

## GREAT BIBLE DOCTRINES - LESSON 9 THE DOCTRINE OF THE COVENANTS

Introduction: God and man are both rational beings and God always deals with people through covenants whose terms can be clearly understood. A covenant also defines a relationship and provides a framework for faithfulness in that relationship. God has dealt with people through many different covenants through history, according to His purposes at any given time.

### 1. God's various covenants with people

- A. The covenant with Adam and Eve before the fall - Genesis 1:28, 29; 2:15-17
- B. The covenant with Adam and Eve after the fall - Genesis 3:15-19 (Provision for worship and sacrifice probably were included - Genesis 4:1-5; Hebrews 11:4.)
- C. The covenant with Noah before the flood - Genesis 6:13-22
- D. The covenant with Noah and his descendants after the flood - Genesis 9:1-17
- E. The covenant with Abraham concerning land, descendants, and blessing through Christ - Genesis 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 17:1-8; 18:18; 22:17,18 (This covenant was reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob - Genesis 26:3-5; 28:13,14.)
- F. The covenant concerning circumcision - Genesis 17:9-14
- G. The covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai - Exodus 19:5-8; 20:1-24; 21:1 (This is the major covenant of the Old Testament period, from which the Old Testament (covenant) gets its name.)
  - 1) Made with Israel only - Deuteronomy 4:7, 8
  - 2) Made to teach and guide and separate Israel until the coming of Christ and His New Covenant - Galatians 3:19, 23-25
- H. The New Covenant of Christ - Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 1:1,2; 9:15; John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:3-11; 1 Timothy 2:5
  - 1) Made with people of all nations - Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 10:34-43; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11
  - 2) Sealed and made possible through the blood of Christ - Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:11-14; 1 John 1:7; 2:2
  - 3) The terms of this covenant are offered through the gospel - Mark 16:15, 16; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.
  - 4) This is the final covenant between God and man on earth - Hebrews 1:1, 2; Galatians 1:8, 9; Jude 3.

### 2. The Old and New Covenants contrasted

- A. Different priesthood - Hebrews 7:11-28

- B. Different atonements - Hebrews 9:13, 14; 10:1-12
  - C. Different limitations on eligibility - Deuteronomy 4:7, 8; Ephesians 2:11-18; Galatians 3:27, 28; Romans 1:16
  - D. Different promises - Hebrews 8:6; Galatians 3:10-14; Acts 13:38, 39
  - E. Different writing - 2 Corinthians 3:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34
  - F. Different age and manner of entrance - Genesis 17:9-14; Jeremiah 31:34; John 3:3-5
  - G. Different measure of forgiveness - Hebrews 10:3, 4, 10-14; 8:12; Acts 2:38
  - H. Different requirements for worship - John 4:20-24
  - I. Different dynamics for obedience - Romans 8:15; John 15:14, 15; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Romans 6:4; John 12:32; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 John 4:19
3. Christians are not under the Old Covenant but the New.
- A. The Old covenant was only for Israel - Deuteronomy 4:7, 8.
  - B. Christ fulfilled and abolished the Old Covenant at His death, "nailing it to His cross" - Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 2:13, 14; Galatians 3:24-26.
  - C. Christians are clearly free from the law of Moses - Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 3:15-29; 4:21-31; 2 Corinthians 3:3-11; Colossians 2:13-17; Romans 6:14; John 1:17; Matthew 17:1-5.
  - D. To seek to be saved through a covenant of law is to fall from the covenant of grace - Galatians 5:4.
- [Note: This does not mean that the Old Testament Scriptures are not important to Christians. The Old Testament is still God's word and we learn much from it about God, righteousness, the mind of God, examples of faith and disobedience, etc. All of the Old Testament prepares the way for Christ and the gospel, and we cannot understand the New Testament without the background of the Old - 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Romans 15:4.]
4. Certain general principles such as faith, repentance, obedience, and worship, pertain to both old and New covenants - Hebrews 11; Ezekiel 18:27; 1 Samuel 15:22, 23; 1 Chronicles 16:29; Romans 1:16; Luke 24:47; John 14:15; 4:24.
5. One enters The New covenant with God through Christ when he hears and believes the gospel, repents of sin, confesses Christ as Lord, and is "baptized into Christ" - Mark 16:15,16; Acts 16:31; 2:38; Romans 10:9,10,17; Galatians 3:27; John 3:3-5. Those who enter are sealed with the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1; 13, 14; 4:30.
6. We are warned not to forsake the covenant we have with God through Christ, for there is no other way of salvation or fellowship with God - Hebrews 10:23-31; 2:3; Acts 4:12; Luke 21:19. (God is perfectly faithful and never breaks His covenants - Deuteronomy 7:9; Compare 1 Kings 8:23).

**CONCLUSION:** It is a marvelous thing that the great God of all the universe should love small and wayward creatures like us and desire personal fellowship with us in covenant relationship. There is nothing more important in the world than accepting and understanding God's offered covenant so that we may please him, relate to him and be accepted and blessed by him.

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**Addendum:** Article on the Sabbath (next page)

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS KEEP THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH?

Sabbatarians (those who believe Christians should keep the Saturday Sabbath) maintain that the Sabbath command was not to Israel only but is a universal command binding on all followers of God from creation till the end of time.

The word "Sabbath" means "rest." God himself rested on the seventh day at the creation (Genesis 2:2, 3). The scriptures do not tell us that Adam, Noah, Abraham or any of the "patriarchs" before Moses were commanded by God to keep the Sabbath, and there is no mention of their keeping it.

The first recorded instance where God commanded people to keep the Sabbath day is found in Exodus 16:4, 5, 22-30, when Israel had come out of Egypt and were nearing Mount Sinai. When this law was given, the people reacted to it as something new and strange to them, not something known among them from the time of their forefathers. Some of them went out to gather manna on the seventh day as on any other day, showing that they were not accustomed to resting on the Sabbath.

In fact Nehemiah tells us that God made known the Sabbath to Israel at Sinai (the time of Moses) (Nehemiah 9:13, 14; Ezekiel 20:10-12). Therefore the Sabbath law is not a law for all people and for all time from the creation. Rather it was a law for the nation of Israel during the period of the "Old Covenant" which began with Moses and was fulfilled and taken away at the death of Christ.

The Sabbath was given to one nation, the Israelites. It was a sign of the special covenant between them and God (Deuteronomy 4:8; 5:3,15; Exodus 34:27; 31:13,16,17; Ezekiel 20:10-12; Nehemiah 9:13,14). The Sabbath law was never given to any other nation. God rebuked Israel many times for failing to keep the Sabbath. No other nation was rebuked concerning the Sabbath, because none had received that law. Therefore Gentiles were not bound by the Sabbath commandment. Israelites who broke the Sabbath incurred the death penalty (Exodus 31:14, 15; 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36). But there is no record in scripture of any Gentile being executed for working on the Sabbath.

Further, Israel was commanded to keep

Sabbaths of years which were part of the Sabbath system (Leviticus 25:1-11; Exodus 23:11; Deuteronomy 15:2-18; Nehemiah 10:31). If Christians today are obligated to keep the weekly Sabbath, they are also obligated to keep the seventh-year and fiftieth-year Sabbaths. But the scriptures show that Christians are not under any Sabbath commandment.

Clearly the Sabbath commandment was given only to Israel and only under the Old Covenant which God made with Israel through Moses. The commandments of that covenant are sometimes referred to as the Law of Moses, or the Old Law. When the Old Covenant was taken away, the Sabbath law ended along with all the commandments which God gave through Moses. Christ has given us his own teachings in the New Covenant (Hebrews 1:1, 2; John 1:17; Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:4). Though some of the commands in the New Covenant are like some in the Old, many laws in the Old Covenant are not included in the New, because they were specifically for Israel and for the Old Covenant period.

Let's look at New Testament evidence that Christians are not bound by the Sabbath commandment. The scriptures clearly state that:

1. The Old Law or Old Covenant has been taken away and there is a New Covenant today (Hebrews 7:11, 12; 9:15-19).
2. Jesus in his death removed the dividing wall of hostility that was between Jews and Gentiles, by abolishing the law with its commandments and regulations (Ephesians 2:14-18). The context shows that he is speaking of the Old Testament Law of Moses which separated Israel alone as God's chosen. Now Jews and Gentiles are all one through the gospel.
3. The [old] law was put in charge to lead people to faith in Christ. Now that we have reached faith in Christ, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Galatians 3:24-27).
4. The Covenant given at Sinai (symbolized by Hagar, Abraham's concubine), has nothing to do with Christians, because we have a New Covenant (symbolized by Sarah, Abraham's

wife) (Galatians 4:21-31).

5. We are free from the old law just as a woman is free from her husband when he is dead (Romans 7:1-7). And we know that the "law" Paul writes about here is the ten-commandment law given through Moses, because Paul mentions one of its commandments written on the stones, "Do not covet" (verse 7). The Sabbath law was written on the same stones.
6. The Old Covenant, written on stones, is taken away, and Paul and his fellow-apostles are ministers of a New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:5-14). Since the Sabbath commandment was written on stones, it is part of the Old Covenant which has been taken away.
7. Christians are not to be judged by Old Testament ordinances concerning food and drink, religious festivals or the Sabbath (Colossians 2:13-17). These ordinances were "nailed to the cross" and taken away when Jesus died.

Christ himself kept the Sabbath while on earth before he died, for the Old Testament law was not taken away until Jesus' death. Jesus obeyed the Law of Moses until his death. In his death, he took that law away and established the New Covenant which God makes with all nations through the gospel. Therefore Christians are not bound by the Sabbath law.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, his apostles went to the Jewish synagogues on many Sabbaths because they wanted to teach their Jewish brothers who did not know Christ. But they did so as a matter of free choice, not in order to obey a law of Christ about keeping the Sabbath. These apostles did not tell Christians to keep the Sabbath. The only "Sabbath" which remains for Christians is the eternal Sabbath rest in heaven. The Christians in the early church kept the first day of the week as the "Lord's Day," the day on which Christ arose from the dead (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Revelation 1:10).

Some believe that the emperor Constantine or the Roman Catholic church changed the day of worship, replacing the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday-keeping in the fourth century A. D. But historical evidence clearly shows that Sunday was

kept as the "Lord's Day" by the early church from the time of the apostles in the first century. The church at Troas kept "the first day of the week" during Paul's time (Acts 20:7; compare 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2).

Justin Martyr, writing about 150 A. D., says that Christians kept the "day of the sun, the "eighth day" (another way of saying the day after the seventh-day Jewish Sabbath). Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, writing around 200 A. D., also testify to Sunday as the day kept by Christians, as do many other lesser writers of the second and third centuries. All of these wrote long before Constantine or the Roman Catholic papacy existed. Decrees by Constantine or Catholic officials merely recognized and legalized what Christians had always done since the days of the apostles. ---B. Shelburne

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