

## Covenant as Treaty

### Introduction

As you are probably aware, the story of Biblical faith is the story of a relationship, and that relationship was based upon an agreement called a “covenant”. Biblical history is the story of how that relationship fared, its ups and downs, its heroes and villains. A covenant relationship represents a certain approach to life, thus it can be properly called a philosophy. Both in Old and New Testament times, differences among the people of God resulted from various views about the implications of covenant. Today, within the larger Christian community, we see many divisions, all of which relate to various views on the understanding of covenant, and particularly how each group related the Old Covenant to the New. All Judeo-Christian Theology is forever bound to, centered on and related to covenant. In short, Covenant is the single most important aspect relating to Christian Theology and Biblical understanding.

### Category Systems

The beginning of Biblical interpretation revolved around establishment of category systems that promote harmony within the Scriptures. Covenant is a concept that falls within the category systems of *Agreements*. There are many kinds of agreements, but not all of them are Biblical Covenants. Category systems have subcategories, and sub-sub categories. In the case of Biblical Covenants, they are a sub category of the sub-category of Treaties. Thus:

- I. Category System: Agreements (contracts)
  - A. Sub-category: Treaty
    1. Sub-category: Biblical Covenant

While this may seem odd at first, it is the method we use to understand every concept that is contained within the framework of human language. A treaty is an agreement, this is obvious. A covenant in the Bible is a treaty, therefore it is a type of agreement. We know that a covenant is a treaty because in Hebrew the word for covenant is *b'rth*. This word has two translations, both of which are proper: One is covenant and the other is treaty. Therefore a covenant in Scripture is a kind of treaty. When understood this way, Biblical covenants become much more easily understood. God and Man were at odds with one another after the fall of Adam in the Garden. God came to Abraham and offered him a treaty that would end hostilities. Christ came to this earth to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin so that a treaty could end hostilities between God and Man forever. Thus, a Biblical Covenant is a special kind of treaty that establishes a relationship between God and His Covenant People, and it includes the framework within which God and Man can experience a loving relationship. This relationship is chronicled in Sacred Scripture.

A Testament is the body of documents that contain the record of the Covenant, thus we have Old and New Testaments within the Bible. In modern usage, the word covenant means the agreement or contract itself, and testament means the body of documentation that contains the description, history and explanation of the covenant.

### Hebrew words closely associated with covenant:

***b'rth***: covenant or treaty

***alah***: the act of taking an oath to enter a covenant; a ceremony

***yada***: having a covenant relationship with, or behaving in a manner consistent with being a covenant partner; to know someone in a covenant context.

***hesed***: covenant-keeping, doing what is necessary to keep one's obligations under covenant terms and supporting the covenant partner; faithfulness in keeping covenant.

### Covenant Formulary

Covenant Formulary refers to the particular structure and content of a covenant. Biblical covenants are made up of *Parties*, *Stipulations (terms)* and *Promises (or blessings)*. A covenant was binding upon the parties to that covenant. It was not binding upon anyone else. Thus, those of us who are not blood descendants of Abraham are not entitled to inherit the land of Canaan, nor are we required to circumcise our sons. The Abrahamic Covenant was not universal in nature. Thus, one must be very careful in reading the Bible to understand the nature of the covenant in question or operation. The Bible is a treaty document. It means what it says in the language on the page, and is not anyone's personal divination tool for special revelation. The Bible is therefore intended to convey the same message to each and every reader; it is bound by the rules of grammar, and when taken in proper context, the original and true meaning or message will emerge.

### **Covenant Structure**

Covenants in the Old Testament in particular follow the customs of the near east of that day. They contain a structure which has been found within the last 40 years to mirror that of the surrounding peoples, the Hittites being important amongst them in light of recent manuscript discoveries. A covenant was not binding until an oath was sworn, and normally that oath involved the shedding of blood as the symbol of what would happen to the covenant party who neglected his obligations under the covenant. The structure of these covenants followed the lines set out below:

1. *Preamble*: "I am the Lord your God,... the God of your fathers... Jehovah." (Exodus 20)
2. *Historical Prologue*: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians... brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage..." (Exodus 19,20)
3. *Stipulations*: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me." (Deut. 5:7)  
"... make no covenants with them..." (Deut. 7:2)  
"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah" (Deut. 6:16; Exodus 17:7)  
(613 Laws of Moses, etc.)
4. *Provision for deposit of the treaty text and public review*: "The book of the Covenant was put in the Ark of the Covenant." (Exodus 25:16)
5. *List of witnesses to the treaty*: "I call upon Heaven and earth to witness.." (Deut. 4:26)
6. *Blessings and curses*: "A curse if you kept not all of the words..." (Deut. 27:26)
7. *Formal oath taking*: "All that is written in the Book, we shall do. And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people..." (Exodus 24:8)

### **Hesed as Critical Component of Covenant**

No covenant is worth its salt if the parties will not keep its terms and promises. In a Biblical covenant, you have parties consisting of God and Man. That God is a covenant-keeper is the cement that holds a covenant together. God because of His justice will keep His word, and because of His loving mercy will help us keep our word. Without this component, the entire concept falls apart. The Old Testament writers constantly refer to God's *hesed*. Our *hesed* is always the problem. We don't like to think about it, but a covenant is a conditional instrument. The stronger party (God) does not need to provide the blessing He has promised if we do not keep our part of the deal. See Deut. 28:1-14 for Old Covenant blessings, and 28:15ff. for the curses God would justly inflict if Israel did not keep up its end of things. *Hesed* with God is a given; with man it is the condition upon which all promises are based. Therefore Biblical covenants are *conditional promises*. All covenant-keeping should be based upon the relationship of the parties, not simply the legal relationship, but also upon the relational qualities of the relationship.

For the Hebrew, covenant-keeping was all about his behavior. The treaty stipulated which behaviors were acceptable and which behaviors were not acceptable. If a behavior was not mentioned, it

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was assumed to be permissible. *Hesed* is the essence of a covenant because it requires action on our part: keeping the covenant through our behavior (which is of necessity an action).

## Covenant as Theological Core

It is extremely difficult to find a major religious theme in the Bible that is not related to covenant, and thus we say that covenant is the theological core of all Judeo-Christian philosophy and theology. Consider the following:

**God:** the term used most often to modify the word "God" in the Old Testament is "covenant keeper. (Deut. 7:7-9)

**Man:** was made in God's image and given what no other creature was given, the ability to make moral choices. Man can follow God or not... a dog has no such choice. Man can choose to make a moral commitment (covenant) and to find ways to keep it. Micah asked what God required of man, and the answer was, "To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8) Note that all of these things are empty notions unless they are placed into the context of a previous moral commitment... a Covenant.

**Righteousness:** is keeping covenant. So it was with Adam, and in the Law (Deut. 6:25) and in the New Covenant (1John 3:7) What is "right" is what is stipulated in covenant.

**Justice:** in the Bible is deciding rightly (Deut. 33:21) What is right is stipulated in covenant.

**Hearing:** the Lord was doing what He said to do, and He said it in the covenant. (Deut. 28:2, 13, 15)

**Sin:** was breach of covenant or disobedience. (Deut. 28:58-61) John also said it was disobedience.

Offerings were made for breach of the Law (covenant) whether one knew it or not. (Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27)

**Sacrifices** were made to atone for sins committed. The sins were defined by covenant, and the atonement was prescribed by covenant. When the Old Covenant was done away with, so were the sacrifices. (Heb. 10:1-10)

**The Law** was the statement of stipulations of the Old Covenant.

**The People of God** were those who were parties to covenant.

**Blessings** were stipulated by covenant (Deut. 28:1-14)

**Curses** were stipulated by covenant (Deut. 28:15ff.)

**Prophets** were not crazies running around predicting the future. They were lawyers of the covenant sent by God to press His case against a law-breaking nation; to warn the people what will happen if they do not change their ways. They confessed that their teachings were based upon the Law of Moses (Dan. 9:7-19)

**The Lord's Supper** is a covenant renewal ceremony, as were the Old Testament sacrifices.

**Loving the Lord** is used in parallel with covenant-keeping

**Called, Elect, Elected, Chosen:** All of these are words that trace back to the Abrahamic Covenant.

**Determinate, Predetermined, Predestinated:** All trace back to God's plan to bless all mankind through Christ, the seed of woman and of Abraham... beginning with the call of Abraham.

**Grace:** This word deals with God's forbearance toward mankind. Through His *hesed* God offers grace to us when we fail. Paul's approach to grace was as an example of covenant love that breaks down all barriers.

**Inheritance** traces back to Genesis 12 where God set forth the land promise as an inheritance in the Abrahamic covenant.

**Kindness** is used 36 times in the Bible as a translation for *hesed*.

**Loving kindness** is an English rendering of *hesed*.

**Mercy** is shown by God to His children (who are established by covenant) as an example of His covenant keeping.

**Obey** means to keep the covenant.

**Peace** is established by a covenant relationship. It is the opposite of rebellion and enmity.

**Promise** is normally used to refer to covenant promises of God.

## Final Thoughts

If the concept of covenant is not the core of Biblical interpretation, then what is? The Old Testament contains the writings and story of the people of God. Being one of God's people is determined by being a party to a covenant. Everyone else is in opposition to God. This point is made repeatedly in the Bible, thus, how can there be any other central core?

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We have the same problem in the New Testament. What is the church? The church is Christ's Kingdom on earth... but how do you get into it? You get into it by becoming a party to the New Covenant that Christ established by the shedding of His blood. Therefore, the New Testament also has a covenant as its central core. There is no other logical possibility.

## The Basis of Biblical Thought

### Introduction

If you want to understand someone from a different culture, it helps to understand how people in that culture see things. This is a problem for Americans who conduct business with people in other cultures, here's an example: Suppose you had a meeting at 10 in the morning with a key person in a Japanese company. You fly to Tokyo, and as any good professional knows, you need to be prompt. You arrive 10 minutes early, are shown into the office, get through the introductions and say, "Thanks you for meeting with me today. I don't want to waste your valuable time, so let's get down to business." Your Japanese counterpart is offended by your rudeness! Let's say the same scenario takes place in Argentina. You arrive 10 minutes early, and are really irritated when you are shown in at 10:25. How could they have been so rude!

In both cases, your approach was that of a good American professional, but your counterparts are from different cultures. The Japanese never negotiate with someone they haven't gotten to know on a more personal level. You need to spend some time forging a relationship before getting down to business. In Latin cultures, time is viewed differently than it is here. 10:25 was very prompt, what's your problem, man?

In the same way, we must realize that the Hebrews view things much differently than Western cultures do today. If we approach the Bible with Western attitudes, we are likely to misunderstand what we read. This section seeks to examine the basic assumptions that people have in Bible study, and look at their sources: Western or Hebrew? Traditional Western thought examines the nature of things, while Hebrew thought gave a higher priority to the purpose of things.

### Western Ideas about Reality

Western thought originates with the Greeks, and the most influential of their thinkers was Plato, followed by his pupil Aristotle. They are by no means the only Greek thinkers, nor are they representatives of the only Greek philosophy, but they are dominant. Their ideas carried forward into modern thought, and dominate us to this day.

Plato's ideas about reality are interesting, and will start to sound familiar to you. He did not seek reality in the gods, he sought reality in nature itself. He studied the laws of nature and of human behavior and concluded that true reality was the reality of being. This he called 'spirit'. Spirit was the reality of all of the laws of nature and behavior, not the physical matter itself, for physical matter was not eternal, the laws behind it were. This is the approach of science, and the presupposition of materialism: Nature is all there is.

### Hebrew Ideas about Reality

Moses took quite a different approach. To him (thus to the Hebrew) reality consisted of nature and God; the natural and the supernatural. Matter existed as a result of God willing it. "Let there be light. And there was light." Moses did not look to nature for an understanding of God, nature was not God. While Plato was concerned with how god could relate to nature, Moses was concerned with what God wanted in and from nature. The concept of covenant fits in at this point, for it is within the context of covenant that we find out what God wants, and how He will relate to it. When God made covenant with Abraham, we learn two things from the Hebrew perspective: God exists, and God is willing to limit His power to have a relationship with Man. This would shock Plato!

### Materialism

As we have seen, the philosophy of materialism is the result of Greek thinking. It has several consequences we should consider. First, if nature is all there is, then everything is driven by nature, and nature itself is something of a machine. The laws of nature always apply: therefore everything is regulated by them. As a result we have phrases like, "Do what comes naturally," "He is a product of his environment" and so forth. Again, modern science takes this view most of the time. A Western analysis of

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the fall of Adam can be most interesting. Since Adam was a man, and he fell from fellowship from God through sin, therefore Man is now sinful and evil. As we will see, this point of view will result in serious error.

Hebrew thinking on the subject is completely the opposite of materialism. Man was created by God and placed into nature, in the case of Adam, the Garden. He was to be with nature, but above it. He would care for it, maintain it, and put it to good use. He would not be dominated by it, however. Nature would not determine man's fate in any way. Nature itself was created by God to have regularity. But that regularity could be interrupted. Consider: "Objects in motion tend to remain in motion and objects at rest tend to remain at rest." Science and materialism... and therefore Western thought accepts this statement, but the Hebrew would amend it: "Objects in motion tend to stay in motion, unless other forces intervene; and objects at rest tend to stay at rest unless other forces intervene." "Unless other forces intervene" is always present in Hebrew thought. We may wonder about the "other forces" and when we start thinking about it, there can be many. Any animal can intervene to a degree, God can intervene, and Man can intervene, and this is the point: God created Man with awesome potential; almost god-like potential to think, plan, feel and will. Man was not a product of environment or nature, but in the Image of God!

What follows then is the Hebrew and Christian moral code. Since Man was created in God's image, he had what the animals did not have: the ability to make moral choices. This leads to the idea that Man will be held accountable for what he does. The point here is that Man can choose to do whatever he wants, but there will be a consequence, and he can't choose what the consequence is... God does that. Paul taught about this concept at length. Consequences will be suffered by wrong-doers either by nature "who bear in their bodies the marks of their shame" (Romans 1:27) or by society "for there is no authority except what God has established" (Romans 13:1) or in the last judgment "when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel" (Romans 2:16). This is all in stark contrast with Greek thought on the matter.

### **God's Restraint of Power**

God is all powerful. Is power His greatest attribute? To Western thought, yes; to the Hebrew, no. Think it over carefully... When God created nature and set it in motion, He limited His power. True, creation itself was a powerful act, but now that it's created and functioning He has limited His own prerogative in toying with it. In other words, he has to give it room to operate. God gave up considerable power when He made man with a spiritual nature: thinking, feeling and willing. Allowing man to choose to sin against His stated will was a major limitation. When Adam sinned, God did not get His way! Just think about that! To not get one's own way is a major limitation. God limited Himself when He spoke to man in language; He could have just 'downloaded' information, but He limited Himself to language. Do you marvel at this? Do you find that amazing and shocking? Do you ever wonder why God didn't make man more of like a robot? If so, it's because you have a Western mindset, not a Hebrew one!

Are you ready to go a step further? What is the central difference between what is a sin, and what is not? Put another way, what is the difference between righteous behavior and unrighteous behavior. What is the difference between being a person of character, and an unprincipled person? Think carefully... because it probably isn't what you think. Speaking out loud is not sin, but telling a lie is. Sex within marriage is no sin, but outside it is. Possessing material goods is no sin, but stealing from someone else is a sin.

Do you have the answer yet? The difference is that righteousness requires restraint in the exercise of our powers or abilities. An act becomes a sin (unrighteous) when we do not exercise restraint. Western thought has missed this entirely. Restraint is God's most notable quality, and it should be yours, too. *God's greatest restraint is seen in His covenants.* In covenant, God limited His freedom of action tremendously, and for long periods. His *hesed* requires that He act in a certain way... "for He cannot deny Himself" (2Tim. 2:13) Once again, *restraint should be your greatest attribute as well!*

### **Greek Views of Man**

The Greeks had a very low view of man. Their mythology held that there was a war between Zeus and Titan. Titan, the evil one, was cast down to earth and burned to ashes by lightning. From Titan's ashes, came man. Man, therefore, was from evil. Plato expressed this thought in his names for the body, the head was the mind, the upper torso was called 'courage' and the lower torso 'appetite' or 'lust'. This forms the idea of dualism that dominated Greek philosophy: man's mind is like God, and his body like Titan. The mind or "life force" could be good, but our physical essence could not be anything other than evil. This philosophy caused great difficulty for the early church, as it is the philosophical origin of

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Gnosticism. They claimed that the soul was good, but the body was evil. Does this sound familiar? It is still with us today.

## Hebrew Views of Man

Man was created by God in His own image, his own reflection. Man did not have a soul, man was a soul. Man was the very pinnacle of creation. There was no thought that the body was evil. In fact, it was so closely associated with the mind, that the two were considered to be inseparable, thus there was no dualism for the Hebrew. The body could be weak, the soul could tire, but the body was never evil in and of itself. Evil resulted from behavior, and behavior from choices made. As a result of this philosophical view, man was entirely capable of entering into covenant. No other approach is consistent with it.

## Free Will and Depravity

When we assume the absolute power of God, without the concept of restraint for fellowship, God becomes the absolute cause of everything. Therefore, if man does wrong, if there is evil in man, and God is the cause of everything, then God must be the cause of evil. When Adam fell, man became what the Greeks said all along: no good. This idea is called "total depravity". Total depravity as a doctrine has been in the church for a long time, and has been written and taught widely. Martin Luther and John Calvin, for instance wrote of it often. The idea teaches that because of sin, man became evil, and can really do nothing else. The Bible text doesn't indicate this, however. Think: If man had become incapable of anything but evil, why would God waste His time trying to maintain a relationship with man? Why would God continue to give us choices? It doesn't make sense.

Consider Gen. 4:7; Deut. 30:20; 24:15; Is. 1:18; 7:14-16 Does "come, let us reason together" sound like God considers man totally depraved? Get real!

Total depravity is ridiculous! I have no desire to offend anyone, but this is destructive. It is Western thought, coming directly from the Greek philosophy that goes all the way back to Titan's ashes. It is found nowhere in the Bible. Remember, the very fact that God believed that man was sufficiently competent to enter a covenant demonstrates that God does not view us as totally depraved. **There is no counter argument to this fact. Period.**

## Summary of Contrasting Views

### Western (Greek) View

1. God is pure idea. Power is the best and greatest expression of God
2. Man came from the ashes of the evil Titan. Man is prone to evil. He is of matter, and matter is somehow wrong.
3. Matter is in the wrong. It is solid whereas spirit is idea or light. The more density, the more error.
4. Nature is like a machine; all parts are interconnected. All things in nature are determined by things in nature. Man is trapped, and wills as he is made to will.
5. Sin is failure to seek the "wisdom" or idea or laws governing nature and man, a failure to find or act according to such laws.
6. Salvation is the loss of body and living in an idea only kind of formless, colorless, non-material, no substance kind of extinction.
7. Religion is determining who controls what, and then practicing divination to find out what will happen in advance.

### Hebrew View

1. God is spirit who thinks, feels and wills. His glory is in his restraint of power.
2. Man was made in the image of God. He can do both good and evil. He can think, feel and will.
3. Matter was made by God as part of a system that was said to have been "good". Matter can be used for good or for evil.
4. Nature has regularity and interruptability. Man is not to a slave, but a master of nature. Man must react to stimuli but can control and redirect his response to it.
5. Sin is breach of fellowship or breach of God's word or doing anything to aid such lawlessness.
6. Salvation is reconciliation with God, living in the world forever, having sins forgiven.
7. Religion is living a life in harmony with the laws or will of God, and responding in every situation as God would also have responded.

## Major Old Testament Covenants:

**“All the leading terms and phrases of the New Testament are to be understood and explained by the history of the Jewish nation and God’s government of them”** Alexander Campbell

Three covenants from the Old Testament form the entire base of New Testament theology. Even though there are other covenants mentioned in the Old Testament, these three are referred to over and over by Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament Scriptures and almost exclusively provide the foundation of our Faith. It is only too sad that so many Christians fail to grasp them fully. These three covenants are the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants.

### The Abrahamic Covenant

The Jews began real history with Abraham. While other things may have happened before him, none of that was very important: Abraham was their beginning point. When an Israelite brought an offering to God, he was required to cite the *shema* or Abraham, see Deut. 26:5.

This fact is evident all through the Old Testament. We see it in such passages as Deut. 1:8; Ex. 32:11 ff.; Lev. 26:42; Ex. 33:1; and the following, which may be the most explicit demonstration of God’s motivation in giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites:

After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ( Deut. 9:4-5)

As you can see clearly here, God would act in concert with Israel, but not for Israel’s sake per se, rather he would act to fulfill His covenant with “Father” Abraham... and He would do so *in spite of* the Israelites themselves. Thus we can establish the core connection of Jewish history’s beginning with Abraham, and God’s covenant *hesed*... New Testament accounts also begin with Abraham. For example, Stephen began his account of redemption history with the call of Abraham, explaining the exodus as Moses did in the context of covenant; (Acts 7:17). In short, God called Abraham for reasons not revealed, tested his obedience, and made a covenant with him. Thus began the history of the relationship between God and men. (See Genesis 12:1-3.)

Here is a composite summary of the Abrahamic Covenant:

Parties:	God and Abraham, his posterity through Isaac and all slaves who were attached to that family Gen. 17:1 ff.
Terms:	Dwell in Canaan (12:4) Continue to trust God and Him only (14:22; 15:4-7) Circumcise all males (17:9) Establish Isaac as covenant heir (17:19) “Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.” (15:13)
Promises:	Canaan was to belong to the heirs of Abraham (15:18 ff.) They would become a great Nation (15:4) God was to rescue them from Egyptian captivity (17:16) Sarah was to have a “son of promise” (17:15) Isaac was to become the father of 12 nations )17:20) The covenant with Abraham would be renewed with Isaac (17:21) “...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (12:3)

### Abraham

As a man like any other, Abraham was not perfect. He made his share of mistakes, and it can certainly be argued that he made some very serious errors. He needed reassurance from God, and God tested him several times. Even after all of this, the New Testament writers used him as an example of how we should relate to God. He is the example of the person who satisfies God because he believed God. To the Hebrew, to believe is to receive, understand and act upon a message. (See Hebrews 11:16; James 2:21 ff.)

### **Sons of Covenant**

The covenant passed from Abraham to his son Isaac (Gen, 26:1-5) and onto Isaac's sons after that. Like Abraham, none of these men were perfect by any means, nor was the rest of the family. But God kept His part of the deal. Isaac was basically a moral man, but his son Jacob was quite another matter. Yet Jacob is considered great because he took the covenant seriously, in spite of his cheating, lies and other peccadilloes. Believing in, supporting, and enhancing the success of the covenant was morality. This was true then; it is true today.

### **The Davidic Covenant**

Once again, God chooses a man to enter covenant with. David, like Abraham was a good man, but not perfect; he had all of the human weaknesses. While his story is well known, his covenant is less well known. It follows a slightly different format than Abraham's or Moses' but the formulary is the same. This is a "vassal-grant" covenant, common in ancient times, which follows or ensues from a prior treaty: two in this case, the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. It can be summarized as follows:

Parties	God and David (2Sam. 7:12-17)
Terms:	Keep the Law of Moses satisfactorily (1Kings 2:2) Stay away from idols (1Kings 11:9) Protect and promote the covenant (1Kings 11:33)
Promises:	A descendant of David to be king (2Sam. 7:13) To punish but not forsake the royal house (2Sam. 7:15) Be ruler over one state only (1Kings 11:36) "...and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (1Kings 11:39; Luke 1:33)

It is important to note the conditionality of this covenant. (See 1Kings 2:12 ff.) Note that David in giving his charge to his son, Solomon makes it clear that they must obey and promote the covenant if they are to expect to receive its promises.



## The Old Covenant

With the Old Covenant, we are faced with a category system unfamiliar to the western philosophic world: the promise to a group could be virtually unconditional with God. That is. He would do what He had promised – with the group. An individual's right to the promise was very conditional. He had to keep the covenant. He might fall outside the blessings himself because of unbelief, but the group that was faithful could indeed inherit the benefit of the covenanted promise. This principle, if understood, will make Biblical theology considerably easier to grasp.

The covenant of Sinai has been described in four of the five books of the Pentateuch. Some summary will be necessary. This very brief analysis is helpful because it is essentially accurate and easily remembered. We shall analyze the covenant by the usual formulary.

Parties:	God and the Children of Israel (Lev 26:46)
Terms:	Keep the 613 Laws of Moses (Lev 26:14)
Promises:	All physical, national, earthly (Lev 26:1-13)

### Parties:

God never intended all nations on earth to keep the Law of Moses. No place can be found in the Treaty where Israel was to teach or impose the law upon other nations. They were not commanded to be "evangelistic" about their religion, as far as non-Israelites were concerned. We can summarize by stating again, the Sinai Treaty was made with the flesh and blood descendants of Abraham and none other. No one and no nation could simply opt into membership. One had to be born into the Old Covenant. Consider the following: The Lord has chosen you out of all peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you because you were more numerous than other peoples. . . but it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers (Deut. 7:6-8).

O Lord God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? (II Chron. 20:7).

The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 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 (Jer. 31:32)

In the New Testament Paul was quite emphatic about the limitation of the Old Covenant. He wrote the following passages.

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the Law... (Rom. 2:14)

What advantage is there in being a Jew? Much in every way. First of all they have been entrusted with the very words of God (Rom. 2:1).

What if God did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. As He says in Hosea. "I will call them. MY PEOPLE, who are not my people" (Rom 9:23)

### Terms:

The terms of the Mosaic covenant numbered 613 according to the Jewish count. There are several parallel names for the entire set. By the use of parallel words for the terms of the treaty, God meant to urge that all be kept. Below are samples of ways of saying the obligations of the Treaty. (Exod. 24:4, Num 4:44, Lev 27:14, Deut. 8:11, Deut. 28:9, Deut 30:11-20)

We see that obeying the covenant was identical with loving the Lord, and walking in His ways, listening to his voice, and clinging to Him. They are parallels. The Law was declared to have been able to be clearly understood. It was not too difficult for them. On the basis of keeping the covenant they were assured of God's aid in prosperity and long life in their new land. The foregoing clause was understood to be a formal statement of covenant, as it called upon witnesses to verify its formality and acceptance.

One thing the Law of Moses (another way of saying the Law of God) did was create a theocracy. It was a nation where God was the King. Religion and culture were one. Faith in God and governmental

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administration were linked in the covenant. This was no freedom of religion in such a state. Everything was religion. There was no difference between the sacred and the secular. The laws of the land were the laws of God. The Law, God's Torah, involved every aspect of life, from duties of king (Deut. 17:14), to public health (Lev. 13-14), to marriage and divorce (Deut. 22:13), to public holidays (Lev. 23:1), to type of sacrifices (Lev. 1-7), to approved and forbidden relationships (Lev. 18-19), foods (Lev. 11:1), sexual practices (Lev 12 and 18), inheritance (Num 36), public worship (Deut 12&13), administration of justice (Deut. 19:15), conscription for war (Deut. 20), camp sanitation (Deut. 23:12), slavery (Deut 15:12), public finance (Deut. 14:22), care of poor (Deut. 24:19 and many others. In its totality, the Old Covenant terms include provisions for ceremonial, sacrificial, moral and national law.

### **Promises:**

The promises written as part of the covenant are easily cataloged. They were all physical, national and immediate. They were classified by the Hebrews themselves as the positive promises, called blessings and the negative ones called curses.

They were physical blessings. A partial list from Deuteronomy is shown here:

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

- In the fruit of your womb
- And the crops of your land,
- And the young of your livestock,
- Your basket and your kneeding trough,
- Your enemies defeated before you,
- Abundant prosperity,
- You will lend, not borrow,
- And will be the head and not the tail (Deut. 28:1).

From Leviticus comes this partial list. It is but another way of saying what was said in Deuteronomy.

I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue till grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and you will live in safety in the land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. (Lev. 26:4)

The promises were all national. That is, they related to the entire nation and not simply to an individual. An individual might be very faithful amid a wicked generation suffer defeat and imprisonment along with the rest. There is no mention of eternal life in the entire Covenant, its promises all dealt with life on earth. The blood of Christ, the last sacrifice under the law, imparted life to all who had lived in good faith under the former system (Hebrews 9:15).

### **Administration of Death**

Paul called the Old Covenant the administration of death, and with good reason. Chiefly because the law of the land was also the laws of religion, the administrators of the covenant were also required to act on behalf of civil administration and execute judgment upon breakers of the Law. There is no way around the problem. In a theocracy, there is no room for religious failure without it also being civil rebellion. The 10 Commandments for example, each carry with it a command to kill any violator, with the exception of the last: Covetousness. Below is a list of commandments and passages where offenders were commanded to be put to death.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. "No other gods"             | "Shall be utterly destroyed" (Exod. 22:20) |
|                                | "But you shall kill him" (Deut. 13:6-10)   |
| 2. "No graven images"          | "Shall be put to death" (Deut. 17:6)       |
| 3. "Not take ... name in vain" | "Shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:16)       |
| 4. "Remember the Sabbath"      | "Stoned to death" (Num 15:36)              |
| 5. "Honor father & mother"     | "Shall be put to death: (Exod. 21:17)      |
| 6. "Do Not Kill"               | "Shall be put to death" (Exod. 21:12-14)   |

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7. "Do not commit adultery" "Both ... put to death" (Lev. 20:10)
8. "Do not steal" "He dies" (Exod. 22:2)
9. "False witness" "the kidnapper must die" (Deut. 24:7)  
"Purge the evil" (Deut. 19:19)
10. "Covetousness is idolatry" "Idolaters ... put to death" (Deut. 17:6)  
(Col. 3:5)

## Prophet and Covenant

### The nature of History

History is always an interesting subject, for it contains events that hold lasting significance. It is not merely a collection of all events that have ever taken place... such a collection would be impossible, in fact. History is a record of events that have significance for some reason. Anyone who records history, whether modern or ancient, begins with a philosophic point of view. One historian may have the point of view that political matters are most important, and this person would record political history. Another might believe that social trends were what mattered, and the result would be social history. In the case of the Bible, the most important consideration was the story of the relationship between the Jewish Nation and their God. The result is sacred history: the history of Covenant people.

The Old Testament Books of History are those that follow the Pentateuch. Interestingly, they are all written by prophets. These prophets are referred to as "former" prophets, for they collected information, and used their revelations from God to make a judgment on whether or not it was relevant to the story of Covenant. This also demonstrates for us the second element of history; events. All things that happen are not historical events, because most things that happen do not contain relevance to your philosophical point of view. For example, you get out of bed every day, but no biographer is likely to write a record of each time you get up in the morning. But the day you graduate from Medical School is an event that will shape your entire life, so that occurrence becomes an historical event. The third element of history is the actual meaning of an event. If you graduated from Medical School, but never practiced medicine, the event of your graduation may be little more than an asterisk in your biography. To sum up, history has three components: a unifying philosophy, events, and significant events. Since Old Testament History is recorded by prophets, the unifying philosophy of it is by necessity the history of Covenant.

### Two Occurrences

Two events recorded by the former prophets illustrate their unifying philosophy. The first is contained in 1 Kings 13. There is a young prophet and an old prophet, and in the end the young prophet dies because he defies God's instructions to him. The point is clear: obey the commands of God. The second is better known and is contained in 2 Kings Chapter 5. In this story, a Canaanite general named Naaman. If you read the chapter very carefully, you will see that a covenant is made:

Parties:	God, through the prophet Elisha and Naaman
Terms:	Dip yourself seven times in the Jordan
Promise:	You will be healed of leprosy

The bottom line here is, comply with the covenant terms that have been offered and live, or don't comply and die. This is an event that is cited by New Testament writers as an example of covenant-keeping. (2 Peter 2:1-22; 2 Peter 3:11-18) Both of these instances reflect the covenant priority of the authors, and of the Hebrews in general.

### Latter Prophets

Latter prophets are broken into two groups: Major and Minor prophets. These distinctions do not refer to their importance or lack of important, but rather to the size of the record (books) they left. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah Ezekiel and Daniel; the Minor Prophets are Hosea through Malachi. The latter prophets did not act as historians, but more in the role of Lawyers of the Covenant. They were preachers of God of the hour, with a message for that hour. With the coming of the latter prophets came an ominous new turn; the lawsuit motif.

### Lawsuit Model

In ancient treaties of the region, it was typical for a party that believed itself wronged by its treaty partner to send a message to the offending party requesting him to make corrections. If the corrections were not made, the offended party would send an official notice to the offending party demanding a hearing before the original witnesses to the treaty; all of this happening prior to force being used. Remember, when the two parties swore their oath and touched the blood of the oath-swearing animal, they gave permission to each other to shed their blood if they did not keep their oath, so this was a

serious process. It is not all that much different from legal proceedings today, other than in the remedies allowable by law. In the Old Covenant, the original witnesses were identified: see Deut. 30:19; 4:26. The prophet Micah provides a good illustration of this model:

1. Micah, attorney for the prosecution calls upon Israel to defend itself: "Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.'" (Micah 6:1)
2. He calls upon the Covenant witnesses: "Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel." (Micah 6:2)
3. In verses 3 and following, Micah makes God's case against the nation and makes it clear that the time for talk is over.  
Hosea took a similar approach, in laying out God's case. Following are the specific sins listed by the prophet in making his case:

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Terminology used</i>	<i>The Code</i>
1:3	"Departing from the Lord"	EX 20:1-3
1:5; 5:7	"Children conceived in sin"	EX 20:14
2:8	"Used for Baal"	EX 20:1
4:11	"to prostitution"	Deut. 5:18
4:6	"rejected knowledge"	Deut. 30:1-10
4:17 ff.	"no faithfulness of love of God"	Deut. 17:14 ff.
10:4-5	"false oaths... lawsuits"	Deut. 23:21
12:7-8	"dishonest scales"	Deut. 25:15
13:1-3	"sacrificing babies, kissing calves"	Deut. 18:9 ff.
9:7-8	"the prophet considered a fool"	Deut. 18:14 ff.

Note carefully that the sins or breeches of contract listed by the prophet here are all violations of the Law of Moses. This provides us with further evidence that the message of all of the prophets are within the Covenant context. They used both general and specific terms, but all of the terms they used belong in the same category system: total breach of faith to a covenant partner, and as such are more or less synonymous. Such terms include, but are not necessarily limited to the following, and make reference to what is expected of a covenant partner: love of God, justice, hearing his voice, faithfulness, *hesed* or mercy, walking in His way and obeying the voice of God. A similar chart can be made from the Books of the other prophets, as well.

### **Prophetic Curses**

Many of the passages contained in the Old Testament books of prophecy contain curses and doom. It is interesting to note that the curses contained are the curses specified in the Torah as the curses to be suffered in the event of breach or default of the people. Following is a list of some of them:

<i>Prophetic Vision</i>	<i>Echoing</i>	<i>The Torah</i>
Jer. 8:17	"terror, fever, drain away your life"	Lev. 26:15
Jer. 5:6	"wild animals against you"	Lev. 26:22
Eze. 5:10	"eating one's own children"	Lev. 26:29
Isa. 29:3	"besieged in cities..."	Deut. 28:53
Isa. 29:9	"stunned, staggering, but not from beer"	Deut. 28:29
Amos 6:7	"You noblemen, you shall be first"	Deut. 28:56 ff.
Micah 1:15	"I will bring a conqueror"	Deut. 28:49
Nahum 3:13	"Look at your troops; they are all (like) women!"	Lev. 26:36

## Summary

The prophets of the Old Testament demonstrate the conditionality of covenant. The whole notion of obey and live or disobey and die, which comes from the Law itself, relates to conditionality. God's *hesed* is very much evident as well. Note that time after time the prophets list ways in which God shows patience with a stiff-necked people, how God has come to their aid over and over, and how God has done everything possible to help them, and indeed how the sacrificial system itself provides a means to God's grace. In addition, the very fact that there were prophets sounding warnings at all is a sign of God's *hesed*. God gave warning after warning to the people that they had strayed from the path. Remember also that keeping covenant has two aspects: keeping faithfully what you have promised, and second helping your partner when he falls short. The other side of the covenant coin is that if your partner utterly fails to keep his obligations, you are no longer bound to keep your promises... and that is where the Old Testament prophets saw Israel going, and that is where they told the people they would end up.

A crisis of faith occurs when the people of God put their faith, love and hope on something other than God, and it becomes even more acute when they refuse to understand conditionality of covenant. This was certainly the case during the time of the pre-exile prophets. Jeremiah, for instance was telling of the woes to come, but others were telling the people that God would never allow Israel to be overthrown, for they were the elect of God. Sadly, these people could not comprehend conditionality. Yes, Torah said God would never forsake Israel... but it was conditional on Israel not forsaking God. Israel had long forsaken God, and the day of reckoning came!

## The End of the Old Covenant

The Jews went into exile as the prophets had said... some ended up in Babylon, others in Persia, from there many were scattered to Western Europe, India and even to Eastern China... as had been foretold, they were scattered to every nation under heaven. Some became high officials, other merchants and land owners, still others were sold into slavery. Women sold into slavery produced children with fathers from many lands, and a change was made: being Jewish no longer passed from the father, now it passed from the mother. Eventually, a small band was allowed by the Persian government to return to Jerusalem.

This group, headed by Nehemiah faced many obstacles, but they grew, and eventually rebuilt the city. The time came when this group of returnees renewed the Covenant with God in a striking ceremony. (Neh. 9:32-10:39) In this Covenant renewal, some interesting things emerge: First, the oath swearing was done only by those who can understand. The idea of covenant passage to any blood relation of Abraham, regardless of understanding or personal faith had been strained to its breaking point. This concept became very significant in the New Testament. Second, some Jews returned to Canaan, while many, many others did not. Since returning to the Land had more to do with covenant keeping than it did with blood, the idea of being a Jew by blood was weakened, and eventually resulted in the collapse of the Covenant.

Many other questions were raised by these circumstances. Some of them are: What would become of those who could return, but chose not to? Do you need to live in Canaan to receive the covenant promises? Could a man be a Jew, and yet not speak the language of the Torah? How could sins be atoned for without the Temple sacrifices as required by Law? Ezra was quite strict on these questions. Jews who returned were not enrolled unless they could prove with documentary evidence that they were of pure Jewish blood. Jews who had married foreign women were required to divorce. Jews who returned out of pure devotion to the Lord, but who were not of pure blood were left entirely out of the central power structure.

They had a city and a Temple, and they had Levites, but they had no king of Davidic blood... things were confused. Ezra and Nehemiah organized delegates to go to wealthy Jews abroad to collect donations for the Temple, and to attempt to convince them to return. These delegates, called Apostolos also organized groups of Jews who could not return into communities called synagogues. These synagogues became little Jewish outposts, where among other things they attempted to buy the freedom of Jewish slaves. From that time forward, the dispersed Jews, called Diaspora, played an important role in Bible history.

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Those who returned hardly personified the glorious visions of the prophets who had told of a glorious return of “multitudes” from exile. They had barely gotten things in order when the land was conquered by the Greeks led by Alexander the Great, and the result of this conquest was the “Hellenizing” of the culture, meaning that they would be overwhelmed by Greek thought, philosophy, language, architecture, religion and values.

### **The Greek Old Testament**

During the exile, a large number of Jews moved to the new city of Alexandria, built on orders of Alexander. This great ancient city had a famous library containing over 500,000 volumes, and it was there that scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. This translation, called the Septuagint, provided many advantages; among them it allowed the Jews to access the scriptures in the dominant language. In fact, it was the version of the Old Testament used during the time of Jesus and the early church. It also had disadvantages. The Greek translation tended to result in Greek definitions and philosophical interpretations in place of Hebrew definitions and understandings, and the confusion this caused are at the very heart of much of the divisions still with us to this day. For example, when the Greek word for “hearing” would be translated, a Greek would understand it to mean “listen to” whereas the Hebrew concept is to “hear and do” (Mt. 7:24) When the word “flesh” is used, the Greek understanding is philosophic: it refers to the evil nature inherent in the body of Man. The Hebrew would never allow the understanding of the human body to be inherently evil! Paul tells us that it refers to a wicked and sinful way of life, (Gal. 5:19) or a lifestyle dominated by the needs of the body. (Gal. 6:7)

The entire context of Hebrew Covenant is lost when it is understood in a Greek philosophical context, as we have seen previously.

### **Messianic Dream**

Additional confusion arose because many of the pre-exile prophets spoke of a Messiah. There were four theological strands in these prophecies. First, “the One to come” (Dan. 7:13) would be a “true son of David” (Isa. 11: ff.) and restore Israel. He would be “anointed” by God as was his father David (1Sam. 16:13)

Second, was that he would be a prophet (Deut. 18:15-18). He would be a “suffering servant” prophet. (Isa. 53:1 ff.) He would speak from God and lead the people as Moses and Elijah had done. He would be a “messenger” and a “covenant for the peoples” (Isa. 42:1-6; 61:1-6)

Third, he would be a priest. (Isa. 53:12) See also Psalm 110:4.

Fourth, he would be the “son of man” (Ps. 8:4) this figure is also seen in the writings of Ezekiel:

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.” (Ezekiel 33:7)

Clearly, this was the image Jesus Himself preferred, as he used it in reference to Himself more than any other. Daniel also used it:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

There were then, as there are now various ideas about what this passage means, but one thing is clear: it was understood by some in the age of the Apostles to mean that someone would come from Heaven to set up his own eternal kingdom. What is important to realize in this study is that the One who would come had the authority, that of king, prophet, priest and redeemer to set all things right, and when He arrived, Israel’s problems would be over.

### **The Last Promise to Abraham**

“And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3)

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In the writings of Joel, Isaiah and Jeremiah the word "gentile" began to be used... in fact, it was used in parallel with "peoples, nations and tongues". How indeed could they be blessed by the seed of Abraham, the holders of the promise of God? Consider:

"In that day I will restore  
David's fallen tent.  
I will repair its broken places,  
restore its ruins,  
and build it as it used to be,

so that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations that bear my name, "  
declares the LORD, who will do these things. (Amos 9:11-12; Cf. Acts 15:16-17)

Other passages indicate an expectation that the gentiles will share in the glory to come: (Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10) God's intention was to develop a people who would obey His commands, and when the day arrived, they would hear Him... and the day did come when the command that all of heaven had been waiting for came:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (Mark 16:15)

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

### **Hints of the End**

There are four hints in the Old Testament texts pointing toward an end or revision of the Old Covenant. They are listed below:

1. Genesis 3:15. This is the passage that indicates that the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head (Satan) and that the serpent will strike the offspring's heel. It is understood by many that the serpent was crushed at the cross, and also at the cross he struck the heel... but Paul put it differently: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20) Paul saw that it would ultimately be the church that crushed Satan for all mankind through the Gospel, which is the "power of God unto salvation". In order for this to occur, the Law of Moses must pass so that all mankind can be united, as it was in the Garden.

2. The promise to Abraham implies a covenant change, because if the Mosaic definitions of blessing remained, there was no room for any blessing to the gentiles. This is true because, as defined by the Law, the gentiles were to be utterly excluded from the blessings of the Covenant.

3. Deut. 18:15-18 tells us that there would be one to come after Moses, and as a result, the Jews should have expected that one to come after the giver of the Law would give a new law... a New Covenant. Peter spoke plainly of this in Acts 3:22-23...

For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

4. Jeremiah 31 tells directly that there will be a New Covenant... and it does so in exact and clear words:

"The time is coming," declares the LORD,  
"when I will make a new covenant



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with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah. (Jer. 31:31)

Read the entire passage: Jeremiah 31:31 ff. Note verse 34:

No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,"  
declares the LORD.  
"For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more."

No one will be a part of the New Covenant Jeremiah is talking about who does not *already* know the Lord. This is very different from the Old Covenant which is entered into by birth! In the New Covenant, *you must know the Lord and swear allegiance to Him in order to enter the Covenant*. The author of Hebrews slams the door on the issue:

<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 neighbor,  
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>f</sup>

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

**Jesus and the End of the Law**

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The coming of the Christ was foretold by many of the Old Testament prophets, and it was prepared for by the last and final prophet of the Old Covenant: John. When the Christ came, he had several issues to resolve, they are:

1) *What is it that God wanted in a man?* Jesus demonstrated what God had intended when he made Adam, and consequently is called the second Adam (1Cor. 15:22). Christ was the "image" in which man had been cast (Heb. 1:1-3). What God wanted in the Law of Moses was someone like Christ (Rom. 8:1-3). Jesus fulfilled the Law as God had wanted it fulfilled when he gave it at Mount Sinai (Matt. 5:17). What God wanted in the remnant he demonstrated in Christ, the true suffering servant (Matt. 12:17). He was what God wanted of the church that He was to establish (Eph. 4:12-16). He is the model for the new humanity that God intended to create in Christ (Eph. 2:15 ff.). God had intended for all humanity to have the character and personality of Christ from the very beginning (Rom. 8:29). As a consequence, Jesus needed to show that the Law was just and right and that man could, and should have kept it all along; He kept it as God had intended for it to be kept.

2) *Jesus needed to re-interpret the Law placing things in their proper perspective.* The Law had been intended to be the rule for the House of Israel, and not the guide for all mankind. If it had been, the specific ceremonies and one location Temple would be inappropriate. For this reason, Christ needed to set forth what ethic and duty would be when the kingdom came... He frequently contrasted what had been written with what he would bring, see Matt. 5:21 ff. Many of his teachings separated the principles contained in the Law from the specific statutes.

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matt. 22:36-39)

Here Jesus shows the application of the principle: if you love the Lord your God, you must also love your neighbor, as God loves all men. Jesus understood that all Law must have a priority system that takes into account the conflicts that will naturally arise, and his biggest charge against the Jewish legal authorities was that they had no sane priority system, instead preferring to apply whatever Law made them look good, and the other fellow look bad. (Mark 7:1 ff.; Heb. 1:3) When He died on the cross, the last sacrifice was finished; it was for that reason he had come into the world (John 12:27-28). When the goal was achieved, Jesus ended the Law: 3) *Jesus came to put an end to the Mosaic system by being its last sacrifice.*

It is finished. (John 19:28) In that moment the curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matt. 27:51)

Paul interpreted the meaning of this:

...having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:14-15)

The Law had outlived its usefulness and had actually been used to crucify the Son of God. As always, anything that placed the mission of God, the relationship with His people, or the success of the relationship, it became a vile thing. The very Torah was nailed to a tree, and as Torah says, "Cursed be anyone that hangeth on a tree." (Deut. 21:23) Jesus and the Torah, both servants of God were nailed to a tree. Jesus died for the sins identified by the Torah. When Jesus died, the Torah died with him. This is something that only Jesus could do, because He was God in a body (John 1:1, 14) and was therefore party of the first part in the Covenant; the Covenant was His to terminate and replace.

## **Jesus' Covenant Orientation**

The word covenant is not used much in the Gospels because it's a given. It is the only framework in which a religious discussion can take place, thus it need not be mentioned as pre-requisite. It was very clear however that significant tension developed between Jesus and the Jewish authorities because Jesus was intent on making significant changes in the three elements of the Covenant: the *parties, terms*

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*and promises.* Much of what He did in the Gospels is to demonstrate His authority to do so, and much is also said about each of these elements.

In the case of the parties, the Old Covenant parties are God and the blood descendants of Abraham through Isaac. Jesus had come to sweep that away:

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:11-13)

Christ's philosophy of covenant is similar to the Old Covenant in certain ways. He saw a covenant relationship as being about mutuality, but He held men responsible for evidence presented, and realized that words open men's hearts. Words opened hearts so that men could be born of the Spirit.

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. (John 6:63)

Jesus said several times that men who do not choose the blessings of God do so because they prefer the praise of men. In so stating, he indicates not that men are deprived, but rather holds them responsible for their choices:

How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? (John 5:44)

Jesus also set about to change the terms of covenant. In so doing, His approach focused on the positive benefits rather than upon the penalties for breach. Whereas the Law focused on "Cursed be..." Jesus' focus was on "Blessed are..." and the differences are striking:

<b>Old</b>	<b>New</b>
Cursed is the man who carves an image	Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
Cursed is the man who moves a boundary stone	Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth
Cursed is the man who dishonors...	Blessed are the merciful...
Cursed is the man who withholds justice	Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness
Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person	Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God
Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law (Deut. 27:15 ff.)	Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. (Matt. 5:1 ff.)

Jesus summed up all His ethical principles into one definition: Godliness was the sum of ethic... "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48) This is inadequate without a thorough description of what our heavenly Father is like, and Jesus provided that explanation. He described God as being much like an earthly father who loves his children. Our Heavenly Father loves His children and does well for them (Matt. 7:7). He lets His children go their own way (Luke 15:11 ff.). He welcomed home the prodigal son with joy and weeping. The best definition of God-likeness was Jesus; He and the Father were one (John 10:30). Jesus embodied God's personality and character, Christ-likeness was God-likeness.

A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40)

### **The Death and Resurrection of Christ**

Jesus saw His death as formal covenant ratification, and that fact can be seen in the following verses:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:20)

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This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matt. 26:28)

The words “this is the blood of the covenant” were intended to refer to a formal covenant oath taking (Exod. 24:8). God was promising in the oath remission of sins through Christ, and was signing the New Covenant in blood. As surely as Christ died on the cross, God will save to the uttermost all that draw near to Him in Christ. (Heb. 10:19-23) The cross was intended to show God’s goodness and mercy to man, and to draw men to repentance...

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (John 12:32)

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4)

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

God did at the cross what the Old Covenant promises had not done, He broke men’s hearts and gained their allegiance... something that says quite a bit about God’s character and His love for us. The cross assured all men of God’s love toward us:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1Cor. 15:20)

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will rest secure,  
because you will not abandon me to the grave,  
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.  
You have made known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:9-11)

God had indeed kept His commitment to Christ by raising Him from the dead; the first of millions! Paul called the resurrection a “guarantee offering” using the old sacrificial system as a frame of reference to illustrate the fact that the resurrection of Christ confirmed all that Christ had taught and promised.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:4)

### **The Great Commission**

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

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and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Jesus invoked authority to begin His commission. When someone invokes authority, what he is doing is communicating to his hearers that what follows is very important. If you ever read words that say something like: "I, \_\_\_\_\_, president of the United States of America..." you would know right away that the president is making an official statement placing the whole power of his office behind it. When Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..." He is letting you know that you had better listen to what He is telling you, because it is coming from the highest authority in the entire universe, and that this official statement had better be taken seriously!

In the Great Commission, Jesus was laying out terms of service: go, make disciples, baptizing, teaching to obey. These four *actions* are not suggestions, or something to be left to the professionals: they are direct covenant commands from God Almighty through Jesus Christ to you! In fact, they look an awful lot like a covenant:

Parties:	God, and the disciples of Christ
Terms:	Go, make disciples, baptizing, teaching to obey Christ
Promises:	"I will be with you always"

This is not a command that will be measured by the attempt, but by the results. It isn't enough just to go, we must MAKE DISCIPLES. More than any other single passage of scripture, the Great Commission illustrates the end of the Old Covenant!

## The Apostolic Doctrine of Two Covenants...Part 1

### Introduction

The great Commission had been given, and the plan of Ages was being revealed... the Apostles waited in Jerusalem until they received "power from on high". God wanted it to be clear that the Apostles had the authority to speak for Christ.

I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. (John 17:14-20a)

The Apostles understood that they had the authority to speak for Christ, that to lie to them was to lie to the Spirit, that to disobey them was to disobey the Spirit, and that to listen to them was to hear what the Spirit was saying.

Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:4)

...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1Cor. 2:10-13)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1Thess. 2:13)

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Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1John 4:1-6)

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1Thess. 4:8)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. (2Thess. 2:15)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:18-25)

There are two basic assumptions at work here: First that the Apostles spoke with authority. Second, the Apostles were not only men who understood what Jesus wanted, but that they were faithful in doing what Jesus wanted. If we accept these assumptions, we can then also understand their message: the church and the Great Commission. In addition, we can look at the activities of the Apostles, and see what Jesus wanted. The Apostles established local churches and nurtured their growth: Therefore that is what Jesus wanted.

### **Acts and the New Covenant People**

When Jesus returned to Heaven, the "last age" began. (Acts 2:17) By the Spirit, the sad events of the Tower of Babel were reversed, and all men heard the same message; the Gospel of Christ. They declared Him to be risen: Messiah...Christ.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38)

Jesus had given to the Apostles the authority to set the terms of entry:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 16:19)

The new church was organized by the Apostles into local assemblies that were devoted to “the Apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42) and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47)

## Two Philosophies of Mission

In the book of Acts, we see two methods of mission. They were not necessarily in conflict, both were successful, and they both fulfilled prophecy relating to the period. Both of them have huge theological implications...

1. The *centripetal* theology of mission was practiced first. This is an inward theology. In the early days, the Apostles, except for Paul, remained in Jerusalem, and seldom left the city. Even when Peter eventually did so, at the express instruction of the Spirit, he was called to account by the Jerusalem church for having done so. (Acts 11:1-4) Later, of course, Paul would begin the process of openly taking the good news to the Gentiles. The Apostles would go daily to the Temple to instruct the people concerning the Lord, and such prophetic passages as Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1 ff., and Isaiah 66:18-19 demonstrate this era. Luke, in Acts, took pains to show parallels between passages describing the glorious reign of Messiah and what was happening at the time:

Isa. 65:25	The wolf and the lamb will feed together	Acts 6:1-7
Isa. 66:12	I will extend peace to her...	Acts 9:31
Isa. 66:12	And the wealth of nations like a flowing stream	1Cor. 16:1-4
Jer. 31:19	And I will add to her numbers	Acts 2:47
Jer. 33:17	David will never fail to have...	Acts 7:56
Isa. 49:6b	I will make you a light to the Gentiles	Acts 10-11
Isa. 42:7	Free captives from prison	Acts 5:19
	...to release from the dungeon... darkness	Acts 16:26
Isa. 42:6	To be a covenant to the people	Acts 3:25
Isa. 42:1	I will put my Spirit on him...	Acts 7:55
Isa. 42:7	To open the eyes of the blind...	Acts 9:18
Isa. 44:18	Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past...	Acts 17:34
Isa. 44:25	And remember your sin no more	Acts 3:19-21
Isa. 56:4	To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths...	Acts 8:38
Amos 9:11-12	And Gentiles that bear my name	Acts 11:26
Amos 9:11-12	I will rebuild the fallen house of David	Acts 15:14-16
Isa. 2:4	And settle disputes for many peoples	Acts 15:1-8
Isa. 2:17	Ananias heard this he fell down and dies	Acts 5:5

While there are many more examples, this should suffice to see the Apostles’ thinking. The Gentiles flowed into Jerusalem and brought their wealth with them which they laid at the Apostles’ feet, and the Word flowed out to the entire world when they returned home: Isaiah’s prophecies came true.

2. The other philosophy of mission is called *centrifugal*, meaning that it flowed out from the center. When Paul, on his journeys went out to the ends of the known world took the Gospel to the nations, this is what he was doing. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, this has become the mainstay of Christian Missions.

## The Apostolic Doctrine of Two Covenants...Part 2

### Introduction

Acts Chapter 10 tells the story of the conversion of Cornelius, the first recorded Gentile to be saved through Christ. This event was to have great consequences in the early church. The central question became: does a person need to become a Jew before becoming a Christian?

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When the news concerning Peter and Cornelius reached Jerusalem, a conference was held in which Peter was called to account. Many of the brothers there insisted that Cornelius be circumcised and follow the Law, even though they had already been baptized into Christ, for it was almost unthinkable to them that anyone other than a Jew could actually be saved. Peter recalled the events in Acts 11:1-18 and ended his account with this question: "So if God gave them the same gift that he gave to us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? (Acts 11:17) This question put the matter to rest in the First Jerusalem Conference, but not for very long!

## **Second Jerusalem Conference: Crisis of covenant**

Paul and Barnabas were reaping great results for the Gospel in Antioch and the Eastern Mediterranean area, and the old question soon arose: Must a Gentile become a Jew in order to receive Christ? Paul returned to Jerusalem to once again put the question to the Apostles. It is interesting, in light of the outcome of the previous Conference that so many still struggled with it. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." (Acts 15:5)

Those Christians who had been of the party of the Pharisees had believed that Jesus was the Lord of Israel, and that the Torah was Christian Law. But Paul pointed out:

He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are (Acts 15:9-11)

The assertions of Peter and Paul make it clear that not only can Gentiles be saved through faith in Christ without becoming Jews, but this is also the way Jews are to be saved. James was next to speak:

When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

“After this I will return  
and rebuild David's fallen tent.  
Its ruins I will rebuild,  
and I will restore it,  
that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,  
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,  
says the Lord, who does these things'  
that have been known for ages.  
(Acts 15:13-18)

Finally, the Conference determined once and for all (minus some naysayers who gave Paul problems later) that neither circumcision nor the Law of Moses were necessary for Salvation.

In this determination, backed up by the accounts of Peter and Paul, and discussed later, the matter was put to rest, and a very interesting Theology begins to emerge, that of two covenants. Is the Old Covenant still in effect? The answer is clearly "no". Does being a Jew result in Salvation? Again, the

answer is "no". If the Law cannot save you, and being a Jew cannot save you, then is Abraham's covenant still in effect?

To answer this question, consider this: why did the Apostles determine that circumcision was not necessary? After all, circumcision is the sign of the Old Covenant, right? Wrong! It is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant! If that Covenant were effective, then wouldn't it be necessary to circumcise all males? If you say "no" because the Covenant only passed through Abraham's seed, you would only be half right. Was anyone else, other than Abraham and his physical descendants in that Covenant? Remember that Abraham *and his entire household* were circumcised. A Christian is a member of the



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household of Christ! If the former covenant were in effect, then one could enter it through circumcision... but it wasn't, because it had been entirely fulfilled through Christ.

At this time there was only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism for all (Eph. 4:1,2) As Paul would later write, and we will study next week, the true Israel was according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh. Jesus was the true seed of Abraham.

## The Apostolic Doctrine of Two Covenants... Part 3

### Introduction

The Apostles came to view the Books of the Old Testament as relating to an entirely different relationship from that of the Christian. In fact, they viewed the covenants of the Old Testament as being altogether separate from Christ's Covenant. They treated the religion of the Old Testament as a completely different covenant from that of Christ, and the result was a clear-cut doctrine of two covenants. This clear distinction is demonstrated in the following passages.

### Romans 7

Here, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to demonstrate what happens to a bride when her husband dies; she is free from the binds of marriage, and able to enter into another covenant. In the analogy, the husband represents the Law (Old Covenant) and the wife represents those who were under the Law. When the husband (Law) dies, the wife (us) is free to marry (enter the New Covenant).

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. (Romans 7:4)

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:6)

In this chapter, Paul points out to us that those who lived under the Old Covenant terms werereleased from those terms when that Covenant died on the cross along with Christ, and that as a consequence, we are not bound by the terms of the Old Covenant.

### Romans 10

Here Paul discusses the fact that in the New Covenant, Christ is righteousness, and that those who are "in Christ" are righteous because Christ is righteous. Under the Law, righteousness was defined by a written code, and we were left to follow it; something resulting in a hopeless situation.

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:3-4)

### 2 Corinthians 3

In this chapter, Paul has put together an amazing comparison and contrast of the two Covenants in vv. 6-18:

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Tables of stone	New covenant
In letter	In Spirit
Kills	Gives life
Glory	Greater glory
Fading	Permanent
Brings condemnation	Brings righteousness
Israelites look...	We behold...
At Moses' face	Glory of the Lord
Which is veiled	With unveiled face
Veil lies over their minds	Veil is taken away
Mind hardened	We are being transformed
	The Lord is the Spirit
	There is freedom

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It was all or nothing... there was no middle ground. Moses had mediated a Covenant that faded as he faded, and now all things were new in Christ. The Ten Commandments were part of the old treaty, and if parts of the Commandments were to be kept, it was because they had been re-authorized by Christ through His Apostles, not because they had been part of the old Law.

## **Galatians 2**

We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)

Under the Law, men were justified by keeping the standard of the written code. This is no longer possible because the code has been done away with at the cross. Even if a man can keep the Law, in all of its 613 dictates... he will not be justified, as even the Jew, a descendant of Abraham cannot be justified by it any longer. Justification comes by our living "in Christ" as Christ would have us to live; justified by Christ's righteousness and not by our own. Under the Law, a man's conscience can never be free from guilt. It is only through Christ that a man can be freed.

## **Galatians 3**

Paul's treatment here of Jesus as the "seed of Abraham" is one of his strongest arguments.

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8)

Abraham had more than one son by more than one wife, but only through the son of promise was this blessing passed: Isaac. Now, Jesus was in the place of Isaac, and only through Him would blessing be passed. You were either the blood of Isaac or you were not; now you are either the blood of Christ or you are not.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Abraham had entered into covenant for himself. After Abraham, people entered into covenant by the blood of Isaac. From Calvary forward, people entered into covenant by the blood of Christ. Abraham believed God, and that was considered righteousness by God. Now, all men must believe God, and the result is that they are counted righteous by the righteousness of Christ. His strongest statement follows:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26 ff.)

At the Second Jerusalem Conference, Peter had boldly stated that Jews, like Gentiles, were saved by faith in Christ apart from the Law. Here, Paul takes away the last shred of pride in being a physical descendant of Abraham; he declares the Gentiles to be Israelites: If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

A Jew not in Christ was "not my people" (Romans 9:25). A Gentile in Christ was part of "all Israel" (Romans 11:26). The "all Israel" about which Paul spoke was related to the covenant of the "deliverer from Zion":

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;  
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins." (Romans 11:26-27)

## **Galatians 4**

In this chapter, Paul uses an interesting metaphor: Hagar represents the two major covenants of the Old Testament, the Mosaic and Abrahamic Covenants. Paul claims that the Law was added to the Abrahamic covenant, and in effect only until the last promise of the former covenant was fulfilled in Christ. Sarah represents the New Covenant, and the result of the New Covenant is the ouster of both Hagar and her son.

These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written:

"Be glad, O barren woman,  
who bears no children;  
break forth and cry aloud,  
you who have no labor pains;  
because more are the children of the desolate woman  
than of her who has a husband."

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." (Galatians 4:24-30)

Jerusalem is another name for the church when so noted:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (Hebrews 12:22 ff.)

When Paul said "cast out" he was really referring to the casting out of all non-Israelites by faith. For him, there was absolutely no possibility of two covenants operating side by side, one for the Jew and one for the Christian. There were two covenants, but the first one was over... and that was all there was to it!

## **Ephesians 2**

Here, Paul is dealing again with the same issue. Once there had been two kinds of people: Jew and Gentile. The wall between them had been created by the Law of Moses (2:15). Now, the wall was gone forever!

by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:15-20)

The Old Law was gone, but the history of redemption continued seamlessly. Because the New Covenant in Christ was the fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic systems, it continued the history of the relationship forward into the future for the rest of time, and the old systems ceased to function.

## **Hebrews 7**

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For it is declared:

"You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 7:17)

The Law of Moses provided a priesthood from the Levites. If Jesus is a priest, it is an illegal priesthood! But the argument is made that Abraham bowed down to Melchizedek, thus indicating that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham. If this is so, then Aaron and Levi are also subservient to Melchizedek, and ought to bow before him. Jesus, as a priest of the order of Melchizedek is also superior to Abraham, Aaron and Levi: therefore all Levites and all Jews must bow down to Him. This creates a choice: The Law or Christ. If the choice is for Christ, the priesthood of the Law is replaced:

For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. (Hebrews 7:12)

The Law was abolished.

## The New Covenant

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
with burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you were not pleased.

Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, O God.' " First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)

Jesus and the Apostles recognized the meaning and formulary of the concept of covenant to be the same as it had always been throughout the Old Testament period, but they saw the emphasis of covenant as being different. For them, it was different in a radical and revolutionary way: it was not about *form*, it was about *purpose*. It had been understood that God's *will* had been expressed in our covenant duty, but Christ and the Apostles used the word *will* as a synonym for the word *covenant*, and in this they changed its emphasis: covenant in the New Testament period is all about *purpose*. It was no longer a matter of WHAT the covenant was, but WHY God was making a treaty with men.

## Christ as Covenant

Jesus Himself was Covenant:

"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;

I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you

to be a covenant for the people

and a light for the Gentiles,

to open eyes that are blind,

to free captives from prison

and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

(Isaiah 42:6-7)

Jesus quoted this passage in Matthew 12... He stood between God and Man: He was Man's only access to God...He was Covenant.

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Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7)

This declaration immediately creates two camps: those "in Christ" and those "outside Christ". There is opposition and hostility between the two. Those who are outside of Christ are described by Paul as "dead, culture led, philosophy led, Satan led, disobedient, separated, excluded, without God, without hope, hostile, far off, foreigners and aliens. (Eph. 2:1 ff.) and those "in Christ" as "raised up, saved, recreated, brought near, at peace..." (Eph. 2:14 ff.). In this, Paul is using covenant terminology, and thus his orientation is clear. In a covenant context, those who were "in Christ" are Covenant Parties.

### **Baptism as Pledge**

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' (Acts 22:16)

In Noah's time, water was judgment; it put to death the sin of the times. Water also saved Noah, by God's grace. Water was judgment, and it separated the living from the dead. The water of Christ is also a judgment: it is a judgment on the sin of the old life, and a pledge by both God and convert. The convert pledges his life to God; God pledged admission to covenant.

and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Peter 3:21)

The water, as death, provided a Hebrew oath or pledge. Prayer cannot provide this, and a careful inspection of the New Testament will reveal the fact that there is no conversion narrative or account that ends with a prayer of conversion; a "sinner's prayer". Each and every single time there is a conversion narrative, there is a Baptism. It is simply inconceivable that there can be a covenant pledge without death.

By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:2-7)

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

### **Baptism and Belief**

There is nothing magic about Baptism. It is not a magic ritual you can perform and receive a magic result, and there is no special significance to water as opposed to some other substance other than water is required by covenant. The person being Baptized is giving his testimony of his faith and belief that Jesus died, was buried and rose again. In fact, his testimony is "I believe that Jesus was buried and rose up again, just as I am going into this water, cut off from life, and will be raised up again." He is further saying, "As Jesus died and rose again, so also my old way of life is dead and buried... and as Jesus rose up again, so also I will rise up again in a new life." This is the crucial connection between Baptism and belief, and either one without the other is not productive.

There are many errors among Christians at the present time regarding Baptism, and while this work does not have the purpose of debating Baptism, one thing needs to be very clear: When a person enters the water of Baptism, they are saying "yes" to faith in Christ, and they are saying "yes" to the

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covenant command to be Baptized. One may not enter covenant by saying “yes” to faith in Christ, and “no” to the covenant command to be Baptized!

So far we have the following formulary:

## **New Covenant**

**Parties:** Christ and those “in Christ”

**Terms:** live “like Christ”

**Promises:** Eternity “with Christ”

Being “in Christ” requires entry into the New Covenant. This is accomplished by a partnership between belief and obedience; believing Christ, and being Baptized into Christ.

## **New Covenant Terms**

In the Old Covenant, man’s promises were the terms of the covenant; man’s obligations. That these obligations needed to be kept was obvious, and those obligations are clearly listed. What are our obligations (terms or stipulations) living under the New Covenant? This is not as easy to answer as it is for the Old Covenant. The New Testament, unlike the Old, does not contain lists of things we must do or not do; in fact the New Testament is not a record of rules and regulations at all. The New Testament is not the covenant. The New Testament is the record of the covenant, it bears the covenant, it give a brief background and history of its conception, and it gives an explanation of how the covenant is to be executed... but it is not a legal code book. It contains practical discussions of problem solving, and it shows how the Apostles used the new means to build a system of decision making, and all of this was based not on a legal code, but rather on the execution of a mission assigned to us by Christ Himself:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

The New Covenant priority is to complete the mission; we are required to do whatever it takes to MAKE DISCIPLES. In all that we do, this is our obligation, our duty and our priority above all else. If we operate in this fashion, we are keeping covenant. If we are keeping covenant, we are “like Christ”. Little else need be said!

## **Category Terms**

Jesus gave us His command to make disciples, and this word “disciples” sums up our proper aim. He gave a considerable amount of instruction on what a disciple is, how a convert becomes a disciple, and how a disciple should behave. In this term, we find parties, terms and promises. (See Acts 6:1,7; 12:24; 16:5) Being a good disciples involves being as much like Christ Himself as possible (Luke 14:26) following the word of Christ (John15:7-12), willingness to suffer as He suffered (John 15:20), and doing the kinds of things Jesus did, thus becoming fully perfected, equipped, matured... fully like Christ (Luke 6:40) Jesus used the term disciple interchangeably with the term “servant” (John 15:20).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Note here Paul’s use of parallelism: Making disciples is parallel with election. Perfecting them is parallel with stipulations of covenant. Becoming perfected is the summation of the promises.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1John 3:2)

Another term that deserves notice is “mystery”. The “mystery of God” when used in a ministry context means covenant. Jesus was the mystery revealed (Matt. 12:28). The spreading of the Gospel

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was the mystery being revealed (Mark 4:11). Paul stated that the mystery was no longer hidden (Rom. 16:25 ff.). In Ephesians Paul defines the “mystery”:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Eph. 3:2-12)

Parties: Israel and Gentiles in “one body”  
Terms: “The administration of the mystery”  
Promises: “In the promises of Christ Jesus... unsearchable riches”

### **Ministry of Reconciliation**

Paul seldom used the word “covenant” in his writings. Rather than say “Old Covenant” he preferred the term “Law”, for he knew it was part of the Covenant. When speaking of the New Covenant he often used the name of Christ, for he knew that Christ is the personification of the Covenant. In the following passage, he demonstrates his thinking by using a parallel in which he begins with the word “covenant” and then used the word “ministry” which then changes to the term “ministry of reconciliation”.

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. (2Cor. 3:6)

New Covenant stipulation is ministry.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2Cor. 5:18,20)

Ministry is the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, New Covenant stipulation is the ministry of reconciliation.

Chapter three discusses the two covenants; chapter four discusses ministry and being a servant of Christ, and Christ's definition of a servant (disciple). A servant advanced the best interests of his Master. The best interest of Christ is for all men to “believe and obey” the Gospel, become reconciled to God and live like Christ.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Cor. 5:18-21)

When you sum it all up, the terms of the New Covenant are to do whatever is necessary to complete the mission outlined in the Great Commission. The text does not actually list a set of regulations; of do's and don'ts for the Christian to follow, for the New Covenant is all about God's PURPOSES, not following a code. When we place the correct priority on the mission of making disciples,

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and our lives are lived as Christ's servants, then we are like Christ. Therefore, the stipulations of the New Covenant are to become and live LIKE CHRIST.

### New Covenant *Hesed*

You will remember the word *hesed* from our discussion of the Old Testament. It is the word used most often to describe God in the Old Testament. You will also recall that it has two elements: keeping covenant, and aiding your covenant partner to keep his part of the covenant. We will continue to use this word because it is so expressive, and because it has no counterpart in the English language. When translated into English, words such as faithfulness and covenant keeping are used. Jesus used four words in parallel with this concept: service, love, rule and submit. Paul used the expression "one another" frequently to describe the same thing, which is to take care of the best interests of the other person. The exact nature of those best interests were determined by the relationship circumstances of the two; i.e. their covenant. Taking care of the best interests of your relationship partner is an example of *hesed*.

#### **Service**

Jesus told a parable about a master and his three servants, the Parable of the Talents (Luke 19:11 ff.) is what we call it. In this parable, a master gives his three servants a sum of money to care for in his absence. His instruction is to put the money to work until he returns. Two of the three invest the money and receive a return by the time the master comes home, the third buries it in the ground to keep it safe. The first two are rewarded upon the master's return: they are called faithful and trustworthy. The third is punished, for he has not realized any return for the master. The point of the story is that the first two servants cared about and acted in the best interests of the master, while the third acted in his own best interests. The first two servants demonstrated **hesed**, the third did not.

#### **Initiative and Stewardship**

Jesus told another parable to demonstrate the role that human initiative should play in stewardship. In Luke 16:1 ff. Jesus tells a story about a manager who was called to account by his master. Knowing that his situation was in peril, he called in several of the master's debtors and forgave their debts, thus earning their appreciation and friendship. He then left his master's service with the probability of gaining new employment. While Christ doesn't endorse the dishonesty of the move, he commends the initiative shown by the manager in looking out for his interests saying that Christians must likewise use their creativity and initiative in the Lord's service, less the dishonesty.

In many examples, Jesus instructed us that it is insufficient to simply do one's duty. To get ahead, to gain true appreciation, we must put the Master's interests ahead of our own, and use initiative in advancing those interests: this was true stewardship. See Luke 12, 16, 17; 1Cor. 4, 2Cor. 4. True *hesed* is being a faithful and true servant, one who uses his ingenuity and initiative to advance the interests of the covenant partner.

#### **Rule and Serve**

When the disciples were talking amongst themselves about who would be great in the coming Kingdom, they each saw themselves in powerful and important positions. Jesus, upon hearing this gave them a new definition of what it meant to rule:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:25 ff.)

Jesus indicated that there are two ways to rule: first, one could rule by the exercise of power, and second, one could rule by serving others. It was service to others that he had in mind. Consider this: Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. By doing this, he came to serve his covenant partners: us. Just as he came to serve, so also should we serve our covenant partner: Christ. In English, there are two possible definitions of the word "rule". One is someone who exercises power, such as a king or president. The other is a standard of measure. It is the second that Christ expects of us, that we should be ones whose service to the Lord provides the standard for others to follow: that is Biblical leadership.



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To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1Peter 5:1-4)

In this passage, Peter has taken directly from the teaching of Christ to define rule and leadership as a Christian: it is about setting an example of humility and service, not about power in the earthly sense.

### **Rule and Love**

Jesus defined service and rule both as putting the interests of the other person ahead of your own. Love was also defined the same way: the three are in parallel. In the New Testament, love is not simply an emotion, it is a manner of behavior towards others. (John 15:15; 15:12) Paul linked the concepts of love and service just as Jesus had:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:16)

John wrote on this subject often:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1John 3:16)

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1John 3:10)

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him (1John 2:5)

Paul defined love with a series of words...

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (1Cor. 13:4-6)

Doing what was right for the other person was "love". The ultimate "right thing" for others was to be reconciled to God through Christ, that they too might be Christ like. Thus, Jesus defined three words with the same meaning as *hesed*: serving, ruling and loving. In each case, the meaning is keeping covenant... like Christ. Serve like Christ. Rule like Christ. Love like Christ.

### **Love and Submit**

Obedience and submission were not simply to follow instructions without question. Submission became another action that was meant to be in putting the interests of others first. Christ submitted Himself to the cross willingly. This was the ultimate action of putting the best interests of others first, for his death on the cross was done to promote the best interests of his covenant partner: mankind. Christian submission is not about letting anyone exercise raw power over you; it is all about putting the interests of your covenant partner first.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:21)

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb. 13:17)

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The standard for all of this is Jesus. To serve one another as Jesus would serve is to be like Him. Jesus was held as the perfect example for our behavior:

Jesus cited as example:

Courtesy	1 Peter 3:8
Doing right	1John 3:7
Walking in the light	1John 1:7
Knowing God	1John 2:3
Living in Him	1John 2:6
True light	1John 2:8
Being perfected	1John 3:2
Purity	1John 3:3
Sinless life	1John 3:4-6
Love of brothers	1John 3:16
Assurance of the Spirit	1John 3:24-25
Assurance of God's love	1John 4:7-11
Being born again	1John 5:1-5
For treating others	Matt. 25:40
Standard of suffering	1Peter 2:21
Giving	2Cor. 8:9
Leadership	1Cor. 11:1

### **Service: Breadth and Range**

The lifestyle of the ancient church is demonstrated, at least in concept, by the numerous terms used in the New Testament texts to describe various types of servants. In all cases, these were people who put the interests of others ahead of their own interests. The idea is that throughout the sacred writings, putting others ahead of oneself is a covenant priority. To illustrate this concept, let's consider three of the Greek words used (out of a total of 8). First, *doulos* is the word we translate as "slave". It was often used by Jesus to describe the accountability God expects from His stewards (Matt. 25:14). Christ was so described (Phil. 2:7). Paul described himself as one (Phil. 1:1). All Christians were slaves of Christ (1Cor. 6:20). Second, *diakonos* is a term meaning "servant" (2Cor. 4:5). It is also rendered "deacon" (1Tim. 3:8), "deaconess" (Rom. 16:1). And "minister" (2Cor. 3:6). Third, *oikonomos* was a word used by Paul to describe service as a total system of responsibility. In the NIV it is rendered "manager" and describes stewardship. A stewardship was the oversight of the master's entire business; business management was a synonym. Christ regarded his people as stewards (Luke 16:1-13). Every Christian was to manage the church to Christ's best interests (1Pet. 4:10). The management of the covenant, the revealed "mystery of God" was a stewardship (Eph. 3:3,9)

### **Christlikeness: Words and Behaviors**

The Apostles took the message of Christ's Lordship to the people, offering his death and resurrection as a proof of his Lordship. As people responded to the Gospel and entered the church, many who had no Jewish behavioral background needed an example for their new life's actions. It was not practically possible for the eyewitnesses to explain in detail the biographical details of the life and behavior of Jesus to everyone, so a system of attitude development began where the Apostles taught the new Christians to imitate Christ's attitude and purpose rather than his specific biographical actions, thus they did not initiate behaviors of imitation of Christ in culture, but rather the imitation of his *approach* to culture and daily life. As a consequence, generalities were developed demonstrating what types of behaviors were never like Christ, and what types of behaviors are always like Christ.

Paul often generalized actions never Christlike as "the works of the flesh". In so stating, he did not indicate that the body was evil or sinful, rather that a lifestyle centered around the body was sinful.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

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When Paul spoke of liberty, it was understood that it never included these types of behaviors; they were always out of bounds for the Christian.

In the same way, there were certain types of behaviors, when undertaken with proper motive, that were always like Christ. Paul usually described them with some form of the word "Spirit" (Eph. 5:18 ff., Phil. 2:1-9).

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:8-9)

### **Christlikeness: the Individual**

Individuals differ in Christlikeness at the time of their conversion, and they develop at differing rates. Some may develop Christlikeness more quickly in one area of life, and more slowly in another. For example, one person may exhibit very mature attitudes and behaviors in social settings, but may lag behind someone else in private prayer, while yet another may have a strong prayer life, but lag in their finances. For this reason, the church was not to impose a list of rules on everyone. Instead, there was one basic rule: "love the Lord your God" and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14).

In addition, each individual was to bring some kind of ministry, some kind of gift to build up the body of Christ. For some, that might be large amounts of money, for others teaching, or hospitality or service to widows... (Rom 12:3 ff.). "Normal" for a Christian occurred when he or she lived in their culture as Christ would have lived in that place and time. "Abnormal" was to live in their culture in a way that was not Christlike. The individual Christian was to be like Christ seven days per week. He was to behave as Christ would behave had He held the same job. By helping his co-workers succeed, he would be doing what Jesus would have done, and such behavior was "right in the sight of everybody" (Rom. 12:17). When God had Christians well placed in society who were "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16) the explosive leaven of God could work in society (Matt. 13:33 ff.).

### **Christlikeness: the Church**

The church was the very embodiment of Christ, and as such it was to project Christ to the surrounding community. Its behavior was crucial in this effort. What the church brought to society was revolutionary. At last a system had come into the world that made sense; that had an objective standard... and that standard was Christ. It was covenant with compassion: *hesed*. The ancient prayer of the Jew had been overridden by God.

I thank God I was not born a Gentile,  
I thank God I was not born a slave,  
I thank God I was not born a woman.

It made little difference if one was born a man, for the man would support the best interests of women. What difference would it be to have been a master? He was charged with promoting the best interests of the slave. What difference if he were a Greek? He must aid the Jew. If he were a Jew, he must support the Greek. It was true what they were saying:

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here..." (Acts 17:6)

The Hebrew church deferred to the Greek in a dispute (Acts 6), Paul collected an offering from the Greeks to support the Hebrew church (1Cor. 16). In every human relationship in the church, the rule of Christ was to prevail. Christ and the church were the model not only for husband and wife, but for every superior/inferior social relationship. The socially superior was to be superior as Christ, and the inferior to remember Christ as a servant: each was to behave as Jesus would behave.

### ***Church and the "Rule Book"***

An interesting situation that develops within the church is the one that develops when some members are stronger, and others are weaker... not because of social position, but because of their relative maturity in dealing with temptation. A newer, weaker member may find that they cannot easily

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resist certain types of temptations, and the natural tendency of such people is to develop a system of rules. For example, one who feels sexual temptation while dancing may decide that they should abstain from dancing. One who feels temptation to gamble away their paycheck when playing cards might determine never to play cards. One who is tempted to return to their old way of life when they attend social gatherings and festivals may choose to abstain from such gatherings entirely. While this all makes perfect sense, the difficulty arises when these people attempt to impose their personal abstentions on everyone else, in the assumption that all of the members share their personal areas of weakness. As we have already seen, there is no such listing of rules in the New Testament, rather the standard is Christ. He drank wine, attended festivals and spoke with sinners, and was often criticized for it by His enemies. A stronger member, not attracted to a particular weakness had liberty. Like Christ, he might drink a little wine, attend a social event and so on, without troubling his faith. Paul instructed in this area:

When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. (1Cor. 8:12-13)

Could the weaker brother be allowed to destroy the liberty of the stronger? Could the liberty of the stronger brother be allowed to destroy the faith of the weaker? In both cases, the answer was no. Each was to consider the best interests of the other. The weaker brother was not to take away the liberty of the stronger (Rom. 14:3) he was not to rewrite the covenant (Gal. 5:1) but the stronger could not destroy the weak (1Cor. 8:9-13). The solution is that the stronger may exercise and enjoy his liberty in Christ, but not in the presence of the weaker who might be harmed by it. Again, the emphasis is on placing the interests of the other in first priority.

### **Breach of Covenant**

According to Jesus, love of God and love of one's neighbor was the foundational basis for all law. Failure to love God and one's neighbor is therefore the foundational basis of all law breaking: sin. Under the Christian Covenant, failure to be like Christ was failure to keep the covenant, and therefore sin.

#### *"Sin not Unto Death"*

The Lord viewed all converts to Christ as "little children" (1John 3:7) and thus immaturity is expected. Such immaturity was sin (1John 1:8); it was sin "not unto death" (1John 5:16). Such sin was expected, although not accepted, and the Lord's Table was provided as a cleansing of sin and conscience: it was there for a reason. One making progress towards Christlikeness was said to be growing in grace and the Spirit; a perfection in itself. One was not thrown out of the covenant every time he sinned; you are not in covenant in the morning, out in the afternoon and back in that evening. Error is not the basis of being out of covenant for us any more than it was for the Corinthian church which even in its time of grave error and sin was called by Paul as the church of God, of saints and people who had dedicated themselves to Christ (1Cor. 12). Paul demonstrated that they were accepted, even with their sins, and offered correction so that they may be conformed to Christ.

#### *Sins Unto Death"*

This, on the other hand is the complete repudiation of Christ and His Covenant. Since there is no way other than by the cross, a complete rejection of the way results in being lost. The New Testament reveals two ways in which this can happen:

First, is a complete break with Christ and the church. This was called "fallen away" (Heb. 6:6), "severed from Christ (Gal. 5:4), "deliberately keep on sinning" (Heb. 10:26), "carried away" and "fall from your secure position" (2Pet. 3:17), "remove your lamp stand" (Rev. 2:5), and "denied my name" (Rev. 3:8). The long course of human and Divine experience demonstrated that some people keep their commitments, and others do not.

Second, one could "fall away" by their own utter neglect of their covenant pledge. The Apostles spent considerable time and effort writing to their flocks urging them to remain faithful:

Paul           By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. (1Cor. 15:2)

Peter          Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For

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- if you do these things, you will never fall (2Pet. 1:10)  
If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. (2Pet. 2:20)
- Jude They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.  
Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. (Jude 4 ff.)
- John Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)  
And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. (Rev. 20:4)
- Hebrews <sup>1</sup>We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. <sup>2</sup>For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (Heb. 2:1 ff.)  
Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Heb. 10:32 ff.)  
See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. (Heb. 3:12 ff.)
- James What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? . . . You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. (James 2:14 ff.)
- Jesus 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' . . . They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'  
"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (Matt. 25:41 ff.)

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:12) The terms of keeping the New Covenant are being "in Christ". There is no way to keep the covenant terms if we are outside of Christ, and there is no way to keep the covenant terms if we swear allegiance to Christ, and then utterly turn our backs on our obligations. Repent! Return to your first love!