

An Introduction to the Two Covenants

Jesus is the Center of It All

II Corinthians 3:15-18

A definition of "covenant": *"An agreement between two or more people or groups."* You can have neighborhood covenants, shopping center covenants, fraternity covenants, or even church covenants.

Bible Covenants: When it comes to the Bible, God entered into agreements with various people (covenants) including Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and others. However, the Bible refers to only two MAJOR covenants between God and sinners where there are *expectations* from God: The first (Old) covenant and the last (New) covenant. The first covenant was made with the nation of Israel and all every "foreigner, stranger and alien" who would identify with Israel. The Old Testament is a history of Israel and man's failure and God's mercy through redemptive sacrifices, feasts, and priestly rituals designed to cleans God's people of their sin. The Messiah is the center of it all (Appendix 1).

The Apostle Paul makes a clear contrast between the **Old** and the **New Covenants**. Although the Old Covenant was "glorious" (v.7), it was "passing away." The Old Covenant was a physical covenant, written on stones, and lived out in the priesthood and Levitical laws of Israel. The "latter" Covenant (the New Covenant) is established and inaugurated through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, through fulfillment the Old Covenant Law, sacrifices, and feasts and the obtaining of all the blessings of obedience for *His people*. Other names for the New Covenant include an "everlasting covenant" (Jer. 32:40: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them..."), "covenant of peace" (Ezek. 37:26: "And I will make a covenant of peace"), and "my covenant" (Hos. 2:18-20).

I. The first Covenant is a history of God's agreement with His people Israel.

Exodus 19:5-6: "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, **then** you shall be My own possession among all the peoples (e.g. "**a chosen people**"), and you shall be to Me **a kingdom of priests** and **a holy nation**. These words you are to speak to the sons of Israel." What was Israel to obey? God gave Israel the law (moral, ceremonial, and civil) and Israel replied **Exodus 24:7** – "All this we will do!" Within forty days *the covenant was broken* by idolatry (Exodus 32). The history of the Old Testament is of foreign nations raised up by God to capture and/or destroy Israel. It was the agreement: "Obey Me and keep My Law and be blessed in the land; disobey Me and be scattered." The "Law" brought conviction of sin.

II. Jesus is the true Israel who came to fulfill the Law where Israel failed.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, his parents took Him to Egypt to avoid the murderous plot of King Herod. Later, Jesus left Egypt with Joseph and Mary and settled in Nazareth. When Matthew recounts how Jesus was "called out of Egypt" (Matt. 2:15), he says that Christ coming out of Egypt fulfills the statement of Hosea 11:1 - "*Out of Egypt I have called My Son.*" Wait a minute! That **Hosea 11:1** passage says:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."

But the gospel writer (Matthew) says that this statement from Hosea is fulfilled in the life of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the true and faithful Israel. Unlike Old Covenant Israel, Jesus fulfills the Law - every jot and tittle of it! Jesus is the true Israel, the One whom the Father has given us to establish our righteousness.

- (1). The King of Kings was born in Bethlehem, the very place where King David was crowned King of Israel.
- (2). After Jesus was born, He went to Egypt, just as national Israel fled to Egypt to avoid death (see Gen. 46:8).
- (3). Both national Israel and the new Israel (Jesus Christ) were "called out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1).
- (4). God gave the Law on a mountain through Moses; and God gave the new Law by His Son on a mountain.
- (5). God told Peter, James and John to ignore Moses and Elijah, the great Law-giver and prophet of the Old Covenant, and to listen to "My beloved Son" (akoute auton - "Hear Him!") because HE is the Christ of God.

- (6). National Israel has a history of disobedience to God and failure to meet the conditions of the Old Covenant. The new Israel, Jesus Christ, fulfilled every "jot and tittle" of the Law (Matt. 5:18).
- (7). Since the Law promised "blessings" from God for full obedience, and punishment for disobedience, national Israel experienced punishments from God throughout the entire Old Covenant (ending in AD 70). Jesus only felt the full pleasure of the Father ("My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased") due to perfect obedience.
- (8). Before Jesus entered into His public ministry of mercy and grace, He endured 40 days in the wilderness; so too, before national Israel entered into Canaan, they spent 40 years in the wilderness.
- (9). Jesus Christ was baptized at the very location (Betharaba) national Israel crossed the Jordan to enter Canaan.
- (10). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law's Festivals (born at Tabernacles, died at Passover, in the tomb during Unleavened Bread, raised on the Feast of Firstfruits, and sending the Comforter at Pentecost, etc...).

When you come to faith in Jesus, you become "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9).

III. The contrast between the two covenants is distinct.

The Old Covenant, having been annulled ("done away," 2 Cor. 3:11; Heb. 10:9, etc.), there remains now, of all the covenants ever made by God with a people in this world, none but "**the everlasting covenant,**" or "**new covenant,**" whereof Jesus Christ is the **Guarantor** ("Surety," Heb. 7:22), who fulfills all the conditions of perfect obedience, even "*unto death*;" is also the *Mediator* (Heb. 9:15). The New Covenant was sealed with His blood and is received by faith in Christ.

The emphasis of the New Covenant is on liberty and freedom.

Paul concludes his commentary on Exodus 34:34 with the statement *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (v. 17). What did this word mean to Paul? Elsewhere it refers to freedom from death (e.g., Rom. 8:2), sin (e.g., Rom. 6:18, 22), the law (Gal. 5:1-3) and condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2). Here it means to be free of **religious barriers that would impede spiritual maturity**. It is the work of the Spirit to remove such spiritual impediments. *Freedom* also belongs to the gospel minister in verse 18, who, unlike Moses, has the liberty to minister with an "unveiled face." Freedom in what?

- A. Freedom to serve as God the Holy Spirit leads us to serve ...
Including witnessing, praying, Bible-teaching, giving, etc. No law—freedom in it all.
- B. Freedom to advance in our walk with Christ as the Spirit leads us ...
There is no need to measure our sense of spiritual worthiness—we are righteous by Christ.
- C. Freedom to love and accept other people where they are ...
We trust Christ to perform the good work of conversion and sanctification and not the law.
- D. Freedom to rest and not toil, freedom to enjoy and not resent.
The freedom and liberty that comes from New Covenant living is extraordinary.
It is like water to the dry and thirsty person, like balm to the broken and hurting person.
"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).
- E. Freedom to love as God the Father loves you.

This series is designed to help you understand the differences between the Two Covenants, and revel in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, learning to relax in His performance, His righteousness, and His obedience.

"The Old Testament proclaims God's mighty acts of redemption. These acts reach a climax in the New Testament when God sends His Son. Redemptive history is a mighty river that runs from the old covenant to the new and holds the two together." Sydney Greidanus