

## GOD OF THE COVENANTS

God is a great and awesome God, far above us in power and might. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. How great He is! He has made us and all nations are like a drop in a bucket before Him. We are like worms or dust. Yet believe it or not, amazingly, He wants to have a personal relationship with each one of us!!

He wants to get to know us. He was willing to die for us, so that we can live with Him forever. He makes promises to each of us and makes an agreement with us, that if we will believe in Him, He will help us through life.

God has always interacted with the people He made, and built personal relationships with them, called covenants.

Deut. 7:9 "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments."

He is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Covenants are a central theme of the Bible. How many covenants do you think are mentioned in the Bible? You will be amazed at the number! Let's have a look at some of them:

1 Samuel 18:3 "And Jonathan **made a covenant** with David because he loved him as himself."

A covenant is a personal agreement between two people – e.g. marriage is a covenant, the sale of a house is a covenant. It is a solemn (serious) agreement where each person promises to do something for the other.

1 Sam. 23:17-18 <sup>17</sup> "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." <sup>18</sup> The two of them **made a covenant** before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh."

2 Sam. 3:12-13 <sup>12</sup> "Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, "Whose land is it? **Make an agreement** with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you." <sup>13</sup> "Good," said David. "I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me."

2 Sam. 5:3 "When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king **made a covenant** with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel."

1 Kings 5:12 "The LORD gave Solomon wisdom, just as He had promised him. There were peaceful relations between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them **made a treaty**."

1 Kings 15:19 "**Let there be a treaty** between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me."

1 Kings 20:34 “I will return the cities my father took from your father,” Ben-Hadad offered. “You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.” Ahab said, “On the basis of a treaty I will set you free.” So he **made a treaty** with him, and let him go.”

2 Kings 11:4 “In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of units of a hundred, the Carites and the guards and had them brought to him at the temple of the LORD. He **made a covenant** with them and put them under oath at the temple of the LORD. Then he showed them the king’s son.”

Proverbs 2:17 “who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the **covenant she made** before God.”

Marriage is a covenant between two people, made in God’s presence.

Mal. 2:14 “You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of **your marriage covenant.**”

There are a number of covenants in Genesis, e.g.

Genesis 21:27 “So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men **made a treaty.**”

Genesis 31:43-44 <sup>43</sup> “Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? <sup>44</sup> Come now, **let’s make a covenant**, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

There are plenty of other covenants between people and nations etc, right through the Bible. And of course the two divisions of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, could just as easily be called the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

A “Testament” is a covenant concerning what will happen after someone dies – how the property will be distributed – a will is a testament. So in fact the Old Testament would better be called the Old Covenant, since no one died. The New Testament can be called either the New Testament or the New Covenant, because the same Greek word is translated both testament and covenant.

So we see that this subject of covenants is quite important in the Bible, and we haven’t even started talking about the really important covenants yet – the covenants between God and Man.

Here again, you’re in for a surprise if you think there were only a couple of covenants God made with men. There were lots of them too! God didn’t have to make any covenants with men. But because of His love for us, He has made some promises and bound Himself to keep them, if we do our part of the bargain.

It is a very remarkable thing that God, who is holy, omniscient, and omnipotent, has consented to enter into covenants with us feeble, sinful, flawed men and women!! That’s why this sermon is called God of the Covenants.

Let's look at some of the covenants God made with men. And you might be surprised to see that you are involved in more than one of these. God has made several covenants with you and me!

Hosea 6:7 "As at Adam, they have broken the covenant; they were unfaithful to me there." The first covenant God made was with Adam. God gave him a beautiful garden, a beautiful wife, food and all his needs, if he would look after the garden and follow God.

Gen. 9:8-17 <sup>8</sup> "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup> "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." <sup>12</sup> And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup> Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." <sup>17</sup> So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

God made this covenant with Noah, and also his descendants (vv9, 17) – which includes us! So here is a covenant you and I are parties to! Are you fulfilling your part in this covenant? It's easy – there is nothing for us to do. God is the only one who has responsibilities to fulfil.

Gen. 17:1-2 "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." A covenant between God and Abraham.

Gen. 17:4-8 <sup>4</sup> "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup> The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

This one includes us too – descendants of Abraham. No matter what country we come from, if we have the Holy Spirit we are spiritual children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:29 – you are Abraham's seed and heirs of the promises.)

Gen. 17:9-14 <sup>9</sup> "Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. <sup>13</sup> Whether born in your household or bought with your money,

they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

We know from the New Testament that we don't have to be circumcised in the flesh, but spiritually – so the covenant is fulfilled in a spiritual way now, and doesn't have to be done physically. Therefore the word “everlasting” in verse 13 means “while those circumstances exist.”

God also made an important covenant with David, and covenants with Phinehas, Joshua, Jehoiada, Josiah, Hezekiah, Ezra – it's amazing how many there were. We don't have time to go through all of them, but let's now look at the two most important covenants of all, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

We've seen that each of us is involved in the covenants made with Noah and Abraham – they were made with us too. How about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant – are we involved in those ones too? Are you under the Old Covenant or the New Covenant?

The Old Covenant was made at Mt Sinai.

Exodus 19:3-6 <sup>3</sup> “Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

This was made with the people of Israel only, not the rest of the world. Isn't that the answer right away – it was made with ancient Israel, so we can't be under it! Some people will agree with that, but some won't, so let's go on.

Exodus 24:7-8 <sup>7</sup> “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.” <sup>8</sup> Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

The covenant was ratified or sealed with the blood of animals. That was how the covenant began.

Luke 22:20 <sup>20</sup> “In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Later, the New Covenant was ratified or sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant began when Jesus Christ died. That was how the covenant began.

The Old Covenant was a marriage agreement between God and Israel. A marriage lasts until death. God died, the first marriage covenant finished, and He was free to marry again. This time He married New Testament Israel, the Church. The Old Covenant finished and the New Covenant began.

When anyone makes a new will, the old one is deleted, cancelled, and replaced with the new one.

Heb. 10:9-10 <sup>9</sup>“Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do Your will” He sets aside the first to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Jesus set aside the first covenant to establish the second.

Heb. 10:15-18 <sup>15</sup>“The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First He says: <sup>16</sup>“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” <sup>17</sup> Then He adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” <sup>18</sup> And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.”

The Holy Spirit prophesied this in Jeremiah 31. It is amazing that Jeremiah and Ezekiel knew of a time when this would happen – a wonderful example of prophecy in action. When was this prophecy fulfilled – or is it still future?

Heb. 10:16 “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

How does God put the laws in people’s hearts and minds? By giving the Holy Spirit.

Heb. 10:17-18 <sup>17</sup> Then He adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” <sup>18</sup> And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.”

This results in the forgiveness of sins. When we repent and are baptised, we accept Jesus’ blood shed for us, the blood of the New Covenant. At that time we enter the New Covenant, we receive the Holy Spirit, the laws are written in our hearts, our sins are forgiven and we are under the New Covenant!

The Old Covenant was given to physical Israel. It contained lots of physical laws, sacrifices, the 10 Commandments, etc. The New Covenant was given to spiritual Israel. It contains lots of laws too – there are many laws and commandments outlined in the New Covenant. We’re not going through those today – just covering the theme of the Covenants of God, and which Covenants we are under today.

Heb. 8:13 “By calling this covenant “new,” He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”

The Old Covenant is obsolete. What does that mean? In my dictionary, “no longer in use, out of date.” The King James version doesn’t use that word. It says “decays and waxes away.” The Greek word is “palaio” = antiquated.

At the time Paul wrote, the Temple was still standing in Jerusalem, and the priesthood still functioning. In a very short time they would be gone and the Old Covenant would have disappeared.

Heb. 7:18-19 <sup>18</sup> “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.” The Old Covenant was weak and useless (because the people couldn’t keep it.)

Verse 22 “Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a **better** covenant.”

Heb. 8:6-7 <sup>6</sup> “But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.” <sup>7</sup> For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.”

Better promises. The New Covenant also has “better hope” (7:19); “better sacrifices” (9:23); “a better covenant” (11:16); a “better resurrection” (11:35); a “better covenant” (7:23)

Gal. 4:21-31 talks about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. <sup>21</sup> “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. <sup>24</sup> These things are being taken figuratively: **The women represent two covenants**. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written: “*Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.*” <sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. <sup>30</sup> But what does 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.” <sup>31</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

V22 Ishmael from Hagar and Isaac from Rebekah.

V23 Isaac was promised by God.

V24 This is a parable.

V25 Old Covenant – Hagar; Mt Sinai – slaves

Vv26-28 New Covenant – Rebekah; Heavenly Jerusalem – Free

V30 The Old Covenant is gone!

V31 We are under the New Covenant!

2 Cor. 3 also discusses the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

2 Cor. 3:6 “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.”

*We are ministers of the New Covenant. Not just me, but all of you are ministers too!*

V7 “Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was,”

*That is the Old Covenant.*

V8 “will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?”

*That is the New Covenant.*

V11 “And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!”

The Old Covenant came with glory but it was fading away. V11 KJV – “is done away.”

Vv12-13 <sup>12</sup> “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. <sup>13</sup> We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.”

Vv14-15 <sup>14</sup> “But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.”

*People under the Old Covenant have a veil.*

V16 “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

*But when we come under the New Covenant the veil goes.*

Why? Because we receive the Holy Spirit when we accept Jesus Christ’s blood of the New Covenant. And the Holy Spirit opens our minds to wonderful things. That’s the great thing about the New Covenant – God’s laws are put in our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit – what a fantastic blessing!

See how much the Bible revolves around Covenants? Isn’t it wonderful that our Great God wants to build personal relationships with His people, and has made agreements or covenants with us. Let’s rejoice that we serve a wonderful covenant-making and covenant-keeping God!