

6: God the Eternal Saviour



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Do you know why Abraham and Moses enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant? **Jon Garvey** unpacks the wonder of the 'eternal gospel'!

The Covenant Jesus makes with believers actually stems from one He made with His Father before creation

God's chosen people – Jew and Gentile – have eternal life through the New Covenant in Jesus' blood, and access to God through His Spirit, becoming one holy nation¹, and the temple of Yahweh². This Covenant saves from everything that of Moses did not³.

But when did God decide to save the world this way? Was it when the Jews' finally rejected Moses' Covenant? But he had promised Messiah in David's Day⁴. He had promised the 'Seed' in his Covenant with Abraham⁵. Noah's ark had actually symbolised the Jesus' baptism⁶. Even the curse on the serpent in Eden foretold the new Adam, and His suffering⁷.

So the Gospel, far from being the desperate afterthought of a God whose plans were frustrated by sin, was actually His intention from the beginning. Indeed, it was His intention *before* that – before the beginning of time⁸. The Covenant Jesus makes with believers actually stems from one He made with His Father before creation.

The eternal Covenant of the Father with the Son

The idea of an eternal Covenant between the Father and the Son was commonplace in Puritan times, but is hardly known today. Like so much they understood, we have neglected it to our loss. **Yet the Gospel is called 'eternal'⁹, and this is spelled out clearly in several passages¹⁰.** Notice how closely these describe the New Covenant covered last time – promising (not demanding) blessing, holiness, blamelessness, knowledge, salvation, the Spirit, faith, eternal life, and obedience.

All this, you will notice, is described in very personal terms. God's purpose was not to offer a way some people might be saved. Rather individuals were chosen in Christ; their names were as familiar to him in the beginning as those of Abraham or Israel surely were¹¹. So the words

of that wonderful song are more than pious platitude: 'You took the fall, and thought of me, above all.'¹²

God's eternal purpose, we read, is bound to Christ, so how were the Father and Son both involved? Scripture reveals that the Father gave a commission to the Son, promising Him a reward, and that the Son willingly agreed to obey. This two-way agreement, initiated by the Father, is why the old teachers called it a Covenant.

The Covenant in the New Testament

Jesus frequently affirms that the Father sent Him for a specific mission¹³. These verses show how that mission matches the New Covenant announced by the prophets: its themes include the kingdom, eternal life, the death and resurrection of God's Servant, effective salvation, knowledge of God, spiritual unity, and holiness.

We have already seen scattered references elsewhere in the New Testament to the eternal origin of salvation. But perhaps the clearest is in Hebrews 13.20, which refers to 'the blood of the eternal covenant' through which God raised up the Lord Jesus. **This blood was shed immediately before the resurrection, but the Covenant itself clearly already existed between the Father and the Son.**

The Covenant in the Old Testament

There are relatively few direct references to the Gospel in the Old Testament, but once we understand it we see that it is the whole of the Old Testament! So it is with the Eternal Covenant. Perhaps the best place to start is Psalm 2, known to be messianic long before the New Testament affirmed it¹⁴. In vv7-9 God commissions Messiah to rule the nations, and He willingly proclaims God's decree.

Hebrews 10.5-7 similarly confirms Psalm 40.7-9 as messianic. It uses a variant reading to

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Have you not heard?

the covenants of God

show how the Father prepared a body for the Son, which would become the perfect sacrifice, all foretold in Scripture (or perhaps the scroll refers symbolically to the Eternal Covenant itself, written on the heart of God).

God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.14 seems at first only to apply to Jesus as David's descendant. But Hebrews 1.5b shows it to be a promise made to Christ Himself. This explains Psalm 89.3-4: the Covenant with David is actually a restatement of the Eternal Covenant made long before between the Father and the Son.

If that seems confusing, remember what Jesus taught about His relationship to David, quoting Psalm 110.1-4¹⁵. David prophetically saw Messiah, his descendant, as his own Lord and champion. Yahweh had already promised to subdue all Messiah's enemies as He sat at His right hand: what Peter quoted in his first sermon was actually part of the Eternal Covenant!¹⁶

The surety of a better covenant

This same quotation ends with God's oath that Jesus will be a priest 'in the order of Melchizedek'. This mysterious phrase is explained in Hebrews 7, but here we need only note Hebrews 7.22: 'Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.' The word 'guarantee' is better translated 'surety'. Someone who was a 'surety' was absolutely bound to ensure that another's legal obligations were, in fact, met.

Hebrews explains this in terms of Jesus' everlasting priesthood. Since He lives forever, and intercedes with the Father for all who come to God through Him, He is able to save them completely. But this explanation depends on Jesus' being a surety of our righteousness, under God's oath.

In the light of the passages already quoted from Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, 1 Peter and, particularly John, this provides very strong individual assurance. Jesus intercedes for us because, like those in John 17.2, 6, 9 & 24, we were given to Him by the Father to be saved and made holy. Should this not happen, Jesus would have failed as the surety of the Covenant. **Should we remain guilty of sin, then Jesus would have broken His eternal Covenant with the Father, and God's oath would be worthless.**

That is why Christians **must** live entirely by faith in Christ's work, and never their own works. 'What he has done as the Representative and Surety of all his people, they are no more in duty bound to do. The work has been done'.¹⁷

This produces a surprising consequence. God's salvation is crowned by the New Covenant in Christ's blood. It meets the need of sinners by being, throughout, a Covenant of Grace. **It is superior to the old not because obedience disappears, but because it provides by grace what it commands** – faith, obedience, holiness and perseverance. Such is the incredible value of Jesus' blood.

But the Covenant made before creation, although the greatest of all, is a Covenant of Works, not of Grace! All its wonderful provisions, especially its superlative guarantees of our salvation, depend on Jesus' total obedience to His Father. We see this in His sinless life, for He alone of all men kept God's law. But we see it too in His willingness, from eternity, to accept the Covenant, knowing it would lead to His humbling as man, His sufferings, and His sin-bearing God-forsakenness for undeserving sinners like us. No wonder that the Father has rewarded Him by glorifying Him¹⁸ and giving Him the name above all names!¹⁹

All seven Covenants we have studied arise from this one, and we can only fully understand them in its light. Its eternal nature explains why the faithful of ancient Israel – whom we shall meet at the resurrection – will receive the same salvation as us. Moses, Abraham, Noah – even Adam – are saved by faith in Christ's death, though they never saw it. 'Only together with us would they be made perfect.'²⁰ **So the whole Bible tells one story, the story of the Covenant between the eternal Father and the eternal Son, through the eternal Spirit.** What a story that is!

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| 1 John 10.16 | Baloche, "Above All" (c)1999 |
| 2 Ephesians 2.11-22 | Integrity's Hosanna |
| 3 Acts 13.39 | Music/Sovereign Music UK |
| 4 2 Samuel 7.11-16 | 13 Luke 22.29; John 5.30, 43; |
| 5 Genesis 12.1-3 – it's even | 6.38-40; 8.26-29, 38, 42; 10.17- |
| called "the gospel" in | 18, 27-29; 17.1-26 |
| Galatians 3.8 | 14 Acts 13.33; Hebrews 1.5; |
| 6 1 Peter 3.20-22 | Revelation 2.26-27, 12.5, 19.15 |
| 7 Genesis 3.15 | 15 Luke 20.41-44 |
| 8 Titus 1.1-3 | 16 Acts 2.35 |
| 9 Revelation 14.6 | 17 Louis Berkhof, Systematic |
| 10 Ephesians 1.4, 9-11; 3.9-11; 2 | Theology, Banner of Truth |
| Thessalonians 2.13; 2 Timothy | (Edinburgh 1976), p.268. |
| 1.9; Titus 1.2-3; 1 Peter 1.2; | 18 John 17.5 |
| 11 Romans 11.2 | 19 Philippians 3.9-11 |
| 12 Lenny LeBlanc & Paul | 20 Hebrews 11.40 |

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