

The Two Covenants

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First printing, June, 2018

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The nominal Christian world refers to the Noachian covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant, the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, and so on, as if these are all different. We will take a closer look, to see if there is a common thread that binds all these covenants together. Let's begin by defining what a covenant is. A covenant is simply a deal or agreement between two parties. The first recorded instance of an agreement between two parties is found in Genesis 1:26, where God and His Son agreed to make man in their own image and likeness. Since God is Agape,¹ this would indicate that Adam and Eve were created with an Agape nature. After our original parents were deceived into rejecting Agape, God came looking for them, as was His custom, and had to call out to them, as they had hidden themselves from Him. After a bit of investigation, God “discovered” that they had eaten of the one fruit they were forbidden to eat. After pronouncing the consequences of their rejection of Him, and the ultimate fate of satan, God killed an animal – the principle of types would indicate it was a lamb – and made coats of skin for our parents. Genesis 3:21. This was a covenant between God and Adam. God offered to cloth the couple, and they, recognizing their great need, received His gift, and were clothed, or “covered,” both physically and spiritually.

The next recorded covenant occurred between God and Noah, and his sons, and their offspring. Genesis 9:8,9 In Genesis 9:10, God made a covenant between Himself and every living creature (all the animals), assuring them that He would not destroy the earth with a flood again. How did the animals respond to God's covenant?

Of course, that was a trick question. Animals cannot talk. All they can do is receive whatever good God gives them. Only man is perverse enough to reject God's gifts. God's covenant was that He would not destroy the earth again with a flood, and the sign or

token of His promise was the rainbow. Whenever the sons of men saw a rainbow, they would remember the covenant, and the goodness and forbearance of God.

The next recorded covenant, perhaps the most well known, was between God and Abram. God had already called Abram out of the place he was born, and away from his father's house and relatives, Genesis 12:1. In Genesis 12:2,3 He made this incredible promise to him:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The promise was repeated, and then expanded on in Genesis 15:1-5, after Abram questioned how God was going to fulfill His promise, since he had no children:

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward.

2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?

3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Abram's response is in verse 6: "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." The word translated 'believe' is the Hebrew word 'Aman,' which simply means 'let it be so.' Abram recognized that he could not fulfill any of God's promises. For years, he and Sarai had tried to have a child, with no success. He had nothing to lose by letting God do it for him. But he did ask for proof: "And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?", verse 8. What follows is one of the most fantastic events in the history of man. In Genesis 15:9,10 God told Abram:

And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

10 And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.

This is called a Suzerain Treaty. At the time, whenever there was an agreement between a greater Lord and a lesser Lord, the *lesser* Lord would take clean animals and cut them in half, and lay each half next to each other, in a row, with a place to walk between them. Then the lesser Lord would walk between the animals, signifying that if he did not fulfill his part of the agreement, he would be cut in half, like the animals that were cut in half. Thus, a Suzerain Treaty is a solemn oath. After the sun had gone down, something had passed between the animals that had been cut in two, Genesis 15:7:

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

Who had passed between the the animals cut in two? There is no Bible record that it was Abram. Genesis 15:12 records:

And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

Abram was scared to death. Although he was the lesser Lord, he knew he could not fulfill the agreement between him and God. Thus, it was the LORD God Himself - the Son of God - that walked between the animals! God was indicating that if He could not fulfill His promise to Abram, He would be cut in two like those animals. That is, He would cease to exist. The Son of God, who inherited the life of His Father, was staking His existence upon being able to fulfill His promise to Abram.² Human promises are like ropes of sand, but God's promises are sure! God is the only one with the power to do what He says He will do. Note also what He told Abram would happen to his offspring in Genesis 15:13-16:

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full.

God claims to be the only one that can predict the future, Isaiah 44:7; 46:9,10. This prediction came true in Abram's offspring, in their captivity in Egypt. Up to now, God has a 100% track record in predicting the future. Based on past results, it's very likely that will continue.

Unfortunately, Abram's faith faltered. After many years, he and Sarai still did not have a son. Sarai blamed God for it, Genesis 16:2, and suggested to Abram that he produce a son for her through Hagar, her maidservant. After all, He said that Abram would have a son; He didn't mention her. Being a dutiful husband, Abram did not argue with her, and in a short time Hagar became pregnant. This lack of faith on their part, mostly Abram's, caused many problems, which persist to this day.

God again appeared to Abram when he was 99 years old, and again affirmed His covenant with him, Genesis 17:1-9. He changed his name to Abraham, which means 'the father of nations.' Then in Genesis 17:10 God states:

This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

Many mistake circumcision for the covenant, but please read carefully: the covenant God is speaking of has already been stated in verses 1 through 9. Circumcision is merely the *token* or *sign* of the covenant, Genesis 17:11, not the covenant itself, just as the rainbow was the token or sign of the covenant in Genesis 9:12,13. God then went on to affirm that his offspring, which He had promised him, would be born from Sarai. Unlike Abraham and his wife, God was so sure He could produce offspring through her that He changed her name to Sarah, which means mother of nations. Abraham laughed at God, so of course God instructed him to call his child, not yet born, Issac, which means laughter.

At Abraham's request, God assured him that Ishmael would be blessed too, even though he was not the son that God promised him. Genesis 17:20. Since God's blessings are spiritual in nature, Ishmael's blessings will be spiritual, and have yet to be completely fulfilled. That same day, Abraham and Ishmael, and all the males in Abraham's household were circumcised. It was to be a reminder, a painful one, to Abraham and his descendants, that God can fulfill His promises, and doesn't need man's help.

The next time they met, in the plains of Mamre, the Lord appeared to Abraham, with two others, in the form of men, Genesis 18:1,2. Note especially Abraham's attitude - he was trying to feed and comfort the Creator of the universe! Genesis 18:2-5. (To this day, the people of the middle east are very hospitable to strangers.) We would do well to consider God's honor and needs before our own. When we do, it's evidence to others that God's spirit is in us.

This time it was Sarah that laughed at God, Genesis 18:12, after overhearing God tell Abraham she would have a child, but she denied it, Genesis 18:15. God assured her that she did laugh, and replied, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." Genesis 18:14. We should be thankful for God's faith, as we seem to have so little of our own, and what little we have we do not exercise enough, and so it atrophies. Abraham and Sarah must have finally exercised the measure of faith given to them, because the promised son came, just as God had foretold, Genesis 21:1-3:

And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

Up to now, we have seen that the covenant is God's one sided promise. As we are created, fallen beings, we have nothing to contribute. Only the Creator and Redeemer of man can make promises, as only He has the power to fulfill them. This is called the New Covenant.

The next instance of a covenant we will examine is at the one at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel, had fled Egypt, where they were slaves, led by Moses. Moses spoke with God on Mt. Sinai, and he was instructed by God to give this promise to the children of Israel, Exodus 19:3-6:

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

What a promise! It's similar to the promise that God made Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. But now, He has a people that can evangelize the world, giving the Gospel message to every language and tribe and people. Their response is given in Exodus 19:8:

And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken **we** will do. (Emphasis added.)

The problem is that God never asked them to do anything. The word translated *obey* in verse 5 is better translated as *listen*. And the word translated as *keep* is the same word used in Genesis 2:15, where Adam was to keep the garden, which is better translated as *cherish*, not possess. So the people were to listen to the Lord their God and cherish the covenant He made with their father Abraham, to proclaim the Gospel, and be a blessing to the world.

What could God do? The people had put Him between a rock and a hard place. They said they could do it, so He ratified their covenant. It was as if God responded, “oh, so you can do it, can you? Alright then, here is what you have to do.” So he prepared them for His arrival:

And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled.

17 And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

18 And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

The Lord appeared with thunder and lightning and earthquake and fire, His holiness and majesty hidden by the smoke, something their father Abraham never experienced. Abraham spoke with God face to face, without any fear. How different their experience was to their father Abraham, whose faith was demonstrated by his works. Here is God's own testimony in Genesis 26:5:

...Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.

God spoke with Moses, and gave him the Ten Commandments law, Exodus 20:1-18. God wrote them with His own finger on tables of stone, Exodus 24:12; 31:18, because the stone was softer than the people's hearts. Since His people were not understanding that God is Agape, 1John 4:6, He had to show them the holiness of His character, and that they were lacking in any righteousness, and could not do what He asked of them. The children of Israel were so dull that Moses had to give them other laws also, to guide their behavior, Exodus chapters 21-23. A sanctuary for the Lord was also set up, Exodus 25:8, so that God could be as near to His people as possible, without dwelling in their hearts, and destroying them, Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29. If the people could not come up to His level, the Lord would stoop down to their level, as far as possible.

As Moses was up on the mount, where God was writing the Ten Commandments with His own finger, God informed him that the people were corrupting themselves, and were worshiping false idols. God offered to destroy them, and to start over again with Moses, Exodus 32:10. Moses was able to convince the Lord to relent. Exodus 32:11-13. Nevertheless, when Moses was bringing the Ten Commandments down from the mount and heard the people carrying on, he broke the tables of stone. After executing 3,000 of the unrepentant guilty, Moses asked the people to consecrate themselves, and went back up to the mount to speak with God. What followed after is the only pause in the whole Bible. Exodus 32:31,32:

And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.

32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Moses had broken down and cried, before informing God if He could not forgive the people, he was willing to perish with them. God had finally found a man after His own heart, who was more concerned about God and His people than he was about himself. God responded that He would blot out of His book (of life) the names of those who sinned against Him. Exodus 32:33.

The history of the children of Israel was one of great spirituality, as well as great depravity. Nevertheless, to carry out the plan of salvation, God replied in Exodus 34:10:

And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou *art* shall see the work of the LORD: for it *is* a terrible thing that I will do with thee.

There were many marvels, for those who were faithful, and accepted the new covenant. But for those who persisted in trying to keep the law in their own strength, the results were terrible indeed.

The writings of Paul in Galatians 3:15-19 give further confirmation of the relation between the promise to Abraham and the law:

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man's covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

17 And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

The Ten Commandments, and other laws, were only given because the promise God made them, in Exodus 19:3-6, was rejected. Paul goes on to explain, in Galatians 3:21-26:

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

The law cannot produce righteousness. The law can only punish us if we do not obey it. In Paul's day, the estate owners son was brought to school by a slave. If the estate owners son strayed off the path, the slave was allowed to beat him, and get him on the path to school again, even though the son would eventually inherit the estate. The purpose of the law was to let us know if we are in Christ or not. The apostle James picked up on this idea, in James 1:23-25:

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

The Ten Commandments are the character of God - Agape - as applied to man. As we look at the Law and realize we fall short, we are driven to Christ, who is the only means for us to be justified. Paul brings this out clearly in Hebrews 8:6-10:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead

them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

This is brought out also in Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”. The following verses then show what the mind of Christ is – He was willing to give up all He had, in order to save one world lost in selfishness, even if it meant goodbye to life forever.

The Law is holy and good, but it cannot save us or give us life. Romans 7:12. The only way man can live is by receiving the life of Christ. We must 'let it be so,' as Abraham did. Genesis 15:6.

1. See authors booklet, Discourse On Agape.
2. Since the Son inherited the Father's life – His spirit – the Son's failure would have been the Father's failure as well.

