



*Covenants Part 2*

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## Covenants Part 2

### Lesson Five

#### The Davidic Covenant

The covenant made by God with David is recorded in **2 Samuel 7: 10-17** and **1 Chronicles 17: 11-14**. Although the word covenant does not appear in either of these passages, God's promises on that occasion are described in **Psalm 89** as God's covenant with David.

*"He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour'. I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my kindness to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure."*

*"I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness - and I will not lie to David - that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." Psalm 89: 26-29, 33-35.*

Like the covenant with Abraham, that with David is everlasting. It is called, *"holy and sure blessings promised to David"* (**Acts 13:34**) or God's *"faithful love promised to David"* (**Isaiah 55:3**). David's last words affirm that confidence.

*"Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part?" 2 Samuel 23:5.*

We now have to see just what God's covenant promise contained and why it has enduring significance, ranking with the Abrahamic covenant and surpassed only by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. The promises to David centred on several distinctive features.

#### A Royal Dynasty

David had proposed building a house for God, but this was not to be, the task was reserved for David's son, Solomon. But then God declared to David that **"the Lord himself will establish a house for you"** (**2 Samuel 7:11**). This "house" was not a residence, because David had already built himself a palace, it could only refer to his household, that is, his family and descendants. Everywhere we go in the Old Testament, we come across the "father's house". (**Genesis 12:1; 24:7; 2 Samuel 2:8**). It is the strong enduring community of the family (**2 Samuel 9: 1-3**)

*"Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight. O Sovereign Lord you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant." 2 Samuel 7: 18-19.*

THIS WAS A NEW ADDITION TO THE PROMISE. IT MEANT THAT ALL THAT HAD BEEN OFFERED TO THE PATRIARCHS AND ISRAEL IN THE PREVIOUS COVENANTS WAS NOW BEING OFFERED TO DAVID'S DYNASTY, IN OTHER WORDS, A SUCCESSION OF RULERS FROM HIS FAMILY.

### An Everlasting Kingdom

One item in the Promise to Abraham was that ***"kings will come from you"***. (***Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11***) and in the covenant with Israel God said that there would be a kingdom (***Exodus 19:6; Numbers 24:7***). Now that the kingdom was assigned in perpetuity to David and his descendants.

***"Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."*** (2 Samuel 7:16.)

***"For this is what the Lord says, 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ... if you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant .... Can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne.'" (Jeremiah 33:17, 20-21).***

When David realised the magnitude of what had been given to him, he was completely overwhelmed.

***"Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou has brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in thine eyes, O Lord God, for thou hast spoken also of the house of thy servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom (law) of man."*** (2 Samuel 7: 18/19 NASB.)

The best translation of the last phrase is "This is the charter for humanity." In other words, the ancient promise of God to Abraham regarding a universal blessing would continue, only now it would involve a king and a kingdom. This kingdom and the blessing of the kingdom would also bring within its scope the future of all mankind.

### The Ark the City and the Kingdom

The presence and the power of God in Israel are intimately connected with the ark of the covenant. Therefore, David brought the ark into the tent in Jerusalem, David's tabernacle, until he could build a temple. He established the kingdom given to him by God (***2 Samuel 6: 1-19***).

***"For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: This is my resting place forever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it."*** Psalm 132: 13-14.

This is the beginning of the insight that absorbed the attention of the prophets - the coming of the kingdom of God and the Messiah, the Son of David, who would reign over the whole earth.

***“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.” Micah 5:2.***

Even when the Davidic house or dynasty was in tatters, now merely a hut or tent, it would rise from the ashes under a new coming David and would extend its authority to the Gentile nations.

***“After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its’ ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things.” (Acts 15: 16-17).***

James is applying the prophesy of **Amos 9: 11-12** regarding the restoration of David’s tent to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.

### **A Messianic King - The Son of God**

The future Davidic king is addressed as God in **Psalm 45**, and the writer of Hebrews applies this passage to Christ, the Son of God (**Hebrews 1: 8-9**).

***“Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (Psalm 45: 6-7)***

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” (Isaiah 9: 6-7)***

THE FULFILMENT OF THE COVENANT WITH DAVID CAME WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST. AS THE ANGEL GABRIEL MADE VERY CLEAR TO THE VIRGIN MARY.

***“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end ..... So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1: 31-33, 35).***

Fifteen times in the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as the Son of David. In **Matthew 1:1**, he is ***“Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,”*** establishing his identity as the Abrahamic - Davdic Messiah and legal heir of David’s throne. In **Revelation 5:5**, He is the ***“Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,”*** and in **Revelation 22:16** ***“The Root of the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”*** He holds the ***“key of David” (Revelation 3:7)***, that is, the authority of the Davidic kingdom, which is the authority to prevail against the kingdom of Satan (**Luke 10: 18-19**).

Christ came as the Messiah, the Anointed King, to bring the kingdom of God to earth. He will come a second time to consummate that Kingdom - the rock cut out without human hands, that becomes a huge mountain and fills the whole earth (*Daniel 2: 34-35; 44-45*).

## Lesson Six

### The New Covenant

In this history of God's redemptive covenants with man, there remained, even after the covenant with David certain critical issues that stood in the way of God achieving his desire for an everlasting relationship of personal intimacy with man.

- 1) One was the need for a final solution to the sin problem. The sacrificial system spoke in faith of sin being covered, but the blood of animals could not deal with the question of guilt nor could it cleanse the conscience of the worshipper (**Hebrews 9:9**).
- 2) The law of God, holy and righteous and good as it was (**Romans 7:12**) was external to man. It could show man what he ought to do but could not enable him to do it because of the internalised sinful values of the fallen nature (**Romans 8:3**). All God's dealings with Israel proved over and over again that when external law and inner values disagree, in the long run inner values will win out every time.
- 3) Man not only lacks the power to obey the law of God, he lacks the motivation to even desire to obey it. His mind-set is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so (**Romans 8:7**). Furthermore, the entirety of man's nature is affected by sin and rebellion so that there is no place where he can stand to get the leverage to change his attitude towards God (**Romans 1: 9-32**).
- 4) In this situation, there is an enormous gulf between man and God, Man is literally lost and can never find a way back to God, even if he should try. An initiative must therefore come from God. Man is shut up in God's grace for salvation.

***“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-24).***

### Prophecies of the New Covenant

It is in this context that the prophets begin to speak about a New Covenant - not new in the sense that it totally replaced what had gone before, but new in the sense that it represented a radical breakthrough that would finally achieve the purpose of the covenants in a dramatic new way. Two of the key passages for understanding the New Covenant are **Jeremiah 31: 31-34** and **Ezekiel 36: 25-28**.

***“‘The time is coming’, declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord.***

***‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time’, declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord”, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest’ declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’” Jeremiah 31: 31-34***

***“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36: 25-28.***

There is a close link between the concept of shalom (peace) and b’riyth (covenant). Shalom is the state of those united in full harmony of the soul with each other, and b’riyth is the bonded relationship with all the privileges and duties implied in it. Both words may be used together. For example, a covenant is a covenant of peace (***Ezekiel 34:25; Isaiah 54:10***), or converse to enter into covenant is to “make peace” (***Joshua 10: 1,4; 2 Samuel 10”19; 1 Kings 22:44***).

The new covenant, accomplished by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is also described as “making peace”.

***“For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1: 19-20.***

We now turn to examine the way in which the New Covenant achieves the covenant goal in God’s heart.

### **The Final Solution to the Sin Problem**

1) All sin is an offence against God’s nature that God cannot overlook and must judge. God’s wrath is his implacable enmity against sin (***Romans 1:18***). Furthermore, only judgement ends the destructive power of sin.

2) God, therefore, cannot forgive man until his sin is judged and until man recognises God’s perfect justice in judging and punishing sin and the rightness of his wrath against it.

3) If we are to escape judgement, we need a sin-bearer on our behalf, but only a sinless man could perfectly recognise the divine justice of God’s wrath against sin and perfectly agree with it. Therefore, we need a sinless sin-bearer.

4) In Jesus Christ, God reaches across the divide between the infinite God and finite man, and across the moral divide between the Holy God and sinful man. God becomes Man (***John 1:14***) and the God-Man is willingly made sin for us:

***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21.***



5) In the incarnation Jesus becomes:

a) Our substitute, a man for all men.

***“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” 1 Peter 3:18.***

b) Our representative, a man as all men.

***“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15.***

6) On the cross, Christ bore God’s judgement on sin and perfectly, with a human heart, agreed with God’s justice in dealing so with sin. Therefore, divine judgement and wrath fell on the only place where it could be redemptive. The holiness of God’s character and the holiness of God’s law has been upheld.

7) Now God can justly forgive individual (men and women who by repentance and faith become identified with Christ’s substitutionary and representative death on their behalf.)

***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1: 7-9.***

Forgiveness deals with the guilt of sin, purification or cleansing deals with the stain. The problem of sin has been dealt with, the problem of obedience remains.

### **The Internalised Law**

In ***Jeremiah 31:33***, God says that the first step in a final solution to the problem of covenant obedience is to internalise the law - to write it this time not on stone tablets, but on human hearts. It is to become an internal law, not an external one. Instead of being a standard to keep or even a principle to live by, the law of God is to become an internal motivation. Instead of knowing what we should do but lacking the motivation to do it, we will be moved from within to freely keep God’s law. (***Ezekiel 36:27***).

But how is this internalising of the law to be accomplished? Through the Incarnation. The importance of the Incarnation to our salvation cannot be emphasised enough.

***“For if we, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life.” Romans 5:10.***

Jesus is called by Paul “the last Adam” (***1 Corinthians 15:45***). He came to create a new beginning for man. As the progenitor of New Covenant man, he had to fulfil in his human life the promises of the New Covenant. His death solved the problem of guilt and forgiveness, but his life was the vehicle whereby the law of God was internalised.

How did he do it? By obedience, painstaking, persistent, perfect obedience in every situation and in every circumstance, in times of stress and in times of boredom, over great issues and small issues, writing God's law on the human heart.

***“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, O God.’”***

In his incarnate life, Jesus created in himself, and for us, a new self that is ***“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24)***. And this is the nature that is born in us by the Holy Spirit.

Paul deals at length with the inner dynamics of the New Covenant in ***2 Corinthians 3***.

***“You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts .... He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”***  
***2 Corinthians 3: 3,6.***

### **New Inner Values, a Heart of Flesh**

Not only is the law to be internalised, but under the New Covenant, something is also to happen in the polluted heart of man.

1) Sin is to be cleansed from it and the hostile inner values of the sinful nature are to be rendered inoperative.

***Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24.***

2) In its place there is to be implanted in the heart, a new set of inner values. We know them as the fruit of the Spirit.

***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”***  
***Galatians 5: 22-23.***

3) ***“Against such things, “Paul says, there is no law”, or put another way. “The law of God is not against such things.”*** On the contrary, these inner values are in perfect harmony and concord with the internalised law.

4) In the life of Jesus, the result of this perfect harmony between inner values and internalised law was perfect obedience. Out of this perfect obedience came perfect freedom. In other words, Jesus was free to do spontaneously whatever he liked, because the value system which guided his preferences or desires was in every situation what the law of God or the will of his Father was. It was in his heart so that he spontaneously and freely lived in it, knowing that what pleased him was always what would please the Father (***John 8:29***).

## The Indwelling Spirit

- 1) The motive of covenant is, as we have seen, the desire of God for a personal intimate relationship with men and women, but a holy God can have communion only with holy people. ***“Be holy because I am holy”.*** (*Leviticus 11: 44-45; 1 Peter 1:16*).
- 2) The Holy Spirit unites us to the life of Christ and by his indwelling:
  - (a) Imparts the active holiness of Christ in us. This is his sanctifying work. (*2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 8: 1-9*).
  - (b) Gives us access to the Father (*Ephesians 2:8*).
  - (c) Teaches us the relationship of sonship (*Galatians 4:6; Romans 8: 15-16*).
  - (d) Maintains and deepens our relationship with God, so that we live to please him. (*1 Peter 1:2*).

The result is the liberty of the New Covenant, also called by Paul, ***“the glorious freedom of the children of God”.*** (*Romans 8:21*).

***Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*** *2 Corinthians 3: 17-18*.

The New Covenant of peace made by the blood of Jesus Christ achieved the purpose of covenant. The alienation caused by sin has been overcome, God and man have been reconciled and it is now possible once again, and this time forever, for God to be their God, the nations of the earth to be his people and God to dwell in the midst of them. In achieving this end, the New Covenant gathers in, and both includes and expands, all that is provided under the previous covenants.

## Lesson Seven

### The Covenants Today

We have briefly traced the nature and history of the covenants between God and man, culminating in the New Covenant of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We now have to consider whether, and to what extent, the previous covenants are still in force, and specifically:

- 1) Which if any, of the old covenant promises are ours to receive today, and:
- 2) Which, if any, of the old covenant obligations do we still have to fulfil today in order to enjoy the benefits.

### The Unity of the Covenants

There has been a great deal of unnecessary misunderstanding of the covenants due to a failure to grasp their essential underlying unity. That is, that from the beginning to the end they have a common purpose namely, to bring man back to a relationship of personal intimacy with God. We find this aim expressed throughout Scripture in the covenant formula, ***“I will be their God, they will be my people and I will dwell in the midst of them.”***

From this perspective, it will be seen that each of the covenants we have examined has this relational aspect at their heart, but lays stress on particular aspects.

- 1) In the Abrahamic covenant, the emphasis is on grace and faith. The promise was given to Abraham by grace (***Galatians 3:18***), and was received by faith (***Romans 4: 16-17***). Abraham is supremely “the man of faith” (***Galatians 3:9***) and the “father of all who believe” (***Romans 4:11***).
- 2) In the Mosaic covenant, the emphasis is on obedience to the covenant requirements. God sets the terms and Israel’s duty of obedience to the terms is called “keeping the covenant”. (***Exodus 19:5; Psalm 103: 17-18***).
- 3) In the David covenant with its focus on the kingdom, the emphasis is on the all-embracing, societal and even creation-wide sweep of the covenant under the Messianic King (***Isaiah 9: 6-7***).
- 4) The New Covenant deals with the dynamic of the covenant relationship, the sin problem and the obedience problem through the atonement, the internalising of the law of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit (***Hebrews 8: 10-12; Galatians 3:14***).

THUS, THE COVENANTS REPRESENT ONE EXPANDING REVELATION THAT REACHES ITS CLIMAX IN THE NEW COVENANT WHICH IS BOTH THE FULFILMENT AND THE EXPANSION OF THE COVENANTS THAT WENT BEFORE AND IS ALSO THE MEANS WHEREBY THE COVENANT GOAL OF A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN IS FINALLY ACHIEVED.

## Are the Covenant Promises Ours Today?

The evidence for the continuance of the covenant promises rests not only on the essential unity of the covenants but also on the following:

1) All the covenants are everlasting, because that was stated as God's declared intention when they were established. Therefore, once the promises were made they became inviolable. Paul makes this clear in *Galatians 3: 15-17*, when he writes concerning the Abrahamic covenant, ***Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.***

The covenant benefits could be forfeited by disobedience or violating the conditions of the covenant, but God remained faithful to his word and the promises were available for any succeeding generations that fulfilled the conditions of faith and obedience.

2) The writer of the Hebrews affirms the immutability or unchanging nature of God's promises with reference to the covenant with Abraham confirmed with an oath. But then he links that to our present situation. We, he says, have this same hope.

***“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor of the soul, firm and secure.”***  
***Hebrews 6: 18-19.***

3) We, the Gentiles, are described as having been ***“excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world”***. (*Ephesians 2:12*). But now in Christ Jesus we have been brought near and are ***“no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people”*** (*Ephesians 2: 13,19*). Thus we inherit the covenants of promise (note the plural), the Abrahamic, Mosaic and David covenant promises.

***“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.”*** *Galatians 3:29.*

***“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David”***. *Acts 13:34.*

4) All the covenant promises are said to meet their fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ, the promised seed and the Davidic King.

***“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.”*** *Romans 15: 8-9.*

***For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”***

- 5) The covenant mercies of the Old Covenant are repeated in the New Covenant, for example:
- a) Spiritual blessings. To the Hebrews “the blessing” was what gave the soul its life and vital power. It was synonymous with the presence of God, “and God was with him”, and is always associated with covenant, both the Old (*Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 28: 3-14*) and New (*Ephesians 1:3; Revelation 15:29*).
  - b) Healing. The covenant with Israel contained promises that had particular reference to health, healing and disease (*Exodus 15:26; 23:26; Deuteronomy 7:15; Proverbs 4: 20-22; Psalm 91:3; 105:37*). Healing figures in the prophecies of the New Covenant (*Isaiah 35:5; 42: 6-7; 61:1; Malachi 4:2 etc.*,) and was in the ministry of Jesus declared to be the fulfilment of those prophecies (*Matthew 8: 16-17*).
  - c) The covenant contained the promise of blessing for families and children (*Deuteronomy 28:4; Isaiah 59:21*) and children are included in the blessings of the New Covenant (*Acts 2:39; Mark 10:14*).
  - d) The covenant promised victory over enemies (*Deuteronomy 28:7; Isaiah 54: 14-17*), and this is continued in the New Covenant (*Revelation 12:11; 1 John 5: 4; 1 Corinthians 15:57, etc.*,).
  - e) The covenant included material blessings (*Deuteronomy 28:8, 11-12*), and similarly the New Covenant blessing holds out generosity as the path to prosperity, and generosity as the purpose of prosperity. (*2 Corinthians 9: 6-15*).

THEREFORE, WE CAN AFFIRM THAT ALL GOD’S COVENANT PROMISES REMAIN IN FORCE FOR HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. THEY ARE UNCHANGING, IMMUTABLE DECLARATIONS OF GOD’S WILL AND PURPOSE AND DISPOSITION TOWARDS HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. THEY EXPRESS WHAT GOD IS DISPOSED TO DO AND WOULD DO FOR THEM ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CONDITION SET OUT IN THE COVENANT. IF WE FULFIL THE CONDITIONS, WE CAN DEPEND ON GOD BEING FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE.

### What Covenant Conditions Apply Today

Although the covenant promises of God remain in force because they are everlasting, can the same be said of the covenant conditions? Clearly the covenants introduce obligations that the covenant parties are required to fulfil in order to receive the covenant benefits.

- 1) The fundamental covenant conditions remain what they have always been, that is, faith and obedience. Israel failed to enter into covenant rest because of unbelief and the rebellion and disobedience that resulted from that unbelief.

***“To whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not those who disobeyed. So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” Hebrews 3: 18-19.***

Unbelief and disobedience disqualifies us from the covenant blessings, just as they disqualified a whole generation of Israelites in the wilderness.

BUT COVENANT FAITH IS NOT MERELY BELIEVING THAT A PROMISE OF GOD IS FOR US TO RECEIVE, LIKE A SORT OF BLANK CHEQUE ON WHICH WE CAN PUT OUR NAME. IT IS BELIEVING IN CHRIST, IT IS FAITH IN THE COVENANT GOD BEHIND THE PROMISE, LETTING THE OUTCOME OF OUR WHOLE LIFE AND DESTINY GO OUT OF OUR HANDS INTO HIS. THAT IS WHY IT IS INSEPARABLE FROM RADICAL OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST THE LORD.

***“Anyone who loves his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is nor worthy of me: and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”  
Matthew 10: 37-38.***

***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24.***

Jesus is not advocating the abandonment of family ties but is demanding that where there's a clash of loyalty between the claims of family and the covenant claims of discipleship, the latter takes preference.

- 2) SOME CONDITIONS OF THE OLD COVENANTS ARE, HOWEVER, DECLARED TO BE FOR A TEMPORARY PURPOSE AND HAVE BEEN SUPERSEDED BY THE NEW COVENANT.
  - a) The law, as we have seen, was put in charge of us to lead us to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith (***Galatians 3: 24-25***). What the law could not do, Christ did for us (***Romans 8: 3-4***).
  - b) The sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant and the regulations for worship in the tabernacle have been rendered obsolete by the New Covenant (***Hebrews 8: 1-13***). We have Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant founded on better promises. His blood is the blood of the eternal covenant (***Hebrews 13:20***).

Covenant is for those who fear the Lord, as the Psalmist says:

***“The secret of the Lord is for those who fear him. And he will make them know his covenant.” Psalm 25:14 NASB.***

To fear the Lord is, according to Deuteronomy, to keep his commandments, to walk in his ways, to listen to his voice, to cling to him, to love him and to serve him. For such people, the promises of God are an open book.

## Lesson Eight

### Marriage as Covenant

Because covenant is concerned with the personal relationship between God and man, it should be no surprise to find that the most intimate of human personal relationships, that is, marriage also takes the form of a covenant.

***“Because the Lord was witness (to the covenant made at your marriage) between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously and to whom you were faithless. Yet she is your companion and the wife of your covenant (made by your marriage vows). And did not God make (you and your wife) one (flesh)? Did not One make you and preserve your spirit alive? And why did God make you two one? Because he sought a godly offspring (from your union). Therefore, take heed to yourselves, and let no one deal treacherously and be faithless to the wife of his youth.” Malachi 2: 14-15 Amplified Bible.***

In the Old Testament, the image of marriage is used to describe the covenant relationship between God and Israel. He is a husband to Israel (***Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:7***) and married to the nation (***Isaiah 62:4***), but unfaithful Israel is an adulterous wife (***Ezekiel 16:32; 23: 1-21***).

In the New Testament, the church is the bride of Christ (***Ephesians 5:32***) and the wife of the Lamb (***Revelation 2:9***). In fact, in his teaching on the one flesh of marriage in ***Ephesians 5: 25-33***, Paul merges the two images of the church as the bride of Christ and the church as his body. First, husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church (***verse 25***).

Second, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies (***verse 28***). Third, a man feeds and cares for his body as Christ does the Church which is his Body (***verses 29-30***).

In this study, we summarise the main applications of the covenant principles we have been discussing to the covenant of marriage. We have to point out, however, that as far as Christian marriage is concerned that is a radical new and transforming factor to be taken into account that is rarely understood and therefore seldom experienced.

**BECAUSE WE LIVE UNDER THE PROVISION OF THE NEW COVENANT, THE PROVISIONS THAT APPLY TO CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE ARE ALSO THOSE OF THE NEW COVENANT.**

In other words, the cross of Jesus Christ, that affected the final reconciliation between man and God and provided the spiritual dynamic of the New Covenant, also provides its spiritual power for the covenant of marriage. We will discuss this in more detail later.

### Covenant Characteristics of Marriage

Note the following characteristics of covenant that apply to the marriage relationship.

1) Marriage is a bonded relationship, that is, it is entered into by a solemn promise, confirmed with an oath or a vow by which the parties call God to witness the binding



nature of the commitment they have entered into with one another. The heart of the marriage relationship, therefore, the bond of personal loyalty between husband and wife. Because of the vows the marriage covenant is:

- a) Pre-eminent, that is, it takes priority over all other obligations other than those we owe to God as our Covenant Lord. All other human obligations, are subordinated to those of the marriage relationship, including vocation, job, ministry and civic responsibilities.
- b) Permanent, that is, marriage is intended to be a life-long relationship between one man and one woman (**Matthew 19:3**).
- c) Inviolable, that is, it must not be broken or violated, and adultery or unfaithfulness to the marriage vows is, therefore, the most serious form of wrongdoing (**Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 14:4**). Note, however, that there are other ways in which the vows at marriage can be, and often are broken. That also is unfaithfulness and breaking covenant.

2) The basis of marriage as covenant is grace. Therefore, it must be founded on grace and will function successfully on the basis of grace. In human terms, grace maybe described as doing good to one another gratuitously, that is, with no strings attached. To say “I will come half way if you come half way” is not grace, it is law. To say “I have done my bit, now you have to do your bit” is not grace, it is works. Covenant will not function on the basis of works or law, but only on the basis of grace.

3) In covenant, the stronger party voluntarily undertakes obligation towards the weaker party. In the marriage covenant, the Bible clearly places the greater degree of responsibility on the husband. It is the man who is to **“leave his father and mother to be united to his wife” (Genesis 2:24)**. The husband is the one who is commanded to love his wife and to give himself for her **“as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25)**. He is to be considerate to his wife and treat her with respect as a physically weaker partner and heir with him of the gracious gift of life (**1 Peter 3:7**).

### The Advantages of Covenant

Covenant at first glance seems an awesome obligation for us to live up to. But there are particular blessings built into covenant that are of inestimable advantage as far as marriage is concerned. When we see what they are we realise some of the wisdom of God in making marriage a covenantal relationship. Here are some important considerations.

- 1) In covenant we have the security of making mistakes and learning from them. Without the protection of covenant, the demands of a perfect performance to keep the relationship in being would become unbearable.
- 2) We have the discipline of having to work through our problems, and not taking the easy way out and merely opting out of the relationship if the going gets tough.

- 3) Covenant keeps us secure during the emotional lows and humdrum periods that comes in every relationship. The obligation and commitment of covenant remains regardless of our feelings and save us from judging the relationship solely from the point of view of feelings.
- 4) Covenant also protects us from infatuations springing from emotional love, sexual attractions of being physically close to someone, because our covenant vows have already determined what our behaviour ought to be.
- 5) Covenant leads us to discover that the ungiven self is the unfulfilled self, and that the fulfilment comes from giving ourselves to each other and not from getting from each other.
- 6) Covenant is realistic in that it recognises our fallenness and the need to prove our trustworthiness by keeping our public made vows to one another.
- 7) Finally, covenant rests ultimately in the righteousness, that is, the covenant faithfulness of God himself, and in Jesus, the guarantee of the New Covenant (*Hebrews 7:22*).

### New Covenant Provisions for New Covenant Marriages

We come now to the specific provisions of the New Covenant as they apply to the covenant of marriage, with particular reference to *Jeremiah 31: 31-34* and *Ezekiel 36: 25-28*.

- 1) Covenant is entered into only by sacrifice. Christ has become the sacrifice for us, and by identification with his death and resurrection, we die to our sinful past and enter into a new, living relationship with God. But by the same sacrifice, we can enter into a covenant relationship with one another in marriage. The implications for us are as follows:
  - a) We are saying we have died to any past relationships with, and past attachments to members of the opposite sex. "Forsaking all others" as the marriage service says, we have become separated unto each other.
  - b) We are henceforth renouncing our right to live for oneself, for our own personal desires and the satisfaction of our self-centred needs.
  - c) We are entering into a new life in which we live wholly for our marriage partner, to meet their needs and see them fulfilled as persons. Henceforth, whatever happens and no matter what arises we are committed always to be FOR each other, and all we have and are is for them and on their side in any circumstance.
- 2) Because the sin problem has been dealt with in the New Covenant, the damaging effects of wrongdoing in marriage can be overcome.
  - a) The New Covenant provides for forgiveness, which deals with the guilt of sin (*Jeremiah 31:34*), therefore, we have the ability to forgive one another.

***“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. Ephesians 4:32.***

Forgiveness is releasing from blame or recriminations or punishment or revenge. It ends the matter because it says:

“I will never mention this to you ever again, it is forgiven”

“I will never mention this to anyone else again, it is forgiven”

“I will never mention this to myself ever again, it is forgiven”

b) The New Covenant also provides for cleansing to deal with the stain of sin (Ezekiel 36:25). Because of this, the relationship can avoid the effects of wrongdoings that often leave a marriage besmirched and tarnished. It is possible for the marriage relationship to be kept as fresh and untainted as a blood cleansed conscience as we learn to continually “walk in the light” with one another (*1 John 1:7*).

3) Under the New Covenant the law of God is internalised, that is, it is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit (*Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3: 3-6*). In exactly the same way, the law of God regarding marriage can be written on our hearts - the law of love, the law of faithfulness, the law of honour and the law of understanding. When that happens, the law becomes not a set of rules or standards of behaviour to obey, nor even a set of principles to follow, it becomes the inner motivation that shapes all our behaviour towards one another. The gulf that used to exist between what we knew we ought to do and the motivation to actually do it, had been bridged, so that living by the law of love becomes a way of life.

4) Furthermore, we are given a heart of flesh for the previous heart of stone (*Ezekiel 36:26*). In other words, a new set of inner values that is in harmony with the law of God. We have all been programmed with false, misleading and sinful values imbibed from the world around us regarding marriage, sex, the role of husband and wife, and so on. We can be freed from these inadequate and wrong attitudes. Instead, we begin to see marriage from God’s perspective and to appreciate the glory of his design in the marriage relationship.

5) We begin to experience the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (*Ezekiel 36:27*). We find him resident, not only in our individual lives, but also within the marriage relationship. He is the bond of our union.

***“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity on the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12.***

In his book “The Marriage Covenant”, Derek Prince points out that a rope of three strands, no more, no less, is the strongest that can be made, because each strand is in constant contact with the other two. In the marriage covenant, the Holy Spirit is the third person in the relationship, in continuous touch with the other two and keeping them in continuous touch with each other.

- a) In such a position, the Holy Spirit is able to monitor the quality of our relationship, and, if we are sensitive to his reactions, we will know unmistakably when things are not right between us, and we will sense his joy when we are walking in unity with one another.
- b) The result is that we can correct matters that need correction before they become major differences or conflicts. In other words, the Holy Spirit wants to intervene at an early stage when matters can easily be rectified. He corrects us without crushing us and humbles us without humiliating us.

Similarly, he encourages us without making us careless and blesses us without making us proud.

6) True knowledge of the other becomes possible (*Jeremiah 31:34*). The purpose of covenant, personal intimate relationship, becomes wonderfully possible. Covenant began in the Garden of Eden when man and woman lived in perfect intimacy with each other, naked and not ashamed, and in perfect intimacy with God. The New Covenant restores what was lost by sin, so that we come back to something like the Garden of Eden in our ability to disclose ourselves to each other and to receive each other.

Here, as elsewhere, we are touching areas of what the Bible rightly calls “mystery”. Not a puzzle or a complicated riddle, but a category of spiritual and existential truth that is known only by experience and can only imperfectly be described or explained in words.

On the main features that distinguish marriage from all other types of interpersonal relationships is that of becoming one identity, husband and wife become a single unit to whom God reveals himself and his truth and in which both partners grow to maturity together. Equality, mutuality and complementarity are the hallmarks of the relationship that God has designed for men and women to live together in marriage. That being so, where gross differences in growth, development or maturity persist in a relationship, the reason may well be that there has not been the true bonding that creates the “one flesh” of the marriage covenant.

7. The importance of remembrance. In *Malachi 3:16* we read:

***“Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll or remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name”,***

We cannot underline sufficiently the importance of remembering, recalling and rehearsing to one another the works of the Lord in our lives, and consciously seeking to understand his revelation and his dealings with us. Time needs to be set apart for this on a regular basis. Mistakes can be put right, the Lord’s hand discerned and rejoiced in and harmony reinforced and restored.

