**The Covenants — An Introduction**

**Introduction**

Why are the covenants important?

What are covenants?

Different Ideas about the Covenants pertaining to the Bible.

* *Theological Covenants* — Theologically deduced covenants; not specifically mentioned in the Bible. .
* *Biblical Covenants* — These are those covenants specifically mentioned in the Bible.

1. **The importance of the Biblical covenants.** 
   1. **In relation to Bible Interpretation.**

The Biblical Covenants provide a framework for interpreting the rest of the Bible by presents us with a worldview that is: (A) Comprehensive, (B) Cohesive, and (C) Consistent.

* 1. **In relation to prophecy.**

The biblical covenants provide the framework for understanding both fulfilled and yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy.

1. **The idea of a covenant** 
   1. **The Use of the Word “Covenant” in the Bible.** 
      1. **The Hebrew Bible / Old Testament.**
         1. *Berith* ***—*** בְּרִית*Berith / BeRiyTH —* 287 times in the OT in 27 books — Frequency and Grouping.

| Book | Hits | Book | Hits |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Dt*** | 27 | ***Dan*** | 7 |
| ***Gen*** | 27 | ***Judg*** | 7 |
| ***Jer*** | 24 | ***Mal*** | 6 |
| ***Josh*** | 22 | ***2Sam*** | 6 |
| ***Ps*** | 21 | ***Hos*** | 5 |
| ***Ezk*** | 18 | ***Num*** | 5 |
| ***2Chr*** | 17 | ***Neh*** | 4 |
| ***1Kgs*** | 14 | ***Job*** | 3 |
| ***1Chr*** | 13 | ***Zech*** | 2 |
| ***Ex*** | 13 | ***Obad*** | 1 |
| ***Isa*** | 12 | ***Ezr*** | 1 |
| ***2Kgs*** | 12 | ***Prov*** | 1 |
| ***Lev*** | 10 | ***Amos*** | 1 |
| ***1Sam*** | 8 |  |  |

* + - * 1. “My covenant” בְּרִיתִ֖י  *berithy*.

Often refers to “God’s Covenant”; “my” being God.

Appears 52 times in the OT; 2 x’s in NT; 54 x’s total:

*OT* — Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21; Ex 6:4, 5; 19:5; Lev. 26:9, 15, 42, 44; Num. 25:12; Deut. 31:16, 20; Josh. 7:11; Judg. 2:1, 20; 1Kings 11:11; Psa. 50:16; 89:28, 34; 132:12; Is. 54:10; 56:4, 6; 59:21; Jer. 11:10; 31:32; 33:20, 21, 25; 34:18; Ezek. 16:60, 61, 62; 17:19; 44:7; Hos. 8:1; Mal. 2:4, 5; *NT* — Rom. 11:27; Heb. 8:9.

*Key Passages:* Gen 9:8-17; Gen 17:1-27; Lev 26:40-45; Isa 56:4; Jer 33:19-26; Ezk 16:60-62.

*This phrase (“my covenant”) focuses mostly on two of the covenants: The Abrahamic Covenant and The Mosaic Covenant.*

* + - 1. **Carath —** כָּרַת ***carath —*** Meaning — “to cut” — Used some 289 times in OT.
         1. *The word “carath” and “berith” appear ca. 34 times in the same verses:* Gen. 9:11; 15:18; 21:17, 32; 26:28; 31:44; Ex. 23:32; 24:8; Deut. 4:23; 9:9; 29:1, 12, 25; 31:16; Josh. 4:7; 9:6, 7, 11, 15; 24:25; 1Sam 18:3; 1Kings 8:21; 20:34; 2Kings 17:15, 38; Is. 61:8; Jer. 11:10; 31:32, 33; 34:18; Hos. 12:1; Psa. 83:5; Job 31:1; 2Chr. 6:11; 21:7
         2. *In reference to “carath” & “berith”, these are the key references:*

Gen 15:18; 21:27, 32; 26:28 Gen 31:44

Ex 23:32

Josh 9:6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 24:25

1Sam 18:3

* + 1. **Greek — διαθήκη *diatheke*** 
       1. It is used 33 times in the NT.
       2. The predominant covenant referred to is The New Covenant — 15 x’s [Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Rom 11:27; 1Cor 11:25; 2Cor 3:6; Heb 7:22; 8:6, 8, 10; 9:15; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20].
       3. The other covenants referred to:
          1. Abrahamic Covenant — 6 x’s [Lk 1:72-73; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Gal 3:17-18; 4:24-28; Heb 8:9].
          2. Mosaic Covenant — 3 x’s [2Cor 3:14; Heb 9:4, 20].
          3. Israel’s Covenants in general — 2 x’s [Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12].
          4. Generic use — 2 x’s [Gal 3:15; Heb 9:16-17].
  1. **The Meaning of the word “Covenant” — A legal binding Contract**
     1. It is more than a Promise.
     2. It is more like a legal contract.
     3. Suggestions:
        1. “An agreement between two parties that bound them together with common interests and responsibilities.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
        2. “A compact or agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertaking on each other’s behalf.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
        3. “Theologically it denotes a gracious undertaking entered into by God for the benefit and blessing of man, and specifically of those men who by faith receive the promises and commit themselves to the obligations which this undertaking involves.[[3]](#footnote-3)
        4. “A divine covenant is (1) a sovereign disposition of God, whereby he establishes an unconditional or declarative compact with man, obligating himself, in grace, by the untrammeled formula, “I will,” to bring to pass to himself definite blessings for the covenanted ones, or (2) a proposal of God, wherein he promises, in a conditional or mutual compact with man, but the contingent formula “if ye will,” to grant special blessing to man provided he fulfills perfectly certain conditions, and to execute definite punishment in case of his failure.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
     4. **My Definition: “A covenant is an agreement or contract between two parties.”**

A Covenant…

* + - 1. Is made between two parties (sometimes individuals, sometimes groups).
      2. It is made with specific requirements for both parties; party 1 will do this, party 2 will do that.
      3. It is made with explicit penalties — penalties are enumerated to each party if they fail to keep their part of the covenant.
    1. **Summary** — “The word ‘covenant’ plays a key role in both the Old and New Testaments. It relates to a legally binding contractual agreement between two parties. Another word closely connect to God and the idea of covenant is *hesed*, חֶ֫סֶד , which has the idea of “covenant keeping.”

1. **The kinds of Covenants.**
   1. **Biblical versus Theological Covenants**
      1. **Biblical Covenants** are those covenants that we find explicitly mentioned in the Bible. These are covenants we find in the Bible. The bible says that they are a covenant. Examples: Abrahamic, Mosaic, New.
      2. **Theological Covenants** are those covenants that are not found explicitly in the Bible but are viewed as being implied, in some way, by the Scriptures. Examples: the covenants of Works, Grace, and Redemption.
   2. **Conditional versus Unconditional Covenants.**
      1. **Conditional Covenants** are covenants which have requirements and responsibilities for both parties in the covenant which must be met for the covenant to be fulfilled. Examples: Mosaic and Abraham with Abimelech & Phicol (Gen 21:32).
      2. **Unconditional Covenants** are covenants where only one of the parties has a requirement to meet certain responsibilities in order of the covenant to be fulfilled. Examples: the Land Covenant and New Covenant.
2. **The pattern of a Covenant — The Suzerain/Vassal Covenant.**
   1. **The Parties:**

Suzerain — *The Superior* Vassal — *The Inferior*

* 1. **The Parts.**
     1. The Preamble
     2. The Prologue
     3. The Stipulations
     4. The Publication
     5. The Divine Witnesses
     6. Blessings & Curses
     7. Sacrificial Meal
  2. **The Promise / Commitment**
     1. **Suzerain** — To bless the vassal according to the terms of the covenant.
     2. **Vassal** — To do what is necessary according to the terms of the covenant.
  3. **The application of this covenant to Gen 15:7-21.**

1. **The unchanging nature of a covenant. Gal 3:15-18**
2. **The specific covenants** 
   1. **The Noaic Covenant. (Gen 9:8-17)**
      1. **The Parties. (v. 8-10)**
         1. 1st Party — God
         2. 2nd Party — Noah, his sons, and their seed after them, and every living creature with you.
      2. **The Topic of the Covenant.** 
         1. Destruction / judgment of the earth and every living creature. (v. 11, 15)
      3. **The nature of the covenant: conditional or unconditional.** 
         1. It is unconditional — The only party who is doing anything is God.
         2. Consider…
            1. v. 8 — “God spoke…”
            2. v. 9 — “I myself do establish my covenant with you…”
            3. v. 11 — “I establish my covenant with you…”
            4. v. 12 — “which I am giving…”
            5. v. 13 — “I set my bow…”
            6. v. 14 — “…when I bring a cloud…”
            7. v. 15 — “and I will remember…”
            8. v. 16 — “then I will look…”
            9. v. 17 — “…which I have established…”
      4. **The sign of the covenant — A “bow” or “rainbow.”**
      5. **The duration of the covenant — Eternal, to the end of time: v. 11, 12, 15, 16.**

1. Beware, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. G.L. Arch, “Covenant,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 67-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)