

THE COVENANTS

A few introductory notes and a lot of relevant biblical verses:

1. Why an Old Testament and a New Testament?

Better terminology: covenant. Jeremiah 31:31, Hebrews 8:8

Indivisible unity: only one book. Hebrews 1:1-2, II Timothy 3:16-17

2. What is a covenant?

Simple definition: An arrangement God makes for His people to relate to and have fellowship with Him.

Includes laws and promises, blessings and curses. Always a life and death matter.

There are *six* such old covenants:

2.1. With Adam. Hosea 6:7 "... with Adam ..." [I Timothy 2:13-14]

2.2. With Noah. Genesis 9:8-17 Divine preservation. [II Peter 2:5]

2.3. With Abraham. Genesis 15:1-21, 17:1-27 Faith, justification and inheritance. [Romans 4:1-6]

2.4. With Moses. Exodus 19:1ff. A Kingdom of Priests: community. [I Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6]

2.5. With Phinehas. Numbers 25:1-15 An eternal priesthood. [Hebrews 5:5-6]

2.6. With David. II Samuel 7, Psalm 89:3-4. An eternal kingship. [Hebrews 1:5, 8]

[The NT references in square brackets are added to indicate that the NT writers evidently believed that an understanding of all these Old Testaments covenants is essential for a genuine appreciation of the Christian gospel. And to the true appreciation of Jesus Christ.]

There is *one* such new covenant: With Jesus Christ. Hebrews 8:6-13. And see Jeremiah 31:31ff.

In the first *six* there are some that emphasise obedience (e.g. 2.1, with Adam), some that emphasise faith (e.g. 2.3, with Abraham), and some that emphasise both (e.g. 2.4, with Moses). However, both faith and obedience are required in all the covenants. This theme runs throughout the Bible – faith and obedience.

Then, the covenant with Adam is unique, standing alone as a *creational* ordinance.

The remaining five are *redemptive* ordinances and each adds to the preceding covenants (see Exodus 2:24, Galatians 3:17-19). One does not cancel out another.

To sum up these thoughts, we can speak about A Covenant of Works and A Covenant of Grace.

3. What is the difference between the *old* covenants and the *new* covenant?

Remarkable similarities:

Both offer salvation through faith alone: Romans 3:24-26, 4:1-3, cf. Genesis 15:6.

Both offer a changed heart: Deuteronomy 30:6, Psalm 51:10, Hebrews 10:22, Philippians 4:7, I Peter 1:22.

Both refer to the law written on the heart: Deuteronomy 6:6, 11:18, Psalm 37:31, 119:11, Hebrews 8:10.

Both refer to the saving ministry of the holy Spirit: Nehemiah 9:20, 30 (cf. Acts 7:51), Luke 1:15, 67.

Both share the same faith, which is always a gift from God: Hebrews 11, Ephesians 2:8.

4. What, then, is new about the new covenant?

Simply, but profoundly, the newness is Jesus Christ:

He is the eternal apostle (or prophet) and guarantor of the new covenant: Hebrews 3:1, 7:22.

He is the eternal priest of the new covenant: Hebrews 7:17, 25.

He is eternal king of the new covenant: Hebrews 1:8.

All the old covenants come together and coalesce in the new covenant.

All the salvific benefits of the new covenant were heralded in the old covenant.