

Covenants in the Bible

by Bill Crews

The following are some notes I made many years ago while discussing the meaning of “old covenant” & “new covenant” with some Seventh-Day Adventists

The familiar definition of “an agreement between two parties” will not fit the covenants of God with and for men. God announces his covenants to men rather than enters into agreements with man. He also gives the conditions, if any, that man must meet.

God’s covenant with Noah in Genesis 6:18 had to do with saving him and his family from the great flood in the ark that he was to build.

God’s covenant with Noah and with his descendants and with all living creatures on earth in Gen. 9:8-17 had to do with God’s promise not to destroy the earth again with a flood; the rainbow was given as a token of that covenant.

Read Gen. 12:1-3; 26:2-5 and 28:13-15 for the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which promises contain covenants: “The covenants of the promise,” Eph. 2:12.

“In that day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram” to give unto his seed the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, Gen. 15:18-21.

In Acts 7:8 Stephen speaks of “the covenant of circumcision” which God gave to Abraham, but Gen. 17 speaks of God’s covenant with Abraham to be a God unto him and his seed after him, to give the land unto him, to make him the father of a multitude of nations, and circumcision is called “my covenant which ye shall keep” and “a token of a covenant.” God’s covenant was to be established with Isaac and not with Ishmael.

The promise to bless (offer salvation to) all nations in Abraham’s seed (the Christ) -- Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 -- is called a covenant, Gal. 3:8,15-17; Acts 3:25.

Ex. 2:24, during the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt, says that “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” He set in motion the plan that would set them free. Ex. 6:4-5 refers to God’s covenant to give them the land of Canaan. Acts 7:17 speaks of the time of the promise vouchsafed unto Abraham drawing nigh.

God to the Israelites at Sinai said, “If ye will obey my voice and keep my covenant,” referring to the law given them through Moses, Ex. 19:2-6; cf. Ps. 78:10. “The book of the covenant” was read by Moses to the people; the people were sprinkled with “the blood of the covenant,” Ex. 24:7-8. “Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel,” Ex. 34:27. When God said, “break my covenant,” He was referring to their not doing all His commandments, Deut. 26:15. The ten commandments, at the heart of this covenant, are even called “the covenant,” Read Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 5:1-21; 1 Kings 8:9, 21. Read Jer. 31:31-34 with Heb. 8:6-13; the law of Moses is obviously the “first” or “old” covenant.

The people of Israel were not to make a covenant with the nations of the land or with their gods, Ex. 23:32; 34:12, 15.

The observance of the sabbath was for a “perpetual covenant,” “a sign” between God and Israel, Ex. 31:16. Read about “the salt of the covenant” in Lev. 2: 13, the twelve cakes of shewbread in Lev. 24:8, “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” in Ex. 25:12-13, and “the ark of the covenant” in Num. 10:33; 14:44; 1 Kings 8:9, 21 and Heb. 9:4-5.

A covenant was made with “the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he made with them in Horeb” (Deut. 29:1ff).

We read also of Joshua’s covenant with Israel (Josh. 24:25-28; 23:16), God’s covenant with David (2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89:3-4), and Israel’s with God (Ez. 10:3ff).

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