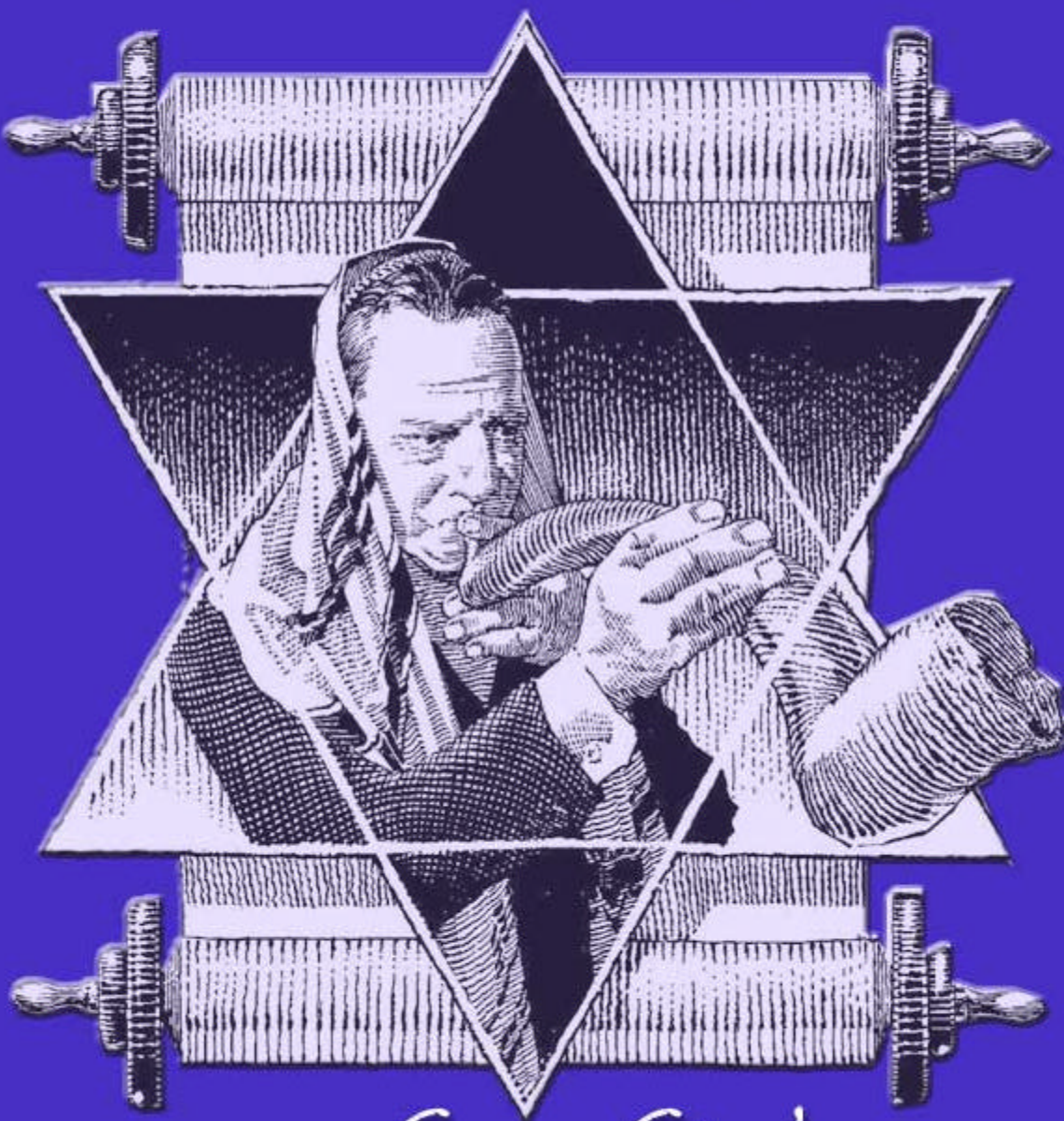


Covenant: The Form and Fire of Scripture



Steve Singleton

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DEEPER STUDY

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Promise and Faithfulness: An Introduction to Covenants

1. Definitions of terms:
 - a. Words translated 'covenant'

Hebrew: *b^erith* – pact, compact, treaty, alliance, league, agreement, pledge.

Greek: *diatheke* – last will and testament, pact, contract, decree, covenant
 - b. Make covenant: The Hebrew expression is to “cut a covenant,” demonstrating the close connection with sacrifice (see Gen. 15:7–21).
 - c. Response to covenant—Hebrew: *khesedh*, which means goodness, kindness, faithfulness, loyalty.
2. Some representative covenant passages:
 - a. Genesis 12
 - b. 2 Samuel 7
 - c. Exod. 20
3. The contribution of archaeology: Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties may have served as a model for God’s treaties or covenants with human beings.

Six components of such a treaty:

 - preamble naming parties,
 - review of historical relationship of parties,

- declaration of their future relationship, details of the new relationship,
- invocation of the respective gods of both sides to serve as witnesses, and
- a pronouncement of blessings and curses for keeping or breaking the treaty.
- When the treaty was made it was usually accompanied by a covenant meal.

In nearly all biblical covenants, we can find parallels or hints of most or all of these features.

Lesson: God is humbling himself to enter into a covenant relationship with human beings. He imposes on Himself (unnecessarily) obligations and makes gracious promises to undeserving mortals. His covenants are one of the greatest expressions of His grace toward us.

Assignment for next lesson: Read the following passages: Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17; 9:1-17; 12:2-3; Exod. 20:1-20; 32:25-29; Ps. 89:19-37; Mark 14:22-25.

The Bible's Seven Covenants: A Helicopter View

1. The Covenant with Adam (Gen. 1 and 2)

Grace before the covenant: God put Adam and Eve in the garden and gave them everything they needed. They did nothing to earn these blessings.

2. The Covenant with Noah (Gen. 6 – 9)

Grace before the covenant: God saved Noah and his family from the waters of the Great Flood. Their response was obedient faith, but they did not deserve such favor.

3. The Covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12 – 15)

Grace before the covenant: God chose Abram and blessed him greatly. Abram (later Abraham) trusted and obeyed God.

4. The Covenant with Moses and the Israelites (Exod. 20, etc.)

Grace before the covenant: God brought the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage through the plagues, culminating with the Passover, deliverance and the victory at the Red Sea. He challenged them to trust Him, but they did nothing to deserve His mighty acts of salvation.

5. The Covenant within a Covenant: with the Levites and Aaron (Exod. 32, etc.)

Grace before the covenant: God made Aaron, his family, and his tribe the high priest, the priests,

and priestly assistants, respectively. They had been loyal to Moses at the crisis involving the golden calf but did not deserve this blessing that continued for many generations.

6. The Covenant with David (2 Sam. 7)

Grace before the covenant: David was chosen before he had done much of anything, even before he killed Goliath. God greatly blessed David and his descendants.

7. The New Covenant (Jer. 31; Mark 14)

Grace before the covenant: Salvation from sin and death was purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ "while we were yet sinners." God demonstrated His remarkable love for us, and only then calls us into covenant with Him.

Lesson: Even though the Bible records seven covenants, the same God is party to them all. He possesses absolute justice and infinite mercy. As the benefactor in each covenant, he acts graciously, and He expects an appropriate response. In the weeks to come, as we examine each covenant in detail, we will see these themes repeated again and again.

Assignment for next lesson: Read the following passages about God's covenant with Adam: Genesis 1 – 3.

The First Covenant: with Adam and Eve

1. What gracious acts did God perform before entering into covenant?
2. What were the blessings of covenant obedience?
3. What were the curses of covenant disobedience?
4. What factors led to covenant breaking?
5. How did God show grace despite disobedience?
6. How does this covenant contribute to our understanding of the New Covenant (ours)?
 - a. First Adam/Second Adam – Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15
 - b. Our own personal Eden experience – Rom. 7
 - c. New creation – 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:
 - d. Life as a preparation (earth is the lobby of heaven)

Lesson: God's covenant with Adam and Eve sets the pattern for the way he dealt with human beings in the generations to come. Already we see the main themes of the rest of the Bible, including God and the Serpent, good and evil, obedience and rebellion, the holy and the profane, life and death. In revealing to us His covenant with Adam and Eve, God lays the foundation for all that is to come.

Assignment next lesson: Read the following passages about God's covenant with Adam: Genesis 6 – 9; Heb. 11:7; 1 Peter 3:18-22.

Second: Noahic—A promise to the human race (Genesis 6–9)

1. The need: salvation from an ever-sinful world
2. The mighty, saving acts of God
 - a. Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”
 - b. God saved Noah by the flood.

Saved from evil	Saved by water
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 - c. God saved Noah from the flood.

Saved from water	Saved by ark
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 - d. Noah and family had their part to play in God’s saving acts.
3. The gracious covenant of the Savior-God with Noah and his family.
 - a. The covenant-making process begins with sacrifice.
 - b. God makes a gracious promise to all of the survivors of the Flood: no universal Flood ever again.
 - c. The provisions of the Noahic covenant:
 - 1) Eat meat but not blood.
 - 2) Avoid shedding blood.
4. The later meaning of the Noahic covenant
 - a. Rabbinical teaching: Gentiles are subject to the Noahic covenant.
 - b. Compare these provisions with James’s requirements in Acts 15.
 - c. What does God require of people who are ignorant of Him? Some passages to consider:

1) Naaman's request—2 Kings

2) Acts 17:30–31

3) Romans 1

d. This saving, mighty act of God was symbolic of the new covenant (see 1 Peter 3).

Lesson: God graciously saved Noah and his family—in fact, it was a double-salvation (from evil, from the flood). Then, he called this saved family into covenant with Himself. He made gracious promises to them and then asked from them a loving response. The resulting covenant sets a pattern for the covenants that were to come. God's grace was demonstrated by a mighty, saving act in which human's cooperated in faith. The divine and the human then enter into a special, covenanted relationship.

Assignment for next lesson: Read Genesis 12–15

Third: Abrahamic—Part 1: The Promise and the Burden

1. The need: the blessing of the nations
2. The original calling:
 - a. Leave your home and family: Releasing from the grip of the past.
 - b. Go to a land I will show you: Opening the potential of the future by faith.
 - c. I will make you into a great nation.
 - d. Blessing those who bless the covenant-man.
 - e. Cursing those who curse the covenant-man.
 - f. The promise: In you and your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.
3. The first test of the covenant: waiting.
 - a. Abraham responds to the calling.
 - b. Nothing has happened to fulfill the main covenant promise.
4. The covenant is renewed
 - a. God promises to be Abraham shield and His “very great reward.”
 - b. God binds Himself by “cutting a covenant.”

Lesson: Being in a covenant relationship with God does not always involve instant gratification. Sometimes, the covenant demands that we be faithful to our covenant Partner despite trouble, hardship, or just no results. The covenant blessings will come—we can be sure of that, but the timing is in God’s hands.

Assignment for next lesson: Memorize Gen. 15:6 and read Rom. 1:16–17.