

THE  
PRESENT WORD

ADULT STUDENT'S BOOK

SUMMER 2019  
LIVING IN COVENANT

## ABOUT THE WRITER

DONALD K. MCKIM is an honorably retired minister of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He has served as a pastor, seminary theology professor, and academic dean, and as an editor for Westminster John Knox Press and Geneva Press. He is the author and editor of several books, including *Coffee with Calvin: Daily Devotions*; *Moments with Martin Luther: 95 Daily Devotions*; and *Mornings with Bonhoeffer: 100 Reflections on the Christian Life*. He and his wife, LindaJo, live in Germantown, Tennessee.

## COMING NEXT QUARTER

The fall quarter focuses on God's gift of faith and how we respond to it both personally and communally. The sessions from the Old and New Testaments illuminate how God's grace affects the lives of all believers, as demonstrated by their obedience, gratitude, and holy living.

Unit I, "God Is Faithful"

Unit II, "Responses to God's Faithfulness"

Unit III, "Faith Leads to Holy Living"

© 2019 Geneva Press

Published in partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, The Moravian Church in America (North and South), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ.

*The Present Word* is published quarterly by Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

The ADULT STUDENT'S BOOK is based on *International Sunday School Lessons: International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching*, copyright © 2007 by the Committee on the Uniform Series, and uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America; both used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, and 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America



# ADULT STUDENT’S BOOK

## LIVING IN COVENANT

Introduction ..... 2

### Unit I: A Fulfilled Covenant

**Editor**  
Mark D. Hinds

**Writer**  
Donald K. McKim

**Cover:**  
Jesus teaches the multitudes in his Sermon on the Mount.

Artist Gisele Bauche,  
Saskatoon, Sk, Canada;  
e-mail: gbauche@sasktel.net; website: spiritualityandart.ca/.

1. June 2	Jesus Institutes the New Covenant ..... 3
	<i>Mark 14:12–31; Hebrews 8</i>
2. June 9	Jesus Seals the New Covenant ..... 9
	<i>Mark 14:32–50; 15</i>
3. June 16	The New Covenant’s Sacrifice ..... 15
	<i>Hebrews 9:11–28</i>
4. June 23	Hearts United in Love..... 21
	<i>Colossians 2:1–15</i>

### Unit II: A Heartfelt Covenant

5. June 30	Jesus Teaches about Right Attitudes ..... 27
	<i>Matthew 5:1–12</i>
6. July 7	Jesus Teaches about Fulfilling the Law ..... 33
	<i>Matthew 5:13–20</i>
7. July 14	Jesus Teaches Us to Love One Another..... 39
	<i>Matthew 5:21–32</i>
8. July 21	Jesus Teaches about Transforming Love..... 45
	<i>Matthew 5:38–48</i>
9. July 28	Jesus Teaches about Spiritual Discernment..... 51
	<i>Matthew 7:1–6, 15–23</i>

### Unit III: Covenant: A Personal Perspective

10. August 4	A Covenant between Friends ..... 57
	<i>1 Samuel 18–20</i>
11. August 11	A Mother-Daughter Covenant ..... 63
	<i>Ruth 1:1–18</i>
12. August 18	A Covenant to Marry ..... 69
	<i>Ruth 1:6–18; 3–4; Matthew 19:1–12</i>
13. August 25	Marriage: A Covenant of Mutual Love ..... 75
	<i>Ephesians 5:21–6:4</i>
	Session Resources ..... 81
	Session Notes..... 85

# Introduction

We believe that God has chosen to come to us and enter into a relationship with us. We see this in the covenant that God makes with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants. We see the covenant reconfirmed as the people of Israel enter the Promised Land after God frees them from slavery in Egypt. We see the covenant expanded through Jesus Christ to include the church and, through the church, the world. The covenant is the relationship God has established with us and is the basis for our relationships with one another. To understand covenant is to understand what it is to be God's covenant people.

A covenant is a pact, an agreement, or a contract. From the faith perspective, the basic understanding of a covenant is that it is a relationship. In marriage, a couple defines their relationship by making vows to each other and promising commitment of a lifelong love. This is a covenant in the truest sense of the word.

God loves you and will never fail you. That is the message of covenant. May you be blessed in the knowledge of God's love through Jesus Christ during this quarter's study.

In Christ,

Mark D. Hinds  
Editor

SCRIPTURE  
SELECTION

Mark 14:17–24;  
Hebrews 8:6–7,  
10–12

A VERSE TO  
REMEMBER

Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.

—Hebrews 8:6

M The Original Passover, Deut. 16:1–8  
T Triumphal Entry, Mark 11:1–10  
W Preparation for Passover, Mark 14:12–16  
T The New Covenant, Jer. 31:31–34  
F The Last Supper, Luke 22:14–23  
S Clean Feet and Hearts, John 13:2b–7

## Jesus Institutes the New Covenant

**14:17** When it was evening, he came with the twelve. <sup>18</sup>And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” <sup>19</sup>They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” <sup>20</sup>He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. <sup>21</sup>For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

<sup>22</sup>While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” <sup>23</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. <sup>24</sup>He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

**8:6** But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. <sup>7</sup>For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one. . . .

<sup>10</sup>“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

after those days, says the Lord:  
I will put my laws in their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

<sup>11</sup>And they shall not teach one another  
or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,'  
for they shall all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.  
<sup>12</sup>For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more."



## **STEPPING INTO THE WORD**

Promises are part of our lives. We make promises; we receive promises from others. They are important because they state what we or others intend. Promises are a pledge or guarantee to assure that what is expressed will be enacted. They raise expectations and hopes.

We are assured by Scripture that God's promises last. Throughout the pages of the Bible, God makes promises, often called "covenants." They are made to people like us, and, in them, God pledges to act for people like us. The people of God are the recipients of promises. These promises arise from the relationship God has established with God's people, with Israel and the church.

Most significantly for Christians is the covenant, or promise made by God in Jesus Christ. The covenant is dramatized in the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before his death and resurrection. Jesus offered himself, as represented in the bread and the wine, as God's covenant (Mark 14:22–25). Jesus fulfills God's everlasting promise to be with God's people. God will "be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

God's word in Jesus Christ is true. God's promises are sure. Jesus is God's new covenant. Our sin is forgiven, and God is with us, forever.

## **A WORD ABOUT COVENANT**

Our God makes covenants. Sometimes the covenant is "unilateral," meaning God makes promises that humans receive as acts of God's sheer grace. Sometimes the covenants are "bilateral." God promises to do something, and the people respond in kind with promises to God. Several biblical covenants are found throughout the Old Testament. For Christians, they all find their fulfillment in the new covenant in Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

God's covenants with Abram (Abraham) were unilateral promises: God promised descendants to Abraham, a promise Abraham believed (Genesis 15:1–6). In Genesis 17, God promised: "This is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. . . . I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you" (Genesis 17:4, 7; cf. Exodus 6:4).

The covenants with Abraham, with promises of a people, a homeland, and a special relationship with God, began what would become the people of Israel. God chose Moses to lead the people and assured him of God's presence. God told Moses: "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burden of the Egyptians" (Exodus 6:7).

God liberated and led the people of Israel out their slavery in Egypt and gave them through Moses the Ten Commandments ("ten words") at Mt. Sinai. These words expressed God's will for how the covenant people of Israel should live. God also stipulated a variety of laws as practices for society—as ways for the people to express faithfulness to God's covenant promises to them, a bilateral covenant. (See Exodus 20:3—23:33.)

God's covenant with King David was to assure him of a permanent line of descendants to rule as kings in Israel. The kings would be known metaphorically as "the son of God" (2 Samuel 7:1–17; Psalms 2:7–8; 89:27–28).

While Israel was to obey God, the nation broke the covenant and needed God's forgiveness (see Jeremiah 31:27–30). To Jeremiah, God promised a new covenant, in a new form: an internal covenant. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33; cf. Hebrews 8:10–11).

The new covenant was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled God's covenant promises. Now the people of God are always in the presence of God. Our sins have been forgiven through the body and blood of Christ that was given for us. Now God's promises are for all people, Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ instituted the new covenant. As we take part in the Lord's Supper, we recognize and receive God's eternal promises in Christ.

## A LESSON ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Christians stand in the line of the people of God who have received God's promises and the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Hebrews describes Christ as "the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). Jesus has brought a covenant in which he, as the mediator, bridges the space between us and God. In Jesus Christ, God's promises come true.

The description of Jesus' work as mediator of the new covenant in Hebrews points to three important dimensions of what our relationship with Christ means:

*We are God's people in Christ.* Participating in the Lord's Supper expresses our unity with Christ by faith. We receive the bread and the wine as Jesus' body and blood. By eating and drinking, we receive God's promises to us in Christ. We also express our love and commitment to Christ as his disciples and as members of his body, the church. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers spoke of the Lord's Supper as a sign. Like the oath soldiers took when they joined the army in ancient times, so our participation in the Supper and the new covenant in Christ shows the world we belong to Christ and are part of the body of Christ, the people of God (Hebrews 8:10).

*We know God through Christ.* In Christ the mediator, the covenant promise of God in Christ is real: "For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Hebrews 8:11). By knowing Christ, we know God. The church has always believed the first verse of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus Christ is the Son of God, "fully God and fully human" as the ancient creeds expressed it. John Calvin said Jesus Christ the mediator was "the mirror of God's inestimable grace."<sup>1</sup> By God's grace in Christ, we know who God is and what God has done. Our God initiates all covenants. Our God sent Jesus Christ into the world to reveal God and to save the world (see John 3:16). Jesus Christ is God's grace in a person. In Christ, we know God.

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.14.5.



*We are forgiven by God in Christ.* The writer of Hebrews speaks of God's saying, "I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). This is the work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ. Through Christ's death, we receive mercy for our iniquities, and our sin is forgiven and remembered no more (Colossians 1:13–14). For "while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). In Jesus Christ we are new people, a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are people redeemed and forgiven by Jesus Christ who is the new covenant of God. Our lives are made new by God's loving embrace of us sinners by the One who has shown us mercy and forgiveness. We rejoice in Christ!

## **STEPPING INTO THE WORLD**

In his simple actions at table, Jesus displayed to his disciples a visual parable of what his imminent death would mean for them and for the world. Protestant Reformers described the Lord's Supper as a "visible word of God." God's Word, made flesh in Christ, is now set before us in the Supper of our Lord. When we see the bread and wine on the Communion table, the good news ought to ring in our ears. Christ's body and blood were given for us.

In some church traditions, the Lord's Supper is sometimes treated as an "add on" to regular worship services. If we took more time to reflect on the meaning of the Supper, our attitudes would change. Word and Sacrament go together. Each testifies to the gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ. We respond to the preaching of the Word of God in faith. So also with the Lord's Supper. As we eat and drink and hear the gospel promises, our hearts are lifted up to the Lord. In faith, we receive the benefits of what Christ has done for us in his death and resurrection. The gospel of Christ is sealed in our hearts as we take part in the Supper. God reaches us through our seeing, tasting, and touching in the Supper; just as we are reached in our hearing through preaching. God has given us the Lord's Supper to strengthen our faith and to bless us.

As you walk the walk of faith, be assured daily that God's promises are certain. Be strengthened in the knowledge and love of God in Jesus Christ.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- ❓ Why is it important to remember the sweep of God's promises throughout the Old Testament, culminating in Jesus Christ as the new covenant?

---

---

- ❓ What does it mean to you to be redeemed and forgiven by God in Jesus Christ?

---

---

- ❓ What does the Lord's Supper mean to you? In what ways does it strengthen and nourish your faith?

---

---

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for giving yourself for our salvation. Thank you for being the new covenant for us, the one who has fulfilled God's promises. Thank you for giving your body and blood for us. Give us the comfort of your presence with us. Make us your faithful disciples who proclaim your gospel by our words and deeds. Help us always to point to you, the Son of God, who has loved us and given yourself for us. Hear our prayers, O Christ, and use us for your service. Amen.

## A LOOK AHEAD

Mark describes how Jesus' crucifixion forges a new covenant and reconciles God and humankind.

### Background Scripture for Next Time

Mark 14:32–50; 15