

Priesthood, Prophecy & Covenant

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The word “Covenant” describes the way in which God has related to his human creation since the beginning. It is a relationship in which each party declares binding obligations one to the other. God’s original covenant with Adam was that He would be Adam’s God and father, and Adam would be obedient to his father as is fitting for a loving son. But Adam did not obey, and so God changed the covenant. He removed Adam from the Garden of Eden, and distanced himself from Adam so that, from that time forward, Adam and his descendants (i.e. all of mankind) would have to prove their way back to a relationship with God over centuries, and in stages.

There came a time when God decided to draw men a step closer to Him through a unique combination of priesthood and prophecy. Priests and prophets are persons who are specially gifted to be intermediary communicators, thereby reducing the relational distance between man and God. The actual distance between man and God does not change, but the effective distance does. It’s kind of like how it was in these United States before and after the pony express. Prior to the pony express, anyone who moved west and wanted to communicate back to someone in the east had to return there personally. With the advent of the pony express, however, riders served as communicators by carrying written messages back and forth. The mileages between east and west did not change, but the apparent effective distances were shortened through communication.

Priests and prophets function similar to these messengers, but with important differences. The pony express riders did not open the messages that they carried, and they carried their messages in both directions. God’s priests and prophets (in a sense) do open the messages they carry, sometimes adding their own prayers of intercession to them, and priests carry them from men to God, while prophets carry them from God to men. Sometimes, priests and prophets are one and the same person, and a priest who is gifted prophetically can carry messages in both directions as did the pony riders. My analogy with pony riders is over-simplistic, of course, but perhaps it will serve to make my point.

God communicated with mankind through individual priests and prophets for a considerable number of years, but it wasn’t until Abraham, that God decided to expand his way of communicating with mankind, from using occasional “priest/prophet” individuals, to commissioning an entire corps of them. And he chose Abraham’s family and descendants to be that corps, for we read in Genesis 17:1-7:

“When Avram was 99 years old *ADONAI* appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am *El Shaddai* [God Almighty]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted. I will make my covenant between me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly." Avram fell on his face, and God continued speaking with him: “As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend

from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.”

The future mission of Abraham and his descendants was not fully understood by them at the time the covenant was given. What did it mean to be the “father of many nations?” Full understanding had to wait until the next great covenant – the “Mosaic:”

Exodus 19:3-6: “Moshe went up to God, and *ADONAI* called to him from the mountain: "Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya'akov, to tell the people of Isra'el: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of *cohanim* [priests] for me, a nation set apart.' These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el.””

So, the Israelites were to be a priestly people and, while there isn't a specific Scripture describing them as also a prophetic people, we know that they were prophetic because there is at least one time on record when they heard God's voice clearly and directly. We read of that occasion in Deuteronomy 18:15-16:

“*ADONAI* will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to him, just as when you were assembled at Horev and requested [of] *ADONAI* your God, [saying] 'Don't let me hear the voice of *ADONAI* my God any more, or let me see this great fire ever again; if I do, I will die!”

The attribute of being able to hear God's voice is the prophetic attribute but, because the gathered Israelites begged God not to speak to them directly again, He did not do so for the remainder of the Mosaic Covenant, and spoke instead only through certain individuals whom we call the prophets. The Israelites as a whole retained their priestly commission to the Gentile nations but, from that time on until the New Covenant, only select individuals were gifted prophetically.

I want to move forward to speak about the New Covenant, but I would be remiss were I not to mention how the Levitical priesthood came into existence. Apparently, God's original plan did not contemplate a Levitical priesthood, but rather that every firstborn of Israel would be separated out for special priestly service. We read of this in Exodus 13:2, in which God says:

“Set aside for me all the firstborn. Whatever is first from the womb among the people of Isra'el, both of humans and of animals, belongs to me.”

Although Scripture does not specifically say it, some scholars believe that it was these firstborn of the Israelites and not the Levites that were originally to serve in the Holy Tabernacle (later the Temple). However, when the tribes of Israel (excepting those of Levi) sinned during the incident of the golden calf, scholars surmise that God changed his plan and took the Levites as His

Tabernacle priests instead of the firstborn Israelites. They draw this conclusion from Numbers 8:17-19 which reads:

“For all the firstborn among the people of Isra'el are mine, both humans and animals; on the day I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I set them apart for myself. But I have taken the *L'vi'im* [the Levites] in place of all the firstborn among the people of Isra'el, and I have given the *L'vi'im* to Aharon and his sons from among the people of Isra'el to do the service of the people of Isra'el in the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the people of Isra'el, so that no plague will fall on the people of Isra'el in consequence of their coming too close to the sanctuary.”

And as for the golden calf incident, we read in Exodus 32:25-29:

“When Moshe saw that the people had gotten out of control- because Aharon had allowed them to get out of control to the derision of their enemies- Moshe stood at the entrance to the camp and shouted, "Whoever is for *ADONAI*, come to me!" All the descendants of Levi rallied around him. He told them, "Here is what *ADONAI*, the God of Isra'el, says: 'Each of you, put his sword on his side; and go up and down the camp, from gate to gate; and every man is to kill his own kinsman, his own friend and his own neighbor!' The sons of Levi did what Moshe said, and that day three thousand of the people died. Moshe said, “You have consecrated yourselves today to *ADONAI*, because every one of you has been against his own son and against his own kinsman, in order to bring a blessing on yourselves today.””

Because God installed the Levites to serve in His sanctuary in place of the firstborn of Israel, He subsequently commanded that all the firstborn males of Israel should be purchased back (or redeemed) from sanctuary service by means of their parents paying the Levitical priests five silver shekels for each of them. This procedure is called *pidyon ha-ben* (or redemption of the son), and we read about it in Numbers 18:15-16, in which God says to the Levitical priests:

“Everything that comes first out of the womb, of all living things which they offer to *ADONAI*, whether human or animal, will be yours. However, the firstborn of a human being you must redeem, and the firstborn of an unclean beast you are to redeem. The sum to be paid for redeeming anyone a month old or over is to be five *shekels* of silver [two ounces], as you value it, using the sanctuary *shekel* (this is the same as twenty *gerahs*).”

Okay, now on to the New Covenant. I want to emphasize at the outset that it is the “New” Covenant and not the “renewed” covenant as some would like to think of it. Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34) says of the New Covenant:

““Here, the days are coming," says *ADONAI*, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says *ADONAI*. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says *ADONAI*: "I will put my *Torah* within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow

community member or his brother, [saying] 'Know *ADONAI*'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.'”

The New Covenant is new because Jeremiah said it is new, and also because Hebrews 8:13 said (at the time Hebrews was written), that the Mosaic Covenant was already old and in the process of passing away; we read:

“By using the term, "new," he has made the first covenant "old"; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”

The New Covenant is also prophesied and described in Joel 3:1-5a(2:28-32a), which reads:

“After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions; and also on male and female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit. I will show wonders in the sky and on earth- blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible Day of *ADONAI*. At that time, whoever calls on the name of *ADONAI* will be saved.”

The New Covenant was ushered in by Yeshua, and was brought to fruition when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within all who would receive Him. This is prophesied in Ezekiel 36:27 where we read:

“I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them.”

All of biblical covenant history has to do with mankind’s return to its original and intended relationship with God, and the New Covenant is a giant leap forward toward that goal. There are seven main elements of the New Covenant; I will list each of them along with a Scripture or two for each:

1. The New Covenant brings forgiveness of sin, and salvation to those who repent, through the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua.

Romans 3:25a: “God put Yeshua forward as the *kapparah* [covering]for sin through his faithfulness in respect to his bloody sacrificial death.”

John 3:14-15: “Just as Moshe lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life.”

2. The New Covenant moved the Temple of God from its house of brick and mortar, to the bodies of believers in Yeshua, and the Holy Spirit resides today in each of our bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19a: “Or don't you know that your body is a temple for the *Ruach HaKodesh* [the Holy Spirit] who lives inside you, whom you received from God?”

3. The New Covenant restored our ability to hear the voice of God individually through the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13: “However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative but will say only what he hears. He will also announce to you the events of the future.”

Romans 8:14: “All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons.”

4. The New Covenant brings us spiritual gifts, and power to lead godly lives through the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:7: “For God gave us a Spirit who produces not timidity, but power, love and self-discipline.”

Ephesians 4:11: “Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers.”

5. The New Covenant, with all of its benefits, has been extended to Gentile believers in Yeshua by covenantally connecting them to the Jewish people.

Ephesians 2:14-16: “For he himself is our *shalom*- he has made us both one and has broken down the *m'chitzah* [curtain of separation] which divided us by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the *Torah*, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity and thus make *shalom*, and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus in himself killing that enmity.”

Romans 11:16-18: “Now if the *hallah* [bread] offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- [Gentiles] were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree [Israel], then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.”

6. The New Covenant brought us a new priesthood consisting of all believers in Yeshua, and it also brought us our new High Priest, who is Yeshua.

1 Peter 2:9-10: “But you are a chosen people, the King's *cohanim* [priests], a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; before, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Hebrews 4:14-15: “Therefore, since we have a great *cohen gadol* [high priest] who has passed through to the highest heaven, Yeshua, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we acknowledge as true. For we do not have a *cohen gadol* unable to empathize with our weaknesses; since in every respect he was tempted just as we are, the only difference being that he did not sin.”

7. A new book of Scripture has been added to the old – the *Kitvey B’rit Chadasha*, also known as the New Testament.

2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living;”

Revelation 22:18-19: “I warn everyone hearing the words of the prophecy in this book that if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. And if anyone takes anything away from the words in the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the Tree of Life and the holy city, as described in this book.”

Notice that God’s original way of communicating with mankind through priests and prophets is a continuing theme of the New Covenant which has been bumped up several notches from the Mosaic Covenant, in that now all believers in Yeshua have become priests with prophetic abilities. Our access to (and our ability to fellowship with) God, has been largely restored, reminiscent of the way it was for Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Keep in mind also, that we could not have received any of these New Covenant benefits, had Yeshua not died for our sins, been resurrected back to life, and returned to the Father to send back the Holy Spirit.

I think Ephesians 2:17-22 is a suitable ending for this message; it says of Yeshua:

“Also, when he came, he announced as Good News *shalom* to you far off and *shalom* to those nearby, news that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!”