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BASIC COVENANTS IN THE BIBLE

BY

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Abstract

The term “*Old Testament*” basically reflects the idea of the covenant between God and man. However, “old” does not mean the old, the ancient or the discarded, but the word “old” here has the meaning of distinguishing specific stages in God’s plan of salvation. Or in other words, to distinguish between the Old Covenant [2Cor 3:14] and the New Covenant [2Cor 3:6]. However, we must understand that although the two stages are different, they are closely connected. Indeed, “The Old Testament was arranged with the main purpose of preparing for the coming of Jesus, the Savior of all, the day of the Messianic Kingdom, announced through the prophets and signified by various images” [Constitution on Divine Revelation, nos. 14-15]. The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the light of the New Testament. Therefore, the study of the *biblical* covenantal thought of this period dispelled the skepticism of some scholars, who believed that the Old Testament had no connection with the New Testament and even had no role in the formation and consolidation of Christian faith.

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Introduction

The covenant is the main theme of the content of the Old and New Testaments. According to the original language of the Bible, the word “covenant” in Hebrew is “beriyth” H1285, transliterated as/ be-rit/, meaning “binding” and in Greek is “diathēkē” G1242, transliterated as/ dia-a-phe-ke/, meaning “covenant” or “testament”. As for the term covenant in Hebrew, the word ‘ברית’ (berith) means covenant (covenant). This word is equivalent to the Greek word ‘διαθήκη’ (diatheke).

Thereby, we must affirm that the term covenant is used to refer to the agreement and binding between two or more people or two or more groups of people about something. Including rights, obligations and sanctions with each other. However, in history as well as today, many scholars studying the Bible rely on different aspects and perspectives and affirm that there are different covenants such as: a research group believes that there are five types of covenants in the history of Christianity: The covenant between God and Noah [Gen 6:18; Gen 9:11]; The covenant between God and Abraham [Gen 15:18; Gen 17:7]; The covenant between God and the Jewish people through Moses [Ex 19:5-8; Ex

34:27]; The covenant between God and David [2 Sm 7:8-16; Ps 89:3-4]; The New Covenant between God and the human family through Jesus [Mt 26:28]. Some scholars even believe that in the Bible there are more than the five covenants above: Adam and Eve [see Gen 1:26-2:3]; Noah and his family [see Gen 9:8-17]; Abraham and his lineage [see Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-14; 22:16-18]; Moses and the people of Israel [see Ex 19:5-6; 3:4-10; 6:7]; King David and the kingdom of Israel [see 2 Sm 7:8-19]; Jesus and the Church [see Mt 26:28; 16:17-19].

Through this, we see that there is no consensus among scholars about the covenants in the history of Christianity. Therefore, the author does not deny the scholars, but the author only focuses on **presenting the basic covenants in the Bible** that God established with mankind. These are: *the Adamic Covenant; the Sinai Covenant and The New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ*. With rich and profound contents about God's love and forgiveness for sins of doubt, disobedience and arrogance in humans, God's detailed reflection of the plan of salvation for humans through the following covenants:



First, the Adamic Covenant:

Who is Adam? This question is sometimes redundant for Christians. However, it is lacking for those who are new to God. Therefore, to create a complete picture of God's plan of salvation, we must understand Adam. In Genesis 2:7, Adam carries the idea of the first man, the one created by God and among the most noble of God's children. In the Bible, Adam is also mentioned as God's masterpiece: God molded Adam from clay and breathed life into him at the end of the creation story.

When talking about the Adamic Covenant, right in the first chapter of *Genesis* [st 1-3], it is noted that there is no covenant or in other words, the word covenant does not appear in the first chapter of *Genesis*, but it is only the "promise and blessing" of God with Adam and Eve. Therefore, if we only stop at the promises and blessings called covenant, it is difficult to convince. However, considering the context, promise as well as the natural expression in "promise and blessing" describes the manifestation of the covenant. Indeed, considering before our First Father sinned, humans were implicitly created by God, but God gave humans a certain *freedom of choice* and formed a covenant with Him. That is demonstrated as follows: The covenant between God and Adam as the representative of all people born from him through the normal generation. Under the terms of this covenant, God promised to confirm Adam in a state of eternal life and happiness from Him, which the Bible describes as follows: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them, and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away'" [Revelation 21:3-4]. In response, God made demands on *Adam* to love, trust, and obey Him. This included specifically refusing to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He attached a death curse to breaking His word [Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17].

Thus, comparing the positions and roles of the two sides. Although, on the side of God with more power, he gave Adam on the side with less power [see Joshua 9:6,15; 1 Samuel 11:1; Ed 17:13] many more blessings than just one request from God. And it is also the covenant of love between God and man in the book of *Genesis* that begins the creation with the marriage of Adam and Eve and will be completed by the new creation with the wedding feast of the Lamb and the Bride in the book of *Revelation*.

Second, the Sinai Covenant:

Moses was a famous prophet, teacher, and leader around the 14th - 13th century BC. He was blessed and chosen by God to represent the people of Israel in making a commitment to God at Mount Sinai. Therefore, this Covenant is also called the Sinai Covenant. The content of this covenant God made a covenant with the people of Israel, including all those who were not Israelites but agreed to live with the people of Israel and obey the conditions of the covenant. Therefore, it can be said in a broad sense that God made a covenant with humanity through the people of Israel. The

covenant also concretized the laws in the relationship in social life between people and with the profound moral values it carried, the covenant was considered by the Jewish people as a *Charter*.

Humans, with the "increase of sin, push people further and further away from God. People seem to struggle in despair, unable to escape from the abyss of sin" [Gen 4-11]. The people of Israel are no exception to this sin. In God's plan to exile the people of Israel, this event is not a poison pill but a bitter pill that God must use to cure the disease of arrogance, disobedience and even offending God of His own people. Sin has separated them from God's love and pushed them away from God, losing their happiness.

The people of Israel repented of their sins from the event that God freed them from slavery in Egypt "Israel was in slavery, mistreated and exploited in every way [see Ex 1,8-22]. And tested them on their journey through the desert and to the promised land of Canaan. Through that event, the people of Israel realized their sins, repented, regretted and wanted to meet to reconcile with God. With His love and compassion, God proposed to establish a Covenant with them, which was also a special friendly relationship between God and His people [see Ex 19,5-6]. God looked down and became the great Father of this nation, and Israel became His child: "Israel is my son, my firstborn" [Ex 4,23]. Contents of the Ten Commandments:

First: Worship only Jehovah God. [Exodus 20:3]

Second: Do not worship idols. [Exodus 20:4-6]

Third: Do not use God's name carelessly. [Exodus 20:7]

Fourth: Keep the Sabbath day. [Exodus 20:8-11]

Fifth: Honor your father and mother. [Exodus 20:12]

Sixth commandment: Thou shalt not kill. [Exodus 20:13]

Seventh: Do not commit adultery. [Exodus 20:14]

The eighth commandment: Thou shalt not steal. [Exodus 20:15]

Ninth: Do not bear false witness. [Exodus 20:16]

Tenth: Do not covet what belongs to others. [Exodus 20:17]

The Decalogue is divided into two main parts. The first three commandments were engraved on a stone tablet, which defined the laws that people must obey to strengthen their relationship with God: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. I punish the children for the iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but show mercy to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who takes his name in vain. Thus, it can be

said that the basic content of the three commandments above reflects the obedience, respect and reverence of the Israelites towards God as filial children.

The remaining seven commandments are engraved on a stone tablet that regulates the relationship between man and man: "Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to his neighbor." Human beings not only exist with God but also live with one another and for one another. In other words, humans live in the world and need to live with others in order to learn about themselves through them. Furthermore, these Seven Commandments are established to ensure an order of people with people in order to promote the relationship of people within themselves and with others. Although these commandments are simple and natural, they clearly express God's concern for the moral life of mankind, which is suffering from moral corruption, lifestyle degradation and corruption of conscience. Such simple justices have been the basis for many centuries, becoming the noble moral convention of mankind.

Besides the commandments, in the new covenant there is also *the Covenant Ceremony*. *The Covenant Ceremony* [x. Ex 24]. Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain and sacrificed a bull. The covenant was sealed with blood, representing the origin, the beginning of life, and was a sign of faithfulness in keeping the covenant. The Israelites, as well as ancient religions, considered blood to be life. Therefore, the sprinkling of blood on both sides of the Covenant, God and the people, indicated that from now on the two sides shared the same life, were connected to each other in a family of the same blood. From then on, the rituals of worship had a very profound meaning for the Israelites. Israel's worship had many sacrifices [see Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deut 16:1-16; Lev 23; Num 28-29], but these can be summarized into three types:

Burnt offering: The entire sacrificial animal is burned on the altar. This ceremony represents the meaning of man's complete dedication to God, the master of all things.

Communion: Part of the sacrificed animal was burned on the altar, the rest was divided among the priests and the participants [community meal - cf. Ex 24:11]. This ceremony expressed the unity in the Covenant.

The Ritual of Atonement: After sprinkling the blood of the sacrificial animal on the cover of the Ark, the high priest laid his hands on the head of a goat, confessed the sins of the people into the animal's ears, and then sent it into the desert to take away the sins. This ceremony expressed the desire to ask for forgiveness, reconciliation, and re-establish the Covenant [see Lv 16]. At this stage, the Israelites had the Covenant, the Ark, and the liturgy. These were the fundamental elements of the religious life of the Israelites, a religion that bound God to His people and vice versa.

Thus, the Sinai Covenant was based on mutual commitment. Yahweh would be the only God of the people of Israel. Israel would be a special people, a people chosen by God, a gift of God. And God promised to recognize Israel as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation [see Ex 19:6]. "...Who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood; and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father-to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" [Revelation 1:5-6]. Here we must also understand in a broad sense, as a kingdom of priests, meaning that they have the role of being the sole mediators between God and the other nations, by proclaiming His word and offering sacrifices on their behalf. Therefore, the vocation of Israel has a particular nuance, which is to guard the treasure of faith.

Third, the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ.

The New Covenant established by Jesus is also the covenant shed by the blood of Jesus, the Son of God who came to earth as a human [Mt 26:26-29; Mc 14:22-25; Lc 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25]. So who is Jesus? Most scholars agree that Jesus was a Galilean Jew, born around the beginning of the first century and died between 30 and 36 AD in Judea, he lived and worked only in Galilee and Judea and not elsewhere [11-12. pp. 42-303]. The Gospels focus only on the last three years of Jesus' life on earth, especially the last week before being crucified to redeem humanity. And in this last week He made a covenant with humanity. This is the covenant considered by mankind as *the Charter of the Kingdom of Heaven*.

The content of the new covenant is reported in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as follows: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" [Mt 26:26-29]. "And while they were eating, he took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they drank from it, all of them. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" [Mk 14:22-24]. And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me".

And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" [Luke 22:19-20]. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me". For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" [1 Cor 11:23-26].

Thus, although the Gospels in each book have certain differences in language, their content reflects the same nature of the covenant

between Jesus and humanity. The Eucharist or Mass each time the Church celebrates it is Jesus, the New Covenant Banquet, who freely gives himself to his disciples until his return. The Eucharist is the source of the Church's stability until the Day of the Lord's return [see 1 Cor 11:26].

To highlight the sacredness and completeness of the new covenant, we compare and find the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant through three points:

First, like the old covenant, the new covenant is the bond between God and man. Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, plays a decisive role in the dimension of faith.

Second, the new covenant is more perfect than the old covenant, because the old covenant was only a shadow. In the new covenant, Jesus is both priest and sacrifice. Only through Him can humanity be forgiven of sin and united with God.

Third, the new covenant is inaugurated in Christ and is only truly fulfilled on the last day, with the prospect of the wedding of the Lamb of God and the Church as his bride. In the eyes of St. Paul and the author of the letter to the Hebrews, each covenant in Jewish history has different characteristics.

Here we ask again, does the new covenant completely replace the old covenant? This clarification is important in the practice of faith. Indeed, it is worth our attention that the new covenant that Jesus established does not invalidate the old covenants, nor does it completely replace the old covenants. What is worth mentioning here is that the spirit of the covenant that Jesus established is a new spirit. The way Jesus established it is a new way. This fulfills God's words in the book of the prophet Jeremiah that this covenant is not engraved on stone tablets but on the hearts of men. Furthermore, God condemns those who are circumcised but live hypocritically. He exalts "circumcision of the heart" as necessary to prove that one belongs to God [Jer 4:4; Jer 9:24-25]. Through this, we realize that this is God's plan expressed through the process of human salvation.

Thus, the covenant of Jesus is called a new covenant because it is expressed by a new love, a love that surpasses the perception of all people in the human family. The blood of the new covenant is the blood that cleanses man from all sins, pulling man from the fate of eternal death because Jesus died and destroyed death once for all. According to the author of the letter to the Hebrews: "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" [Heb 10:10].

In short, through God's plan for humanity expressed through the covenants is the main theme of the content of Christian faith. The word covenant appears more than 300 times in the Bible, from the beginning of mankind to the new covenant where the true savior shed his blood, has shown us how much hope and love God has for humanity. In conclusion, I have a friend who asked me: what is the most precious love in your life? and I answered that it is the love that God has given me. And after many years, my friend asked the same question and I still answer the same way. Indeed, only with the sincere love and the love of God's immense heart, He let His own Son shed tears and shed blood to save mankind through the blood covenant of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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