

LESSON 3

THE NEW COVENANT AND MISSIONS

Introduction

The New Covenant is between Christ and the individual believer. The New Covenant or Testament fulfilled and completed the Old. Let us make two comparisons. The Old Testament is like a root, while the New Testament is the flower. The Old Testament lets us see truth in the full midday light of Christ Jesus. The Bible is one, but we see things more clearly and more fully as Jesus Christ becomes incarnate and reveals the Father to us.

The Greek language has two words for covenant. The New Testament uses only *diathēkē*, and that choice is important. In this kind of covenant, "one person alone initiates the agreement and draws up the terms. It remains for others to accept or reject."¹

In the other type of covenant, "there are possibilities for arguments, concessions, compromise, and final bargaining by both parties. . . ."² The Covenant of the New Testament does not allow for bargaining. God has made His way of salvation possible through the Cross. Man accepts the conditions of repentance, faith, and surrender to Jesus Christ, or he rejects God's way. Once he becomes a Christian and a member of the covenant people, he accepts God's gracious promise and assumes the responsibilities belonging to the New Covenant people. We are His disciples; we are His witnesses.

The Book of Hebrews, where the central theme is the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, describes the relation of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant. The New Covenant or Testament is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's promise:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Heb. 8:10-13, RSV)

In speaking of a New Covenant, the author of Hebrews speaks of the Old as obsolete.

Peter, speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit, shows how the covenant relationship of the people of God carries with it a missionary responsibility.

The New Covenant is between _____ and the individual _____. The New Covenant or Testament _____ and _____ the Old.

(Christ, believer, fulfilled, completed)

The New Testament word for covenant means one person initiates the a _____ and draws up the t _____. It remains for others to a _____ or r _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

God made His way of salvation possible through the _____.

Man accepts the conditions of _____, _____, and _____, or he _____ God's way.

(Cross, repentance, faith, surrender, rejects)

The theme of the Book of Hebrews is the superiority of the _____ Covenant to the _____.

(New, Old)

¹ Eugene A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language* (New York: Harper and Bros., Publishers, 1952), p. 62.

² *Ibid.*

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10, RSV)

Note carefully, that as God's people, we are to declare the wonderful deeds of God. We see here God's election. God chooses a person or a group because of His grace, not because they deserve it. This new people has as its purpose the serving of God and exalting His name throughout the earth.

The purpose of the calling is to call others who now walk in darkness and death into light and life.

Incarnation and Missions

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. His incarnation has profound significance for missions as the following incident reveals. Two Chinese Christians lay on the floor of a Communist prison. They had been forbidden to speak to each other. In the damp, cold semi-darkness one of the Christians remembered that it was Christmas Eve. Painfully he picked up bits of straw from the floor and began to lay them into the Chinese character *Immanuel*, "God is with us." Because of the Incarnation even the darkest tragedies can be transformed, since God is eternally with us. The child of God in seeking to express the Son of God in his daily life gives expression to an incarnational faith.

The Incarnation means that God is vitally interested in people. It means that He cares about the human situation and has come into our world to rescue man. When we look at religions that have no incarnation, we see gods that are distant and separated from the struggles and hurts of mankind. Jesus, by contrast, became incarnate and lived among us.

Distorted Patterns

To the Christian student, who has grown up with the Christmas story as a part of his heritage, it is difficult to conceive of gods that are not interested in men. The Greek gods were not. Many of the world's religions have at their heart a god who is indifferent to human need.

Islam, the religion of millions in the Near East, Africa, and Pacific Islands, provides an example. Allah is wholly transcendent; he is completely apart from active participation in the daily affairs of his people. Like the God of Deism, he has set in motion a plan that neither the prayers nor the actions of his people can alter.

To the Muslim, the idea of God's having a Son who came into human history and died on the cross is unthinkable. This concept of Allah has had its effects on the

Peter shows how the covenant relationship carries a _____ responsibility.

(missionary)

Jesus' incarnation means that _____ is _____ with us.

(God, eternally)

What does the Incarnation tell us about God?

(Compare your answers with the text.)

To the Muslim, the Incarnation is _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

lack of social action in Arab countries. Until very recent times when petroleum-based wealth has allowed these countries the luxury of schools and hospitals, they have been known for their lack of interest in humanitarian enterprises such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

Here is another, individual example. Lalu Boodhoo's marriage was breaking apart. His wife had told him she would no longer put up with his drunken brawls and his beating the family. Now this East Indian Hindu was in desperate straits in his South American home in Guyana. He sought help from his gods. In the tradition of his people, he bathed himself, fasted, and put on clean clothes.

After the family went to sleep, he began his lonely vigil, asking the gods to help him conquer the vice of alcohol that was destroying his family. In the early morning hours he felt an impression, almost audible, that said, "I want a blood sacrifice." Lalu cut his finger until blood ran out and let it drop on the flame of the candle. The sacrifice had no effect. The next morning he went on the biggest drunk of his life.

In desperation, he attended a Christian service and heard the parable of the prodigal son. Through Christ he found the heavenly Father, who received him. He dedicated himself to Christ as completely as he had dedicated himself to the rum shops before. Lalu had found the God who was seeking him.

Let us look at the distorted pattern of animism. The smoke hangs heavily over the steps of the Catholic Church in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. The witch doctors burn their incense to buy favours from their gods for their clients. To make life more pleasant, to make crops profitable, to bring success in the love life, the animist bribes, threatens, and cajoles his gods.

Each of these religions stands in marked contrast to the self-giving, self-revealing Christ who comes to us in the Incarnation.

The Vertical Impossibility

The vertical impossibility means that man cannot climb up to God; he must receive the Christ who has come down. Man cannot earn or buy salvation from God; he must accept it as a gift (Eph. 2:8-10). Deep in the heart of man lies the false concept that he can climb up to God. Romans 1 shows this trait in action. Man is continually trying to build his religions, to take heaven by storm, and to create a god in man's image.

The crumbled ruins of the Tower of Babel speak of man's failure to get to heaven in his own way. The Babe's cry in the manger of Bethlehem speaks of God's desire to come down to reveal Himself to man. God told the Hebrews to make no graven images, because all of them would be distortions and caricatures of God (Exod. 20:4).

How has the Muslims' rejection of the Incarnation affected their humanitarian activities?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

What affect did Lalu Boodhoo's conversion have on his life?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The vertical impossibility is that man cannot climb to _____; he must receive Christ who has come _____. OR

Man cannot _____ salvation;

He must _____ it as a gift.

(God, down, earn, accept)

God made this prohibition in love because He wanted to send His perfect image in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15). Man cannot climb up to God; that step is the vertical impossibility. God *did* come down to man in Jesus Christ; that fact is the glory of the Incarnation.

The Divine Pattern

The Incarnation is the divine pattern. The Incarnation had two great purposes: *to reveal* God and to *redeem* man.

In His incarnate life, Jesus revealed the holiness of God. The Old Testament prophets had called man to "be holy even as he is holy," but in Jesus that holiness became flesh and life. Christ's purity spoke of the Father's purity. When He went into the Temple to commune with the Father and found temple authorities selling sacrificial animals and profiteering on changing money for the pilgrims, His holy countenance flashed with anger. He twisted together a whip of cords and drove them out of the Temple. When Jesus challenged His enemies to find fault in Him, they could not. He was the Incarnation of God's holiness.

Jesus' earthly life also incarnated the love of God. John stated, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but that statement is abstract. At Calvary, Jesus gave us a living expression of God's love.

Little children felt the love of Jesus so real that they climbed up into His lap. Women with sordid lives turned to Him, knowing that they would find understanding. Outcast lepers sought Him as the one person in the world who would not cast them out. Jesus demonstrated God's eternal love in the flesh.

Jesus, as God Incarnate, not only revealed God but came to save man. The Cross tells the *why* of the Incarnation, but the manger tells the *who* of the Cross. Jesus came and tabernacled among us so that He might "seek and save that which was lost" (John 1:14; Luke 19:10).

God's Message in Flesh and Blood

Philippians 2 traces the pattern for missionary service. Christian greatness comes through service. Jesus entered the human arena and became part of our experiences in order to express God's love. Each Christian as a follower of Christ is called to be a living expression of God's love and to be like Jesus—obedient even unto death.

This wonderful passage did not have as its primary purpose the teaching of a great doctrine, but rather it was intended to inspire Christians to follow in Christ's train. "Jesus saw as His own work and the mission of His missionaries *the revealing of the Father unto the world.*"³

³ William Owen Carver, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1909, 1951), p. 60.

Jesus' incarnation revealed the _____ of God.

(holiness)

Jesus' incarnation revealed the _____ of God.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

READ JOHN 1:14 AND LUKE 19:10 AGAIN.

The cross tells the _____ of the Incarnation—that He might "_____ and _____ that which was _____."

(Compare your answers with the text and Scriptures.)

READ PHILIPPIANS 2. This chapter sets forth the pattern for Christian service. What is that pattern? _____

(Compare with the text.)

Philippians 2 was written to inspire _____ to follow _____ train.

(Christians, Christ's)

An incarnational faith consists of Christ's living and working in His people (Col. 1:27), expressing His continuing mission through their lives.

Summary

An incarnational faith means that the Church in its mission is to move from whatever position of power, prestige, glory and reputation it enjoys into the world where it becomes the Servant Church, helping the lame to walk, the lepers to be cleansed, and the poor to know the good news (Matt. 11:5).

The Incarnation means that our God is interested in every human being. The Son of God was not content to contemplate the fate of human beings receiving the consequences of their sin, but He came into this world to show us what the Father was like and to reconcile man to his Maker. When He said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21, RSV), He gave the same incarnational pattern for His Church to follow in its missionary activities.

Incarnational faith makes the Church a
s _____.

(servant)

The Incarnation means God is interested in
every h _____ b _____.

(human being)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3)

After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Between whom is the New Covenant? _____

2. What is the relation of the Old Covenant or Testament to the New? _____

3. Define covenant as it is used in the New Testament. _____

4. Give the theme of the Book of Hebrews. _____

5. How does the Muslim look at the Incarnation? _____

6. What effect did Lala Boodhoo's conversion have on his life? _____

7. Explain the term "the vertical impossibility." _____

8. Give the two great purposes of the Incarnation. _____

9. Show how the Incarnation and the Cross interrelate. _____

10. What do John 1:14 and Luke 19:10 reveal about the purpose of the Word's becoming flesh? _____

11. What sort of a pattern or model do we find in Philippians 2? _____

12. What does the passage seek to inspire in Christians? _____

13. How does the Incarnation affect God's people today? _____

14. What does the Incarnation say to the Church about its mission? _____

15. What words did Jesus speak to His disciples to show that we too are sent? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3)

1. What is the relation between the Old and New Testaments?
2. List the similarities and differences of Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 8:10–13.
3. What relevance to missions does the message of Romans 1 have?
4. Interpret Matthew 21:33–43 and show its missionary implications.
5. Explain John 20:21.

Advanced activity (Level 3)

1. Locate and list four Scriptures at the beginning of Jesus' ministry that show He was more than a Jewish Messiah.
2. Paraphrase the parable of the Good Samaritan in contemporary terms.
3. After studying Matthew 13:24–44, discuss Jesus' concept of a universal kingdom.

Seminar Discussion

1. The teacher should define some of the following terms: covenant (*diathēkē*), Messiah, Incarnation.
2. Analyze 1 Peter 2:9 and examine the responsibility and privilege it gives to us as Christians.
3. Discuss the meaning of the Incarnation for missions.
4. In what ways does the Incarnation reveal God?
5. Discuss the phrase, "the Cross tells the *why* of the Incarnation, but the manger tells the *who* of the Cross."