

12 For March 21-22 Contract vs. Covenant

The concept of COVENANT dominates all religious thought in the Old Testament, and it deepens with the passing of time, coming into its fullness in the mystery of Jesus Christ. In modern times we define the professional exchange of goods and services by contracts. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify the conditions of a relationship between two parties. Failure to fulfill the conditions usually ends the relationship.

Note: The Lord did not establish a **contract** with Israel or with the Church. He created a **covenant**. What's the difference? Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. Covenants are not.

For example, if a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract.

According to the Bible, however, the Lord asks: "*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*" (Isaiah 49:15) The Bible indicates the covenant is more like the ties of a parent to her child than it is a doctor's appointment. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. The parent finds out where the child is and makes sure he's cared for. One member's failure does not destroy the relationship. A covenant puts no conditions on faithfulness of the other. It is the unconditional commitment to love and serve no matter what the other does.

In ancient times, a covenant was a treaty between two parties. There were two kinds of covenants: a voluntary agreement between equals (as with David and Jonathan, 1 Sam 18:3) and treaties of loyalty between a great king and a lesser king (his vassal). In the Bible, covenants between God and his people are always of the second type. God always dictates the terms of his covenants, which assert his sovereignty and kingship and the people's obligation of obedience.

The history of God's covenant with his people shows that the Lord is always faithful to his commitment to the covenant, but his people are not. No matter how many blessings the Lord showers upon his people, his people stray from their faithfulness to the covenant. Obeying the conditions from the "outside" seems too hard for human beings to do.

Since God does not want to lose any of his people, the Lord, through Jeremiah the prophet, tells us he will make it so that all human beings will have to do is to sincerely follow what is in their hearts. In other words, to obey what is "inside." The Lord tells us: "*I will make a new covenant with my people ... I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts.*"

God has made it more than possible for you to be faithful to him. Listen to what is really in the depths of your heart.