

In Hebrews 8:6-9 the writer tells us that Jesus' new covenant:

1. Promises **God's grace** (8:7-9) - Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, the writer says in verse 8 and 9: *"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord."* We're told that God's previous promises were rejected by the people of Israel and Judah over and over, and though God had incredible patience with them, in the end God turned from Israel as a nation to a new program in the New Covenant. Now in the New Covenant in Christ's blood, that offer of grace is made to **all people** through faith in Him. Where Israel failed to be that vehicle of grace to the world, **Christ succeeds and supercedes them.** He invites us into God's community of love. Though we don't deserve such blessing, in this community, the church, God will **never turn away** from us, even when we fail Him.
2. Promises **internal change** (8:10) - *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."* Quoting the prophet again, Hebrews tells us that where the old covenant sought to **persuade** a change in the human heart, the new covenant will **transform** hearts. Jesus' death and resurrection offers a way by faith for God's Spirit to produce obedience and holiness inside us. We can be God's loving community; his priests and kingdom people on earth because of Christ.
3. Promises **forgiveness for all** (8:12) - Continuing with a quote from Jeremiah 31, *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* If love was the motivator for God sending his Son, **forgiveness is the mission** (John 3:16,17). Jesus' covenant offers us a way for our failings no longer to get in to disqualify us from friendship with a holy God; this is a forgiveness which produces a lasting bond between us and God with **no condemnation**, only peace.
4. Promises **eternal blessing** (8:13) - *"By calling this covenant 'new,' (Christ) has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."* Hebrews 9:14,15 expands on this idea: *"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."*

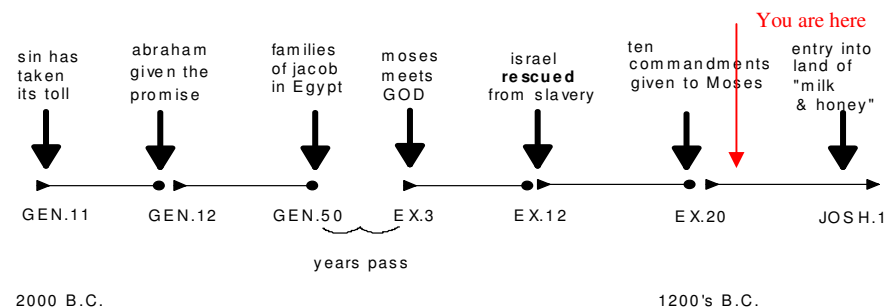
## #7 Covenant Community—Exodus 24 (& Hebrews 8)

*"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."* (Jeremiah 31:31)

*The God of Freedom*



In the third month after their miraculous escape from slavery in Egypt by the hand of Yahweh, the Israelites are still in the desert of Sin, near mount Sinai. In chapters 15 –18 we witnessed their grumbling as God tested their dependence on Him for food, drink, shelter, military defence and good order. More than relying on the Lord for rescue from danger, God wanted them to depend on Him for life itself and to take on the identity as "God's people". With the promised land as their destiny, God delivered through Moses laws and commands that were befitting of those who would live in community with Him (Exodus 20-23). But just what sort of relationship must this be? What is required of those who belong to the Lord? What does this tell us about our relationship with God as Christians today?



### Warm up

Q.1 When did you last miss an appointment with a doctor or other professional? What were the reprisals in not keeping your side of the arrangement to arrive on time?

## Yesterday and Today

We live in a world of contracts (e.g. for loans, jobs, partnerships, etc.). However, in a time when autonomy and individual freedom is god, we resile at the idea of binding agreements. Covenants in the Bible have similarities with contracts today, but also



significant differences:

Take the example of most informal contract- a doctor's appointment. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. An informal contract was broken.

In Exodus 19 God puts the covenant with Israel into a succinct statement for Moses to deliver to the people. Note the contrast from contracts today God said:

4 *'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

5 *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,*

6 *you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exod 19:4-6 NIV)



Q.2 On whose terms is the covenant based? What makes it valid?

Q.3 What will make the outcomes of this promise/covenant effective?

The word we translate as covenant in the Old Testament also comes from a Hebrew word which means "to cut." It is descriptive of the ancient Oriental practice of two people passing through the two halves of a slain animal (valuable property) that had been cut in half to seal an agreement with each other (e.g. Jeremiah 34:18). They would literally "cut a deal". (No wonder we settle for handshakes and signatures today!)



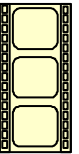
Sometimes those entering into a covenant shared a holy meal (Gen. 31:54). Abraham and his children were commanded to be circumcised as a sign of their covenant with God (Gen. 17:10-11). Moses sprinkled the blood of animals on the altar and upon the people who entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:3-8).

A dictionary definition states that a covenant is: "a binding agreement; a compact".

Note that God's covenant in Exodus 19 above, begs for the other party to respond. The prophet Isaiah notes this quality that transcends our idea of contracts. He quotes the Lord saying: "*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*" (Isaiah 49:15). God's covenant love is **more like the ties of a parent to her child** than the contemporary examples of contracts like a doctor's appointment, or a handshake, or a signature on paper. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't cancelled. If one party welshe on the deal, legal action will be taken. But a parent seeks and finds out where the child is and makes sure she's cared for. One member's failure in this kind of compact does not destroy the relationship. It may disturb the effectiveness and outcomes of the relationship, but not the commitment of the initiator. One party is resolved to love and serve the other. Another difference between a contemporary contract and a biblical covenant is that the former only generally involves only one element of a person (e.g. a skill, or financial responsibility); a covenant involves a person's total being.

### CONTEMPORARY CLUES

In the film "Hurricane", about the boxer Reuben Carter who was wrongfully imprisoned for murder in the 1960's in the States, a group of Canadians crossed the border and made a pact. They made a covenant that they would stay in the United States and work for a retrial for the boxer and represent Carter for as long as it would take to have this innocent man freed from prison. Though Carter was initially unconvinced of their purpose, their love begged for his cooperation. In a similar sense, God has made a pact through his Son Jesus Christ to cross the border into our world and to do what is needed to free us from the prison of sin and death even though, in our case, we have no innocence to boast. God has vowed to bring those who trust in his Son Jesus Christ into a new community of covenant love. As Denzel Washington's character says in the film "Hate put me in here (prison)... loves gonna bust me out". That's a kind of Gospel in a nutshell about what God's covenant has been about since Abraham and through to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.



READ Exodus 24 and note privileges bestowed on Israel and their leaders.

## Covenants and Christians—Hebrews chapter 8

When Jesus of Nazareth held his Last Supper with his disciples in Jerusalem, he instituted our Holy Communion celebrations with words of covenant. He said: "This is the **new covenant** in my blood" (Lk. 22:20). He made a deliberate connection in that Passover celebration with covenants of promise and sealing with blood that took place in the book of Exodus and the statement of the prophets of something new to come. According to the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament, Jesus' "new" covenant has superior and eternal qualities compared to those in the past.