

Jesus Institutes the New Covenant

Bible Background • MARK 14:21–31; HEBREWS 8

Printed Text • MARK 14:17–24; HEBREWS 8:6–7, 10–12; Devotional Reading • JEREMIAH 31:31–34

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY Jesus as the initiator of the new covenant illustrated in the Lord’s Supper; APPRECIATE our standing in right relationship with God because of the new covenant; and CONSIDER the Lord’s Supper with reverence as the sign of new covenant in Christ.

In Focus

“Don’t ever make a promise you can’t keep,” said Rita, Roxanne’s mom. “In fact, you’re probably too young to make promises at all. So don’t.”

Roxanne sobbed softly, remembering her mother’s sage advice. She thought she understood what keeping her word was all about, but she was wrong. While she was at school, she made a promise to her best friend, Keisha, to help her with her math homework after school. They were preparing for a math test, and Keisha needed the extra help from Roxanne, who was an A+ math student.

But now Roxanne’s mom was working late unexpectedly, and Roxanne was going to her grandmother’s for the evening. She was definitely going to break her promise. The only thing she could do was call Keisha to inform her of the change of plans. To her surprise, Keisha wasn’t mad all. She understood why Roxanne had to cancel and decided to study with her older brother Brandon instead.

“I guess your mom was right about making promises, huh?” Keisha said with a smile over the phone.

“I’m just not old enough to control things in my life,” Roxanne replied. “But I have a feeling adults struggle with promises, too.”

God’s promises are unfailing compared to ours. As Christ’s followers, how can we depend on Him being trustworthy? Which promise of God are you holding to dearly?

Keep in Mind

“But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Mediator mesites (Gk.) — A go-between, or someone who tries to bring together two sets of people or individuals who are not getting along.

B. Bread artos (Gk.) — An unleavened flat cake eaten during the Passover.

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

Mark 14:17 And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.

18 And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

20 And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.

21 The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.

22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

Hebrews 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

NIV

Mark 14:17 In the evening Jesus arrived with the Twelve.

18 As they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me here will betray me."

19 Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one?"

20 He replied, "It is one of you twelve who is eating from this bowl with me.

21 For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

22 As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it, for this is my body."

23 And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 And he said to them, "This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many.

Hebrews 8:6 But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

7 If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it.

10 But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

11 And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already.

12 And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

The People, Places, and Times

Mediator. A person who serves as an intermediary to reconcile differences between people. Under the old covenant, a priest served as the mediator between humanity and God. The ministry of Jesus, the new covenant, pronounced Him as the final and complete mediator between us and God (Hebrews 8).

Covenant. A binding agreement made between two or more people or groups; a solemn agreement or vow made between God and His people that promised His blessings in return for their devotion and obedience (Genesis 17:1–27). Some covenants were “onesided,” meaning that God declared His intent to do certain things without any obligation from the second party (Genesis 9). Jesus Christ became the mediator of a new covenant when He sacrificed His life on the Cross, reconciling people to God and bringing salvation and eternal life to all who trust in Him (Hebrews 8:1–13, 10:12–17).

Background

Our Scripture lesson causes us to review the old (Mosaic) covenant and its meaning in order to understand the new covenant in its context. The Last Supper Jesus has with His disciples before His death on the Cross occurs during the Passover celebration in Jerusalem.

The Passover was established and instituted by God through His servant Moses. God established the Hebrew calendar and delivered the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12). God gave instructions on what day the sacrifice was to be set apart, the criteria for the sacrifice, and when the sacrifice was to be offered. God further gave instructions on where the blood of the sacrifice was to be placed on the households of the Israelites. The lamb that was to be sacrificed had to be roasted over fire and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

The Lord was establishing His covenant with Israel. Moses obeyed all God commanded. On the night of Passover, the Death Angel brought death on the houses of Egypt and Pharaoh, and the Egyptians were left in unprecedented mourning and shock. God had executed judgment against the false gods of Egypt and their oppressors. Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and told them to get their people out of Egypt and go worship God as they had said.

From Exodus 12 until the time of our text, the Israelites observed the Passover as the act of God that became foundational for His covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai. God established the Passover, and Feast of Unleavened Bread, as an everlasting ordinance. In our text Jesus sent two of His disciples to go and prepare the Passover for them to celebrate together.

At-A-Glance

1. The Perpetual Promise of Passover (Mark 14:17–24)
2. The Perpetual Purpose of the High Priest (Hebrews 8:6–12)

In Depth

1. The Perpetual Promise of Passover (Mark 14:17–24)

Jesus, knowing that His time of sacrifice and suffering is drawing near, prepares to celebrate and reach the climax of His teaching to the Twelve with this Passover feast. Jesus has removed Himself from public view because there is a plot to kill Him and Judas Iscariot has arranged to betray Him. Jesus, knowing all this, continues in the will of the Father to reveal a new meaning to a traditional meal.

Jesus opens the table talk with a disturbing statement, “Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me” (from v. 18). All the disciples question one another and Jesus, but the only clue that Jesus gives

is still veiled and vague: “It is one of the twelve, that dipped with me in the dish” (from v. 20). All the disciples are now trying to remember who dipped their hands in the dish. Was it them?

Amid their confusion and conversation, Jesus pulls their attention back to Him and to the reason for their gathering. Jesus takes two elements from the meal and gives them new meaning. First He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives each of them some. Then he takes the cup, gives thanks and let them drink from it. Jesus tells His disciples that the bread and cup of Passover have now become His body and blood. Jesus reveals how He is related to the Passover feast for His disciples.

As we reflect on Exodus 12, when the Passover was instituted by God through Moses, God showed Moses, the Israelites, and the Egyptians that He alone was a mighty deliverer! The blood of the Passover lamb was a sign to the Israelites and the death angel that they belonged to the Lord.

By comparison, now with the new covenant, the blood of Jesus identifies those who believe in Him as Lord and Savior of their lives. Just as the blood on the doorpost spared the lives of those Israelites who were in bondage in Egypt, so likewise the blood of Jesus delivers us from the penalty and bondage of sin. We have this declaration from Jesus Christ: “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many” (from v. 24). The purpose of the great Passover Lamb Jesus was to set all who are in the bondage of sin free from the penalty of death.

What continuing experiences have you had because of the perpetual promise and purpose of salvation through Jesus?

2. The Perpetual Purpose of the High Priest (Hebrews 8:6–12)

Now on the other side of the resurrection of Jesus, we experience Him not only as the Passover Lamb, but also as our High Priest forever. Those who served as ministers of the old covenant, Aaron and his sons, also needed redeeming, for they could not redeem themselves. Jesus became the Passover Lamb that made everything new. Jesus alone is the only High Priest needed between heaven and humanity. The priests of the old covenant would offer sacrifices to God on behalf of themselves and the people. But Jesus as God in human flesh offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. Now Jesus has been elevated to a more excellent ministry of High Priest, as the prophet Jeremiah foretold (31:31–34). Now we see this new covenant being established and fulfilled through Jesus. Jesus said to His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless, but He would send the Spirit of Truth. This promise extends to us today. The Holy Spirit leads us in all manner of truth (John 16:13).

Search the Scriptures

1. Who could make acceptable offerings for sin in the old covenant (Hebrews 8:6)? How is the new covenant different?
2. We see from these two passages of Scripture that God has an incomprehensible love for humanity. What does the Scripture say about God forgiving and forgetting our sins?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Typically, are you a promise keeper or a promise breaker? Under which circumstances have you been one or the other? How do you count the cost of keeping or breaking your word? How have these experiences affected your relationship with others? With God?
2. Think of a time when you needed to rebuild trust with someone or even yourself. How did you respond? Compare and contrast that with Jesus’ need to make a better covenant.

Liberating Lesson

As you consider your life as a Christian, consider what this new covenant has afforded and provided you. Write down how different your life would be if you were still under the old covenant. Praise Jesus for His willingness

to be our Passover Lamb and High Priest. What will you do with your liberty? Do you feel any responsibility to help others because of what Jesus has done for you? Hear and see this text in view of what Jesus says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). What will you do? Whom will you help lift and liberate from sites and systems of oppression?

Application for Activation

Because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, we now have a new covenant and a High Priest who sits in the highest of heavens who is our mediator, advocating for us in the presence of God the Father. The product of sin is death, but the new covenant provides us with an opportunity to accept Jesus’ sacrifice, which freed us from our sins. Today we have the opportunity not only to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord but to then share the redemptive power of Jesus with someone who needs to be saved.

This week what can you modify in your attitude, behavior, or character to express your identity in Christ?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Mark 14:17–24

¹⁷ And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. ¹⁹ And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? And another said, Is it I? ²⁰ And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.

In the evening (Thursday after sunset), Jesus came to Jerusalem with His disciples fully aware that He was to accomplish the Passover in His own person.

Jesus warned the disciples of the betrayal. He announced that one of them would betray Him. Even though the betrayal described in the Scriptures was clearly foreseen by Jesus, it was a surprise to the disciples. The word “to be sorrowful” in Greek is *lupeo* (loo-PEH-oh), meaning to be grieved or distressed. This word points out the strong reaction of the disciples. The question they ask “one by one” shows that they did not understand that it was too late. In His answer Jesus removed all ambiguity and said that it was one of the twelve “that dippeth with me in the dish.” Thus, the betrayal is revealed as all the more horrible because of the betrayer’s intimate fellowship with Jesus.

²¹ The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born. ²² And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

The expression of “as it is written” refers to the Scriptures in general and not a particular passage. The death of the Son of Man is in harmony with the Scriptures. Judas’ betrayal is within the context of God’s plan and purpose. Yet Judas was responsible for his act. Here his existence was deplored and the terrible destiny awaiting him pronounced.

The “bread” (Gk. artos, ARE-toce) usually denotes a flat cake of unleavened bread. Jesus takes the symbols of His coming death. He “blesses” the bread, in Greek eulogeo (ew-low- GEH-oh), “to bless or speak well of,” and gives it to them. The bread stands for His dying. The breaking of the bread stands for Jesus’ suffering. Taking Communion—the Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, or whichever name is used—is a means of participating in the covenant of Jesus. The Greek expression soma mou (SO-MAH moo), translated “my body,” can mean the whole being.

²³ And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

He took the cup and after giving thanks (Gk. eucharisteo, ew-kha-rees-TEH-oh), He gave it to them. The word for giving thanks mean something closer to “giving a good gift or grace.” The cup stands for blood atonement, which inaugurates a new covenant. His blood is poured out for many. “Shed for many” is probably both a reference to Exodus 24:8 and to the work of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah. Making a new covenant is part of the mission of the Servant, whose prophecy is fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). “Shed” in this context is present tense but the implication in the Greek is a participle involving a near future (is being shed). “For many” probably refers to Isaiah 53 and shows the great number of the beneficiaries of the sacrifice. This phrase speaks to the reality that Jesus would shed His blood soon (within days) for His disciples, but the impact of that shed blood would reach far beyond those at the table to impact all who would respond to Jesus Christ in the future.

Hebrews 8:6–7, 10–12

A major point of the book of Hebrews is that Christians have a “high priest” in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 6:20, 8:1). He is the one who connects us to God and God to us (see 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6). Ironically, under the old covenant, Jesus would not have qualified to be a priest. Under the Law, all priests were required to be Levites, and although His mother was related to the Levites, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (see Hebrews 7:14). However, Jesus’ priestly tabernacle is heaven, and His priestly commission comes directly from God, who ordained Him for ministry.

⁶ But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

A “mediator” (Gk. mesites, meh-SEEtace) is a go-between, or someone who tries to bring together two sets of people or individuals who are not getting along. Christ is the mediator between God and humankind (1 Timothy 2:5). The Greek word diatheke (dee-ah-THAY-kay) is translated as “covenant” and is a pact, arrangement, or agreement. It can also be translated as “testament.” The covenant between God and the nation of Israel is thus referred to as the Old Testament (Exodus 19:5–6). Moses was the mediator in the Old Testament. However, approximately six hundred years before Christ, God promised His people a new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31) involving a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). The word “better” (Gk. kreiton, KRATE-tonn) is found twice in this verse, and means more useful, more serviceable, or advantageous. Here, the writer implies that the new covenant—as fulfilled by the blood of Jesus—will be a far greater ministry than that of the priests under the old covenant.

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

If the first covenant had been faultless, then God would not have needed a second one. The phrase “have been sought” is the Greek verb *zeteo* (dzay-TEH-oh) and implies “seeking something out or trying to find it.” Because God was dissatisfied with the Israelites for not keeping the law under the old covenant, He sought to establish a second covenant—a covenant based on grace, through Jesus Christ, who is faultless. Our human tendency to sin and the dependency on human obedience to keep the covenant made it flawed in keeping us in right relationship with God. God had to act apart from our works in order to bring right relationship. The new covenant gives us access to the benefits of righteousness through Jesus Christ who fulfilled the old covenant with perfect obedience. Hence, we now have been given a more excellent covenant by God.

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

In the old covenant, God’s agreement with the Israelites was written on stone tablets given to Moses at Mount Sinai. These stone tablets were external to the individual. In contrast, under the new covenant, God would now write His truth inside the hearts and minds of humankind. This is a fulfillment of God’s Word prophesied by Jeremiah, where God’s law would be in the hearts of people, coming to pass through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers in Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 31:33). By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christians have an internal and intimate relationship with the living God. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (from John 14:23). God wants an intimate relationship with us.

¹¹ And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

In the old covenant, few people could read, and instruction was primarily mediated through the priest. In other words, in order to have a relationship with God, people were dependent on another human being. However, the new covenant promises the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (v. 10), resulting in every person being able to “know” the Lord for him or herself. Here, two different Greek words are used to express the word “know.” In the first instance (“know the Lord”), the word is *ginosko* (ghee-OCE-ko), meaning “to understand, perceive, or have knowledge.” In the second instance (“all shall know me”), the Greek word is *oida* (OY-da), meaning “to pay attention or observe.” Thus, getting to “know” God means both understanding and paying attention to what the Holy Spirit teaches from within. Everyone can “know the Lord.” In fact, the very definition of having eternal life is that we might know the only true God and Jesus Christ (John 3:15–16). When we come to “know” God through His Son, Jesus Christ becomes our mediator and we receive the gift of salvation (John 1:12).

¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Two of the synonyms for “sin” occur in this verse: “unrighteousness” (Gk. *adikia*, ah-dee-KEE-ah), which means injustice, and “iniquities” (Gk. *anomia*, ah-no-MEE-ah), meaning contempt for and violation of the law. In the Old Testament, the people were constantly reminded of their need to atone for their sins by virtue of Levitical laws. However, here we see that God has chosen not to remember the people’s sins. What great love God has for His people! Elsewhere in the Bible, we find God casting sins into the deepest sea (Micah 7:19). This is God’s way of saying that our sins will never be found again. We can, therefore, take comfort in the fact that if God chooses to forget our sins, there’s no point in our dredging them up again! Because of the new covenant through Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and forgotten by God.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Original Passover Celebration
(Deuteronomy 16:1–8)

TUESDAY

Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem
(Mark 11:1–10)

WEDNESDAY

Preparation for the Passover Meal
(Mark 14:12–16)

THURSDAY

The Heart-Centered New Covenant
(Jeremiah 31:31–34)

FRIDAY

The Lord's Supper Shared With Disciples
(Luke 22:14–23)

SATURDAY

Clean Feet, Clean Hearts
(John 13:2b–7)

SUNDAY

Jesus Institutes the New Covenant
(Mark 14:17–24; Hebrews 8:6–7, 10–12)