

# WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

## THE BIBLE IS A COVENANT CORPUS

**Thesis:** The Bible, in its nature and formal character, is body (a collection) of covenants.

**Contention:** Christians and churches today have not clearly, consistently, and unequivocally asserted the divine covenants as the basis of God's governing arrangements throughout biblical history.

### **Introduction: What is the Bible...?**

#### **Seriously. What is the Bible?**

- We read the Bible. We study the Bible. We say we "love" the Bible. But what is it?
- Have you ever taken a step back from all the details *in* the Bible to ask yourself that question?

#### **I want to ask... and I want you to think with me about the "formal character" of the Bible--its "nature." What *is* it?**

- Is it a religious book?
- Is it a history book?
- Is it a self-help book ("chicken soup for your soul")?
- Is it a love letter?
- Is it a book of Jewish myths and maxims?

#### **I ran across this question in a book by Dr. Meredith G. Kline called The Structure of Biblical Authority<sup>1</sup>.**

- I saw a reference to this book in another I was reading, and I wanted the whole context so I bought it.
- This question (*What is the Bible?*) appeared in the second paragraph (of the whole book). Page 1.
- Now, let's be up-front: Kline is a scholar. But, that's partly why his question struck me like it did.
  - ✓ He's a professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.
  - ✓ He has several earned degrees: B.D., Th.M., and Ph.D.
  - ✓ He's written extensively and his writings are typical of those by scholars: well researched and noted.
  - ✓ And after all that... He says he came full circle to ask himself, "What is the Bible?"
  - ✓ How do we define and describe the formal character of Scripture? What *is* it?

#### **I want to compile a study on Scripture (this is what I'm working on right now and podcasting).**

- I've been working on this study for a few years and I have notes scattered all over on index cards, sheets of paper, and in the margins of several Bibles and in the margins of even more books.
- And I want to organize my notes into a study I've been thinking about for these last few years.
- What kind of study is it...?
  - ✓ Do you have a study Bible? If you do, you know how they are laid out.
    - Each book of the Bible has a brief introduction at the beginning that gives you some facts about the content that are meant to help orient you and prepare you to read the book in its proper context.
    - There may be some other information offered such as authorship, date of writing, and an outline to show you the structure, etc.
  - ✓ I want an introductory study like that... but for the whole Bible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1989).

### I want an introductory study of the Bible and its structure as a unified whole.

- Just like study Bibles will provide an introductory study of each book as a unified whole, I want that for the whole Bible.
- If the Bible is truly inspired (originated) by God (and it is), then the Bible in its entirety is the product of *one mind*, God's mind. It is not, therefore, a random jumble of ancient books just cobbled together later in history by Jewish scribes and Catholic theologians (like the Darwinian textual critics would like us to believe).
- The Bible is *one* Book. It is cohesive, consistent, and unified in theme, structure, and purpose.
- It is "the" Bible, one Book made up of 66 books that fit together perfectly by divine design.
  - ✓ Each passage fits into its chapter.
  - ✓ Each chapter fits into its book.
  - ✓ Each book fits into the context of the whole of Scripture.
- Okay... so... What *is* it? The "whole" of Scripture, the "one Book": What is it?

### We need to start here, with this question, because of where I want to go with this study (and it's my study and my podcast... so I get to go where I want with it...).

- I want to build a truly *biblical* biblical theology (not just a biblical theology, like so many out there... but a biblical theology based *on the Bible*).
- Dr. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. said this in the book he co-authored with Moisés Silva on hermeneutics, and I think it aptly describes very well what I have in mind when I say I want a *biblical* biblical theology:
 

Biblical theology is the quest for the big picture or the theological wholeness and the overview that brings out the unity, the plan, the cohesiveness, and the purpose of God as that plan moves through the course of history.<sup>2</sup>
- That's what I want! I want my very own biblical theology! But a "biblical" theology is of necessity *based on the Bible*, the Book we hold in our hands and read each day.
- And so this question needs to be addressed first... now... in this first study of our *introductory study of the Bible and its structure as a unified whole*.
- What is the Bible?

### We are going to answer this question in three parts, and the first part is this one...

- Our topic of study in this lesson: *The Bible is a covenant corpus*.

**Definition:** A *corpus* is a large collection of writings *of a specific kind* or *on a specific subject*.

- The Bible is a collection of writings of a specific kind (covenantal) and on a specific subject (covenants; specifically, covenants between God and His moral creatures).
- The Bible is a covenant corpus; it is a body, a collection of covenants.
- This is the nature of the Bible: covenant. This is the formal character of the Bible: covenant.

---

2 Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 69.

## The covenant structure of the Bible is at once foundational and forgotten.

- C.I. Scofield, in his original ("Old Scofield") reference Bible stated very clearly what he believed about the covenantal nature of the Bible:

...the eight great covenants of Scripture... about which all Scripture crystallizes...<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ The contents of Scripture "crystallize" (form around) the covenants.
  - ✓ Covenants are the structure around which all Scripture hangs and organizes itself.
  - ✓ Covenants are as essential to the body of Scripture as the skeleton is to the human body.
- Hal Harless states the importance of the covenants this way:
 

...the concept of covenant is critical to the understanding of the cultural and historical context of the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>
  - And yet something so foundational (the very structure, nature, and formal character of the Bible) is largely forgotten in today's modern church.

## In this study we are going to answer the question (What is the Bible?) by drawing attention to two specific aspects of Scripture:

1. The Two Testaments
2. The Eight Major Covenants

### **I. The Two Testaments: The Bible is a Covenant Corpus (a body/collection of covenants) because it consists of two Testaments, the Old and the New.**<sup>5</sup>

#### **A. Testament: What is it?**

1. Any covenant that involves the death of someone could properly be called a testament.<sup>6</sup>
  - a) Every testament is a covenant. A testament is a covenant that requires the death of the testator to make it of legal force.
 

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. [Heb 9.16-17]
  - b) But not every covenant is a testament (and this distinction becomes critically important, especially when applying the term "testament" to the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant).
2. The term and concept of *testament* is defined in the Bible by its first mention<sup>7</sup> during the Lord's Supper at the end of the Gospels, and by its full mention<sup>8</sup> in chapter 9 of the Book of Hebrews.

<sup>3</sup> C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Hal Harless, *How Firm a Foundation: The Dispensations in the Light of the Divine Covenants* (New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Harless, *How Firm a Foundation*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> I am very much indebted to the insight provided by Dr. Peter S. Ruckman in two simple paragraphs of his commentary on the Book of Hebrews. With two simple paragraphs, Dr. Ruckman clarified and simplified a concept that most others I have read obfuscated by confusion, complication, and misunderstanding. Peter S. Ruckman, *Bible Believers Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Pensacola, Florida: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1998), 220, 224.

<sup>7</sup> "Definition. That principle by which God indicates in the first mention of a subject, the truth with which that subject stands connected in the mind of God." J. Edwin Hartill, *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1947), 70.

<sup>8</sup> "Definition--that principle by which God declares His full mind upon any subject vital to our spiritual life. Somewhere in the Word, God gathers together the scattered fragments that have to do with a particular truth, and puts them into one exhaustive statement. That is His full mind concerning that truth." Hartill, *Hermeneutics*, 76.

## B. Testament: The First Mention, Matthew 26.28

For this is my blood of **the new testament**, which is shed for many **for the remission of sins**. [Mat 26.28; cf. Mar 14.24; Luke 22.30; 1Cor 11.25]

1. The Lord refers to His work of shedding His blood as the "new testament."
  - a) Note that He did *not* call it a "covenant" but rather a "testament" (it *could* be called a "covenant" because every testament is a covenant; but it is more *accurate* to call it, in this context, a "testament" and we will see why in just a moment).
  - b) The Lord referred to this new testament in the context of his death (the shedding of His blood in substitutionary sacrifice) for the remission of sins.
  - c) Therefore, based on the first mention of this word we see that a "testament" is a formal, legal arrangement of a substitutionary sacrifice for sins.
2. With the shedding of His blood on the cross (with His death), Christ established a *new* testament--a *new* system of substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins--and thereby made the previous testament (the previous system of substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins) "old."
  - a) The "old testament," therefore, refers to the old system of substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins until the death of Christ.
  - b) The "new testament" refers to the new system of substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins after the death of Christ.
3. And that leads us to the full-mention passage of the Bible regarding testaments: Hebrews 9.

## C. Testament: The Full Mention, Hebrews 9

1. The first thing we should notice (as we read this chapter and the ones immediately before it and after it) is the use of both the word "covenant" and the word "testament." And although these terms may be similar, they are not the same and we should not assume they are same.

Then verily the first **covenant** had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. [Heb 9.1]

For where a **testament** is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a **testament** is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. [Heb 9.16-17]

This is the **covenant** that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. [Heb 10.16-17]

2. Similarity: Any covenant that involved the death of someone could be properly called a testament.
  - a) This is why the Mosaic Covenant (with its elaborate system of bloody sacrifices) is at times referred to in Scripture as a "testament."
 

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of **the old testament**; which vail is done away in Christ. [2Cor 3.14]

And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple **the ark of his testament**: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail. [Rev 11.19]
  - b) The New Covenant (clearly called a covenant in Jeremiah 31.31-34) is at times referred to as the New "Testament" because it was ratified at Christ's death (it will not, however, go fully into effect until "after those days," at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ).
    - (1) The shed blood of Jesus Christ initiated the new "testament."

For this is **my blood of the new testament**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. [Mat 26.28]

(2) The shed blood of Jesus Christ also ratified the New "Covenant."

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted **the blood of the covenant**, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? [Heb 10.29]

c) So we see that there are similarities between a testament and a covenant. We should not, however, assume that they are identical in every context.

3. **Different and Distinct**: The usage of the word "testament" in context (in the Bible and, particularly, in Hebrews 9) specifically refers to the system of sacrificial death that was legally and formally arranged by God for the salvation of lost, sinful man.

a) A "testament" achieved the "remission of sins" (e.g., Mat 26.28).

b) A "testament," therefore, resulted in life (what we would call eternal life today; salvation).

4. In Hebrews 9, observe the comparison between the sacrificial death of Christ and the sacrificial death of goats, calves, and bulls.

a) Two sacrificial systems are in comparison: animals and Christ.

b) The "blood of goats and calves" has now been replaced by the better system based on "his own blood" (Christ's blood).

Neither by the **blood** of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. [Heb 9.12]

c) The blood of bulls and goats served before to "sanctify" and to "purify."

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, **sanctifieth** to the **purifying** of the flesh. [Heb 9.13]

d) This is to say that the blood sacrifice of a substitutionary animal (a bull, a goat, etc.) "purged" and provided for the "remission" of sins.

And almost all things are by the law **purged** with blood; and without shedding of blood is no **remission**. [Heb 9.22]

e) But now the blood sacrifice of Christ is better than the blood sacrifice of animals.

**How much more** shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, **purge** your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? [Heb 9.14]

(1) The Lord's blood sacrifice also provided for the "remission" of sins.

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**. [Mat 26.28]

(2) And His sacrifice is better because it sanctifies eternally.

By the which will we are **sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. [Heb 10.10]

f) And it is here, in this context (comparing the old system of animal sacrifices to the new system of Christ's sacrifice), where God introduces the term "testament."

And for this cause he is the mediator of **the new testament**, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under **the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [Heb 9.15]

(1) Pay very close attention to what this passage says:

(a) There are two (and only two!) Testaments.

(b) And they do not refer to any specific covenant (of the eight major covenants God made with man).

(c) These "testaments" refers to legal systems of substitutionary sacrifice, the shedding of innocent blood in payment of a sin debt.

- (2) **The New Testament** is the one of which Christ was and is the mediator. He is the One who died to make this Testament of legal force to remit sins (the remission of sins).
- (a) The New Testament is "tied to" (part of) the New Covenant. That is true (and we are going to look at little bit more at that in some detail later, in the second half of this study).
  - (b) However, the term "New Testament" refers very specifically to the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ to obtain complete forgiveness of sins and eternal life for guilty, sinful man.
  - (c) The New Testament, therefore, must be distinguished from the New Covenant.
    - i) The New Covenant was made with Israel and contained far more than forgiveness of sins and eternal life (see Jeremiah 31.31-34).
    - ii) The New Testament refers to the legal "deal" God made to accept the payment of Christ on the cross for sinful, lost man. It refers to the "salvation" portion of the New Covenant only.
    - iii) The New Testament (Heb 9.15), therefore, is the one of which Christ was and is the mediator. He is the One who died to make this Testament of legal force to remit sins (the remission of sins).
- (3) **The First Testament** (Heb 9.15) is the one that was in place before Christ and it consisted of animal sacrifices for the remission of sins. It was "first" and now is "old." It is the "Old Testament" that has been replaced by the "New Testament."

g) Observe the "force" and "strength" of a testament (it's legal force and strength).

For where a testament is, there must also **of necessity** be **the death of the testator**. For a testament is ***of force*** after men are dead: otherwise it is ***of no strength*** at all while the testator liveth. [Heb 9.16-17]

- (1) In order for a testament to be of legal force (to be active and applicable), someone (the testator) must die. This is what distinguishes a covenant from a testament.
- (2) Without the death of the testator, the testament is of no legal strength to what it was designed to do.
- (3) Christ is the one who died to make the new testament of legal force and to give it strength to save by the remission of sins.

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. [Mat 26.28]

- (4) Animals (goats, calves, bulls, etc.) were the ones who died to make the first (old) testament of force and give it strength to save by the remission of sins.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. [Heb 9.22]

- (a) Therefore, the first testament (now the "old" testament) was the system of sacrificial animals that died to provide remission of sins to lost man.
- (b) The animals that were sacrificed, according to Hebrews 9.16-17, were the "testators" that died to give "strength" to the legal arrangement in "force."

h) This system of substitutionary animal sacrifices is *particularly exemplified* in the Mosaic system of Levitical sacrifices.

Whereupon neither **the first testament** was dedicated without blood. For when ***Moses*** had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took ***the blood of calves and of goats***, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is **the blood of the testament** which God hath enjoined unto you. [Heb 9.18-20]

- i) However, this system of substitutionary animal sacrifices is *generally inclusive* of the entire system of blood sacrifices of animals established by God in Genesis 2 and 3.

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for *in the day* that thou eatest thereof **thou shalt surely die**. [Gen 2.15-17]

Unto Adam also and to his wife did **the Lord God make coats of skins**, and clothed them. [Gen 3.21; an animal died that day instead of--in the stead of--Adam and Eve]

- j) Salvation (forgiveness of sins and "life" instead of death) under the Old Testament came by faith and a *blood sacrifice of an animal*.

And Abel, he also brought of **the firstlings of his flock** and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. [Gen 4.4]

**By faith** Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. [Heb 11.4]

5. There are only two "testaments" and they make up the entire Bible.

- a) The "Old Testament" began with Adam in Genesis 2 and 3.

(1) The term "Old Testament" refers to the collective deaths of animal sacrifices from Genesis chapter 3 (Adam) until the death of Christ on the cross.

(2) The goats and calves (Heb 9.12) were the testators (Heb 9.16-17) that were "of strength" to redeem (Heb 9.15) by the remission of sins (Heb 9.22) when they died and shed their innocent blood in substitutionary sacrifice for sinful man.

(3) Obviously...

- (a) This did *not* "clear the guilty."

Keeping mercy for thousands, *forgiving* iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will **by no means clear the guilty**; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. [Exod 34.7]

- (b) This did *not* "take away sins."

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should **take away sins**. [Heb 10.4]

(4) But this Old Testament did purify and sanctify (Heb 9.13), purge with blood, and provide remission of sins (Heb 9.22).

(5) The "death of the testator" in the Old Testament, therefore, is the entire body of animal sacrifices.

- (a) This body of sacrifices, as testator, testifies to that which was to come.

And Abraham said, My son, **God will provide himself a lamb** for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. [Gen 22.8]

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**. [Jn 1.29]

- (b) The deaths of these "testators" (Heb 9.16-17) purged repentant, faithful sinners with blood for the remission of sins (Heb 9.22) during the Old Testament just as the blood of Christ purges us for the remission of sins under the New Testament.

Now [in the New Testament] where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. [Heb 10.18]

(6) The Old Testament, therefore, began with the first animal sacrifice--with the first "testator" that died in order to give legal force and strength to remit the sins of the guilty sinner. The Old Testament began with Adam and Eve, and it continued until the death of Christ.

- b) The "New Testament" began with the death of Christ (Matthew 27).

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. [Mat 26.28]

- (1) The New Testament replaced the Old Testament when Christ shed his blood and died on the cross.

And for this cause he is the mediator of **the new testament**, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under **the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. [Heb 9.15-17]

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. **He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.** By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. [Heb 10.9-10]

- (2) Christ died on the cross for a *better* remission of sins, for an *eternal* redemption.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. [Heb 9.22]

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. [Heb 10.18; Christ's is a better remission]

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained **eternal redemption** for us. [Heb 9.12]

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of **eternal inheritance**. [Heb 9.15]

6. And this is why the New "Testament" can be in effect (legally in force with strength to save) while the New "Covenant" is not (not yet; not until after "those days").

- a) The singular death of The Lamb of God in Matthew 27 constituted a New "Testament"--a new sacrificial system that replaced the old system (the "Old Testament") of animal sacrifices.
- b) The New "Covenant" (in its entirety, as a whole), even though it was ratified at the cross, does not go into full effect until "after those days" of the Tribulation, Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week (Dan 9.27), at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

31 Behold, **the days come**, saith the Lord, that I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; **After those days**, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.31-34]

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, **the days come**, saith the Lord, when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel **after those days**, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. [Heb 8.8-12]



This is *the covenant* that I will make with them *after those days*, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. [Heb 10.16-17]

- c) The only aspect of the New Covenant in force today is the aspect of salvation: forgiveness (remission) of sins and eternal life (through the new birth by the presence of the Spirit of God).
- This aspect constitutes the "New Testament," the new sacrificial system of Christ that replaced the old system (the "Old Testament") of animal sacrifices.
- d) This is why Paul could say he was a minister (and we are ministers) of the new "testament" but *not* of the New "Covenant."

Who also hath made us able **ministers of the *new testament***; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. [2Cor 3.6]

- (1) (Jer 31.31-34) The Church did *not* receive the New Covenant. The New Covenant is given to Israel and to Israel only.
- (2) We did, however, receive *the salvation* provided by and through the New Covenant: forgiveness (remission) of sins and eternal life (through the new birth).
- Be it known therefore unto you, that *the salvation* of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. [Act 28.28]
- (3) This salvation ("the" salvation originally provided for Israel under the New Covenant) is now provided in the New "Testament" to all. It is the legal arrangement established by God to accept the death of the Testator, Jesus Christ, as a legal substitute to purge us from all sin and make us acceptable in His sight.

...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.34b]

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. [Heb 9.22]

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but *by his own blood* he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained **eternal redemption** for us. [Heb 9.12]

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared **to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**. [Heb 9.26]

So **Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many**; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. [Heb 9.28]

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein **he hath made us *accepted in the beloved***. [Eph 1.6]

#### **D. Review & Conclusion: What is the Bible?**

1. The Bible is a covenant corpus. It is a body, a collection, of covenants. That is what Scripture *is* by nature and in its formal character.
2. This is seen, first of all, in the fact that the Bible consists of two "Testaments," the Old Testament and the New Testament.
  - a) A "testament" is a covenant that requires the death of the "testator" for it to be of legal force.
  - b) The Old Testament (Adam to the cross) involved the death of various "testators" in the sacrificial system of animals.
  - c) The New Testament (from the cross) involves the death of the Testator, Jesus Christ, and His "once for all" sacrificial death at Calvary.
3. Therefore, at its most basic and fundamental level (its two-part division; its two-part structure), the Bible is covenant--it is a collection of two testaments (two covenants).

4. Now, before we move on to our second point, I think a small "side note" is in order.
  - a) Bibles that change "testament" to "covenant" destroy the clarity of the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments we just studied out.
  - b) And because of that they cause unnecessary confusion among God's people.
    - (1) Every testament *is* a covenant (so you *can* call a testament a covenant).
    - (2) But *not* every covenant is a testament (so clarification in context is always best).
  - c) I think we have seen that God has some very specific things to tell us and teach us through the word "testament."
    - (1) Words have meaning. If you change the words, you change the meaning.
    - (2) Things different are not the same. You cannot change "testament" to "covenant" and think they teach the same thing. They do not.
  - d) Choose your Bible wisely; choose your Bible based on faith (not man's wisdom).

## II. **The Eight Major Covenants: The Bible is a Covenant Corpus (a body/collection of covenants) because its contents are structured around eight major covenants God made with man.**<sup>9</sup>

### A. Introduction

1. There is a ninth covenant we may talk about later, but for now we simply want to see the structure the covenants provide and not the details of the covenants themselves.
2. The eight major covenants mark major stages in God's progressive revelation to man.
  - a) Without just starting at the beginning and working our way through the eight covenants (which we could easily do and which I plan to do in detail later), I want to show you how Scripture "crystallizes" around the covenants (to continue borrowing Scofield's term).
  - b) The covenants are not just a nifty way to outline the Bible. They *are* the Bible. And I'd like to try to bring that out in this section of this lesson.
3. I want to start where we left off with the two Testaments.
  - a) There are only two Testaments and they make up the Bible.
 

And for this cause he is the mediator of **the new testament**, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under **the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [Heb 9.15]

Whereupon neither **the first testament** was dedicated without blood. [Heb 9.18]

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away **the first**, that he may establish **the second**. [Heb 10.9]
  - b) The two Testaments deal very specifically with salvation--with the remission of sins based on a substitutionary sacrifice.
 

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without **shedding of blood** is no remission. [Heb 9.22]

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. [Heb 9.16-17]

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many **for the remission of sins**. [Mat 26.28]

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. [Heb 10.18]
  - c) But there is far more to the covenants in the Bible than just provision for salvation. God is doing a whole lot more in creation history than simply saving us from hell.

<sup>9</sup> Scofield, *Reference Bible*, 5-6.

- d) And so, even though a Testament is a covenant, there is more to the covenants than the two Testaments (a lot more).
- e) The New Testament is a natural and perfect place to start...

## B. The New Testament and the New Covenant

1. The New Testament is a provision in the New Covenant.
2. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament *and* of the New Covenant (and the two are not the same).

- a) Jesus Christ became the Mediator of the New Testament (the new system of substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins) when He shed His blood and died on the cross.

And for this cause **he is the mediator of the new *testament***, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [Heb 9.15]

- b) But the Bible also says that Jesus Christ, with His death on the cross, became the Mediator of the New Covenant that will replace the old, Mosaic Covenant.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also **he is the mediator of a better *covenant***, which was established upon better promises. For if that **first *covenant*** had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. [Heb 8.6-8]

- (1) Observe the difference between the New Testament and the New Covenant (or at least a key difference).
- (2) The New Testament is related to salvation (the remission of sins) and is given to all men, Jew and Gentile alike.
- (3) The New Covenant, however, is given *only* to Israel and it deals with a lot more than just salvation and the remission of sins.

3. For our purposes here, I want to focus on how the New Testament is a provision of the New Covenant.

- a) The passage in Hebrew 8 that is cited and referenced from the Old Testament is Jeremiah 31.31-34, the full-mention passage of the New Covenant.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a **new *covenant*** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.31-34]

- b) The "testament" portion of this covenant (the stipulations that deal with salvation through the remission of sins) is found primarily in the last part of the last verse, Jeremiah 31.34b.

...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.34b]

- (1) God promises the forgiveness of iniquity.
- (2) God promises to remember their sin no more (an eternal remission of the sins, an eternal redemption, just like we saw in Hebrews 9 and 10).

- c) But the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31.31-34 has many more stipulations in addition to the last couple that deal with salvation. God made some very specific promises to Israel in the verses preceding the last one that deals with salvation.
- d) The point to make (and see) here is that the New Testament is inextricably tied to the New Covenant (it is impossible to separate the two); the New Testament is a provision of the New Covenant (the Covenant being much more broad in scope than the Testament).
- (1) Notice, then, how the New Covenant with its broader scope "crystallizes" around the New Testament and how the New Testament is couched in the stipulations of the New Covenant.
  - (2) To understand the New *Testament* you need to understand the New *Covenant*. And if we do not understand the New *Covenant*, we are going to have a hard time understanding the New *Testament*.
  - (3) The New Testament (in effect and active today) is tied to the New Covenant (promised in Jeremiah, ratified on the cross, but not active and in force until the second coming).
  - (4) The New Testament is inextricably tied to the New Covenant. To understand the New Testament today, you have to go *back* to passages like Jeremiah to see how it relates to the New Covenant.
4. But let's not miss the fact also that the New Covenant is inextricably related to the Mosaic Covenant. To understand the New Covenant you have to go *back* to the Mosaic Covenant.

### C. The New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant

1. In Jeremiah 31.31-34 God references the Mosaic Covenant when He promises Israel the New Covenant.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to **the covenant** that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; **which my covenant they brake**, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord... [Jer 31.31-34]

- a) God said He "was" an husband unto Israel. He likens the relationship with Israel under the Mosaic Covenant to a marriage that was broken.
- b) Israel broke that marriage covenant with her infidelity (her apostasy) and her spiritual adultery (her idolatry).
- c) But under the New Covenant there will be a reconciliation: The Lord will be their God and Israel will be His covenant people yet again.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and **will be their God, and they shall be my people**.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.31-34]

2. Suffice it to say for now (without going too deep into the details) that the New Covenant is clearly and directly (inextricably, inseparably) tied to the Mosaic Covenant.
- And we could ask ourselves why that is and the answer would be found in the relationship between the New Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Abrahamic Covenant.

#### D. The New Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Abrahamic Covenant

1. The New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant are inextricably tied to the Abrahamic Covenant.
2. God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham and his physical descendants (his physical "seed") through Isaac and Jacob, who was later called Israel.
  - a) The Abrahamic Covenant was offered in Genesis 12, then it went through several modifications (God added to it, further defining and describing what was offered in Genesis 12) and then finally ratified it in Genesis 22 after Abraham proved himself with the sacrifice of Isaac.
  - b) Two key passages provide the salient elements for our discussion here:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And **I will** make of thee a great nation, and **I will** bless thee, and make thy name great; and **thou shalt be** a blessing: And **I will** bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and **in thee shall** all families of the earth be blessed. [Gen 12.1-3]

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And **I will make my covenant** between me and thee, and **will** multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and **thou shalt be** a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And **I will** make thee exceeding fruitful, and **I will** make nations of thee, and ***kings shall come out of thee.***

7 And **I will** establish my covenant between me and thee **and thy seed after thee** in their generations for ***an everlasting covenant,*** to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And **I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land** wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. [Gen 17.1-8]

- c) There is obviously a lot going on in these passages in the Abrahamic Covenant, but let's simplify it for our purposes here (and we can work out all the details later).
  - d) Because of the Abrahamic Covenant and its unconditional promises to Abraham and his physical seed (descendants), "everyone gets in." All of Abraham's physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob have been unconditionally promised blessing from God.
    - (1) This includes spiritual and physical blessing.
    - (2) This includes blessing in the promised land.
    - (3) This includes blessing over the rest of the nations of the world--Abraham's descendants will be the "kings" who rule over and bless the Gentile nations.
    - (4) The Abrahamic Covenant is the covenant of great promise. It is unconditional and eternal. And it is for Israel (all Abraham's descendants through his son Isaac, and through Isaac's son Jacob/Israel).
3. But with the conditional Mosaic Covenant, everyone (all Israel) ended up being excluded because of their disobedience.

5 Now therefore, **if** ye will obey my voice indeed, and ***keep my covenant,*** then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, **All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.** And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. [Exod 19.5-8]

3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, **All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.**

4 And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

5 And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord.

6 And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

7 And he took **the book of the covenant**, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, **All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.** [Exod 24.3-7]

a) Israel could never keep up their agreement to do all that the Lord commanded them in the Law of Moses.

b) So, again, to simplify this for our purposes here:

(1) In the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant of promise, all Israel "gets in" on the blessing.

(2) But under the conditional Mosaic Covenant they are all "excluded" from blessing because they failed to meet the condition of the covenant: total and complete obedience.

(a) This is where God speaks of "divorcing" Israel, saying He "was an husband" to them.

(b) When they failed in their obedience, the Israelites broke the Mosaic Covenant and God likened that to a divorce (they had entered into a "holy matrimony" on Mount Sinai and covenanted together, but Israel was unfaithful to her Lord).

4. However, because God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham, He promised and made provision for the restoration of Israel even though they were unfaithful and broke (invalidated) the Mosaic Covenant. This promised provision of restoration is the New Covenant (notice the connection with the Mosaic Covenant):

31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 **Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; **which my covenant they brake**, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and **will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [Jer 31.31-34]

a) And here we see that these three covenants are inseparably tied together.

(1) And they make up the vast majority of the the entire Bible: from Genesis 12 through the New Testament.

(2) So with just these three covenants, we can easily say the Bible is a book of covenants.

b) The unconditional **Abraham Covenant** (in Genesis 12) promised everlasting (eternal) blessing to Israel, Abraham's physical descendants.

c) The conditional **Mosaic Covenant** laid out God's expectations of those who would be His people, and Israel failed miserably in those expectations (i.e., complete obedience).

d) So God promised them a **New Covenant**, also unconditional, so as to bring the original Abrahamic Covenant to its eternal fulfillment.

5. But, wait... Who gets in? Who gets the benefit and blessing of the New Covenant? Everyone?
  - a) All Israel is promised blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant.
  - b) All Israel is excluded from that blessing (and placed under the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) because of the Mosaic Covenant.
  - c) All Israel *can be* blessed under the New Covenant... *if*... they meet the conditions...

#### E. The New Covenant and the Palestinian Covenant

1. The Palestinian Covenant is found in Deuteronomy 29-30.
  - a) Participation in the New Covenant is conditioned by the Palestinian Covenant.
  - b) And the Palestinian Covenant was given within the context of the Mosaic Covenant (and actually requires the Israelites to obey the Mosaic Law if they want the blessings of the New Covenant).
  - c) All Scripture "crystallizes" around the eight major covenants of the Bible (which at this point seems to be an understatement made for emphasis).
2. God anticipated the failure and resulting dispersion of Israel into captivity based on their breaking of the Mosaic Covenant.

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee... [Deut 30.1]

3. Therefore God gave them a provision for restoration if they would return (repent) and obey Him (devotion to Him alone).

And shalt **return** unto the Lord thy God, and shalt **obey** his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with **all** thine heart, and with **all** thy soul... [Deut 30.2]

4. This is an *additional* covenant "beside" (in addition to) the Mosaic Covenant the Lord made with Israel in Horeb, Mt. Sinai.

These are the words of **the covenant**, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, *beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb*. [Deut 29.1]

5. In this Palestinian Covenant God promised Israel's return and restoration to the land that He originally promised to Abraham under the Abrahamic Covenant.

That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. [Deut 30.3-5]

6. In this covenant of Deuteronomy 30 God promised a future circumcision of the heart that would result in life for those who met the conditions of the covenant (this is one of the first prophecies of the new birth by the Spirit of God; cf. Ezek 37.1-14; John 3.3-8).

And the Lord thy God will **circumcise thine heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest **live**. [Deut 30.6]

7. God also promised in this Palestinian Covenant that Israel would be the head of all the Gentile nations, just as He said in the Abrahamic Covenant.

And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. [Deut 30.7]

8. All this means that...
- Everything God promised in the **Abrahamic Covenant**...
  - Everything Israel lost because they broke the **Mosaic Covenant**...
  - Everything offered to Israel in the **New Covenant**...
  - All of that became *based on the conditions* established by God in the **Palestinian Covenant** of Deuteronomy 30.
9. God conditioned Israel's future blessing and life in the land upon their *conversion* from sin (repentance) to Him in complete submission and obedience (devotion).

*If* thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and *if* thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. [Deut 30.10]

15 See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

16 In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

17 But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

18 I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.

19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live. [Deut 30.15-19]

10. The New Covenant provided a way for rebellious Israel, condemned under the Law of the Mosaic Covenant, to enter into the fullness of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.
- But it was not "automatic." Not everyone just "got in" because they were a physical descendant of Abraham (which was one of the main contentions of Christ with Israel during the Gospels).
  - God placed conditions on entrance into the New Covenant and He did so in this covenant of Deuteronomy 29 and 30, called the Palestinian Covenant (because of its relationship to the land of Palestine--the land of the Philistines--promised to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant).
11. God will use these covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, New) to "purge out the rebels" of Israel, allowing only the repentant faithful to enter His kingdom.

35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.

36 Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God.

37 And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:

38 And **I will purge out from among you the rebels**, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. [Ezek 20.35-38]

- The Abrahamic Covenant:** Unconditional blessing for all Israel (everyone gets in).
- The Mosaic Covenant:** The Abrahamic blessings are conditioned upon complete obedience (because that is God's expectation for all those who would enter His Kingdom).
  - Under the Law of the Mosaic Covenant everyone fails. All Israel is excluded.



- c) **The New Covenant:** God made a provision for Israel to once again enter into the promised blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.
- (1) But not all Israel gets in...
    - 4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;
    - 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.
    - 6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. **For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.** [Rom 9.4-6]
  - (2) Yes, Israelites from all 12 tribes will get in (under the New Covenant)...
 

And so **all Israel shall be saved:** as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. [Rom 11.26-27]
  - (3) But God will purge out the rebels first... through the Palestinian Covenant.
 

Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved. [Heb 9.27]
- d) **The Palestinian Covenant:** God will purge out the rebels (those who refuse to repent and follow God) with the conditions established in Deuteronomy 30.
12. **Soteriological Side Note:** From Deuteronomy 30 on (in biblical history), salvation under the Law and then later during the Church Age (in general, salvation under both Testaments) becomes based on the conditions of the Palestinian Covenant.
- a) Remember that when the Apostle Paul wrote the most famous and well-known chapter in the Bible on how to be saved during the Church Age (Romans 10), his mind was so completely absorbed in Deuteronomy 30 (the Palestinian Covenant) that he quotes it in context.
    - (1) Paul's concise and succinct explanation of salvation during the Church Age:
      - 9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
      - 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
      - 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
      - 12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.
      - 13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. [Rom 10.9-13]
    - (2) In that salvation context, in the verses immediately preceding that passage, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30.12-14:
      - 6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)
      - 7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)
      - 8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach... **[Rom 10.6-8]**
      - 12 It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?
      - 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?
      - 14 But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. **[Deut 30.12-14]**
    - (3) Paul's mind (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God) was on the Palestinian Covenant when he was explaining salvation during our dispensation, the Church Age.

- b) This is why Paul always called sinners to *repentance* and *faith* (to turn from sin and turn to God in full and complete devotion to Him). These are the conditions for salvation established by God in the Palestinian Covenant of Deuteronomy 30 (conditions for the the salvation ultimately provided for in the New Covenant).

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ. [Acts 20.20-21]

- c) This is because "*the* salvation" God provided for and offered to Israel (the salvation based on the New Testament of Christ's shed blood and substitutionary sacrifice) was rejected by Israel. So God sent that very same New Testament salvation ("the" salvation offered to Israel) to the Gentiles directly.

Be it known therefore unto you [Paul is addressing Jewish leaders in Rome], that *the* **salvation** of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. [Act 28.28]

- (1) Notice the definite article "the." It is not "a" salvation or "another" salvation.
  - (2) God sent to the Gentiles "the" very same salvation He provided for the nation of Israel.
  - (3) It is the salvation promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, lost in the Mosaic Covenant, promised in the New Covenant but conditioned by the Palestinian Covenant.
  - (4) That is "the" salvation God sent to us, the Gentiles, during the Church Age.
- d) From Deuteronomy 30 on, salvation for Israel and later during the Church Age (forgiveness of sins and eternal life) is based on the conditions stipulated in the Palestinian Covenant.
- (1) God made provision for salvation in the final stipulations of the New Covenant (those stipulations later became the basis for the New Testament).
  - (2) God offered that salvation first to Israel (in the Gospels and Acts) and then, after their rejection of the offer, He took it out to the Gentiles through the Apostle Paul and during the Church Age.
  - (3) And God conditioned participation in the life and blessing of the New Testament (and Israel's participation in the full blessings of the of the New Covenant) in the stipulations of the Palestinian Covenant of Deuteronomy 30.
- e) And so we see again that all the Bible "crystallizes" around the covenants.

- (1) If you want to understand salvation today, you need to understand the Abrahamic, Mosaic, New, and Palestinian Covenants.
- (2) Within those covenants the majority of our soteriology is established and developed.
- (3) But what about this future salvation and kingdom that God promised in the Palestinian Covenant, the kingdom the faithful Israelites could participate in?

4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:

5 And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.

6 And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

7 **And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.** [Deut 30.4-7]

- (4) What of this future, eschatological kingdom of Israel? Where does that fit in...?

## F. The Future Kingdom and the Davidic Covenant

1. The future (unified) kingdom, which is Israel's sure hope, is inextricably tied to the Davidic Covenant in 2Samuel chapter 7.
  - a) But 2Samuel 7 is based on promises given in the Mosaic Covenant, specifically in Deuteronomy 17.
  - b) And, of course (as we have seen), the Mosaic Covenant is based on the Abrahamic Covenant, so the kingly promises (and prophecies) of Deuteronomy 17 are based on earlier promises to Abraham, like those in Genesis 17. So let's start there.
2. The Abrahamic Covenant unconditionally promised kings to Israel, kings to reign over Israel while Israel reigned over the Gentile nations.

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my **covenant** between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my **covenant** is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and **kings shall come out of thee...**

16 And I will bless her [Sarah], and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; **kings of people shall be of her.** [Gen 17.1-16]

3. The Mosaic Covenant conditioned the Kingdom of Israel on the nation's complete obedience to the Law.

5 Now therefore, **if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then** ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me **above all people:** for all the earth is mine:

6 And **ye shall be unto me a kingdom** of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. [Exod 19.5-8]

- a) Within the context of the Mosaic Covenant and Law, we see God's further development of the prophetic promise of kings to reign over Israel while Israel reigned over the nations.

14 When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

15 Thou shalt in any wise **set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose:** one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother..

18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of **this law** in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19 And it shall be with him, and he shall **read therein** all the days of his life: that he may learn to **fear the Lord** his God, to **keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:**

20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his **kingdom**, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel. [Deut 17.14-20]

- b) Therefore a king over the kingdom given to Israel has always been God's plan.

- c) But, under the Mosaic Covenant Israel lost the Kingdom because of their lack of obedience to the Mosaic Law.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.. The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. [Deut 28.15, 36]

- d) Much could be said, too, about Israel's kings and their failure in keeping "all the words of this law... to do them" (even David, the king who was a man after God's own hear; he committed murder and adultery with the wife of Uriah).
- e) When Israel's failure reached its fullness, (ultimately in 606 B.C. with the Babylonia Captivity), the "times of the Gentiles" started. That is a time when the Gentile nations rule over the earth, including over Israel (and we are still living in these "times of the Gentiles").

4. But God gave a promise to His nation in the Palestinian Covenant: Israel's enemies would be put down (and, therefore, Israel would again be the head of the nations in God's kingdom).

And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. [Deut 30.7]

- a) This was, of course (being part of the Palestinian Covenant), conditioned upon Israel's repentance. And that begged a very practical question in the minds of God's people.
- b) What if Israel (or enough Israelites) never repented? What of the unconditional promise of kings over nations that God gave in the Abrahamic Covenant?

5. With the Davidic Covenant of 2Samuel 7 God ended all doubt and gave Israel the unconditional hope of a king, a throne, and kingdom... all everlasting and eternal. Note the multiple "I will" statements God made to David in this covenant:

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the shepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10 Moreover **I will** appoint a place for my people Israel, and **will** plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, **I will** set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and **I will** establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and **I will** stablish the throne of his kingdom *for ever*.

14 **I will** be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And *thine house* and *thy kingdom* shall be established *for ever* before thee: *thy throne* shall be established *for ever*.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David. [2Sam 7.8-17]

- a) God promised David a "house", a "kingdom," and a "throne" for ever, eternal.
- b) This is the unconditional Davidic Covenant.

- c) The Davidic Covenant firmly and eternally establishes Israel as the head of all nations with the Son of David (one of David's lineage, of his "house") to sit upon the throne over this unified kingdom for ever.
  - d) This covenant promises what we refer to as the Davidic Kingdom, the Messianic Kingdom, and the Millennium. And that eschatological kingdom of 1,000 years, once established, will continue for ever.
6. From this point on (2Sam 7), the Kingdom was no longer an "if" for Israel. It became only "when."
- a) Therefore we see that great eschatological hope of salvation for Israel was based on...
    - (1) ...the general promises of the Abrahamic Covenant,
    - (2) ...the provision in the New Covenant,
    - (3) ...the conditions of the Palestinian Covenant, and
    - (4) ...the eternal and sure hope of the Davidic Covenant.
  - b) Any Israelite could get in. Any Israelite could lay hold of the future hope of life eternal in the promised land under the rule of the eternal Davidic house, throne, and kingdom.
  - c) Any Israelite could be "saved." All he had to do was meet the conditions of the Palestinian Covenant: repentance and faith (repentance and singular devotion to God).
7. The entire contents of biblical history "crystallize" around the eight major covenants. The Bible *is* covenant; it is a covenant document.
- a) But, wait... it would be right about here that someone will ask, "What about the Gentiles?"
  - b) We have been looking at God's work through the covenants from Abraham to Christ, and that deals almost exclusively with Israel. What about Gentiles during the time of the Old Testament?
  - c) The Gentiles were "strangers of the covenants *of promise*,"...
 

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope, and without God in the world. [Eph 2.11-12]
  - d) But they were *not* strangers of *all* the covenants...

### G. Gentile Salvation and the Original Covenants

1. Gentile salvation (the relationship of Gentiles to God) is inextricably tied, even today, to the initial covenants given prior to Abraham.
2. The Edenic Covenant: God covenanted with man in the Garden of Eden.
  - a) God charged man with a responsibility and He gave man authority in creation to carry out that responsibility. In other words, God dispensed a stewardship to man, and the formal, legal mechanism He used to dispense the responsibility and authority was the covenant.
 

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. [Gen 1.27-28]
  - b) God gave man provision in his new stewardship, and He gave him the law: one prohibition.
 

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God **commanded** the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. [Gen 2.15-17]

- c) God established a conditional covenant with man based on one law: don't eat of that one tree.
  - (1) Notice it was the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil."
  - (2) Notice the pronouncement of the death penalty if man should disobey (clearly stipulated).
- d) This first covenant is the Edenic Covenant of which C.I. Scofield wrote when he mentioned how Scripture "crystallizes" around the covenants. Here is the quote in context:
 

The Edenic Covenant, the first of the eight great covenants of Scripture which condition life and salvation, and about which all Scripture crystallizes, has seven elements...<sup>10</sup>
- e) We will see later that the eight great covenants of Scripture go beyond just "life and salvation," but the quote stands as given. These covenants do condition life and salvation, as we see in the Edenic Covenant and the two that follow.
- f) We know, of course, that man sinned (Gen 3.1-6) and broke the Edenic Covenant God had made with him. This resulted in a new covenant... a new legal and binding arrangement God made with man...

### 3. The Adamic Covenant: (Gen 3.14-24) God covenanted with man again, after the Fall.

- a) Many refer to this formal arrangement God made with man in Genesis 3 as "the curse," and it is that.
  - (1) But it goes beyond just a curse because we see the elements of a new stewardship along with provision for salvation.
  - (2) Let's talk about the salvation aspect first.
- b) In Genesis 3 and 4 we see that God instituted the Old Testament (the first system of substitutionary sacrifices for the remission of sins) within the stipulations of this Adamic Covenant.
  - (1) God established the system Himself:
 

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. [Gen 3.21]
  - (2) We see man immediately following the system in order to maintain a right relationship with the Lord. God required a substitutionary blood sacrifice (the death penalty was pronounced on sin and sinners, therefore someone had to die--the "testator"), and God required faith in that substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins.
 

And Abel, he also brought of **the firstlings of his flock** and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering... [Gen 4.4]

**By faith** Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. [Heb 11.4]

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and **without shedding of blood is no remission**. [Heb 9.22]
- c) God separates man from Himself and leaves him with no other law to guide him except his new found innate ability to "know good and evil."
 

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, **to know good and evil**: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore **the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden**, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. [Gen 3.22-24]

(1) The Adamic Covenant established, among many other things, the moral law of man's conscience as the law that would guide him and ultimately judge him during this time immediately after the Fall.

(2) This law of conscience is still in effect today.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their **conscience** also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. [Rom 2.14-16]

d) Salvation for a Gentile begins with the Edenic and Adamic Covenants: he is condemned to death because he was born in sin (in Adam) and because he sinned willfully (and continually) by violating the conscience God gave to guide him and rule over him.

4. The Noahic Covenant: (Gen 6.18; 9.1-17) God established one final covenant with all mankind.

a) Under the Noahic Covenant, God charged man with governing his own society (curbing sin) through civil, or human, government. God gave man the authority of the "death penalty."

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. [Gen 9.6]

b) When God delegated to man the authority to take the life of another human being who murdered a fellow man, he delegated to man all lesser included authority (to govern over lesser crimes in society).

c) This law, like the moral law of the conscience, is still in effect today.

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God [*ordained in the Noahic Covenant of Genesis 9*].

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. **[Rom 13.1-5]**

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. **[Titus 3.1]**

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. **[1Pet 2.13-14]**

d) Men will be held accountable by God for their relationship and response to the government and its laws in the nation in which they live.

e) This was established in the Noahic Covenant and it is an eternal covenant. Man, from Genesis 9 onward, will always be subject to an external, political government with laws and statutes that we are required to obey (as long as the laws do not contradict God's laws).

5. Summary: The Covenants and the Gentiles in the Old Testament

a) So how did God deal with Gentiles during the Old Testament?

b) From Genesis 12 on, the Gentiles were excluded from the covenants "of promise" that God gave to Israel exclusively.

- c) The Gentiles lived under the laws of the Adamic and Noahic covenants, the laws of conscience and civil/human government.
  - (1) And when they broke those laws (violating their conscience or breaking a civil law), the Adamic covenant provided the Old Testament provision of animal sacrifices to cover their sin.
  - (2) God established this pattern with Adam and Eve.
  - (3) Abel shows us the same pattern in practice: a substitutionary blood sacrifice offered in faith.
  - (4) And Job shows us the pattern in the normal, daily life of a gentile outside the Abrahamic Covenant of promise. Remember, Job was a Gentile who lived during the latter half of the Book of Genesis, around the time of the Jacob's twelve sons, the patriarchs.
- 6. So again we make the observation: even Gentile history recorded in the Bible "crystallizes" around the covenants.

#### **H. Review & Summary: The eight major covenants of Scripture**

1. The Bible is a Covenant Corpus (a body/collection of covenants) because its contents are structured around eight major covenants God made with man.
2. The eight major covenants indicate the major stages in God's progressive revelation to man.
  - a) God did not give all of His revelation to man at once. He did not give all of Scripture to man at once.
  - b) God gave His revelation progressively, throughout history, as He was unfolding His plan and program in creation.
  - c) That progression of revelation generally follows the establishment of the eight major covenants God made with man.
    - (1) The Edenic Covenant
    - (2) The Adamic Covenant
    - (3) The Noahic Covenant
    - (4) The Abrahamic Covenant
    - (5) The Mosaic Covenant
    - (6) The Palestinian Covenant
    - (7) The Davidic Covenant
    - (8) The New Covenant



**Conclusion: What *is* the Bible?****The Bible is covenant corpus.**

- It is a body, a collection, of covenants.
- That is what Scripture is by nature and in its formal character.

**Firstly, the Bible is a Book made up of two Testaments.**

- A "testament" is a covenant that requires the death of the "testator" for it to be legally of force.
  - ✓ The Old Testament (Adam to the cross) involved the death of various "testators" in the sacrificial system of animals.
  - ✓ The New Testament (from the cross) involves the death of the Testator, Jesus Christ, and His "once for all" sacrificial death at Calvary.
- Therefore, at its most basic and fundamental level (its two-part division; its two-part structure), the Bible is covenant--it is a collection of two testaments (two covenants).

**Secondly, we saw that the Bible is a Book whose entire contents "crystallize" around eight major covenants God made with man.**

- The Bible is a book covenants; it is a covenant book (a covenant corpus). The Bible *is* covenant.
- Hal Harless said it this way:

...humankind related to God by covenant... The concept of covenant is critical to the understanding of the cultural and historical context of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

**Because of this (because of the very nature of the Bible), if we want to develop an introductory study of the Bible and its structure as a unified whole (and I do), we need to understand first of all what the Bible *is*.**

- And, sadly, this seems to be quite the problem in modern Christianity and in modern churches.
- For most people today the Bible is a book to make you feel good or to make you a better person. Or its a "love letter" from God to teach you how to "live your best life now."
- Few are the believers who understand the Bible as covenant and its contents as covenant stipulations dispensed by God to man in order that we might know what our Creator and King expects of us, His servants and the stewards He placed in charge of His "household."

**Hal Harless indicates that this problem exists in both major theological camps today.**

- After the Reformation and the initial building out of systems of theology, two major systems emerged.
  - ✓ Most Reformation Protestants that would call themselves "Reformed" or "Calvinistic," generally ascribe to the system of theology called "Covenant Theology" (and we will most certainly be discussing this more in depth later).
  - ✓ The other major system of theology that is popular among those who interpret the Bible normally or literally is the system called Dispensationalism.
- Harless points out the problem of the biblical covenants in both of these theological systems:
  - ✓ On the one hand he says:
 

Covenant theology is guilty of creating covenants for which there is no solid biblical basis.<sup>12</sup>
  - ✓ People who follow Covenant Theology refuse to recognize the eight major biblical covenants and rather invent two (sometimes three)"theological" covenants to bend the Bible to their system.

<sup>11</sup> Harless, *How Firm a Foundation*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

- ✓ But then Harless points the finger at dispensationalists, too, and says:

On the other hand, dispensationalists tend to slight the covenants. To be sure, dispensationalists do not deny the biblical covenants. Nevertheless they do tend to ignore them.<sup>13</sup>

- ✓ And then finally Harless states his criticism very clearly:

Dispensationalism is to be criticized in that it has not clearly, consistently, and unequivocally asserted the divine covenants as the basis of God's governing arrangements.<sup>14</sup>

### **I propose we change that.**

- I propose we let the Bible speak for itself. I propose we pay attention to Scripture in its entirety as a whole and in its details.
- I propose we strive to be like young Samuel:

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and **did let none of his words fall to the ground.** [1Sam 3.19]

### **As I said at the beginning, I would like to develop an introductory study of the Bible and its structure as a unified whole.**

- The covenants will obviously play a major role in the development of the study.
- But we also need to look at the unifying theme behind the covenants. What is it (what is that one thing) that God is doing throughout history, through the covenants?
- We need to also address in detail the results of the covenants in the lives of people in history, including ourselves. Surely the covenants resulted in man being charged with something, and because of that we should flesh out in some detail just what the implications are for those who are affected by the covenants.
- And finally I think all this ultimately begs the question of, "Why?"

### **Why did God do all of this?**

- Think about biblical history from God's perspective. The pain, the anger, the irritation, the wrath, the sacrifice, the sorrow... Why? Why do it in the first place, especially since God is omniscient and knew what was coming?
- Systematic Theology (specifically theology proper) teaches us that God is totally and completely independent. He needs nothing and no one.
  - ✓ God did not need us, this creation, or any of the problems and heartache we caused (and still cause) Him.
  - ✓ So... Why? Why do it at all? What's the point?
  - ✓ We should at least try to answer that question (and I think we can with the certainty of the words of truth God gave us in Scripture).

### **Now that we know what the Bible is (a covenant corpus; a book of covenants), I would like to ask and try to answer another, related, question.**

- Lord willing we are likely going to invest a significant amount of time and effort in developing this study. As a matter of fact, I have a couple years already of reading and writing down notes on the topic.
- Why do it? Why study the Bible? Why invest the time and effort into a project like this?
- That is what I would like to answer in the next lesson.

---

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 278.