

The Two Covenants (Part 5)

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In previous articles in our Two Covenants series we've discussed the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, and reasons why the Old Covenant was given.

To review, we've discussed the concept that the Old Covenant was a type of the New Covenant. It was given as an introduction to living spiritual principles. But as it was a shadow, or type or figure of the New, it was not the full reality of what the New Covenant encompasses. For example, the sacrifices under the Old Covenant were among other things a type of Christ's sacrifice, but they were not the reality of the sacrifice itself.

Reasons for the giving of the Old Covenant that we discussed included:

- (1) The Separation and preservation of a people for God.
- (2) A tutor or schoolmaster pointing to Christ.
- (3) A form of knowledge and truth.
- (4) To teach the nature and effect of sin.
- (5) To reveal the need for the Holy Spirit.

Later in this article our focus shifts to the New Covenant.

But first, we will briefly list some other important reasons for the giving of the Old Covenant in addition to the five already discussed. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but will furnish food for thought.

In addition to the five reasons already mentioned for the giving of the Old Covenant, consider the following:

(6) Why Christ's death was necessary.

By showing that the penalty of sin is death and that an atonement must be made for sin by the shedding of blood, the "law," or the Old Covenant, shows why the death of Christ was essential to the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation.

Under the Old Covenant, the animal sacrifices that were offered to God by the people were required to be taken to the door of the Tabernacle, to be slain by slitting their throats, or, in the case of birds, wringing off the head. In either case, the blood of the animal was shed.

The reason for this is given in Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for **it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.**"

Note that the blood of the sacrifice was to make atonement for sin, as a substitute for the person's life in payment of the penalty of sin, since the penalty of sin, as God told Adam and Eve at the very beginning, is death (Genesis 2:17; 3:11, 17-19; Romans 5:12).

But the atonement sacrifice of the blood of animals **was not of itself sufficient payment for the penalty of sin**, but only a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which alone can fully pay the penalty for our sins in place of our own lives.

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and **without shedding of blood there is no remission.** Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these,

but the heavenly things themselves with **better sacrifices than these**. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:22-24).

"He has appeared to **put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**" (Hebrews 9:26).

The blood of the sacrifices under the Old Covenant were "**symbolic** for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (Hebrews 9:9).

"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. **Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood** He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:11-12).

"For the law, **having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things**, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect" (Hebrews 10:1).

"For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God.'" Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.'**He takes away the first that He may establish the second**. By that will **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**" (Hebrews 10:4-10).

So we see that the offering of the blood of physical animal sacrifices pointed to Christ's sacrifice, and demonstrated by their inadequacy the need for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

(7) Reveals God's will and the way he would have us walk.

Paul wrote to the Jews in his letter to the Romans : "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and **know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law**" (Romans 2:17-18). So we see that the law, the Old Covenant, instructs us in God's will, and in the things of God, that is, his way of life.

(8) Reveals the form and structure of God's Government.

A priesthood was established under the Old Covenant, it was **patterned after** the heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ. He is the High Priest of God, to whom the **copy or shadow** of the priesthood of the Old Covenant pointed.

"Now this is the **main point** of the things we are saying: **We have such a High Priest**, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a **Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man**. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law [the Old Covenant, i.e. the Levitical priesthood] who serve the **copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when

he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:1-6).

"For you have not come to the **mountain that may be touched** and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: 'And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.' And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.') But you have come to **Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. **See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.** For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven" (Hebrews 12:18-25).

God is the sovereign ruler of the earth, and especially his Church. It is Christ's voice speaking through his Spirit inspired word, the Holy Scriptures of the Bible, front to back, that must be properly understood, and obeyed.

(9) Reveals the Plan of God.

The plan of God for mankind was revealed in seed like form in the laws given to Israel under the Old Covenant. This is especially true of the Sabbath and annual festivals, and the meaning behind each of them.

Many details of God's plan of salvation for mankind have been gradually revealed over time, and more will become clear as the prophecies of future events are fulfilled, but the outline of the plan of God is found in the Festivals of God and in various Scriptures of the Old Testament.

"Let none therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in matter of feast, or new moon, or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17, Darby version).

Note that "is" in verse 17 is in italics. There is no word for "is" in the phrase in the original Greek. The translation should read: "...body of Christ." Jesus Christ is our judge in matters of food, drink, festivals, etc., as he is the head of the body, and it is his word by which we are bound (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23; John 8:31).

Note that the Sabbaths **are** [not were] a *shadow*, Greek: *skia*, an *adumbration*, *sketch*, *outline of things to come*. In other words, the Sabbaths, both the weekly Sabbath God commanded to be kept, as well as the annual Sabbaths, have not only historical significance, they have **prophetic** significance as well. Looking beyond the present, they provide an outline of God's plan of salvation for mankind as it is being worked out over the ages.

The weekly Sabbath, for example, portrays the yet future "rest" when those converted in this age will have been resurrected and Jesus Christ brings peace and "rest" to the world from all its evils (Hebrews 4:4, 9; Isaiah 32:15-18). We have available articles which go into this subject in much greater detail, among them "The Weekly Sabbath and Its Meaning," and "Why Christians Should Keep the Sabbath."

(10) Reveals the way of love.

"But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them,

a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:34-40).

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law [literally, the fulfilling of the law is love]" (Romans 13:8-10).

"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments" (II John 1:6).

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15) .

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3).

(11) Set the stage for Christ's ministry.

Jesus Christ never would have been able to accomplish the purpose of His first coming during His short life on earth if the way had not already been prepared. He had to have a framework of instruction to refer to in order to make His teachings intelligible. That framework was the Law of Moses and the prophets.

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

"The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21).

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:1).

"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4-6).

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

As stated before, these are *some* of the main reasons for the giving Old Covenant in such a manner. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, and there may be other reasons for the giving of the Old Covenant besides those mentioned above.

The New Covenant

Up to now we have focused primarily the Old Covenant and the functions it was designed to serve. We now

have the background for a discussion of the New Covenant.

As we begin consideration of the New Covenant it would be appropriate at this point to answer the question: "Why have a covenant at all?" What is the function of a covenant in God's Plan?

A covenant is simply an **agreement** solemnly entered into by two (or more) parties. In the Bible covenants were commonly sealed by the dividing of a sacrifice. The two parties to the covenant shared the flesh of the sacrifice – thus becoming, in a sense, one flesh – symbolizing that they were of one accord or of **one mind**, as well, in the thing they had agreed to.

There are not just two – but several – covenants described in the Bible. The covenants agreed to by God, if thoroughly analyzed, explicitly or implicitly involve two essential features:

They are: (1) Mercy, or grace, unmerited pardon and favor before God; and (2) Obedience to the Eternal Law of God.

Using the covenant of God with Abraham as an example, we find that first God required Abraham to depart from the land of the Chaldeans, whose chief city was Babylon (though Abraham lived in Ur). Gill's commentary, on Acts 7:4, points out, quoting the Roman writer, Pliny, that "Babylon [was] the head of the Chaldean nation." Abraham obeyed. This was a type of repentance, a coming out of sin. Stephen, facing the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court of judgment, on false charges of blasphemy, said to them: "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell" (Acts 7:2-4).

Note that in Scripture Babylon is used as a very symbol of sin and rebellion against God. "And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.' And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues'" (Revelation 18:2-4).

Abraham **obeyed in faith**. "Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? – just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham " (Galatians 3:5-7).

"By **faith Abraham obeyed** when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

God had promised Abraham His blessing if he would leave Babylon (Ur of the Chaldeans, part of the Old Babylonian Empire) and that in him would "all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Each step of the way, as Abraham **demonstrated his faith by obedience**, God confirmed the covenant and revealed to Abraham further details concerning it.

"... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:17-18).

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God.' You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:21-24).

God told Abraham, who was childless at the time, that his seed would be multiplied as the stars of heaven, and it says, "And he believed in the Lord [Yahweh, the Eternal], and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Paul explains what it meant for Abraham to "believe in the Eternal": "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Romans 4:20-22).

Thus because Abraham believed with all his heart and soul that God would **keep His word**, and because he acted on that faith in the righteous fear of God, he became the recipient of grace – that is unmerited pardon and favor.

Note that Abraham **did not earn grace** by his works, for no one can earn God's grace, which is a gift. Abraham **received the gift of grace** through his faith just as he **also obeyed** God through faith.

Paul explains in Romans 4:4-5, "Now if a man earn his pay by his work, it is not 'reckoned to him' as a favor, but it is paid him as a debt; but if he earns nothing by his work, but **puts faith in Him who justifies the ungodly [those who have sinned]**, then his faith is reckoned to him for righteousness." (From translation in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Conybeare and Howson). Thus through faith Abraham received grace, and we see the first essential feature of ALL of God's covenants typified in His covenant with Abraham.

Many theologians explicitly or implicitly contend that grace and law (or works) are mutually exclusive – that they cannot coexist. But as I said **all of God's covenants contain these elements**. Surprising as it may seem to some indoctrinated by those who claim to represent Christ, but teach falsehoods, that especially includes the Old Covenant made with Israel in the Wilderness, as well as the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was not only a covenant of law, but also of grace: "The people... found grace in the wilderness, Israel..." (Jeremiah 31:2).

Now the second feature of **all** of God's Covenants is the requirement of obedience to His Eternal law. As we find this feature also revealed in God's covenant with Abraham, we should understand that faith, grace and obedience to law are **not** mutually exclusive but necessarily complement one another. As James explains, faith is made perfect by the work of obedience and the purpose of extending grace or pardon is fulfilled.

James said Abraham's "...faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God." (James 2:22-23).

Let's notice now how the covenant with Abraham demanded obedience to God's law. First of all, as I have mentioned, God had required him to leave the area ruled by Babylon (Genesis 12:1). Abraham **obeyed in faith** (Hebrews 11:8). As Abraham continued to sojourn **in faith** God revealed further details concerning the **promise**

of the covenant. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8).

"Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land'" (Genesis 12:6-7).

"And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you'" (Genesis 13:14-17).

In Genesis 15:7 is recorded one instance of God revealing further details concerning the covenant. God said to Abraham, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

It's significant that the first of the ten commandments, part of the Law of the covenant with Israel, begins with the statement, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 5:6).

Just as Abraham began his covenant relationship with God by being brought out of Babylon and Israel began hers by being brought out of Egypt, so Christians under the New Covenant begin their relationship with the true God when they are brought out of **spiritual** Babylon and Egypt – enslavement to Satan and his world through sin.

"So He [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, **To proclaim liberty** to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:16-21).

Paul was sent as Christ's emissary: "... to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me' [that is, in Christ]" (Acts 26:18).

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may **walk worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, **being fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified [more accurately, qualifies] us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered [more accurately, delivers] us from the power of darkness and conveyed [more accurately, conveys] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:9-14).

Note also in Genesis 15:16 that God said, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete," implying that

Abraham was familiar with the standards of God's Law. Later God said to Abraham, "...walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you..."(Genesis 17:1-2). Again when God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their UNLAWFUL deeds (Genesis 18:20; II Peter 2:8), He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, Since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:17-19).

How do you suppose God knew that? Obviously He had observed Abraham's obedience for many years. Later when God confirmed the covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac, He said, "...Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). God had given Abraham the supreme test, requiring of him his son, his only heir. When Abraham had passed the test God said, "...now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Genesis 22:12). He then confirmed the covenant, swearing by Himself, saying to Abraham, "...I will bless you ... because you have **obeyed** My voice" (Genesis 22: 16-18).

So we see that both **grace** and **obedience** were essential elements in the covenant God made with Abraham.

Now by understanding that these elements form the essence of the two cardinal points of the New Covenant as well, we are prepared to answer the question: "Why have a covenant at all?"

Note the second of these two features in the New Covenant. It is mentioned **first** in Hebrews 10:16, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them." Here is implied willing obedience from the heart. Obedience which is the product of a **converted** mind willingly led by God's Spirit.

The second mentioned feature, that of **grace**, appears in the next verse, Hebrews 10:17, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Note that implicit in these statements are responsibilities according to the covenant on both sides. Implied is a Christian's responsibility to yield and submit to the Holy Spirit and the Law of God. Implied is God's responsibility, if we are faithful to our obligations, to forgive us and make His Spirit available to us. These responsibilities, along with others that accompany them are drawn out in much greater detail in the "Book of the Covenant," which is the Holy Bible.

Now, though **each individual** is personally accountable, this covenant is a **national** covenant with spiritual Israel, just as its forerunner was a **national** covenant with physical Israel. "...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (I Peter 2:9-10).

Compare: "'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 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).

Paul wrote of the New Testament Church: "...as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God**" Galatians 6:16).

This Covenant is the **constitution** of God's GOVERNMENT. As such, it is perfect and complete. In its entirety, the covenant includes the laws which govern His people and the means of their administration. It provides penalties for the violation of those laws and a means of forgiveness and reconciliation. The **covenant also includes** the promises of benefits and blessings guaranteed by the government to those who – for their part – prove faithful to the covenant.

God 's government is also a Monarchy (or one could say Theocracy, since God is the supreme ruler, or King of kings). It is authoritative, ruled from the top down. But it is also a CONSTITUTIONAL government. It is, in other words, a **Constitutional Theocracy**.

By means of His Covenant, God gives His potential subjects certain guarantees. He also lets them know their **exact** responsibilities. Then He allows each of them to **choose** whether they wish to be a part of His Kingdom or not! That is the reason for a covenant.

God will ultimately have NO ONE in His Kingdom who DOES NOT WANT to be there. And He gives everyone a period of trial and testing, to **prove** by his actions that he wants to be in God's Kingdom. Remember the Covenant is also, in a sense, a marriage covenant, with Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride (II Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7-9).

By such means God is assuring an EVERLASTING KINGDOM OF PEACE, free of schism, dissension and revolution, because all the subjects will have godly character and will be of ONE MIND with their Creator and LIFE-GIVER.

So we see the brilliance of God's plan as it unfolds. God has in mind a life of abundance, joy and peace for all in his kingdom. He is a Creator and Savior most worthy of our worship and exhaltation.

In the next article in this series our discussion of the Two Covenants is planned to continue.

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