

Dr. Jeffrey Niehaus, Biblical Theology, Session 9, The New Covenant

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Niehaus in his teaching on Biblical Theology. This is session 9 on the New Covenant.

We come now to the New Covenant, which, as we understand it, is the final covenant, the culminating covenant in the special grace program.

It is the one remaining special grace covenant that functions. And so, we'll look at that. We've already talked about it, but we'll first look at Jesus as a covenant mediator prophet and the background to that. This is just a quick recap of things we have seen.

He is the prophet that was promised in Deuteronomy 18, the prophet like Moses. As we indicated, to be a prophet like Moses, he would have to be a covenant mediator prophet with a new covenant with Torah for all the people, new Torah, new deal for all the people. And so that's what Jesus was uniquely.

So, he is the prophet who was promised. He mediates the covenant that was promised. Jeremiah 31, as we've talked about, is the prediction of that covenant.

It's a new covenant. It's not a renewal covenant because Jeremiah 31 tells us, this will not be like the covenant that I made with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt. And a renewal covenant is certainly like the covenant that it renews.

So, this is a new covenant, new deal, new priesthood, for example. So Hebrews says, you know, where there's a change of priesthood, there has to be a change of law. So it's a whole new deal.

And we've talked about that in several aspects. Ezekiel 43, the promise of the one shepherd, David, we've talked about that, namely the beloved. He'll tend them.

He'll be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God. My servant David will be prince among them.

I, the Lord, have spoken. This covenant that is coming, which is going to be mediated by this new David, is also called a covenant of peace. And we understand now the meaning of that because that does come through the new David, Jesus, the beloved, who imparts that peace that the world cannot give.

Ezekiel 37, my servant David will be king over them. They'll follow my laws, be careful to keep my decrees, and so on. I will make my covenant of peace with them.

It will be an everlasting covenant. And that, indeed, is an everlasting covenant. As we said, the new covenant is the one everlasting covenant.

It's the one that really lasts forever. And I will put my sanctuary among them forever. In particular, we are his sanctuary.

So, he is among us. He is in us forever. The nations will know that I, the Lord, make Israel holy when my sanctuary is among them forever.

The result of this in the dynamic of the life of the believer is that we can have the love of Christ. And so, Jesus says, people will know. You're my people, my disciples, because of the love that you show.

Well, Jesus then is the covenant mediator. And what about his career? Scholars, New Testament scholars have talked about the question, well, what is, we have the Gospels. They seem to be rather unique in the historiography of the age.

Where do we find anything quite like them? Because they're not merely biographies; they're more than that. Meredith Kline, who taught at Gordon-Conwell before, was my mentor, suggesting that the Gospel genre is really the other example of it, the career of Moses, and we find it in Exodus. And I think he's right.

Because the Gospel genre is partly biography, but it's the biography of a covenant mediator through whom God does signs and wonders to deliver his people and establish a temple presence among them. That's the way I articulate it in terms of the major paradigm. But that's what goes on here.

And so, I've developed this parallel, which I think has some merit. If we look at these two books and compare them, in both cases, you have the birth. In both cases, you are subjected to persecution.

We'll come back to that. In both cases, there's transport from persecution. And there's flight from royal peril, that is, the king.

In both cases, you have a king trying to kill off, effectively, the covenant mediator. You have a return after the flight back to God's people. You have the identity of the prophet made clear.

Moses is making clear who he is and what he's going to want him to do. That identity is clearly established in Matthew. There are followers who are called.

There are initial signs and wonders. The law is given on the mountain, on the mount of the, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus basically redefines the law.

He re-articulates it. He shows you what it really involves. He gives his own instructions.

And then you get, subsequently, more instruction and signs and wonders. There's a transfiguration, or there's an experience like that on the mountain, in both cases. Certainly, there's a covenant institution.

There's a covenant ratification meal. We talked about this in the case of the Last Supper. It's proleptic.

It's anticipating, symbolically, that this is my blood of the covenant. It hasn't been shed yet, but it's going to be very soon. And there's a temple consecration.

We talked about the parallel between the tabernacle session of the Lord and his coming in Acts 2 at Pentecost. And then there's the ongoing presence of the Lord. So, one or two things to notice here, and in particular, I think it's worth looking at what happens with this business here.

Now, when Herod gives the command to kill all the children from two years and under, according to the date that he ascertained from the wise men who came to him, he is troubled. Why? He was troubled because he was the one who was born to be king. Well, he's king.

And so, naturally, he feels that his kingship is threatened. And so, he does what he does. He lies and says, come back. Tell me where he is so I can come and worship him, too.

Of course, they don't come back. He's infuriated. They're warned by an angel to go back home by another route.

And so, he gives orders to kill off all the children. His target is specifically the one who was born. He doesn't understand this is going to be the mediator of a new covenant with a very different kind of kingdom that doesn't threaten his as a political kingdom at all.

He doesn't understand that. But he's motivated to protect his established authority. And so, he kills.

The target is in his mind, this one person. When Pharaoh gives this command, he doesn't have any idea that the person who might be killed among all the male

children who would be killed would be the mediator of a covenant. He's not thinking in those terms at all.

He just thinks, look, they're going to multiply, and they're going to be a threat to us. So, let's kill off the males. We can use the women as we please.

We'll kill off the males. But he is, in effect, targeting Moses because, after all, Moses is one of them, and we know he gets rescued from that. I would suggest that the devil's fingerprints are all over these things.

Pharaoh may not know that the target among the targets is this one who would mediate a covenant for God's people as part of his redemptive program for Israel and then the world. He doesn't know that. But the enemy does.

And so, I think Pharaoh here, Pharaoh as the incarnation of the sun god, as the embodiment of a false religion, he's moved by forces he doesn't even understand exist. And he does what he does. But it's an interesting parallel because, in both cases, the target is a covenant mediator.

And in both cases, of course, it fails. The Lord takes care of things, and the efforts to destroy the covenant mediator-to-be, those efforts fail. And this has broader ramifications, I would suggest.

We've mentioned a little bit the idea of child sacrifice, and in our own day, abortion is not unrelated to this. This all goes back to Genesis 9, where the statement is, anyone who sheds human blood by the blood of man will his blood be shed because God made the human being in the image of God. So the imago Dei, the image of God, is the reason that putting a human being to death or murder, as in these cases, and as in the case of child sacrifice, is so serious.

This is quite apart from those things that, under the old covenant, were matters of justice the Lord commanded, maybe capital punishment for certain things. That's quite a different matter. And so, I leave it to you to reflect.

This is something to think about on the abortion issue in our own country. Obviously, there are huge forces at work to maintain and even increase and expand the rights of people to have abortions or even to put people to death now, in recent legislation in a couple of states, after the child is born. And so, I just say the Lord takes us very seriously.

And it goes back to the Noahic covenant. So, this is a principle embodied in common grace. It applies all over the world, and the Lord takes it seriously because we're made in his image.

And it's true today, right? It was true in those days after the fall. It's true in our day, as James says, we curse people who are made in God's likeness. We are still somehow in the image of God.

We may have fallen, but we're still in his image, and he takes it seriously. So, these things have broader ramifications than may initially appear sometimes. Well, the covenant mediator prophet, as we have indicated, is often involved in warfare.

That was true for Moses, and that's true for Jesus, too. There's prophetic anointing that goes on. Remember, David was anointed, and then he went out and waged war.

Even Saul was anointed, and then he went and waged war. Well, Jesus is anointed. He's baptized by John and the Holy Spirit comes on him.

And he indeed had the spirit without limit. None of us can say that. I wish we could, but we can't, but he did.

After that warfare, after that anointing, he goes out, and there's warfare. So, he's tempted by the devil in the wilderness. His ministry is warfare.

And it's worth understanding, too, that that's what the Christian ministry is. If the Lord is using me or you or me or anyone in true ministry, if the Lord is at work, that means in some way or other that the kingdom of darkness is being pushed away. It's being conquered.

It's being attacked. It's being diminished. So, whether you're preaching the word of God, whether you're teaching it, whether you are praying for someone and they're healed, whether you're counseling and by the help of counseling they're helped to overcome sin in their lives, understand better, worship the Lord better.

All that is warfare. And the enemy doesn't like it. The enemy doesn't want to give ground.

So, there really is warfare. People involved in genuine Christian ministry may be attacked in various ways. That's worth thinking about, too.

Anyway, Jesus did have the warfare after his anointing. And we've talked about David and Saul. And this kind of lays it out.

David is anointed. Then he prophesies. He prophesies his own deliverance from Goliath.

And he wages that warfare initially there with Goliath. Saul before him was anointed. He went and prophesied with the prophets.

And then he waged war. So, with both Saul and David, you have both prophecy and warfare. The warfare is very real.

As the New King James translates, Matthew 11, from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. It's translated in different ways. But one way of understanding it could be that it involves warfare.

As the kingdom advances, there are those who are violent towards it. It certainly involves persecution. As Jesus says, you're blessed when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Well, what is the nature of this warfare? It can certainly be spiritual.

When Jesus is doing deliverance, he characterizes it this way. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. So, the strong man is the evil spirit and the person.

The person is the evil spirit's house. And the evil spirit has the person. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor that the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

So that's using human military terminology to illustrate the warfare aspect of deliverance ministry. Ephesians 6, Paul makes the, well that's all I have there, but we know what that's talking about. Ephesians 6, Paul says our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the heavenly powers, you know, the authorities and rulers in the heavenly places.

All the terms used there are also used of human authorities since he says that in the heavenly realms, we understand he's talking about spiritual warfare. And so that's something to understand, too. You and I, as Christians, whatever service we may be doing for the Lord, I think even by the fact that we belong to the Lord, even to some extent by the fact that we're made in God's image, which the enemy hates, we're going to suffer attacks from the enemy one way or another.

And so, it's good to be aware of that. It's nothing, I think, to be afraid of, but it's good to be aware of it and prayerful about it. The warfare of the church overall, not to speak simply of individual warfare, the warfare of the church takes a missional form.

Missions are a form of warfare. I've drawn this parallel, which interests me quite a bit, and I think the reason I became sensitive to it actually was from reading Assyrian

annals, where the Assyrian kings report how they would go to one place, camp, then they'd go on, they move on, wage war, win a victory, move on, camp, wage war, win another victory, and so on. So, it's an itinerary kind of reporting.

In their annals, you get that in Joshua, too. Joshua is anointed and appointed; he gets this commission to conquer, and then with Joshua 3 and so on, you begin to get the conquest. He goes from one place to another and conquers.

With Paul, you get the same thing. Paul is traveling on his missionary journeys from one place to another, conquering, that is, establishing churches. And so it's a nice kind of parallel, suggestive of the fact, again, that here you have military warfare because of the form of the kingdom.

You're establishing a state. Here, you have spiritual warfare, which means bringing people into the kingdom and planting churches. So, military warfare advanced, and with Acts, spiritual warfare advanced from one conquest site to another.

Well, what about temple consecration? We've talked about that a bit in terms of the church and so on, but we'll look at this again now in terms of Jesus. He is anointed. That's his prophetic anointing, comparable or reminiscent, perhaps, of David. The Spirit comes upon him, and then he is able to function as king.

Of course, the Spirit came to him every day. In Jesus' case, he has the Spirit without limit all the time. But he's anointed, and he goes forth and does the work of the kingdom.

Pentecost, then, the Spirit coming to him so he can do the kingdom warfare, the work that happens with us, too. That's anticipated by Jesus. And so, just as we noted before with the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple, the Spirit coming and filling the temple, and that being characterized as the Lord's putting his name there, his presence there, that happens with us.

And so now we are temples of the Spirit, as well as ministers of the Spirit, as Jesus was. Jesus was a temple of the Spirit, and he was also a missional warrior in the power of the Spirit. Remember, Jesus said, destroy this temple, and I'll rebuild it in three days.

And he was referring to the temple of his body. Well, Jesus is the first person ever called a temple. Subsequently, from Pentecost onward, believers can be called temples because, again, a temple is where God lives.

So that's what we are, and because of that, we can wage the kind of warfare that we are called to wage in the new form of the kingdom. And so this temple that we're

talking about us, analogous to Jesus. And so that just as he ministered by the power of the Spirit we can minister by the power of the Spirit.

That is why, of course, we use the tabernacle or temple language. The word became flesh and tabernacled among us, literally. We know that if the earthly tabernacle or tent that we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.

While we are in this tent, we groan under burden because we want to be close to our heavenly dwelling, and so on. Peter talks about, as long as I live in the tent of this body. So, we are the tabernacles, or we are the living temples, if you will, the temple of living stones.

And its life certainly involves sanctification, as well as being patterned after Jesus in ministry and persecutions. So, as for the individual temple, I think this is something really important to understand, too. I was talking with a student recently about the importance of when you pray.

It's a good thing to invite the Holy Spirit to come and just bring things to mind that need to be brought to mind that he wants you to pray about. We all have an inventory of sins that we've done, and it may do good. Who knows, as the Spirit may bring them to mind, we need to effectively repent of each one and ask forgiveness. Maybe if we think God has done something that hurt us or hurt a loved one, we let him off the hook.

I sometimes say, forgive God. God doesn't need to be forgiven, but we need to let him off the hook. There are all sorts of ways in which, in prayer, we can work out this process of sanctification, which is being made more like him.

I know from experience that the Lord honors this. He will do spiritual work in you and me as we commit ourselves seriously to doing it with him. But he's the one who has to do it.

We have to invite him to enable us to do it. But that's part of sanctification. That's part of the privilege of belonging to him.

What about the corporate temple? What is its nature? Well, the corporate temple is indwelt by the Spirit. We know this. Not only are we temples individually, but Paul can also write to the Corinthian church, saying that you are God's temple.

And if anyone destroys that, God will destroy him. Its architect and builder is Christ. And in him, as we read in Ephesians, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And so, because it is the one Spirit who's at work, he produces unity. He is the one who calls us to different offices. And he is the one who enables us to manage the gifts that he gives us.

This might not be a bad place to say anything about the gifts and the fruit because they are very different. Folks from the Pentecostal and charismatic realm, and I'm perfectly sympathetic to all that. I've seen the Lord do some wonderful things, healing people and whatnot.

But it's easy to be dazzled by the gifts. But remember, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, you lack no gift. And yet, this was really a very immature and troubled church.

You know, a man has his father's wife, they are partisan, and so on. So, there's a difference between the gifts and the fruit. I'd liken the gifts to a toolbox.

They're wonderful. They help you to get the work of the kingdom done. But ultimately, what the Lord is after is the fruit, your development, and mine in Christ's likeness.

And that's what the fruit of the Spirit involves. So that's the real goal. That's the most important thing.

Well, ultimately, of course, this is going to lead to the eschatological temple issue. And we looked at this a long time ago, but we'll look at it again here because this is where it's going to end up. Ezekiel 47 is given this vision where you have water flowing from the temple.

And along this river, you have these trees growing, and the leaves aren't going to wither, the fruit won't fail, and so on. John, in Revelation 22, I would submit a lot of parallelism here, with a little more definition and a little more refinement, according to the principle that as you get certain things revealed and restated in the Bible, you get more clarity, you get more definition. But it's the same thing.

He's seeing this eschatological presence of the Lord. And as we mentioned, this harks back to the situation at Eden, where we get a very simple description. You have the river flowing from the garden, and you have the tree of life.

So, as we talked about this earlier, this would be some of the evidence that would point to the idea that Eden was a temple. And so, there's going to be this eschatological fulfillment of this, though. And so, as the scholars sometimes like to say, end sight parallels or at sight.

So, what was lost in Eden is now going to be established again. You're going to have the temple presence. You're going to have the river, and you're going to have the

tree of life, you're going to have life eternal, you're going to have fruit, fruitfulness. In the meantime, in the already not yet, shall we say, there's an analog to this.

So, Jesus says in John 7, whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this, he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time, the spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

And so, just as I would suggest the leaves are for healing in Revelation 22, however, that plays out, so also, you and I are, we are to bear fruit, and we are to be sources of healing for other people, too. I think there's an analogy there. The eschatological, the ultimate reality, though, is that you've got this river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God on the Lamb, and if you read on in that passage, you read that there's no need of a temple anymore, because God on the Lamb, the Lord, is a temple, which seems very hard to understand, I think.

But maybe it suggests that shall we say, pantheists who want to think that God is in everything they're onto something, but in a twisted way. Indeed, God does support everything by the word of his power, as we read in Hebrews 1. But moreover, ultimately, apparently, eschatologically, everything is going to be in him. He will be the cosmic, the universal temple, and we will all be present in him.

And I don't really know what that's going to look like or feel like, but I can guarantee it'll be good because he's good. So, what about the new heavens and earth? One thing important to understand here, I think, too, is that we're talking about real physicality here. Sometimes, people will mockingly refer to this vision of heaven as, well, you're on a cloud, and you have a golden harp, and wouldn't that be boring, just playing the harp for eternity? You know, I don't think that's it at all.

It's a new earth. That means Earth. It's going to be, I think, you know, as Anthony Hoekema wrote in one of his books on the image of God, when we're there, it's not going to be totally unfamiliar.

I think there's going to be a resemblance. It's a new earth. Who knows what works the Lord will have for us there? And that's another thing if I can just inject it here.

You'll hear theologians talk about the eternal Sabbath. Well, Hebrews tell us a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God, but it's important to understand what that means because the analogy is to the Sabbath that the Lord had at the end of the creation, right? So, on that seventh day, he rested from his work. Well, what works? The works of creation.

But he went on working, sustaining the universe, injecting himself into history, doing things. Jesus says, my father works to this day, and so do I. So likewise, you and I,

when we're there, we will rest from our earthly works. We'll rest from a certain kind of work, but that doesn't mean there won't be other work for us, and I'm sure it'll be wonderful.

But so, it's going to be a real earth. Who knows what works will await? But we'll see. The nature, the physical nature of the new heavens and earth, is rooted in Old Testament prophecy.

Isaiah 65, sometimes called the gospel of the Old Testament, has a lot of reasons, the messianic prophecies, this sort of thing, too. I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind, and so on.

And so, the Lord is going to do this. It's going to be a new humanity and a new heavens and earth. And so, we already get a foretaste of this new humanity.

Paul says, if any man be in Christ, he's a new ktisis, a new creation, a new creature. Old things are passed away. All things are become new.

And then in Revelation 21, I saw a new heaven and new earth, and so on. And so, through the first Adam, shall we say, or involving the first Adam, we had heaven and earth, and we had humanity in the Adamic covenant. Well, with the covenant made by the second Adam, we get a new humanity, and we're going to get a new heavens and earth.

So, a lot of parallelism there. The new earth is going to be physical, and so when you read Isaiah 11, you might think, well, this is all figurative language here. The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, a little child will lead them, and so on.

I think we have a warrant for thinking that, no, there's actually going to be such stuff. After all, if you remember Revelation 22, there are going to be plants, there are going to be these trees, so why not animals? So certainly, this can be understood figuratively; there's going to be a time of great universal peace, but it could be a literal thing, too. That is to say, there will be animals.

I won't go so far as to say it'd be kind of like a Walt Disney cartoon, where you have bears walking along talking with you and stuff like that, you know, but who knows what they'll be capable of, but I think we can expect animals. You get this temple grounds portrayed, and here again, we talked about the physical plants. Isaiah 11 indicates physical plants and animals. There's going to be a heavenly Jerusalem, and that seems to have some physicality about it, too, unless one takes it all as purely symbolic.

So, in the Old Testament, you've got this heavenly city. It's going to be a city of jewels, and so in Isaiah 45 we see this, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires, battlements of rubies, gates of sparkling jewels, and so on, to which the nations will bring their silver and gold. One may look at that sort of prophecy and say, well, this is an Old Testament materialistic way of portraying the idea that from all over this new earth, people will bring tribute, they'll honor the Lord, they'll worship him.

Who knows? There may, though, be this sort of thing. It may be figurative, it may be literal, but again, we are still talking about a real earth. The Lord will be its light, Isaiah 24:23, and the moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed, the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before its elders gloriously.

We talked about this before, but let's just come back to this for a moment, gloriously. The Hebrew term is just a noun, glory, and it can be taken as an adverbial usage, gloriously, that's okay. But I think probably the basic noun meaning is the best way to take it, glory.

Point is that in this time, when this happens, when this, Isaiah 24, which we did talk about way back when we were talking about the Noahic covenant, when this gets realized, all sin will be dealt with, it'll all be done away, and therefore the Lord can be present among his people without anything in between. No more need for dark clouds or anything like that, no storm theophany. He will be there in his untrammelled glory, and unlike the people at the foot of Sinai, we will be able to endure it.

We'll be fine with it because we will be without sin, and the sin which would cause, which would devastate us in his holy presence, will be gone. And so, he will, the glory of the Lord, the full glory of the Lord will be able to be there before his elders and part for the whole before all of his people. He'll be able to be there, and that's how it'll be.

So, and of course, it's the ministry of the Son that leads to all this. Isaiah 60, foretelling likewise. Your God will be your glory, the Lord will be your everlasting light, and so on.

We see this fulfilled in or portrayed as being fulfilled in Revelation. But we talked about the city of jewels in Isaiah, so we have the same thing then in Revelation 21. We're going to have this jewel city, its foundations of these jewels, and so on.

The different gates, 12 pearls, the city has streets of gold, and so on, to which the nations will bring their tribute, just as in Isaiah. In Revelation 21, we have similar things to those we've seen in Isaiah. The Lord will be its light.

The same thing here is basically what we saw in Isaiah: the city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God to give it light and its lamp. The lamb is its lamp. So, I think it's rather hard given that we have this in Isaiah, and it's repeated in Revelation. It's rather hard to take this all as some kind of figurative language.

It does seem to me that we're talking about real stuff here. So, the Lord, maybe we can put it this way: the Lord started out with a physical earth, and the enemy messed with that. The Lord let him mess with it, but that doesn't mean the Lord's let his purpose be defeated, and he's got to do something totally different. So, insight does indeed parallel earthsight.

The Lord is going to restore all things, and so we're going to have an earth, it's going to have physicality, and I think there's a lot to look forward to there. Well, if then we turn and consider what gets all this accomplished, the new covenant, that too can be articulated well, I think, by what we've called the major paradigm. God does work by his Spirit.

The Spirit comes upon Jesus at his baptism. He has the Spirit without measure. That Spirit works through him.

He is a prophet. His whole ministry is warfare. It results in the establishment of a covenant with the people, which establishes us as God's people.

And, of course, then he establishes a temple among his people. In this case, the temple is the church, the temple of living stones, and, individually, the members of it. And the ultimate goal is that not only will he reside in us now, but he will also reside among us.

So, if we do a bit of a recap here to consider where we've come from and where all this goes, we have submitted that God has a covenantal program here. The classic view of covenant theology is that with the Adamic or creation covenant, you have a covenant of works. Then, everything after that becomes a covenant of grace because nobody can do the work.

And we've argued that all covenants entail works and all of them are gracious gifts. So, that's not a helpful characterization. You may recall also that the Noahic covenant is a common grace covenant.

It actually renews the creation covenant. All the others are special grace covenants. This construct obscures that.

So, it's not very helpful. Also, in the ancient world, nobody lumped a bunch of disparate, although even related, covenants together and called them one covenant. So, not a helpful use of the term.

Not a use of the term that's consistent with the way the Bible uses it. John Walton recognizes that the Noahic covenant is a common grace covenant, so he does distinguish it. But then he, too, lumps a bunch of covenants together, all the special grace covenants he lumps together and calls the covenant.

Among other things, this fails to recognize the fact or take due account of the fact that these special grace covenants, the Abrahamic covenant no longer functions, the Davidic covenant no longer functions, and the Mosaic covenant no longer functions as a covenant. They live on, you might say, in the new covenant with Christ as the David, the King. And even though, as Paul says, we're not under the law, and yet we fulfill the law because we have the spirit.

And yet, in Colossians 2, Christ has canceled the law. He's nailed it to the cross. And again, you cannot become a member of the Abrahamic covenant because circumcision is ruled out as a covenant sign.

You can get circumcised and think you're a member of the Abrahamic covenant, but that's not happening. That's what Paul makes very clear. So, this doesn't take into account the fact that you've really only got one special grace covenant happening.

Dumbrell's proposal that all of these covenants reconfirm existing relationships, which I think overstates the case, also raises problems. One of the examples he uses, for instance, is that Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites is an example of the fact that it's the nature of a covenant that it reconfirms an existing relationship. Well, that's not a very good example, in fact, is it? The Gibeonites had virtually no relationship with the Hebrews.

They were deceiving them. They pretended to be from a way off. And so, without consulting the Lord, the Hebrews entered into a covenant with them, and then they found out they were from nearby.

So, covenants don't necessarily confirm existing relationships. In fact, typically, a covenant brings the vassal into a new relationship. Israel's relationship with the Lord, once they had entered the Mosaic covenant, was different from what it was before.

Once they entered that covenant, and the Lord offered to them, you want to do this or not, they did it. Then they had all this law that they had to obey. They had this sacrificial system.

They didn't have any of that before. So, covenants don't confirm existing relationships. There may be a prior relationship of some sort, but the covenant takes it to a new level.

This, if I may digress a moment, is true of marriage. You're engaged. You have a certain relationship.

But once you're married, once you enter into that marriage covenant, Malachi characterizes marriage as a covenant. Once you enter into that, the relationship takes a new level, with new privileges and new responsibilities. And so, it's not a good understanding.

But the idea that covenants confirm existing relationships, in Dumbrell's thinking, is harmonious, then consonant with the idea that, well, all the covenants really involve one relationship because they're all renewing some existing relationship or confirming it. That's just not true to the picture. Scott Hafeman, in his book, *The God of Promise*, thinks the same thing.

But we've talked about this, but this is a recap. The better view here is, I think, that we have one program of redemption, employing successive covenantal arrangements. So, you have a common grace covenant, the Adamic and Noahic.

Together, they form one legal package, and they provide a global platform or a context, a world, a planet, in which the special grace covenants can come into being and function. The special grace covenants, then, are the property of Israel, historically, and they are more than one. And so, Paul, in Romans 9, says of Israel, the people of Israel, theirs is the adoption as sons.

This is where he's grieving that they haven't received Christ. There's the divine glory, the covenants, indicating clearly enough there's more than one covenant, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. And we've also mentioned, before Ephesians 2, the covenants of the promise.

The covenants of the promise being the special grace covenants, the Abrahamic, and then the ones it anticipates, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New. The Mosaic, as we said, is pedagogical toward the New. It anticipates the New.

The Davidic foreshadows the New. Jesus is, in fact, the promised David who's involved under the Davidic covenant. And the New fulfills and takes up into itself everything that was required or hoped for or promised in the previous special grace covenants.

Well, we'll wrap this up with some reflections on the law and the New Covenant, because it's important to understand this distinction, and especially, perhaps,

important for our life in Christ and ministry to appreciate what's going on in Romans 7. If you read the NIV, you'll find the title of this section, Struggling with Sin, pretty ambiguous. But it's very common for Christians to think, well, this is what life is like. I'd say, no, this is not what is meant.

This is not what was intended with the New Covenant. So we look at this. Romans 7, 1 through 6, Paul says, Do you not know, brothers? For I am speaking to men who know the law, that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.

For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she's called an adulteress.

But if her husband dies, she's released from that law and is not an adulteress even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ. So, understand the parallel here.

The woman's husband dies, so she's free. But in that sense, she has died to him. He's no longer a living reality for her, so she's free to marry again.

So, brothers, you died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the flesh, this is in Greek, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit for death. But now by dying to what once bound us, we've been released from the law so that we may serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

So, the parallels here are the parallel of marriage, death, and the law. The husband dies, she's released from the law of marriage, and you died to the law through the body of Christ. That may seem like a backward way of putting it all together, but I think the point is that when the husband dies, as I said, the woman, in effect, dies with regard to the man.

She's dead to the marriage, and it's no longer. And that's what's true with us with the law when we enter into Christ. And so, and that means then there's the parallel of remarriage. Okay, so let's see here, yes.

And so, what does this mean in terms of the old and new covenant? Well, as we've said, the new then cannot be a renewal of the old because this is clearly a different marriage. It's a whole new deal. Let me point out something else here, too, in this statement. The sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies.

It's important to understand here that we said that the law was pedagogical; it was meant to lead Israel to recognize their need for Christ, and that's true. One of the ways that it did that, though, the dynamic involved in that is this. As Paul says in Romans 7, you know, before the law was given, covetousness was not a big deal for me.

But once the law was given, all sorts of covetousness rose up in me. And so what? Well, the law shows sin for what it really is. And this is the nature of law.

It provokes the very sin, because of our sinful nature, that it forbids. This plays out in the fallen world. I remember as a student having a classmate who had, he and his wife had just bought a young black lab puppy, and they didn't want the puppy coming onto the living room carpet.

So, he told me one evening, he was sitting there in an armchair reading a book in the living room, and the puppy was in the kitchen right at the threshold of the carpet. And when the puppy thinks he's not looking, the puppy starts to encroach on the carpet. It's lawlessness, folks.

It's built into the fallen beings. They have a law, and they want to transgress it. This is exactly, and this is a weapon in the hands of the enemy.

That's how in Colossians 2, Paul can refer to it as though this weapon, this legal bill that stood against us. Because when the Lord gave that, he gave a weapon into the enemy's hands, and the enemy used it to sin in us. That's why Paul can talk about the sinful passions aroused by the law.

This goes back to Eden. This is exactly what happened in Eden. They had one negative command: they shouldn't eat this fruit.

That's what the serpent used to bring them down. So that's the nature. Of course, in that case, they did not fall.

They could have said no, but they didn't. But this is the nature of the law. By revealing this sinful nature in us, the law shows what we are and shows us our need for Christ.

Galatians 3 and 4 are related to this. So, here's where we talked about the law having a pedagogical function to lead us to Christ. So, the law was a pedagogue for us unto Christ, into Christ.

It was to lead us to Christ. And so, what does that mean? Well, as Paul says, before faith came, before the new covenant, before faith in Christ that could set us free from this, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be

revealed. And so, life under the law is, in a sense, one of slavery, and that's why he can describe it as such in Galatians 4. What I'm saying is, as long as the heir is a child, he's no longer different from a slave.

That is, we're talking here about the person under the Mosaic covenant, although he owns the whole estate. He's subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world, the *stoicheia* here.

But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law so that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, the spirit who cries out, *Abba, Father*. So, you are no longer a slave but a son, and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Paul talks about being subject to guardians and trustees. He characterizes that as being in slavery to the principles of this world, basic principles. This is very consistent with Romans 7. You do what you know is wrong, but you can't help doing it, and so on.

As we're going to talk about here briefly, these basic principles, as they are called here, is a term that could, in the Hellenistic and the Greco-Roman world, involve spirits. And this may suggest, too, that under the law, without the power of the spirit, you're subject to temptation by the enemy, too, to break the law, and there's not a lot you can do about that a lot of the time. Sometimes, of course, you can obey the law.

Sometimes, more often than not, in one way or another, you break it. And if we go back to the Sermon on the Mount, of course, you're breaking it in your heart very often. So, it's a hopeless situation.

Therefore, if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. So, the world is a prisoner to sin, and the whole world includes those under the law.

And this is consistent with what Paul says in Romans 7. When we were controlled by our sinful nature, we were bound; we were prisoners. Under the new covenant, if we have been united with him like this in his death, of which baptism is a symbolic acting out, we should no longer be slaves to sin. Sin shall not be your master because you're not under law but under grace.

So, the law awakens the consciousness of sin in us and even gives the enemy, I would say, a tool against us. It's the legal bill that stood against us, as Paul says in Colossians 2. And so, the law, in this sense, thus gives opportunity to those *stoicheia*, those basic principles of the world. It's important to note, too, that it was not those under the law who were sons of God.

This goes back, really, to where that first phrase occurs. Genesis 6, where the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were *toiv*, good, fair, and they took as many as they wanted. This seems to be a bunch of bad actors, whether they're fallen angels or ancient Near Eastern kings or Sethites, or whatever school of thought you want to subscribe to. They're not doing something good.

But sons of God, we argued, biblically, is a *terminus technicus*, a technical term. It means those who are made sons of God or children of God by some special act of creation. Understood that way, it refers to angels and angels only in the Old Testament, Job 1 and 2, for instance, as well as Genesis 6. And it refers to those who become sons or children of God by receiving the Holy Spirit, a new creation.

They are born anew. They are new creations. Adam, created by God, was the first son of God in Luke's genealogy.

So that it all fits together. But so, people under the law were not that because the Lord took care of them as his children and so on, but they're never called sons of God. We in the New Covenant, though, can be called that because we are new creations.

We are special acts of recreation by God. And so, he can refer to us as sons. God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, and we're also no longer slaves.

We are now sons. It is important to understand here, wrapping up, that that being the case, we have an obligation, but it's not to the sinful nature to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Because those who are led by the spirit of God are the sons of God. For you do not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the spirit of sonship.

By him, we cry, *Abba*, Father, and so on. So, the point here is this: the point of application, and perhaps it's good to end up on a point of application. We who are individual temples of the spirit, corporately temples of the spirit, we who are sons or children of God by a new creation, we have this ability, this potentiality that they never had on the old covenant, that nobody had after the fall, and that in a sense not even Adam, who didn't have the spirit dwelling in him, had.

But certainly, this is a huge difference between us under the new covenant and people under the old. We can put to death the deeds of the body, of the flesh, as Paul says, by the power of the spirit. Or as he says in Romans 6, sin doesn't have to be your master because you're not under law but under grace.

And so, I would counsel against taking Paul's description in Romans 7, which is I, right? The evil I don't want to do, I do, and so on. I'd submit that's a rhetorical I. And it's describing life under the law, which Paul knew very well. But he's saying that's not the way you have to live anymore.

You are not powerless before sin. Having said that, let's say you're a person who's recently come to the Lord. Well, you're bringing a lot of baggage. We all do.

I came to the Lord when I was in a PhD program I was 27. So, there's a lot of stuff, a lot of old attitudes and stuff that I had to gradually get rid of as the spirit worked in me and helped me. But I remember in those early days, I looked at myself and I thought, look, there's all this stuff still wrong.

So, how do I understand this? And so I read Romans 7. And I thought, ah, well, if even the great Paul had this problem, then I don't feel too bad. But I read Romans 6 and 8. And I thought, no, that just doesn't fit together. You know, Paul can't be counseling the Romans to a higher level of life than he himself is experiencing.

He can't be saying to them, oh, I can't help sinning, Romans 7. But to them, sin doesn't have to be your master because you're not under law but under grace. No, that's the principle. You're not under the law, but you're under grace.

So that's it. But still, you come to the Lord. You bring stuff with you. It's going to be a while before you move more and more into the freedom of the Spirit that you read about in Romans 8. You can put to death the deeds of the flesh by the power of the Spirit.

It takes time. It's sanctification. So, Romans 7 tells us about man under the law.

It tells us about what it can look like for an early believer. You know, you grow gradually away from that. But it does not describe the life of the Christian.

So, we have a better life ahead of us than that. We have better promises fulfilled in Christ and the dynamic of life under the new covenant. And, of course, this really fulfills the old Abrahamic promise.

We can outline the parallelism in this way: as Paul says, the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. So, the blessing given to Abraham is the promise of

the Spirit that comes to the Gentiles; we receive it through Christ by faith. And so, Paul can say in Ephesians 1.13, you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

And so, we see the fulfillment of the ancient Abrahamic promise. And that's our privilege under the new covenant. And that concludes our comments.

So, thank you for your attention.

This is Dr. Jeffrey Niehaus in his teaching on Biblical Theology. This is session 9 on the New Covenant.