

THE NEW COVENANT

The word “covenant” denotes a RELATIONSHIP of commitment. When the eternal God went about to establish relationship with people, He did it through the means of COVENANT.

Often between people, CONTRACTS administer certain relationships. If one party breaks the contract, a court of law will decide who is wrong and what the consequences will be.

A COVENANT is stronger than a contract because it directly brings God into the equation as the arbiter. The word “COVENANT” comes out of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word (*berit*), translated as “covenant”, literally means “*to cut*” or “*to divide*”. To make a covenant was to cut a covenant and involved a solemn ceremony involving bloody, dead animal parts (cf. Gen. 15:9-17).

For example, Jeremiah 34:18 references when Israel made a covenant with God saying:

Jeremiah 34:18 (NKJV)

18 And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—

The idea was that those entering into a covenant relationship before God were responsible to keep their part of the commitment upon pain of death if they violated it. Each party was saying before God, “*May what happened to this cut up animal happen to me if I don’t keep my part of the covenant.*” They were solemnly calling upon God to hold them accountable and to take their life if they weren’t faithful to the covenant.

Because an animal had to die in this ceremony, it was called “cutting a covenant” or a “blood covenant”.

In terms of a specific nation, God had a covenant relationship with only ONE nation, namely, the nation of Israel. Romans 9:4 says that “the covenants” pertain to Israel.

There are 4 MAJOR unconditional/unilateral covenants that God made with Israel. The Abrahamic Covenant is the oldest. The Land, Davidic, and New Covenants build on and amplify various aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant. In the end, everything is tied to the Abrahamic Covenant and finds fulfilment in conjunction with the NEW COVENANT.

The only other MAJOR covenant is that of the Mosaic Law. It alone was a conditional covenant. It is found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It was an administrative covenant intended to govern the faith life of the people of Israel. The Law was not THE way to life, but it was AN administrative way of life for those under it.

John Bunyan is often credited with saying:

***Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands,
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings.***

No one could be saved by keeping the Law because no one could keep it perfectly. It consisted of a total of 613 laws, and God's holiness demanded that all the Law be kept perfectly all the time (cf. Ja. 2:10). No wonder Peter (in Acts 15:10) described it as a yoke of burden which the Jews were not able to bear.

The Law was like a perfect picture of what a person should be but did nothing to enable a person to do it. The Law was like a mirror that shows a person how dirty they are but does nothing to cleanse them (cf. Rom. 3:20, Ja. 1:23-25). However, the Law did serve as a schoolteacher, showing people that they needed the grace of Christ (cf. Gal. 3:24).

The Law was holy and good, but this arrangement was only good for teaching and restraining people. It could not change people's nature or their state.

The Law merely showed us the HOLY standard and that we can't meet that standard (cf. Rom. 3:19-20, 23). As such, it became a ministry of condemnation and death (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7, 9).

If people were really to live in a relationship that was acceptable and pleasing to God, the terms would have to be changed.

The old covenant would have to be replaced with a whole NEW covenant arrangement.

Since people absolutely could not keep the terms of the old Mosaic Covenant, God promised to replace it with a NEW COVENANT. This new covenant would change everything, making people acceptable to God in an ongoing COVENANT RELATIONSHIP with Him.

This NEW COVENANT would be an eternal covenant that would not be broken, with the result being an eternal, ongoing relationship with God. In contrast to being a covenant of LAW, it would be a covenant of GRACE.

“The term ‘covenant’ is defined by the Old Testament. And ‘New Covenant’ is defined by Jeremiah 31.” – **S. Lewis Johnson**

The only place in the OT that specifically names THE NEW COVENANT, as such, is found in Jer. 31:31. However, there are MANY other OT Scriptures that deal with the substance and concept of the New Covenant (cf. Deut. 29:4, 30:6, Isa. 42:6, 49:8, 54:10, 55:3, 59:20-21, 61:8-9, Jer. 24:4-7, 31:31-40, 32:37-41; 50:4-5, Ezek. 11:17-21, 16:60-63, 18:31, 34:25-26, 36:22-38, 37:21-28, Hos. 2:18-20, Zech. 9:11, 12:10).

In the New Testament, there are 5 texts that actually mention the New Covenant (cf. Lk. 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:6, Heb. 8:8, 9:15). However, there are at least 7 other clear references to it (cf. Mt. 26:28, Mk. 14:24, Rom. 11:27, Heb. 8:10, 13, 10:16, 12:24).

Luke 22:20 (NKJV)

20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Thus, it was the death of Christ that brought into place the reality of a new covenant relationship with God for all who will believe in Him.

Romans 3:24–25 (NKJV)

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

Praise God for the reality of a New Covenant relationship with Him made possible through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.