

## Some thoughts regarding the New Covenant

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Perhaps one of the unfortunate things that has happened in the discussion of the terms “old covenant” and “new covenant,” is the meanings attached to the words “old” and “new.” More often than not, we take these two words to be a reference to time. The “old” is what existed in former times, the “new” is what exists in the present. But is this what the biblical writers intended for us to understand? I would suggest that the terms are not speaking of a time-frame, but of basic quality.

The actual term “old covenant” (παλαιᾷ διαθήκης) is found only one time, in 2 Cor 3:14. Here it is usually interpreted to be equivalent with the Tanakh (so called “old testament”). But if the context is allowed to speak, it is not the Tanakh, but the reading of the Tanakh without the illumination of the Ruach. That is, the “old covenant” is “old,” not because of time, but because of an absence of faith. It is read as a means for gaining righteousness, and thus becomes a harsh, condemning law. Even as Paul speaks of the “old man” (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9) as that person who is governed by the flesh, so he here speaks of the “old covenant” in the same terms as Isaiah speaks to Israel about a “covenant of death” (Is 28:15, 18). The “old covenant” is the idea that one can gain right-standing with God through one’s own efforts—through the “works of the Torah.” When one reads the Torah with this in mind, it is an “old covenant” to him or her.

In the same way that “old” in the term “old covenant” must mean “viewing or reading the Tanakh with blinded eyes,” so the “new” in “new covenant” means accepting the covenant on the basis of faith—through a divinely initiated and gracious gift of faith within the heart. The new covenant, then, envisioned by Jeremiah, is “new” because it now accomplishes its goal, that is, the true sanctification of God’s people to Himself. This work of making a sinner holy cannot be done apart from the Word of God written upon his heart. By this metaphor, the scriptures must be speaking of the scriptures becoming the very thought and intent of the born again person. Thus, within the “new covenant” one’s perspective is that of God, not of the world or self. “New” in this sense must be, like Paul’s use of the term “new man” (2Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15), the redeemed individual who is lead by the Ruach (cf. Rom 8:14), not the flesh.

All those, then, from every age, who have received the gift of faith, and have cast themselves upon the mercies of God, receiving from Him true forgiveness and covenant relationship, have espoused the “new covenant.” The only difference in what Jeremiah describes (Jer 31:31ff) and the heart of, say, a David (as evidenced in Psalm 19 or 119) is that Jeremiah’s prophecy embraces Israel on a national basis. Never in the history of the nation has she, as a nation, come to faith in God and His Messiah. Always (by Paul’s own admission, Rom 9:27; 11:5) it has been a remnant that has been genuinely saved. But in the end times, according to Jeremiah 31, the work which Yeshua accomplished on the cross, and in resurrection, ascension and intercession, will finally be completely realized in the national salvation of Israel (cf. Rom 11:25-26). The context of Jeremiah 31:31ff is clearly national (house of Judah//house of Israel), and inclusive (from the smallest to the greatest, etc.). Until the fulfillment of the new covenant in the last days, as a revival upon the nation of Israel, the foreshadowing of the new covenant is being experienced by all who, by faith, take hold of the true Messiah, Yeshua.