

# The Covenants of the Bible

By John J. Yeo

**Scripture to Memorize** *“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”* Romans 5:18

**Session Goal** Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the significance of the divine covenants and how they relate to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**It’s in the Book** A covenant is similar to a legal contract. We use covenants in our daily lives without realizing it. When we fly on an airplane, why do the flight attendants allow us onboard? It’s because we paid the fare that guaranteed a seat on the plane. In other words, the airline is legally bound by the money we paid them to fulfill their part of the contractual agreement.

Likewise, God makes covenants with various people in the Bible and with us today. The divine covenants are important because they help us understand how God relates to His people.

**Read** Genesis 2:15–17 out loud.

**Studying the Passage, vv. 15–17 Verse 15. Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.** God gave Adam the important work of tending and guarding (“watching over”) the garden. **Verse 16. From any tree of the garden you may eat freely.** God graciously gave the fruit-filled garden to Adam as his source of food.

**Verse 17. but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.** God gave Adam only one stipulation (or law): he could not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.** Certain death would result if Adam disobeyed. God made a conditional covenant with Adam. Blessing and life would follow obedience, or a curse and death would follow disobedience.

Look below at the list of divine covenants recorded in the Bible. Take note of their conditional or unconditional nature. A conditional covenant is based on the obedience of the person or nation that is in covenant with God. Both Adam and Israel had stipulations (laws) to obey such as the Ten Commandments. God, however, guarantees unconditional covenants. He promises to fulfill them on behalf of His people and never to revoke them. This progression of covenants leads to the most important one: the new covenant.

Adamic Covenant (Gen. 2:15-17), Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:8-17), Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12 & 15), Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 20-25), Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7), New Covenant (Matt. 26:26-29)

**Discussion Questions** Did God make a covenant with Adam? If so, who were the two parties? What was the stipulation? What was the punishment for disobeying the stipulation?

**Read** Romans 5:12–21 out loud.

**Studying the Passage, vv. 12–18 Verse 12. through one man sin entered into the world.** *Sin* is “missing the mark” of God’s holy standard. Adam sinned by disobeying the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **death through sin.** God warned Adam that his sin would bring death. **so death spread to all men, because all sinned.** Adam’s sin was passed down to all his descendants, including us. **Verse 13. sin is not imputed when there is no law.** The law reveals sin, but sin is not accounted for when there is no law.

**Verse 14. death reigned from Adam until Moses.** Although the law did not come until Moses, people still died from Adam to Moses. Why? They died because Adam’s sin had been imputed to them. To *impute* means “to credit one’s account.” **type of Him who was to come.** The first Adam was a prototype of Christ, the last

Adam. **Verses 15–17.** In these three verses Paul compared the “free gift” of the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, to the “condemnation” of the one who sinned, Adam. Notice the comparisons highlight that Jesus reversed the curse of the first Adam.

**Verse 18. through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.** Adam’s sin condemns us all, while Christ’s obedience on the cross results in our salvation. “All men” does not mean everyone will be saved but only those who receive the gift of righteousness (v. 17).

**Discussion Question** How does Romans 5:12–18 reveal the truth of the gospel regarding what Jesus did in order to save us from our sins?

**Read** Matthew 26:26–29 out loud.

**Studying the Passage, vv. 26–29 Verse 26. Jesus took some bread and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”** Jesus and His disciples were observing the Passover meal (as described in Exodus 12). Just as the Israelites ate the unleavened bread (bread made without yeast, a symbol of sin) of the Passover meal, so Jesus gave His sinless body to be broken for His people.

**Verses 27–28. And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”** Just as the Passover lambs were slaughtered and their blood poured out for the redemption of the Israelites, so Jesus intentionally shed His blood for His people. The new covenant was a conditional covenant for Jesus because He needed to fulfill it for us. But for us it is unconditional because we freely receive what Jesus’s obedient death obtained for us. He shed His blood so that He might wash us clean and grant us complete forgiveness.

**Verse 29. I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.** Jesus promised His disciples that His saving work on the cross would ultimately make a way for them to feast again with Him in His Father’s kingdom.

**Discussion Question** How is the new covenant a conditional and an unconditional covenant? Why are divine covenants important?

**At Home: Nail It Down** In Genesis 2:15–17, God made a covenant with Adam. It was a conditional covenant because He told Adam to obey the one stipulation He gave him. If he disobeyed, certain death would result, but if he obeyed, eternal life would be his reward. Although the Bible does not explicitly tell us this, it is clear that God would have given him access to the tree of life. Therefore, Adam would have merited eternal life for himself and his descendants (see Genesis 3:22). In Romans 5:12–18, Paul revealed that through Adam’s one act of disobedience, sin and death entered the world. God made a covenant with Adam because his sin did not simply affect himself. It was imputed (or passed down) to “all men.” We know this because Paul said all men died from Adam to Moses. Why? It obviously isn’t because of any sins they had committed because the law hadn’t come yet. The law came with Moses. Rather, they died because Adam’s sin had been imputed to them.

This imputation (or the crediting of one’s account) was the reason Jesus came as the last Adam. Paul compared the work of the first Adam to that of the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Instead of bringing death and condemnation, Jesus merited life and justification for those who would receive the gift of His righteousness. This helps us understand the gospel: (1) Adam’s sin was imputed to us; (2) our sin was imputed to Jesus; and (3) the righteousness Jesus earned was imputed to us. In Matthew 26:26–29, Jesus referred to the new covenant. This is the same covenant Paul discussed in Romans 5:12–18. Jesus declared that His body was broken and His blood was shed for His people. He called it “My blood of the covenant.” Although Adam failed to keep his covenant with God, Jesus was completely obedient and paid for our sins as the Passover Lamb by His shed blood.