

2. Covenants

The most meaningful relationships are “covenant” relationships. The best example of a covenant relationship is the marriage covenant. Each person demonstrates whom he or she trusts by the covenants they enter. Just as a bride and groom demonstrate covenant faith in each other, we are called to place covenant faith in God.

The central book of end-time prophecy, titled Revelation, tells about three covenants. Just as with God’s covenants in the Old Testament, scripture depicts covenants in Revelation with a mark on the forehead or hand (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). This type of mark may seem odd. However, consider that a common covenant symbol today, the wedding ring, distinguishes (marks) the left hand of the husband and wife.

During the end-times it will be most convenient to accept the covenant offered by the preeminent world leader, a powerful man commonly called the Antichrist. Initially the leader of a restored Roman Empire, Antichrist will enter a temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and claim to be God. Paul wrote

that Antichrist *sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God* (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Belief in religion is a second covenant option. A person can have faith in his or her religion without having any faith in God. The Pharisees were the preeminent first-century teachers of Israel; yet their faith was in religion instead of God (Matthew 23:23). Pharisees wore long flowing robes (Mark 12:38), prayed in an impressive manner (Mark 12:40), and routinely fasted (Matthew 9:14). The typical Israeli citizen thought they set the gold standard for religious behavior.

Those who followed such religion were also in perilous danger. Jesus warned the Pharisees and their congregations when he said, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matthew 23:13-14)*

THREE COVENANTS*

Covenant	Scripture
Faith in Antichrist	<i>He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right <u>hand</u> or on his <u>forehead</u>, (Revelation 13:16)</i>
Faith in Religion	<i>This title was written on her <u>forehead</u>: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17:5)</i>
Faith in God	<i>“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the <u>foreheads</u> of the servants of our God.” (Revelation 7:3)</i>

* Covenants are depicted as a mark on the hand or forehead (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

The covenant that God offers makes each believer a member of the body of Christ. Jesus took bread during the last supper before his death and said, *take and eat; this is my body* (Matthew 26:26). Paul later noted that we are *members of his body* (Ephesians 5:30). Also at the last supper Jesus took wine and said, *this is my blood of the covenant* (Matthew 26:28). The shedding of blood pays the penalty for sin because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

Each believer possesses a personal relationship with God. Jeremiah foretold this covenant relationship; centuries later it was restated in the New Testament. *“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-12) [New Testament believers are citizens of *Israel* (Ephesians 2:11-13)]