

# THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS – GOD’S GRACIOUS PROGRAM

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<https://doi.org/10.47433/tv.xcviiiin9-12.73>

## Abstract

*One of the many things the Bible tells us about God is that he made covenants with people. That is very important: after all, we are beneficiaries of the last and greatest of those covenants, which has been called “the New covenant” (Jer. 31:31).*

*As theologians have sought to understand God’s covenants, they have found different ways of accounting for them or reconstructing them. As a result of their efforts (which disagree in significant ways) two major questions have arisen: (1) How many covenants did God make; and (2) How do God’s covenants interrelate? Theologians have proposed what may be called different “covenant schemes” to answer those questions. The schemes are all similar because for the most part it is clear in the Bible whenever God makes a covenant. So anyone who compares the most broadly accepted Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant “covenant schemes” will find a great deal of overlap among them. All will agree, for example, that God made covenants through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Nonetheless, there are also significant differences among the views that theologians have proposed.*

*It is not the purpose of this paper to present those differences. To present them and do justice to them would require a substantial book. It is rather our purpose to present an alternative to the covenant schemes theologians have developed. The hope is that what is proposed here can bring some modest illumination to what has been thought before. The proposal, then, comes de novo, and is based entirely on what the Bible tells us of God’s covenants — if we add that we can now see the biblical idea of “covenant” as an ancient near eastern person could have seen it, thanks to what archaeology has provided for us.*

**Keywords:** covenant, Old Testament, new covenant.

## I. How many covenants, and of what sort?

I have proposed that one aid to understanding the biblical covenants has been provided by the second millennium B.C. Hittite international treaty form. K. A. Kitchen in England and M. G. Kline in the United States showed more than a half century ago that the whole book of Deuteronomy (for example) is structured