



# A short look at Covenant

How it helps to explain why we have the bible in the first place.

# Covenant

- As far back as any written history exists, persons have been constructing binding agreements using the concept of a covenant.
- Two or more people.
- One usually in the position of power (suzerain) and one in the position of being less powerful and usually a servant of some sort (vassal).

# Covenant

- The agreement had some combination of reasoning, stipulations, curses, blessings.
- Each participant swore to uphold his particular end, and they swore to a particular deity.
- Made one copy for each participant, and one to be kept in a sacred location, proximal to the deity's temple.
- Covenants need documents.
  - Two copies of the 10 Commandments
    - One for the people
    - One for God

# Covenant

- As a covenant was sworn by the authority of a deity, in the absence of the deity, there was a mediator.
  - Jesus as mediator and/or priest.
- There would have been an authoritative prosecutor of a law suit on behalf of the deity.
  - Jesus as prophet.
- There would have been a suzerain, a king or otherwise highly leveraged authority who could execute or defend the covenant and/or the law suit.
  - Jesus as King
- There would have been a demonstrable punishment exacted
  - Jesus as the *hostia* (victim and/or sacrifice).

# Covenant

- Jeremiah's reference to a New Covenant
  - *31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.*

# Covenant

- ***"33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."***

- “If early Christians came to believe that the actions of Jesus were the fulfillment of this long-awaited redemption of God, and if they were immersed in the Old Testament writings and the redemption-revelation pattern that it contained, then it is only natural that they would **expect** a new revelational deposit to accompany that redemption. ***Indeed, if covenant documents were given to Israel after the deliverance from Egypt by Moses, how much more would early Christians expect that new covenant documents would be given to the church after deliverance from sin by one greater than Moses, Jesus Christ*** (Heb. 3:1–6).<sup>55</sup> After all, Jesus was not just another prophet. He was the eschatological realization of all of redemptive history.

- “He was the prophet (Deut. 18:18; John 7:40, 52), the son of David (Matt. 12:23), one greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6), the Mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6), and the perfect and final revelation of God (Heb. 1:1–2). Charles Hill notes, “If a new written corpus should arise with the claim of embodying that new revelation in the wake of a supremely important new redemptive act of God, this can hardly be called unnatural or wholly unanticipated.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the New Testament canon exists because, at its core, it is an eschatological canon.”



# Textual Criticism

How do we know that we have the right Bible?

# *Prolegomena*

- ***God is in charge of how He makes himself known.***
- No autograph of any writer from antiquity or the early church still exists.
- 1,500 years of copies of copies of copies with very little control.
- Almost 6,000 Greek manuscripts and about 18,000 manuscripts in other languages.
  - *No two of them are exactly alike.*

- The only path to the original text is to deduce what the original looked like based on the copies. This is, by definition, what *textual criticism* is about – the science of the recovery of any ancient document's original text. It involves sifting through the textual material, detecting mistakes and changes, and determining which reading at any given point is most likely to be original. [In other words, textual criticism], is the study and history of mistakes.

- Colin R. Nichol, Ph.D.

## 4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 1) Spelling and nonsense readings
- 2) Changes that can't be translated; synonyms
- 3) Meaningful variants that are not viable
- 4) Meaningful *and* viable variants

## 4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 1) Spelling-
  - 75% of the errors - Easily detectable.
- 2) Synonyms, can't be translated –
  - 15-20% of the errors - Greek is not dependent on word order, and context easily conveys the use of the synonym.

## 4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 3) Meaningful but not viable – Matthew 24:36
  - Occasional omission of *οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός* (nor the son).
  - Not viable - the lack of omission is the most desirable, because it has the earliest and best evidence.

## 4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- An example that incorporates 1, 2, and 3 – Romans 5:1
  - εἰρήνην ἔχομεν – we have peace – present tense
  - εἰρήνην ἔχωμεν – [that] we may have peace – subjunctive tense
  - The context fairly demands that the proper understanding is the first, because Paul is making an argument addressing what is going on **right now** for the believers he is addressing based on faith in Christ.

## 4 Different Kinds of Errors – Dr. Dan Wallace

- 4) Meaningful and Viable –
  - Would impact what we know *if* so much information didn't exist elsewhere.
  - No matter of importance is at risk.
  - Example: Mark 16:9-20 – Does not have the earliest and best attestation, most likely not original.
    - *However*, all of the matters addressed in this epilogue have independent attestation throughout the New Testament.

## *A lot of different reasons for mistakes*

- What follows is taken *very* liberally from the handouts and notes from “New Testament Interpretation” with Colin R. Nicholl, Ph.D. If another source is used, it will be cited, otherwise, presume Dr. Nicholl as the citation.

# *A lot of different reasons for mistakes or changes*

- Unintentional
  - *Scriptio continua* – predominant scribal style
  - Fallible memory
  - Misreading
  - Tired
  - Eyestrain
  - Carelessness
    - Eye could slip up or down, side to side, especially where there are similar letters or patters.



# Unintentional Errors

- Assimilation – In copying the synoptic gospels, one might conflate a more familiar version.
- Parablepsis – losing one's place and then omitting or repeating words
  - Dittography – repeating a letter/word/passage
    - Romans 7:25 – doubling of the definite article "to" would have changed the noun "thanks" to a verb "I thank", which would have lead a later scribe to add "eu", which means "good", and usually is used as a prefix in the word translated "I am thanking" or "I am giving thanks".
      - *χάρις τὸ θεου*
      - *εὐχαρίστο τὸ θεου*

# Unintentional Errors

- Haplography – a word occurs twice in a passage, and the scribes eye jumps to the second word.
  - Matthew 5:19 and 20 both end with “The kingdom of Heaven”, in slightly different grammatical form.
    - Consequently, some manuscripts don’t have 5:20 at all.
  - An omission is often the preferred reading (which we will get to), but if the syntactical context shows a more plausible reason for the omission, and the manuscript evidence is good, then the lack of omission is preferred.

# Unintentional Errors

- Glosses – marginal comments would occasionally be integrated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.
- Itacisms – mixing up vowels and diphthongs
  - Many would have the same pronunciation in different settings.
    - The example of Romans 5:1.
    - 1 Corinthians 15:54
    - Change νικος to νεικος
    - Changes “Death is swallowed up in victory” to “Death is swallowed up in controversy”
    - A scribe, repeating this to himself, after weeks of doing this, could easily have made this error.

# Unintentional Errors

- Overlooking breathing marks or accents.
  - The Greek “H” would have been a single quotation-styled mark over the first vowel.
    - “Into/In/On” becomes “one/only” if you change εἰς to εἶς.
  - The difference between  $\tau\iota\varsigma$  and  $\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  is the difference between talking about a particular thing and asking a question about a particular thing.

# Unintentional Errors

- Confusing letters
  - M ΛΛ
  - Γ Π T
  - Δ Λ
  - O Ω Θ E E H
- Simple spelling errors

# *Intentional* Changes

- Conflation – integrating more than one reading.
- Grammatical/syntactical/stylistic “improvements”
- Harmonization
- Formulaic Additions
- Theological Changes