and discussion encouraged.

Griffith University, Nathan Campus

Room 0.10, Macrossan Building (N16)

No charge to attend.

For more information

contact Frank Haegler (07) 3297-1981.

Everybody welcome!



# The New Covenant

## When was it instituted, and with whom?

As was said in the earlier part of this study, many Christians are somewhat confused about just when the New Covenant commenced. "It's obvious", some would say. "Our part of the Bible is called the New Testament, so it starts at the beginning of the Gospels, doesn't it?" No, not quite. If most believers are questioned closely, they would soon get to the point where they realised that the New Covenant was not instituted until the night of what is known as the Last Supper, which was the night before the Lord was crucified. That means that prior to the Lord's Crucifixion, the New Covenant could not have been in force.

We have references to the New Covenant during the Last Supper in Matt. 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22. John has quite a long account of much that the Lord said to His chosen disciples that night, starting in ch. 13, but surprisingly, John makes no mention of the institution of the New Covenant. The particular verses in the Gospels which refer to the New Covenant are:

Matt. 26:27 & 28. "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'"

Mark 14:23 & 24. "Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.'"

Luke 22:20. "Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'"

As we consider the significance of the Lord's words, I want you to put aside the traditional teaching about the Last Supper if you can. I know full well it has become the central ritual of many Christian denominations, and it may seem to be heretical to question the traditional interpretation put upon it. I ask you, however, to try to put yourself back in the position of the disciples who were gathered around that supper table. What did it all mean to them? If we can get an insight into that, I think we will be well on the way to understanding what the New Covenant really is.

There are at least two questions that we must answer as we try to understand what the Lord was doing that fateful night. The first one is this. What

was the occasion when the Lord passed the cup around to the disciples? I wish all the questions were as easy to answer as this one. It was the Passover Feast, of course, and they had gathered together to remember the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt centuries before. Do I need to stress that the Passover is a Jewish Feast, and that it is really the foundation on which the Old Covenant stood?

The second question is this. What would have come to the disciples' minds when the Lord said, 'This is My blood of the new covenant?' I know that we are not actually told, but is it too hard to imagine what their thoughts would have been? Remember, they were celebrating the annual Feast of Passover, which, back in the wilderness, had been followed quite quickly by the institution of the Mosaic Covenant. One thing of which I am absolutely certain, is that they did not think the Lord was about to tell them what He had written in His

*"What would have come to the disciples' minds when the Lord said, 'This is My blood of the new covenant?'"*

'last will and testament'!

Remember also, that like all Jews worthy of the name, the disciples would know their Scriptures very well indeed. When they heard the words 'new covenant', there was only one passage of Scripture that would spring to their minds, and that is, of course, Jeremiah 31. This is the one passage where God foretells that the day will come when He will make a new covenant with His people. Here are the relevant verses, Jer. 31: 31–34.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was an husband to them, says the Lord.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Now let me ask you this. When you read these verses, particularly the words ‘I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah’, do you substitute the thought ‘church’ in your mind for ‘the houses of Israel and Judah’? Many believers tend to do that when they read promises relating to Israel. But I ask you to do your best to let the words that the Holy Spirit has inspired, convey their simple meaning to you. Neither the House of Israel or the House of Judah are the Church of which we are part today, in spite of what years of tradition might say. Think again of the disciples as they listened in awe to what their Master was saying. “This is My blood of the new covenant.” They understood that a covenant had to be confirmed – sealed, if you will – by the blood of the animal appointed for the task. They also knew that the prophecy said that the Lord would make the new covenant with **the same people** with whom He had made the old covenant. What they still did not understand on that night, was that they were looking at the One who was the Appointed Victim, as well as being the High Priest who would later take that blood into the true Tabernacle in Heaven. That understanding came later. But I am sure they knew the Lord was referring to Jeremiah’s prophecy about a new covenant to be made between God and Israel.

Let’s look at some of the context of Jeremiah’s words back in ch. 31, and see if that can help us.

31:1. “At the same time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”

4. “Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! ...”

7 & 8. “Sing with gladness for Jacob ... O Lord save Your people, the remnant of Israel!”

9. “... for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.”

10. “Hear the word of the Lord ... He who scattered Israel will gather him ...”

11. “For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he.”

Look at the references to the return of Israel to their own land in vv. 16 & 17. Then note the references to Ephraim, another name for Israel, in vv. 18 to 20. Then comes references to them dwelling in Judah in peace and prosperity in vv. 23 to 26.

27, 28. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord.”

Let me ask you this. How can the references to plucking up, scattering, persecuting, destroying and afflicting refer to Israel, but in the same verse, the references to building up and planting refer to the ‘Church’? If my question strikes you as bizarre, again I must tell you that quite large sections of the Christian Church teach just those things. The Church has replaced Israel, they say. All the prophecies and promises about the restoration and blessing of Israel are to be fulfilled in the Church. Israel is finished, and God has nothing more for her at all. So many

say. But look at vv. 35 to 37. Here the Lord says that if the sun stops rising, and night no longer follows day, and if the universe can be measured and comprehended, that is the time when He will cast off the seed of Israel for their

sins. The sun is still coming up every day when I last checked, so as far as I am concerned, Israel is still a big part of the plans of God.

The last few verses of Jer. 31, from 38 on, speak of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and that it shall not be destroyed again. And in the midst of all these references to Israel, Judah, Ephraim and Jerusalem, we have the marvellous promise of a coming time when God will make a new covenant with the same people with whom He made the old one.

Once again, I remind you of the importance of context. If in ch. 30, the subject is Israel, and if through the early part of ch. 31, the subject is still Israel, and if Israel is still the subject in the verses that come after the statements about the new covenant, surely Israel is the subject of the section that foretells the making of the new covenant, especially as terms such as ‘the House of Israel and the House of Judah’ are used. Does it not then inescapably and logically follow that, when the Lord said to the disciples, without any words to signal that He was changing the context of Jeremiah’s prophecy, ‘This is My blood of the new covenant’, He meant that long-promised new covenant God would make with the Houses of Israel and Judah? To take the Lord’s words and make them apply to the Christian community of later time is I believe, a mistake of huge proportions and significance. In addition to leading Christians astray generally, it has meant that Christians have robbed

*“When you read terms such as ‘the house of Israel’ and ‘the house of Judah, do you substitute the word ‘Church’ for them in your mind?”*

# Is The New Covenant Operating Today?

To say that this is a vexed question is something of an understatement. I know that I am treading on what to many believers is 'sacred ground', but I assure you that my motive is to know and understand God's truth as revealed in His Word, even if that means discarding something that has been a tradition in Christendom for centuries. Remember, the Lord said that the truth will set us free! (John 8:32.)

So, is the new covenant operating today? To put it another way, are believers today saved and blessed under the new covenant? After what has been said so far in these studies, it will come as no surprise when I say that the simple answer is no.

If what has already been put forward is correct (as I believe it is), then it follows as surely as night follows day, that Gentiles believers who are not part of the Houses of Israel or Judah, are not party to, nor are blessed under the terms of a Covenant that Scripture clearly says belongs to Israel.

I was born a Gentile, not a Jew. How about you? And I did not become a 'spiritual Israelite' when the Lord saved me. Paul, the Christ-appointed Apostle to the Gentiles, not only tells me that the covenants belong to Israel (Rom. 9:4), but also that, as a Gentile, I was a stranger to the covenants of promise that belong to Israel (Eph. 2:12). Does that mean I have no basis for my salvation and relationship with God? Certainly not, but we'll return to that shortly.

But what about the Gentile converts in the years covered by the Book of Acts? Did they not become

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Israel of rights and blessings that will be hers in God's good time. Of course, the fact that Christians have mistakenly appropriated the new covenant to themselves will not prevent God from making the covenant and applying the wonderful blessings it will bring to the right people, i. e., none other than the rescued, regenerated and restored Remnant of Israel.

As we have considered the circumstances when the Lord introduced the new covenant, we have also answered the second question of whom the covenant is for. In saying that the new covenant is for Israel and not the Christian Church, we raise another important question or two. Is the new covenant operating today? If not, what is the basis for our relationship with God? We'll consider these matters in the next part of our study.

part of Israel and share in her blessings? Those are good questions! If, as I have been trying to do in these studies on Covenants, you will give Israel her rightful place in God's plans and not push the Christian Church into places it does not belong, then you will soon see that the years from the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to the fateful conference of Paul with the Jewish leaders in Rome were a remarkable time of mercy for Israel, even though they had crucified their Messiah.

As He was being nailed to the cross, the Lord prayed for His Father to forgive Israel for what they were doing in ignorance. The Book of Acts records the answer to that prayer, which was a most gracious

second chance to accept their Messiah. So we have the apostles making up their number to twelve again, following the defection of Judas. They wait in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost to

arrive, and after the 'power from on high' falls on them, Peter goes out into the streets of Jerusalem and tells the assembled crowds that what was happening before their very eyes, was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Read Joel. It is all about Israel.

Then several weeks later, Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin after the healing of the lame man at the gate of the Temple. Read Peter's words to these men carefully (Acts 4), and remember that he was speaking to the very ones who had condemned the Lord to death. In effect, Peter offers forgiveness and healing (same word in Greek as salvation) to the nation if they will but repent and accept Jesus as their Messiah. He had told the crowd that had assembled after the lame man had been healed, that if the nation would repent, then the Lord Jesus would return, and the times of restitution and restoration, as foretold by the prophets, would commence (Acts 3).

The miraculous signs performed by the Apostles and others during Acts, were a continuation of the miracles of the Lord. They were signs to unbelieving Israel, and when Israel was set aside at the end of Acts 28, the signs ceased. The other thing to be said about Acts is that it shows us why Israel was set aside and have not been at the forefront of God's purposes for such a long time. But the day is getting near, I believe, when Peter's 'times of restitution' will come into operation. But those times have not come yet, and right now, we are still living in the times when Israel is 'LO-AMMI' (not my people).

***"The simple answer is No".***

In Romans 9–11, Paul lays out clearly the purpose and status of Gentile believers in those Acts years. Briefly, he says that Gentiles were brought in for the special purpose of stirring up Jews to accept their Messiah, even through a spirit of jealousy. Also, the Gentiles who believed were like wild olive branches grafted into the olive tree of Israel, to stimulate the flagging tree to bear fruit. That was the situation in the Acts period, but it is certainly not the position today. In most of our churches now, there are hardly any Jewish Christians at all. Since the destruction of Jerusalem back in the first century A. D., the Christian church has been predominantly Gentile. Gentile believers do not now occupy the inferior position that they did in the Acts assemblies. As Paul says in Eph. 2:14, the ‘middle wall of separation’ has been abolished.

Many Christians today believe that they are spiritual Israelites, or children of Abraham by faith. Do you remember some of those verses from Jer. 31? Not only was the word ‘Israel’ used, but also ‘Jacob’ and ‘Ephraim’. The three terms were used equally for Israelites, yet I have never, in all my long years as a believer, heard any Christians refer to themselves as ‘spiritual Jacobs’, or ‘spiritual Ephraimites’! The truth is that it was Gentile converts during the Acts period, when God was making a special appeal to Israel, who became children of Abraham by faith.

Therefore, seeing that Israel were put into their ‘LO-AMMI’ condition at the end of Acts, and that a new dispensation was revealed through Paul after that point in time, it is a plain fact that the new covenant, which belongs to Israel, is not now in operation.

Next question. Did the new covenant ever operate after the Lord confirmed it with His death? There is some disagreement about the correct answer to this question, even amongst those who believe we are not under the new covenant today. Many say that it did not operate at all, simply because Israel did not receive their Messiah. That rejection brought about the withdrawal of God’s offer of forgiveness and the postponement of the ‘times of restitution’. Therefore, the new covenant has never operated.

On the other hand, however, I would like to make a very tentative suggestion – please note the word tentative – that the New Covenant may have operated as far as those who did accept the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and Saviour were concerned. Consider these references.

2 Cor. 3:5 & 6. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves ... but our

sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant ...”

1 John 2:27. “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same appointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him”.

You will remember that one of the results prophesied by Jeremiah, to come from the New Covenant, was that no one would have to teach others about the Lord, for they would all know Him. Is this reference from John’s epistle a fulfillment of this promise, even ever so slightly? And what was Paul and his fellow workers ministering when he

claimed that God had made them sufficient as ministers of the new covenant? I do not wish to be dogmatic about this point. I put forward these thoughts for prayerful consideration, and I would welcome any discussion.

Michael Penny, in his booklet “The New Covenant”, says that the New Covenant has never operated, and he could well be right. His booklet is well worth reading. But I can’t help wondering. What is absolutely sure, however, is that the New Covenant is not in operation for believers today, but awaits the time of the Lord’s return, when He will rescue and restore His people Israel, and write His law on their hearts. As Paul says in Romans 10:15, “For if (Israel’s) being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”

## The Final Question

Well, final as far as these studies are concerned. If believers today are not under the New Covenant, what is the basis for our salvation? Please turn to Titus 1:1 & 2:

“Paul, a bondservant of God ... in the hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”

2 Tim. 1:9. “God ... who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

Eph. 1:3 & 4. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ...”

Here is something that you can check for yourself, and I certainly hope you will. There is not one promise, law, covenant, or anything else to do with Israel that is said to have been done before time began or before

*The Gentile convert in the Acts period was a ‘wild olive branch grafted into Israel’s olive tree. That is not the situation today!*

the foundation of the world. All the time references to do with Israel and her promised Kingdom are said to be from or since the foundation of the world. So when we see that we, in God's wisdom and grace, are not part of Israel's covenants and promises, there is no need for us to fret, for we have lost nothing. The promise of God on which our salvation as Gentiles is based, goes back to a period that is BEFORE the foundation of the world, or before time began. It is certainly different from Israel's position, but it is just as sure and certain as any promise God ever made to that nation that is peculiarly his own.

And not only is our salvation linked to a different time frame to that of Israel, but so is our destination.

The places of blessing for Israel are either the promised land that is the centre of so much strife at the moment, or the New Jerusalem. But the place of blessing for the members of the Church which is the Body of Christ is at the right hand of God, seated with Christ there, far above all. These are plain statements of God's wonderful Word. I pray that your reaction will be one of faith and acceptance.

The subject of the Believer's position today demands more than the few words devoted to it in this study. Rest assured that much more will be presented in future issues.

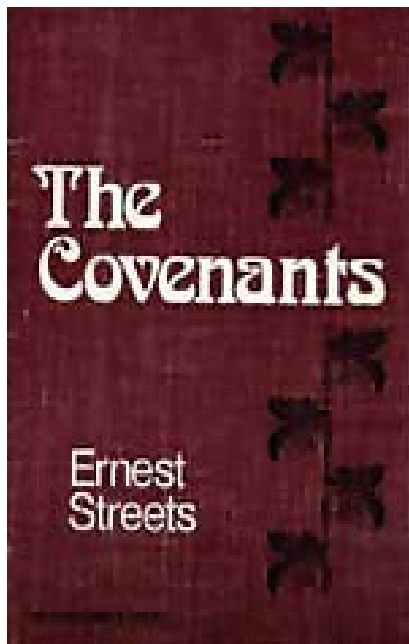
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**Further reading:**

**More details concerning Covenants of the Bible in general and the New Covenant in particular may be found in the following: The Covenants by Ernest Streets, examines Biblical covenants generally, and The New Covenant by Michael Penny looks specifically at the New Covenant. See advertisement below. Two articles entitled "Covenant" are to be found in The Alphabetical Analysis by Charles Welch, in Vol. 1, p. 172 and Vol. 8, p. 149. These articles provide much information. The Alphabetical Analysis, in 8 volumes, is also available from the address below, and is a worthwhile investment.**

THE COVENANTS (Ernest Streets). Deals with the OT covenants, the place of the covenants in the NT and the place of covenants today. Paperback 31pages

THE NEW COVENANT (Michael Penny) The author first explains what a covenant is, then answers the following: What is the New Covenant? Who is it between? When is it in operation? Paperback 34 pages



Both books available for a total of \$10.00, which includes postage. Please forward a cheque / money order (payable to "BBFA Book Agency") to P.O. Box 3141, Glendale NSW 2285, Australia.

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Group Co-ordinators: Peter & Anne Ward, (02) 9743 3452.

### **Newcastle:**

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34 Arona St., Edgeworth.  
Group Co-ordinators: David & Janelle Tavender, (02) 4950 6708

### **Maitland:**

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20 Short St., Lorn.  
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