

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS - THE NOAHIC COVENANT

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### **I. Introduction**

- A. [Turn in your bibles to Genesis 9 – our eventual destination.]
- B. Next six Sundays – a series of messages on the Biblical Covenants
  - 1. Presentation will be introductory in nature since much could be said about each covenant. Especially those which find their basis in the Abrahamic covenant.
  - 2. Overview will identify the covenants, their main provisions, their relationships, and aspects which have continuing significance today and in the future.

### **II. Biblical Covenants**

- A. Biblical Covenants – those covenants which God Himself denotes as covenants within the Biblical text.
  - 1. We will not be discussing theological concepts which some denote as covenants, but which are not clearly portrayed as such within Scripture.
    - a) Covenant of Grace, Covenant of Redemption – imagined between the members of the Trinity before creation.
    - b) Covenant of Works – as important as God's communication and promises with Adam and Eve may be, the text does not denote this interaction as a covenant.
- B. Covenants – plural.
  - 1. Old Testament vs. New Testament
    - a) 5. Archaic. A covenant between human beings and God. [Middle English, a will, from Latin test<sup>3</sup>mentum, from test<sup>3</sup>r<sup>0</sup>, to make a will, from testis, witness. See *trei*-below.]<sup>1</sup>
    - b) Unfortunate implication – perhaps there are only two covenants of significance in Scripture
      - (1) The Old Covenant (the Law or Torah given through Moses)
      - (2) The New Covenant (the means of grace obtained through Jesus Christ)
    - c) As important as these covenants are, we miss important aspects of God's will if we fail to recognize that these covenants operate within a framework of divine promises formalized as covenants.
      - (1) For example:

<sup>1</sup> American Heritage Dictionary.

- (a) Viewing the New Covenant simply in relation to the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law) is an oversimplification because the New Covenant is rooted in promises originally given to Abraham and formalized as the Abrahamic Covenant.
    - (b) When we see the New Covenant in light of the Abrahamic Covenant, we begin to realize additional relationships between the New Covenant and other developments arising from the promises to Abraham, such as the promise of a Davidic ruler and blessing for all the peoples of the earth.
  2. Beyond the "Old Covenant" (Mosaic Law) which was broken and replaced by the New Covenant, other covenants remain relevant.
  3. In Romans, when clarifying Israel's continued significance in the plan of God, Paul states:
    - a) For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom [pertain] the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service [of God], and the promises; (Rom. 9:3-4 NKJV)
  4. When describing the relationship of Gentiles prior to being joined into "one new man" with believing Jews, Paul told the Ephesian church:
    - a) Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:11-12 NKJV)
  5. If we are now no longer aliens from "the covenants of promise," and these covenants are still said to be the nation of Israel's, then it becomes important for us to understand more about them and the nature of our connection with them.
- C. Major Covenants
1. The covenants we will be discussing include:
    - a) Covenant with Noah after the global flood.
    - b) Abrahamic Covenant – which becomes the unconditional basis of other covenants
    - c) Mosaic Covenant – associated with the giving of the law to Israel at Mt. Sinai.
    - d) Land Covenant – the "Promised Land" given to Israel.
    - e) Davidic Covenant – a ruling throne and King in the line of David.
    - f) New Covenant – the basis of our salvation.
  2. There are additional minor covenants which will not be our focus.

### III. Significance Today

- A. Why are these covenants of significance today?
- B. Unfulfilled Promises
  - 1. In our overview of the covenants, we'll see they include promises which have not yet been fulfilled.
  - 2. Unfulfilled aspects of the covenants serve as a basis for our expectations about God's work in the future which awaits fulfillment.
  - 3. A sober reminder that what God is doing is not "all about us".
  - 4. Guards against the tendency to assume He is through with working with certain people groups such as Israel or other nations.
  - 5. For example, in relation to the New Covenant:
    - a) Gentiles who are "in Christ" enjoy benefits of the New Covenant made with Israel.
    - b) Key aspects of the New Covenant have not yet come to pass and await future fulfillment by God.
- C. Unconditional Promises
  - 1. Although aspects of some of the covenants are stated in a conditional form—conditioned upon the obedience of people—we'll see that the basis upon which a covenant with conditions is founded may itself be unconditional.
    - a) These covenants are sometimes referred to as "unilateral" covenants because, although failure by man to meet the conditions may forestall the promises, man's failure cannot annul or break the covenant.
      - (1) Example: Abrahamic covenant where Abram did not directly participate in the formal ratification of the covenant (Gen. 15:12).
    - b) As opposed to "bilateral" covenants where man's failure to meet the conditions of the covenant may cause the covenant to be 'broken.'
      - (1) Example: Mosaic covenant which was broken (De 29:25; 31:16,20; Isa 24:5; 33:8; Jer 11:10; 22:9; 31:32; Eze 16:59; 44:7; Ho 6:7; 8:1; Zec 11:10-11).
  - 2. Rather than assuming these promises have fallen by the wayside due to disobedience, we'll understand that a covenant may include unconditional promises whose enjoyment is conditional.
    - a) The question of whether a promise will come to pass is rooted entirely with the nature of God—the dependability of His pronouncements.
    - b) The question of when a promise will be enjoyed (be fulfilled) hinges on obedience to the conditions associated with the promise.
    - c) Not unlike a father who buys a car for his son.
      - (1) "I purchased the car. The car is yours."

- (2) "You can drive the car--I'll give you the keys--when you are obedient."
  - (3) There is no question as to whose the car is and whether someone else will get it instead.
3. Covenants containing conditions for the enjoyment of the unconditional promises therein are often termed "unilateral" in that it is God's stated purpose to bring about their fulfillment promises themselves depend only upon the character of God

#### **IV. The Nature of Language – Interpreting the Old Testament**

##### **A. Sufficiency of Language**

1. Unlike animals, God gave man the gift of language.
2. The purpose of language is at least twofold:
  - a) God and man can communicate.
  - b) Man and man can communicate.
3. Two key principles at the foundation of interpreting the Bible
  - a) **FIRST PRINCIPLE:** Language is sufficient for the purpose God intended it.
    - (1) Specifically: it is sufficient for God to communicate both His will and His promises to man.
      - (a) The Law – God could not legitimately judge man by the law if language did not adequately communicate the law.
      - (b) The Gospel – God could not legitimately grant salvation on the basis of the gospel message if language was not adequate to communicate how man obtains salvation in Christ.
    - (2) Extremely weighty matters between God and man hinge on the adequacy of the written text of the Scriptures to communicate God's intention.
  - b) **SECOND PRINCIPLE:** The understanding of the original recipients is key.
    - (1) The words of a promise given by Scripture are sufficient to convey God's intended meaning to the original recipients.
    - (2) The normal understanding of the original hearer in the target population is determinative in establishing the primary intention of God.
    - (3) God may choose to extend a promise: to enhance or bless beyond the original promise, but... and this is extremely important
      - (a) He is bound by the sufficiency of language and His perfect, truthful, character to uphold the basic understanding conveyed by the words.

##### **B. Keys to How to Interpret both Testaments**

1. Progressive revelation by God may clarify, enhance, broaden, or extend the limits of His original promises.

2. Progressive revelation may not redefine, subvert, or reinterpret the understanding of promises as previously given to the original recipients.
3. The idea that we may use the New Testament as an "interpretive lens" to change the meaning of passages in the Old Testament is unacceptable.
  - a) If a promise were considered to be a boat, this is the equivalent of weighing the anchor—the meaning conveyed by God to the original recipients—and sailing away with the promise to a distant ocean never intended by God.
  - b) The ears, knowledge, heart, and understanding of the original recipients serves as a guard against abusing, reinterpreting, stealing, or otherwise hijacking what God has said.
4. The Proper Interpretation
  - a) Understand the promises in the ears of the original recipients. This establishes a baseline meaning and expectation in alignment with God's communication.
  - b) Progressive revelation may enrich the original promise by enhancing, extending, clarifying
  - c) Progressive revelation may not subvert, redefine, or reinterpret the meaning in the minds of the original recipients
5. The very character of God is at stake.
  - a) He is bound to fulfill His Word.
  - b) It cannot be made to mean something less or completely different at a subsequent date.
  - c) Otherwise, God's Word would be intentionally misleading and God's character is maligned.

## **V. What is a Covenant**

- A. A formalized contract
  1. A "covenant" is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance.<sup>2</sup>
  2. Often accompanied by signs, sacrifices, and a solemn oath that sealed the relationship with promises of blessing for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it.
  3. The ancient precursor for what we might today consider a "legal contract."
- B. Isn't a promise good enough for God?
  1. God makes both promises and covenants.
  2. Covenants contain formal conditions and promises.
  3. The formal aspect of a covenant serves at least two purposes:

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<sup>2</sup> David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1179 (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992).

- a) Where man is involved, a covenant provides a binding legal instrument to mitigate against his sinful tendency to fail to meet promises made.
  - b) Since God cannot lie or violate His word, a promise is 100% sure and a covenant does not serve to bind His performance any more than a promise.
    - (1) Instead, a covenant serves to emphasize certain promises in the overall plan of God. It is God's way of saying, "Pay attention! This is important to Me!"
  - c) The results of upholding or violating a covenant are generally heightened from what they would be for a promise not formalized as a covenant.
- C. Words for covenant (OT) – [omit if time is short]
- 1. Berith
    - a) B'nai B'rith (sons of the covenant) – Jewish service organization.<sup>3</sup>
    - b) Karat Berith - "cut a covenant" - referring to the custom of cutting animals in half where the covenanting parties pass between the divided parts.
      - (1) We will see a most interesting variation of this practice when we discuss God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:17).
  - 2. Dabar (Haggai 2:5) – [not discussed]

## **VI. Noahic Covenant**

- A. Gen. 6:18 – First occurrence of the word "covenant" in the Biblical text.
  - 1. Ge 6:17-18 - And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.
  - 2. The covenant is established after the flood subsides and Noah's family and the animals disembark.
    - a) Noah builds an altar and offers a sacrifice of every clean animal and bird (Gen. 8:20).
      - (1) The first altar in history.
        - (a) Prior to the flood, the Garden of Eden, though guarded, was still on earth—which is where God had chosen to manifest His presence. Now all trace of the place where man walked with God was gone.
      - (2) Each animal was incredibly valuable at this point in history. Noah offers from among "the best" -- the "first fruits" of the Ark.

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The oldest continually-operating Jewish service organization in the world, It was founded in New York City by Henry Jones and 11 others on October 13, 1843. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B'nai\\_Brith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B'nai_Brith)]

- b) Covenant formally concluded  
Ge 9:9-17 - "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."
- 3. Common elements of a covenant: 1) parties; 2) conditions; 3) a sign.
  - a) Parties to the covenant
    - (1) God
    - (2) Noah
    - (3) Noah's descendants—which includes you and I
    - (4) every living creature
- 4. Conditions:
  - a) If the conditions also include statements made from Noah's altar sacrifice in Gen. 8:20.
    - (1) Never again curse the ground for man's sake (cf. Gen. 3:17).
      - (a) The ground was cursed as a result of Adam's disobedience resulting in much greater effort required to produce edible crops.
      - (b) The earth had undergone a water-baptism related in some way to the curse on the ground. This can also be seen in the name given to Noah by his father:
        - i) Ge 5:29 - And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed."
          - a) Narrative links important actions with Noah's name due to a shared Hebrew root:
            - [1] When the "ark rested" on the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4).
            - [2] "Soothing aroma" of Noah's burnt offering (Gen. 8:21).

- (c) This may also provide additional insight as to why Cain's offering of the "fruit of the ground" was not respected by God (Gen. 4:3-5), whereas much later, after the flood, God commands Israel to offer grain and fruit.
- (d) Whatever the beneficial aspects of the flood in relation to Noah's offering, we know from Romans that the whole creation still labors under the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21-22).
- (2) Continuation of the seasons without interruption (Gen. 8:22).
  - (a) Critical for raising crops for food.
- (3) Fear of man by beasts (Gen. 9:2).
- (4) Man commanded to repopulate the earth.
- (5) And end to vegetarianism, man now permitted to eat animals (Gen. 9:3 cf. Gen. 1:30).
  - (a) Prohibition on eating blood. Blood is here equated with "life," in recognition of its importance to living beings and its special atoning qualities.
    - i) 'For the life of the flesh [is] in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it [is] the blood [that] makes atonement for the soul.' (Le 17:11 NKJV)
- (6) Dominion/stewardship over the animal kingdom.
- (7) Capital punishment (Gen. 9:5-6)
  - (a) The establishment of human government: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."
  - (b) Cain did not undergo capital punishment at the time of his murder of Abel (Gen. 4:10-15).
  - (c) Man is allowed to kill animals, but neither animals or man is allowed to kill man.



- i) The basis for capital punishment: Man is not part of the "animal kingdom" as evolutionists suppose. He is uniquely created in the image of God.
  - ii) Deny this truth and "legal monkey business" is the result  
[1999 article] - Campaigners who want four great ape species to be given legal rights believe they may be on the verge of victory. The four species are chimpanzees, bonobos (a pygmy chimp), orangutans and gorillas....  
[I]f a new animal welfare bill in New Zealand is drafted to include a clause to do just that. The law would then make the great apes the first non-human species to enjoy individual, fundamental rights. Enforceable in law, they would include the right to life, the right not to suffer cruel or degrading treatment, and the right not to take part in most experiments. The bill could soon become law and could set a precedent for other countries. [Advocates argue] partly from the genetic similarities between the great apes and human beings - chimps and humans share 98.5% of their DNA. But it also says all four species have some "indicators of human hood" - intelligence, deep emotions, some linguistic ability, and self-awareness.... Dr Jane Goodall explains why she supports the Great Ape Project "The genetic similarity means we have a special kinship with the great apes, we share an evolutionary path." ...Dr Goodall adds: "One has to make a start to break the arrogant perception that most people have that we are totally different." If you deny rights to apes, [advocates] argue then logically you should withhold them from mentally-disabled human beings.<sup>4</sup>
    - a) One wonders about the potential of a future court case involving a primate where the local zoo serves as a source for "suitable peers" for the jury.
    - b) The idea of extending certain legal rights to animals is sound: based on our accountability to exercise Godly dominion over the animal kingdom. But to extend "human rights" or designate apes as "persons" is evidence of confusion in the extreme and just the type of fruit that can be expected when, as a culture, we reject Biblical truth.
- b) While the earth remains: never again shall all flesh be destroyed by a flood.
- (1) Next judgment and cleansing of the earth will be by fire
    - (a) 2 Pe 3:5-7 - For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

4

[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/277031.stm>]

- (2) Incidentally, if Noah's flood is localized as some try to do, then God has broken this covenant on numerous occasions when animals have perished in a local flood.
5. Sign:
- a) Rainbow – as a reminder to God (Gen. 9:13-16).
  - b) Scripture does not say, but it may well be that the first time that a rainbow ever appeared was at the end of the flood, when the windows of heaven were being stopped and the sun reappeared.
    - (1) Gen. 2:5-6 - ... the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, ... but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.
    - (2) The bow is now "put away," hung in place by the clouds, suggesting that the "battle," the storm, is over.<sup>5</sup>
    - (3) The rainbow appears in several other places in association with God's pending judgment, as if to indicate his remembrance that future judgment will come by a different means.
6. Summary - Relevance of Noah's Covenant Today
- a) Government – the establishment of human legal system enforcing capital punishment – is God-ordained and based in God's covenant with Noah and his offspring, the entire human race.
    - (1) Human rights are unique from animal rights.
      - (a) Only man is created in the image of God.
      - (b) Man has dominion over animals and may kill them for food. Extreme forms of animal rights activism are completely out of step with the Bible.
  - b) The rainbow, far from being a modern symbol of diversity which embraces unnatural sexual relations<sup>6</sup>, is a frequent reminder—both to God and man--of God's manifest grace.
    - (1) "Although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," God holds back from destroying evil men from the face of the earth as He did during the flood.
    - (2) Every rainbow is a reminder of this period of grace, an ongoing merciful period of opportunity, during which sinners may turn to God before final judgment falls.
    - (3) As the Apostle Peter wrote, nearly 2,000 years ago:

<sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>6</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 1:40 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

The rainbow flag, sometimes called 'the freedom flag', was popularized as a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans gender (LGBT) pride and diversity by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker in 1978. The different colours symbolize diversity in the gay community, and the flag is used predominantly at gay pride events and in gay villages worldwide in various forms including banners, clothing and jewelry. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow\\_flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_flag)]

- (a) 2 Pe 3:3-4 - ... scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."
- (b) 2 Pe 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (cf. Rev. 21:1)