

A Study
Through
The
Book of

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What are Covenants and why are they so important in the Bible?

Part of the teaching series:

THE BOOK OF
BEGINNINGS

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לא תגאף
לא תגנב
לא תענה
לא תהמד

אנכי ה'
לא יהיה
לא תשא
זכור את
כבוד את



*What is a **Covenant**?*

ברית
(Heb. *berit*)

διαθήκη
(Gk. *diatheke*)

In the Ancient Near East, the word “covenant” (Heb. *berit*) was used to describe a formal relationship between people or groups who had mutually agreed to fulfill a set of obligations or promises toward the other.

Covenants implied a binding oath between parties and included responsibilities, benefits and penalties should the covenant be broken. In the Bible, covenants are made between God and various men (*cf. Noah and Abraham, Gen 6:18, 15:18*), as well as between men themselves (*cf. Abraham and Abimelech, or Jacob and Laban, Gen 21:27, 31:44*).

So the LORD made a covenant (berit) with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River” (Gen. 15:18, NLT).

After making their covenant (berit) at Beersheba, Abimelech left with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned home to the land of the Philistines. (Gen. 21:32, NLT).

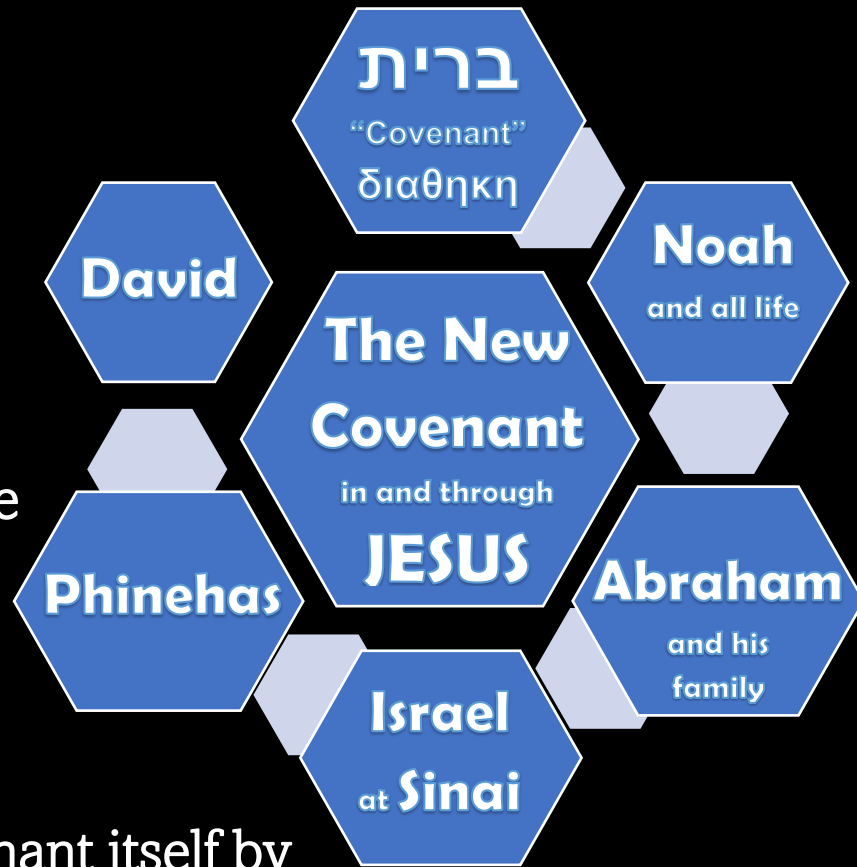
“So come, let’s make a covenant (berit), you and I, and it will be a witness to our commitment” (Gen. 31:44).

What are the Major Covenants in the Bible?

While there is some variation found in the Bible, the basic elements which appear in most covenants are:

(1) A statement of the terms agreed upon. (2) An oath by each party to observe the terms, with the word "oath" sometimes used in place of the word "covenant." (3) A curse invoked by each party upon themselves if they should break the agreement. (4) The formal ratification of the covenant itself by a solemn or ceremonial act, *cf.* "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you" (Gen. 17:11).

Below are some of the major covenants established by God in the Bible...



With Noah

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with...every living creature on earth." (Gen. 9:8-10)

With Abraham

“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations... I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants for generations to come” (Gen. 17:4-7).

With Israel at Sinai

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6)



With Phinehas

The Lord said to Moses, “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites... Therefore, tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites” (Num. 25:10-13).



With David

“When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your flesh and blood...and will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Sam. 7:11-13).

Jesus of Nazareth

The LORD of Two Covenants*

And Judah was carried away into exile to Babylon for their unfaithfulness.

– 1 Chronicles 9:1

It is because of their failure to honor their covenant with God that Israel is eventually exiled in Babylon. It is while in exile however, that many of God's prophets begin to speak of a future king through whom God is going to establish His kingdom on earth. Some even speak of a new covenant, and of God placing His Spirit in the hearts of His people as an act of covenant fidelity and love, *cf. Jer. 31:31-34, Ezek. 36:22-32.*

Jesus of Nazareth and the New Covenant People

When Jesus dies and rises, he does so in fulfillment of the Old Covenant, while also bringing about the New. His blood is the "blood of the new covenant," and his resurrection the defining act of a new creation.

In Jesus, God Himself has become flesh and fulfilled both the divine and human roles of the covenant. As his disciples, we are invited to receive his Spirit, and to live within the new covenant he establishes between God and creation.



Hebrews Chapter 8 and The New Covenant

Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are already priests offering the gifts required by the law. They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven...

But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far better than the old priesthood, for he mediates a FAR BETTER COVENANT WITH GOD...

If THE FIRST COVENANT had been faultless, there would have been no need for A SECOND COVENANT to replace it. But when God found fault with the people, he said: "The day is coming, says the LORD, when I will make A NEW COVENANT with the people of Israel and Judah. THIS COVENANT will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to MY COVENANT, so I turned from them, says the LORD. But this is THE NEW COVENANT I will make with the people of Israel... I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people... And I will forgive their wickedness, and I never again remember their sins." When God speaks of A NEW COVENANT, it means He has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.

(Hebrews 8:1–13)