

THE TWO COVENANTS

PART 1

ROD REYNOLDS

Why does the Bible speak of the two covenants, or "testaments"?

Did God try one system and find that it didn't work -- so substituted another totally different system? Or did God give us an "Old Covenant" to show that man could not Live by His Law -- then later substitute a new covenant of "grace" that required no obedience to law?

Is the "New Covenant" the very antithesis of all that the old Covenant stood for -- as many assume?

Why did God give Israel the "Old Covenant"? Why did He later institute a "New Covenant"?

The true answers to these questions have been understood by very few -- yet they are simple and plain.

Nothing is more essential to an understanding of true Christianity than a knowledge of the relationships between the two covenants. Millions have fallen prey to subtle satanic deceptions because they LACKED THIS UNDERSTANDING. Even some who have had a knowledge of true Christianity and have received the Holy Spirit have stumbled and FALLEN over a lack of understanding regarding this issue!

It may prove essential to your salvation that you gain a true knowledge and perspective of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants!

Because of the importance and complexity of this subject, this article presents the first in a series exploring the "two covenants," that is, the Old and New Covenants, and the relationship between the two.

The Function of the Old Covenant

Why did God institute the **Old Covenant** -- and what was its purpose? The answer lies in a few very plain scriptures from the Bible. Yet almost NO ONE has understood! Incredible, but true! False religion, masquerading under the title of "Christianity" has so misrepresented, maligned and vilified the "Old Testament" and the covenant relationship revealed in it that most people have been utterly confused and deceived as to its true nature and purpose. And, for that matter, the "New Covenant" has been totally misunderstood as well!

To understand we must cast off preconceived notions based on false and ignorant assumptions. We must examine God's Word honestly -- with minds unfettered by

religious traditions steeped in error, even though they may be called "Christianity"!

Our search for the truth will lead us all the way back to the beginning of mankind's history. It will lead us to a knowledge of the very purpose for which God created human beings.

Let's begin with a simple statement made by the Apostle Paul. Paul actually tells us more about the true relationship between the covenants than any other Biblical writer. Yet his writings have been twisted more than any other to obscure the true meaning!

Our first plain statement regarding this important subject comes from the book of Galatians -- one of the most misunderstood books of all the Bible. Yet notice how clear and **plain** Paul's statement is: He asks, "What purpose then does the law serve?" (Galatians 3:19).

Before we proceed to Paul's plain answer, let's determine what "law" he is talking about. The word translated into "law" by the King James translators is in every case in the book of Galatians the Greek *nomos*. This Greek word has the general meaning of law, regulation, or principle. The specific meaning must be determined by examining the context in which the word appears.

Our usage of the word "law" is much the same. We use the word "law" referring to the general body of statutes governing a city, state or nation; or referring, to a specific statute; or in reference to officers responsible for enforcing laws; or in reference to a general principle -- a cause and effect relationship, as in science. It is the context which determines the specific meaning in a given instance.

The context in which Paul wrote to the Galatians

He was writing to a church composed primarily of Gentiles, with some Jews and other Israelites mixed in. Israel had a law. The law -- as the Jews and Samaritans used the term in general reference -- was the set of statutes and regulations written down by Moses in the *Torah* -- the first five books of the Bible.

This system of law came to be called the "**Law of Moses.**"

Jesus said: "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).

Jesus' statement reflects the manner in which the Jews commonly divided the "Old Testament" Scriptures. The "Law of Moses" (the first five books of the Old Testament), the "Prophets," and the "Writings," (or Greek: *Hagiographa*) of which the book of Psalms was representative.

The **Law of Moses**, in this particular context, was that system of government and law instituted under and embodied in the **Old Covenant**. It included **all** of the laws, commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments incorporated into the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant was a **national** covenant whereby Israel became the **nation** of God:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:5-6).

When Paul spoke of the "law," then, he was most often referring to the Law of Moses, i.e., the **Old Covenant**. But -- one should note -- he occasionally used the term **law** in a different sense -- to refer to:

(1) Law in general: "...where there is no law there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15).

(2) An operational principle: "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good" (Romans 7:21).

(3) Or to what he called the "law of Christ": "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Another very important use of the word "law" in the New Testament, is the Old Covenant, **along with added Jewish traditions**, which were human devised laws, not part of the laws God gave, and which were rejected by Jesus Christ and the New Testament Church:

"He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men - the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.' He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition'" (Mark 7:6-9).

The scribes among the Pharisees created and transmitted the pharisaic rabbinical traditions. The body of authoritative traditional law which they formulated, called the *Halakah* (which is the subject of and preserved in the *Mishnah*), is extra-biblical.

Although authoritative for Jews who followed pharisaic tradition, much of the

Halakah was not supported by Scripture, but was intended as a “hedge” about the law, to prevent any possibility of its being broken. Yet, in doing this very thing they were breaking the law, for God had said, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2; also Deuteronomy 12:32). In adding the weight of their tradition to the law of God they bound “heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders” (Matthew 23:3).

They placed the authority of their traditions above that of Scripture itself, thus blaspheming the word of God. Joachim Jeremias is a late German scholar who authored an encyclopedic study of economic and social conditions during the New Testament period. He points out that the oral tradition was “above the Torah,” and that the esoteric writings containing scribal teachings were regarded as inspired and **surpassing** the canonical books “in value and sanctity” (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 1.3). Alfred Edersheim also points out that traditional law was of “even greater obligation than Scripture itself” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1.8; also see his footnote).

It's recorded in the book of Acts:

"But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile converts to Christianity], and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5).

The “law of Moses,” as the Pharisees viewed the term, included not only the Biblical requirements of the Old Covenant, but all of the oral traditions of the Pharisees, as well.

The Biblical account continues:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?'" (Acts 15:7-10).

What law?

Let's go back now to Galatians 3:19: “What purpose then does the law serve?” What law? We don't have to guess as to exactly what Paul is talking about here. He specifically identifies the “law” he is discussing. Notice: “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant [made with

Abraham, verse 16] that was confirmed before by God in Christ..." (Galatians 3:17). What law was given 430 years after a **confirming** of the covenant of promise God gave to Abraham?

Notice, "Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years - on that very same day - it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:40-41).

The sojourning of Israel, covering a period of 430 years, had **ended** on the day of the Exodus. At what historical event did the sojourning of Israel **begin**? The answer: When Israel began to be reckoned as a nation in God's sight. When was this?

The answer is in Genesis 17, when Abraham was 99 years old. It was at this time, precisely at the time of year Israel left Egypt 430 years later, that God **confirmed** His covenant with Abraham, and in so doing changed Abraham's name from Abram -- meaning high father -- to Abraham—meaning father of a great multitude, or, in other words, father of a **nation** or **nations**.

Abraham and his descendants

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 'As for Me, behold, **My covenant is with you**, and you shall be a father of **many nations**. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant **between Me and you and your descendants** after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also **I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.**' And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations'" (Genesis 17:1-9).

At this same time God gave Abraham for the first time the covenant of **circumcision**, requiring his entire **household** to be circumcised. "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your

house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Genesis 17:10-14).

This was no longer a covenant between God and Abraham only. Now it was a covenant between God and the **House of Abraham**, and that included his **descendants**. Abraham was looked upon by God now not only as a person but as a **people**. God said in verse 14 that the man of Abraham not circumcised was to be "cut off from his people." On the same occasion **Isaac** was named (Genesis 17:21), of whom it is said "in Isaac shall your seed be called" (Genesis 21:12). So the covenant included those who would be descended from Abraham through Isaac.

The Covenant and the promises were to be passed down to Abraham's seed through Isaac, and only Isaac: "...nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called'" (Romans 9:7).

Sarah's name was changed at the same time from Sarai to Sarah - princess - and, said God, "I will...give you a son also of her... and she shall become nations..." (Genesis 17:16). When this covenant was sealed by circumcision "that very same day" (NKJV) or (KJV) "the selfsame day" (Genesis 17:23), the nation of Israel came into existence in God's sight.

430 years of sojourning

At this time the **nation** also began its sojourning, for Abraham was in the land of Canaan, "the Land of their **pilgrimage**, wherein they were **strangers**" (Exodus 6:4).

Egypt also was a Land of Israel's sojourning:

Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!

.....

O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

.....

Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan As the allotment of your inheritance, "When they were few in number, Indeed very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, From one kingdom to another people,

.....

Israel also came into Egypt, And Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham. (Psalm 105:1, 6, 11-13, 23).

That this was the beginning of the 430 year period of sojourning for Israel is further adduced by the fact that the covenant of circumcision was given a renewed emphasis with Israel on the very day of the Exodus (Exodus 12:43-51).

And it says at the time a renewed emphasis was placed on this covenant of circumcision -- the **sign** of an Israelite - "And it came to pass, on that very same day [**430 years -- to the day -- from the beginning of the sojourn**], that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt..." (Exodus 12:51).

The Old Covenant is spoken of in general terms in the Bible as the covenant which God "made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 29:25) . It took almost a year's time for the Laws of this covenant to be fully revealed and implemented.

The sequence of events follow a similar, although perhaps not identical, pattern in both the year of Israel's original "birth" as a nation described in Genesis and the year of her "rebirth" 430 years later as described in Exodus. At the confirming of the covenant Abraham was told that Isaac would be born approximately one year later. "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year" (Genesis 17:21).

Within three months Isaac was conceived: "And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him - whom Sarah bore to him - Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, 'God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me'" (Genesis 21:1-6).

It should be noted that if Isaac was conceived early in the third month (Sivan), in the normal gestation period of about nine months, he could have been born, and a period of time corresponding to the purification period completed around the time of the Passover on the following year. This, however, does not imply that either the Passover or the purification rituals of the Old Covenant were being kept during the days of Abraham and Sarah, as they were not instituted until later (Exodus 12:25-27; Leviticus 12:1-8).

In the third month (Sivan) after the Exodus, Israel came to mount Sinai and agreed to the national covenant. According to a Jewish tradition they came to Sinai on the first day of the third month, on the day following Moses went up to God, then the next day, Moses gathered the elders and rehearsed to them God's words, then on the third day after that (the sixth day) the law was delivered to them (*John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*). The idea is that the law was delivered from Mt. Sinai on the day of Pentecost. Although that, at least, seems likely, whether this tradition is accurate or not bears further investigation.

Scripture tells us:

“In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.” And God spoke all these words, saying: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.' So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.' So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord” (Exodus 19:1-9).

Three days later they received the law:

And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

.....

So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives." Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

.....

And God spoke all these words, saying: (Exodus 19:11; 14-17; 20:1 ff.)

Less than ten months after that the tabernacle was raised up: “And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up” (Exodus 40:17).

The sacrificial laws and other Levitical Laws were part and parcel of this covenant -- having been given in summary form from Sinai along with instructions for the building of the tabernacle, then given in greater detail after the tabernacle was raised up.

So the **confirming** of the Abrahamic covenant spoken of by Paul and the beginning of the sojourning of Israel coincided. Four hundred thirty years later the sojourning ended and God enjoined **the law**, the **Old Covenant**, to Israel. It should be noted in passing that the occasion in Genesis 17 was not the only time the covenant with Abraham was confirmed by God. It was confirmed several times during Abraham's lifetime, both before and after Genesis 17. But Genesis 17 marks the beginning of Israel's sojourn.

That the "Law" of Galatians 3 is the Old Covenant is finally conclusively proven in chapter four. Paul says Christ was sent "to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians 4:5). Then he draws an analogy between the two sons of Abraham and the **two covenants**: the Old and The New. Speaking to those who desire "to be under the Law" -- he says the two sons represent "the two covenants, the [older] one from the mount Sinai ...which ... corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children" (Galatians 4:24-25).

Paul likens in his analogy those who desire to be "under the law" to Ishmael, the son of a bond servant (or bondwoman) -- who represents those who are circumcised Israelites under the legal authority -- or law -- of the Old Covenant. Paul thus plainly equates the "law" with the Old Covenant -- the covenant agreed to at Mount Sinai, 430 years after the beginning of the sojourning of Israel in Abraham's loins. It was by this covenant that Israel, in the flesh, was in a sense, restored to their calling as the nation of God.

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:5-6)

So then when Paul wrote, "Wherefore then serves the law?" in Galatians 3:19 he was asking why was the **Old Covenant** given -- that is -- what purpose did it serve? Notice now the answer that Paul gives this question: "It was added [or enjoined] because of transgressions...." We have here the basic purpose for which God instituted the Old Covenant, It was enjoined to Israel **because of transgressions**.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? When we have fully explored the answer to this question, we will UNDERSTAND the PURPOSE for which the "Law" -- the Old Covenant -- was given.

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cogmessenger.org

Messenger Church of God
PO Box 542
Peculiar, MO 64078
USA