

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Called to Covenant

by Dan Trygg

“I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth.”

Genesis 9:13

“On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram...”

Genesis 15:18

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine...”

Exodus 19:5

“I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant...”

Psalms 89:4

“...He took the cup..., saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.’”

Luke 22:20

“He also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit...”

2 Corinthians 3:6

**God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.** Salvation history is full of covenants He made with people. *A covenant is an agreement, promise, pledge, contract or commitment between two parties.* Beginning with the first humans, God established a covenant, an agreement that they could eat of all the fruit in the garden, but they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was *conditional*, based upon their keeping their part. When they didn't, they were thrust from the garden, and experienced the consequences of the sin they chose.

**God made an unconditional covenant with Noah** and all the creatures of the earth. He promised to never again destroy all flesh with a flood. He gave them a sign, as a reminder of this covenant, the rainbow.

**The next significant covenant was also an unconditional covenant, between God and Abraham,** in Genesis 15. When it came time to confirm the covenant agreement, God put Abram in a trance, and He bound Himself to the agreement alone. He *will* fulfill His commitment to Abram, no matter what Abram might do. His promise was to give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants. God has brought the Jews back into that land on *three* separate occasions, after their removal, ...and they are there to this day.

This was one of the big lessons the people of Israel were to learn through the deliverance of the nation from Egypt: that God was a covenant-keeping God. The patriarchs knew that He was God Almighty, but they did not know Him as Yahweh, the One who does not change, the covenant-keeper (Ex. 6:1-8). By God's remembering them, and rescuing them from Egypt under Moses, they were to learn that He was the dependable Promise-keeper. Then, in Exodus 19, **Yahweh established a conditional covenant with the people who came out of Egypt.** *If they obeyed His words, and kept His commands, then He would bless them, protect them and they would be able to live long in the land He was bringing them to. If they disobeyed, disregarded His commands, or worshipped other gods, then He would take away their blessings, their protection from their enemies, and they would be conquered and exiled from the land. If they kept His covenant, then He would take them for His special people, and they would be a sign to the nations of the greatness and goodness of their God. If they rejected God and His ways, then their destruction and desolation would be a sign to the nations.* The history of the OT after the time of Moses was about the working out of these covenant agreements, and the repercussions of disobedience on the Israelites who disregarded God's ways.

**The next significant covenant is the unconditional commitment God makes to David,** to make an enduring house of his descendants and make his dynasty an everlasting dynasty. Even though this covenant was *unconditional*, the offer made to Solomon was conditional. Solomon failed to keep God's commandments, and he turned away to other gods. As a result, his family line, the line of the kings of Judah, came to an end, as the sons of Josiah were all cursed (Jer. 22). None of their descendants would ever again sit on the throne of David. Ultimately, God fulfilled His promise to David through Jesus, who was descended from another son of David (Lk 3:31).

As the kingdom and nation were coming to the end of their rope, and God's judgment was about to fall, the prophet **Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant** which God would initiate with His people (31:31-33). This new covenant would not be like the Mosaic covenant, the conditional covenant established at Mt. Sinai. **This will be an unconditional covenant.** God will put His law upon their hearts. Ezekiel picked up on this same theme, prophesying that **God would cleanse and change their hearts, and put His Spirit within them.** **This is not only so that they could walk in the way of His commandments (11:19,20), but that eventually they will do so (36:24-27).**

**Jesus instituted this new covenant through the shedding of His own blood (Heb.9:11-28), so that the promise of a cleansed and renewed heart, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, might come to all who enter into a faith covenant with Him.**

Thus, we who come to Him by faith are *equipped, empowered and made capable* to be His servants, *not* by our own fleshly willpower or abilities, *but* by the Spirit who comes to dwell within us. **We have the potential within us right now to walk victoriously in God's ways, by walking with the Spirit.** Our lives will radiate the heart and character of God as we sustain that walk, and the fruit of the Spirit is developed and finds expression in our lives.

***It is important to see our Christian commitment as a covenant with God. He expects us to draw near to Him, to walk in His ways, and serve Him as the Holy Spirit leads us.*** The *potential* is within us *right now*, but we still have a choice to disregard Him and His covenant. We still live in the "already-but-not-yet" overlap of the old evil age and the age of the Kingdom of God. We have the old man we inherited from Adam, and we are also made new in Christ, and are new creations in Him. We experience *both* realities at the same time, and *we must choose who we will serve each day.* In the end, however, when this old sinful, Adam-nature falls away at death, or Jesus' return, the causative operation of the Holy Spirit of the new covenant will be unhindered by sin, and we *will* walk in God's ways.

In 1885, a group of Swedish immigrants covenanted together to form the Evangelical Covenant Church. Just as God is a covenant-maker and covenant-keeper, it seemed to be God's leading that these "Mission Friends", as they were called, join together to more effectively further the mission of spreading the gospel and making disciples. Although they chose to avoid a particular statement of faith, they rested their identity on six affirmations:

- 1.) the Bible as the *only authority* in matters of faith, doctrine and life;
- 2.) the necessity of the *new birth* in Christ;
- 3.) the church as a fellowship of *believers*;
- 4.) the commitment to the *whole mission* of the church;
- 5.) a conscious *dependence on the Holy Spirit*; and
- 6.) the reality of *freedom in Christ.*

While these distinctives may seem elementary to many of us, they were truths and principles which set these "covenanters" apart from many other groups. Their background was steeped in evangelism, spiritual devotion and discipleship. The movement grew on a foundation of evangelism, through preachers and the distribution of Christian publications, books and tracts. As people were converted, they were discipled through small, intimate group meetings, with an emphasis on developing an active devotional life. A key component of Covenant fellowship was to ask the question, "How goes your walk?" This offers both accountability and opens the door for care for those who are struggling. The emphasis has always been on living out your faith in your daily life.

The ECC is now one of the fastest growing denominations in North America, comprised of nearly 880 churches. It is also one of the most diverse groups, as well. More than 20% of its churches are ethnic or multi-ethnic. There are over 40 African-American churches, over 50 Hispanic churches, and over 30 Asian American churches within the Covenant. From the beginning, "covenanters" were motivated to reach people for Christ. Mission efforts at home have taken a wide variety of expressions, including efforts to bring the love of Christ by offering help to the hurting, the marginalized, the powerless and the oppressed. World missions began with outreaches into native communities in Alaska and China. Over the years this has expanded to other areas in Africa, South America, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe. There are now 14 national Covenant churches on five continents that have ties to the ECC. The Covenant Church in Congo, which originated in 1936, now has more members than the ECC churches in North America! Covenant World Relief is a Covenant ministry offering disaster relief and community development to address human suffering, especially through the transformation of individuals and families in the name of Christ.

**All of this growth, expansion and these accomplishments were the results of a relatively small number of people choosing to make a commitment to work together to follow Jesus, and expand the outreach of the gospel into new areas.** They *committed themselves* to the foundational affirmations of Covenant believers, and *they chose to join forces with others* to accomplish the mission. **They made a "covenant", an agreement, promise, pledge and commitment to work together to grow people up to maturity in Christ, and to live out their faith as the Holy Spirit would lead.** It is an amazing story! It shows the power of diversity in the Body of Christ, as many common people were led to initiate ministry outreaches in a wide variety of directions and expressions. By *themselves*, they likely would not have been able to accomplish much, but through the encouragement, support, and help of *others*, incredible things were achieved in the name of Christ. Many of these accomplishments started out small, but grew into very large ministries. North Park University began in a Minneapolis pastor's home. The idea of a "Home of Mercy" grew into a major medical center, Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago. Together, great things can happen.

**Let me challenge you to make a covenant with God, and with other like-minded believers, to be an active part of a team of co-workers, ...to bring the gifts, abilities, visions, hopes and aspirations God has given you to actively support the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Do not despise the day of small things, but look with eyes of faith and expect that the God of covenant will do great things with those whose hearts are yielded to Him.**