



19-Minute Studies: Grand Themes Key Words

Old Testament Themes & Words

Angel of the LORD
Circumcision
Fasting
Line of the Savior
LORD
Sabbath
Tithes and Firstfruits
Zion

New Testament Themes & Words

Apostles
Body of Christ
Children of God
Gospel
Kingdom of God
Persecution
Reconciliation
Repentance

Figures of Christ

David's Son
King Priest
Prophet
Rock
Shepherd and Sheep
Slaves and Servants
Son of Man

Salvation Words

Covenant

Faith
Glory of the Lord
* Grace*
Holiness Redemption
Resurrection
Righteousness
Sacrifice for Sin

Important Symbols

Anointing
Fire
Idolatry and Adultery
Light and Darkness
* Seven*
Twelve
Water
Wind and Spirit
Yeast

Christian Life Themes & Words

Abraham's Children
False Teaching
Holy Spirit's Presence
Law
Miracles, Signs, Wonders
Names
Presence of Christ
* Retribution and
Restitution*
Testing Faith
Witnesses

Covenant

1. What is a covenant? We can understand this word better if we compare it to something we are familiar with. Let's compare "covenant" to "contract":

<i>Contract</i>	<i>Covenant</i>
mutual benefit for mutual self-interest	self-giving loyalty
based on legal premises	based on personal character
governed by human law	governed by divine oversight
exchange of property	exchange of life
two-sided	two-sided or one-sided
usually temporary	usually permanent, even intergenerational

In summary, the difference is more a flavor than a definition:

emphasis on what you will do for me	emphasis on what I will do for you
-------------------------------------	------------------------------------

2. Which did Ruth offer to her mother-in-law in last week's Old Testament reading?
3. Which is marriage more like – covenant or contract? Does it make a difference whether we are talking of Christian marriage or non-Christian marriage?

The original gospel covenant with Abraham

Genesis 12:1-3—*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* (Also 13:15-16; 15:5,7,18; 22:17-18.)

4. Look at the parts of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. Notice the ways in which it sounds more like a covenant than a contract. Who is pledging to do something?
5. What does God promise in the seventh and last part: "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"?

The law covenant with Israel

Exodus 19:5 [at Mount Sinai]—*If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.*

6. God's covenant with Abraham was a one-sided promise. How was God's covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai different?

Exodus 32:7-8—*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt...’”*

Acts 15:10—*“[This obligation was] a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear.”*

7. What did Israel's history prove about the Mt. Sinai covenant?

Exodus 32:13-14—*[Moses said,] “Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.*

8. Yet which covenant had precedence before God? His covenant of grace with Abraham or his covenant at Mount Sinai with Israel?

The new covenant with all people

Colossians 2:14—*[Christ] canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*

Hebrews 9:15—*Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Matthew 26:28—*This is my blood of the [new] covenant.*

9. What is the new covenant?

10. The Lord's Supper is part of the new covenant. What does the covenant aspect of the Lord's Supper mean for us?

Helps:

(1.) After looking at the differences, the words “contract” and “covenant” should have a different feel in our minds. (2.) In Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth swore to go with Naomi through any difficulty. (3.) While both the church and the state consider marriage to be a binding agreement, they do so in different ways. (4.) Notice that only one side is active in this agreement. (5.) This is the promise of the Savior who will be a blessing to all people of all time. (6.) God promised to care for Israel, but he also demanded something from Israel. (7.) The Exodus passage talks of the Golden Calf incident. The Acts passage is the Apostle Peter reflecting upon the Covenant of Sinai and all its laws. (8.) Look at how Moses appeals to God's first covenant with Abraham. (9.) The Colossians passage points out what it is not. The Hebrews passage points out what it is. (10.) Remember that the Lord's Supper is a one-sided covenant from God. It is a great reminder of God's covenant of grace.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for obligating yourself to forgive us by the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ. Now that you have set us free, lead us to feel indebted forever to love you and to love one another. Amen.

Answers:

- (1.) After looking at the differences, the words “contract” and “covenant” should have a different feel in our minds.
- (2.) In Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth’s promise to Naomi is a covenant in every way listed above.
- (3.) The marriage which our government gives is something much closer to a contract. But a Christian marriage will be much closer to a covenant, especially in the emphasis of self-giving.
- (4.) God comes to Abram and promises to bless him, without any consideration of what Abram will do. It is a one-sided blessing for Abram’s benefit.
- (5.) The last phrase refers to the promised Messiah.
- (6.) The Mount Sinai covenant required obedience on Israel’s part.
- (7.) The Golden Calf incident happened less than two months into the covenant. It was a covenant impossible to keep.
- (8.) In these words after Mt. Sinai, God showed that his covenant of grace had precedence.
- (9.) The new covenant is that of forgiveness, established in the blood of Christ. Like the covenant with Abraham, and unlike the covenant at Mount Sinai, this “New Covenant” is a one-sided covenant of grace.
- (10.) It emphasizes that what God did through Christ, and what he offers us in this sacrament, is God’s doing, his undeserved love.

Covenant and Contract Distinguished

Contracts and covenants differ in a few areas. In terms of initiation, contracts are made by the exchange of promises, whereas covenants are sworn by solemn oaths. In application, contracts are limited by the terms of the exchange of property (“this is yours, that is mine”), while covenants involve an exchange of life (“I am yours, you are mine”), which covers a virtually unlimited range of human relations and duties. In terms of motivation, contracts are based on profit and self-interest, while covenants call for self-giving loyalty and sacrificial love. Contracts are temporary while covenant bonds are permanent, even intergenerational. Such distinctions do not imply that covenants are necessarily opposed to contracts, since covenants call for both promise-making and oath-swearing (Heb 6:13–18). A contract is an arrangement in human affairs that may be reinforced by swearing a covenant, in order to add the more binding dimension of the divine.¹

Divine Covenants in the Economy of Salvation History

Israel is unique among ancient Near Eastern peoples in their belief that God entered a covenant with them. While non-Israelites formed covenants with other peoples by invoking the names of their gods, only the God of Israel initiates a covenant and binds himself by oath to his people (Gen 22:16–18; Heb 6:13–19) (why start with Gen 22 and not Gen 12 or 15?) and Israel responds by swearing a covenant by which they bound themselves to him (Exod 24:3–11) (this does not seem a fair characterization of the Sinaitic Covenant which was also initiated by God). Even after violating that oath with the worship of the golden calf (Exod 32), Moses discovers how God’s “sworn mercies” take precedent over covenant curses (Exod 32:13), and so Israel’s covenant is renewed according to God’s “grace and mercy” (Exod 33:19).²

Covenant Types: Kinship, Treaty, Grant

Covenants may be classified according to which party swears the oath that ratifies the covenant. When both parties swear, a “kinship” (or “parity”) covenant results. This type of covenant is classified as “kinship” on account of the mutual pledge sworn by both parties rather than a unilateral obligation sworn by one party to another. In a kinship covenant, both parties jointly pledge themselves to each other, resulting in a bond with reciprocal responsibilities. Scripture offers many examples of kinship covenants (Gen 26:30; 31:54; Exod 24:11), which typically include a family meal in the covenant ritual.

When a subordinate party alone swears the covenant oath, the result is a “vassal” covenant. In such a situation, the superior party imposes a unilaterally sworn covenant oath upon the inferior, frequently with a ritual of self-malediction. Ancient Near Eastern examples of this covenant include the famous Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (king of Assyria, 681–669 BC), who imposed covenant loyalty oaths on rebellious vassals to guarantee their acceptance of his heir, Ashurbanipal. Biblical examples of the vassal covenant include the covenant of circumcision (Gen 17), where Abraham alone performs the ritual, along with the Deuteronomic covenant, where Israel alone swears an oath of self-malediction (Deut 27:11–26; Josh 8:30–35) (it seems strange to remove this section of Dt from the larger context of a covenant document; this is but one component of the larger).

When the superior party alone swears the oath, a “grant” covenant results. Various grant covenants are found in ancient Near Eastern sources, in which suzerains reward the loyal service of vassals by swearing a covenant oath, granting them royal lands (or offices) in perpetuity. In such a covenant, the superior party unilaterally binds himself to bless the inferior for heroic deeds of loyal service. Biblical examples include God’s sworn covenant oath with Abraham and Isaac on the occasion of the Aqedah (Gen 22:15–18; Luke 1:72–73; Heb 6–7), and with David and Solomon (Pss 89:3–37; 110:4; 132:1–11) (Again, why not bring in Gen 12,13,15 here?)³

English Translation of the Terms for Covenant

The Hebrew word for “covenant” in the Old Testament is *berith*, which the Septuagint consistently renders with the Greek word *diatheke*. There is little doubt that the New Testament authors followed the practice of the Septuagint and employed the term *diatheke* to mean *berith*, “covenant.” However, because many classical Hellenistic sources also used *diatheke* to refer to a “last will” or “testament,” some older English translations (KJV) render *diatheke* as “testament” in certain passages. More recent translations correct this error, except in a couple of instances.⁴

¹ Hahn, S. (2012, 2013, 2014). Covenant. In J. D. Barry, L. Wentz, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair-Wolcott, R. Klippenstein, D. Bomar, ... D. R. Brown (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*