



Glenn Brown

February 2013

441 ½ Lark Drive
Grand Junction, Colorado 81504
Telephone 970-434-1377

GOD'S COVENANT WITH US

God's relationship with us is so important and serious that He spelled it out in a formal, court-room type contract called a "covenant" or "testament." This agreement is so central to our faith that we have named our holy book, the Bible, after the two major covenants that God initiated with His people: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word "covenant" is used in the Bible almost 300 times. This may seem like a dry, academic subject, but when I first started learning about covenants it enlightened and thrilled my soul. I hope it affects you that way.

The Hebrew word *berith* means "covenant, treaty;" while the Greek, New Testament word for covenant is *diatheke*. The ancient world, like the modern world, was filled with treaties or covenants among nations, tribes, and individuals. There were different types of covenants:

1. Covenant between equals, as between two nations who made a military alliance to stand with one another against a common enemy.
2. Covenant between a strong nation and a weak nation.
3. Covenant between a ruler and a subject.
4. Covenant between two individuals.
5. In the history of Israel, God used this common practice to initiate a new and different type covenant: a covenant between God and man.

Following are some of the common elements and distinctions between different types of covenants:

- **Usually a formal, public ceremony.**
- **Promises of loyalty to one another, sometimes accompanied by self-curses if you broke your promise.**
- **Sometimes one or both parties took one another's names.**
- **There was a promise that "Your friends will be my friends, and your enemies will be my enemies."**
- **Some of the covenants were conditional, and some were unconditional.**
- **The shedding of blood was a key element in many covenants. In fact, the root of the word *berith* includes the word "cut," so the actual phrase could be interpreted as: *To cut a covenant*. The two parties would cut their thumbs or wrists and press the cuts together as they made vows, or they would cut/sacrifice an animal.**

- **Oftentimes there was an exchange of clothing or gifts or weapons.**
- **The ceremonial covenant was followed by a ceremonial meal.**

There are many examples of national and individual covenants in the Bible:

A. **Jonathan and David.** 1 Samuel 18 - *Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.....And Jonathan made a covenant with David because of his love, and Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.* In effect, Jonathan seems to have been surrendering his claim to the throne as King Saul's son, and recognizing that God had overruled the normal succession and chosen David. In 1 Samuel 20 Jonathan vows his very life to David, and asks David to protect his (Jonathan's) family in years to come - which David honored much later when he took Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, into his home.

B. **Naomi and Ruth.** Ruth 1:16ff - *But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."* Note the commitment to a shared identity, to the death, and the self curse if she broke this covenant.

C. **The nation of Israel and Gibeah.** In Joshua 9, Joshua made a treaty or covenant with the Gibeonites. Even though the Gibeonites had deceived Joshua into making this treaty, when Gibeah was attacked by five kings, (in Joshua 10), Joshua led his army to defend the Gibeonites.

Elements of the ancient ceremonial covenants are apparent today:

The Marriage Ceremony. Marriage is a public ceremony. Vows and promises are made. The father formally gives the bride away.

Note some of these words: *I require and charge you both as you stand in the presence of God, that having duly considered the holy covenant you are about to make, you do now declare before this company your pledge of faith each to the other.....I, _____, take thee, _____, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my faith.* Then a ring or rings are exchanged. Then the bride takes the husband's family name, or sometimes they take one another's names. Followed by a ceremonial meal - usually symbolized by the bride and groom feeding each other a piece of cake.

Now look at some of the covenants God made with man:

God and Noah. Genesis 9:8-17. This is a "Royal Grant" covenant. God made an unconditional promise never to destroy all earthly life with a natural catastrophe, the covenant sign being the rainbow in the storm cloud.

God and Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3. A Royal Grant, and Royal Land Grant Covenant.

- The condition was that Abraham and his immediate family would leave his land and people and go wherever God led him.
- In return, God said, *I will make you into a great nation and will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.*
- In Genesis 15 God promised to be a shield to Abram.
- At this time, in Genesis 15:17, God granted to Abram and his descendants the grant of land forever.
- Then God told him: *Bring me a heifer, a goat, a ram, along with a dove and a young pigeon.* He had Abram cut the large animals in two (the Hebrew language says that God "cut a covenant" with him),
- God promised to punish the nations that would enslave Abram's descendants (Abram's enemies would be God's enemies); *and when darkness had fallen a smoking firepot and a blazing torch* (the Shekinah glory of God) *appeared and passed between the pieces* to finalize the covenant.

- The Covenant of Circumcision. This was established with Abram in Genesis 17. Thus Abram's flesh was cut and he shed his blood.
- At this time God gave to Abram a part of the divine name. He changed his name to Abraham, and changed Sarai to Sarah.

God and Israel through Moses. God made a major covenant with the nation of Israel at Sinai. God had redeemed the people from slavery and promised to be their protector; the condition was that the people would be consecrated to the Lord and live by His commandments. Rebellious Israel was expelled from the promised land in actualization of the most severe covenant curse (Lev. 26:27-39); Dt. 28:36-68).

THE NEW COVENANT. Now we get to the thrilling part! God spoke through the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) an unconditional divine promise to forgive Israel of her sins and establish his relationship with her on a new basis by writing his law "on their hearts" - a covenant of pure grace. This covenant is quoted in the New Testament in Chapter eight of Hebrews. This amazing covenant, testament, promise, is initiated by the Father through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- A divine covenant was "cut" when Jesus went to the cross and shed his blood for our sins. A transfer was made: **He took our sin, we take His righteousness.** (Ro. 3:22)
- Jesus took upon himself a human body. In exchange, we take upon ourselves *the robe of His righteousness*. And we are commanded to: *Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience* - the character of Christ. (Col. 3:12)
- Jesus took our name - He became the *Son of Man*. We become Christians - which literally means "Little Christs." And we are now the *people of God*.
- We also take His armor and weapons: *The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit.* (Eph. 6:14ff)
- The covenant of circumcision has been replaced by the ordinance of baptism.

This signifies that we are to publicly proclaim our faith

and loyalty to Christ, as He publicly took our shame upon the cross. *Whoever confesses me before men, I will confess before my Father in heaven; whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.* (Mt. 10:32)

- The ceremonial, covenant meal is the rite of communion. Jesus said, *This is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.* (1 Cor. 11:25)

THREE QUESTIONS

There are three very important questions that we should meditate on. As a matter of fact, these questions are always in the back of our minds, and we are answering them all the time by the way we live. Here are the questions:

1. **Do I believe that God is truly sovereign over everything that happens on earth and in my life?** This does not mean that I must believe that everything that happens is His will. That is obviously not true. There are a great many things that happen in this broken world that are certainly not God's will. Just read the daily news. Sin is never God's will, but when people sin and hurt themselves and others, do I believe that God is still sovereign?
2. **Do I believe that God is truly good?** The Bible declares that *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.* (1 John 1:5) The Bible says that God is holy, righteous, kind, gentle, loving, peaceful, and faithful. That God is just like Jesus. *When you have seen me, you have seen the Father.* (Jn. 14:9) Do I really and truly believe that? Do I believe it when I have lost my health, job, spouse, or child? When God seems to have turned His back on me? When He seems to have broken His promises to me?
3. **Will I hold onto God and wait until I see that He is faithful, that He is sovereign, that He is truly good?** Will I wait beyond all reason, wait until the last day of my life on earth, wait even if I die without ever seeing Him prove himself to me? Hebrews 11 tells of those heroes of the faith *who subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, escaped the edge of the sword, received their death raised to life.* But then that same chapter tells of others *who were tortured, not accepting deliverance; had trials of mocking and scourgings, of chains and imprisonment, were stoned and slain with the sword, and yet did not receive the promise.* Do I believe in God even to that extent?

As I draw near to the end of my life, I see dear ones who are going through circumstances that require them to answer these very questions. These are not academic questions, they are personal, crucial questions for you and me. Please reflect on them.

I want to remind you: God has made an amazing covenant with us. He has ratified that covenant with the body and blood of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

GRAVITY

Albert Einstein set forth the Theory of Relativity about 100 years ago, when I was a little boy, so I am behind the curve in catching on to his insights. You probably already know all about this, but I read a book about the cosmos and just now understand about gravity. I always assumed that matter has a tiny bit of innate pull or force toward its center, and the more mass, the more cumulative force of gravity, which is why the earth has more gravity than the moon. Not so! Einstein said that: *Since gravity and acceleration are equivalent, if you feel gravity's influence, you must be accelerating. Therefore, you and the earth and all the other things we usually think of as stationary are accelerating upward! And why are we accelerating upward? Because space is warped or bent.*

Well, duh! It's so obvious once someone points it out. Next month I will explain quantum mechanics and string theory.

SOMETIMES THE PROBLEM IS NOT ME, IT'S THE PROBLEM

(Quote from Where is God? By John Townsend) "I was speaking to a spiritual growth group recently, and during the open-mike period a man stood up and said, 'I need some advice. I have had some bad stuff happen in the past few years. My wife left me for another man, and she has been lying about me to get more custody of the kids. On top of that, I lost my job at around the same time, and I am running out of money for myself and support for them.'

My heart went out to him. I said, 'If what you are telling me is true, you don't have a character issue. You are in despair and need help.' I was thinking about how sometimes being hurt has nothing to do with a personal area of weakness that is unearthed. As I saw in the case of this man, sometimes we are just broken and sinned against.

The man came up to me after the talk in tears. He said, 'You have no idea how much I needed to hear that. I thought it was all because of some broken thing in me. When you said it wasn't a character problem and that I needed help, I felt like someone understood.' Sometimes, it is just about getting help and healing from despair. Make sure you understand the difference."

I keep asking God to give me wisdom and kindness so that when I counsel with people they will leave strengthened in the certainty that they are loved by God and that I care. If I don't know how to help them, which happens a lot, at least I don't want them to go home feeling more guilty and condemned. Physicians have a motto, "Do no harm," that I think would be good for all of us to keep in mind.

GOD'S HEALING IS USUALLY A PROCESS

In Francis MacNutt's classic book, The Power to Heal, he teaches us some important insights about healing. For instance, he points out that in praying for healing usually people are not completely, instantly healed by prayer, but they are improved. Most things are that way. Healing through medicine is that way. We go to a doctor and come away happy as long as healing has begun and improvement has been shown. We are delighted if the doctor holds out hope that in a week or a month our body will be restored to wholeness. But in some teaching about healing there is a kind of absoluteness that makes it imperative that all healing through prayer be immediate. "Can you claim your healing now?" puts sick people in a bind. They want to show faith in God by saying yes, but they want to be honest, too, and say, "But I still can't walk so I'm not sure." Remember that even Jesus prayed for a blind man twice (Mk. 8:22), and the ten lepers were healed "as they went."

Francis points out that (1) There is a time element in most healing. Even in healings that seem instant there is at least a period of minutes in which the change takes place. (2) There is also an element of more or less power, more or less authority in me, since I am not God. Faith is of course a key element in all healing, but in some mysterious way our relationship with God, our faithfulness, our character, also seems to be a key. Remember the seven sons of Sceva that tried to use the name of Jesus to heal a demonized man, but the demons in that man recognized that the seven men didn't have a relationship with Jesus, so they beat up those men. (Acts 19:14)

One of the big problems is that people confuse the logos (written) Word of God, with the rHEMA (spoken, heard) Word of God. Some preachers and teachers insist that if something is in the Bible, a logos word, we can claim it by faith. But remember the time that Jesus invited Peter to step out of the boat and walk on water in a raging storm? That invitation to Peter was a rHEMA, "now" word, and not many preachers would insist that we can claim that word for ourselves. Yes, we are told to go forth and do the same works Jesus did, and Jesus' final words to His followers (Mark 16) were that those who believe would lay their hands on the sick and they would be healed, and God, in His grace, heals people again and again as we pray for them. But we need to distinguish between faith and presumption. For instance, we should never assure people that they have been healed and can throw away their medicine just because we have prayed for them, unless we, or the sick person, has received a rHEMA word from God.

COVER THEIR NAKEDNESS!

Genesis 9:20-27 reads: *And Noah planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him,* (and placed a curse on Ham's descendants).

A remarkable story! At the conclusion of the amazing story of Noah and the ark, what does Noah do? He feels like relaxing and having a party. His options were limited, not a bar in sight. So he fermented some grapes, got very drunk, and fell on his couch in a drunken, naked, stupor. (God's people always have a way of messing up.)

Noah's middle son, Ham, wandered through the tent, saw his father, and smirked in contempt at his "old man." (My theory is that he was bitter about being named Ham.) He went outside and called to his brothers, "Hey, guys, come and look at this old naked fool!" Shem and Japheth were mortified, not at their father but at their brother for showing his lack of respect for their dad. So they went into the tent, avoided their eyes, and covered their father's nakedness.

From time to time the sins, or supposed sins, of my enemies, acquaintances, friends, and loved ones have become known by me in some fashion. I am ashamed to admit that there have been occasions when I have passed along that information to others. When the information was about my enemies (someone I didn't like), I sometimes passed along that information with relish. Almost always, following an experience like that, God reminded me: "Glenn, I have never exposed your hidden sins to others. I have not only forgiven those sins, but I have buried them in the deepest part of the sea, and I will never remember them against you."

Friends, we need to be very careful about exposing the nakedness of others!

God Bless

Glenn

WEBSITE: glennbrownministries.com

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions,
you may send them to:

CANYON VIEW VINEYARD CHURCH

736 24 ½ Road Grand Junction, Co. 81505