

## GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to see:

1. that God remains faithful to his covenant in all its phases and throughout all generations
2. that in order to fulfil our calling we need faith expressed in obedience

## I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

### 1. Prayer

*Pray* that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

### 2. Meditation

Worship is to dedicate yourself to remain faithful to God's covenant.

**Theme: God is the God of the covenant**

*Read* the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

#### Exodus 3:14-15

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD (The Hebrew for 'LORD' sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for 'I AM' in verse 14), the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob introduces himself with the name 'JaHWeH' in the Hebrew language. This is translated with the word LORD and means 'I am that I am' or 'I will be what I will be'. He will forever be the unchangeable God who faithfully keeps his promises and covenant.

#### 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

<sup>4</sup>Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. <sup>6</sup>He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

When we began to believe in Jesus Christ, we were saved and our lives received new meaning. The unchangeable God enables us to be servants of the new covenant.

In this lesson we are going to use the words in the Bible concerning God himself to worship him. Let each group member take a turn to read one of these Bible verses and the group leader explains the verse. After reading and explaining all the Bible verses let each group member pray a short prayer worshipping God with the words said about God. (There are 8 Bible verses for 8 group members).

#### Deuteronomy 7:7-9

<sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup> But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

#### 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

<sup>14</sup>But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. <sup>15</sup>For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup>To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

#### Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

#### Philippians 1:3-6

<sup>3</sup>I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup>In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup>because of your partnership in the gospel from the first Day until now, <sup>6</sup>being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus.

### James 1:26-27

<sup>26</sup>If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup>Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

### 1 Peter 2:4-5

<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### 1 John 2:15-17

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

## 3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) as the God of the covenant, who will be what he is (the God of his people) and who gives to his people the task to serve as servants of his covenant.

## II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

**The theme for this meeting is: The second continuous theme in the Old Testament: God's covenant**

*Read or explain* in your own words.

In the whole Bible there are a couple of continuous themes.

### 1. The first continuous theme in the Bible

The first continuous theme in the Bible is the coming of the Messiah (the line of descent of the Messiah).

### 2. The second continuous theme in the Bible

The second continuous theme in the Bible is God's covenant promise to his people. God revealed himself by speaking and acting in human history! We get to know God by listening to his words and by observing his deeds in human history. God not only reveals himself to people, but also desires to have a relationship with people. *God wants to be the God of people and he wants people to be his people.* The essence of God's covenant promise is: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). God created people to live for him and with him. God is the God of the covenant with his people. The progress of God's covenant promise from Adam to the first coming of Christ is explained in this study.

## III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

*Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.*

### Theme: God's covenant

Day 1	Genesis 17:1-8 The covenant between God and Abraham
Day 2	Genesis 22:1-18 Abraham obeys God completely
Day 3	Genesis 28:10-22 God reaffirms his covenant to Jacob
Day 4	Exodus 6:1-7 God reaffirms his covenant to Moses
Day 5	Jeremiah 31:31-34 The new covenant announced
Day 6 <sup>BS</sup>	Hebrews 8:1-13 The new covenant a reality
Day 7	Exodus 19:3-6 God's people is God's treasured possession
Day 8	Leviticus 26:12-25 Obedience is a prerequisite
Day 9	1 Peter 2:9-10 God's New Testament people
Day 10	Revelation 21:1-10 A new heaven and a new earth

## IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

### 1. Discussing the study

*Discuss* the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

**Theme: The second continuous theme in the Old Testament: God's covenant**

- What was God's covenant with Adam after the fall into sin?
- What was God's covenant with Moses?
- What are the consequences when people unilaterally break God's covenant?
- What is God's new covenant according to Galatians 3:26-29 and Ephesians 3:1-6?

**2. Commitment**

In the new covenant God promises:

- that you will be born again, i.e. that the Holy Spirit will live in you
- that you will receive a personal knowledge of God
- that you may be very certain that all your sins are forgiven (Hebrews 8:6-13)
- and that you are being made holy and perfect (Hebrews 10:14).

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- "On which ground do you believe that you stand in God's new covenant?"

**3. Personal sharing**

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

**V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)**

**1. Review previous Bible verses**

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

**2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse**

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

**GOD'S COVENANT  
Leviticus 26:12**

I will walk among you  
and be your God,  
and you will be my people.

**Leviticus 26:12 (NIV)**

**3. Memorisation of the Bible books**

The first 6 minor prophetic books:

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah.

**VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)**

**Theme: God's old and new covenant**

**1. Bible Study**

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

**Hebrews 8:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup>and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

<sup>3</sup>Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. <sup>4</sup>If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. <sup>5</sup>They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

<sup>6</sup>But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to (more excellent than) theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

<sup>7</sup>For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

<sup>8</sup>But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

<sup>9</sup>It will not be like the covenant

I made with their forefathers

when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of Egypt,

because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,

and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

<sup>10</sup>This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

I will put my laws in their minds

and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

<sup>11</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbour,

or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'

because they will all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest.

<sup>12</sup>For I will forgive their wickedness

and will remember their sins no more."

<sup>13</sup>By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

## 2. Emphasis

- *God first made a covenant of works with Adam* (Genesis 2:15-17).

Adam disobeyed God and broke the covenant of works. Thus he caused the fall of all of mankind into sin.

- *Then God made a covenant of grace with Abraham* (Genesis 17:1-7)

Later God added the law to this covenant (Galatians 3:17). Israel disobeyed God and *broke* the covenant, that is, they broke the law that had been added to the covenant of grace (Hosea 6:7).

- *'The first or old covenant'*

This does not refer to the covenant of grace which God made with Abraham, but to the covenant of the law which God made with Moses (the ceremonial law with its temple, priests, sacrifices and circumcision, which God added later to the covenant with Abraham. Already during the period of the kings, Israel came to regard the keeping of the external laws as more important than acknowledging and knowing God (Hosea 6:6). And since the period of the exile to Babylon the Jews and especially the Pharisees came to regard the keeping of the external laws of Moses as the way to justification (salvation).

- *'The second or new covenant'*

This refers to God's covenant with Abraham which, after the first coming of Jesus Christ, has far greater effects than trying to keep the laws of Moses. During the New Testament period, the covenant with Abraham effects regeneration (the law is written in the heart); it effects a personal knowledge and fellowship with God (through Christ); and it effects a genuine experience of justification (the forgiveness of sins)!

- *The fulfilment and abrogation of 'the first covenant'*

'The first or old covenant' (the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament as well as the civil laws of the state of Israel) has been fulfilled (Matthew 5:17), cancelled (Colossians 2:14) and abrogated (Ephesians 2:15) and may therefore never again be reintroduced into the Christian Church (God's New Testament Community)!

## 3. Explanation for the group leader

### 8:1-7. Temple, priesthood and covenant

- *The Old Testament shadows and the New Testament realities*

The Old Testament priesthood (Hebrews 7), the Old Testament covenant (Hebrews 8) and the Old Testament temple and its sacrifices (Hebrews 9) were 'patterns' and 'shadows' (Hebrews 8:5) of the New Testament 'realities' (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). They were 'illustrations' and 'external regulations' until the time of the new order (i.e. the New Testament order) (Hebrews 9:9-10).

- *The better covenant is based on better promises*

Just as the priesthood according to the order of Aaron had to make way for the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, so the old covenant had to make way for the new covenant, the earthly temple had to make way for the heavenly temple and the temporary animal sacrifices had to make way for the sacrifice of atonement of Christ on the cross, which is really effective and valid forever. The 'better covenant' and 'the better promises' are 'the new covenant' which the prophet Jeremiah announced (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

*God's covenant in the Old Testament, which God made with Abraham and affirmed with Moses, was not terminated or simply replaced by God's new covenant, but it is continued on a higher plane and is extended to include all the nations in the world! That is why the new covenant is superior to the old covenant!*

### 8:8-9. The old covenant (the law) was broken and the new covenant was instituted

- *The institution of the first covenant*

The essence of God's covenant is: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). God's covenant was not altered in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:10b; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). The writer of the book of Hebrews does not occupy himself with God's covenant with Abraham, namely, "In you (literally: in your Seed) all nations on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 22:18) and also not with the essence of God's covenant. The writer occupies himself exclusively with 'the law' (given to Moses), which God added at Sinai to his covenant (with Abraham) (Galatians 3:16-19) and calls this 'the first covenant'.

'This first covenant' was confirmed by bringing animal sacrifices and the sprinkling of blood on the altar, on the Book of the covenant and on the people (cf. Exodus 24:1-8). Moses called this sprinkled blood 'the blood of the covenant', that is, the blood that ratified the first covenant (the law) (Hebrews 9:18-22). In the book of Hebrews, 'the first covenant' is in essence: "Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people" (Jeremiah 7:23). The emphasis lies on that part that was later added to the covenant with Abraham.

- *The breaking of the first covenant*

But the Israelites paid no attention to the first covenant. For centuries the Israelites had turned against the Living God. They did not listen to the prophets and hardened their hearts more and more (Jeremiah 7:24-26). If Israel had remained faithful to God and his covenant, then they would have enjoyed the blessings of the covenant. But because Israel was unfaithful (i.e. she turned to idols) and remained disobedient (i.e. she disobeyed the law), all God's threats were carried out against Israel (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-28; Jeremiah 18:1-12).

Finally God accused Israel of breaking the first covenant (Jeremiah 11:10-11) and announced that he would institute the new covenant with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Already the announcement of the new covenant brought the dissolution of the first covenant nearby.

The first covenant was 'not without faults', because the other party in the covenant (Israel) was not without faults. 'The law was spiritual, but Israel was unspiritual' (Romans 7:14). God rebuked Israel again and again that she had not been faithful to his covenant. The result was that God no longer had concern for Israel (he neglected her)!<sup>1</sup> What was wrong with the first covenant was not the covenant itself (the law), but the fact that Israel broke that covenant! The Israelites *did not* keep the first covenant and *could not* keep the first covenant! That is why a mere reaffirmation of the first covenant (the law) would never bring relief to anyone! What was needed was a new covenant, new with respect to its nature and effect and new with respect to the time it is realised. Jeremiah announced this new covenant.

➤ *The inauguration of the new covenant*

God himself brought the new covenant into being. The new covenant would not only be 'a second covenant', but 'a new covenant', a different kind of covenant. The first covenant was characterised by *outward and temporary matters*. The new covenant would be characterised by *inward renewal and durability*.

**8:10-12. God contrasts the new covenant with the old covenant**

The prophet Jeremiah announced that God would constitute 'his people' on a completely new basis. The relationship between God and 'his people' would be based on three important issues:

- The law would be written in the hearts of his people
- The knowledge of God would be their personal experience
- And all their sins would really be wiped out.

➤ *Hebrews 8:10. The new covenant consists of writing the law in the hearts of his people instead of merely in the books of the Old Testament.*

Although the Israelites had promised that they would keep the first covenant (the law) (Exodus 24:7), they did not have the spiritual and moral power to carry out their good intentions.

What really was needed was rebirth, a total inner renewal, a transformed mind and heart that has been liberated from its bondage to sin! What was needed was not only a

heart that knew God's will, but that had the inner power to do it! What was needed was a completely new covenant! God announced this new covenant through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-28) and the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

*The new covenant is not new with respect to its contents and essence:* the God of the Bible would be the God of believers and believers would be his people (cf. Exodus 6:7; 29:45; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:22-23; 30:21-22; Ezekiel 11:19-20; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 8:7-8; 13:7-9; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Revelation 21:3).

*But the new covenant is new with respect to its effect:* it would cause regeneration through the Holy Spirit! The covenant of grace remains the same throughout the ages, but is filled with a new meaning and a new effect, so that it may rightly be called 'a new covenant'. The words: "I will be your God" received fuller significance as God's self-revelation progressed in the New Testament. And the words: "You will be my people" received deeper meaning as God's people came to know God's will better and better. For example, God did not only love one people (his people Israel), but many peoples (the believers in the world) (John 3:16)!

➤ *Hebrews 8:11. The new covenant consisted of a personal knowledge of God and a close and confident relationship with him, instead of only a national acknowledgement of God and a national relationship to him.*

In the Israel of the Old Testament period there was some knowledge of God, more than in the surrounding nations, because God had revealed himself to Israel by speaking and by acting within her history. And although there were certain individuals in Israel like king David (cf. Enoch and Abraham) who experienced a personal and confidential relationship with God, there was in general only a national acknowledgment of God and his words and deeds in the past.

**Deuteronomy 4:32-35**

<sup>32</sup> Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the Day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? <sup>33</sup> Has any other people heard the voice of God (or: of a god) speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? <sup>34</sup> Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

<sup>35</sup> You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.

<sup>1</sup> A quotation from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Jeremiah 31:31-32, which in that translation is found in Jeremiah 48:31-32.

Already the second generation of Israelites in the Promised Land did not know God anymore and also did not know what God had done to Israel. They did what was evil in the eyes of God and served the idols of the Canaanite nations (Judges 2:10-11). 'Knowing God' was always connected to being faithful to God, being obedient to God's commandments and laws (Hosea 4:6; 6:6) and in doing what was right and just (Jeremiah 22:15-16). In the first covenant 'knowing God' was simply a national acknowledgement of God that was expressed in outward obedience to God's laws.

In the Old Testament period the community had knowledge about God and had a national relationship with God. But in the New Testament period the individual believer has a personal knowledge of God and a close, intimate and confidential relationship with God. This knowledge increases all the time until it is made complete when all Christians will see Christ face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12; cf. 1 John 3:2).

➤ *Hebrews 8:12. The new covenant consists of experiencing the complete forgiveness of sins, instead of being reminded of one's sins again and again.*

Although the forgiveness of sins was known in Israel (Exodus 20:6; 34:6-7a; Jesaja 38:17b; 43:25; 44:22a; Micha 7:18-19), it was not a real experience during the Old Testament revelation. During the Old Testament revelation not only God's forgiveness of believers (Exodus 34:6-7a), but also God's retribution of the unrepentant was emphasised (Exodus 34:7b). God's holy and righteous indignation about Israel's sins had to act against their sins (Exodus 20:5).

When God brings Israel's sins into remembrance, he causes them to feel his wrath (his holy indignation or anger). His holiness and righteousness must take action against their sins. And he brings harm to them: breaks down their protection, tramples their accomplishments in life and turns them into a wasteland of briars and thorns (cf. Isaiah 5:5-6).

But when God no longer brings their sins into remembrance, his grace and mercy is determined to forgive his people. This new covenant only became a possibility after God's holiness and righteousness had taken action against the sins of people when Jesus Christ died on the cross as a sacrifice of atonement for sins (Romans 3:24-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). He died in the place of those people who believe in him (cf. John 10:11; Mark 10:45).

That is why God's grace and mercy is never contrary to his holiness and righteousness. He shows mercy and forgiveness, because his holy and righteous indignation has been satisfied by Christ's death on the cross.

During the first covenant the system of animal sacrifices brought sins into remembrance whenever these sacrifices were brought (Hebrews 10:3). But during the new covenant sins are no longer brought into remembrance, because the sacrifice of atonement of sins has already been brought once for all time (Hebrews 7:27; 10:17)! The absolute assurance of forgiveness of sins had become an important part of the new covenant!

### **8:13. Immediately after Christ's death the first covenant became obsolete and stood at the point of disappearing**

➤ *The first covenant has become antiquated and disused*  
The main thought of the writer of the book of Hebrews is the abrogation of the first covenant (the ceremonial law) and its replacement by the new covenant (God's grace expressed in genuine regeneration, in personally knowing God and in experiencing the complete forgiveness of sins)!

The apostle Paul and his colleagues regarded the old covenant as the covenant associated with Moses (2 Corinthians 3:13-14) and themselves as 'servants of the new covenant' (2 Corinthians 3:6). If the first covenant associated with Moses had become old, antiquated and had fallen in disuse, then also the priesthood according to the order of Aaron (associated with Moses), the earthly sanctuary (the temple in Jerusalem) and the Levitical sacrifices had become old, antiquated and had fallen in disuse, because they all came into existence under the first covenant.

➤ *The first covenant together with all its laws has been abrogated and has disappeared.*

"What is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." These words can mean that when the prophet Jeremiah announced the new covenant (588-587 B.C.), he therewith also announced that the abrogation of the Old Testament order was near!

But these words can also mean that at the time the letter to the Hebrews was written (64 A.D.), the temple with its priesthood and sacrifices were still standing and functioning.

Also Jesus and Stephen announced the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:2; cf. John 2:19; Acts 7:48-49). With the first coming of Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of his work of salvation by his death and resurrection the first covenant (the ceremonial law) was fulfilled (Matthew 5:17), cancelled (Colossians 2:14) and put out of use (Ephesians 2:14-15). When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., the first covenant disappeared forever!

That is why no part of the first covenant (the ceremonial law) may be re-introduced into the New Testament

Church! When some Christians in the Galatian congregations did this, the apostle Paul said, “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh (i.e. by sinful human effort trying to keep the law)?” And Paul warns, “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:4)”.

#### 4. Overview with regard to the covenant in the Bible

##### ➤ *The form of the covenant*

The biblical covenant is more than a mere contract or agreement. A ‘contract’ is an agreement between two more or less equal parties (Greek: sun-theke). But a ‘covenant’ is a settlement which a higher authority offers to a lower authority and which the lower authority must accept (Greek: dia-theke). The covenant in the Bible is more like a treaty in which the conquered nations were bound to a conqueror in the second millennium B.C.).

##### ➤ *The essential contents of the covenant*

*The New Testament covenant remains essentially the same as the Old Testament covenant.* “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 31:33; Zechariah 8:8). In the New Testament this same covenant applies to all believers in Jesus Christ from all the nations on earth (2 Corinthians 6:16)! And at the second coming of Christ all the believers in Christ from all the nations in the world will be ‘God’s peoples’ and ‘God will dwell in their midst’ (Revelation 21:3)!

The covenant of God should not be illustrated with examples from national or international politics, but rather with examples from the family circle. The relationship within the covenant is that of a Father with his children (Hosea 11:1-4) and that of a husband with his wife (Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8; Malachi 2:14).

##### ➤ *The new covenant is not a renewal of the old covenant.*

In the second century B.C. the Jewish community at Qumran tried to realise the promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The members of this community were described as ‘people entering the new covenant’. They talked about the new covenant, but tried to renew the highest ideals of the old covenant. They were looking forward to a new temple, which would still be a temple built with human hands. And they looked forward to a pure worship by means of sacrifices, which would still be animal sacrifices by the priesthood in the order of Aaron.

##### ➤ *The new covenant is a complete abrogation of the old covenant.*

According to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews the new covenant is not a renewal of the old covenant with

Israel. The new covenant is an abolition of the whole Old Testament system of ceremonial worship (Hebrews 8:13). This abolition is based on the perfect and superior High Priest, Jesus Christ. It is based on his perfect sacrifice of atonement which can never again be repeated. And it is based on his perfect ministry of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, worshipping God in spirit and in truth is completely set free from outward things as a temple building, priests and sacrifices; and is set free from the worship on set times with prescribed manners.

##### ➤ *The new covenant was instituted during the first Lord’s Supper.*

The first covenant was ratified with blood (Exodus 24:8). Also the new covenant was confirmed with blood. On the night before he shed his blood on the cross, Jesus inaugurated the Lord’s Supper with the words “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24; Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus hereby announced that the first covenant has been replaced by ‘the new covenant’ of which Jeremiah spoke.

##### ➤ *The new covenant has been extended to believers in all the nations.*

In the prophecy of Jeremiah the promise concerning the new covenant was made ‘to the house of Israel and Judah’, because they were ‘God’s people’ during the Old Testament period.

But even Jeremiah already implies the extension of the new covenant to other peoples, because all the outward ceremonies of the Old Testament religion had to disappear! The outward ceremonial laws, the national acknowledgement of God, the sacrifices of animals, (Jeremiah 31:31-34), the priesthood in the order of Aaron and the earthly sanctuary at Jerusalem (cf. Hebrews 8:1-7; 9:8-10) had to make place for the New Testament worship in spirit and truth (John 4:19-24).

Also belonging to the natural, national people of Israel (Isaiah 56:6-7) had to make place for belonging to ‘God’s people’ that consists of believers from every nation on earth (Romans 9:6; 10:12-13; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 5:9-10; cf. Genesis 22:18).

Already in the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah was shown what effect the new covenant would have on the Gentile nations in the world (cf. Isaiah 42:6; 49:24-25; Romans 15:9-12). In the New Testament fulfilment the new covenant was no longer limited to Israel, but extended to include believers from all the nations, that would be born-again by the Holy Spirit!

While the people who still held on to the old covenant (the law) are characterised by their inability to understand and obey the Old Testament revelation, the

people belonging to the new covenant are characterised by open eyes that understand God's revelation and by regeneration and continuous renewal through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6,14)!

- The new covenant has exactly the same significance for the natural nation of Israel as the natural Gentile nations.

Two extremes must be avoided:

On the one hand, Christians may not maintain that with the words 'Israel' Jeremiah intended the New Testament Church. Although God had not shown to Jeremiah what the new covenant would mean to the rest of the world (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12), this does not mean that he excluded the rest of the world from the new covenant!

On the other hand, Christians may not maintain that the new covenant means something different for Israel than for the New Testament Church. It is a false doctrine to maintain that Israel would be saved in another way than the New Testament Church!

- In the New Testament at the first coming of Christ, God did not abolish the natural nation of Israel, but rises above it by bringing into existence the new people of God (consisting of believers from the Jews and the Gentiles) (Romans 1:14-16; 10:12-13; 11:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 5:9-10).
- In the same way at the second coming of Christ, God does not abolish the present physical body of the Christian but rises above it by making it conform to the likeness of the glorious body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).
- God also does not abolish the present earth, but rises above it by liberating it from the bondage of decay and making it share in the glorious freedom of the

children of God (Romans 8:19-21). That is why it is not called 'the recreation' of the earth, but 'the restoration' of everything (Acts 3:21; cf. Matthew 17:11; Acts 1:6)!

Not all people will inherit the new earth. Likewise not all physical descendants of Israel will be saved (Romans 9:6; 11:7)! God fulfils his promise by saving the full number of the elect from the natural nation of Israel and by saving the full number of the elect from all the natural Gentile nations in the world (cf. Romans chapter 11, Bible study in lesson 14). Together they form the new people of God.

- *The new covenant will continue forever*  
The first or old covenant was temporary and for the main part limited to one natural nation (Israel). But already in the time of Jeremiah this covenant was nearing its end.

The era of the Law and the Prophets has definitely ended and the era of the Son of God has definitely begun and will remain unto eternity (Matthew 5:17; 11:13; Matthew 22:34-40; Hebrews 1:1-2)!

## VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

*Pray* with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

*Pray* with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

## VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

*Hand out* the preparation for the next gathering.