

What is a Covenant?

(Overview)

Definition

“Covenant”: ברית *brith* (Hebrew)

“A covenant is a type of contract in which the covenantor makes a promise to a covenantee to do (affirmative covenant) or not do some action (negative covenant).”¹

“From the Hebrew *berith* it is translated ‘will’, ‘covenant’, and ‘testament’, and comes from the word translated “to cut”. Also from the Greek *diatheke*. It is mentioned 300 times in Scripture. It is important to note that not all the covenants are mutual agreements i.e. it is not IF you do this THEN I will do that. A covenant in the strict biblical sense is not a joint obligation but rather a commitment one makes to another. A covenant is a relationship wherein the party making the covenant binds himself to fulfill certain conditions. This was often sworn and invoked in the presence of God to make the promise more solemn and binding². When God's name was invoked and the covenant was broken it was considered a heinous sin³. An example of covenant is marriage.⁴ Covenants were sealed with a gift which was to be looked at and remembered⁵ or attested to by a monument such as planting a tree⁶ or a heap of stones⁷.”⁸

Biblical Covenants

“All **Abrahamic religions** consider biblical covenants important. Of the covenants found in the Pentateuch or Torah, the Noahic Covenant is unique in applying to all humanity, while the other covenants are principally agreements made between God and the biblical Israelites.”⁹

The main biblical covenants:

- Edenic Covenant – Genesis 1:26-31; 2:16-17 (*With humanity*)
- The Noahic Covenant – Genesis 9:8-17 (*With humanity*)
- The Abrahamic Covenant – Genesis 12-17 (*With Abraham and his descendants*)
- The Mosaic Covenant – Exodus 19-24 (*Israel*)
- The Aaronic Covenant – Exodus 29:9; Leviticus 24:9 (*With Aaron and his descendants*)
- The Davidic Covenant – 2 Samuel 7 (*With David and his descendants*)
- The New Covenant – Jeremiah 31:31 (Luke 22:20) (*With humanity*)

“Most Christians believe this New Covenant is the ‘replacement’ or ‘final fulfilment’ of the Old Covenant described in the Old Testament and as applying to the People of God, while a minority believe both covenants are still applicable in a dual covenant theology.

The New Covenant is a biblical interpretation originally derived from a phrase in the Book of Jeremiah, in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is often thought of as an eschatological Messianic Age or world to come and is related to the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God.

Generally, Christians believe that the New Covenant was instituted at the Last Supper as part of the Eucharist, which in the Gospel of John includes the New Commandment. A connection between the Blood of Christ and the New Covenant is seen in most modern English translations of the New Testament with

1 – Google definition

2 – 1 Samuel 20:8

3 – Ezekiel 17:12-20

4 – Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14

5 – Genesis 21:30

6 – Genesis 21:33

7 – Genesis 31:52

8 – Charles Monk (05/06/2003) “COVENANTS” (www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=789)

9 – Covenant (biblical): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant_%28biblical%29

the saying: "this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood".

Christians see Jesus as the mediator of this New Covenant, and that his blood, shed at his crucifixion is the required blood of the covenant: as with all covenants between God and man described in the Bible, the New Covenant is considered "a bond in blood sovereignly administered by God"¹⁰. It has been theorized that the New Covenant is the Law of Christ as spoken during his Sermon on the Mount."¹¹

Steps in Covenant Cutting

- “1. Preparations – Since a covenant was meant to be a permanent relationship it was entered into only after much prayer, counsel and deep thought.
2. A Witness was sought as a trusted mediator of both sides. A covenant was meant to be a public declaration of intent. Depending on its importance, God was sometimes called upon to witness. Sometimes heaven and earth were the only witnesses.
3. Often garments and weapons were exchanged. A garment signified who the individual was i.e. the tribes would wear clothing which would readily be identifiable to others. This kept the parties ever mindful of their commitment.
4. The belt or girdle would be exchanged signifying, "My strength is your strength".
5. An animal would be split in two and the parties would stand in the midst of the split animal, thus representing as the animal gave up its life, so too, will I give up my life to maintain this covenant. In a mutual covenant both parties would then cut their own wrists, raise their hands into the air and clasp hands while pointing to heaven making God their witness to this agreement. The intermingling of the blood signified the joining of a blood relationship. They would then often coterize the wound with a hot branding iron to inflict a noticeable scar which would act as a perpetual reminder.
6. Often times names would be exchanged and the parties would refer to themselves as _____ the friend of _____.
7. Exchange a list of ALL assets and liabilities because as a united, covenanted pair they would each share the other's belongings and burdens.
8. A formal exchange of the covenant's blessings and curses was then made in public and an exchange of Mizpah not asking for God's blessing or benediction but asking that Yahweh insure the faithfulness of the covenant.
9. Set up the covenant reminder, i.e. a plant, a tree, a heap of stones.
10. The covenant meal of bread and wine – This is my body which as you eat it becomes a part of you – this is my blood which as you drink it becomes your blood.”¹²

How does the Church fit into the New Covenant?

“First, the Old Testament says nothing about the church's relationship under the New Covenant. Paul indicates this should come as no surprise since no revelation of the church age was given to any prophet prior to the time of the Apostles and New Testament prophets¹³ and secondly, the Old Testament prophets who presented God's revelation of the New Covenant were amazingly Israelites whose specific task it was to reveal God's message to His people. Despite the Old Testament's silence concerning the Church's relationship to this covenant, the New Testament indicates several areas in which the Church is tied in:

- (a) The Church partakes of communion¹⁴ which, when it was established by the Lord, was to be a sign of the New Covenant¹⁵;
- (b) Believers who make up the Church partake of the spiritual blessings”¹⁶.

10 – This definition of covenant is from O. Palmer Robertson's book *The Christ of the Covenants*. It has become an accepted definition among modern scholars.

11 – Covenant (biblical): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant_%28biblical%29

12 – Charles Monk (05/06/2003) “COVENANTS” (www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=789)

13 – Ephesians 3:2-9

14 – 1Corinthians 11:23-30; 10:21

15 – 1 Corinthians 11:25; Luke 22:20

16 – Charles Monk (05/06/2003) “COVENANTS” (www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=789)

The New Covenant's Foundation¹⁷

- No NT writer states that we are in a covenant relationship with God
- The OT covenant was ratified with the Jews in a Kinship ceremony. (Exodus 19-20, Deuteronomy 5)
- The OT Vassal covenant was agreed to by the Jews. (Deuteronomy 27)
- Jesus mentions his intention to create a New Covenant at the Last Supper – prior to his death.
- No blood covenant ceremony took place between Jesus and his followers.
- Jesus went into the tabernacle in heaven to seal the New Covenant with Father in his blood (Hebrews 9:11-28)
- If the New Covenant was made with the church it would have been made on Earth with a physical ark.
- Christ mediates the New Covenant for us.
- **Hebrews 9:15** – And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
- We receive our covenantal benefits by inheritance, not agreement. Either by:
 - marriage to the King (Romans 7:4), or
 - adoption into sonship (Galatians 4:5)
- Based on Father-Son covenant “All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine” – Jesus to Father (John 17:10)
- “The Hebraic understanding of covenant entails two parties joining their lives. The covenant means that what one person owns the other person owns. This is similar to a modern marriage in which two people share all possessions.”¹⁸

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Gavin Finley “Blood Covenant Christianity: The Witness of the New Covenant”
(endtimepilgrim.org/bloodcove.htm)
- “What was a blood covenant (Genesis 15:9-21)?”
(www.gotquestions.org/blood-covenant.html)
- “Blood Covenant Teaching” (set of 4 videos)
(www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpubkyi2neo&list=PLnxYU78F62-Z6QxWD_Ts9EJF8X_i64IMo&index=1)

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17 – Summary of L.D. Smart (2015) “Is the New Covenant Made Between God and Us?”

18 – Harold Eberle