

Covenants

The study of the major covenants in the Bible is, in effect, the study of God's plans and purposes. (Psalm 25:14)

The Bible contains many covenants. Covenants are promises or agreements. Some are purely one-sided, not dependent upon any cooperation. Such was the rainbow covenant of Genesis 9:8-17. Some covenants are conditional like the Jewish Law Covenant which would bring its blessings only if those under it would "do" the things it required. (Galatians 3:10-12) That will also be the nature of the New Covenant once it is put into effect. (Revelation 20:12) But, at that time, mankind will have the ability to do what is asked because that New Covenant will be written in the hearts of people instead of on stone. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)



The major covenant of Scripture is the Abrahamic Covenant which Paul calls the Gospel itself. (Galatians 3:8) This Covenant, strangely, seems rarely discussed in Christian circles though it is the all-encompassing covenant of the Bible. In simplest terms, God promises unconditionally that He will use the "seed of Abraham" as the tool to bless all the families of the earth. What a promise! What a Covenant! (Genesis 12:3) We will return to look at its features after considering some other points.

The word covenant is the equivalent of the word testament. As we all are aware, the Bible is divided into two parts, one (originally in Hebrew) is called "The Old Testament;" the other (originally in Greek) is called "The New Testament." Because people are so used to these terms, and because the Abrahamic Covenant has almost been lost sight of, most Christian people simply have assumed that Jesus' first advent was the end of the "Old Testament" (the Jewish Law Covenant) and the beginning of the "New Testament" (that which Jeremiah 31 called a New Covenant). This simplistic thinking not only is wrong, but it destroys the very Gospel (the Abrahamic Covenant) which Paul taught in Galatians 3 and which Jesus preached.

The period between the two advents of Christ is set aside for the development of "the body of Christ," Christ's Church — the Seed of Abraham which inherits the

promise that it eventually will bless all the nations of earth. (Galatians 3:29, 8) Once that seed is completed, the New Covenant will be ready to function.

THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

We call the Jewish Law Covenant "old" because it now is out-of-date. Paul says that its purpose was to lead Israel to Christ. (Galatians 3:24) Obviously, when Messiah came, the Law no longer was necessary. (Galatians 3:25) However, AND THIS IS IMPORTANT, Jesus was the end of the Law ONLY TO EVERYONE THAT BELIEVETH. (Romans 10:4) Jews who have not accepted Jesus as Christ ARE YET UNDER THE LAW. When Paul is contrasting the New Covenant to the Law Covenant, he says that the Law "decayeth and waxeth old and is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:13) Notice! He did not say it was gone. As a matter of fact, the Greek word he used for "waxeth old" means growing SENILE. Senility is the condition of living in the past. Paul is saying that if Jews hang on to the Law, they are living in the past — living under an agreement designed for a former age.

The New Covenant, according to the Apostle, is instituted BECAUSE THE OLD ONE DIDN'T WORK. (Hebrews 8:7) This is important. Paul does not reason that the old covenant didn't supply what was needed; he reasons that a new covenant is needed because the old one didn't work. The reasoning is clear: the New Covenant will supply what the Old (Law) Covenant couldn't — perfect eternal life on earth. Notice in Hebrews 8:8-12 that it is with Israel that the New Covenant is made — once they come out from the senile covenant they still cherish. (Hebrews 8:13)

Thus the Old Law Covenant was not for Christians, and neither is the New Covenant which replaces it. According to Galatians 3:17, the Law Covenant was ADDED to the Abrahamic Covenant and cannot disannul it. And we have seen in Hebrews that the New Covenant is A REPLACEMENT FOR AN ADDITION! Hebrews 8 and Galatians 3 tell us BOLDLY that Old and New Covenants are of secondary importance to the Abrahamic Covenant to which they are added. Therefore, Christians are not under either of these additions because Christians are the product of the original covenant. (Galatians 3:29)



Moses giving the Law Covenant to Israel

In Galatians 4, Paul shows the allegorical nature of Abraham's life. Paul wants early Jewish Christians to understand that they have absolutely no continuing responsibility under the Law. To do this, he shows how God used the wives of Abraham to picture how the Abrahamic Covenant would unfold. If we recall that Abraham waited in waiting for "the promised seed," we can see how his taking Hagar as a concubine produced a child which God refused to recognize as the child of promise. Paul comments on this in Galatians 4:22-28. He shows that Hagar's child pictured Israel, the NATURAL seed of Abraham, but that Sarah later produced Isaac, the seed of PROMISE. Paul shows that we as Christians are the promised seed. Sarah, obviously, did not represent a new covenant. She was the first or oldest wife of Abraham.

Paul fails to mention the New Covenant in this passage because (1) it was not time for it, and (2) his point was to show the Galatians that they were being developed under the Abrahamic Covenant—NOT the Law Covenant added to it, and certainly not the New Covenant which Paul totally ignores here!

Interestingly, Abraham eventually had a third wife who produced many children. If we follow Paul's lead about Abraham's wives being allegorical, it seems safe to continue this reasoning that Keturah, the third wife, pictures the New Covenant. Abraham took her to wife after Sarah had died. Thus the New Covenant will go into effect after the church is complete — after the Sarah (or Abrahamic) Covenant has produced its promised seed. (Genesis 24:67-25:2)

It is very important to note that, while the New Covenant does not begin to FUNCTION until Christ's peaceable kingdom, it HAS BEEN IN PREPARATION

since the first advent. The blood which seals it was the blood Jesus spilled for our redemption. (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:22-26) In Hebrews 8:6 it is shown clearly that the New Covenant already is "established" (Greek = legislated). But this does not mean it is functioning. This verse proves that point by saying that it is "established upon...promises." The New Covenant is insured and promised because of Jesus' sacrifice. However, we don't need promises once something is a reality.

IN SUMMARY

1. The primary covenant of the Bible is that made with Abraham which promises to develop a seed which will bless all families of the earth. That seed is Jesus and his disciples who will do that work using the mediation of the New Covenant as a tool to do so.
2. The Law Covenant with Israel was added to the Abrahamic Covenant in order (among other reasons) to bring Israel to Christ. It did not do so nationally although it did prepare many Jews to receive Messiah and become the nucleus of the Gospel Age church. (The additional members of that church would come from the Gentiles who never were and are not now under that Jewish Law Covenant.)
3. The New Covenant is a replacement eventually for the Jewish Law Covenant. It is to be made with the same nation, but it will be made available to the whole world symbolized by the "sea." (Isaiah 60:5) Once the Gentiles have been converted, there will be "no more sea" (Revelation 21:1) because there will be no more restless masses that it pictures. All the world will have to conform to the New Covenant arrangement through Israel, or they will be denied the blessings. (Zechariah 14:16-17; Jeremiah 31:31-34)