



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The New Covenant and Prophecy, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

Our subject is the “New Covenant and Prophecy, Part I.” We’ll be continuing this in our next study. For those of you who have not been here in our last study, we completed a rather brief survey of the Davidic Covenant and Prophecy. We have been trying to show from the Scriptures that the Abrahamic Covenant is the one great, historical covenant, and these other covenants are expansions and enlargements of it. We pointed out that the basic biblical promises are found in that Abrahamic Covenant in which God promised Abram a seed, a land, and a royal line.

Then coming to the Davidic Covenant, it too being an unconditional covenant, we traced the Davidic Covenant in history and psalm. We dealt with 2 Samuel chapter 7, 1 Chronicles chapter 17, and Psalm 89, three great passages which unfold the Davidic Covenant in the Old Testament. We looked at the Davidic Covenant in the Prophets very briefly; the Davidic Covenant in the Gospels in Luke chapter 1, then in the Acts, in two passages in the Book of Acts; in the Epistles primarily in Romans chapter 1 and Romans chapter 15. We made reference to 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 8, and we also looked at the Davidic Covenant in the apocalypse.

And we saw that throughout the Scriptures there is this one line of teaching that God has promised that a Messiah would come of the line of David and that he would rule

in the kingdom and that this was really the fulfillment of that part of the Abrahamic Covenant in which God said to Abraham “kings shall come out of thee,” so that each of these covenants that follows historically the previous, unfolds, enlarges upon certain aspects of that Abrahamic Covenant.

We also took a brief look at the Davidic Covenant in theology and tried to answer the question: Must the Davidic Covenant be fulfilled literally? We answered yes. Must partial fulfillment be followed by complete historical fulfillment? Yes. Is literal fulfillment harmonious with the other covenants? Yes. And is the New Testament in harmony with this? And we didn’t have time to look at this in much detail, but I would have wanted to look again at Acts chapter 15 and point out that that passage is in harmony with it and that the amillennial interpretation of that particular passage does not hold. Since we have looked at that passage several times, I don’t think it’s necessary for us to look at it again.

So we want to come to the New Covenant and Prophecy and this is the last of our great historical covenants. I want you to turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 31. And will you listen as I read verses 31 through 34? Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 through 34. This is the normative passage dealing with the New Covenant. And I do think that if we are to understand anything about this covenant, it is this passage that we must understand preeminently. There are a number of other passages that refer to the New Covenant, but this is the most succinct and, yet at the same time, a full treatment of it. Verse 31 -- really the whole context could be read beginning at verse 27 but -- in fact, the whole chapter, but we will concentrate on verses 31 through 34.

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with 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 bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel;

After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

I want you to turn with me also to the eighth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 8, and I’m going to read the citation of this very passage with the application that the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews makes of it. Hebrews chapter 8, let me read beginning with the sixth verse.

“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”

Now, the first covenant, of course, is the Mosaic Covenant. We have considered that covenant. Remember we saw that it was a conditional covenant and thus differs from both the Abrahamic and the Davidic. If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

“For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and will write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be

to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, a New Covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and groweth old is ready to vanish away.”

The New Covenant and Prophecy: the last of the great historical covenants comes before us in Jeremiah 31. It is said in the context of the final collapse of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah, when he writes of this New Covenant, is in prison. Famine and plague rage in the city of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian army is battering against the city walls. This was Judah’s midnight hour and the thing that the people needed above all else was some sense of hope and some sense of covenant comfort in the light of their present condition.

So in chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34 through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord gives them what has been called the Book of Consolation or the Book of Comfort. It is not all saccharinely sweet. Disciplinary judgment must come. And this section is the section in which we have the famous reference to the time of Jacob’s trouble. So it is evident that what is promised then is not altogether sweet. But the seed of Israel is to abide forever. And that I think is probably the chief thought of these chapters, that God is not going to destroy his people Israel. The program that he sets forth in these chapters involves the time of Jacob’s trouble, which is of course a reference to the tribulation period of the future. They are to be disciplined in exile, but there is to be no final disaster. I think it’s important to remember that, too, that the tribulation is a time of national discipline. And in spite of that great time of discipline called, as I say, the time of Jacob’s trouble, yet there is the promise he shall be saved out of it.

The second thing that the program involves is the restoration from captivity. That is stated very definitely in chapter 32 in verse 37, but it is implied throughout. There we

read “Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, to which I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury.” And finally the New Covenant. So the program that God suggests for Israel in the midst of their difficulties with Babylon is a picture of the future, a time of necessary discipline because of their disobedience, a time of scattering and captivity to the four corners of the earth, a time of tribulation. But, nevertheless, God is going in the future to restore them from captivity, he is going to make a New Covenant with them, and this New Covenant is to be an enduring compact. It is not a fleeting imposition from without like the Mosaic Covenant was, but it is to be a covenant inscribed in the hearts of its recipients and thereby guaranteed so far as its fulfillment is concerned. The New Covenant then, an unconditional covenant, reiterates and expands the basic Abrahamic and Davidic promises.

In fact, in Ezekiel chapter 16, verses 60 through 63 there is a reference made to the New Covenant under the terminology of “the everlasting covenant.” And there reference is made specifically to the days of thy youth so that this covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and also the Abrahamic Covenant are really part of the one covenantal program of God which finds its origin and its source in the everlasting covenant of redemption.

Its stress, of course, rests upon the personal redemptive blessings, especially the forgiveness of sins. And that is why, when you read in Jeremiah chapter 31, you have stress laid upon the last statement: “for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” You may remember reading in the Abrahamic Covenant and reading also the passages that have to do with the Davidic Covenant, practically nothing is said about the forgiveness of sins. In fact, someone who had a theological mind and had read to him or had read the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant might raise the question: how is it possible for God to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant since men are sinners? How is it possible for the Davidic Covenant to be fulfilled since men are sinners? That question may have disturbed, I say, those who have some kind of theological mind.

Because they would, of course, sense immediately that God is unable, apart from some provision for man’s sin, to confer these blessings upon him in his sinful state.

The New Covenant supplies a full and complete answer, for it stresses the fact that there is a covenant that does have, as its direct object, the forgiveness of sins. So that is stressed in this covenant. And as you know -- next week we will take this up. As you know this covenant is finally inaugurated in the blood of our Lord Jesus upon Calvary’s cross, and it is this covenant and particularly the elements of the forgiveness of sins that we celebrate every time that we observe the Lord’s Supper. We observe and remind ourselves of the New Covenant.

Now, there are some problems of interpretation and for a moment I want to turn to them. Three different views have been held historically on this passage in Jeremiah chapter 31. First, the postmillennial view. The New Covenant according to the postmillennialists will be fulfilled to Israel in the golden age that precedes the Second Advent of Christ. Some of you have not been here in the times that we have taken up the millennial systems, and I just simply will state in case you may be confused regarding this, that the postmillennial view, the postmillennial interpretation of prophecy is an interpretation that affirms that the Lord Jesus is not going to come until there comes a time of gold -- of the golden age upon the earth. This golden age is to be brought in, generally speaking, by the preaching of the gospel. The postmillennialists interpret Jeremiah chapter 31 as a covenant that will be fulfilled in that golden age preceding the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus to the earth.

The amillennial view is different. According to the amillennialists, those who do not believe that there is going to be an earthly kingdom of a thousand years, they believe that the New Covenant is being fulfilled in the present age, and it is fulfilled in the salvation of both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church of Jesus Christ. Since the church of Jesus Christ has come into existence, this is the fulfillment of the New Covenant. Thus the promises given to the house of Israel, according to Jeremiah chapter

31, verse 31, are transferred to the church by process of spiritualization. When we read in verse 31, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,” amillennialists, generally speaking, do not take the house of Israel to be ethnic Israel and the house of Judah to be a reference to ethnic Israel or Judah. They spiritualize those promises and that statement is made applicable to all who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ in this age, whether they be Jew or Gentiles.

Now, of course, the amillennialists, like the premillennialists, differ on some details among themselves. You might find an amillennialist -- in fact, if you cannot find one, I’ll give you a name or two -- who would disagree slightly with what I have said. But, generally speaking, this is the amillennial interpretation.

Now you can see of course that right here we have a violation of a principle upon which the premillennial interpretation of Scripture depends. And that is that the Bible is to be interpreted in a normal way or, as it is quite frequently said, in a literal way. I gave you what one of the Bible teachers of another generation used to call the Golden Rule of Interpretation. It is this: when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Some have said don’t seek nonsense. When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context stood it in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise. That is a good rule of interpretation. When the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense -- makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise. That principle of interpretation allows us, if there are figurative statements made in a context, to take them figuratively.

I once said in the course of this particular series of studies that all interpretists coming to the Bible agree that parts of the Bible are symbolical, parts of the Bible are figurative, parts of the Bible are to be taken literally, so that amillennialists who spiritualize a great deal of the prophetic word and premillennialists both affirm that the Bible is figurative in sections, it is symbolical in sections, it is to be taken literally in sections. The question is: what is the rule and what is the exception? What is to be the rule and what is to be the exception? And it is the affirmation of the premillennialists that in the prophetic Scriptures, the rule is to take the word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning. In the case of the amillennialists, the rule is to take these statements of the prophetic Scriptures in a spiritualized or spiritual way.

So that we need to bear that in mind so that we do not become unbalanced; that we do not deny that the word contains many figures of speech; that there are many symbolical sections of the Bible, particularly books like the Book of Revelation, and on the other hand, there are many, many sections of the Bible that are to be taken literally. It is my own feeling that when a person spiritualizes these great prophecies of the Old Testament then he would bring upon himself the judgment that John Calvin pronounced upon false teachers in his day, of whom he said, “They were perversely ingenious in futile inventions.” And it seems to me that this is exactly what some of our good Christian amillennial brethren have become. They have become perversely ingenious in feudal inventions.

Arthur Pink, who as a good interpreter of Scripture as a general rule, and a man who has great -- has had in the past great insights into the word of God, in the last years of his ministry became an amillennialist and in the course of his treatment of many passages of the word of God, he began to spiritualize them. And this particular passage is one which he spiritualized. He taught that the term, Israel, means not only Israel but also includes believing Gentiles. And he appealed to the text in Romans chapter 9, verse 6 to which we referred once before: not all who are of Israel, these are Israel.

Now, the distinction that the Apostle Paul was making in Romans chapter 9 was a distinction amid Israelites. He was distinguishing believing Israelites from unbelieving Israelites. He was not by any manner of means suggesting that that text included believing Gentiles. He was talking about Israelites and was simply saying there are two kinds of Israelites. And of course the reading of the Old Testament would show anyone that. So that -- that was the point he was making. Mr. Pink, however, went on to say this text teaches therefore that believing Gentiles may be called Israel. But they are nowhere called Israel in the Bible and nowhere intended to be referred to as Israelites.

We are in the New Testament said to be children of Abraham, we who are believers. Because we are children of Abraham by faith; we are followers of Abraham in his faith. But we are nowhere said to be the children of Israel. There is a great deal of difference between the two. For Abraham was not an Israelite. So we must remember then in studying Scripture to make the proper distinctions and not gloss over these points which are often extremely important.

The premillennialists then, coming to them, they interpret the New Covenant as having been made with Israel and that it will be fulfilled completely, only in the kingdom. Within this view there are several variations. Mr. Scofield differed from Lewis Sperry Chafer, for example. And Scofield and Chafer both differed from John Nelson Darby, for example. And there probably have been some other distinctions, too, but these are the three important distinctions. Now, we will deal with these next week when we consider the relationship of the New Covenant to the church as we look at the New Covenant and the New Testament. But we are looking at the New Covenant in the Old Testament.

Roman II, the plan of organization of the passage. Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 31-34. Now, if you were listening carefully as I read through in the passage in Hebrews, you might have noticed a little phrase that occurs quite a few times. In fact, in verse 31, 32, 33, 34, four verses, you will find that the expression occurs four times. Now, it’s the kind

of expression that most of us pass by unthinkingly, but occasionally these things can be important.

Now, you may be surprised but the expression that occurs four times is the expression: “saith the Lord.” Now, the importance of it gives us a clue to the structure of this passage. Now that little expression in the Hebrew text is an expression that sounds like this *n’um adonai*. It really is the saying of Yahweh. *n’um adonai*. That word *n’um* is a word that refers, generally speaking, to an oracular statement; that is, it is a prophecy. It usually introduces some prophetic saying.

Now, you will find that it occurs four times, and it occurs in the beginning of verse 31, and then it occurs near of the end of verse 32. It occurs in the beginning of verse 33, and it occurs at the end -- near the end, of verse 34. So that these two verses, the first two verses 31 and 32 begin and end with saith the Lord, verses 33 and 34 begin roughly and end roughly with saith the Lord. And then the climactic statement is the last of verse 34 introduced by a ‘for’ or a *kijy* in the Hebrew text.

So what we have then is a threefold statement. One, verses 31 and 32 in which a reference is made to the New Covenant that it’s not like the old covenant. Verses 33 and 34 in which the contents of the New Covenant are given, and at the end of verse 34, the foundation or the basis for those promises that are given in verse 33 and 34. So, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant, not according to the Mosaic Covenant, saith the LORD.” And the end of the verse. One section verse 33: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD.” Now, follow the provisions and at the end -- near the end of verse 34 we read: “from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD.” There are the provisions. And the final foundation of it all: “for.” This makes it possible for God to do these things that he has said that he is going to do: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. That’s a beautifully constructed little paragraph and a

beautiful expression and very succinct form of the statements of and blessings of the New Covenant.

Let’s look now finally at the particulars of the covenant. We want to look at the details. And, first of all, we want to look at the time of the covenant according to the prophecy. “Behold, the days come,” verse 31. And then in verse 33: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; and after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts.” What is the time reference? Well, when we go back and look at the context of chapters 30 and 31, for this section is something of a unity, we discover that we are talking about the events of the last days of Israel’s history upon the earth, before the advent of our Lord. We have referenced, as I have already referred, to the time of Jacob’s trouble in Jeremiah chapter 30, verse 7: “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” Then there is a description in chapter 31 of the time of Israel’s tribulation and the time of Israel’s re-gathering and the time of their blessing in the future.

So, that the time of fulfillment of the New Covenant is stated to be the time of the tribulation and the regathering of the nation Israel. That should give us a clue right at the beginning that we cannot expect the fulfillment of the New Covenant in the present age. The New Covenant is to be fulfilled in the future, in the days that are to come; after the days of Israel’s scattering to the four corners of the earth; after the days of the Great Tribulation; at the time of the consummation, then we may expect the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

The amillennialists, on the basis of their interpretation of this, I think you can see have difficulty in -- from the text here in Jeremiah 31 proving that we are now in these days in the light of those references to the tribulation and in the light of the references to the regathering of the nation Israel.

The term “New Covenant” being the New Covenant: I will make a New Covenant. By the way, this is the only reference to the term “New Covenant” in the Old Testament.

Now, it is not the only reference to the New Covenant. But it is the only reference to the term “the New Covenant” in the Old Testament. The idea is found in the Old Testament 16 or 17 times. For example, we have references to the “everlasting covenant” and the contexts indicate that the covenant in view is the New Covenant. We have reference to God putting a new heart in a man or giving a new spirit to a man in passages such as Ezekiel chapter 36, Jeremiah chapter 32, as well. These are passages that refer to the blessings of the New Covenant but the term “New Covenant” is not used there. This passage is also the subject of nine other New Testament texts: four dealing with the Lord’s Supper, three in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and two in the Apostle Paul’s writings. But this is the only place in the Old Testament that we have the expressed, the precise statement “the New Covenant.” I will make a New Covenant.

The parties to the covenant, verse 31: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” I think it is important for you to notice that this covenant is a covenant made between God and the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Now, that, in itself, tells us that it is very unlikely that we are to understand by this the church, for again the expression Israel is never in the New Testament referred to the church. We have looked a couple -- the two passages that are in dispute. But out of the scores of references in the New Testament to Israel, our amillennial brethren -- not all amillenailists are brethren, but quite a few of them are brethren -- and our amillennialist brethren are hard-put to find any passage in the New Testament of which they can appeal, which they may say supports their contention that the term “Israel” may refer to the church. There are a couple: Romans chapter 9 in verse 6 is one to which they often appeal. The one to which they appeal most is Galatians chapter 6 in verse 16. We have already pointed out in previous studies that that contention cannot be substantiated. So when we read here: I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel. There is a strong presumption that this is a covenant made with ethnic Israel.

Now, of course it is not made with unbelieving Israel in the sense that God is going to bless all of unbelieving Israel. That is never said in the Bible. As a matter of fact, the Old Testament is one picture after another of God’s distinguishing grace in the selection of His people. That’s the great lesson of Romans 9. Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated. In Isaac shall thy seed be called. So when we talk about the blessing of God for Israel, we are not talking about the blessing of God for every Israelite. No good premillennialist with his head on right would make such a ridiculous statement as that. The promises of God are to his elect individuals, whether of a Nation Israel or of the Gentiles who will have faith, for he will produce that faith in them of course. He will give them that faith.

So we do not, when we say that the covenant is made with the house of Israel, mean thereby that every Israelite without exception is going to be saved; that every Israelite is the recipient of this New Covenant. This covenant is made with the house of Israel, it’s made with the house of Judah, but the reference is to the elect of the house of Israel and the elect of the house of Judah, or to use the Old Testament language, it is made with the remnant, the remnant of Israel. And it is made of the remnant of the house of Judah. That is why we have in the Old Testament the Doctrine of the Remnant. They are the true recipients of the promises of God.

So the parties to the covenant then are God on the one hand, the house of Israel and the house of Judah on the other. As you know and as I have been saying to you over and over again, our amillennialist brethren are strong to affirm frequently, generally, not entirely -- generally to affirm that there is no ethnic future for Israel. That is, there is not going to be any time in the future in which Israel as a whole, Israel as a nation, the nation as a whole -- not every individual Israelite -- but the nation as a whole, its leadership in the great mass of its people are going to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Amillennialists, generally speaking, do not accept that view of Israel. There are a few amillennialists who have accepted that.

Professor John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary was somewhat unique in this. He wrote a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. And when he got to Romans chapter 11 he finally decided from his exegetical study of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that there was no way to escape the fact that Paul was teaching an ethnic future for Israel. And so he affirmed that in the last days before the coming again of our Lord Jesus to the earth to establish his kingdom, that there would be a great, massive coming into the church of the Nation Israel in the last days. So he looked for an ethnic future for Israel.

Now, he went on to hasten to say, of course, there is not going to be a kingdom of God upon the earth for a thousand years, after that time, but he affirmed everything else that a premillennialist would affirm. And at the present time he is affirming that also, because last month he went to be with the Lord from the city of Edinburgh in Scotland. [Laughter] Now, Professor Murray, a man whom I admire very much, will not mind my saying that because I am sure he has a good sense of humor. And if I’m wrong, I know he is going to wait until I get there and have a few words with me. But I do believe that now he knows.

The man who led me to the Lord was Donald Gray Barnhouse. And one time he was preaching shortly after one of the popes had died. And Dr. Barnhouse could wax oratorical at times in his sermons, and he got off on a little phrase -- I think he was speaking about Pope John -- but he was saying, “Now he knows that salvation is through the blood of Christ and not through the ordinances of the church. Now he knows that there is no such thing as Purgatory, that the only Purgatory is the blood that was shed upon the cross at Calvary which has purged all our sins. Now he knows that there is no mediator but our Lord Jesus Christ. And now he knows that salvation is not -- salvation from original sin is not through baptism” and so on. And he went on: now he knows, now he knows. Finally when the sermon was over, someone came up to him and said: Dr. Barnhouse, said with all this “now he knows,” it seems to me you’ve put Pope John in

the company of the faithful in heaven. He said “Purely an oversight. Purely an oversight.” [Laughter]

So Professor Murray was one of our great interpreters of the word of God. And I was so happy when I read his commentary on the Epistle of the Romans 15 years ago to see that through the force of the statements of the Apostle Paul in the eleventh chapter, contrary to almost all of his amillennial brethren, and almost all of them who had taught with him on the faculty of Westminster Seminary, he said Paul affirms that there is going to be an ethnic future for Israel. And so, all Israel shall be saved must be fulfilled in that literal fashion. Now, of course recent history, in the last twenty years, has done great damage to the no-ethnic-future-for-Israel thesis. But it should never have been accepted by as many as it has been accepted.

Now, in fourth or D: the contrast with the Mosaic Covenant. Verse 32: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with 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 bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.”

The Mosaic Covenant to which he referred could not provide for the faultiness of its possessors. And that is the thing to which the prophet alludes, and it is the thing to which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews alludes. There was nothing wrong with the Mosaic Covenant, per se. The law was holy, just and good. But, unfortunately, the law was addressed to men who did not have enablement to fulfill it. The faultiness of the law was not in the law. The faultiness of the law, if one may even speak of faultiness in the law, that was holy, just, and good, lies in the nature of those to whom it is addressed for they are sinners and unable to do the will of God.

There are two things that the Apostle Paul states and the Bible states concerning men that are outside of Jesus Christ. It states -- the Bible states that they are totally depraved, and the Bible also states that they are unable to do the will of God. We read

because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God -- that’s a reference to the fact that men are depraved. And then Paul adds: neither in deed can be. So that man is unable to do the will of God. So the inability of man is one of the effects of the fall just as much as the depravity of man is the effect of the fall. So there was nothing wrong with the law, in itself. The trouble is that it had to deal with us.

James Stifler has said, “The anchor of the law was strong in itself, but it wouldn’t hold in the mud-bottom of the human heart.” That’s the difficulty with the law. The Ten Commandments are a great picture of the character of God. They are, of course, a set -- a code of righteousness that we could never make fun of because they express the holiness of our great God in heaven. They are a great revelation of the righteousness and justice of God. If one wants to know something about the attributes of God, the Ten Commandments loom large in explanation of what God is like. But unfortunately they are addressed to people like you and like me. And we do not have the power to fulfill the law of Moses.

That is most beautifully illustrated in the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Book of Exodus. While Moses is in heaven receiving the law, the children of Israel are down on the earth disobeying it. He cannot even bring them the law before they have disobeyed it. And they have constructed a molten calf, and they have begun to worship the gods that they were supposed to have been delivered from in the land of Egypt. This is a beautiful picture of the character of everybody’s heart naturally. And it’s a picture of yours; it’s a picture of my heart, too.

So then, God promises this covenant will not be according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in day that I took them by the hand to take them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD. It will be a different kind of covenant because it will be a covenant that will provide enablement.

About a month or two ago I received some material through the mail and it had a quotation from that great spiritual leader of the 1930s, Clark Gable. [Laughter] And this quotation from Clark Gable was to the effect, I quote: “Man has to be able to get up off the floor when he can.” Man has to be able to get up off the floor when he can. Now you might expect that to come from somebody like Clark Gable. He was one of my favorite movie stars back in the ‘30s, but evidently not a great spiritual leader. A Pelegian if there ever was one. [Laughter] Man has to be able to get up off the floor when he can.

Now, after I read this and had a good laugh over it, about two weeks later, the person who gave me this quotation issued a correction. He said that was a misquotation of that great spiritual leader of the 1930s. He didn’t say that; I was saying that about the great spiritual leader. He thought it was really a good quote. But the later correction is almost as bad. It is: “The definition of a man is someone who is able to get up off the floor when he cannot.” But that’s still Pelegian.

The law is addressed to people who are Pelagian in their theology. It’s addressed to people who think that they can do the will of God. It is addressed to people who don’t know that they’re depraved. It is addressed to people who do not realize that they are unable to do the will of God. It is addressed to those who haven’t heard about total depravity, haven’t heard about inability, that don’t know what semi-Pelagianism is or Pelagianism.

Now, this covenant is not going to be like that, Jeremiah says. But verse 33 -- here we come to the provisions of the covenant.

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD:

for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Now, we have just a few minutes, but I want to -- want you to notice two little words. They are the words -- the same word “for” in verse 34. First, right in the middle of the verse: *for* they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD. And then the second one: *for* I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Now of course when you have a little statement like a “for,” you’re giving the ground, the basis, for the preceding statement. I will stop speaking at 8:00, *for* our time is up. So the foundation of that I will stop speaking is: for our time is up. Now, that means when we see some “fors,” we should start at the end and proceed backwards. Now I want you to notice what we get here. First of all then, the basis of all of the provisions of the covenant is that last statement. The basis is the cause of the superiority of the New Covenant to the old covenant is: I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. That’s something the legal covenant never could do. So the foundation, the basis of the New Covenant is the forgiveness of sins. For I will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sin no more.

Now then, that’s the fundamental fact. That’s the basis. But as a result of that, if we move up now just another statement, then we come to the result of the forgiveness of sin and iniquity: *for* they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them. So the statement then is: they shall all know me *for* I will forgive their sins. So first thing necessary is to forgive our sin, then as a result of that we come to know Him. No man can know God who does not know the forgiveness of sins. This is the essential thing that we learn about God, that he is a god who forgives sins.

So because we have our sins forgiven, we know him. They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: *for* I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. The barriers that hinder fellowship between me and God are broken down through the forgiveness of sin, and I come to know him. That word is experiential knowledge, too. I know him experientially. And it’s from the least to the greatest. There is no privileged class in this great company of forgiven people such as priest or prophet, speaking out of the Old Testament context. All shall know me from the least to the greatest. What is spoken of is a kind of universal knowledge of the Lord.

Now, we don’t have that in this age. We don’t have that at all. That does not come until our Lord Jesus comes back to the earth. That is the time of the fulfillment of that. Now, that doesn’t mean that we cannot enter into and enjoy some of the blessing of the New Covenant now. We are talking about the fulfillment of the New Testament covenant -- of the New Covenant.

Now, so then if the basis is the forgiveness of sins and the first result is we know the Lord, I have another *for*. That second *for* there: *for* they shall know me is the foundation of the preceding statement. So I move back to the first of verse 34 -- or of verse 33. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD.

So in other words, what we have here is a kind of chain. I’m going to put my law in the inward hearts of men *for* they shall know me. They shall know me *for* I shall forgive their sins. Or to turn it around, I will forgive their sins; therefore, they shall know me. And since they know me, they shall have communion with me. That’s what he means. I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts and will be their God and they shall be my people. That’s beautiful. That’s beautiful. Forgiveness leads to the knowledge of God and the experiential knowledge of God leads to communion with

him. And after all, that is the purpose of all of the redemptive program: that men should be brought again into fellowship of God.

So, there is coming a day, my dear Christian friend, when I shall be delivered from this wandering heart that I have. There’s a day coming when I’m going to be delivered from the indifference that I so often show to my great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. There’s a day coming when I’m going to be delivered from the lethargy that I have in my spiritual experience. There’s a day coming when I’m going to be completely delivered from the rebellion that I have. All of the things that caused me so much difficulty in my Christian life and experience, a day is coming when I am going to be delivered from them. I hope you don’t mind, I say, Hallelujah! After all, this is the one essential knowledge: the forgiveness of sins and the one satisfying experience [is] fellowship with God, and they both come as a result of a sovereign God.

Now, you who have been with me in the theology class all of these weeks, you don’t have to be told, I’m sure, that this comes as a result of sovereign grace, do you? You don’t have to be told that, do you? Don’t you go through the Bible looking for things like that? I would. I went through this passage looking for that. You know what I found? Well, I found this little statement in verse 31, “I will make.” That’s pretty sovereign. *I will make a New Covenant.* He doesn’t say, *After you’ve begged sufficiently, I’ll yield and make this covenant.* He said, *I will make a New Covenant.* Verse 33: *I will make (twice) then he says, I will put my law in their inward parts. He says, I will write it in their hearts. He says, I will be their God. That’s all in verse 33. And then verse 34: I will forgive. I will remember their sins no more.*

Now, that’s sovereign grace. It doesn’t say anything about the things that you and I have to do in order to make him do this, does it? You see, this covenant is an unconditional covenant. This covenant depends upon the faithfulness of God and so it’s, *I will make; I will make; I will put; I will write; I will forgive; I will remember no more.* This is what he’s going to do, and he’s going to bring it to pass.

Well, our time is up. There is one passage I wish you’d put in your notes. It’s Ezekiel chapter 37, verse 21 through 28. And in that passage you will find a reference to the New Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the Abrahamic Covenant. All in one little passage which confirms what I have been trying to show you: that these covenants are related to one another. Each expanding in different ways the basic, fundamental covenant made between the persons of the Trinity but the Abrahamic covenant being expanded and enlarged by the Davidic, and also by the New Covenant.

Next week we’ll take a look at the New Testament and what it has to say about the New Covenant. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we’re grateful to Thee for the Scriptures. We thank Thee for this great covenant. And we thank Thee particularly that it depends not upon fail, failing, feeble, sinful, rebellious men but upon our great, sovereign, faithful God. And we rejoice, Lord, that as Gentiles Thou has brought us into the possession of the forgiveness of sins, promised through the New Covenant, inaugurated in the blood of the Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. We give ye thanks for him.

In his name. Amen.