



CONNECTING THE DOTS: NEW COVENANT & THE CHURCH

I grew up in a traditional church that didn't offer a kid's ministry during the adult worship - this meant my brother and I were trapped and tortured by boredom. It's tough for a couple of rowdy, squirmy, fidgety little boys to sit completely motionless for over an hour - in our starched white shirts and clip-on ties. The fresh air and red mud were calling our names. It's no wonder both of us are now pastors that offer engaging CM during the Sunday morning service. Part of my calling is to make church fun for little boys.

But my dad deserves a lot of credit. He saw the problem his boys were having with [church](#), and he came to our rescue. This was before game boys and smart phones, so he'd come on Sundays armed with paper and pencils, and we'd play *connect the dots*. I don't recall the details of the game, but it sure helped beat the boredom!... And here I am 45 years later, again "[connecting the dots](#)." That's what we've entitled our current series of Bible Studies... We're putting the Bible together - connecting the dots and looking at the "*the big picture*." God forbid that you're ever bored with your Bible. It's an exciting story filled with life-changing truths, but to appreciate its message, it helps to be able to connect the dots!

And one way to *put the Bible together* is to focus on the seven major covenants God made with man... The [Edenic](#)... [Adamic](#)... [Noahic](#)... [Abrahamic](#)... [Mosaic](#)... [Davidic](#)... and the [New Covenant](#). This has been our subject matter over the last seven weeks. Remember God wants a relationship with mankind, but not just any type of relationship. God has terms and expectations for the relationship He desires. And His covenants define those terms. Understand, real fellowship doesn't just happen. It's not meaningful or sustainable without a covenant. A real relationship is governed and guided by an agreed upon understanding between both parties.

Take two single people, they forego marriage and decide to shack up... *Hey, they like each other, it's convenient, even cheaper, and they want to have sex.* Who needs the promises, and expectations, and stipulations, and provisos that come with marriage? And all might go well for a while... *But what if he brings home another girl?... Or she wants a break?... Or either of them invite another friend to move in?...*

Without a covenant who defines the relationship? It's all up in the air. This is why a non-covenantal arrangement lacks the value and stability to survive. In Amos 3:3, God asks, "[Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?](#)" The obvious answer is no. Lasting relationships are based on covenants.

And the same is true in our relationship with God. Amazingly, God wants a relationship with man, and He sets out terms... Understand, God doesn't negotiate. You don't sit down and work out a covenant that's convenient for you and that works for Him. God never haggles or brokers deals. His covenants are always *take it or leave it* propositions. You either play by God's rules or you can't join God's team.

This is why it grieves me when I hear people say, "[Well, Me and the Man Upstairs... we're tight.](#)" Or "[I'm cool with God. We've got our own understanding.](#)" Or "[I've worked out my own relationship with God.](#)" Say that, and you're just revealing your own blindness. God doesn't go around striking up individual deals with just anybody. Seven times in human history God laid out covenants with mankind... And they were important enough to be recorded in Scripture. These covenants are what the Bible is all about. God establishes the terms and conditions by which He plans to restore and redeem a fallen world.

It's a tribute to God's amazing grace that whenever man rebelled, God's responded with a covenant. When the first man, Adam, sinned, God didn't shrug His shoulders and says, "[boys will be boys.](#)" No! Something had to be done. There was a proper way to cover man's sin and shame. God used skins to cloth the man and woman. He sacrificed an animal. According to the Edenic Covenant the wages of sin was death. Thus God's covenant had to be satisfied for mankind to resume a relationship with the Creator.

When the human race became so polluted God had to purge the Earth with a flood - He started over with a undefiled family. He made a covenant with Noah. When Noah's descendants disobeyed God, and launched a coup d'état at the Tower of Babel, God busted up the party, and started over with a covenant. Rather than work with humanity as a whole, He chose one family and made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He promised Abraham [a land, a nation, and an heir who would bless the world.](#)

After the nation of Israel exited Egypt God prepared His people for the Promised Land. He set them apart from other nations, by giving a covenant to Moses... God even promised Israel an *eternal kingdom* and an *eternal king*. God made a covenant with David that his heir would sit on his throne forever. He would rule the world and live forever. He was called "[Messiah.](#)" But when the Babylonians conquered the Jewish kingdom and took the nation to Babylon a chill settled over the more knowledgeable rabbis. A son of David no longer ruled in Israel. *Had God's covenants failed?*

Nearly 2000 years earlier God called Abraham out of Babel, the land of idols. Now God's people are back in Babylon. Tragically, they've come full circle... Psalm 137 was written in tears by the exiled Jews... "[By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows... For those who carried us away captive asked us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth... How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill...](#)" The Jews longed to return home to Israel. And just like the gracious God He is, Almighty God responded to His people's longing with a covenant. At their darkest hour, He shined the brightest light. Jeremiah in Israel, Ezekiel in Babylon... announced a [New Covenant](#) God would make with His people. It included three promises... Israel would be [regathered](#) to their land. Spiritual life would be reborn, or [regenerated](#). And a King would come to [re-establish](#) the throne of David and kingdom of Israel.

And God sent His only Son, Jesus, to ratify this covenant. All God's covenants were signed with blood. And the **New Covenant** was no different... The night before He was crucified, Jesus took the Passover cup and redefined its meaning. The Lamb of God said **"this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins..."** Jesus came to activate the New Covenant.

At the time of Jesus the Jews had been regathered. With His death on the cross, and its payment for sin, it was now possible for sinful men to be forgiven, and be given new life - *a new start and a new heart*. And as we discussed last time, if the Jews had received the Gospel, and Jesus as their Messiah, there's evidence from Peter's preaching, that Jesus would've returned in the first century to establish the throne of David and God's kingdom on the Earth. But they didn't! And they haven't! For 2000 years God's NC has been on pause. He offered His Kingdom to the Jews, but they refused, and chose to remain under the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a tragic mistake.

Over the centuries, the curses of Deuteronomy 28 have come upon the Jews over and over again... Shortly after their rejection of Messiah in 70 AD the Romans sacked Jerusalem and burned the Temple. Thousands of Jews were crucified or sold into slavery. The Romans leveled the Temple Mount, and built a temple to their own idolatrous god Jupiter. They even renamed Jerusalem, **"Aelia Capitolina,"** after the Emperor Hadrian's family. Eventually, Rome barred the Jews from their own holy city. The nation was no more, and the Jews were a scattered people.

And if you had just been following the OT storyline you would've cried. **The NC was the last of God's covenants - and His plan ends in His people's failure?** But God had a secret. He kept back vital information from the Jewish prophets. He can do that! *Did you know God has secrets?* I love Deuteronomy 29:29, **"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..."** Put the two thoughts together and you get the idea God has secrets and He likes to reveal them.

I got a story to tell you... It was first reported in the Boston Globe. And the events occurred in June 1990. A young lady from Boston had grown up in a poor family. Even spent time in the city's homeless shelter. Yet through hard work and a successful business she'd risen out of squalor. Her life seemed perfect. She met a man, and they decided to get married. In preparation for the reception she contracted with the downtown Hyatt - ordered a meal with all the trimmings, expensive centerpieces, formal waiters - she even hired an orchestra for entertainment. The price tag for the big shindig came to \$13,000.

But here's where the plot thickens... A couple of days before the wedding the groom got cold feet. He didn't know if he was ready for a big commitment like marriage. After an awkward conversation he backed out. The spurned bride immediately went to the Hyatt for a refund, *but to no avail*. She couldn't get out of the contract. *She had two options...* cancel and forfeit 90% of her money, *or* she could through with the party. Though at first it seemed crazy, the more the jilted bride thought of going on with the party the more she liked the idea.

Here's what she did... First, she changed the night's menu to **boneless chicken - in honor of the groom**. Then she sent invitations to Boston's homeless shelters and rescue missions. That night, Hyatt waiters dressed up in tuxedos served delicious hors d'oeuvres to bag ladies, and panhandlers. People who normally ate half-gnawed pizza feasted on chicken cordon bleu. Vagrants sipped champagne, and street people ate chocolate wedding cake. They all danced into the night to big-band melodies.

All I can say is “**Surprise!**” The jilted Bostonian bride did the unthinkable. Rather than let a good party go to waste she invited people who would appreciate the blessing. She hosted a feast and invited strangers. And this was the secret God kept from Israel. Here’s where we need to read our text, Ephesians 2:12-13 is addressed to Gentiles - *people who aren’t Jews*. Paul writes, “**That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**”

Like the jilted bride, God had been jilted by His people Israel. When they refused to believe in Jesus, He made an unprecedented move, no one expected. God had a perfectly good covenant - paid for by the blood of His own Son... *Why let it go to waste?* So God sent shock waves through the halls of heaven. He took promises and covenants intended specifically for the children of Abraham, and offered them to everyman - to the Gentiles - to strangers...

Understand, this was like a dog breeder who specializes in properly-pedigreed pups, suddenly opening up the kennel to mutts and mongrels. God took the status He’d reserved for His special, chosen people, Israel - and offered it to any human with a pulse. Gentiles were offered God’s covenants. Here’s the secret God refused to reveal to the OT prophets... Israel would reject their Messiah, but God would not be without a people. He would make a new people group out of both Jews and Gentiles - anyone who believed in Jesus was invited to the party.

Remember the story Jesus told in Luke 14... A man hosted a great supper. But the people he invited all had excuses not to come. So he told his servants to invite the “**poor, maimed, lame, blind.**” Yet despite their efforts there was still room for more. So he sent his servants into “**the highways and hedges**” to recruit anybody and everybody for his party. The host’s only priority was a full house... And here’s the meaning of the parable - God will fill up His kingdom with misfits, and nobodies - not just blue bloods. In Christ, God opens the door to all men.

In Matthew 21 Jesus said it again... A landowner planted a vineyard, and leased it to a crew who didn’t like paying rent. All they wanted to do was *whine*... So when he sent his servants to collect the rent, this malicious bunch beat, stoned, killed the servants. *That’s no way to treat a friendly rent-collector!* So the landowner sent his own boy. Figured, “**They’ll respect my son.**” But the men saw it as a chance to kill his heir and steal the owner’s estate.

It’s funny, but later in Matthew 21 we’re told, “**When the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.**” Of course He was. **The Jews were enjoying New Covenant blessings without bearing New Covenant fruit.** They occupied the land, and looked forward to the kingdom, but they rejected the life of His Spirit. They killed His Son and practiced on His prophets. And the vinedressers of Judaism were destined for judgment. Jesus delivers the moral of the story when He says, “**The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it...**”

This is what Paul in Ephesians refers to as a “**mystery.**” In 3:4 he speaks of the “**the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...**” God keeps secrets. Paul calls them “*mysteries,*” and His biggest mystery was the Church. *I like a little mystery in my life... How bout you?* A predictable life is a boring life. I love surprises. Kathy and I have been married for 31 years, but she still surprises me. She can supply some mystery.

But it's the mystery that keeps me intrigued and enchanted. *Don't you like to keep a secret - then spring it on someone special.* It's a thrill. It stirs love. Well, the Church is the mystery of the New Covenant. All along God knew what He would do, but He kept it a secret - so *that He could spring it on us!*

Don't ever think of the Church as [God's Plan B](#). *Ah, since the Jews wouldn't dance, God was stuck with the Gentiles as His partner.* Granted, that's how it might seem. But plenty of passages state that it was always God's will to include the Gentiles in the NC. He just kept it a secret. It was a mystery.

I love how 1 Peter 2:9 addresses the Church - *Jews and Gentiles*. *"You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people..."* That's how God spoke of Israel under the MC... He made the Jewish people a nation of priests - a holy nation, dedicated and set apart to Him.

Remember, at the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages and scattered the Gentiles. That's when He turned His attention to one family, the Jews. But Abraham's family rejected the salvation God offered under the NC, and He turned His attention back to the rest of humanity. On the Day of Pentecost God started a new work among the nations... He reverse what He did at the Tower of Babel. Rather than confuse the languages, God gave the Church the gift of tongues to speak in other languages the praises of God. It unified the crowd.

In a supernatural way, God ended the language barrier that had kept men segregated. The nations God drove apart at Babel were reunited at Pentecost. God was forming a new people group. As 1 Peter 2:10 puts it, *"(those) who once were not a people... are now the people of God."*

Understand what God is doing in the Church. He's creating in us a whole new species of human being. Before this mystery was revealed there were only two kinds of humanity on the planet – *Jews and Gentiles*. But that changed with the Church. When God invited Gentiles to take part in the NC He was creating out of Jews and Gentiles a new distinction. Listen to how Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:15, *"So as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross..."* Today, there's no longer just Jews or Gentiles in the world, there's a third breed, called ["Christian."](#) In Christ [a New Covenant community](#) has been born.

For a time, the Church has replaced Israel as God's focal point on the Earth... *Not forever! Not hardly!* The restoration of all things is a promise God made to Israel. God will again return His attention to the children of Abraham. God's ultimate rule on Earth will be from the throne of David, and in the land of Israel. But according to Romans 11, for the moment, Israel is the branch that's been cut off from the vine. And the Church - a new group - has been grafted in its place.

Remember under the OC, where did Israel come to worship God? They came to the Temple, center of Judaism. It was God's designated meeting place. In fact, it was a sin to sacrifice on any other altar. Part of the Davidic Covenant was that David's son would build God a Temple. When Solomon got his certificate of occupancy, God dedicated the new Temple with divine fireworks. Fire fell from heaven and consumed the meat. *It was a new day in Israel...*

But again, God repeated the miracle at Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church flickers of fire fell on the heads of the disciples. God was dedicating a new Temple. The fire of the Spirit had fallen on the sacrifice, but this time not dead meat, the sacrifice was alive and kicking. God likes His sacrifices rare. He likes living sacrifices. He wants us to be totally dedicated to Him.

But here's the point, today the Church is the Temple of God. We're the place where men now come to worship God! "A house of prayer for all nations." As the Temple was under the Mosaic Covenant, today the Church is a reflection of God's glory. 1 Peter 2 refers to believers as "living stones." We're stacked up on Jesus, our chief cornerstone!

Let me help you understand what it means to be a New Covenant believer. How **the third breed** differs from the former two - both Jews and Gentiles... Think of it this way, the Gentiles were **unrighteous**. Ephesians 2:1 describes their nature as "dead in trespasses and sins." And dead means dead. There're no degrees to death - you can't be partially dead - you're dead or your not... The Gentiles were hostile to God - "children of wrath" - dead in their sin.

But the Jews weren't any better - they were **self-righteous**. This was our Lord Jesus' biggest beef. He was kind and merciful to the tax-collectors and prostitutes - but He was intolerant of the self-righteous, legalistic, hypocritical, prejudicial people the Jews called "Pharisees." Jesus called them "brood of vipers," "whitewashed tombs," "sons of hell." The Gentiles were "unrighteous." The Jews were "self-righteousness."

But the New Covenant refers to the Christian as "the righteousness of God." *Absolutely amazing!* 2 Corinthians 5:21 puts it, "For (God) made (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." In Christ, we receive - then become - *the righteousness of God!*

Recall the middle promise of the NC - **regeneration**. In John 3, Jesus explained it to Nicodemus, as being "born all over again." It's a spiritual awakening. In Jeremiah 31:33 God explains what He'll do, "I will write My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts... No more shall every man teach his neighbor..." "Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest..."

Fail to understand these promises and you'll live below your privileges as a Christian... Under the Mosaic, or Old Covenant, God wrote His laws on stone tablets. Moses brought down The Ten Commandments written by the finger of God. But under the NC God writes His will into our hearts. Before I came to Jesus my instinct was to resist God and *do my own thing* - most times my own thing was a *bad thing*, on occasion it was a *good thing*, but it was always *my thing* - I was selfish at the core. But when I embraced Jesus a change took place inside me. He etched into my heart a love for Him and a love for others. I have a desire to obey. That *spirit of defiance* was replaced with a *spirit of compliance*.

Now that doesn't mean I never sin. I still slip up and sin, but I hate it when I do. Sin is no fun anymore. Once I was at home with sin, now when I participate, it feels out of character. It's not me. My deepest desire is to please God. You could say it like this, before I knew Jesus, on occasion I'd slip up and do a good deed. God's desires and my desires might accidentally cross paths. But my inner compass pointed away from God. But now everything has flip-flopped. On occasion I'll slip up and sin, but God's desires and mine remain in sync. I don't always succeed, but my heart's desire is to please God. Now my compass points God-ward.

There's a Christian bumper sticker that's actually spreading bad theology. I saw it again the other day. It reads, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." And I understand the basic sentiment. It's trying to say that what sets Christians apart is *not* that we live a perfect life. It's that we've thrown ourselves on the mercies of God and have received His forgiveness. But implied in the statement is that when a person becomes a Christian all that changes is their rap sheet. Their sins get expunged, but nothing really happens inside them. That couldn't be more false.

The NC highlights a fundamental transformation – a metamorphosis occurs inside the Christian. An ugly, earthbound caterpillar gets wings. God turns us into butterflies. He gives us power to soar above our sin and treat others in a new way. The New Covenant changes our heart's desire. We get a new set of wants. The Law of Moses *forbid* sin, but under the NC *I no longer want to sin*.

The Mosaic Covenant worked like the speed limit. God posted His commandments beside the road of life - "You shall not..." But the New Covenant puts us in intimate contact with God. He puts His Spirit in us. Now I've got a question... *what's more likely to keep you from driving too fast? A law on the books somewhere, or the cop parked at the intersection?* Obviously, *a cop on the street* has a far greater impact than *a law on the books*. And this is the difference between the NC and the Mosaic Covenant. Under the OC we're governed by laws. Under the NC we're connected to God's Spirit.

Moses was like the coach who put his players through the drills, and stressed execution, and even yanked them from the game at their first mistake. But Jesus is a player-coach. He sends His Spirit to join us, and play with us. Fall behind and the Spirit works harder. He takes up the slack. It's His effort inside me, that motivates me to play harder too.

2 Corinthians 3 compares the covenant written on stone, with the covenant written on human hearts. Whenever you put a thought down in print you run the risk of it being misinterpreted, or misunderstood. And that's what happened to God's Law. The Jews interpreted it in a stilted, wooden, legalistic manner. This is why Paul said, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." God imbeds His will into our spiritual DNA. The NC is not about rules, but following a person.

2 Corinthians 3 is a tremendous chapter. It compares the glory of the OC, a fleeting and fading glory - with the glory of the NC, a transforming glory. When Moses received the OC his face glowed with the glory of God. Call it the divine shine, the Mo glow. And he had to cover his face. The glory of God was off-limits to anyone but Moses. Well, in contrast Paul says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Under the NC we're all invited to behold God's glory. As Paul puts it, we come with "unveiled face."

On the cross Jesus purchased an unlimited data plan for everyone who believes. It's unlimited access. God's presence is always online. And I love verse 18. Paul encourages us. He says, when we "Behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, (we) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." Under the NC here's how we grow more holy, and reflect His glory, and become more like Jesus - *by spending time with Him!* It's a mirror effect. The more you look at Jesus, the more you pick up His reflection.

Here's the simple point I'm making, the Gentiles are made part of the NC, not the OC God made with Moses. Hebrews 7:22 tells us, "Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant." The term "surety" is an older word. It means *down-payment* or *guarantee*. The covenant Jesus

offers is better than the OC. It cannot fail because it rests on His work, not mine. Jesus died for sins once and for all. His work needs no augmentation. It needs only to be trusted. Recall the Savior's final words on the cross - **"It is finished."**

It reminds me of a joke! Moses and Jesus were sitting around in heaven reminiscing about their time on earth, and the various miracles they performed. Moses wondered if he still had it what it takes... They both decide to revisit earth and renew old times. Moses is by the Red Sea. He turns to Jesus and says, **"Well, here's hoping!"** He raises his rod, and sure enough, the sea splits in two just like before. Moses says, **"Wow, it's nice to know I still got it."**

Next they're on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus says to Moses, **"Well, it's my turn now. It's been years since I've walked on water. Let's see if I can still do this..."** Jesus strides off the shore and walks several hundred yards out into the water. He turns around and grins at Moses. He comments that it feels good to be back on top of the water.

But when he tries to walk back there's a problem... He takes a few steps and sinks to his ankles. He walks a few more yards and he's trudging in water up to his knees. Finally, He sinks, and has to swim to shore. Jesus can't figure out what went wrong! That's when Moses points to His feet. He tells Him, **"Lord, You forgot about the holes."** *It's not just a joke!* The difference between Moses and Jesus is not *the miracles*, it's *the mercy!* Jesus – not Moses – loves you enough to die in your place. He's the guarantee of a covenant *with no holes* - a far better covenant!

And here's the big question... **Are you living under the OC or the NC?** I know believers in Jesus who don't understand how *real righteousness* works. It's not a list of dos and don'ts we try to keep. It's not elbow grease. Rather, we trust God and spend time with God – and in return He works it in us. He writes it on our hearts. He changes us from inside out. Too many Christians live as if they're under the OC. They live from the outside in... *obeying the do's and don't - grinding it out on their own.* They rely on their own willpower and never experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. **Don't be unrighteous or self-righteous. Receive God's righteousness by faith.**

In Romans 11:25 is another place where Paul writes of the **"mystery"** of the Church, but he takes it one step further. He tells us why this has happened. He says in verse 11, that **"salvation has come to the Gentiles"** to **"provoke the Jews to jealousy."** This is God's plan for evangelism. Often we think of evangelism as an altar call or passing out a track. But it's far more comprehensive. God wants the Church to be a witness of what life will be like in God's Kingdom. Our fellowship with God and each other should be so rich - so full of grace and truth – that it makes the Jews and the world around us jealous of our faith, and our riches in Christ.

Understand this is the power of the Church! Our great influence in the world is not our ability to mobilize politically - or pool our resources financially. There've been times in Church History when the institutional Church thought it had a military mission. Armies formed under the banner of the Cross. But we need to see the NC Church through God's eyes... *We're a temporary home for Kingdom citizens.*

The Kingdom of God won't come physically until Israel is **re-gathered, regenerated**, then **Jesus returns**. Right now we're living in the meantime. We're a stopgap measure. We're God's unfolded mystery. And our purpose is to be living out the values of the future Kingdom today in our relationships with each other. We're an advertisement for God's Kingdom. We're an outpost of heaven behind enemy lines.

It might seem ironic at first, that the last of God's covenants is called *the New Covenant* - but God is a God of newness. He wants to make all things new... He can give you a new start. He can give you a new heart. Bow your life to Messiah, King Jesus, today – trust His Spirit to etch God's will upon your heart – and watch the Father pour out to you the riches of Christ!