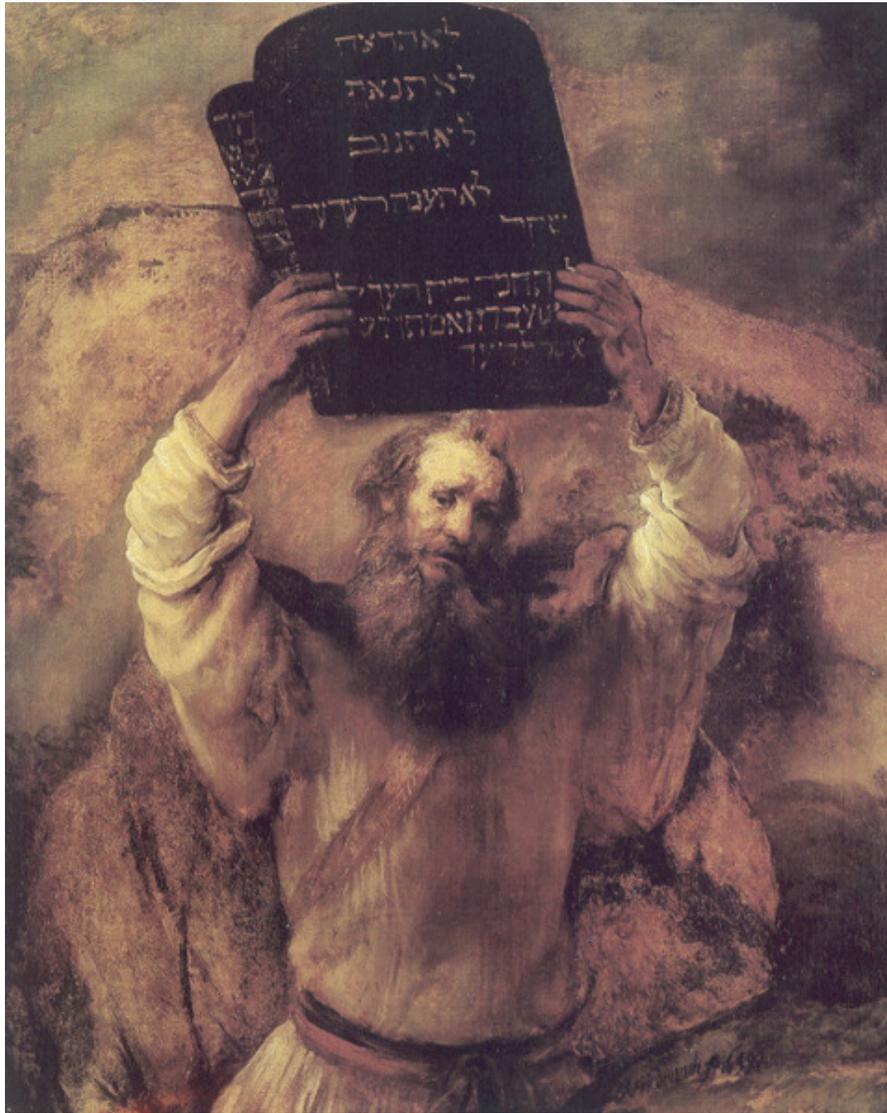


# THE COVENANTS

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*A Biblical Study*



*Curtis Byers*  
1998

*Front Cover*

**Rembrandt van Rijn, *Moses*, 1659**

Gemaldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Preussischer  
Kulturbesitz, Berlin

[http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/rmbrndt\\_1655-1669/moses.htm](http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/rmbrndt_1655-1669/moses.htm)

## **Syllabus**

Since the beginning of time, God entered into covenants with various people as a means to reveal his will and to accomplish his purposes. Thus, a proper understanding of the covenants is essential. This study of the covenants seeks to gain that understanding so that the student not only appreciates the correct teaching of the scriptures, but is also able to identify false teachings on the covenants and their consequences.

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**LESSON 1**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE COVENANTS**

**INTRODUCTION** The term *covenant* is not very common in modern use. It still finds some use in legal contexts and with reference to the marriage relationship. Nonetheless, its relative rare occurrence has caused it to become sufficiently unfamiliar that its use in scripture has been misunderstood. The purpose of this lesson is simply to highlight the basic meaning of a covenant.

**COVENANT**

The term *covenant* is the common English translation of the Hebrew word *berith* which occurs about 300 times in the Old Testament. The precise etymology of the Hebrew word is uncertain, but *berith* was possibly derived from the Hebrew word *bara*, “eat bread with”, or the Assyrian noun *birithu*, “bond” or “fetter” (Thompson, p.790; Dumbrell, p.16; Payne, p.1001).

From the usage of the word in the Old Testament, **a covenant is simply “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance”** (Mendenhall, ABD, 1179).

1. Read each of the following accounts where a covenant is made and then answer the questions:

<i>Covenant</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Genesis 21:22-32	
Joshua 9:3-27	
1 Samuel 18:1-3; 20:1-16	
2 Samuel 3:12-13	
1 Kings 20:31-34	
1 Chronicles 11:1-3	
Malachi 2:14	

- a. In the above examples, the parties to the covenants were men. Is a covenant always between a “strong” party (e.g., king, ruler, etc.) and a “weak” party (e.g., servant, slave, etc.)?

[*Note:* Covenants between equal parties are called *parity covenants* and those where one party imposes his will on the other party (i.e., unequal parties) *suzerainty covenants*.]

- b. Are the covenants entered into voluntarily by both parties?
- c. What was the purpose of making a covenant?
- d. How serious was the covenant to be treated?

***THE FORM OF A COVENANT***

The covenants found in the Old Testament accounts are not unlike covenants found in other ancient documents that have been discovered. Similarities to loyalty oaths found in Assyrian documents and to treaties imposed by the Hittites have been well documented. By comparing all these accounts, the following components of a covenant have been discerned:

- I. The Parties to the Covenant
- II. The Stipulations (terms or conditions) of the Covenant
- III. The Promises (blessings or curses) of the Covenant
- IV. The Oath of the Covenant
- V. The Sign(s) of or Witness(es) to the Covenant
- VI. The Duration of the Covenant

All these parts may not be explicitly stated in the covenant account, but they are often implied. Consider the covenants studied in Question 1 above in answering the following questions:

- 2. Are conditions at times required by one party of the other before the covenant is established?
- 3. Are oaths pronounced in connection with the covenant?
- 4. Are signs or witnesses of the covenant stated?

### **COVENANT/TESTAMENT**

In the Septuagint (LXX), *berith* is translated by the Greek word *diatheke* which carries the meaning of “testament” or “will”. However, *berith* does not have this meaning, and even when it is used in the New Testament, *diatheke* has the meaning of *covenant* instead of *testament* (with three possible exceptions: Galatians 3:15, Hebrews 9:16-17) (McCaig, p.797).

Although the word *diatheke* only occurs 33 times in the New Testament, the concept of a covenant remains a central part in God’s relationship to his people. It was this understanding that led the scriptures to be divided into the *Old* and *New Testaments* (although a more proper labeling would be *Old* and *New Covenants*).

#### *Notes:*

1. Of the 33 times *diatheke* occurs in the New Testament, the KJV translates it ‘covenant’ 20 times and ‘testament’ 13 times. Modern translations generally use the term ‘covenant’ for all the New Testament occurrences except that they vary in their translation of the Galatians 3:15 and Hebrew 9:16-17 passages.
  2. The Greeks had a word, *syntheke*, which means a covenant, but it is never used in the New Testament. So the question must be asked why *diatheke* was used instead. One reason suggested has been that the covenant “that God makes with men is not fully mutual as would be implied in *syntheke*” (Estes, p. 793; Berkhof, p.262-263; Payne, p.1000).
  3. The division of the scriptures into the *Old* and *New Testaments* began with Jerome and his translation, the Latin Vulgate (last revision AD 405).
5. What is the essential difference between a *covenant* and a *testament*?
6. What other English words do we use that has the same basic meaning as a covenant? In what contexts are these words used?

**LESSON 2**

**THE COVENANTS WITH ADAM AND NOAH**

**INTRODUCTION** From the very beginning, God has established covenants with man to reveal his will, to accomplish his purposes, and to bless man.

***THE COVENANT WITH ADAM***

The first five chapters of Genesis that record the life of Adam do not explicitly mention that God had a covenant with Adam. However, one possible translation of Hosea 6:7 is “But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me” (ASV; NASV, NIV sim.).

1. If this translation is correct and God had a covenant with Adam, what, do you suppose, was the nature of that covenant?
2. Is it necessary for the word *covenant* to be used in the text for there to have been a covenant?

***For Further Study:*** Two other possible translations of Hosea 6:7 have been suggested:

- (1) “*But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with me*” (NKJV; KJV sim.)
- (2) “*At Admah they violated the covenant, there they played me false*” (REV; NRSV sim.)

*Do either of these translations have merit in the context of this passage? Which translation does the most justice to the last phrase in the verse?*

***THE COVENANTS WITH NOAH***

***Read Genesis 6:5 - 7:1.*** Within a few short verses, the scriptures tell of the “wickedness”, “evil”, and “violence” that characterized all of mankind, except Noah. Thus, God decides to destroy both man and beast off the face of the earth.

3. Who is the initiator of the covenant described in v.18?
4. Who, exactly, does God “establish” his covenant with?
5. What is the purpose of the covenant? (i.e., what are its blessings/promises?)
6. Does Noah have any obligations to enjoy the blessings/promises of the covenant?

7. How is the character of Noah described? (cf. also Ezekiel 14:14,20)

Does the character of Noah have anything to do with God establishing his covenant with Noah?

**Read Genesis 8:20 - 9:17.** With the destruction of the earth by water completed, God again “establishes” a covenant.

8. With whom does God establish the covenant described in 9:9ff?

9. What are the blessings/promises of this covenant? (8:21; 9:11)

10. What is the sign of this covenant?

To whom is this sign a reminder?

11. What is the duration of this covenant?

12. Are there any terms or conditions that man must meet for the covenant to be maintained? (In other words, is this a *unilateral* or *bilateral* covenant?)

Who is the only one bound in this covenant?

**For Further Study** *Changes take place on the earth in the post-flood era. Compare the following passages:*

*1:28 // 9:1*

*1:29-30 // 9:3-7*

*3:17-19 // 5:29; 8:20-22*

*What does the name “Noah” mean? (cf. Genesis 5:29) What is the significance of his being given this name?*

**LESSON 3**

**THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB**

**INTRODUCTION** For all practical purposes, the Biblical narrative begins with the life of Abraham (Abram). The creation and history of the world prior to Abraham are briefly summarized, whereas God’s dealings with Abraham are carefully detailed.

**THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

**Read Genesis 12:1-9.** After a brief description of Abraham’s genealogy in the closing verses of chapter 11, we read of God making extensive promises to Abraham.

1. In verse 1, what command does God give Abraham?

How old is Abram at this time?

2. In verses 2-3, what are the five promises that God makes to Abraham?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

3. When Abraham arrives in Canaan, what additional promise is given? (verse 7)

*Note: These promises are often grouped as three promises: (1) the Nation Promise, (2) the Land Promise, and (3) the Seed Promise. Others group the Nation Promise and the Land Promise together as one promise (the Nation/Land Promise).*

4. Is Abraham a faithful follower of God at the time of his call? (cf. Nehemiah 9:7-8)

**Read Genesis 15:1-21.**

5. Abraham reasoned that Eliezer was the heir that God promised. Did this show a lack of faith?
6. How does God further explain what he meant when he had earlier told Abraham that he would make of Abraham “a great nation”?
7. The Biblical expression “make a covenant” literally means “cut a covenant”. The meaning of this expression is illustrated by this instance of God having Abraham cut the animals into two pieces. The covenant was formed by passing between the parts (cf. Jeremiah 34:18). What was the covenant that God made with Abraham at this time?

***Read Genesis 17:1-21.***

8. As God restates his covenant with Abraham in verses 1-7, what new features about this covenant are introduced?
9. How old is Abraham at this time?
10. What does the God mean when he says that he had made Abraham “a father of many nations”? (Careful, cf. Genesis 17:15-16; Romans 4:17)
11. Note that God declares that his covenant with Abraham is “an everlasting covenant”. What else in this context is said to “everlasting”?
12. What does God give as a “sign of the covenant” (v.11)?
13. When God tells Abraham that Sarah is going to be the mother of his descendants, Abraham “laughed”. Since God earlier had rejected Eliezer as the promised son, how had Abraham thought that God was going to fulfill his promise? (cf. Genesis 16:1-16)

How long did Abraham think that Ishmael was the promised son?

***THE COVENANT WITH ISAAC AND JACOB***

14. ***Read Genesis 26:1-5 and 28:13-15.*** Are these new and different covenants that God made with Isaac and Jacob or are these a restatement of the covenant with Abraham?

***For Further Study***

15. The term “covenant” does not occur in the account of Genesis 12; it does occur in Genesis 15 and 17. Does that mean that the covenant with Abraham was not made in Genesis 12? (cf. Luke 1:72-73; Galatians 3:15-18)
16. Was the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob conditional (i.e., did they have any obligations, which, if they violated, would have broken the covenant) ? (cf. Genesis 22:16-18)

**LESSON 4**

**THE COVENANT WITH ISRAEL**

**INTRODUCTION** Being faithful to the covenant he made with Abraham, God made a covenant with Isaac and then with Jacob. As foretold to Abraham, the descendants of Jacob were enslaved for 400 years [*according to Genesis 15:13 (Acts 7:6), but more exactly (?) 430 years, Exodus 12:40 (Galatians 3:17); also four generations (Genesis 15:16) = Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses, Exodus 6:16ff*].

**Read Exodus 2:24-25.** This statement is made immediately before God revealed Himself to Moses.

1. In what way does God “remember” his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
2. What is the meaning of the expression that “God acknowledged them”?

**Read Exodus 6:1-9.** After Moses’ initial meeting with Pharaoh and his cruel response, God appears again unto Moses.

3. What new revelation does God give to Moses?
4. What are the three blessings that God holds out to the children of Israel? (6:6-8)
  - 1)
  - 2)
  - 3)

**Read Exodus 19:1-9.** When the people arrive at Mt. Sinai (Horeb), God speaks to Moses.

5. If the Israelites obey God and keep his covenant, what blessings are in store for them? (v.5-6)
  - 1)
  - 2)
  - 3)
6. Are the people willing to accept God’s offer of blessings?

**Read Exodus 20:1; 21:1; 24:3-8.** God speaks “words” and “judgments” (ordinances) to Moses, who in turn speaks them to the people.

7. What is the people’s response when Moses relays Gods words unto them?

8. What is the book called in which Moses writes all these words of God?
9. How is the covenant ratified?

***Read Exodus 31:12-17.***

10. What is called a “sign” between the Lord and the people?
11. What is the purpose of this sign?
12. What is the duration of this sign?

***Read Exodus 32:1-14.*** The people quickly break the covenant while Moses was on the mountain.

13. God in his anger says to Moses “Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (v.7-10). How could God have done that and still kept his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? (v.13)
14. Is it a fair statement to say that Moses’ breaking of the tablets was symbolical of the people’s breaking of the covenant?

***Read Exodus 34:1-10; 27-28.*** As instructed, Moses returns to the mountain with new tablets.

15. What is the significance of the way in which the Lord “proclaims” himself to Moses? (v.5-7)
16. How does God demonstrate that he is a God of mercy and grace?
17. What are the “Ten Commandments” (literally, *Ten Words*) called?

And where were the “Ten Commandments” stored? (Exodus 25:10-16; Deuteronomy 10:3,8)

***Read Numbers 14:11-24.*** Based on the spies’ report, the people refuse to enter Canaan.

18. What does this episode teach about who would enjoy the blessings in God’s covenant with Israel?

**Read Deuteronomy 4 - 11.** Moses speaks to the people before his death.

19. What condition does Moses repeatedly state as necessary for Israel to remain in the land of Canaan? *Note major passages.*

20. What two reasons does Moses rule out as the basis on which God established a covenant with Israel? (7:7; 9:4-6)

1)

2)

Why, then, did God establish his covenant with Israel? (7:7-8)

**Scan Deuteronomy 27-28; read Deuteronomy 29:1, 9-13; 30:19-20.** Moses enumerates the blessings and curses of the covenant.

21. Why is God establishing yet another covenant with Israel at this time? (cf.29:1)

Are there different conditions or blessings/cursings associated with this covenant compared to that established earlier at Horeb?

**For Further Thought:** Why were there *two* tables of stone (i.e., not just *one*)? (To my knowledge, the Bible doesn't say. Consult Bible dictionary for possible answer.)

***LESSON 5***

***THE COVENANT WITH DAVID***

**INTRODUCTION** When the Israelites cried out for a king, the Lord chose Saul after the manner of their desire (cf. 1 Samuel 8:18; 9:2; 10:24). But Saul sinned and thus was rejected by God. (1 Samuel 15:24-26).

**Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14; 16:1,7; Acts 13:21-22.**

1. How does God describe the character of David?
2. Was this crucial to God's selection of David?

**Read 2 Samuel 7:1-29.** David desires to build a house for God. Instead, God builds David a house.

3. Summarize what God says he had done for David. (v.8-9)
4. What does God say that he will do for Israel? (v.10-11a)
5. What does God say that he will do for David? (v.11b-16)
  - 1)
  - 2)
  - 3)
  - 4)
  - 5)
  - 6)
  - 7)
6. Is God establishing a covenant with David? (cf. 2 Samuel 23:1-7)
7. What is the duration of this covenant?

**Read Psalm 89.** A psalm of Ethan the Ezrahite according to the psalm's prologue. The writer of Kings implies that Ethan was noted for his wisdom, yet he was not as wise as Solomon (1 Kings 4:31)

8. What characteristic of God is Ethan extolling? (v.1-2)
  
9. Ethan speaks of the covenant between God and David.
  - a. What is the main feature of the covenant that Ethan is emphasizing? (v.28-37)
  
  - b. Is this covenant conditional upon David's or his son's obedience? (cf. Jeremiah 33:20-22)
  
  - c. Assuming the answer to *part b* is "no", how do you explain the conditionality implied in 1 Kings 2:3-4; 8:25-26; and Psalm 132:11-12?

**Read 1 Kings 5:1-7; 8:14-21.**

10. Did Solomon understand that he was the one of whom the Lord said that would build him a house?
  
11. Was the Lord faithful to his word?

**LESSON 6**

**THE COVENANT IN THE KINGDOM YEARS**

**INTRODUCTION** “For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD His God, as was the heart of his father David” (1 Kings 11:4).

**Read 1 Kings 11:9-13.**

1. What punishment did God give for Solomon breaking His covenant?
2. Yet “for the sake of David” what two concessions did God give?
  - 1)
  - 2)

***After the division of the kingdom, the Northern Kingdom of Israel refused to follow the Lord.***

3. For a time, the Lord was gracious and did not destroy Israel. Why? (2 Kings 13:23)
4. However, later the Lord used the Assyrians to destroy Israel. Why? (2 Kings 18:9-12)
5. Why was Assyria not able to destroy Judah at the same time? (2 Kings 19:15-19; 32-32; 20:6)

***Some of the kings of Judah were faithful to the covenant while others were not. Note the following accounts from the book of 2 Chronicles.***

6. *Read 2 Chronicles 15:1-15.* Asa was the third king following Solomon (Rehoboam – Abijah – Asa). What did he do that was noteworthy? (v.12f)

[Yet, later in life he put his trust (1) in the King of Syria when attacked by Israel and (2) in physicians when struck with a disease. See 2 Chronicles 16.]

7. *Read 2 Chronicles 21:4-7.* Jehoram is an example of a king of Judah who was unfaithful to the covenant. Why did the Lord not take the kingdom away from Jehoram and his sons?
8. *Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-3, 8, 14-19, 26-33.* Josiah, like his grandfather Hezekiah, “did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David.”
  - a. What was Josiah’s reaction when the Book of the Law [= Book of the Covenant] was found and read to him?

- b. After reading the Book to the people, what did Josiah do?

***During these years, God spoke to people through his servants, the prophets.***

9. The prophets in the following passages emphasize which command of the Law?

Isaiah 56:2-4

Isaiah 58:13-14

Jeremiah 17:21-27

Ezekiel 20:10-26

Why this command more so than other commands?

10. *Read Jeremiah 11:1-11.* Judah, like Israel, would be destroyed. Why?

11. Although the prophets of Judah clearly proclaim the coming destruction, they just as clearly tell of God's continued mercy. Reference is frequently made to a "remnant" and to the covenant with David. Note the following passages within their context:

Isaiah 1:9

Isaiah 10:20-23

Isaiah 11:1-4, 10-16

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Jeremiah 33:4-18

Ezekiel 34:11-13, 23-25

12. In exile, Nehemiah understands the reason for the things that has happened to God's people.
  - a. On what basis does Nehemiah believe that God's people should return to the land? (Nehemiah 1:1-11)
  - b. Back in the land, the people under Nehemiah and Ezra reestablish proper observance of the Law. A good summary of God's dealings with his people is given in Nehemiah 9:5-38.

**LESSON 7**

**THE NEW COVENANT**

**INTRODUCTION** Jeremiah 31:31 is the only passage in the Old Testament that speaks of a “new” covenant. Recall that Jeremiah prophesies to Judah shortly before their destruction.

***Read Jeremiah 31:1-31.***

1. What future event is the prophet looking forward to throughout this chapter? (v. 3-4, 7-8, 17, 23)
  
2. With whom is this new covenant made?
  
3. By calling this future covenant a “new” covenant, the Lord implies that some covenant is old. Which covenant is identified as the “old” covenant?
  
4. What are the features of this “new” covenant? (v.33-34)
  - 1)
  - 2)
  - 3)
  - 4)
  - 5)
  
5. Jeremiah again speaks of this covenant in Jeremiah 32:36-44. What additional features of the covenant does he give?

***Other prophets foretell of a future covenant. Make note of the features of this covenant from the passages below.***

6. Hosea 1:10-2:1, 16-23; 3:4-5
7. Isaiah 54:7-10
8. Ezekiel 16:59-63
9. Ezekiel 34:23-31
10. Ezekiel 37:21-28

**LESSON 8**

**THE COVENANTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (I)**

**INTRODUCTION** God's covenants did not end with the close of the Old Testament. Teaching on the covenants continues to be prominent in the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

***The Covenants in the Gospels***

1. Note the references to the covenants in these passages concerning the birth of Jesus.
  - a. Jesus' genealogy: Matthew 1:1
  - b. The announcement of Gabriel: Luke 1:26-33
  - c. The prophecy of Zacharius: Luke 1:67-80
2. Several passages speak of the Law. Read each of the following passages and note the teaching concerning Christ's work and the law.
  - a. Matthew 5:17-20
  - b. Luke 16:16-17
3. Read the following passages that allude to the seed of Abraham. What conclusion must one make?
  - a. Matthew 3:1-12
  - b. John 8:30-59
4. Read the gospel accounts where Jesus institutes His Supper: Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26, and Luke 22:14-23 (and Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
  - a. What is the significance of Jesus describing the cup as the "blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" (Mark)?
  - b. Most modern translations omit the adjective "new" in these passages. If that were the case, is the meaning any different?

5. It is obvious that the Jews of Jesus' day understood that the Messiah was to be the "Son of David" and that many of them believed Jesus to be the Messiah (read Matthew 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; John 7:42). Does Jesus accept this title? (see Matthew 22:41-46 // Mark 12:35-37 // Luke 20:41-44)

***The Covenants in Acts***

6. In the early gospel sermons recorded in Acts, the covenants continue to take an important place. Notice the following instances:
  - a. Acts 2:30-39
  - b. Acts 3:24-26
  - c. Acts 13:16-41

**LESSON 9**

**THE COVENANTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (II)**

**INTRODUCTION** The covenants continue to be discussed in the letters of the New Testament.

***The Covenants in the Writings of Paul*** Although Paul does speak of the covenant that God made with Abraham, his focus is upon the role of the Law of Moses in God's scheme of salvation. Undoubtedly, Paul's focus arose out of his charge to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

1. Forgiveness of sins is offered to those who accept Christ. Paul concludes from this that observance of the Law of Moses is not required.
  - a. Colossians 2:13-17. What has been "wiped out" and "nailed to the cross"? What specific examples of teaching does Paul give?
  - b. Ephesians 2:14-15. What is the "enmity" that has been "abolished in His flesh...through the cross"?
2. To the Jew, saying that the Law of Moses was removed was equivalent to saying that the covenant that God made with Abraham was made void. Paul goes to great efforts to deny this equivalence.
  - a. According to Paul, what are the two ways that a man can be justified? (Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:1-6)
  - b. How can the Law of Moses justify one? (Romans 4:4; 10:4; Galatians 3:10-12)
  - c. Yet, on what basis was Abraham justified? (Romans 4:1-12; Galatians 3:6)
  - d. Consequently, on what basis would the promise of blessing through Abraham's seed be given? (Romans 4:13-25; Galatians 3:7-9, 13-18)
3. Who are the true Israelites (i.e., Abraham's seed, people of God)? (Romans 2:11-29; 9:1-8; Galatians 3:26-29)
4. If the Law of Moses was not to bring justification, what was its purpose? (Romans 3:20; 7:7-12; Galatians 3:19-25)

5. In Galatians, 4:21-31, Paul gives an analogy to put the covenants in proper perspective. Explain.

***The Covenants in Hebrews***

6. In the following passages concerning God's covenant with Abraham, what main point is the writer making?
  - a. Hebrews 6:13-20
  - b. Hebrews 11:8-19

Explain the apparent contradiction between Hebrews 6:15 ("he obtained the promise") and Hebrews 11:13 ("not having received the promises").

7. The prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the new covenant is quoted twice in Hebrews.
  - a. What application does the Hebrew writer make in each instance?  
Hebrews 8:7-13  
Hebrews 10:11-18
  - b. What is Jesus' relation to the new covenant? (Hebrews 9:15; 12:24)

8. How is the Law of Moses described?
  - a. Hebrews 7:18-19
  - b. Hebrews 10:1

9. What are the main comparisons between the old and new covenants?
  - a. Hebrews 4:14 – 5:11; 7:1-22
  - b. Hebrews 8:1-2; 9:1-11
  - c. Hebrews 9:16-22

**LESSON 10**

**UNIVERSAL MORAL LAW**

**INTRODUCTION** The Old Testament primarily records God's dealings with the children of Israel. We read of the Law that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. But what about other people who were not in the lineage of Abraham? Both before and after Christ, what law was the Gentiles under?

**Before the Law of Moses**

1. Read Romans 5:12-14, 20-21.
  - a. Did sin exist prior to the giving of the law to Moses?
  - b. Thus, did positive law exist that could be violated? Could this properly be called an Universal Moral Law?
2. List a few of the sins we read about during the time before the giving of the Law.
3. Were there righteous people before the giving of the Law? (Give examples) On what basis were these people saved?

**After the Law of Moses**

4. After God gave the Law to the children of Israel, did God no longer have any dealings with those outside that covenant, i.e. with Gentiles? If the answer is no, give examples were God did have something to say to Gentiles.
5. Read Romans 1:18 – 2:16.
  - a. Did the Gentiles know the will of God?
  - b. What is the basis of God's judgment on the Gentiles? (2:6-9) Thus, was the Universal Moral Law still in effect for the Gentiles?

**After the Coming of Jesus**

6. There are those who say that the Universal Moral Law is still the law by which unbelievers will be judged. That until unbelievers submit to the gospel (i.e., become believers) they are not under law to Christ. What do you think? What does scripture say?

**Thought Question:** What are the particulars of the Universal Moral Law?

**LESSON 11**

**COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS**

**INTRODUCTION** Many students have seen the covenants as central to understanding scripture. Thus, much effort has been expended to understand the relationship between the various covenants. Unfortunately, different conclusions have been reached. Among protestant groups the two main views are called Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. The debate between these two systems still rages, but common to both of these views is that they see a complete separation between Law (works) and Grace (faith).

**Dispensationalism** “Dispensationalism is the system of interpretation and theology contained in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible...The basic thesis of dispensationalism is that there are seven distinct economies of God in which God specifies certain conditions or terms and tests for men for his obedience to these terms...With the seven dispensations there are eight covenants. The expert interpreter will not only keep his dispensations separate but he will also be careful to apply covenantal terms only to those whom the covenants are made.” Ramm, *ibid.*, p.36-37.

- Observations:*
1. The seven dispensations are often entitled (e.g. Scofield): (1) Innocence, (2) Conscience, (3) Civil Government, (4) Promise, (5) Law, (6) Grace, (7) Kingdom. These distinctions are somewhat arbitrary with some dispensationalists holding to as few as four dispensations and some to as many as eight.
  2. The crucial distinction held by dispensationalists is between Israel (in the dispensation of Law) and the Church (in the dispensation of Grace). Thus OT prophesies generally refer to Israel, not the Church. Thus, the future Kingdom dispensation is required wherein these prophesies can be fulfilled for physical Israel.
  3. Most dispensationalists are premillennialists as well.

**Covenant Theology** “Reformed theology sees the drama of the Bible in the form of two covenants: the covenant of works made with Adam, and the covenant of grace between the Father and the Son. After the sin and fall of Adam the covenant of grace comes into effect. All the covenants of the Old Testament are thus various forms of the one covenant of grace. Its final form is the new covenant in Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.” Bernard Ramm, A Handbook of Contemporary Theology (Eerdmans), 1966, p.27-28.

- Observations:*
1. Reformed churches are generally considered those that adhere to Calvinism (primarily Presbyterians).
  2. God’s covenant of works with Adam required perfect obedience on his part.
  3. Within the covenant of grace, covenant theologians see only one “plan of salvation”, i.e., justification by faith alone.
  4. Covenant theology sees good works (obedience) as a necessary corollary to faith, but such works are only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  5. Most covenant theologians are amillennialists.

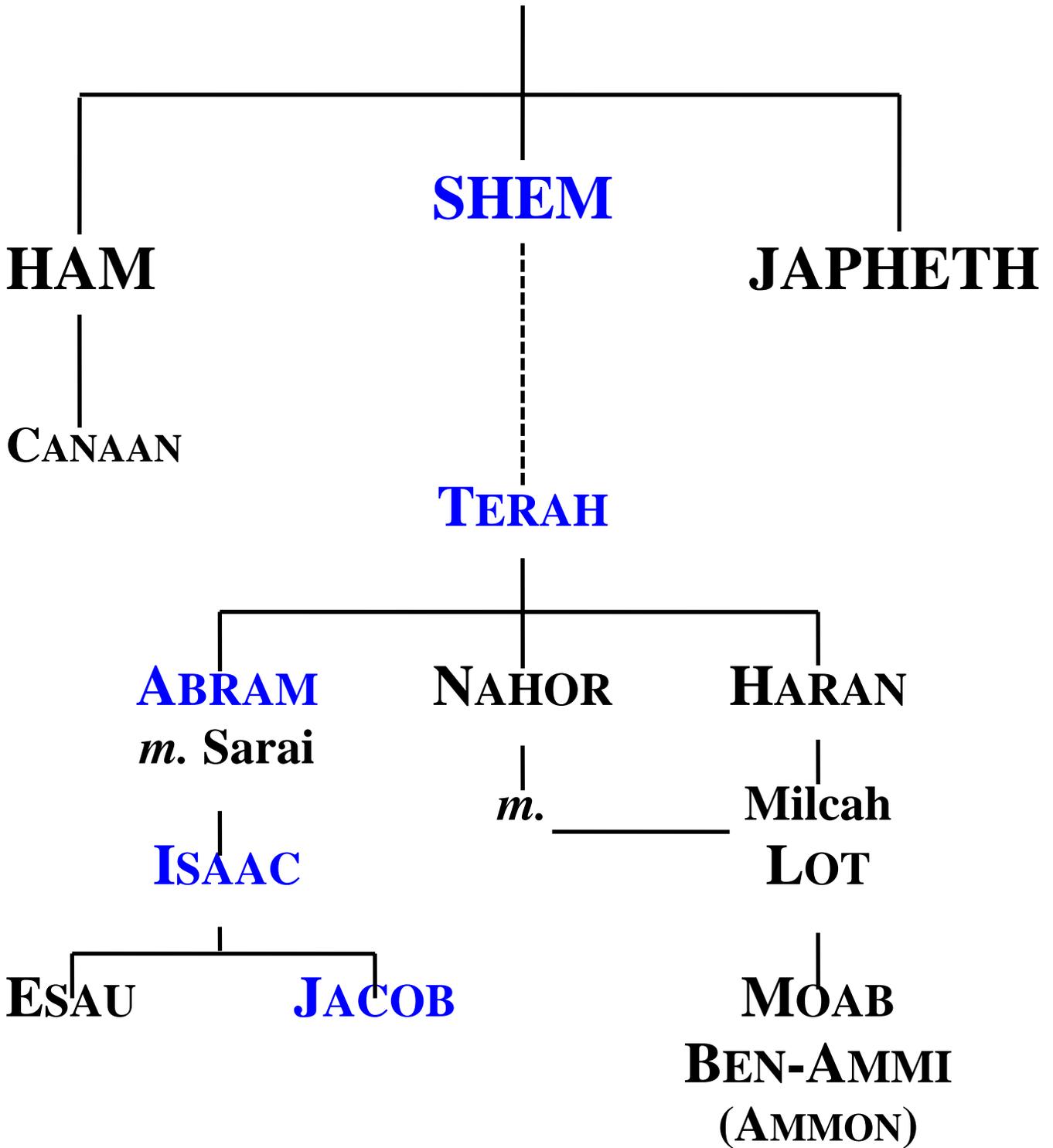
1. Does the fact that dispensationalists do not agree on the number of dispensations or on the precise point when dispensations change have any bearing on the truthfulness of dispensationalism?
2. Enforcing a strict separation of Law and Grace, the dispensationalist sees no grace within the dispensation of the Law and no law within the dispensation of grace. (In this regard, they are much like Lutherans.) Is this separation correct? Can grace and law coexist?
3. Some brethren have adopted the *language* of dispensationalism. Emphasis is given to three dispensations: Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. What point is intended by this distinction? Is this a helpful distinction? What may be misleading about this distinction?
4. Is there any biblical justification for the two-fold distinction: covenant of works and covenant of grace?
5. Covenant theologians see total depravity of all men as the consequence of Adam's sin. Thus, man is unable to perform any good works or even to exercise faith, except by the power of the Holy Spirit. Does Ephesians 2:8-10 teach that faith is a gift of God?
6. From the covenant with Noah onwards, covenant theology sees all the covenants as simply an expression of "one" covenant. The point of this is to emphasize the "oneness" of the "plan of salvation". What is useful about this concept? What is misleading about this concept?
7. What about Covenant Theology's idea about a single "plan of salvation"? Is God's fundamental expectation of all men, of all time, the same?

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**NOAH**



## Genesis 12

*Abram is 75 years old*

LORD: “**In you** all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (The Seed Promise)

## Genesis 15

Abram: “Heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus...**one born in my house**”

LORD: “One who will **come from your own body** shall be your heir”

Abram: “And he believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness”

## Genesis 16

*Abram is 86 years old*

Abram & Sarai: **Ishmael by Hagar**, Sarai’s servant

## Genesis 17

*Abram is 99, Sarai is 90 years old*

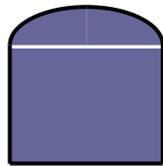
LORD: Abram → Abraham “Father of Nations”  
Sarai → Sarah “Mother of Nations”

Abraham: “Oh, that Ishmael might live before you”

LORD: “**Sarah ... shall bear you a son**”

# *Dispensations*

**Patriarchal**



**Mosaic**



**Christian**

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# *Covenant Theology*

Adam

*Covenant of Works*



All

Men

*Covenant of Grace*

Since

Adam

# *Dispensationalism*

Adam *Dispensation of Innocence*

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Adam → Noah  
*Dispensation of Conscience*

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Noah → Abraham  
*Dispensation of Civil Government*

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Abraham → Moses  
*Dispensation of Promise*

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Moses → Christ  
*Dispensation of Law*

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Christ → Second Coming  
*Dispensation of Grace*

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Second Coming → Judgment  
*Dispensation of the Kingdom*