

Chapter 12

THE COVENANTAL PRINCIPLE

I. DEFINITION

That principle by which the interpretation of a verse or group of verses is determined by a consideration of its Covenantal setting.

II. AMPLIFICATION

A. Definition of "Covenant": In English the word "covenant" signifies a mutual understanding between two or more parties, each binding himself to fulfill obligations. In Scripture, the Hebrew and Greek words denote a somewhat different meaning:

Old Testament Hebrew:

BERIYTH

= "to cut, to contract" (because of being made by passing between pieces of flesh — Genesis 15:17; Jeremiah 34:18).

Translated:

confederacy Genesis 14:13; Obadiah 7

covenant Genesis 6:18; Exodus 2:24; 24:7, 8; 34:28;
Leviticus 2:13; Joshua 3:3;
Psalms 89:3, 4, 34; Daniel 9:27.

league Joshua 9:6, 7, 11, 15, 16; Judges 2:2.

New Testament Greek:

DIATHEKE

= "a disposition, arrangement, testament, will"

Translated:

testament Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 7:22; 9:15-17, 20;
Revelation 11:19

covenant Luke 1:72; Romans 9:4; Ephesians 2:12;
Hebrews 12:24; 13:20.

SUNTITHEMAI

= "to put together, place together, to make arrangement"

Translated:

covenanted Luke 22:5

agreed John 9:22; Acts 23:20

assented Acts 24:9.

The word "covenant" in Scripture refers to an agreement or a contract between men, or between God and man. In Scripture, we find that men often made covenants with men in relation to various matters (e.g., Genesis 21:27, 31, 32 — covenant between Abraham and Abimelech concerning the well of Beersheba; Luke 22:5 — covenant between the chief priests and Judas concerning the price of betrayal).

The covenantal principle under consideration here pertains only to the covenants between God and man. In every case in Scripture when a covenant was instituted between God and man, God is seen as the initiator. Man did not come to God with a proposal seeking God's approval, rather God came to man declaring His will and seeking man's adherence. It is a contract between God and man drawn up by God and presented to man. Man can either accept it or reject it, but he cannot change it. However, the usage of "covenant" in Scripture does not always contain the idea of joint obligation, but usually signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person: God. In these instances, the aspect of covenant is emphasized in "the promise" (Galatians 3:17; Romans 15:8).

B. Kinds of Covenants: There are two kinds of Divine Covenants seen in Scripture:

1. **Irrevocable Covenant:** A covenant in which God obligates Himself to fulfil the promises of the covenant regardless of man's response; a covenant whose fulfilment is *not* dependent upon man's fulfilling certain conditions. Formula: "I will" (Exodus 6:3-8; Genesis 9:11).
2. **Revocable Covenant:** A covenant in which God obligates himself to fulfil the promises of the covenant only upon man's obedience to the conditions set forth by God. A covenant whose fulfilment is dependent upon man's fulfilling certain conditions. Formula: "If . . . then . . ." (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 28:58, 59).

C. Classification of Covenants: God has revealed Himself as a covenant making and covenant keeping God (Psalms 111:9; Hebrews 6:12-17). The source of the covenants is the grace of God and the purpose of the covenants is to make man in the image of God and to bring man to full fellowship with Him. There are nine specific Divine covenants revealed in Scripture, eight of which are progressive expression of the first. The covenants are:

1. The Everlasting Covenant
2. The Edenic Covenant
3. The Adamic Covenant
4. The Noahic Covenant
5. The Abrahamic Covenant
6. The Mosaic Covenant
7. The Palestinian Covenant
8. The Davidic Covenant
9. The New Covenant.

These covenants involve eternity and time. The Everlasting Covenant, made in the counsels of the Godhead in eternity is an all-encompassing covenant. It includes in itself the other eight covenants, each of which constitute a progressively unfolding expression of it in time, as related to man. All nine covenants are involved in God's creative and redemptive nature and plan. The Everlasting and Edenic Covenants involve primarily creation's plan, while the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic and New Covenants involve more specifically the outworking of redemption's plan.

D. Elements of the Covenants: There are basically three parts to each of the Divine covenants. Any covenant is incomplete and, therefore, invalid without the testimony of these three things. These three parts are:

1. The *Words* or Promises of the Covenant
2. The *Blood* of the Covenant
3. The *Seal* of the Covenant.

These three elements which constitute a covenant will be noted in the following outline.

E. Outline of the Covenants

1. **The Everlasting Covenant** — Hebrews 13:20, 21
 - a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — This covenant was made in eternity in the counsels of the eternal Godhead; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was made according to God's eternal purpose which He

purposed in Christ before the world began. (Ephesians 1:4; 2:10; 3:11; John 17:5.) It was founded upon God's foreknowledge, election and predestined purpose.

- b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — The blood of the Everlasting Covenant is seen in the fact that the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 13:20, 21; Acts 20:28.) This plan was *before* the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4; I Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 25:34; John 17:5.) This plan was also *from* the foundation of the world. (I Peter 1:19, 20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8.)
- c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — The Divine seal involved "eternal life which God promised *before* the world began." (Titus 1:2 with II Timothy 1:9.) It is consummated in the glorified body of Christ, and ultimately the Church. (Philippians 3:21.)

2. **The Edenic Covenant** — Genesis 1:26-30

- a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — Though the word "covenant" is not specifically used in relation to Eden, covenantal language is evident. (Refer to First Mention Principle.) The Edenic Covenant involved the creation of man in the image of God. It was made before the entrance of sin. Adam had only one commandment given to him. The promises of dominion depended upon obedience. Hence, this covenant was a conditional covenant. (Genesis 2:16, 17.)
- b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Adam was made a living soul. The soul-life of man is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11-14). Adam originally had sinless blood. It has been suggested that sinless blood was shed for Adam's bride to come forth from his side. This shadowed forth the truth that the Last Adam shed sinless covenant blood to provide His bride. Adam was indeed a type of Him who was to come (Romans 5:14 with Ephesians 5:23-32).
- c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Genesis 2:8-17; 3:22-24 — The tree of eternal life was the sign or seal of the Edenic Covenant. It was forfeited through sin and man was cast out of the Paradise of God. The tree of life is restored in and through Christ. (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14.)

3. **The Adamic Covenant** — Genesis 3:1-24

- a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — Though the word "covenant" is not specifically mentioned here, covenantal language is evident. The Adamic Covenant was made after the entrance of sin. It is the most comprehensive covenant of all. It is an irrevocable covenant. It was founded on the grace of God and involved the promises of redemption for man and the ultimate bruising of the head of Satan. (Genesis 3:15.)
- b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Genesis 3:21 — Adam and Eve witnessed the first substitutionary death and the shedding of sacrificial animal blood. God was the first one to shed blood. The innocent died for the guilty. It foreshadowed the plan of redemption and the broken body and shed blood of the Lamb of God. It was covenant blood.

- c. **The Seal of the Adamic Covenant** — Genesis 3:21 — The seal of the covenant to Adam and Eve were the coats of skin. They discarded the fig leaf covering and accepted the coats of skin; a covering acceptable to God and provided through the death of a victim. These coats of skin shadowed forth the seal of a faith-righteousness that would come through Christ. (John 1:29; Romans 4).
4. **The Noahic Covenant** — Genesis 8-9
- a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — Genesis 9:1-17 — It is here that we have the first specific mention of the word “covenant.” This covenant was made with Noah and every living creature after the flood. The language of the covenant is very similar to the language of the covenant made with Adam (Genesis 9:1-12 with Genesis 1:26-30). This also is an irrevocable covenant. The promises of God concerning the earth never being destroyed with a flood again were made to all generations.
 - b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Genesis 8:20-21 — Noah sacrificed to the Lord burnt offerings of every clean beast and fowl. Here faith in substitutionary blood is evidenced (Hebrews 11:6, 7). Life is forfeited and covenant blood becomes the evidence of death.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Genesis 9:12-17 — The sign or seal or token of the Noahic Covenant was the rainbow. It is still the seal of that covenant to all the world. Any reference to the rainbow in Scripture attests to the fact that God is a covenant keeping God (Revelation 4:3; 10:1-2).
5. **The Abrahamic Covenant** — Genesis 12:1-3; 15; 17; 22
- a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — Abraham is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:16). The promises of God involved in the Abrahamic Covenant touch the natural and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal. The major promise was the promise of salvation through Christ, the seed of Abraham (Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16). It was to be through Christ that all the nations would be blessed. This covenant was confirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26:2-4) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:3-14). It was an irrevocable covenant!
 - b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Genesis 15 — The covenant blood was shed in the offering of the God-appointed five sacrifices mentioned in Genesis 15. God passed between the pieces of those sacrifices as he covenanted with Abraham.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Genesis 17 — The sign, seal or token of the covenant was circumcision. It is distinctly called the seal of the covenant (Romans 4:11 with Acts 7:8). This pointed to circumcision of the heart, that of the spirit, not of the letter or of the flesh (Romans 2:28-29).
6. **The Mosaic Covenant** — Exodus 20-40
- a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — This covenant was expressly made with the chosen nation, Israel. (Deuteronomy 4:10-13; 5:1-33). It held promises out to Israel specifically and this also was a revocable covenant. The words were summarized in the ten commandments and amplified in the civil laws. This covenant involved distinction of meats, keeping of Sabbaths, and festival days.

- b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:18-20 — The Mosaic Covenant was established upon sacrificial blood. It was called the blood of the covenant, and it was sprinkled on the people and the book of the covenant.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Exodus 31:12-18 — The Mosaic Covenant had the seal of the Sabbath day upon it. This seal was distinctly the seal of this covenant; not any other. It pointed to the true Sabbath rest which would be found in Christ (Matthew 12:28-30; Hebrews 3-4).
- 7. **The Palestinian Covenant** — Deuteronomy 27-28-29-30.
 - a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — This covenant is vitally linked with the Mosaic Covenant. Because of this it is not often recognized as a covenant. However, Deuteronomy 29:1 clarifies this matter for us. It states, “These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab *beside* the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.” It was made with the generation who were about to enter the land. It was a conditional covenant. Its promises concerned the blessings and/or cursings upon Palestine, the promised land. Israel’s dwelling in the land was conditional. If these conditions were not met they would be expelled (Leviticus 26 along with Deuteronomy 28-29).
 - b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Deuteronomy 27:1-8 — The day the new generation of Israel entered Canaan land, an altar of stones was built to the Lord and sacrificial offerings were made. It signified the cleansing of the land by atoning covenant blood.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Deuteronomy 11; 28; 29 — The seal of God upon the land was to be evidenced in the early and latter rains. Blessing and fruitfulness by the rains was God’s seal to Israel upon their obedience to the laws of His land. When God withheld the rains it was the evidence of His withholding the seal of His blessing. This seal foreshadowed the coming of the early and latter rains in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (James 5:7 with Joel 2:23-32).
- 8. **The Davidic Covenant** — II Samuel 7:4-29; Psalms 89.
 - a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — The covenant that God made with David was an irrevocable covenant. It was by implication an integral part of the Abrahamic Covenant. The major promise of the Davidic Covenant was that which involved the coming of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David as well as the seed of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). He would take the throne of David and rule and reign upon it as a righteous king forever (Genesis 49:8-12; Psalms 89:3-4, 34, 35; Psalms 132:11-12; I Kings 8:20-25; Jeremiah 33:20-21; Isaiah 9:6-9; Luke 1:30-33).
 - b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — II Samuel 6:17-18; 7:1-3 — As in all previous covenants, sacrificial blood was shed, so it was for the Davidic Covenant. David offered sacrifices to the Lord at the return of the Ark of the Covenant. It was at this time that the Everlasting Covenant was made with David concerning his seed, Jesus Christ.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — Psalms 89:27-37 — As God took the rainbow to be the token of the Noahic Covenant, God here used the sun and the moon to be the token or seal of the Davidic Covenant.

God promised David that as long as the sun and the moon existed, the seed of David would sit upon his throne. This seal finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the ruler of this world.

9. **The New Covenant** — Matthew 26:26-29; Hebrews 8-9; Jeremiah 31:31-34.
 - a. **The Words or Promises of the Covenant** — Jesus Christ is the New Covenant personified (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). He is the mediator of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is the covenant of grace and it is everlasting. This covenant is the consummation of all previous covenants, and it is the covenant which brings redeemed mankind into the Everlasting Covenant — the eternal purposes of God. It will never be superseded by another covenant, because it fulfills all others in itself.
 - b. **The Blood of the Covenant** — Matthew 26:26; John 19:34, 35; I John 1:7 — The precious and incorruptible blood of Jesus is the blood of the New Covenant. Revelation 12:11; Hebrews 9. All previous covenantal sacrificial blood pointed to His blood. The blood of Jesus fulfills and abolishes all typical animal blood. It is the blood of the Everlasting Covenant (Hebrews 13:20); the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:19, 20). It is the blood of God (Acts 20:28). God will never return to animal blood now that He has the blood of His beloved Son.
 - c. **The Seal of the Covenant** — II Corinthians 1:21, 22; Revelation 7:1-4; 14:1-2 — The sign and seal of the New Covenant is the infilling or baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus had the seal of God upon Him (John 3:33, 34), and the believer in Christ is also to receive the seal of God (Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30; II Corinthians 1:21, 22; Acts 2:4). This seal fulfills in itself all previous seals. It is worthy of note that God never took the seal of any other covenant and placed it upon another. Each covenant had its own distinctive seal. However, all previous seals pointed to the New Covenant seal.

F. Summary of Covenantal Revelation: In the light of the all-embracing revelation of God's covenants, the Bible is not to be viewed merely as a compilation of sixty-six books, but is rather to be seen as ONE BOOK having ONE AUTHOR, with a progression of thought throughout. God Himself was the Mastermind of Scripture, utilizing various literary methods in presenting His thoughts in an integrated and harmonious manner. God, being the author of all Scripture, wove throughout the books of the Bible the progressive revelation of His covenantal dealings with man.

The literary method of *progressive covenantal revelation* used in writing Scripture gives rise to the *Covenantal Principle* of interpreting Scripture.

III. QUALIFICATION

A. The first step in using the Covenantal Principle is determining which covenant or covenants are being referred to in the verse or passage under consideration. This is done by noting covenantal language.

B. It is only practical to use the Covenantal Principle when the verse or passage at hand involves covenantal elements or covenantal language.

C. In using the Covenantal Principle, the interpreter must recognize that he is working from whole to part and from part to whole. He must have an understanding of the covenants as a whole to interpret the part, but he must interpret the parts in order to realize the whole.

D. In using this principle, there must be a recognition of the interrelatedness of the covenants and their ultimate fulfilment in the New Covenant.

E. The interpreter must recognize that he is under the New Covenant and must view the other covenants from that standpoint. Thus he interprets all covenants in the light of the New Covenant.

IV. DEMONSTRATION

A. **The Edenic Covenant:** Revelation 2:7 — “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Revelation 22:14 — “Blessed are they that do His commandment, that they may have right to the tree of life.”

In order to arrive at a proper interpretation of these verses, the Edenic Covenant must be referred to because it is under this covenant that the tree of life is first mentioned. Adam and Eve forfeited their right to eat of the tree of life when they failed to fulfill the condition of the Edenic Covenant by eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus they did not “overcome” because they did not “do His commandments” and lost the “right to the tree of life,” “which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” (Genesis 2:8-17; 3:22-24).

B. **The Adamic Covenant:** Romans 16:20 — “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

In order to understand the full implication of this verse it must be considered in the light of the Adamic Covenant. After the entrance of sin into the human race, God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The verse in Romans points toward the fulfilment of the prophetic word of the Adamic Covenant. Thus, this verse draws its significance from the fact that it is a reiteration of the first Messianic promise of redemption.

C. **The Noahic Covenant:** Revelation 4:3 — “And there was a rainbow about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”

This verse must be interpreted in connection with the Noahic Covenant. The rainbow was the seal of the Noahic Covenant. It was placed in the heavens to be a reminder to God and man that God would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood (Genesis 9:8-17). The rainbow around the throne in Revelation shows that God is keeping the seal of the Noahic Covenant constantly before Him, proving His faithfulness to His promise.

D. **The Abrahamic Covenant:** Galatians 3:29 — “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.”

It is impossible to properly interpret this verse without a recognition of that which is involved in the Abrahamic Covenant. As previously noted, from Abraham was to come two seed lines: natural and spiritual (Genesis 13:16; 15:5). To these two seed lines there were two sets of promises: natural and spiritual. The natural promises pertained to land, seed, and possessions. (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:16-18). The spiritual promises pertained to the Messiah and His ministry to all the nations of the earth. These promises included justification by faith and the reception of the Spirit (Galatians 3:8, 14). Thus, this verse is stating that the person who belongs to Christ is Abraham’s seed and is in covenant relationship with God, being an heir of the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant through Christ.

E. The Mosaic Covenant: Galatians 4:10 — “Ye observe days, and months, and times and years.”

The subject matter of this verse can only be understood by relating it to the Mosaic Covenant. Under this covenant, Israel was commanded to observe Sabbath days, Festival months, times of convocation, and Sabbath and Jubilee years (Leviticus 23, 25). In Galatians, Paul is referring back to these observances belonging to the Law Covenant. For the Galatian believers under the New Covenant to keep these observances is to place themselves back under the Mosaic Covenant.

F. The Palestinian Covenant: Jeremiah 25:11 — “And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”

The reason for this judgment upon the promised land can only be ascertained by referring back to the Palestinian Covenant. Under this covenant God threatened to remove Israel out of the land by captivity to another nation if they ever broke the conditions of the covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1-29). The verse in Jeremiah transforms this threat into a prophecy, about to be executed because of Judah's idolatry.

G. The Davidic Covenant: Luke 1:32, 33 — “. . . and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.”

This verse must be interpreted with respect to the promise of the Davidic Covenant. This promise is basically four-fold, relating to:

1. A Seed
2. A House
3. A Throne
4. A Kingdom

The verses in Luke prophesied that this four-fold promise would find its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David.

H. The New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31 — “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. . .”

This prophecy can only be understood by linking it with its fulfilment when Messiah established the New Covenant. At the last supper, just prior to the crucifixion, Jesus said, “This is My Blood of the *NEW* Testament (covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Therefore, the days that Jeremiah prophesied of are shown to be the days of Messiah, in which He established the New Covenant.

I. The Everlasting Covenant: Titus 1:2, 3 — “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His word through preaching. . .”

A proper understanding of this verse can only be reached by relating its contents to the Everlasting Covenant. The Everlasting Covenant was made before time began, in the eternal counsel of the Godhead, in the event of the entrance of sin and death into the human race. It is the Creative and Redemptive strains of the eternal purpose of God and the heavenly foundation of all the covenants expressed in time. The main promise of the Everlasting Covenant is eternal life (I John 2:25). By eternal life is meant conformity to the image of God and full fellowship with Him. Thus these verses in Titus speak of our hope in this promise made in the Everlasting Covenant.

SPECIAL NOTE: It is worthy of note to recognize that a number of passages or chapters in the Bible involve several of the covenants, and only by a study of the language of the context can it be determined which covenants are referred to. Examples of this are seen in the following passages.

1. **Ezekiel 16:59-62:** The Abrahamic, Mosaic and Everlasting Covenants are all involved in these verses.
2. **Hosea 1:6-10; 2:18-23:** The Mosaic, Abrahamic and New Covenants are involved in the language in these passages of Hosea.
3. **Galatians 3:1-29:** The Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenants are seen in their principles in this chapter.
4. **Romans 9, 10, 11:** These chapters dealing with the blindness and cutting off of natural Israel and their grafting in again by faith involve the three great covenants: The Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenants.

NOTE: For a comprehensive treatment of this subject, the student is referred to the textbook on "The Covenants" by Conner/Malmin.