

Understanding the Covenants Clay Bond

It has been said that “the Old Covenant is the New Covenant concealed and the New Covenant is the Old Covenant revealed.” If we are to find truth and walk in the light, we must learn to rightly divide the two covenants contained in the Bible. A proper understanding of these covenants will enable the Bible student to draw correct conclusions about what God expects of him.

The Old Testament or Covenant is made of up thirty-nine writings that can be classified into four major sections: books of law, books of history, books of poetry, and books of prophecy. It contains accounts of the creation of all things, God’s early dealings with mankind and the beginnings of His plan to redeem mankind. We learn in the Old Covenant that God created all things with man as the centerpiece (Gen. 1:26-27). We learn how man fell by sinning against God and that God had a plan to restore His fellowship with mankind (Gen. 3:1-15). We learn that God chose a man named Abraham and made three promises to him. God promised to: 1) make Abraham’s descendants a great nation, 2) give them a specific land, and 3) bless all nations through Abraham’s seed (Gen. 12:7; 22:17-18).

As we follow the history of God’s interaction with Abraham’s descendants we learn much about the love, mercy, and patience of our Creator. Over and over the Hebrew people violated their covenant with God and turned their back on Him. Yet, as a loving Father or a tender husband, He worked to draw them back with “bands of love” (Hos. 11:4).

The Old Covenant, which was given to Israel (Deut. 5:1-3), was a temporary covenant with a very specific purpose. It served to prepare the way for the coming Messiah by showing man his own insufficiency. Mankind would come to realize that he could never be restored to fellowship with Jehovah through law ordinances, because law would always be weak in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). It was this realization that laid the foundation for the coming of the Messiah and the covenant based on His blood (Gal. 3:24-25).

The New Testament or Covenant is contained in twenty-seven writings in which we find accounts of the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. It is in the New Covenant that we discover the culmination of God’s plan of redemption.

The gospel accounts begin by pointing the reader back to the Old Covenant with its genealogies and prophecies. These four accounts of Christ’s earthly ministry identify Him as the subject and fulfillment of the Old Covenant (John 5:39).

The book of Acts records both the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom and the process of establishing relationship with Christ under the New Covenant (Acts 2; 8:1-40; 9:1-22; 10:1-48; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:1-11; 19:1-7). The twenty-one epistles follow Acts as the road map for daily life under the New Covenant. These letters give instructions “for the perfecting of the saints” by providing instructions for the daily reality of walking in newness of life with Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:23-27; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6).

The New Covenant closes with the book of Revelation which can be summed up in one verse, “...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Too many times Christians allow outward circumstances to drag us down. We are so focused on violence, chaos, trouble and sorrow that we lose sight of Christ and His victory. We forget that we can be triumphant over all of these things, and even over death, through Jesus Christ. The message of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is that we can overcome Satan, self and, sin and come on over to live with Him in eternity. The final message of the New Covenant is that, in the midst of

struggles, with torment and death on every side, Christians can rest in a hope that transcends this earthly existence.

Far too often a well meaning Bible student will turn to the Old Covenant seeking to establish authority for some religious practice. The Biblical distinction between the Old and New Covenants is made with good reason. Two laws with different requirements cannot both be binding on the same people at the same time. Hebrews provides us with the most important key to understanding the two covenants; “He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second” (Heb. 10:9). Thank God for the New Covenant. With its better sacrifice, better promises and better priesthood, it is truly a better covenant (Heb. 8:6).