

## Summary Session 21

### **The Covenants of God and the Promise of the New Covenant**

We talked last time about the covenant God made with Noah in Genesis 9. The promise was simple: there would never again be a universal flood to destroy the earth. That covenant was not just with Noah personally, but with all flesh—with Noah's descendants and every living creature on the earth.

The sign of that covenant was the bow in the clouds. We call it a rainbow, but the text simply calls it a bow.

There is an interesting detail in that passage that is easy to miss. When the bow appears in the clouds, who is reminded of the covenant? We naturally think of ourselves remembering God's promise when we see a rainbow. But Genesis 9 says something striking:

“And I will remember my covenant.”

God says that He Himself looks upon the bow and remembers the everlasting covenant between Himself and every living creature on the earth.

The next time you see a rainbow standing on the edge of a thunderstorm, with sunlight breaking through one side of the sky, remember that while you are looking at the bow and remembering God's promise, God is looking at it too. He says so Himself.

Then somebody mentioned double rainbows, and we got talking about how the colors reverse in the second bow. That may not change your theology much, but it is still interesting to notice.

From there we started thinking about covenants in general because the Bible is filled with them. There is the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with David, the covenant connected with Moses and the giving of the law, and then there is a question raised in Hosea 6:7.

Many translations read:

“But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant.”

That raises the question: was there a covenant with Adam?

Genesis never directly uses the word covenant there, but clearly God placed Adam under conditions. Adam was placed in the garden, given responsibility to tend and keep it, and commanded not to eat from the tree in the midst of the garden. It was conditional. Adam broke that covenant arrangement and brought the curse upon the earth.

So even if Genesis does not explicitly use the word covenant, Hosea seems to point us in that direction.

But there is another covenant that is especially important for us, and it is one Christians hear about regularly, often without stopping to think about it deeply. During communion, Jesus spoke of “the new covenant in my blood.”

That new covenant was not invented in the New Testament. It was promised beforehand in the Old Testament.

### **The Promise of the New Covenant**

The two major Old Testament passages describing the new covenant are Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:26–27.

Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 helps us understand why these passages matter so much. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, and Nicodemus did not understand what He meant. Jesus responded almost with surprise:

“You are the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”

That statement implies Nicodemus should have understood. But from where? Where in the Old Testament would he have learned about this inward spiritual transformation?

I think the answer is found in these new covenant passages.

### **Jeremiah 31 and the Law Written on the Heart**

Jeremiah says:

“Behold, days are coming, declares Yahweh, when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

At first glance, we might think this has nothing to do with us because it explicitly mentions Israel and Judah. But Jesus applied it to His people when He said during communion:

“This is the blood of the new covenant.”

If Jesus had never said that, we would probably never think to apply Jeremiah’s promise to ourselves. But He did say it, and so we understand that somehow we are participants in it.

Jeremiah then contrasts this new covenant with the covenant made when Israel came out of Egypt. That earlier covenant was connected with the law given at Sinai. God told Israel what He required, and Israel agreed to it.

The problem, of course, was that the law demanded perfect obedience.

If you break one point of the law, you are guilty of the whole thing.

That is why the law condemns all of us. We fail continually. We fail in impatience. We fail in trusting God fully. We fail daily, probably hourly. That is why we need a Savior.

But then Jeremiah describes what God will do differently in the new covenant:

“I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it.”

Under the old covenant, the law was external. It was written on tablets of stone and preserved in written commands. Under the new covenant, God places His law within His people.

That is why Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand the necessity of a new birth. The prophets had already spoken about God doing an inward work.

As believers, we are participants in that covenant. God’s law is not merely outside us commanding us; it is within us.

Jeremiah continues:

“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

That means something profoundly personal. God is our God, and we belong to Him.

Then Jeremiah says:

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

There is forgiveness in the new covenant. Sin remembered no more.

The passage also says:

“And they will not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know me.”

I do not pretend to fully understand every detail of that statement, but it seems to point ahead to a future great work of God when people come to know the Lord broadly and powerfully through the work of His Spirit.

### **The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Adulthood**

This connects closely with Paul’s teaching in Galatians.

Paul describes the law as a schoolmaster leading us to Christ. Think about how children need external rules. We tell children not to run into traffic, not to stick things into electrical

outlets, not to touch a hot stove. Those rules are external because children lack maturity and understanding.

But when maturity comes, those rules become internalized.

Paul applies that idea spiritually. Before Christ came, the people of God were under the law in a kind of spiritual childhood. But when Christ came, something changed fundamentally.

The Holy Spirit now dwells within believers.

David did not experience the permanent indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the same way believers do now. Under the new covenant, the Spirit writes God's law within us.

That is the great difference between the covenants.

### **Ezekiel 36 and the New Heart**

Ezekiel expands this even further.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean."

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."

"I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

That is what God has done for His people in the new covenant. He removes the hard, stony heart and replaces it with a living heart responsive to Him.

Then He says:

"I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes."

That is an astonishing promise. God does not merely command obedience externally; He works within His people to carry out the obedience that He requires.

That does not mean Christians become sinless. Romans 7 makes that very clear. Paul says that when he wants to do good, evil is present with him. He desires to obey God, yet he still finds sin at work within himself.

But that inward struggle itself is evidence of spiritual life.

A Christian wants to obey God. A Christian grieves over sin. A Christian desires the things of God. Those desires are evidence that the Spirit is at work.

Sin is still present, but believers are called to put it to death—to smother it, stifle it, and let it atrophy rather than feed it.

The presence of that battle is not proof God has abandoned His people. It is evidence of the very work the new covenant promised.

### **Faith Has Always Been the Issue**

All of this ties back to Abraham and Noah.

Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness.

Noah also found grace in the eyes of the Lord because he believed what God said. When God told him to build the ark, Noah obeyed.

God's desire has always been that His people trust Him.

Not merely trust Him for salvation, but trust all of His promises.

That brought us finally to Romans 8:28:

“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called.”

That verse is easy to quote and hard to believe.

“All things” includes sickness, hardship, broken relationships, poor decisions, suffering, financial mistakes, disappointment, and pain.

Even our foolish choices fall under “all things.”

God takes all of it and works it together for good.

That is difficult to believe sometimes. But that has always been the call of God to His people—from Noah to Abraham to us:

Trust God. Believe His promises. And live.