God’s Covenant with man

Chapters 11 – “The Consummation of it All” and
12 – “Finding the Balance”

We have now made our way to the end-game, to the last act. All the discussion we have had thus far, and indeed all of human history from the Creation up to the birth of Jesus Christ has pointed toward Him. Each of the covenantal relationships which God has made with man have shown forth types and shadows of the final consummation of God’s plan, which has been made complete the person and work of Christ. In this week and next, we’ll look at the concept of the New Covenant, and how Christ has been variously foreshadowed in the past – and how he acts in covenant with us, and for us, today and into the future.

Our primary goal tonight is to summarize the promises of the New Covenant. The passages which we’ll concentrate on come from Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Jer. 31:31-34, 32:37-41, 50:4-5; Ez. 16:60-63; 34; 37:24-28. Read these in your preparation for this week’s meeting.

Often today, we hear about “New Covenant theology” – a school of thought which divorces the ideas presented in the New Covenant from those Old Testament covenants which we’ve been studying in this group. Let us keep in mind as we consider these things how intimately tied the promises of the new bring into light the promises of the old, through the fulfillment of all the covenants, Jesus Christ.
1. What are the characteristics of the New Covenant that we see outlined in the passages mentioned above? Let’s first look at the ways in which the New reflects common themes from the older administrations.

a. In Ezekiel 37:24-28, we see promises from old covenants that we’ve been discussing brought into view in the New. What three ‘continuing’ promises do we see, and with whom are they most closely associated?

b. The imagery of the shepherd and his flock representing God and his people is something with which we’re familiar in the New Testament. But as we see in Ezekiel 34\(^1\), and Jeremiah 32:37-41, it is a picture with which observant Jews of the early Christian period would have been familiar. How do we see God’s role as gather and protector in these chapters? How does God contrast Himself with those who would do harm to His flock?

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\(^1\) Especially see vv. 8-16 & 31, and the prophetic language of vv. 22-23.
c. Jeremiah 50:4-5. Again, here we see Jeremiah telling his audience that God’s people will come together to Him, for they seek one thing, relationship with Him in His covenant that WILL not be broken. What a comfort this is! What comfort do you see regarding God’s people in the verses which follow, vv. 6-15?

2. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the “classic” text from which the name “new covenant” is derived. We’ll camp out here for a bit.

a. In verse 32, what covenant was broken? How? What does it mean that Israel broke God’s covenant?

b. What does this verse have to say to those who believe that the new covenant is no more than a renewal of the old? ... or those who argue that the old covenant terms, practices & promises will be renewed with national Israel at Christ’s second coming?

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2 Again, note God’s protective, shepherd-like role here.
c. What is the response God makes in v. 33?

d. In verse 34, we see, probably, what most would argue is the central feature of the New Covenant... What is that? (that we see also in Jer. 33:8) How is this promise a realization of old provisions? How has it changed? (or has it?)

e. In this last verse, God says that He will remember the sins NO MORE. How does Robertson deal with this statement (p. 114, Covenants)? What contrast does he see between the New & Old covenants with regard to forgiveness? What do you see similarly? differently?
3. By way of summary, how does Ezekiel 16:60-63 illustrate the humility required of those in covenant with God? Let’s always make it a priority to approach God and others with these verses in mind.

A few more kilobytes for nibbling on:

Robert Haldane, Commentary on Romans (Rom. 1:2, “Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures”).

By declaring that the Gospel had been before promised, Paul tacitly repels the accusation that it was a novel doctrine. At the same time, he states its Divine origin as a reason why nothing new is to be admitted in religion. He further shows in what respect the Old and New Testaments differ — not as containing two religions essentially dissimilar, but as exhibiting the same grand truth — predicted, prefigured, and fulfilled. The Old Testament is the promise of the New, and the New the accomplishment of the Old. The Gospel had been promised by all the prophecies which foretold a new covenant, — by those which predicted the coming of the Messiah, — by all the observances, under the law, that contained in themselves the promise of the things they prefigured, — by the whole of the legal economy, that preceded the Gospel, in which was displayed the strictness of Divine justice, which in itself would have been a ministration only of condemnation, had it not been accompanied by all the revelations of grace and mercy, which were in substance and embryo the Gospel itself, and consequently foretold and prepared the way for a more perfect development.
Robert Haldane, Commentary on Romans (Rom. 6:1 “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”).

The full import and consequence of being dead to sin will be found, ch. 4:7, 8: —

‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’ They who are dead to sin, are those from whom, in its guilt or condemning power, it is in Christ Jesus entirely removed. Such persons, whose sins are thus covered, are pronounced ‘blessed.’ They enjoy the favor an blessing of God. The necessary effect of this blessing is declared in the new covenant, according to which, when God is merciful to the unrighteousness of His people, and remembers their sins and iniquities no more, He puts His laws into their mind, and writes them in their hearts, and promises that He will be to them a God, and they shall be to Him a people. In one word, they who are dead to Sin are limited to Him who is the Fountain of life and holiness, and are thus delivered from the curse pronounced upon those who, being under the law, continue not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. The guilt of their sins, which separated between them and God, having now been canceled, they enjoy His favor, and all its blessed effects. It is upon these great truths that the Apostle rests his absolute denial that the doctrine of justification by grace, which he had been unfolding, is compatible with continuing to live in sin.

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary, (Exodus 19:1-8)

Moses was called up the mountain, and was employed as the messenger of this covenant. The Maker and first Mover of the covenant, is God himself. This blessed charter was granted out of God’s own free grace. The covenant here mentioned was the national covenant, by which the Israelites were a people under the government of Jehovah. It was a type of the new covenant made with true believers in Christ Jesus; but, like other types, it was only a shadow of good things to come. As a nation they broke this covenant; therefore the Lord declared that he would make a new covenant with Israel, writing his law, not upon tables of stone, but in their hearts, Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:7-10. The covenant spoken of in these places as ready to vanish away, is the national covenant with Israel, which they forfeited by their sins. Unless we carefully attend to this, we shall fall into mistakes while reading the Old Testament. We must not suppose that the nation of the Jews were under the covenant of works, which knows nothing of repentance, faith in a Mediator, forgiveness of sins, or grace; nor yet that the whole nation of Israel bore the character, and possessed the privileges of true believers, as being actually sharers in the covenant of grace. They were all under a dispensation of mercy; they had outward privileges and advantages for salvation; but, like professing Christians, most rested therein, and went no further. Israel consented to the conditions. They answered as one man, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. Oh that there had been such a heart in them! Moses, as a mediator, returned the words of the people to God. Thus Christ, the Mediator, as a Prophet, reveals God’s will to us, his precepts and promises; and then, as a Priest, offers up to God our spiritual sacrifices, not only of prayer and praise, but of devout affection, and pious resolutions, the work of his own Spirit in us.
There are two main parts in this covenant; the first regards the gratuitous remission of sins; and the other, the inward renovation of the heart; there is a third which depends on the second, and that is the illumination of the mind as to the knowledge of God. There are here many things most deserving of notice. The first is, that God calls us to himself without effect as long as he speaks to us in no other way than by the voice of man. He indeed teaches us and commands what is right but he speaks to the deaf; for when we seem to hear anything, our ears are only struck by an empty sound; and the heart, full of depravity and perverseness, rejects every wholesome doctrine. In short, the word of God never penetrates into our hearts, for they are iron and stone until they are softened by him; nay, they have engraven on them a contrary law, for perverse passions rule within, which lead us to rebellion. In vain then does God proclaim his Law by the voice of man, unless he writes it by his Spirit on our hearts, that is, unless he forms and prepares us for obedience. It hence appears of what avail is freewill and the uprightness of nature before God regenerates us. We will indeed and choose freely; but our will is carried away by a sort of insane impulse to resist God. Thus it comes that the Law is ruinous and fatal to us as long as it remains written only on tables of stone, as Paul also teaches us. (2 Corinthians 3:3.) In short, we then only obediently embrace what God commands, when by his Spirit he changes and corrects the natural pravity of our hearts; otherwise he finds nothing in us but corrupt affections and a heart holy given up to evil. The declaration indeed is clear, that a new covenant is made according to which God engraves his laws on our hearts, for otherwise it would be in vain and of no effect.