

## Chapter 8 - God's Covenants

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**For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [nations] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility . . . Consequently, you [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**

– Ephesians 2:14-16,19 (insertions mine)

### The Bible Says . . .

Bible history reveals the Jews were not always faithful to God. Church history confirms the same is true of Christians. Human beings within any religious system are capable of adjusting or distorting their understanding of God's will for expedient social purposes. But, deviant theology has no effect on God's truth. God's truth is everlasting. Civilizations come and go, but God and His truth remain forever. So, what was nailed to the cross? In a sentence, two covenants were nailed to the cross.

One covenant was given to Adam and Eve, the second was given to the biological descendants of Abraham. ( Genesis 15:18; Exodus 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 31:16; Jeremiah 11:10; 31:31-34; Ephesians 2; Colossians 2:13-17). When these covenants became null and void at the cross, two things changed.

Animal sacrifices were no longer necessary, and all distinction between Jews and Gentiles came to an end. Paul wrote, **“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ”** (Romans 10:12,13) After the cross, salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. **“. . . Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16)

To understand the two covenants that were made null and void at the cross, a person has to understand God's use of covenants in the Bible. Unfortunately, many Christians do not concern themselves with the basics on this subject and this explains why there is so much confusion. It is not necessary to be confused on this topic, since the Bible provides the answer.

### Unilateral and Bilateral Covenants

God has two types of covenants: unilateral and bilateral. A unilateral covenant is a *one-sided* covenant which God *imposes* upon Himself and/or man. A bilateral covenant is a *two-sided* covenant or a *mutually agreed* upon covenant between God and man. Both types of covenants

require a continuous relationship between God and man. Both types of covenants have rules within them giving them the effect and the appearance of law. But, a covenant is more than a set of laws.

A covenant requires an ongoing relationship between God and man whereas a law does not. For example, the law of gravity is not “a covenant” because there is no intelligent relationship between gravity and man. A “law” is an authoritative statement and a covenant may have certain laws or authoritative statements within it. The quality of a covenant relationship is determined by love and affection. When both parties are happy in a mutually agreed upon covenant, the covenant is wonderful.

However, if disaffection should arise between the parties, the covenant becomes a terrible bondage for both parties! Have you ever noticed that some marriages begin so happily and end so miserably? Obviously, the marriage covenant did not change. There was a change in affection which brought about a change in the relationship. How long should a mutually binding covenant be honored when there is no love in the heart of one party?

## Contrasting the Covenants

A unilateral covenant is one-sided and nonnegotiable. It *is not* a mutual agreement between God and man. God’s unilateral covenants are imposed on Himself or man for as long as He deems necessary. This is why it is called unilateral or one-sided. On the other hand, a bilateral covenant is a *mutually agreed* covenant between God and man. A bilateral covenant has a set of rules or laws that are binding upon both parties.

A bilateral covenant is drawn up and put into effect for mutually beneficial purposes and it remains in effect for as long as the covenant stipulates. The terms and conditions set forth in a bilateral covenant can transfer to succeeding generations. A bilateral covenant comes to an end when (a) either party is unfaithful to the agreement, or (b) when the object for which the covenant was created is fulfilled. Consider these examples: Marriage is a bilateral covenant – two people fall in love and they willingly *agree* to honor vows of moral fidelity and faithfulness “until death do us part.”

The exchange of vows constitutes a mutual agreement and the marriage covenant is put into effect before witnesses. At death, the marriage covenant is terminated because all that was promised has been fulfilled. Similarly, if a builder and a customer enter into an agreement to build a new house, the bilateral covenant between them ends when the house is finished – because the covenant is fulfilled. When the purpose of the covenant is fulfilled, the covenant expires.

To be legal, bilateral covenants require witnesses. In ancient times, if third-party witnesses were not available when a bilateral covenant was made, inanimate objects such as stones were stacked into a large pile as a witness to the agreement. (See Genesis 31:44-48.)

## Covenant Definitions

If a person enters into a contract with a realtor to sell his house, the realtor's contract will state certain matters (covenant laws) which the seller and the realtor are expected to honor (through obedience). The contract goes into effect when both parties sign (or ratify) the contract. We may use the word "contract" to describe this relationship, but in a biblical sense the contract between the seller and the realtor is a bilateral covenant because a relationship exists for the duration of the contract.

Even though the contract has a number of covenant laws or performance specifications in it, we know that compliance with the terms of a covenant is something else. The realtor may not meet the expectations of the seller; he may not promote the property as specified or the realtor may not represent the seller's best interest in selling the property. Likewise, the seller may refuse to meet certain demands set forth in the contract. The point is that all bilateral covenants are performance-based covenants entered into on the basis of "good faith" from the moment they begin.

A bilateral covenant becomes necessary when two parties need each other to accomplish something one party cannot do alone. The hope and expectation of both parties at the beginning of a bilateral covenant is superior performance out of each other.

Many people get married each year in the United States. The marriage covenant is a bilateral covenant. At last count, the number of people in the United States terminating the marriage covenant each year is about half of the number getting married. So, even though two people may enter into the marriage covenant, neither party loses its right to abandon the covenant if the performance of the other party does not meet the specifications of the covenant. Of course there can be serious consequences for choosing to violate the terms and conditions of a mutually agreed upon covenant.

A bilateral (two sided) covenant can be declared null and void if there is evidence affirming that one party violated the laws or stipulations within the covenant. But, unilateral covenants are not declared null and void if they are violated.

For example, when Adam and Eve sinned, they came under the condemnation of a unilateral covenant which states: **"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."** (Genesis 2:17) Because this covenant required their death, Jesus had to die. In other words, someone had to die to pay for the penalty for sin because this unilateral covenant could not be declared null and void. **"The wages of sin is death. . . ."** (Romans 6:23)

This is a fundamental covenant of the universe and it cannot be altered. With these definitions in mind, let us consider five unilateral covenants that were put in place *before* Moses went up Mt. Sinai to see God.

### 1. Unilateral: "Do Not Eat of the Tree . . . ."

At the time of Creation, God commanded Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for if he did, he would be put to death. (Genesis 2:17) According to divine wisdom and

sovereign authority, God *imposed* this unilateral (one-sided) covenant upon Adam and Eve *before* sin began and it was nonnegotiable. A unilateral covenant is not a mutual covenant. When God imposed this covenant upon Adam, He spoke to Adam as the father of the human race.

Eve had not been created yet. In other words, this unilateral covenant rested upon Adam and all of Adam's offspring that were forthcoming. (In a sense, Eve is considered an offspring of Adam since she was made from Adam's rib.) When Eve was deceived and disobeyed this covenant she came under its condemnation even though God spoke the covenant to Adam. Adam, we know, willfully violated this covenant and God condemned him to death just like Eve, but Jesus spared their lives by stepping "in the way" of the executing angel when He offered to die in their place.

## 2. Unilateral: "I Will Put Enmity . . . ."

After Adam and Eve sinned, God announced another unilateral (one-sided) covenant to man. He declared that (a) He would put enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman, and (b) that "He," the Messiah, would someday crush the head of the serpent even though the serpent would strike His heel. (Genesis 3:14,15)

God imposed this covenant upon Himself. (Praise God!) Carefully notice that this covenant is not dependent upon the cooperation or agreement of man. This covenant declares the forthcoming actions of God. This covenant will be fulfilled when the serpent's head is finally crushed at the end of the one thousand years. (Revelation 20)

## 3. Unilateral: "Destroy Those Who Commit Murder . . . ."

Soon after the flood waters subsided, God declared a third unilateral covenant to Noah. "**And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."** (Genesis 9:5,6)

This covenant was unilaterally imposed upon Noah and his offspring (there were only eight people living at the time) and it declares man's accountability to God. Notice that death by execution in the event of murder is a unilateral decree. God did not negotiate with Noah. (Compare Genesis 9:5,6 and Numbers 35:33.) God left no wiggle room on this subject. God has imposed accountability on every beast and on every person and He declares that murderers must be executed.

## 4. Unilateral: "Never Again . . . ."

A fourth unilateral covenant was also given to Noah right after the flood. God declared, "**Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood . . . .**" (Genesis 9:9-17) Notice again that this covenant is one-sided. This covenant is binding upon God, not man, and God has faithfully honored this covenant for nearly 4,500 years!

## 5. The Fifth Unilateral Covenant

In Genesis 12 and 13, we find a compelling story of faith. God selected a man who was eager to follow Him and obey His commandments. Every time I review Abraham's life, I am impressed with his deep faith in God.

I am not surprised that God gave a unilateral covenant to Abraham. Neither am I surprised that Abraham's humanness got the best of him at times. Abraham died without seeing the things that God promised him, but Abraham will live again and he will see everything God promised to him. God promised a childless Abraham three things:

- (a) Through Abraham, all nations of the Earth would be blessed.
- (b) Abraham's descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the sky.
- (c) God would give Abraham and his heirs a specific section of land. (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:5)

The unilateral covenant God gave Abraham was not conditional nor was it based on mutual agreement. God honored Abraham's faith by granting a unilateral covenant to him! We find the same to be true for a few other people of faith in the Bible such as kings Hezekiah and David. God promised Hezekiah that he would live 15 more years and God promised David that his throne will remain forever. (1 Kings 2:4; 2 Kings 20:6; 2 Samuel 7:16)

The unilateral covenant God gave Abraham was implemented because of sin. As the first man of the human race, Adam was to be the Great "grandfather" of billions of sinless beings, but he forfeited that honor when he sinned. After the flood, God started over by honoring Abraham's faith, declaring him to be the Great "grandfather" of all who would live by faith. However, the unilateral covenant which God gave to Abraham still awaits completion. Notice this text: **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [that still stands]."** (Galatians 3:29, insertion mine.)

This verse, written about 30 years after Jesus died on the cross, confirms three things. First, God reckons all people who put their faith in Christ to be children of Abraham (heirs). Second, the time and setting of this verse confirm that the covenant given to Abraham was in effect *after* the cross! Third, this text indicates that anyone can become Abraham's heir through faith in Jesus. (Ephesians 2; Romans 2:28,29; 9:6,7) So, the unilateral covenant God gave Abraham still stands and as far as God is concerned, the offspring of Abraham are those people who put their faith in Christ!

Actually, faith in God has always been the core issue for salvation from the beginning of sin, but the biological offspring of Israel stubbornly refused to comprehend this point. (Jeremiah 3:20; Hebrews 4) Rebellion is the opposite of obedient faith and because of rebellion, God finally destroyed Jerusalem. But, Abraham will receive everything that God promised to him because *God redefined Israel at the cross!* The Israel of God are believers in Christ. (Romans 9 - 11; Ephesians 2; Galatians 3 and 4; James 1:1)

At the end of the 1,000 years, the unilateral covenant God gave Abraham will be fulfilled. At that time everyone will see that all nations were blessed through Abraham for the Savior of the world came through the lineage of Abraham! Second, at that time the saints will be a numberless multitude, numbering more than the stars in the sky. Last, when the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends from God out of Heaven, it will rest upon *the specific land* that Jesus promised to give to Abraham and his offspring! (Zechariah 14; Revelation 21)

Abraham well understood the curse of sin. He knew God's covenant included more than merely living in the land of Canaan. This is why the Bible says Abraham was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. (Hebrews 11:10) By faith, Abraham could see beyond the curse of sin. He was looking for a new Heaven and a new Earth. So, be assured that the unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham will be fulfilled because God *always* keeps His word.

## Five Unilateral Covenants

So far, we have examined five unilateral covenants. All of these covenants *predate* Mt. Sinai by hundreds of years. They are:

1. "Do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."
2. "I will put enmity between the serpent and the woman and will one day send a Savior."
3. "I will demand an accounting for each man's life. Murderers are to be put to death."
4. "I will not destroy the world again with a flood."
5. To Abraham:  
    "Through you, all nations will be blessed."  
    "I will make you the father of many nations."  
    "I will give you and your descendants this land."

## ***Bilateral: If You Will Be My People . . .***

Now , we turn our attention to the first bilateral or mutual covenant offered to man the day sin began. Although Genesis 3 does not say this in the clearest of terms, God offered a bilateral covenant (a two-sided agreement) to fallen man before He evicted them from the Garden of Eden. The silver lining of that dark day is this: God offered man a way back home if he wanted to return. It may take God 7,000 years to restore man to his garden home, but returning home is possible! This covenant can be summarized with words that God has used in various places in the Bible: "***If*** you will be *my* people and show faith in *me* by obeying *me*, I will be your Salvation." (See Exodus 6:7; 19:5,6; Jeremiah 7:23; Ezekiel 36:28; Revelation 21:7.)

Because bilateral covenants are performance based, notice the conditional element in this bilateral covenant. "*If* you will be my people . . ." It is apparent from Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve accepted the covenant. Jesus ratified this covenant by conducting the first animal sacrifice to demonstrate the price of sin. (Genesis 3:21) The killing of a flawless lamb was a shadow of the death of man's Creator. After slaying the lamb, I believe Jesus covered the nakedness of Adam and Eve with the skin of the lamb. This is a beautiful object lesson showing how God

covers our sins through the righteousness of Christ. (Romans 3:21,22)

This bilateral covenant, which was offered in perpetuity to Adam and Eve and their descendants, is one of the two covenants that was nailed to the cross. When Jesus died, the requirement for animal sacrifices – established in the Garden of Eden – came to an end. This bilateral covenant between God and man was fulfilled and a fulfilled covenant is a finished covenant. A new bilateral covenant was implemented at the cross which is based on the blood of Jesus.

## **Abel's Sacrifice**

Consider for a moment how the first bilateral covenant worked: Because the blood of Jesus would have to be spilled to bring about man's restoration, God mandated that animal blood be periodically shed until Christ's blood could be shed. (Genesis 4:4) Animal sacrifices served as a symbolic reminder of the price of salvation. We know this to be true because of Abel's "approved" offering and subsequent death. (Hebrews 11:4; 12:24; 1 John 3:12)

Although Cain could actually see into the Garden of Eden, he was so rebellious that he would not submit to the terms and conditions that God required to return there! He refused to offer the prerequisite animal sacrifice and God refused to honor Cain's offering of fruit. As Abel obediently presented the prerequisite sacrifices, God commended him and Cain went deeper and deeper into a jealous rage. No doubt Cain thought, "How can God continue to embarrass me, the firstborn of mankind, in front of this lesser (younger) brother?"

Finally, Cain vented his rage toward God and Abel by killing Abel. For 4,000 years, from Adam to the time of Christ, everyone wanting salvation had to submit to the requirements of the first bilateral covenant God gave to Adam and Eve. Noah obediently submitted to this requirement. (Genesis 8:20,21) Remember that everyone prior to the flood (with the exception of Enoch) who offered animal sacrifices went to their death without receiving what was promised. (Hebrews 11:39,40)

Understand that salvation is granted to no one on the basis of obedience. Obedience can be the result of faith or obedience can be the result of conformity. In other words, a person can offer animal sacrifices because it is "the religious thing to do," but this is not faith. Faith is most clearly revealed when obedience comes with a penalty. In Abel's case, it cost him his life.

## **Bilateral Covenant Expanded at Sinai**

The bilateral covenant which God offered to Adam and Eve was both perpetual (for 4,000 years) and temporary (until Jesus died). The slaying of animals was an act of faith for 40 centuries. The slaying of sacrificial animals, according to the requirements that God established, was an expression of faith. Faith renders obedience; presumption excuses transgression. At Mt. Sinai, God offered the descendants of Abraham a bilateral covenant.

This covenant was an enhanced and expanded version of the bilateral covenant that He had

offered to Adam and Eve. The covenant which God offered to the offspring of Abraham at Mt. Sinai was not entirely new nor was it entirely unique. Instead, it was a repetition and enlargement of certain issues that had been extended to the human race through Adam and Eve.

The bilateral covenant offered to Israel included certain new features for Israel (such as the privilege of being a kingdom of priests to God), but it remained a conditional two-sided covenant, “If you will be my people, then I will be your God.” (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28-30)

## Dispensationalism

A misunderstanding of God’s covenants has led to the rise of a concept called dispensationalism. Proponents of dispensationalism teach that salvation is offered to man in different ways at different times. Dispensationalists have a point, but their balance and message is wrong. It is true that God has required people at different times to do different things. For example, prior to the death of Jesus, all who chose to accept the terms of the original bilateral covenant were required to offer animal sacrifices – from Adam down to the time of Christ. But, the offering of animal sacrifices did not provide salvation (Hebrews 10:4) nor do sacrificial animals change the means to salvation. (Ephesians 2:8,9) Faith in God has always been the prerequisite for salvation. Review the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11 and notice: “By faith Abel . . .”; “By faith Enoch . . .”; “By faith Noah . . .”; “By faith Abraham . . .”; “By faith Moses . . .” Dispensationalism teaches that God starts over from time to time by declaring a covenant obsolete and creating a new one. Again, dispensationalists have a point but their emphasis is wrong. As we shall see, it is true that God can declare a covenant void and create a new covenant. The problem with dispensationalism; however, is that it does not properly define the covenants that God created and discarded!

## Basic Problem

The following comments may appear to be entirely out of context in this study on God’s covenants. However, I would like to address the fundamental reason for dispensationalism at this point. Protestants are on the horns of a dilemma. They have a thorny problem with the fourth commandment that will not go away. The fourth commandment states: **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”** (Exodus 20:8-11)

If Protestants honored this commandment as they do the other nine, the behavior of millions of Christians would be vastly different each weekend. Saturday is God’s holy day, the seventh day of the week. Sunday is the first day of the week. The Lord’s Day (Mark 2:27,28) was changed from Saturday to Sunday by the church of Rome.

This change came about because of two factors. First, Saturday was the Sabbath of the Jews and early Christians in Rome did not want any association with those “repugnant” Jews, especially after Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. (The theological impact of anti-Semitism upon early Christianity was mentioned in the previous chapter.) Second, about 100 years before Christianity arrived in Rome, the ancient pagan religion of Mithraism arrived in Rome and it quickly gained a very large following. Later on, the emperor Commodus (A.D. 180-192) even made Mithraism an imperial cult.

Mithraism centers around the worship of the sun-god, Mithra, whose day of worship is Sunday, the day of the Sun. Priests of Mithraism were called “father” and they promoted a high moral code of conduct. In fact, the similarities between Mithraism and Christianity were so striking that Tertullian (A.D. 160-225) believed the devil had created a deliberate parallel of Christianity even before Christianity began. Converts from Mithraism to Christianity brought “the observance of Sunday” with them into Rome’s version of Christianity.

Remember, early Christians in Rome wanted to distance themselves from the hated Jews, and since Sunday worship was commonly practiced in Rome, why not worship Jesus on Sunday? The first Sunday keepers in Rome did not use a command from Scripture to support this transition, but they did attempt to justify their actions. About A.D. 150 Justin Martyr wrote:

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. (Justin Martyr, *First Apology of Justin Martyr, Ante-Nicean Christian Library*, (Boston 1887) p. 187 Chap. 67)

Christian groups differed in theology and practice because of distance, the lack of communication, regional religious baggage and anti-Semitism. Sunday observance was a unique feature that began in Rome and spread to Alexandria. About the turn of the fourth century, Socrates, a church leader of that time observed:

Such is the difference in the churches on the subject of fasts. Nor is there less variation in regard to religious assemblies. For although almost all churches through the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Rome and Alexandria have ceased to do this. (Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chap. 22, *Ante-Nicean Christian Library*, Vol II, (Boston, 1887 p. 132)

These facts are presented because the Catholic Church does not historically defend the change from Sabbath to Sunday on the basis of Scripture, but on the basis of church authority. After Constantine came to power, the sacredness of Sunday for Christians was affirmed by law in A.D. 321. Eusebius, the trusted confidant and advisor to Constantine, defended this action saying:

And all things whatsoever that it was the duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord’s Day, as more appropriately belong to it, because it has a precedence and is first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath. All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord’s Day. (Eusebius’s *Commentary on the*

Psalms 92, quoted in Coxe's Sabbath literature, Vol I, p. 361, insertions mine.)

These references are presented because Protestants separated from Catholicism because of conflict between Bible truth and church authority. Protestants claim there is no authority on matters of faith and duty other than that what is found in Scripture. Catholics claim that authority is found in either the inerrant declarations of the pope or decisions reached by scholars and church leaders. So, the only way Protestants have found to void the fourth commandment which mandates the observance of Saturday as a holy day is to nail all Ten Commandments to the cross.

This is the primary objective and function of dispensationalism. The scheme is elaborate and complex but the net effect is that millions of Christians have been misled into believing that the Sabbath commandment was nailed to the cross. However, if you ask most Christians about murder, adultery, stealing, etc., they will return to the Ten Commandments for authority to show that these behaviors are wrong.

This is a great mystery. Somehow, the Ten Commandments were made void at the cross only to have nine commandments immediately reinstated! This doctrine is one of the harmful contributions of dispensationalism to Protestantism.

## The Ten Commandments Are Called a Covenant

There is sufficient evidence in the Bible to conclude that the Ten Commandments are a unilateral covenant which God has imposed on all mankind for the duration of sin. Let us examine the evidence.

The Ten Commandments are called "the covenant" in the Bible. **"Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments."** (Exodus 34:28)

The Israelites kept the two tablets of stone in a golden box that was called, "the ark of *the covenant*." The Ten Commandments are not ten suggestions and contrary to what dispensationalists teach, they are not included in God's bilateral covenant with Israel. They are ten laws that were unilaterally imposed upon all of mankind by divine authority when sin began! We know that obeying the Ten Commandments will not bring salvation. They are not a shadow of good "things to come." They are not ceremonial. They say nothing about sacrifices, rituals or redemption.

Instead, they are ten profound commandments from man's Creator telling people on Earth how to live. The first four commandments define man's relationship to God. The last six define man's relationship to man. Even though God deposited them with Israel as trustees of His grace, He spoke them and wrote them down for the benefit of all mankind. There is nothing *Jewish* in the Ten Commandments.

Consider this thought question: When you study the *New Testament*, do you get the impression

that obeying the Ten Commandments is harmful? If so, which commandment is harmful to Christian growth and development? Do you find any behavior forbidden in the Ten Commandments that is *permitted or sanctioned* in the New Testament? If you answer yes to either question, please send the Bible text to me.

In my study of the Bible, I have found that there is only one new commandment in the whole New Testament. Jesus said, **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** (John 13:34,35) Have you wondered why Jesus calls this a new command? What makes this commandment new and different from anything said before in the Old Testament?

The answer is that divine love was demonstrated through the humanity of Jesus. Jesus gave man a new example of what it means to love one another. He gave His life for us, and we should love one another enough to do the same. Because we have a living example to follow, a model of perfection, we have one new command, we are to “love one another as Jesus has loved us.”

## The Ten Commandments Are a Unilateral Covenant

I am convinced the Ten Commandments are a unilateral covenant that God revealed to man *at the fall*. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve were in perfect harmony with God’s will. After all, they were created in His image. A written copy of the Ten Commandments was not necessary *before* sin occurred because Adam and Eve had the laws of God written in their hearts. Stealing or lying were foreign to Adam and Eve before the fall. We know from our study of the sealing in Chapter 6 that God will remove the carnal nature and write His laws in our hearts and minds as He originally wrote them in the hearts of Adam and Eve. (Hebrews 8:10-13)

Although the Bible does not specifically mention the Ten Commandments prior to Mt. Sinai, this silence does not eliminate the presence or knowledge of God’s law as dispensationalists claim. Moses says very little in Genesis about the extent of man’s knowledge as it pertains to God’s laws. But, Moses does explain how sin began and that God’s patience with sin and rebellion reached its limit during the time of Noah. (Genesis 6:5,6) The silence of Moses does not prove the absence of the Ten Commandments.

Moses says nothing about adultery prior to the flood. Does this mean adultery did not occur prior to the flood? No! It is inconceivable that God would wait 2,500 years after sin began to give humanity a basic understanding of right and wrong at Mt. Sinai. Did it suddenly become wrong to worship idols, profane God’s name, violate His holy Sabbath, kill, steal, lie and commit adultery at Mt. Sinai?

No! If so, were these sins unique to the Jews only? No! From the beginning, murder was a sinful act and Lucifer as well as Cain knew it. (John 8:44; 1 John 3:12) It was also a sin to steal, to commit adultery, to profane God’s name, and to violate God’s holy Sabbath day long before events at Mt. Sinai took place.

A knowledge of God's law existed prior to Mt. Sinai. Noah faithfully reminded the antediluvians about God's laws. Peter says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness for 120 years! (2 Peter 2:5) If there were no commandments defining sin and rebellion prior to the flood, righteousness and wickedness could not be defined. Paul argues, where there is no law, there is no sin. (Romans 4:15)

If there is no law establishing a speed limit, there can be no speeding! The wholesale destruction of the world by a flood convinces me that millions of men and women had a generous opportunity to know God's will (His laws), but they rejected it. From Genesis to Revelation, rebellion is the only justification that God ever uses to destroy anyone! If humanity was almost obliterated from the face of Earth because every thought was "only evil continually," then humanity must have knowingly chosen a course of rebellion. (Genesis 6:5 [KJV]; 2 Peter 3)

This is why Jesus compares the end of the age with days of Noah. When men and women refuse to walk according to the laws of the Almighty, He has no other option but total destruction. (Matthew 24:37)

Consider the words of Paul: **"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one [disobedient] man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all [have] sinned – for before the [Mosaic] law was given [at Mt. Sinai], sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no [knowledge of] law. Nevertheless, death reigned [because it is mandatory that sinners die] from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a [known] command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come."** (Romans 5:12-14, insertions mine.)

Some people offer these three verses to prove that there was "no law" before God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. If there was no law, how could God condemn Adam or the antediluvians? What were they guilty of? They could not have been declared lawless if there was no law. We must be careful to understand what Paul is actually writing in Romans 5. Paul is making the point in Romans 5:12-14 that we cannot escape the consequences of sin.

Even if a man does not know that he is a sinner, even if he knows nothing about God's law, death still reigns over him because the law of God demands death for all sinners. Paul is clear that before the law was given at Mt. Sinai, sin was in the world. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of God's law. (Romans 4:15; 1 John 3:4)

Paul is making the point that God's law was present from Adam to Moses, but man's knowledge of God's law was limited in scope compared to what was known about sin after Mt. Sinai. Because man's knowledge was limited to the Ten Commandments, God overlooked certain sins because man had no knowledge. God did not destroy the antediluvians for their sinful ignorance. Instead, he sent "a preacher of righteousness" who spoke plainly about the authority and presence of God's law and its penalty.

God destroyed the antediluvians because they willfully rejected His laws. God's Ten Commandments existed prior to the flood. In fact, the holiness of God's Sabbath is declared in

## Genesis 2!

God reduced “oral law” to written form at the time of Mt. Sinai. The Ten Commandments existed in oral form from the beginning. Adam and Eve instinctively knew the contents of the Ten Commandments for these laws were written in their minds and hearts! They knew it was wrong to lie or steal because their lives were in complete harmony with God’s character. They knew of the holiness of the Sabbath because it was their first full day of life with their Creator. (Genesis 2:1-3)

But the day sin entered their souls, rebellion clouded their hearts and darkened their minds. The offspring of Adam and Eve became even more ignorant of God. This is why eventually, God wrote the law on tablets of stone and God required the reading of law every sabbatical year to make sure that each generation heard “the Word” with their own ears. (Deuteronomy 31:10,11)

### **Unilateral in Content**

It makes no sense to include the Ten Commandments with the Mosaic covenant because the stipulations given in the Ten Commandments are universal and eternal. No born again Christian will say that worshiping other gods, committing adultery, murder, stealing and using God’s name in vain was permissible *before* Mt. Sinai or *after* the death of Jesus. Therefore, scholars who abolish the Ten Commandments with the Mosaic covenant have to restore nine of the Ten Commandments by proposing these commandments are mentioned in the New Testament and stating that the Sabbath commandment is not.

This is foolish reasoning. The authority of the Sabbath commandment is affirmed throughout the New Testament. The underlying purpose for this dispensational maneuver is to eliminate the obligation of the fourth commandment. Christians do not want to observe the seventh day Sabbath of the Jews – actually though, it is the seventh day Sabbath of man’s Creator, Jesus Christ.

Thus far, we have examined six unilateral covenants and one bilateral covenant:

### **Unilateral**

1. “Do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.”
2. “I will put enmity between the serpent and the woman and will one day send a Savior.”
3. “I will demand an accounting for each man’s life. Murderers are to be put to death.”
4. “I will not destroy the world again with a flood.”
5. To Abraham:
  - “Through you, all nations will be blessed.”
  - “I will make you the father of many nations.”
  - “I will give you and your descendants this land.”

### **Bilateral**

## 1. To Adam and Eve: “If you will be my people, I will be your God.”

We now turn our attention to the bilateral covenant offered to Israel. To understand the origin of this covenant, we must start with a visit between Jesus and Abraham.

### A Bilateral Covenant for Abraham’s Offspring

A few years after declaring His unilateral covenant to Abraham, Jesus visited again with Abraham and told him that He was going to offer a special covenant to his descendants after 400 years passed. This covenant would be a bilateral covenant, that is, based upon mutual agreement. (Genesis 15) There is a sharp distinction between the *unilateral* covenant given to Abraham and the *bilateral* covenant that would be offered to Abraham’s descendants 400 years later. God intended to make Abraham’s biological descendants a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. (Exodus 19:6)

In other words, because of God’s great love for Abraham, God wanted to exalt Abraham’s offspring as “His finest sons” on Earth. The sons of Abraham would stand between God and the nations of Earth as priests, trustees of His grace. God intended the “Abrahamites” would be men of faith like their father. He wanted them to love Him with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves – *just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did!* God wanted the Israelites to be a shining light to the Gentile nations in darkness.

He wanted Israel to love the people of other nations and hate their sin. God wanted Israel to evangelize the world with a testimony about His love and gather a great harvest of souls for His coming kingdom. (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47) Israel was to be a nation of “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” a literal “Salvation Army,” a “World-wide Church of God.”

At the time of this second visit, Abraham still had no offspring. So, Jesus did something that was customary in ancient times. He made an oath to Abraham assuring him that He would offer a bilateral covenant to his descendants. This oath was ratified by Jesus when He walked through animal parts that Abraham laid upon the ground. (See Genesis 15, also Jeremiah 34:19,20 on this practice.)

This event served as a witness to the oath that Jesus made to Abraham. In other words, Abraham killed the necessary animals for this oath and Jesus passed through the animal parts signifying that He would offer His covenant to descendants of Abraham who were not yet present on Earth.

Although Abraham knew he would not live long enough to see God’s plans fulfilled, Abraham was satisfied that God would keep vigil and honor His oath. (Exodus 12:42) By requiring blood at the declaration of this oath, Jesus signified to Abraham that He, the Great I AM, an eternal member of the Godhead of the Universe, would keep His covenant with Abraham’s offspring upon pain of death.

## Ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant

Although Jesus gave Abraham an oath that He would offer a bilateral covenant with his offspring, the covenant with the heirs was not ratified (mutually agreed upon) for more than 400 years. (Exodus 12:41; Hebrews 9:18-21) In fact, the bilateral covenant was not ratified until *after* God gave all of the details to Moses on Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 24:1-8)

Remember, a bilateral covenant is two-sided; based on performance. Unlike a unilateral covenant, both parties must agree and both parties must be faithful to the terms and conditions set forth in a bilateral covenant. So, when the time came to fulfill the oath that God had promised to Abraham, God directed Moses to come up the mountain and meet with Him. Moses was required to write down all the terms and conditions of a bilateral covenant. This covenant would be both perpetual (until Messiah appeared on Earth) and temporary (until Messiah should die for mankind).

This covenant bound God and the seed of Abraham together for more than fourteen hundred years. When Moses had completed this task, he went down the mountain and read the words of this covenant to all of the people. Notice how the story unfolds in the Bible:

**“Then he [Jesus] said to Moses, ‘Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.’ When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, *‘Everything the Lord has said we will do.’* Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, *‘We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.’* Moses then *took the blood, sprinkled it on the people* and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’ ” (Exodus 24:1-8, insertion and italics mine.)**

The bilateral covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham was ratified with the sprinkling of blood. After hearing the terms and conditions of the covenant, the people voiced their agreement twice. Since third party witnesses were not present, Moses stacked twelve huge stones (one for each tribe) in a pile as a witness to this event, signifying Israel’s corporate agreement. The shedding of blood put this covenant into effect. (See Hebrews 9:18-22.)

The significance of the blood is very important. A blood covenant in ancient times was a life or death issue for both parties. For God, the only way out of this covenant was through His own death. For Israel, the only way out was their destruction. (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) If one party proved to be unfaithful, then the faithful partner had the right to demand the blood (death) of the unfaithful party.

## Sunset Clause

The bilateral covenant (or Mosaic covenant) between God and Abraham's offspring was temporary from its inception. It had a sunset clause in it. (Matthew 26:28; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:15-10:4) Jesus offered a covenant to the descendants of Abraham because He needed a special job done. Basically, He needed a group of informed people to reveal what He was all about to an uninformed world. (Acts 13:47; 26:22,23)

As with any covenant, the special covenant that Jesus offered Israel contained a number of laws. The Mosaic covenant included laws regarding food (clean and unclean), tithing, animal sacrifices, purification ceremonies, the observance of annual feast days, new moon celebrations, the observance of sabbatical years, circumcision, the priesthood of Aaron, and many civil laws. All of these laws served as illustrations of Jesus as King and High Priest, His coming kingdom and shadows of His death and ministry.

When "The Light of the World" came to Earth, the shadows expired. (Colossians 2; Galatians 3) After the covenant between Israel and God was nailed to the cross, all believers in Christ stand before God as one flesh.

## Israel's Prophetic Destiny

Because of dispensational theology, many Christians disagree with the previous paragraph. Christians widely believe that God's covenant promises given to ancient Israel must last forever. This doctrine is affirmed by many popular end-time scenarios promoted by Christians. But, all of the terms and conditions put forth in the Mosaic covenant *were conditional*. A bilateral covenant is based on good faith and the performance of the parties involved.

It is a distortion of Scripture to teach that God is still obligated to fulfill promises He gave to ancient Israel during a future 70th week. God did offer many promises to Israel, but they were based on terms and conditions. **If** Israel had "kept faith" with the Lord, loved Him wholeheartedly, and walked according to His commandments and statutes, **then** God would have fulfilled all of His promises. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Ezekiel 20) "If" is the key word on this topic because God *is not* obligated to keep a mutual covenant with any party that persists in rebellion. (See Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28, 31:16-32:52; Romans 9-11; Galatians 4.)

Bible history underscores God's behavior regarding this fact repeatedly. For example, "the Israel" who experienced a jubilant Exodus from Egypt entered into a covenant with God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:4-8), but they all perished in the wilderness because of rebellion (except Joshua and Caleb). (Psalms 95:10,11; Hebrews 3:7-4:1) God's plan for leading Israel into the Promised Land was ultimately fulfilled, but not for *those people* to whom the opportunity was first given! (Hebrews 3:16-19)

Furthermore, honest Bible students cannot overlook God's subsequent actions during 1,500 years of Jewish history. Israel rebelled and God sent the king of Assyria to destroy the northern ten tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. Then, in 586 B.C., God sent King Nebuchadnezzar to finally destroy Jerusalem and the two remaining southern tribes.

## A Fulfilled Covenant is a Finished Covenant

At the cross, the covenant between God and Israel was declared void. Jesus declared the bilateral covenant between God and Israel, with all its commandments and regulations, null and void. Consequently, God abandoned the nation of Israel because of their persistent unfaithfulness. This is why Jesus pronounced this final benediction upon Israel, **“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”** (Matthew 23:38, [KJV])

What did He mean with these solemn words? The Jews regarded the temple at Jerusalem as God’s dwelling place. They believed they were (a) the apple of God’s eye, and (b) safe from the threat of any nation. (Deuteronomy 28; Jeremiah 7:4; Luke 21:5, 6) Israel did have an opportunity to be the apple of God’s eye, but they forfeited this great opportunity by rebellion. They could have been safe from the threat of other nations, but they chose to rebel. “The Great I Am” came and lived in their midst, but they rejected Him.

So, what did Jesus mean when He said, “Your house is left unto you desolate?” He meant that “never again” would His Presence enter that temple. Their house of worship (the centerpiece of their religion) was declared an empty hollow building. A desolate house is an empty house and the Shekinah would never return to it. John says, **“He came unto His own and His own received Him not.”** (John 1:11, [KJV]) In A.D. 70, Jesus sent the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem. He fulfilled the terms and conditions set forth in the blood covenant through His death on the cross. Not only did He shed His blood to fulfill the covenant, He demanded their blood for unfaithfulness. (See Deuteronomy 28:44,45 and Daniel 9:26,27)

When the Roman army burned Jerusalem, no two stones of the temple were left standing together. (Matthew 24:2) The Romans pulled the temple stone apart looking for the gold that melted in the great calamity. Jesus decreed an end to the temple that bore His Name and contrary to what many Christians believe, it will not be built again. To ensure His decree remains perpetual, Jesus moved the Moslems to build the Dome of the Rock on that site.

## Two Covenants Fulfilled

The blood Jesus shed at Calvary *fulfilled* the unilateral covenant given to Adam and Eve, as well as the bilateral covenant between God and the nation of Israel. A fulfilled covenant is a *finished* covenant. The animal offerings required under the blood covenant pointed forward to Jesus’ death. When He died, the covenant ended because Jesus’ blood had been shed – the shadow was replaced with reality! (Colossians 2:17) God designed the blood covenant (the Mosaic covenant) from the beginning to be a “tutor” or schoolmaster to explain the wonderful dimensions of the Plan of Salvation.

If Israel had properly understood the object lessons of salvation, it would have had an endless supply of wonderful themes to share with the whole world. (Galatians 3:24-26, [KJV]) Incidentally, the Mosaic covenant was not designed as something that belonged exclusively to Israel. While they were the trustees of salvation and the first in line to benefit from it, God promised to bless *all nations* through Abraham by allowing Gentiles to partake of the wonderful provisions of this

covenant. (See Isaiah 2 and 56.) This is why God called Abraham the father of *many* nations! (Genesis 17:4)

## The New Covenant in the New Testament

Because the bilateral covenant with Adam and Eve and the Mosaic covenant were coming to an end, Jesus initiated a new covenant just before His death. Luke writes, **“In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’ ”** (Luke 22:20)

When Jesus said to His disciples, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,”** He initiated a new bilateral covenant, a better covenant than what He had offered to Israel at Mt. Sinai. (2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 7:22; 9:15) A new blood covenant became necessary because the Kingdom of God could not be established as originally planned. Israel had rejected God for the last time. Consequently, God opened the door of opportunity to the Gentiles. (Luke 21:24) “Whosoever will,” let him come and be my people. (John 3:16; Revelation 22:17)

Jesus offered a new bilateral covenant to everyone who would believe He was the Messiah. *There are two essential differences between the new covenant based on Christ’s blood and the old covenants based on animal blood:* First, the old covenant required the use of teaching aides ( such as sacrificial lambs, ceremonies, etc.), whereas the new covenant is based on a study of the life of Christ. Second, God gave the old covenant to the biological offspring of Abraham whereas He extends the new covenant to anyone in any nation or race who puts his or her faith in Jesus! In both covenants, the means to salvation is the same, namely, obedient submission to the will of God – an experience known as “living by faith.”

God entered into the old covenant with a nation of people who were carnal and rebellious from the start. God enters into the new covenant with people of all nations who are willing to be “born again.” Israel was initially awed into submission at the display of His glory and power at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19; Galatians 4:24,25), but their hearts remained unconverted. Bible history faithfully records their failures beginning with the golden calf at the base of the Mt. Sinai! In every case, Israel’s hard heart led to failure. (Ezekiel 2,3) The Israel that entered into the Mosaic covenant at Mt. Sinai was the Israel that died in the desert because of rebellion. (Hebrews 3:16)

## No Anti-Semitism

I am not bashing the Jews for their failures. Instead, I am reporting the contents of Scripture. I am very confident that if God had chosen any other race of people, the same results would have occurred. The story would be the same, only the names would change. The story of Israel is the story of human nature. Israel’s rebellion at the corporate level is no different from all nations who have come and gone. Israel’s rebellion at the individual level is no different from our personal rebellion against God. The problem with Israel and the problem with all nations is the power of sin!

## A New Covenant

Unlike the old covenant, the new covenant exists only between God and a self-selecting group of people who receive Jesus as their Savior. No longer does God favor one nation as trustees of the Plan of Salvation. Both the old and new covenants are similar in one way; both are based on faith. This faith means a complete surrender to God's will. However, the second covenant is based on the life and death of Jesus – a much better blood covenant than that of animals. (Hebrews 8:6; Romans 5:10)

His offer of salvation is extended to everyone, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile, on the basis of spiritual rebirth and regeneration. (John 3:3- 16; Romans 8: 3,4; 11:19-23 ) Paul says the new covenant is available to the Jew first, then the Gentile. He makes this distinction because He thought the Jews would be quick to grasp the significance of this better covenant. The Jews were much better acquainted with God's ways. Paul knew the Gentiles would have to start from the beginning to understand the big picture.

The bottom line for Jew and Gentile though, is the same. Instead of entering into a blood covenant with a nation of carnal-hearted people who would not understand God nor live according to His ways, God now offers a new covenant to a self-selecting group of people. These are the people who will receive Jesus as Lord and Master and choose to live by faith in Him. Anyone who wants salvation on God's terms can have it! This is good news!

## What Obligations Carry Over?

People often ask me if Christians are under any obligations stemming from the Mosaic covenant – including tithing, abstaining from unclean foods, the observance of feast days, etc. My response in general, and about feast days in particular, is this: *How can the specifications regarding the feast days be satisfied without doing the things required on the feast days?* In other words, how can a person observe Passover and not kill the paschal lamb? I have heard the response that observing the *date* of Passover is not to be confused with the Mosaic ceremonies required at Passover. I disagree.

This is similar to the idea of observing Sunday by doing the things required on Sabbath. In the Mosaic covenant, the sacrificial ceremony and the appointed time to observe the feast were inseparable parts of the package. The Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles were services conducted under the auspices of the Aaronic priesthood. Ever since the cross, we do not live under the laws of that priesthood.

Those laws have been declared null and void. Our High Priest comes from the tribe of Judah, not Levi! Jesus does not preside over any of the Aaronic feasts. This would be illegal. Paul makes it very clear in Hebrews 7 that with a change in the priesthood, also comes a change of law (a different bilateral covenant). Paul says that since the descendants of Aaron can no longer be high priests, Levitical laws (including requirements such as tithing) are no longer valid. (See Hebrews 7.) Therefore, we are no longer *obligated* to keep any of the requirements of the

Mosaic covenant.

In Paul's day, many of the Jewish believers could not let go of their Mosaic baggage. They diligently tried to enforce feast observances on new Gentile converts in Galatia. Paul wrote a strong denunciation to the Gentiles who were following in the footsteps of Jewish converts saying, **"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."** (Galatians 4:8-11)

To underscore the transition from the Mosaic covenant to the "new covenant with Jesus," Paul used the illustration of tithing (verses 5-10). He wrote, **"For when there is a change of the priesthood, *there must also be a change of the law.* He [Jesus] of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests."** (Hebrews 7:12-14, emphasis mine.)

The significance of Paul's statement is profound. How could the Levites demand tithe when the law that gave them authority to collect the tithe has been abolished? How could the old order under the animal blood covenant be intact if Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, is now our High Priest?

Before you jump to the conclusion that God wants us to keep *all* of our money for personal use, we need to consider the next point. Even though the Levitical code and its commands have been made null and void, there is divine wisdom and great beauty in the Mosaic covenant which God presented through Moses at Mt. Sinai. God did not offer Israel a shabby covenant. It is one of the most interesting and valuable illustrations of the ministry of Jesus that has ever existed.

If Israel had *combined* the Mosaic covenant with faith in God, they would have received more blessings than they could count! (Malachi 3:10,11) The world would have been astounded by the nation of Israel, for it would have been the head, and not the tail! Instead of anti-Semitism, there would have been pro-Semitism! (Deuteronomy 28:13) Remember, it is God's desire that we mature in the faith experience. God wants carnal, self-centered people (the human race) to have a change of heart. He wants us to step out in faith and obey Him. I

In this light, the Ten Commandments represent a starting place for spiritual growth. The content of the Ten Commandments is simple and direct. The fourth commandment is a testing commandment. To the carnal mind, the Sabbath is a big waste of time. To the spiritual mind, it represents a wonderful rest. It all depends on our perspective of God and our attitude toward His laws. The Sabbath commandment challenges our faith by telling us to "let go and let God" every seventh day.

It challenges us to stand still and see God's salvation. "The Sabbath was made for man," but the devil has led the people of the world to consider it with contempt by making it appear to be

Jewish or legalistic. It is interesting that the fourth commandment is the *only* commandment of the ten that requires us to do nothing! To honor God, we just have to rest at the right time each week.

God's standard of righteousness is not less today than it was yesterday. God has not changed nor have the Ten Commandments been made void. What has changed is God's approach. Israel's example has proven that righteous laws do not make people righteous. Rather, people become righteous when they inwardly submit to God's Word and obediently follow the leading of the Spirit. ( John 14:16,17; Hebrews 12:14) Under the current "new covenant" that Jesus established, God has not imposed the rules and obligations of the Levitical covenant. However, the requirements for faith and the struggle to do God's will *re mains the same*. This suggests to me that God certainly expects a high level of character development from all who claim to be Christian!

Some people claim that tithing is still obligatory even though they agree the Levitical covenant was nailed to the cross. My response is this: Where does the obligation of tithing originate? Is it through law? No! Abraham tithed long before there was a Levitical requirement to do so. Furthermore, there is no record that God commanded Abraham or anyone else prior to the Mosaic covenant to tithe. Abraham tithed because he came to the place in his personal experience with God where he realized that everything he owned was a gift from God. So, through faith, Abraham voluntarily gave 10 percent of his income to God in recognition of God's ownership of everything that he had. He acted, not according to law, but according to the Spirit. In fact, when a person obeys the Spirit, he or she will conform to God's law because that law is written in the heart.

## Holy Spirit Conviction

As the Holy Spirit convicts us of God's will and truth, we must obediently follow just like Abraham. If the Holy Spirit convicts you to tithe, then follow the Spirit's leading. You will be blessed – not because of the money you gave – but for the faith you exercised. God's eternal wisdom and limitless love is wonderfully illustrated in the Mosaic covenant that He made with ancient Israel. Many Christians want nothing to do with the Old Testament for fear they will lose their freedom. This is not true.

God gave Israel many principles that are incredibly brilliant and few people appreciate the wisdom which God has revealed. Surely, by reviewing the laws God gave to Moses, we can learn much about the principles of life, as well as the ways and blessings of God. The key is to allow the Spirit to lead you into a deeper understanding and application of God's principles in your life and you will be richly blessed. God's wisdom is always beneficial to His creatures.

One note of caution regarding the freedom that God grants under the new "believers covenant." God gives us the freedom to follow a Spirit-led conscience. He gave **no one** the authority to impose their convictions upon you or condemn you because you disagree with them. (Romans 14) The exception to this is promiscuous or immoral behavior and its destructive effect within the corporate body of Christ. In such situations, the body of Christ is required to

pass judgment because of the harmful impact that sexual misconduct produces. (See 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.)

Remember, in matters of diet, dress, culture and lifestyle, some people may not agree or have the same level of conviction you may have in these areas. (Romans 14:1-10) The Holy Spirit knows our heart and tests each of us in different ways and at different times. Each person matures spiritually at their own rate and we are on different rungs of the spiritual ladder. Some people are babes in the Lord, while some may have had ten years of spiritual maturity. (Unfortunately, some are still babes, even in their tenth year!)

However, remember this truth. Although Israel voluntarily entered into the Mosaic covenant, the results were a dismal failure because they were unwilling to surrender their hearts to the Holy Spirit. When the apostles finally understood that the Mosaic covenant had been nailed to the cross, their joy knew no bounds. (Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6) At last, Paul concluded, everything is permissible, even if it is not beneficial. (1 Corinthians 6:12) The disciples were free from the guilt and condemnation of the Pharisees! Free to listen to God's Spirit!

They were free to grow up in Christ rather than being watched and criticized by people who had a legalistic mentality. They were free to respond to God out of love, receiving Christ's righteousness that satisfied God's requirements for man's salvation. The truth will set you free, but it may also set you free from your family, friends, church and possibly, your job. Remember the illustration about Benjamin at the beginning of this chapter?

It is imperative that we submit to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Failure to surrender can lead to the unpardonable sin. (Matthew 12:31) Paul wrote, **"If we *deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*"** (Hebrews 10:26,27, emphasis mine.)

In fact, failure to surrender will ultimately cause us to rebel against God! Do not forget, when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, He speaks with the authority of God. To refuse Him is to refuse God.

## One Last Covenant

Thus far, we have examined six unilateral and three bilateral covenants:

### Unilateral

1. "Do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."
2. "I will put enmity between the serpent and the woman and will one day send a Savior."
3. "I will demand an accounting for each man's life. Murderers are to be put to death."
4. "I will not destroy the world again with a flood."
5. To Abraham:  
"Through you, all nations will be blessed."  
"I will make you the father of many nations."

“I will give you and your descendants this land.”

## Bilateral

1. “If you will be my people, I will be your God.”
2. “If you will be my people, you will be a kingdom and nation of priests . . . .”
3. New: “This is the new covenant in my blood . . . .”

For reasons stated earlier in this chapter, the first two bilateral covenants were nailed to the cross. The good news is that a time is coming when all of these covenants will be made null and void as well! At the end of sin, Jesus is going to declare one final unilateral covenant. Paul knew it was coming. Notice, “**‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. *No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’* By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.**” (Hebrews 8:10-13, italics mine.)

When this covenant is put into effect, there will have been a total of seven unilateral and three bilateral covenants. The seventh unilateral covenant will sustain the redeemed throughout eternity. Notice how this covenant is stated near the close of Revelation: “**He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’**” (Revelation 21:6,7)

This is the final covenant. It brings all others to an end. I long to hear these words with my own ears!

## Summary

I hope this study has brought you a new appreciation for what was nailed to the cross. In a sentence we can say the bilateral covenant given to Adam and Eve and the Mosaic system was nailed to the cross. The Levitical laws are part of a covenant that was temporary and the authority given to the descendants of Aaron, the high priests, has been made null and void. Ever since the death of Jesus on the cross, we have the privilege of accepting a covenant based on the blood of Jesus, our High Priest, who sits at the right hand of the Father.

The Ten Commandments remain intact; they are a unilateral covenant. They were not nailed to the cross. The Ten Commandments are eternal, timeless and universal. Even if we do not understand everything about God’s covenants, we can know we are on the right track if we can say to Jesus, “**I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.**” (Psalm 40:8)

This is an attitude that pleases God, because the last unilateral covenant given in the Bible

contains this promise: **“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”** (Hebrews 8:10)