

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP GOD WANTS WITH US?

The relationship God wants with human beings is the same throughout the Bible story – it is the same God in Old and New Testaments - and is best described by the word **covenant**.



IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

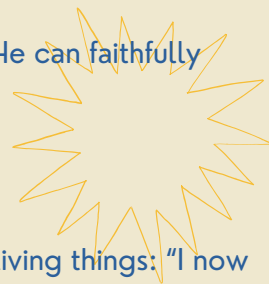
Whenever God makes a promise it is always sealed with a covenant, an agreement between two parties that brings the two into an experience of oneness. Marriage is our most familiar existing covenant. It is most frequently expressed with the words: "I will be your God and you will be my people".

Covenant is the way in which God will be with His people so that He can faithfully restore His world.



A COVENANT WITH THE WORLD

The first mention of covenant is in the story of Noah and is with all living things: "I now establish my covenant with you and...every living creature on earth..." (Genesis 9:8-11) God gives the rainbow as a sign of protection (like a bow) as a sign of the covenant – He will always be faithful to His creation.



Christians have the most profound reason for caring for this earth because not only do we believe it is a creation, but we believe God has bound himself to the animals, the fish, the birds in loving relationship.



GOD COVENANTS WITH US SO THAT WE CAN BE A BLESSING TO THE WORLD, JOINING IN WITH GOD IN ITS RESTORATION.

The meaning of God's calling and covenant with human beings becomes established through Abraham and the whole Bible is an outworking of the promises and calling made to Abraham. "The Lord had said to Abram, "...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...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12: 1-3) Abram is blessed by God in order to bless the world.

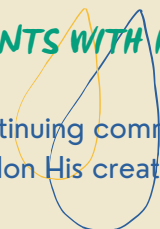


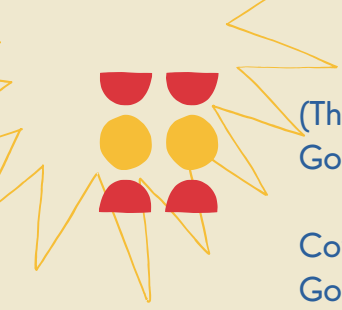
For Christians, Jesus does not change God's original covenant but fulfils it – enabling us to be a people who continue the call to bless and restore God's world, in the same way that Abram was called by God to do. God intends to fix creation through a covenant people who will be a blessing, so that ultimately everything will be renewed (Revelation 21:5), "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay..." (Romans 8: 21) and human beings can be "new creations". (2 Corinthians 5:17)



COVENANT REVEALS THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP GOD WANTS WITH HUMAN BEINGS.

Covenant begins with being chosen. The Bible shows God's continuing commitment to working in human-divine partnership – just as He does not abandon His creation, so He does not let go of the calling on people to image Him in the world.





(This "chosenness" is never portrayed as favouritism – in a sense everyone is a child of God – but as Peter writes, we are chosen for a purpose – to be a blessing.)

Covenant is relationship in which God binds Himself to us. Throughout the Bible it is God who initiates the restoring relationship.



There are two ways to have a covenant. In the first, two equal parties agree to become one.

In the second, two unequal parties become one.

In this, the one who is greater and stronger confers upon the weaker the right to come into an equal relationship.

In the Bible, God confers rights on human beings. But it is still a relationship of oneness.



In the Old Testament when a covenant was made it was always sealed in blood. It was a serious affair – it meant that life was going to change.

It usually involved the exchange of property, and often included a change of name and the scarring of the person's flesh.



The two parties would kill animals and create a corridor of blood. At each end of the corridor stood the representatives of the tribes – the chief or groom. They exchanged places by walking along the corridor of blood.



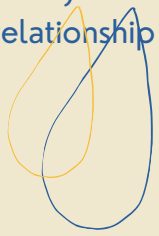
For example, if a tribe of cattle keepers and sheep keepers changed places they would be signifying this: "We who once looked after cattle, now look after cattle and sheep," and vice versa. We possess everything of each other. We two have become one. When God makes a covenant with Abram He tells him to count the stars in the sky, and then bring Him a heffer, and a goat, and a ram. Abram splits them in half, and lays out the pieces to create a corridor of blood. Then...



"When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land..." (Genesis 15: 17,18) Abram is now **one with God** in a way that's never been known before. Everything that belongs to God is now available to Abram.



Later God gives Abram a new **covenantal name**, to remind him of his new identity. "No longer will you be called Abram (exalted father); your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a "father of many nations". (Genesis 17: 5). And God gives a **personal, private scar**, signifying a private and personal relationship - a sign of the covenant: "Every male shall be circumcised".



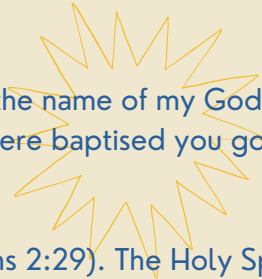
FOR CHRISTIANS WHO ARE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM, HOW DOES UNDERSTANDING COVENANT SHAPE US?



Exchange of identity: "This is my new covenant, sealed in my blood." (Luke 22:20) In the same way that a covenant was established through blood, to be in Christ means we have passed through a corridor of blood -- His. And through the cross we exchange identities: He takes our rebellious identity – our sin – and we take His - His righteousness.

Inheritance: Just as in Abram's covenant God shared His "property", so through Christ we receive the same identity and relationship that Christ has with His father. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8: 16-17)

Change of names. "...to him who overcomes...I will write on him the name of my God and my new name." (Revelation 3:12). In the early church when you were baptised you got a new name – your Christian name.



Sign/scar/seal. "Circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit." (Romans 2:29). The Holy Spirit makes a "scar" which is so intimate it is not on our bodies but within us –on the heart – the inner person.

Incredibly God continues to bear the scars of His covenant with us, taking them into His resurrection. In Luke 24, when the resurrected Jesus appears and shows his disciples his scars first of all he is saying,

"This is a covenant. Not only is it ratified in blood, but it's an everlasting covenant...These scars are precious tokens of the covenant I have with you."



COVENANT REVEALS THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP GOD WANTS WITH HUMAN BEINGS.



Covenant shapes how we see God's character throughout the Bible. Understanding covenant can help us to avoid having a split view of the God of the Bible.

At the heart of it is the story of a covenant God who does not abandon His people despite their faithlessness. God makes a number of covenants throughout the Old Testament – with Noah, Abram, Moses (Genesis 19: 1-6) and David (2 Samuel 7: 12-13).



To the Jews in Egypt He promises, " I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." (Exodus 6:7).

He promises a covenant with all His people so that "...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," because "It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors...because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them...This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel: "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." (Jeremiah 31: 31-34).



QUESTIONS

Why is being a Christian a covenant relationship?
Why does God's covenant with me help me be a blessing?

