

## GOD'S COVENANTS WITH MAN

### I. Meaning of the Biblical words

#### A. Hebrew word *berith*

##### 1. Meaning

- a. A binding agreement or arrangement between two parties, whether unilaterally or bilaterally, involving obligations, responsibilities or obedience
- b. Can be promise, oath, pledge, pact, treaty (II Chron. 16:3), alliance, compact, contract, arrangement, agreement, etc.
- c. Throughout history of mankind, men have covenanted and made covenants to attempt to insure that the other party would follow through on his word of their agreement.
  - (1) These were often sealed in blood
  - (2) Later they became written documents

##### 2. Examples of usage:

- a. Men with men  
Gen. 21:22-32 - (Abraham and Abimelech)  
Gen. 31:44-54 - (Jacob and Laban)  
I Sam. 18:3; 20:8; 23:18 - (David and Jonathon)  
Mal. 2:14 - "your wife by covenant" (marriage)
- b. God with men  
Gen. 9:9-17 - Covenant with Noah  
Gen. 15:8-18; 17:1-14 - Covenant with Abraham  
Exod. 24:4-8 - Covenant with nation of Israel at Sinai  
II Sam. 7:12-17; 23:5; Ps. 89:3,28 - Covenant with David
- c. Promise of "new covenant"  
Isa. 55:3 - "I will make an everlasting covenant with you"  
(cf. 42:6; 49:6-8; 59:21; 61:8)  
Jere. 31:31-34 - "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (cf. 23:5; 32:40; 50:5)  
Ezek. 37:26 - "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant" (cf. 16:60,62; 34:23,25)

#### B. Greek words

##### 1. *suntheke*

- a. *sun* = "together with"; *tithemi* = "to put or place"
- b. Used of mutual, bilateral agreements between human parties, such as marriage and political agreements
- c. Not used in New Testament, because concept of covenant is between God, as the superior party, and mankind.

##### 2. *diatheke*

- a. *dia* = "through"; *tithemi* = "to put or place"
- b. The superior party dictates the terms of the arrangement; "puts it through"
- c. This arrangement does not preclude the necessity of response and obligation
- d. Examples of usage:
  - (1) Old Mosaic cov. inadequate - II Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:9

- (2) Abrahamic, Davidic and Mosaic covenants fulfilled in Christ - Lk. 1:72; Acts 3:24; 7:8; Rom. 11:27; Gal. 3:17
- (3) Better new covenant in Christ - II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 7:22; 8:6,8,10; 9:15;10:16,29; 12:24; 13:20
- (4) Lord's Supper remembrance of new covenant in Christ - Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; I Cor. 11:25
- (5) bilateral human arrangements - Gal. 3:15; Heb. 9:16,17

## II. Biblical concepts of God's covenants with man.

### A. Conditional factor in the covenant arrangements of God with man.

1. There is a singularity and commonality to all of God's covenant arrangements with man.
  - a. God created man as a choosing creature with freedom of choice.
  - b. God always respects man's created freedom of choice
  - c. God's divinely initiated and arranged actions toward man
    - (1). allow for man's response and responsibility
    - (2). expect man's receptivity to God's activity - Faith
  - d. This condition of chosen receptivity and availability does not create a contingency of "conditionalism" whereby God is limited to act only when man acts.
  - e. There are consequences to man's choices
    - (1) Blessings and cursings  
Lev. 26:1-39  
Deut. 28:1-68
    - (2) Privileges and penalties
2. God's covenantal arrangement with physical Israel
  - a. God made a unilateral arrangement with Moses at Sinai
  - b. Physical peoples of Israel were expected to obey, keep, remember, do, and walk in the covenant arrangements.
  - c. They forgot, did not continue in (Heb. 8:9), transgressed (Heb. 9:15), profaned, rejected, broke (Jere. 31:32), and sinned against those arrangements.
  - d. They experienced the promised consequences of "curses," war, sickness, exile, death, and the termination of the covenant arrangement.
3. God's new covenant arrangement with Christians
  - a. God made unilateral arrangement with mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ.  
John 3:16 - "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.."
  - b. Men are expected to receive God's grace in Christ by the receptivity of faith  
Eph. 2:8,9 - "for by grace you have been saved through faith"
  - c. Such receptivity of faith must be maintained in the dynamic relationship of the Christian life  
Col. 2:6 - "As you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in Him"
  - d. There are consequences to our choices  
Col. 3:25 - "he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, without partiality"

I Cor. 3:13 - "the fire will test the quality of each man's work"

B. Change in God's covenant arrangement with man does not impinge upon the immutable, unchanging character of God.

1. God is immutable and unchanging  
Mal. 3:6 - "I, the Lord, do not change"  
Heb. 6:17,18 - "unchangeableness of His purposes"
2. God can change what He does, His *modus operandi*, without changing who He is or His purpose and objective.
  - a. Must not make God's being and character contingent on His performance and activity; Not: "To do is to be"
  - b. A change in covenant arrangement is not a change in God
3. God can have predetermined change within His unchanging purpose.
  - a. The transition from old covenant arrangement to new covenant arrangements was part of God's eternal plan; not "Plan B"
  - b. The unchanging continuity of God's purpose is in Jesus Christ; no duality of purpose.

C. Eternality of God's covenants with man.

1. God is eternal
  - a. God's attributes are exclusive and non-transferable
  - b. What God is, nothing else is.
2. God's covenant arrangements are referred to as "eternal"
  - a. old covenant - Gen. 9:16; 17:7,13,19; Lev. 24:8; II Sam. 23:5; I Chron. 16:7; Ps. 105:10; Isa. 24:5; 55:3;61:8; Jere. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 37:26
    - (1) Hebrew word can mean "long time" or "long duration" - cf. Isa. 42:14; 57:69; 64:5
    - (2) Such "eternal" covenants superseded and fulfilled according to spiritual intent
      - (a) Gen. 17:13 - Rom. 2:28,29
      - (b) Exod. 40:15 - Heb. 7:24
  - b. new covenant - Heb. 13:20
3. The eternality of God should not be attributed to some "thing," such as a covenant arrangement
  - a. God's eternality is expressed ontologically
  - b. When the Being of God is being expressed in the midst of His covenant arrangements, then quantitative and qualitative eternality is functioning.

D. Covenant differentiated from "contract"

1. Binding contracts can be covenant arrangements
2. God's new covenant arrangements with man should not be cast primarily into legal-contractual context.
  - a. A contract, if unilateral, becomes a deterministic imposition by a superior party
  - b. A contract, if bilateral between equal parties, often allows for unenforceable liberties to violate with impunity.
  - c. Legal contracts usually have categorical imperatives: "Thou shalt...", Do this...
    - (1) stipulations, requirements, binding conditions
    - (2) leads to legalism and "works"
  - d. Such obligatory obedience often makes God's action contingent on man's action.

3. God's new covenant arrangements do not have contractual features
  - a. Initiated by God's grace, maintained and preserved by God's grace
  - b. God acts indicative of His Being, rather than imposing imperatives.
    - (1) Promises
    - (2) I AM.; I will.; This is how it is designed to function
  - c. Relational obedience; ontological reality
    - (1) "listen under" - *hupakouo*
    - (2) dynamic of His own demands
4. Religion always tries to turn "covenant" into "contract"
  - a. False view of obedience
  - b. Bargain with God
- E. Covenant not to be equated with "testament"
  1. A "last will and testament" can be a covenant arrangement
    - a. Two passages in NT often interpreted in such context  
Gal. 3:15  
Heb. 9:15-17
    - b. These two passages are not necessarily to be interpreted in such a testator/testamentary context
  2. The idea of covenant arrangement is much broader than a legal death and distribution document
  3. The human titling of the "New Testament" (*He Kaine Diatheke*) can give a wrong impression of new covenant realities in Christ
    - a. projecting such as inheritance "rights" in the future at our death
    - b. allowing a body of literature to be regarded as "covenant"
      - (1) Old testament literature referred to as "book of covenant" - Exod 24:8; II Kgs. 23:2; II Cor. 3:14
      - (2) The literature itself must not be regarded as the "covenant" or "written contract"

### III. The old covenant and the new covenant.

- A. The comprehensive context of the New Testament refers to the differentiation between the old covenant and the new covenant arrangements of God with man.
  1. There is not an arbitrary sequence of covenants
  2. There are two major covenantal arrangements (Gal. 4:24)
  3. The epistle to the Hebrews in particular refers to the old covenant and the new covenant. (Heb. 8:8; 9:15; 12:24)
    - a. The new is "better" than the old (Heb. 7:22; 8:6)
    - b. The new is more effective than the old (Heb. 8:9)
    - c. The new was the intent and purpose of God from the beginning, previewed by the old.
- B. Contrasting the old covenant and the new covenant

<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
Preliminary, preparatory, precursor	Final, "once and for all" (Heb. 7:27; 9:12,26; 10:10,12,14), ultimate
Promise of fulfillment	Fulfillment of promise and prophecy
Prophecy of new covenant	(Jere. 31:31-34; Ezek. 37:26; Lk 1:72;

	Acts 3:25; 7:8; Rom 11:27; Gal 3:17,29)
Temporary, transitory, fading (II Cor. 3:11)	Permanent, remains (II Cor. 3:11; Heb 7:24), Eternality of Christ's life (Jn 3:16)
Pre-figuring, pictorial, preview Symbol/parable (Heb. 9:9) Pattern (Heb. 8:5), blueprint	Reality (Jn. 14:6)
Shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) Physical, racial, national	Substance (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1) Spiritual, re-birth, new heart and spirit (Jere. 32:39; Ezek. 37:14)
Exclusivistic, elitist (Eph. 2:12) Concealed, veiled God's intent (II Cor. 3:12-18)	Universal, non-discriminatory (Gal. 3:28) Reveals God's intent in Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2)
Pointed to Messiah Gen. 3:15 II Sam. 7:12-16 Isa. 9:6,7; 53:1-12	Enacted in Jesus Christ (Lk. 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-13)
Means to an end; not end in itself	Mediator (Heb. 9:15; 12:24; I Tim 2:5) Surety, Guarantee (Heb. 7:22)
Limited hope Animal sacrifices (Ex. 24:5,8; Heb 9:12,20) shedding of blood (Heb. 9:18,22)	End intent of God (Rom. 10:4; Eph. 1:3,10) Finished work - (Jn. 19:30) Better hope - (Heb. 7:19; 10:23; I Tim. 1:1) Sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:12; 13:20) Ratified by His blood (Heb. 9:12-24) Lamb of God
Commemorated Exodus (Exod. 12:14-28) "bread of affliction" (Deut 16:3)	Commemorated in Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; I Cor. 11:25)
Inferior Inadequate, insufficient (Heb. 9:1-10) (quite adequate to reveal man's inadequacy, but not to effect restoration with God and functional expression of divine character)	Superior, better, more excellent (Heb. 8:6,7) Adequate, sufficient, competency in Christ (Christian finds His adequacy in Christ - II Cor. 3:5)
- Could not make righteous (Gal. 2:21)	Functional expression of divine character Partake of divine nature (II Pet. 1:4)
- Could not forgive sin (Heb. 10:4,11) "rolled-over, rolled-back," IOU, stop-gap, cover-up, temporary discharge, held at bay, piled deeper and deeper	Made righteous in Christ - (Jer. 33:16) Rom. 5:19; II Cor. 3:9; 5:21
- Could not impart life (Gal. 3:21)	Holiness (Heb. 10:14)
- Could not cleanse conscience (Heb. 9:9)	Sins forgiven (Jere. 31:34; Ezek 16:63; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 11:27; Heb. 10:18)
- Could not perfect proper function (Heb. 7:19; 9:9; 10:1)	Saved forever - Heb. 7:25
Impotent, ineffectual (Heb. 7:18) Not profitable, beneficial, advantageous	Day of salvation (Isa 49:8; Jere 33:16) Life of God in Christ (John 10:10) Cleanses conscience (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) Perfects proper function of mankind (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 7:28; 10:14; 12:23)
Law, legislated standards of behavior, rules and regulations, codes of conduct (II Cor. 3:6,8); ordinances (Eph. 2:15)	Empowering, enabling Provision in Christ (II Cor. 3:4-6) Holy Spirit advantage (Ezek. 36:27; Jn. 16:7; II Cor. 3:6,7; 17,18)
Performance based obedience	Grace - the dynamic of God's activity to express His character "Law written in hearts" (Heb. 8:10; 10:16)
	Relationally based obedience - "listen

obligation, requirements achievement	under"
Behavior modification, ethics, morality	Obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5)
Epistemology, belief-system	Behavior manifestation of life of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:10,11)
Knowledge "about" God (Heb. 8:11)	Ontological presence of God's Being (Ezek. 37:27; Eph. 2:22)
Cerebral, instructional	Relational intimacy in "knowing"
Physical "people of God" (Exod. 6:7; 29:45;	God in Christ (Jere. 31:34; Heb. 8:11)
Deut. 27:9; II Sam. 7:23; Jere. 11:4)	Spiritual "People of God" (Jere 31:33,34; 32:38
Physical Israel (Exod. 34:27; Josh. 7:8)	Ezek. 37:27; II Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; I Pet. 2:9,10; Rev. 21:3)
External - "letter" (II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 2:29; 7:6)	Spiritual Israel (Jere. 31:31,33; Ezek. 34:30; 37:28; Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16)
Written, codified	Internal - Law written in hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16)
Book-religion (Jn. 5:39)	Investiture with dynamic presence and character of God
Ineffectual, external worship (Heb. 9:1-10; 10:1,2,11)	Effectual worship of God (Heb. 8:1-6; 9:1-14; 10:24,25; 13:15)
Indirect access through priests, (Heb. 9:8)	Direct access to God (II Cor. 3:12-18; Heb. 7:25; 10:19)
Day of Atonement	Reconciled - Rom. 5:10,11; II Cor 5:18
"Hide & seek" - II Cor. 3:12-18	Sin remembered no more - Jere. 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:17
Sin constantly remembered (Heb. 10:2,3)	Christ-conscious
Day of Atonement	Finished work of Christ (Jn. 19:30)
Sin-conscious, sin-confessing, sin-suppressing, sin-recounting	Punishment taken in Jesus Christ He took death consequences
Threat of punishment	No condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
Condemnation (II Cor. 3:9)	Liberating, freeing (II Cor. 3:17)
Static	Dynamic, vital, active, living
Ends in death; die trying to perform and conform (II Cor. 3:6,7), kills	Expresses life of God in Christ (II Cor. 3:6,7)
Physical kingdom	Reign of Christ as Lord, Lordship of Christ Kingdom of God; Theocratic rule Spiritual fulfillment of Davidic kingdom (Jere. 33:17; Ezek. 37:24)
Reveals the need for the new (Heb. 8:7)	Reveals "newness of life" in Christ (Rom. 6: Superior glory (II Cor. 3:7-11,18)
Inferior glory (II Cor. 3)	Forever functionally new (Ezek. 37:28) abides forever - Heb. 7:24 faultless - Heb. 8:7 consummation of ages - Heb. 9:26
Planned obsolescence (Heb. 8:13), served its purpose, outdated, out-moded, antiquated, thing of the past, faded out	Never broken, remains (II Cor. 3:11)
Taken away (Heb. 10:9), supplanted, superseded, done with	Surpasses old (II Cor. 3:10)
Set aside (Heb. 7:18), displaced, replaced, faded away (II Cor. 3:11,13), terminated, canceled, invalidated, disavowed, put away, annulled, abrogated, abolished, null and void, ceased to exist	Eternality of Christ's operative life (Jere. 32:40; Heb. 13:20)
	Eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15)

#### IV. Theological interpretations of God's covenants with man.

##### A. Dispensational theology

1. Commences with Calvinistic theology of divine decrees of deterministically imposed divine action.
  - a. Begin with what God does rather than Who God is.
  - b. Begin with plan, purpose, will and decrees of God, rather than Person of God.
2. Advocates an unconditional promise of God to Abraham with physical intent of fulfillment
3. Emphasizes the discontinuity of God's covenant arrangements with man.
  - a. Discontinuity of Israel and the Church
  - b. Postponed physical fulfillment of promises to Abraham
  - c. Church exists in the parenthetical interim
  - d. New covenant projected into future millennial kingdom, or divided into dual new covenant, one for the Church and one for Israel in millennium
4. Divides time into arbitrary determinations of discontinuous stages, ages or dispensations
  - a. Each time-frame is regarded to have distinct covenantal parameters.
  - b. Variant purposes of God within each dispensation.

##### B. Covenant theology or Reformed theology

1. Commences with Calvinistic theology of divine decrees of deterministically imposed divine action.
2. Advocates an unconditional spiritual election in the Messiah.
3. Emphasizes the continuity of God's covenant arrangement with man.
  - a. Continuous and singular covenant of grace.
  - b. Continuity of equivalence of Israel and the Church
  - c. Constancy of God's spiritual operation throughout time
  - d. Salvific efficacy and existence of Church prior to redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

##### C. Addressing the tenets and concerns of the popular theologies

1. The new covenant is not a renegotiated and modified renewal or extension of the old covenant. (Covenant theology)
2. A new covenant arrangement does not impinge upon the immutability, unchangeableness of God (Covenant theology's concern)
3. The new covenant is not a postponed fulfillment of the physical promises of God to the Jewish people (Dispensational theology)
4. The new covenant is not an abandonment or rejection of the Jewish people (Dispensational theology's concern)
5. The new covenant was God's intent from the beginning to fulfill His promises and restore mankind spiritually by His Son, Jesus Christ.

##### D. Christocentric theology

1. Recognizes that all of God's intents and purposes are centered in Jesus Christ.
2. Commences with the ontological character of God.
  - a. God does what He does, because He is Who He is.
  - b. Starts with the Person of God, rather than a particularly determined "plan"

3. Affirms the conditional factor of God's covenant arrangements with man. (cf. II.A.)
4. Recognizes the continuous and unchanging intent of God for the spiritual restoration of mankind in Jesus Christ.
5. Recognizes the discontinuity of God's covenant arrangements
  - a. Old covenant laid the preliminary groundwork to "set-up" the new covenant
  - b. New covenant implements the ultimate intent of God for the spiritual fulfillment of God's promises in the spiritual restoration of the spiritual life of God in man by the life of Jesus Christ.
6. Accepts the radical newness of the new covenant in the "newness of life" in Christ Jesus.