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Law, Covenants and the Sabbath

The Covenants

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Introduction

This module is Part 3 in the Law, Covenants and Sabbath series. In it we will look at the biblical tension concerning God's law/covenants? Why does Scripture describe the same law/covenants on one hand as 'for our good,' 'perfect,' 'pure,' 'ordained for life,' and yet on the other hand as 'the power of sin,' 'the ministration of death,' 'a curse,' 'slavery,' etc. We will endeavour to solve this tension biblically.

We will also explore what the New Covenant is and how it differs from the Old. Then we'll get stuck into some apparently 'difficult' passages that have been misquoted concerning the covenants.

This study is very enriching and will help you see God's overarching plan for mankind. Take time to look up the verses and mark your Bible.

Part 3: Covenants[A]

How Most Christians Wrongly View the Covenants Today

- Gen. 15:6, 18 - Abrahamic covenant was one of faith ('he believed in the Lord' – vs. 6) and of grace (Abraham did not have to do anything)
- Deut 4:12-13; 5:2-3 - The covenant at Sinai/Horeb, namely, the Ten Commandments, the "old covenant," was different in kind from the covenant with Abraham in that it was a law covenant, rather than one based on faith. The Mosaic covenant's 613 laws engendered a life of bondage.
- Heb. 8:7-9, 13 - The new covenant is different in kind from the one at Sinai in that it returns to a faith-based experience, rather than a law-based one. It releases its adherents from bondage to the old law covenant of Ten Commandments, and sets them free to live in the glorious liberty of life in the Spirit. The 613 laws of the Mosaic covenant have been reduced in the New Testament to one law, namely love, and a few ethical commands or examples to show how love works.

Some other texts used to in argument against the Ten Commandments: Rom 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:4-16; Gal. 3:22-25; 4:21-5:1; Heb. 8:7-13. These will be explored and explained below.

Let's First Look at the Biblical Tension Regarding God's Law/Covenant

God's Law/Covenant Are:	God's Law/Covenant Are:
1. For our good – Deut. 10:13	1. That which killed me – Rom. 7:10-11
2. Written by God in the heart - Deut. 30:10-14; Isa. 51:7; Jer. 31:33; Rom. 2:12-16; Heb. 8:10	2. The power of sin - 1 Cor. 15:56
3. Perfect – Ps. 19:7	3. A letter that kills - 2 Cor. 3:6
4. Converting the soul – Ps. 19:7	4. A ministration of death - 2 Cor. 3:7
5. Pure – Ps. 19:8	5. A ministration of condemnation - 2 Cor. 3:9
6. More to be desired and valuable than fine gold or honey – Ps. 19:10; 119:127	6. A veil which covers the heart and dulls the mind to the reception of spiritual things - 2 Cor. 3:14-15
7. Liberty/freedom – Ps. 119:44-45	7. Something I have to die to in order to be married to Christ and receive salvation – Rom. 7:1-6
8. Truth – Ps. 119:142, 151	8. Not based on faith – Gal. 3:12
9. Great peace for those who love it – Ps. 119:155	9. A curse from which Jesus redeemed us – Gal. 3:14
10. Righteousness – Ps. 119:172	10. That which imprisoned us – Gal. 3:23
11. Holy – Rom. 7:12	11. Engraved on stone only, not in the heart – 2 Cor. 3:7
12. Just – Rom. 7:12	12. That which will prevent those who try to live by from ever sharing in the inheritance of the saints – Gal. 4:30
13. Good – Rom. 7:12	13. That which produces slave children, not free – Gal. 4:24-25, 30-31; 5:1
14. Spiritual – Rom. 7:14	
15. Ordained to Life – Rom. 7:10	
16. Established by faith – Rom. 3:31	
17. Fulfilled in the life of one who walks according to the Spirit – Rom. 8:4	
18. That which reveals sin that we might be led to Christ – Gal. 3:23-24; Rom. 3:20; 7:13	
19. Kept by God's saints – Rev. 12:17; 14:12	

In order to resolve this tension of the two opposite descriptions of God's laws, we need to have a clear understanding of:

- The gospel (are there 2 methods of salvation, two gospels – one for those in the Old Testament who were saved by the Law and another for those in the New Testament, who are saved by grace?)
- What are the old and new covenants and how do they differ from each other?

Two Methods of Salvation?

- Paul clearly shows there is only one gospel in both old and new testaments:
  - Gal. 1:6-9
- There is only one gospel, the Gospel of Christ
- Moses, Abraham, Jesus, Paul, etc. therefore preached one gospel
  - Heb. 3:16-4:2
    - **Us** (Paul's generation) – 4:2
    - **Them** (those who came out of Egypt) – 4:2
    - So the same gospel was preached in both Old Testament and New Testament times
  - Gal. 1:6-9 warns of turning to a "different gospel – which is really no gospel at all"
  - Gal. 3:8 tells us that the gospel was intended for all nations and therefore is universal
  - Rev. 14:6 calls it the *everlasting* gospel – i.e. it is the one and only gospel known in the Bible

God's Covenants in Scripture

- Covenants were legal contracts between 2 parties. But in God's covenant with humankind He promises wholehearted commitment, even to the death if need be, for the welfare of humankind (e.g. Gen. 3:15 cf. Isa. 53; Rom. 8:32) and requires that same wholehearted devotion from humanity in return (Deut. 6:5; 11:1; 30:6, 16; John 14:21; Heb. 11:35-39)
- God made covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David and new covenant believers.
  - **Adam:** Gen. 3:15 – God's remarks to the serpent in Eden were an *implicit* covenant promise to Adam and all humankind that the woman's seed would ultimately destroy Satan. This grace-based, gospel-bearing covenant promise was mission-directed, and Adam was to pass it on to his descendants providing them with hope.
  - **Noah:** Gen. 6:18 – God's covenant with Noah was a 'renewal' of His covenant with Adam.
    - It was a gospel bearing covenant because it has a sanctifying effect on Noah who "became an heir of righteousness that comes from faith' (Heb. 11:7)
    - This covenant anticipated the impending flood and offered protection to Noah and his family. By strong implication, God's gracious offer of righteousness by faith and protection from the flood was extended to the entire world, for God's covenant with Noah had ordained and equipped him as "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5).
    - After the flood, God's covenant with Noah expanded further to include the universal sign of the rainbow to remind people everywhere of the "everlasting covenant between god and *all living creatures* of every kind on the earth" in which God "swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth" (Gen. 9:16; Isa. 54:9)
  - **Abraham:** God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants envisioned that "*all people on earth* will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3; 28:14). God envisioned Abraham's descendants spreading throughout the world carrying the gospel of a coming Messiah to every nation, tribe, tongue and people.
  - **Sinai:** God's covenant with Israel at Sinai called the entire nation to become a "kingdom of priests" through whom "*the nations* will know that I am the Lord… when I show myself holy through you before their eyes" (Ex. 19:5-6; Eze. 36:23)
  - **David:** God's "everlasting covenant" with David (2 Sam. 23:5) was intended for him to "make known *among the nations* what He [God] has done," to "declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (1 Chron. 16:7-33; Isa. 55:3-5)
  - **Israel:** In a scriptural passage that blends the mission of Israel with the prophesied mission of the Messiah, God said through Isaiah: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor [NKJV: in whom I will be glorified]…. It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the *ends of the earth*" (Isa. 49:3, 6)
    - It is interesting to note that when Paul and Barnabas defended their own mission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in the New Testament, they quoted from this very passage in Isaiah, as if to say that they were fulfilling the commission God gave to His covenant people from the beginning (Acts 13:46-47).
  - This universal missionary purpose of God's covenant can also be seen in the New Testament (see Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 3:29-30; Rev. 14:6)

- Thus we can see that the covenant was not narrowly designed for Israel only, but for the whole world. God's intention was that Israel serve as missionaries to the whole world (Isa. 66:18-21; 55:3-7; Jer. 18:7-8; Eze. 36:23; Zech. 2:10-11; 8:22-23), sharing the everlasting gospel of grace with everyone.
- The various covenants are therefore to be seen as unified, progressive expressions / administrations of God's Everlasting Covenant.

In order to understand the old and new covenants, it would make more sense to start off with the New Covenant and then work back to the Old Covenant.

What is the New Covenant?

> "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. [32] It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. [33] "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [34] 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," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer. 31:31-34 cf. Heb. 8:8-12)

The DNA of the Everlasting Gospel is Expressed in the New Covenant

The four promises/provisions of the new covenant – the new covenant DNA – are really the essence of the gospel:

a. **Promise/Provision 1:** "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:10)
   - *Sanctification* - Internalisation of God's law, Restoring God's image in man

b. **Promise/Provision 2:** "I will be their God and they will be my people." (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10)
   - *Reconciliation* - Healing man's estrangement from God; restoring the relationship

c. **Promise/Provision 3:** "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" (Jer. 33:34; Heb. 8:11; 2 Cor. 2:14-15)
   - *Mission* - Making God known through verbal witness and loving service

d. **Promise/Provision 4:** "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12)
   - *Justification* - God providing man with a right standing before Him

It is very interesting to note that we find the same provisions of this new covenant gospel **at Sinai**. Take some time to look up the following verses:

- **Provision 1:** Deut. 30:6, 11-14 cf. Rom. 10:6-8; Ps. 37:30-31; 40:8; Isa. 51:7; Ex. 31:12-13
- **Provision 2:** Lev 26:12
- **Provision 3:** Ex. 19:5-6 cf. Gen. 28:14; Ps. 67:1-2; Eze. 36:23; Isa. 49:3, 6 cf. Acts 13:46-47; Zech. 8:20-23
- **Provision 4:** Ex 34:4-7

So the gospel was proclaimed, even at Sinai

How Was the New Covenant Different From the Old?

But why did Moses say that the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai was not made with their fathers (Deut. 5:2-3)? And why did God say that the new covenant "will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt"? (Jer. 31:32; Heb. 8:9). In other words how was the new covenant different from the old? It was different in the following ways:

- **God anticipated a different response** (Jer. 8:31-32; Heb. 8:7-9)
  - By comparing Jer. 31:31 with Heb. 8:9 we see that God expected a different response to His new covenant. They had turned the old covenant of grace into a system of salvation by works, thus perverting it (see Rom. 9:30-10:3)

- **It's like the new commandment which wasn't new** (1 John 2:7-8; 2 John 5-6)
  - Although it was new in one sense it was really the same covenant of salvation God always had with man. To illustrate this "new that really is old" concept let's look at 1 John 2:7-8. Speaking of the commandment of love (cf. 2 John 5-6) it says: "[7]Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. [8]Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining."

- Was the commandment to love new? No
- What made it new? Because even though the Old Testament commandments to love God and neighbour were there from the beginning, "Jesus lived that love in a way that made the law of love shine with new splendor – almost as though it were a new law" [B]
- The same can be said of the New Covenant. Were the four DNA promise/provisions of the covenant of redemption new? NO. Did we have them from the beginning? YES. But in the light of Jesus' life it's as if we had not seen them before. He lived out the covenant: The law was fully written in His heart and mind. He fully belonged to God and God to Him. No one had to teach Him about the Lord. Even though He did not forgiveness, He was the One who provided for the forgiveness of sin.

- **It was a new and more powerful revelation (Ex. 6:2-3; Gen. 15:6-7, 18; 21:33)**
  - Closely related to the previous point is one related to the name by which God made Himself known to Moses and Abraham. In Ex. 6:2-3 God says, "By my name [Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them." And yet, it is precisely as Lord, Yahweh that God *did* make Himself known to Abraham when He entered into a covenant with him: "He… said to him, 'I am the Lord [Yahweh], who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans….' On that day the Lord [Yahweh] made a covenant with Abram" (Gen. 15:6-7, 18).
  - This brings no confusion or contradiction to the Hebrew mind. What it is saying is that Abraham had known God by His name Yahweh on a limited basis but Moses and Israel were on the verge of knowing Him on an even grander scale. God's self revelation to Moses and Israel as not a different revelation but a *fuller* revelation, and in that sense a new revelation. So when it says in Heb. 8:9 that the new covenant would not be like the one made with Israel at Sinai, it was because the real presence of Christ among us was a *fuller* (not *different*) revelation than that which has been given previously.

- **God's covenant comes as a "new" covenant to each new generation**
  - People have argued that in Deut. 5:2, 3 it distinguishes between the Abrahamic covenant (of grace) and Sinaitic covenant (of law). But this is not what Moses intended when he said: "[2] The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. [3] It was *not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant*, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today."
  - Moses is not here emphasizing the difference between covenants, but saying that each man must renew the covenant for himself – to adopt it and internalise it personally. Although God made a covenant with the fathers of this new generation about to enter the Promised Land, it must be renewed individually and corporately by their descendants. They cannot be excused by saying that God made the covenant only with their fathers, and so it is not binding. No he made it with them, "with all of us who are alive here today." Moses wanted the new generation to personally identify with the Sinai covenant.
  - So in this passage Moses is practically saying: "[2] The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. [3]It was not **[just]** with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today."

- **Ceremonies changed: Lamb sacrifices to Lord's Supper; circumcision to baptism**
  - Another difference between the old and new covenants was their divinely ordained ceremonial systems. The new covenant no longer required animal sacrifices (Heb. 7-10 cf. Dan. 9:27). In the new covenant baptism and the Lord's Supper replaced the old covenant's circumcision and animal sacrifices (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; Col. 2:11-12).

- **Jesus came in the middle!**
  - Jesus' life shed a floodlight on the truths revealed in the law. Even though David could say: 'Your law is truth,' Jesus the Author and Giver of that law, could say, '***I am*** the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). What the law testified to, He was. Those who watched Him, listened to Him, and lived with Him began to view everything in a new light.
  - The advent of Jesus made everything before it 'old,' and everything after it 'new.' God's entire revelation through the prophets came to be regarded at the "Old" Testament, and His subsequent inspired revelation the "New." The old revelation was not old in the sense of somehow being less inspired, valid or applicable than it had been previously, but rather 'old' in the sense that it could never again be fully understood without reading it in the light of the everlasting gospel revealed in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. To read it in any other way would be to do so with veiled eyes and hardened hearts.

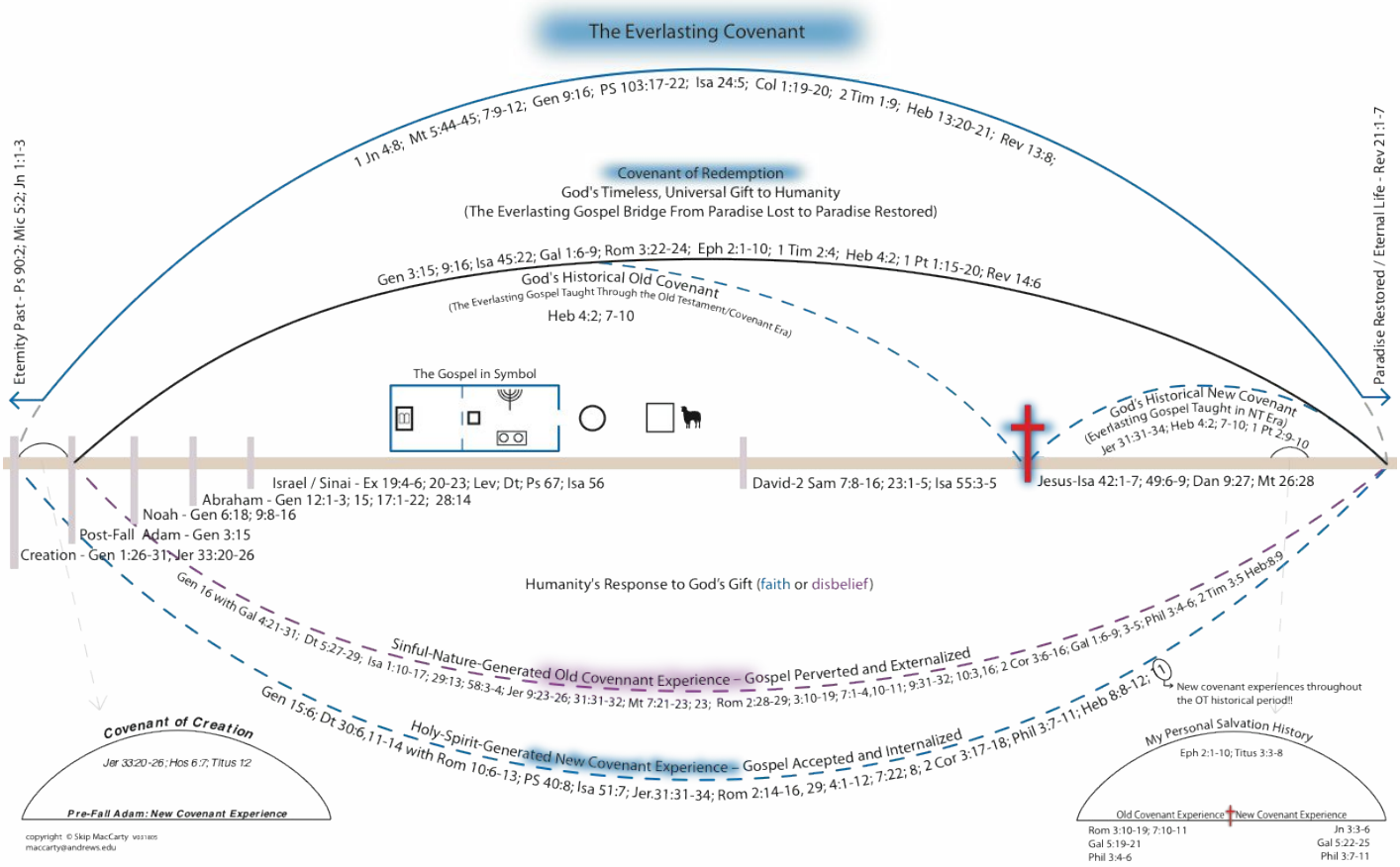
The Covenants in History and Experience

To understand the New Testament tension between the old and new covenants, one must understand the difference between the *historical and experiential* applications of the old and new covenants.

- The ***historical*** old and new covenants (*see Appendix A*)
  - Historical **old** covenant = era of God's covenants (esp. at Sinai) before Jesus came – Old Testament period
  - Historical **new** covenant = era of God's covenant with His people after Jesus came (New Testament period)
  - The historical covenants are the primary focus of Hebrews 7-10.

- The old and new covenant ***experiences*** (*see Appendix B*)
  - Old covenant experience = external religion [engraved on stone only and not ingrained in the heart], religion of the flesh, takes God's good law and converts it into a legalistic instrument of spiritual bondage and death, characterised by rebellion
  - New covenant experience = internalised religion characterised by one who has been born of the Spirit (John 3:3-6), lives by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17), bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25) and exercises the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-11). The Holy Spirit puts God's law in the mind and writes in on the heart of believers (Deut. 30:10; Eze. 36:27). Someone enjoying a new covenant experience delights in and loves God's law (Ps. 1:1-3; 119:97) and lives a life of faith and obedience (Rom. 1:5)
  - This *experiential* aspect of the covenants is the primary focus of the other Pauline epistles (beside Heb. 7-10). Only when this is recognised can passages such as Rom. 7:1-6, 2 Cor. 3 and Gal. 3-5 be correctly understood.

This can be illustrated by the following diagram:



Case study – Gal. 4:21-5:1
Read Gal. 4:21-5:1 preferably in the NKJV and not the following contrasts:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Abraham's son "by the slave woman" (4:22)	Abraham's son "by the free woman" (4:22)
"Born according to the flesh" (4:23, 30)	"Born as result of promise," "born according to the Spirit" (4:23, 30)
"Hagar… Mount Sinai… present Jerusalem… slavery" (4:25)	"Jerusalem above" is "our mother"… "free" (4:26)
"Persecuted" the free son (4:29)	"Persecuted" by the slave son (4:29)
"Slave . . . will never share in the inheritance" (4:30)	["Free woman's son" shares in the inheritance] (4:30)
"Burdened. . . By a yoke of slavery" (5:1)	"Freedom… Christ has set us free" (5:1)

Since the passage speaks of born 'according to the flesh' it is instructive to see the contrasts between 'the flesh' and 'the Spirit'

Flesh vs. Spirit

"The Flesh" (Sinful Nature)	Vs.	"The Spirit"
"Flesh gives birth to flesh"	John 3:6	"Spirit gives birth to Spirit"
Can't fulfill Law's requirements	Rom 8:4	Fulfills the Law's requirements
Mind set on what flesh desires	Rom 8:5	Mind set on what the Spirit desires
"Death"; "will die"	Rom 8:6, 13	"Life and peace"; "will live"
"Hostile to God"; "Cannot submit to God's law"	Rom 8:7	[Love God; "submit to God's law"]
"Cannot please God"	Rom 8:8	[Can "please God"]
"Does not belong to Christ"	Rom 8:9, 14	Righteous fruit; "inherit kingdom of God"
Unrighteous works; "Won't inherit kingdom of God"	Gal 5:19-24	"Does… belong to Christ" "Children of God"
"Faultless" law righteousness (legalism)	Phil 3:4-10[D]	"Righteousness from God by faith"

The passage in Galatians can only be viewed from an experiential perspective. Paul is using Abraham's experience with Hagar as an example of an old covenant experience and with Sarah as a new covenant experience. His experience with Hagar typifies salvation by works.

If we do not view it that way, then following would apply:

- The destiny of those under the Sinai covenant would be death (the destiny of those who are 'of the flesh')
- They only do wickedness or are legalistic since flesh can only give birth to flesh
- They would not share the inheritance of the free woman (the saints). This inheritance includes the new earth, the kingdom and eternal life (see Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10)
- It leads people into bondage, making them persecutors of the true saints
- Those who entered the covenant would be doomed to unconverted lives and eternal loss. Even if they tried to be faithful to it, they would still be lost

What Paul is speaking about is an old covenant ***experience***, or an illegitimate relationship to the gospel, of a rejection of the gospel or a legalistic acceptance of the gospel. That is what the covenant in Gal. 4 is referring to. He is not referring to the covenant He made with His people at Sinai.

Abraham's independent efforts with the slave woman Hagar represents those who confine themselves to spiritual slavery by attempting to produce, through the flesh, their own efforts, what they are incapable on producing, but what God has promised to produce – eternal salvation, obedience, and a godly life that can influence others toward salvation. Abraham's subsequent trust in God and His promise to produce a child through Sarah represents the spiritual freedom of faith and submission to the control of the Spirit, who has the power to produce what we cannot produce.

Hebrews 7-10 [E]

Hebrews 7-10 uniquely considers the two covenants ***primarily from a historical perspective***.

- These chapters reveal that the purpose of the priesthood and sacrificial services of the historical old covenant has met its complete fulfillment in Christ our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary by virtue of His once-for-all atoning sacrifice. This is the context for the author's statement in 8:13 that the historical old covenant (it's priesthood and sacrifices) "is obsolete and aging [and] will soon disappear." Subsequently the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome, and the sacrifices and priesthood which administered it were never reestablished.
    - The author of Hebrews shows that with the arrival of Christ ***historically***, everything became better. Compared to the old testament sanctuary service, we now have:
        - **A better High Priest** (Heb.4:14-5:6) who is sinless compared to the high priests who were sinful

- **A better Sacrifice** (Heb. 9:12-14, 23) – whereas the repetitive sacrifices of goats and bulls could not atone for sin, the once-for-all Sacrifice of Christ could
- **A better sanctuary** (Heb. 8-9) – the priests served in an earthly sanctuary, but Christ serves in 'true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man' (8:2; 9:23)
- **A better covenant** (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) – From a ***historical*** perspective the new covenant was better because with it came the blood of Christ which decisively dealt with sin (see '*How was the New Covenant Different from the Old?*' above)
  - In Hebrews every mention of *covenant*, whether to the first covenant or the new, is always linked with the sacrificial system,[F] thus showing that Paul was dealing with the covenants from a historical/earthly sanctuary/ceremonial perspective.

- The quotation in Heb. 8:8-12 of Jeremiah's definition of the experiential new covenant reaffirmed that the gospel taught in the historical new covenant era was the same gospel by which people were saved in the historical old covenant era (cf. Heb 4:2).
- This extended passage is immediately followed by Hebrews 11. The crucial role of Hebrews 11 cannot be overemphasized. After extensively discussing the covenants throughout the book of Hebrews, the author presents a representative list of believers drawn from throughout the entire ***old covenant historical period who lived a new covenant experience***, and holds them up as examples for New Testament believers! The spiritual experience of these Old Testament believers was characterised by righteousness by faith and the obedience of faith throughout the entire period when the several covenants of the Old Testament, including the covenant at Sinai, were being administered by God. This is proof positive that throughout history there was in essence only one covenantal *experience* into which God was ever and always drawing His people.

Heb. 10:1-4 – The Law, Only a Shadow of Good Things to Come

- Taking the above discussion into consideration and the context of Hebrews 9 and 10, the law of 10:1, is not the Ten Commandments, but the Levitical law of sacrifices under the historical old covenant.
- These sacrifices were shadows (an outline of the real thing, but NOT the real thing) that pointed to Christ, anticipating His arrival in history
- In all of the book of Hebrews, there is no reference to a change of God's moral law

Review the Biblical Tension Concerning the God's Law/Covenant (as found on pages 3-4) and Note the Following:

- God's law can be converted from the right column to the left in a person's life by conversion - "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Cor. 3:16)
- God's law can be converted, rather *perverted*, from the left column to the right in a person's life by:
  - Applying the law in a way it was never intended to be related to, as a means to earn ones way to heaven by living a law abiding life: "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me" - Rom 7:11; cf. 9:30-31
- The left and right columns do not describe two different laws. They do not describe differing assessments of Ten Commandments viewed from different historical periods. Rather, they are describing two different experiences and applications of God's law:
  - The left describes the "law of the Spirit of life," (Rom. 8:2) God's law as it is used by the Spirit to convict, convert, sanctify;
  - the right describes "the law of sin and death," (Rom. 8:2) God's law commandeered by Satan/sinful nature to deceive and kill.

2 Cor. 3-3-18 – Old Covenant as Ministry of Death
Read 2 Cor. 3:3-18 passage, preferably in the NKJV, and note the following contrasts:

Old Covenant Represented by Moses' Ministry	New Covenant Represented by Paul's Ministry
"Written with ink" (3:3)	"Written…with Spirit of the living God" (3:3, 8)
"On tablets of stone" (3:3, 7)	"On human hearts" (3:3)
"The letter [that] kills" (3:6)	"The Spirit [that] gives life… freedom" (3:6, 17)
Brings "condemnation"/"death" (3:7, 9)	"Brings righteousness" (3:9)
A "glory" that was "fading away" (3:11)	"Ever-increasing glory" "which lasts" (3:18, 10)
"A veil covers their hearts"/"their minds are made dull" (3:14-15)	"Veil taken away," "freedom" (3:17)

- Many see the left column as representative of the teaching of the Old Testament, and more specifically of God's covenant with Israel at Sinai. They see the right column as referring to the full gospel teaching of the New Testament.
- But such a strict historical interpretation would leave all in the Old Testament without hope of salvation.
- Paul is once again contrasting 2 responses to the gospel.
- Let's take a closer look at this critical passage:[G]
  - ***V. 3. Not in ink:*** Instead of writing in ink (what most ancient letters were written with), when it comes writing on the tablets of the heart a more durable medium is required, viz., with the medium of the Spirit of the living God. Where the Holy Spirit is at work in the life, God's law and God's truth are manifested in holiness, obedience, and sanctification. Obedience to all the will of God becomes spontaneous.
  - ***Tables of stone:*** Paul also contrasts the two tablets of stone upon which God wrote the Ten Commandments at Sinai with the fleshly tablets of the heart. There was nothing wrong about having the law of God inscribed upon tables of stone, but so long as it was written only there, and was not transferred to the tables of men's hearts, it remained, for all practical purposes, a dead letter. Once the law is written on the heart, it is no longer a dead letter.
  - ***V. 6. Not of the letter:*** The ministry of Paul's adversaries was limited to the **letter** of the law (see Rom. 2:29 where the same Greek word for 'letter' is used as is found here in 2 Cor. 3:6 – referring to 'outward obedience,' 'no conversion,' 'living for the praise of men'). They were concerned almost exclusively with its outward forms; its spirit had never been engraved upon their hearts. What Jewish legalism could not accomplish—for a lack of faith on the part of those who practiced it (Heb. 4:2)—the gospel was now accomplishing (Rom. 8:3, 4).
  - ***Sufficient as ministers.*** In vs. 6–18 Paul sets forth the superiority of "the ministration of the spirit" (v. 8), which he represents, over "the ministration of death," the now-obsolete Jewish system, represented by his Judaizing opponents. He draws this contrast by comparing the "glory" of the new covenant with that of the Mosaic period, and by exposing his Judaizing opponents as exponents of the letter of the law rather than of the spirit of it. He designates the Jewish priesthood as a ministry "of the letter," in contrast with that of Christian ministers as a ministry "of the spirit." A minister "of the letter" of the law administered a system of rules and regulations. His object was to secure conformity to external requirements. But God had made Paul a minister "of the spirit" of all God's revealed will. He had been educated according to the rigid letter of the law (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:4–6), but the spirit of life in Christ Jesus had set him free from that rigid system (Rom. 8:2). He had renounced the ministry "of the letter" for that "of the spirit." (Rom. 8:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:17).
  - The one type of ministry has sufficiency to save men from sin and to make them children of God, the other has not (Eph. 3:7). The one has the Holy Spirit, the other has not. The ministry "of the spirit" is able to convict of sin, the other is not (John 16:8, 9, 13; Eph. 3:7; 1 Tim. 1:11–16). The ministry "of the letter"—the forms of religion—and that "of the spirit" (see on John 4:23, 24) need not have been mutually exclusive (see on Mark 2:21, 22; 7:6–9). But the ministry "of the letter" came to be, in actual practice, a perversion of the true gospel which had been revealed to Moses and to all the prophets (DA 29, 30, 35, 36).
  - ***Not of the letter:*** In that it had come from God the "letter" of the law as recorded in the writings of Moses was good. But God had intended the "letter," the written record of the law, to be only a means to the higher end of establishing the "spirit" of the law in the hearts of the Jews. But, as a whole, the Israelites failed to translate the "letter" of the law into the "spirit" of the law, that is, into a living religious experience of personal salvation from sin by faith in the atonement to be provided by the Messiah. The literal observance, alone, of the law "killeth." Only the "spirit" of the law can possibly give "life," whether it be to Jew or to Christian.
  - ***V. 7. Glory.*** In 2 Cor. 3:7–18 the glory that remains is contrasted with the glory that fades away, the more glorious with the less glorious, the new with the old. In both, the "glory" is the glory of the presence of Christ. In the new there is a full revelation of God's glory in the actual person and presence of Christ, who came to this world to be seen of men (see on John 1:14), which glory abides forever (see Heb. 7). In the Mosaic ministration Christ was seen only in types provided for by the ceremonial law, but the glory was nevertheless the reflected glory of Christ. The Redeemer was hidden behind a veil of types, symbols, rites, and ceremonies, but this veil was done away at the coming of the great Antitype (see Heb. 10:19, 20).
  - ***Passing away:*** Some have falsely argued that according to vs. 7 readers have concluded from this statement that the law of God was to pass away. Notice that the glory on Moses' face "was passing away," but the law of God, "written and engraven in stones," remained in effect. It was the ministry of Moses and the Jewish system that was to pass away, not the law of God
  - ***V. 10. No glory*** - The glory of the ministry centering in the sacrificial system was great, but when compared with that of Christ's glory (as seen in His incarnation, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection), it appeared as nothing. The former ministry has thus lost its glory. It is completely eclipsed.
  - ***Therefore.*** In vss. 7-11 Paul has contrasted the Mosaic and apostolic ministries. In vss. 13-18 Paul presents the differing results of the two kinds of ministration, as seen in the Jews (vs. 13–16) and in the Christians (vs. 17, 18). The Jews remained blind and hard of heart. For Christians the ministry of the "spirit" provided liberty and a transformation of character.
  - ***V. 13. Unlike Moses:*** Paul uses the incident of the veil (Ex. 34:29-35) to illustrate Israel's spiritual blindness (2 Cor. 3:14–16). According to Paul the fading glory represented the types and ceremonies that were to end with the coming of the great Anti-type, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of the veil, Paul says, the Israelites were unable to see the fading away of that transitory glory or to understand its meaning. They fondly believed that the types and ceremonies were to be permanent. They looked upon them as an end in themselves. They did not see that the typical system was temporary and provisional in nature, and foreshadowed the glory of Christ, who was to come…. The veil symbolized the unbelief of the Jews (see Heb. 3:18, 19; 4:1, 2; cf. PP 329, 330) and their refusal to perceive Christ in the sacrificial ministration.

- Some have argued that the veil represents the Sinaitic covenant. This cannot be, for we have seen the covenant God made with His people at Sinai was not a *gospel-veiling* covenant, but a gospel-bearing covenant. The gospel promises were embedded in the Sinaitic covenant. It was a covenant to save them.
- The veil is not the work of God, giving His covenant at Sinai, but of Satan ('the god of this age' – 2 Cor. 4:3-4), blinding (veiling) the minds and causing unbelief and resistance to the gospel revealed in God's covenant.
- Note that the veil is taken away as a result of conversion: "whenever one turns to the Lord [becomes converted], the veil is taken away" (2 Cor. 3:16). Thus the old covenant Paul is referring to in 2 Cor. 3 is the *experience* of rejecting the gospel or accepting it legalistically.

- ***V. 14. Even until this day:*** Some 1,500 years after Sinai the Jews were still as dull of understanding as they had been then. The pattern of Jewish unbelief in Paul's day was identical with that of Moses' day.
- ***Old Testament:*** Paul probably refers either to the Pentateuch, or to that portion of it in which the terms of the covenant arrangement are stated. Instead of being over Moses' face, the veil is now over the book he wrote. Regardless of the spoken or written word of Moses, the minds and hearts of the people were still blinded. The Jews did not do away with the law. They read it regularly and, presumably, honored Moses. But in reality they did not believe him, for had they done so they would also have believed Christ (John 5:46, 47). For them, the glory of Moses consisted in the "letter" of the law and in the outward forms and ceremonies prescribed therein. The nature and work of the Messiah remained a mystery to them.
- ***Taken away in Christ.*** Only the discovery of Christ in the prophecies of the Old Testament, and in the forms and ceremonies prescribed by it, would ever serve to lift the veil from the reading of those passages of Scripture. But the Jews refused to recognize Christ as the Messiah, and the veil therefore remained unlifted.
- ***Turns.*** *Gr. epistrephō*, "to turn about," "to return," here, as commonly in the New Testament (see Matt. 13:15; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19; etc.), "to be converted." When truly converted, men will discern that both Old Testament and New Testament bear witness to Christ (Luke 24:27; John 5:39; 15:26, 27; 16:13, 14).
- ***The veil.*** As Moses removed the veil when he went again into the presence of Jehovah (Ex. 34:34), spiritual blindness and unbelief will be removed from the minds and hearts of those who are truly converted.
- ***V. 17.*** Where the Spirit. To "walk in the Spirit" is to enjoy Christian liberty (see Gal. 5:13–16; cf. John 6:63). In and of itself the ministration of the "letter" engraved on tables of stone has no power whatever to convert sinners and to give liberty. It is the Son who alone can make men "free indeed" (John 8:36).
- ***There is liberty.*** Liberty in Christ does not mean license to do as one pleases…. The man who is renewed in Christ Jesus can be safely trusted with full liberty, because he will not abuse it by making it subserve selfish objectives.

Rom. 8:1-4 – The Law of Sin and Death[H]

- This passage once again contrasts Flesh with Spirit (*see table of 'Flesh vs. Spirit' above*)
- The 'law of the Spirit of life' is the holy law of God applied by the Holy Spirit to sinners as a converting influence and to believers as a sanctifying influence, as the Spirit writes it on their hearts (Ps. 19:7; Rom. 8:4; Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10).
- The 'law of sin and death' is that same holy law of God at work under the power of the evil one and the sinful nature, perverting it into an illegitimate system of righteousness by works – "sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death" (Rom. 7:11).
- These two contrasting laws show God's holy law in the hands of two great contrasting spiritual powers: Satan and the sinful nature on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit on the other. Under the influence of Satan and the sinful nature, the law becomes a 'law of sin and death,' stirring up rebellion against God and enticing us to seek salvation from it. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, the law of God becomes a convicting, converting and sanctifying instrument – holy, just, good and spiritual – just as God intended it originally to be.
- "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life [a new covenant experience through the converting, justifying, sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit] set me free from the law of sin and death [an old covenant experience of being married to law rather than to God, and relying on obedience to the law rather than on the righteousness of God as the basis of salvation]."

Appendix A

Historical Old and New Covenants[1]

Historical Old Covenant	Historical New Covenant
• Spans the period of spiritual history extending from Creation to the incarnation of Christ (i.e. the entire Old Testament period)—"when the old covenant [i.e., Old Testament] is read." (2 Cor 3:14)	• Spans the period of spiritual history extending from the incarnation to the second coming of Christ (i.e. the entire New Testament period)—everything after Jesus came being considered "new," even if it had existed earlier. (cf. 1 John 2:7-8)
• Purpose: To save people living in the Old Testament era through the initial covenant God made with fallen Adam and then expanded through covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses/Israel, David, etc., and to groom them into a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, who would take God's message of salvation to the whole world. (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 6:17-18; 9:8-17; 12:1-3; 15:1-18; 17:1-16; Ex. 19ff; Deut.; 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 67; Isa. 45:22; 49:3, 6; 55:3; 56)	• Purpose: To save people living in the New Testament era through a "new covenant [God made] with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," and to groom them into a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, who would take God's message of salvation to the whole world. (Heb. 8:8-12; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9)
• Characterised by the preaching of the gospel. (Rom. 10:6-16; Deut. 30:11-14; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 4:2)	• Characterised by the preaching of the gospel. (Heb. 4:2)
• Characterised by miraculous and redeeming acts of God on behalf of His people. (Neh. 9; Ps. 78; 104-106; Acts 7)	• Characterised by the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world and the reconciliation to Himself of all things in heaven and earth. (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19-20)
• Characterised by a system of moral and civil laws based on love and the Ten Commandments, expectations which everyone in this era fell short of—"there is no one who does not sin." (1 Kings 8:40; Ex. 20-24; Lev. 19:18; Deut 5:6)	• Characterised by an intensification of moral expectations based on the fuller revelation of love and Ten Commandments as seen lived out in the life of Jesus Christ, expectations which everyone in this era has fallen short of— "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23, 10-18; Matt. 5:19:16-21; 22:35-40; James 2:10-11)
• Characterised by an elaborate ceremonial system eventually focused in a localized sanctuary which represented both God's presence among them and His greater sanctuary in heaven from which He ministered to them. (Ex. 25:8-9; Heb. 9:1-7)	• Characterised by a simpler ceremonial system consisting of baptism and the holy communion which represented the finished work and atoning sacrifice of Jesus who continues His ministry on our behalf from His sanctuary in heaven. (Luke 22:19-20; Col. 2:11-12; Heb. 8:1-2)
• Characterised by a human priesthood from the tribe of Levi who administered the sanctuary services, ministered imperfectly to the people, and represented God to the people and the people to God. (Num. 3:5-9; Zech. 3:1-7; Heb. 7:11, 28)	• Characterised by Christ as our perfect high priest in heaven, having represented God to us through His ministry among us, and now representing us before the Father. (John 7:39; Heb. 7:23-28; 8:1-2)
• Characterised by animal sacrifices which could never take away sin but served as an anticipatory type and shadow of the atoning ministry of the Messiah who was yet to come. (Lev. 4:27-35; Isa. 53:1-7; Heb. 10:4, 11)	• Characterised by the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Christ through which all believers in both historical eras were granted forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of God by which we obtain access to eternal life. (John 1:29; Heb. 9:12-15, 23-28)
• Characterised by the convicting, converting, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to save and empower for ministry. (Gen. 6:3; Ex 31:1-3; Ps. 51:9-12; 1 Sam. 10:6-10; Eze. 36:25-27; 37:1-14)	• Characterised by a greater understanding of the multifaceted ministry of the Holy Spirit than was available to believers in the Old Testament era and a new phase of the Spirit's ministry based on the accomplished sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. (John 7:39; 16:7; Rom. 8:4-17; 1 Cor. 12)

Historical Old Covenant	Historical New Covenant
• Means by which the Holy Spirit birthed in many living during the Old Testament era a *new covenant experience* with an eternal hope assured. (Heb 11)	• Means by which the Holy Spirit birthed in many living during the New Testament era a *new covenant experience* with an eternal hope assured. (1 Pet. 1:3-9)
• An *old covenant experience* with no eternal hope realised by many living during the Old Testament era due to unbelief and rejection of the everlasting gospel. (Rom. 10:16; Heb. 4:2)	• An *old covenant experience* with no eternal hope realised by many living during the New Testament era due to unbelief and rejection of the everlasting gospel. (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 18:8; Gal. 3:10; 4:21-26; 5:4; Heb. 10:26-31)
• Ratified by the blood of animals. (Ex. 24:8; Heb. 9:22)	• Ratified by the blood of Jesus. (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:22-28)

Appendix B

Old and New Covenant Experiences[J]

Old Covenant Experience	New Covenant Experience
• Sin's counterpart of God's four provisions of the new covenant experience—*the gospel externalised* (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9; 7:21-23; 25:1-12; Isa. 26:18; 52:5; Rom. 2:23-24; Luke 18:9-14):	• The four provisions of a new covenant experience—*the gospel internalised* (Jer. 31:32-33; Heb. 8:10-12; 2 Cor. 2:14):
○ "The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'"	○ "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts." (*Sanctification*)
○ "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, . . .' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" "Later the others came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'"	○ "I will be their God and they will be my people." (*Reconciliation*)
○ "You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'" "We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to the people of the world."	○ "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.'" "God . . . through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." (*Mission)*
○ *"Some ... were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else..... 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men.'* … But the tax collector … beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner…. This man, rather than the *other*, went home justified before God."	○ "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (*Justification*)
• An experience with God an His law that God never intended—"they did not remain faithful to my covenant." (Heb. 8:9)	• The experience with God and His law God intended—"if you … keep my covenant, then … you will be . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9)
• An experience possessed by many in both the Old and New Testament/covenant historical eras. (Rom. 9:31-32; 10:2-3, 16; Heb. 4:1-2)	• An experience possessed by many in both the Old and New Testament/covenant historical periods. (Heb. 11)
• Sinful from birth—"there is no one who does good," even "our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:12; Isa. 64:6)	• Initiated at conversion—"whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (2 Cor. 3:16)

Old Covenant Experience	New Covenant Experience
• Simultaneously both "dead in . . . transgressions and sins, . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature," and "as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." As helpless to change this condition on our own as a leopard is to change his spots or an Ethiopian his skin. (Eph. 2:1,3 ; Phil. 3:6; Jer. 13:23)	• "Born again," "born of water and the Spirit." ". . . because of his mercy [God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." (John 3:3-5; Titus 3:4-7)
• Characterised by outward compliance to the law's requirements for the purpose of gaining entrance into God's covenant and eternal salvation—"a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear," "rely on the law," "brag about the law," "merely outward and physical," "by the written code," pursuing righteousness "not by faith but as if it were buy works," "sought to establish their own [righteousness]," "did not submit to God's righteousness," "written … on tablets of stone" not "on tablets of human hearts," "covenant … of the letter," "the letter [that] kills," "the ministry that brought death," "the ministry that condemns men," "rely on observing the law," "want to be under the law," "trying to be justified by the law," "as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." (Acts 15:10; Rom. 2:17, 23, 28-29; 9:31-32; 10:3; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6-7, 9; Gal. 3:10; 4:21; 5:4; Phil. 3:6)	• Characterised by an inner transformation by the Holy Spirit writing God's law in the heart of a born again, converted believer, resulting in a loving "obedience that comes from faith"—"I desire to do your will. . . your law is within my heart," "circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit," "you wholeheartedly obeyed," "the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in [those] who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit," "obtained . . . a righteousness that is by faith," "covenant . . . of the Spirit," "the ministry of the Spirit," "the ministry that brings righteousness," "justified by faith in Christ," "by grace you have been saved, though faith … it is the gift of God," "not having a righteousness of my own . . . but that which is through faith in Christ." (Rom. 1:5; Ps. 40:8; Heb. 8:10; Rom. 2:29; 6:17; 8:4; 9:30; 2 Cor. 3:6, 8-9; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9)
• Those with this experience are "slaves to sin," slaves "to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness," "free from the control of righteousness," "a prisoner of the law of sin," "a slave to the law of sin," "does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so," controlled by the sinful nature," "cannot please God," "burdened … by a yoke of slavery." (Rom. 6:6, 16-22; 7:23, 25; 8:7-8; Gal. 5:1)	• Those with this experience are "freed from sin," "slaves . . . to obedience," "set free from sin," "slaves to righteousness," "slaves to God," "in [their] inner being [they] delight in God's law," "slave[s] to God's law," "controlled . . . by the Spirit," "the Spirit of God lives in you," "by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body," "led by the Spirit," "Christ has set us free." (Rom. 6:7, 16-19, 22; 7:22, 25; 8:9-14; Gal. 5:1)
• Relating to God's law through the influence of sin/Satan/sinful nature which misapplies God's holy law, transforming it into "a law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:2)	• Relating to God's law through the influence of the Holy Spirit who perfectly applies God's holy law so that it functions as God intended as "the law of the Spirit of life." (Rom. 8:2)
• This experience "leads to death" "result[s] in death," and is a "body of death." (Rom. 6:16, 21; 7:24)	• This experience "leads to righteousness," "leads to holiness," and "the result is eternal life." (Rom. 6:16,19,22)
• The gospel rejected. (Isa. 52:7; 53:1; Rom. 10:16; Heb. 4:1-2)	• The gospel accepted. (Isa. 52:7ff.; Rom. 10:6-16; Heb. 4:2; 11)

Endnotes

[A] This section on the 'Covenants' is largely taken from Skip MacCarty's book, In Granite or Ingrained? unless otherwise referenced.

[B] MacCarty, p. 60

[C] NIV says, 'born in the ordinary way' but the Greek is literally, 'according to the flesh'

[D] Sin as separation from God (John 16:7-9) always results in "works of the flesh." The latter has 2 manifestations: 1) Unrighteous acts (Gal. 5:19-24) and 2) Legalistic righteousness (Phil. 3:4-10). Both result in a lost condition before God.

[E] Taken largely from MacCarty's notes, 'The Covenants Handout' sent to the author

[F] Johnsson, William G. The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: Hebrews. Boise: Pacific Press, 1994, p. 154

[G] This section is summarised from F.D. Nichol, vol. 5, pp. 844-850

[H] MacCarty, pp. 109-110; 138-139

[I] Ibid, pp. 294-296

[J] Ibid, pp. 297-300