

A SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINAL PORTION OF HEBREWS

By Ron Harvey

April 11, 2012

The Various Covenants

Sometimes we think of a covenant as being an agreement between two parties. And this would essentially be a contract.

Example: I agree to paint your house, if you agree to pay me \$5,000.00.

Contracts are generally entered into by people of relatively equal position.

But sometimes, one party is so much stronger than the other party that he can impose his will upon the weaker party. So, a king can simply tell his subjects, you will pay 50% taxes. He doesn't ask his subjects if they agree, he simply levies the tax.

And this is the way it is between God and man. We are not parties of equal position. God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. He is far above us in wisdom and knowledge. It would not make sense for God to negotiate with man. Man has no clue about right and wrong. Furthermore, man is the creature and God is the creator.

And so, as between God and man, God makes the rules and we are obligated to follow them. God determines the arrangements that he has with man, and man simply bows to those arrangements.

Now, we might call those arrangements covenants. God says, here is the way it is going to be, here are the terms of the arrangement. And man is obligated to accept those terms.

A summary of major covenants in the Bible

I. The eternal covenant of redemption.

A. There was a plan to save sinners. (Eph.1:4,11; 3:11)

- B. It was an eternal plan. (Eph.1:4; 3:11)
- C. If the plan was eternal, then it was a plan that was devised by an eternal being. Man was not included in the negotiations. This was a negotiation between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- D. This plan was in the nature of a covenant.
 - 1. Father: election
 - 2. Son: Sacrifice and atonement
 - 3. Application of the atonement
- E. This eternal covenant was a covenant of works. Each member of the Godhead committed to perform work in order to save sinners.

Now, when God comes down and manifests his plan to save sinners, that is, when he tells Adam, "I will make animal skins and cover your nakedness," when he tells Able to prepare a sacrifice, when he comes down and tells Abraham, "Here is what I am going to do for you," this is called a,

II. Covenant of grace.

God simply tells men, I have planned to save you and here is how I am going to do it. God doesn't ask for any works in return. He simply reveals his plan to save mankind. It is wholly of grace.

Now God has always saved men by grace. Not one time in all of history did God save anyone by any other method. Never has God saved a man by works. Never has God saved a man by having that man obey a law.

(See, Gal.2:16,21; 5:4)

So, let's summarize. There was a covenant of redemption. And, whenever God carries out his covenant of redemption, it is manifested in a covenant of grace with men. The covenant of grace is God's promise to man to save him.

The covenant of grace extends throughout all of history. It runs through the Old Testament and through the New Testament and to the end

of time.

The covenant of grace is God's promise to save his elect. When God says, "I will save you," this is a covenant of grace. He says, "You are helpless, but I will save you." And I will save you by pure grace.

This has always been the way of salvation and will always be the way of salvation. Adam was saved by a covenant of grace. Seth and his line were saved by grace. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. David was saved by grace. All the Old Testament saints were saved by grace.

All the disciples of Christ were saved by grace. Paul was saved by grace. All the New Testament saints were saved by grace. You were saved by grace and I was saved by grace.

So, what in the world is this Covenant that God gave to Moses for Israel?

III. The Covenant that God gave to Israel.

A. The names of the Covenant

1. The Mosaic Covenant
2. The Old Covenant

B. The nature of the Covenant

1. A covenant of works. (Deut. 28)
2. An earthly covenant. (Deut. 28)
 - a. Earthly promises
 - (1) land
 - (2) victory over earthly enemies
 - (3) bountiful harvests
 - (4) boundtiful flocks
 - (5) peace and safety
 - (6) earthly honor
 - b. Earthly religion
 - (1) Their central focal point was a tent.
 - (2) They had earthly priests.
 - (1) They were sinners themselves.

- (2) They were mortal.
- (3) They had earthly sacrifices – animals
- 3. A covenant of death. (II Cor.3:7)
- 4. A covenant of condemnation. (II Cor.3:9)
- 5. A temporary covenant. (Gal.3:19)
- 6. A typical covenant. (Heb.10:1)
 - a. Moses (Deliverer, prophet)
 - b. Aaron (Priest)
 - c. Wilderness Wanderings
 - d. Joshua
 - e. Tabernacle
 - f. Sacrifices
 - g. Veil (typical of Christ; Heb.10:20)
 - h. Holy of Holies (the place of God)
 - i. Israel (typical of the people of God)

Gal.6:16

Romans 9:6 (Not all Jews were Israel)

I Corinthians 10:18 (There is an Israel after the flesh)

- 7. It was not a saving covenant.
 - a. There was not one person saved by the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a harsh covenant of works that no man was able to perform.
 - b. There were people saved during the Mosaic Covenant, but not by the Mosaic Covenant. When God saved men during this time, he saved them by grace, by the covenant of grace, not by the Mosaic Covenant of works.

C. The purpose of the Covenant.

- 1. To serve as a shadow.

To teach spiritual truth, by physical types. You see, we are like children, we understand physical things. We understand what we can see and touch. But we have difficulty understanding spiritual things. God found it useful to lay out an entire system of carnal things, to ultimately teach us of spiritual things.

And so, the first purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was to serve as a type. It was a picture of real things. If we try to make it the real thing, then it causes us to miss the real thing. The Jews tried to make the Mosaic Covenant the real thing. Oh how they loved their temple and their priests and their sacrifices and their ceremonies. How they loved all the rules and regulations. And they thought by these they would be saved.

But they completely missed the real usefulness of their covenant. It wasn't designed to save them, but it was designed

2. To point them to one who could save them. (Gal.3:24)
3. To show the utter hopelessness of salvation by the law. (Gal.3:21)

The history of Israel is a history of utter failure of a people under the law. From the beginning to the end, it is a story of a people who could not be saved by the code of God's holy law. Israel failed from Moses to Christ. They almost killed Moses on several occasions and they killed the prophets and they killed Christ himself. Why such a bleak history for this people? It was bleak because they were a people under a shadowy covenant that had no ability to save them.

And this is what the book of Hebrews is all about. It is a stark comparison between that old shadowy Covenant which could not save, and the new covenant that came in with Christ.

Even while the old covenant was in force with Israel, God promised a New Covenant. (Jer.31:31) And when Christ came into the world, he brought with him a new arrangement. He brought in a new and grander manifestation of God's grace. He brought in an age of redemption like the

world has never seen before. Oh sure, God saved people here and there in Old Testament times. But he held back the full manifestation of his grace for another time. When Noah was saved in the flood, there was a whole world of unbelievers who perished and one family who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Elijah sat down under the tree and lamented that he was the only one left who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

That Old Covenant period was a preparation time. It wasn't the age of grace. It was the age of law. And by the law comes death and condemnation.

But then, one glorious day, the real thing came into the world. The real priest showed up. The real sacrifice was made. And the real meaning of the Old Covenant was made clear. Furthermore, that Old Covenant was set aside. (Hebrews 8:13)

And God opened up the floodgates of grace and the gospel flowed to all the world in this new covenant age of grace.

Now the book of Hebrews sets up a great contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. And it proves that the New is so much better. It is better because it is the Covenant that has substance. It is the Covenant to which the Old pointed. It is the Covenant that caused the Old to vanish away.

We have learned in Hebrews that:

1. Jesus is better than the Old Testament prophets. (1:1,2) Jesus' revelation is more complete.
2. Jesus is better than angels. (1:4) Jesus mediates a better covenant.
3. Jesus is better than Joshua. (4:8) Jesus takes us to a better rest.
4. Jesus is better than the Aaronic priesthood. (4:14 – 7:28)
5. Jesus has a better covenant. (8:1-13)
6. Jesus has a better sacrifice. (9:1-28)
7. Jesus has an effective atonement. (10:1-18)