

Covenants Of The Lord

'God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there He put Adam whom He had formed (created). Out of the ground God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Tree of Life was in the middle of the garden and also the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil ... God commanded Adam saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you will not eat of it, for in the day you eat of it you will surely die' (Genesis 2:8 & 9; 16 & 17).

"Like Adam they have broken the covenant. They were unfaithful to Me there" (Hosea 6:7). The Lord had a covenant with Adam, but Adam broke his side of the agreement when he sinned. This initial covenant was not so much an agreement between two parties but solely a command to be obedient or die. What God wants from His people is total, absolute, trusting obedience and Adam failed to do that. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden was not a gnarled tree in the back corner of the garden. It was beautiful, it was right in the middle of the garden tempting them every day until they eventually ate of its fruit (Genesis 3:6). The broken covenant with Adam resulted in the flood because sin and violence had overtaken the earth. 'The earth was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with violence' (Genesis 6:11). All of God's holy covenants (in Hebrew, berith) were commands to be obedient and faithful to Him or suffer severe consequences. Unlike today when people make and break legal covenants or agreements with no serious consequences, when God makes a covenant He expects total, unwavering obedience. When we are obedient, He keeps His side of the covenant and we are blessed. When we disobey, God still keeps His side of the agreement but punishes the covenant breaker severely. Adam broke his covenant and was ejected from the Garden of Eden. When Abraham kept his covenant with God, he was blessed to the extreme. 'Abraham believed in the Lord and God reckoned it to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). To have a covenant with God we need to be like Abraham and believe, obey (Psalm 103:18) and have faith (Hebrews 11:1 to 12). The Hebrews were the only nation on earth to have holy covenants with God (Exodus 34:10; Deuteronomy 4:7 & 8).

The Lord's second and third holy covenants were with Noah. 'The Lord God said, "I will establish My covenant with you (Noah). You will enter the ship (Noah's Ark), you, your sons, your wife and your sons' wives with you." ... Noah did according to all God commanded him' (Genesis 6:18 & 22). This covenant was also more of a command than an agreement but Noah obeyed exactly and was blessed. God made another covenant with Noah but this time He included all of creation and the sign of this third holy covenant is the rainbow. 'God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him saying, "Behold I establish My covenant with you and with your offspring after you, and with every living creature with you; the birds, the livestock and every animal of the earth with you ... I will establish My covenant with you. The waters of the flood will not cut off all flesh again ... This is the token of the covenant I make between Me and you and every living creature with you for perpetual generations. I set My rainbow in the cloud and it will be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring a cloud over the earth the rainbow will be seen in the cloud and I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will never become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow will be in the cloud. I will look at it so I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh on the earth'" (Genesis 9:8 to 16). The beautiful token of the rainbow is something we still enjoy even though mankind broke this covenant too. The covenant with Noah guaranteed life on earth would continue.

The fourth holy covenant God made was with Abraham and all of his descendants. Abraham was a Hebrew (Genesis 14:13), a direct descendent of Noah's son Shem (Luke 3:34 to 36). This covenant was different. It was the first covenant requiring the shedding of blood ... male circumcision. 'In that day God made a covenant with Abram saying, "To your descendants I have given this land (later called Israel) from the river of Egypt (Nile) to the great river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). "I (God) will make My covenant between Me and you and will multiply you exceedingly ... Behold My covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations ... I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your descendants after you ... As for you, you will keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant you will keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you. Every male among you will be circumcised. You will be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin. It will be a token of the covenant between Me and you ... My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant ... As for Sarai your wife, you will not call her Sarai but her name will be Sarah (meaning princess) ... Sarah your wife will bear you a son. You will name him Isaac (meaning laughter). I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:2 to 21). As we can read here, this covenant was not an agreement between two parties, it required total obedience and subservience to God.

God's fifth covenant was again with Abraham. It was ratified or sealed in more blood when God told Abraham to bring Him a few animals. 'God said to Abraham, "Bring Me a heifer three years old, a female

goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon.” Abraham brought God all of these, divided them in the middle and laid each half opposite the other but he did not divide the birds ... When the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day God made a covenant with Abram saying, “To your descendents I have given this land from the river of Egypt (Nile) to the great river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:9, 10 & 17 & 18). God Himself walked between the halves of the animals. As Abraham watched, two clearly definable symbols of deities (furnace and torch) walked between the two halves of the beasts. On his part, Abraham and his descendants had to be painfully circumcised. Part of this promised was the land of Israel to be given to Abraham’s descendants until the end of the world. The Hebrews knew if they broke that covenant it would end in death so it was not as voluntary as one would think. The Hebrews continued with this blood-filled animal sacrifice covenant until the second temple was destroyed, but circumcision continues even though it was deemed unnecessary by the Apostles. God wants a spiritual circumcision of the ‘heart’ and ‘spirit’, not in the flesh because we are a new creation when we are committed to God as born-again believers (Romans 2:29; Galatians 6:15). This blood covenant with Abraham guaranteed the nation of the Children of Israel would continue on their own land, Israel.

Abraham made a covenant with his pagan neighbours for the sake of peace. The covenant was not part of God’s covenant but it did help secure the land (later Israel) for future generations of Abraham’s family (Genesis 21:27 to 24). After Abraham died, Isaac also had to make a covenant with the same neighbours for the sake of peace (Genesis 26:26 to 33). Jacob had to make a covenant with his father-in-law Laban after a fierce argument occurred between them over some household goods and because Jacob was taking his wives and children back to the Promised Land (Genesis 31:44). Joshua made covenants with their pagan neighbours for the sake of peace in Israel (Joshua 9:15 & 16). These covenants were for the sake of peace between the Children of Israel and their neighbours but they were not holy nor were they part of the Lord’s covenant. David (later the king) and Jonathan (son of Saul) were very close friends and made a brotherly covenant with each other (1 Samuel 18:3) but God did not instigate it. These covenants were not wrong, they were between people but they were not holy covenants.

The sixth holy covenant was initially with Moses and later included the Children of Israel. After the Israelites had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years (Exodus 12:40) and had become slaves, God remembered His covenant with Abraham and stepped in to rescue his descendents. ‘God heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God saw the Children (descendants) of Israel (Jacob) and God was concerned about them’ (Exodus 2:24 & 25). ‘God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I AM The Lord and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan (later Israel), the land of their travels in which they lived as strangers. I have heard the groaning of the Children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage and I have remembered My covenant”’ (Exodus 6:2 to 5). Three months after the Children of Israel left Egypt (Exodus 19:1), the Lord again reaffirmed His covenant with the Hebrews saying, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be My own possession from among all peoples for all the earth is Mine, and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5 & 6). The covenant with the Children of Israel was different again because it was not just a command from God to be obeyed, the Children of Israel willingly became the people of God. They pledged obedience and God pledged to love and protect them. To each of the commandments given to them they shouted, “Amen!” ‘Moses took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they said, “All that God has spoken we will do and be obedient.”’ Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has made with you concerning all these words” (Exodus 24:7 & 8). Moses and the Children of Israel made the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10 to 22). The Shabbat (Sabbath Day), Holy Feasts of the Lord and the Ark of the Covenant were the tokens of the covenant with Moses at Sinai. The Shabbat and the Feasts are still active today and can be seen by the devotion of the Jewish people in Israel. Included in this covenant was the promise of good health, healing, plenty of food and no miscarriages or premature birth of their children and livestock (Exodus 23:25 & 26; Deuteronomy 7:13 & 14).

The seventh covenant the Lord made was with Moses and the Children Of Israel. It was the Covenant of Salt. ‘Every offering of your meal offering you will season with salt. You will not allow the Salt of the Covenant of your God to be lacking from your meal offering. With all your offerings you will offer salt’ (Leviticus 2:13). ‘All the wave offerings of the holy things the Children of Israel offer to God have I given you, and your sons and your daughters with you as a portion forever. It is a Covenant of Salt forever before God to you and to your family with you’ (Numbers 18:19). ‘You know our God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, to him and to his sons by a Covenant of Salt’ (2 Chronicles 13:5). Salt is mentioned in the Bible over forty times. Salt purifies and preserves food by dehydrating cells, inhibiting the growth of bacteria. Salt also draws blood out of the cells of fresh meat, causing the meat to become kosher. All these thousands of years after the first Scriptural Covenant of Salt, the Jewish people still celebrate the same covenant with the Lord each

Shabbat. The word 'salt' as used in the Bible was the plain white salty grains taken from salty water. This salt is the seasoning not chemical 'salts' containing acids. Salt could be taken from the Salt Sea so it was abundant in Israel. Salt adds flavour. 'Can food that has no taste be eaten without salt? Is there any flavour in egg-white?' (Job 6:6). There are four functions of salt – for flavour, for preserving food, for purifying and cleansing and for healing. Salt is a natural antiseptic and it is a natural preservative. All believers in Jesus are required to do for our society what salt does naturally, as Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. If salt has lost its flavour, what good will it be? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out" (Matthew 5:13).

A covenant is a voluntary formal, solemn agreement, commitment, contract, pledge, promise, treaty, marriage, bond or oath between two parties in a relationship to accept responsibility for one another. All of these can be broken, withdrawn or cease when one of the two parties opts out or dies. Only the holy covenants with God between Himself and the Children of Israel have been made to remain timeless, generation after generation. These covenants have no time limit and are all related to redemption. The code of conduct found in Deuteronomy is part of the covenant between God and the Israelites. The covenant was to bring obedience to God's people. Just like the tree tempted Adam and Eve, with temptations all around them the Israelites failed also. God wanted the Israelites to follow Him out of love but the conditions during their wandering around were so harsh and the expectations of them were more than most of them could endure so the Israelites eventually failed and grumbled or turned to false gods. We must remember, all they had ever known in Egypt was idolatry. Their entire lives were dramatically different once they had left Egypt. There was no real home life or stability. They had to pack up and move at any time of the day or night and they had to carry everything. There were no trucks or even wagons in those days. 'Sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they travelled, by day and by night. When the cloud was taken up, they travelled. Whether it was two days, a month or a year the cloud stayed on the tabernacle remaining on it and the Children of Israel remained encamped and did not travel but when it was taken up they travelled' (Numbers 9:21 & 22). God deliberately made them go hungry and thirsty to force them to rely on Him (Exodus 15:25; 17:3; Deuteronomy 8:3). They had enemies all around them who killed some of them. Some died of snakebites, food poisoning, earthquakes, disease and by the judgement of God. The circumstances for the Children of Israel would have been very difficult for forty years. Yet through all of this suffering, God told them they were to be joyful (Deuteronomy 16:15).

The eighth holy covenant was between God and the Children of Israel led by Joshua. Once again it was a covenant of choice. 'Choose this day whom you will serve' (Joshua 24:15). 'The people said to Joshua, "We will serve our God and we will listen to His voice." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God and he took a great stone and set it up there under the oak tree that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone will be a witness against us for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It will be therefore a witness against you lest you deny your God." So Joshua sent the people away every one to their inheritance' (Joshua 24:24 to 28).

Some people consider the promises God made to King David to be a covenant but the word covenant was not used at the time. Certainly God made many promises to David but they were not ratified or confirmed like previous covenants with the patriarchs. David claimed on his deathbed he had made a covenant with the Lord but that was a personal, almost narcissistic covenant regarding David's personal salvation. David said, "Most certainly my house (the royal bloodline) is not so with God yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for it is all my salvation and all my desire, although He does not make it grow" (2 Samuel 23:5). The promises made to David were just promises even though they were similar to the promises made to Abraham in his covenant. God promised both men their names would be great (Genesis 12:2; 2 Samuel 7:9). They would both conquer their enemies (Genesis 22:17; 2 Samuel 7:11). Both men would have a close relationship with God (Genesis 17:7; 2 Samuel 7:20). Both men would have royal descendents (Genesis 17:6; 2 Samuel 7:12). The descendents of both men would have to keep the laws of God and be obedient (Genesis 18:19; 2 Samuel 7:14).

The ninth covenant of God is a new covenant ratified and soaked in sacrificial blood shed by Jesus Who poured out His blood for humanity. Animal sacrifices had to cease because Jesus was the Ultimate Sacrificial Lamb of God, so God made sure the temple was destroyed to stop all animal sacrifices. This covenant freed us from the law of sin and spiritual death (Romans 8:2). Jeremiah inferred the new covenant would be internal but Ezekiel makes the new covenant more dramatic by speaking of spiritual open heart surgery bringing a radical transformation, but once again God calls for utter obedience. God said, "Behold the days will come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant I made with their forefathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will put My law in their mind and in their heart will I write it. I will be their God and they will be My people" (Jeremiah 31:31 to 33). "I will put within you a new heart and a new spirit. I will take away the stony heart out of your

flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Holy Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes. You will keep My ordinances and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26 & 27). Both prophets gave us the essence of all the covenants which is, "I will be your God and you will be My people." Jesus said, "This is My blood of the new covenant poured out for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). 'When Jesus had given thanks, He broke the bread and said, "Take, eat. This is My body, which is broken for you. Do this in memory of Me." In the same way He took the cup after supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." ... As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes' (1 Corinthians 11:24 to 26). The new covenant brought all the expectations of previous covenants to fruition. Jesus fulfilled all of the expectations. He was the Ultimate Descendent of Abraham, the Messianic descendent of David, the fulfilment of Isaiah's Servant, the Redeemer of Israel and the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to the entire world including the Gentiles. Forgiveness of sin can only be made possible by accepting the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

The new covenant is superior to all of the earlier covenants. The contrast between the old and new covenants is not between 'bad' and 'good' but between 'good but temporary' and 'better or improved and eternal'. The best is yet to come and that will be when our Messiah comes to rule from Jerusalem. 'Jesus has obtained a more excellent ministry ... He is the mediator of a better covenant, which on better promises has been given as law. If that first covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for a second. Finding fault with the laws God said, "Behold, the days will come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant I made with their forefathers in the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, for they did not continue in My covenant and I disregarded them. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel. After those days I will put My laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God and they will be My people ... I will be merciful to their unrighteousness. I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more." When God says, "A new covenant," He has made the first covenant old. What is becoming old is near to disappearing' (Hebrews 8:6 to 13). 'The first covenant had ordinances of divine service and an earthly sanctuary ... For this reason Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant since His death has occurred for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant so those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance' (Hebrews 9:1 & 15). 'Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling, speaks better than that of Abel' (Hebrews 12:24).

The first three covenants with Adam and Noah applied to the human race. They were told to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with humanity (Genesis 1:28; 9:1 to 7). The following five covenants applied specifically to the descendents of Abraham, obedience to God and the increase of the Jewish people. Only the final and new covenant created by Jesus our Messiah was specifically about the redemption of humanity and the reconciliation of mankind with God, but always the Jews first then the Gentiles. Each holy covenant with God has its own token. The two main trees (of life and the other of the knowledge of good and evil) in the Garden of Eden were the tokens of Adam's covenant. The Ark was the token of the first covenant God made with Noah. The rainbow was the token of the second covenant God made with Noah. Circumcision was the token of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sacrificed animals were the tokens of the second covenant God made with Abraham. The Shabbat, Holy Feasts of the Lord and the Ark of the Covenant were the tokens of the covenant with Moses. Salt was token of the covenant God made with the Israelites. Joshua's tokens were the Oak at Shechem and the huge stone that lay beneath it. The blood and cross of Jesus were the tokens of the final and new covenant. As Christians we are privileged to be part of the ancient holy covenants between God, the patriots and the Children of Israel who have become modern Israeli's. We need to fully grasp the reality of life in a covenant with God. We can enjoy all of the privileges of life as a child of God. We have been adopted by the Lord (Ephesians 1:5) and are spiritual children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). The promises God made to Abraham in his covenant continues today. We are the ones who were in the heart of God when He said, "You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our forefathers saying to Abraham, 'In your descendents will all the families of the earth be blessed'" (Genesis 12:3; Acts 3:25).

Amen and God bless you.

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