

THE HISTORY OF SALVATION IN THE COVENANTS OF GOD

Jesus describes His work of redemption within the framework of a *Divine Covenant* - **Matthew 26:28** - "...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." He links up what He's about to do with specific acts of God over thousands of years. The entire history of revelation in the Scriptures unfolds around this single theme. The Bible itself is *divided into "OLD" and "NEW" Covenants*.

- 1) **WHAT "COVENANT" MEANS** - "A formal, solemn, binding contract between two parties." There are normally **5 essential parts**: FIRST, *parties* involved. SECOND, *promises* made. THIRD, *obligations* to fulfil. FOURTH, a *seal or ratification* is often established. FIFTH, the *fulfilment or completion* of the covenant. There are **SIX main covenants between God and man**:
- 2) **THE CREATION COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND ADAM** - The terms are clearly set out in **Genesis 2:16-17** - "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The statement "You may freely eat" includes the "tree of life in the middle of the garden" - **Genesis 2:9** - "And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." While the word "covenant" isn't used in the Genesis account, *Hosea makes it clear that is what it was* - **Hosea 6:7** - "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me."

Simplified, the essential elements of the Creation Covenant are as follows: **a)** The parties are God and Adam. **b)** The promise is one of *ongoing life from the tree in the center of the garden*. Notice that man *doesn't earn eternal life by works*. It is given as a free gift. **c)** The obligation is to remember and obey the command of the Lord - not to eat of one tree - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **d)** There is a *future element of fulfilment* to this covenant - **Revelation 22:1-5** - "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." Notice the sovereign hand of God here. Man may *break* God's covenant, but he cannot *annul* it. God will accomplish His purpose (**Gen.3:15**).

- 3) **THE DIVINE COVENANT WITH NOAH** - **Genesis 9:8-17** - "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, [9] "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, [10] and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. [11] I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." [12] And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: [13] I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. [14] When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, [15] I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. [16] When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." [17] God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Again, the *parties* of the covenant are God, Noah, and "all the creatures of the earth". The *promise* is to never again destroy the earth by flood. God assumes total *obligation* in the keeping of this covenant. The *ratification* is the rainbow God will put in the sky. The *fulfilment* takes place as the rain is followed by the sunshine forming the colors in the heavens. And don't forget the *prophetic significance* of the rainbow in the sky. The warning is given in **2 Peter 3:5-7** - "For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."

- 4) **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM** - **Genesis 17:1-8** "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." [3] Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." We will go into this covenant in much more detail:

- a) **FIRST, the PARTIES involved** - Initially they are God on the one hand and Abraham on the other. Included on

Abraham's side are his descendants (Isaac, Jacob and his physical descendants thereafter). Notice the important reference to the future thrust of the covenant in generations to come (**Genesis 17:7**). Also, notice the specific reference Paul finds to the *single individual, JESUS CHRIST as the ultimate descendant of Abraham* - **Galatians 3:16,29** - "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ....[29]....And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." All those who are "in Christ Jesus" are the ultimate inheritors of the blessings of Abraham.

- b) **SECOND, the PROMISES made** - FIRST, God promised a *multitude of physical descendants* (**Genesis 15:5, 17:2**). The same promise is extended to Isaac (26:4) and Jacob (28:14). SECOND, God promised *a land* (**Genesis 15:18**). This is the *framework for God's incredible deliverance of Israel out of Egypt* (Notice God's words to Moses in captivity - **Exodus 6:8** - "I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord"). It's very important (and often overlooked) that the physical land was only a picture or symbol of *the spiritual longings for a homeland only God can provide for His children* - **Hebrews 11:13-16** - "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." The New Testament takes these thoughts and applies them to all of us as God's children waiting a homeland - **1 Peter 2:11** - "Beloved, I urge you as *sojourners and exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." The THIRD promise is one of *spiritual blessing for mankind* (**Genesis 12:1-3**). It is through Abraham that a Savior will come.
- c) **THIRD, the RATIFICATION given** - **Genesis 15:17** - "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces." The sign God gives is not a word from His mouth, but a *demonstration of His actual Presence*. The significance of this sign is its proof that God will accomplish this covenant by His own power.
- d) **FOURTH, the OBLIGATION required** - **Genesis 17:9-10** - "And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. [10] This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised." Circumcision was of such critical importance, *not merely in the physical sense*, but because it pictured the work God Himself would one day do in their hearts - **Colossians 2:11** - "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...." This is where the superiority of the *New Covenant* (yet to be examined) most clearly shines through.
- e) **FIFTH, the FULFILMENT of the covenant** - Notice that God gave Israel all the land He promised - **1 Kings 4:20-21** - "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. [21] Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." Also, Christ has come and accomplished redemption (Paul calls Him the "*seed of Abraham*" - **Galatians 3:16**). Collectively, those in Christ have been made "*heirs to the promise*" who await a future glory for those who love Jesus (see **Romans 8:22-25**).