

# Christ Teens

## Covenant Baptism: Our Place in God's Plan

February 21, 2015

W. Scott Sager

The centrality of covenant in Christianity has influenced our language, giving us the title pages to our Bibles: Old Testament (covenant) and New Testament (covenant). The concept of covenant appears often in the New Testament writings. Sometimes there is reference to a particular fulfillment of an OT covenant, but more usually it is left general -- for no one single Old Testament covenant can fully describe the events of the cross; and God's calling of a people unto himself.

### 1. The Making of a Covenant:

**Covenant:** "A mutual agreement between two or more persons to do or refrain from doing certain acts. It is applied to engagements entered into by and with the divine being as revealed in scriptures, etc."

These covenants are always regarded as serious affairs. They were a bit like solemn business agreements among us, a binding contract, or in many ways like a treaty. But whereas these covenants are mainly secular, a Hebrew covenant was primarily religious. A covenant was an undertaking entered into before God and solemnly ratified with appropriate religious ritual.

A covenant always means, *"being loyal to the other party; it is never simply an agreement to perform some external duty."* There seems to be no passage where the entire method of making a covenant is outlined. The ancient people knew quite well how it was done, and apparently had no urge to lay it out in detail for the benefit of prosperity. If we put together all the pieces, we can piece a covenant agreement together:

**a. Agreement on the Terms:** Obviously there was no covenant unless the two parties agreed upon some course of action that bound at least one of them (more commonly both) for the future. It always bound them to help and benefit each other, never to hurt one another.

**b. The Swearing of an Oath:** A covenant was never entered into lightly. Each party needed to know the other had full intention of keeping the covenant; so both swore a solemn oath of covenant obligations. This was so central that sometimes the covenant process was called "the oath" (Luke 1:73).

**c. The Offering of a Sacrifice:** Sacrifices were common in religious ritual, but the sacrifice at a covenant had some special features. The animal being offered was split in two and apparently laid on the ground so that the two parties of the covenant might walk between it together (Gen. 15:10-17, Jer. 34:18). This is why the primary way of talking about a covenant was not "make a covenant", but "cut a covenant."

\*Exercise with Play-Dough

Probably, the cutting of the covenant and the walking inside the sacrifice was a solemn reminder to keep the promise--you have now entered into the death of the animal. God said in Jeremiah, "The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces" (Jer. 34:18).

**d. The Witness:** There was often a witness present at the covenant-making--but not necessarily in our terms. We think of a witness as a person who can retell what occurred, but sometimes sheep (Gen. 21:27), stones (Gen. 31:44) or other figures might be used. God created a rainbow to witness his covenant with Noah.

**e. The Feast:** It appears that a feast either marked the making of a covenant (see Lev. 7:15), or at least covenant occasions were remembered by the giving of a feast. The covenant between Jacob and Laban ends with the making of a feast in celebration (Gen. 31:53).

**f. The Giving of Gifts:** It is possible that gifts were usually exchanged at a covenant-making. Jonathan gave David his royal robe, sword, bow and belt. This marked for him a new identity as a brother, and a new protection as well (I Sam. 18:4).

## **2. The Four Major OT Covenants**

Each of these covenant has some familiar points: a. the initiative is with God, b. the one receiving the covenant does so as a representative of mankind, c. the giving of the covenant is pure grace--unmerited favor from God:

- 1.) **The Covenant with Noah (Genesis 9: 1-17)** --promising that God will never destroy the whole world again,
- 2.) **The Covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15: 1-18)** --promising God would bless Abraham as the seed-bearer of redemption for the entire world,
- 3.) **The Covenant at Sinai (Exodus 24: 1-18)** --in which God gave his legal requirements for being his people after He rescued them powerfully from Egypt through the Passover and Exodus, and
- 4.) **The Covenant with David (II Samuel 7: 5-16)** --in which God promised to honor David's heart for God by making his seed the lineage of the coming Messiah.

## **Our Participation in the New Covenant of Christ:**

Paul tells us that on the night Jesus was betrayed he had a supper-meal with his disciples. During the meal, he gave them a cup and said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me*" (I Cor. 11:23-25). Through this simple meal, Jesus connected the shedding of his blood with the making of a new covenant. How did we enter into a covenant with God anyway? The following is an attempt to theorize how we enter into a covenant with God through Christ ourselves.

**1. Agreement on the Terms:** Obviously there was no covenant unless the two parties agreed upon some course of action that bound at least one of them (more commonly both) for the future. It always bound them to help and benefit each other, never to hurt one another.

- a. Repentance from a sinful lifestyle.**
- b. Faith in the faithfulness of God.**

**2. The Swearing of an Oath:** A covenant was never entered into lightly. Each party needed to know the other had full intention of keeping the covenant; so both swore a solemn oath of covenant obligations. This was so central that sometimes the covenant process was called "the oath" (Luke 1:73).

- a. Confession of faith in Jesus Christ.**
- b. Acknowledgment of him as your sovereign Lord.**

**3. The Offering of a Sacrifice:** Sacrifices were common in religious ritual, but the sacrifice at a covenant had some special features. The animal being offered was split in two and apparently laid on the ground so that the two parties of the covenant might walk between it together (Gen. 15:10-17, Jer. 34:18). This is why the primary way of talking about a covenant was not "make a covenant", but "cut a covenant."

- a. Passing through water of baptism--from death to new covenant.**
- b. Sacrifice representative of death, burial and resurrection of Christ.**

Probably, the cutting of the covenant and the walking inside the sacrifice was a solemn reminder to keep the promise--you have now entered into the death of the animal. God said in Jeremiah, "The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces" (Jer. 34:18).

**\* See Romans 6 as a similar reminder of why not to enter again into willing sin--a remembrance of your baptismal event.**

**4. The Witness:** There was often a witness present at the covenant-making--but not necessarily in our terms. We think of a witness as a person who can retell what occurred, but sometimes sheep (Gen. 21:27), stones (Gen. 31:44) or other figures might be used. God created a rainbow to witness his covenant with Noah.

- a. **The Holy Spirit bears witness we are the people of God.**
- b. **Brothers and sisters in Christ affirm this truth.**

**5. The Feast:** It appears that a feast either marked the making of a covenant (see Lev. 7:15), or at least covenant occasions were remembered by the giving of a feast. The covenant between Jacob and Laban ends with the making of a feast in celebration (Gen. 31:53).

- a. **The role of the Lord's Supper in Christian worship.**
- b. **The promise of the ultimate feast in heaven.**

**6. The Giving of Gifts:** It is possible that gifts were usually exchanged at a covenant-making. Jonathan gave David his royal robe, sword, bow and belt. This marked for him a new identity as a brother, and a new protection as well (I Sam. 18:4).

- a. **Spiritual gifts are given by Jesus to all in the New Covenant.**
- b. **Eternal gifts are promised to all of the covenant (see Rev. 2-3)**

### **Three great self-understandings come from this new covenant:**

(Please notice these are three things God does/ we do nothing but receive them)

- 1) Justification**-being made right before God--not having our sins held against us (deals with my SINS),
- 2) Sanctification**-living the saved life of one who has past from death to life with God (deals with me as a SINNER).
- 3) Adoption**- as one in a covenant with God we have a new identity as God's children (deals with me as having a new identity in God).