

Understanding Covenant 1 of 3:#1; By Himself

Hi all,

At first glance this might appear to be a boring subject. The reality however, is that our lives are governed by covenants in its various modern forms.

From leasing or buying your home, to leasing or buying a car, from engagement and marriage to bank and credit cards, covenants in modern form order our lives. And as many have experienced, any covenant of man can be broken, with various consequences for doing so.

But there is a covenant that cannot be broken.

Ancient covenants

The proper term is actually, 'cutting the covenant', for all ancient covenants included the shedding of blood. The covenant heads, which are the 2 cutting the covenant, first had to agree to enter into covenant. Once coming into agreement, they gave each other their most valuable possession. There was always a celebratory feast after the covenant had been cut. There were always vows spoken with blessings pronounced for keeping covenant and curses if they did not.

These elements: Agreement, Blood, exchanging gifts, vows, and celebratory meal, though ancient, govern our spiritual lives in Christ to this day - and beyond!

Agreement:

In Genesis 15 we see the Lord God (Jehovah Elohim) showing Abram the stars and promising this childless man that he would indeed have offspring too numerous for him to count. It was there in v6 Abram agreed to enter into covenant with Jehovah Elohim: "And he believed in the Lord (Jehovah), and it was counted to him for righteousness."

You'll recall from the previous study how the Lord God is. The One who came out of the Elohim to form Adam's body, made the first blood sacrifice as clothing for Adam and Eve, spoke to Moses from the burning bush: Who Jesus claimed to be in John 8:58.

They had a verbal agreement between them, but Abram then asked how he knew for sure he would have a son. To that, Jehovah gave instructions to formalize their verbal agreement.

He instructed Abram to divide in half a 3 year old heifer, a 3 year old she-goat and a 3 year old ram, and set their halves opposite each other. He did not divide the dove and pigeon, but set one on one side and the other on the other side. (15:8-10)

In a normal ceremony of Abram's day, the less powerful of the covenant heads would walk between the divided animals. This was done as the less powerful covenant head was saying if he broke the covenant he would become as one of those animals.

This practice is referred to in Jeremiah 34:18: "Those who violate my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and walked between the pieces."

Abram was to walk between the pieces as the lesser of the two making covenant, swearing he would be as one of those animals should he violate the covenant.

But the Lord did something unexpected.

He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abram, leaving him incapable of walking with Jehovah between the carcasses, leaving Jehovah to walk by Himself between them, making the covenant with Himself.

Genesis 15:17 says: "A smoking lamp and burning furnace passed between the pieces. And that day the Lord (Jehovah) made covenant with Abram saying..."

There are many commentaries about the burning lamp and smoking furnace. The context is the Lord talking to Abram about his descendants' 400 years in Egypt. Some suggest the smoking lamp is the smoke of destruction and the light of salvation (deliverance) from Egypt.

I tend to think of it this way: The Hebrew of 'smoking furnace' is that of a baking oven, which to me signifies God's provision in the midst of slavery in Egypt. The burning lamp is how the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and kept Israel warm in the desert with a pillar of fire - deliverance and direction.

Instead of Abram as the weaker one making covenant passing between the animals, it was the Lord becoming the weaker one, passing between the animals. The Lord promised and then confirmed His promise by making the covenant. He did so in a way to promise Abram provision and direction, unbroken forever.

This is explained in Hebrews 6:13-20 which says in part:

"When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, **He swore by Himself**....for men always swear by something greater than themselves, and that oath is final, it ends all argument. In the same way God, to show His heirs the unchangeable nature and purpose (in making covenant) He swore by Himself and then made covenant. That by these unchangeable things, that God cannot lie and He made covenant to confirm it, we have fled as a refuge of the hope set before us..."

This is what was happening when Jehovah put a deep sleep on Abram and passed between the halved animals. He made a promise to Abram, and then made a covenant with Himself to confirm His promise. There is nothing more sure in the universe than that!

Hebrews 6 tells us the more complete thought, of how we can be assured of our salvation, be assured of our trust in Jesus:

"We have fled as a refuge to the hope (heaven) set before us. This hope is an anchor for our soul, firm and secure. It enters behind the veil where our forerunner, Jesus, has already entered, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

The main point today is the Lord God made covenant with Himself, as if He were the weaker of the two making covenant. This alludes to Christ the Son of God, emptying Himself of all rights and privileges as God's Son, to become a human being. And as Philippians 2:6-11 says, "Finding Himself in fashion as a man, humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross..." Centuries early, as that weaker one, He made promise of salvation and then made covenant with Himself to confirm it - then He Himself became one of us to fulfill the terms of the covenant. "It is finished."

That is the covenant that cannot be broken. Wow. Amazing grace.

More next week, until then, blessings,
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Covenant #2, YHWH and Abram.

Hi all,

Last week I explained how the Lord God (Christ) first promised and then made covenant with Abram as part of cutting the covenant.

In Genesis 15:1-6 the Lord God took Abram into space and told him that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. The rest of Genesis 15 is what we covered last week, the cutting of the covenant between them.

Chapter 16 opens with Abram and Sarai talking about how the Lord God said Abram would have a son. Sarai suggested in v2 since she was barren and past child bearing age, he make a baby with her house girl, Hagar. They were trying to figure out how that promise might happen, and then decided to help God's plan come to pass.

Before we find fault with Sarai....

Remember, the Lord told Abram in chapter 15 he would have a son but said nothing of Sarai at that moment. The Lord did not reveal Sarai would be the mother of that child until chapter 17. Revelation from the Lord is progressive for He is infinite, so there will be infinite learning and infinite time to do so.

Don't let anyone tell you they have knowledge greater than the Bible reveals, or more than what Paul knew, or outside the Bible, and things like that. The canon of scripture we have today is finite for this age, with only glimpses of the next age.

But we are promised we will one day have a more complete revelation: "Now are we the sons of God but it is not revealed what we will be, but we know when He appears we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2

Helping the Lord

Abram and Sarai were trying to figure out how the Lord might fulfill His promise of Abram having a son, and decided to help the word come to pass. Haven't we all tried to 'help the Lord'? Have we received a revelation, then figured out how it might come to pass, then made decisions to help the process along only to fail?

SO many people fail and end up confused because they thought God said...but what they were really doing was making decisions on partial information, very often setting aside common sense and due diligence, only to fail and blame God.

YHWH - Genesis 17, Sarai will have a baby

Genesis 16:16 tells us Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael. Chapter 17 fast forwards, telling us when Abram was 99 years old when the Lord again appeared to Abram. Ishmael is 13 years old.

This time the Lord appears to Abram as 'El Shaddai'. We know that 'El' is God, but 'Shaddai' is so archaic not even the rabbi's agree on its meaning. They suggest 'all sufficient' but its root appears to be stronger, meaning 'strong enough to overpower (anything)', or 'The God who is strong to overpower'. Notice also the Lord says in Genesis 17:1:

"I AM the God who is strong to overpower", or "I AM the El Shaddai".

The Lord in this appearance is emphasizing both His power over everything, and His grace, for He says He is 'cutting covenant' (English, 'making covenant') with Abram. The Lord's grace is that He the all powerful One, condescends to cut covenant with Abram.

Name change

Though we write the name of the Lord as Jehovah (Latin) or in Hebrew, Yahweh, the ancients even to this day remove the vowels so as not to mispronounce His name which would be a vain use. So we know Him as YHWH, vowels removed, lest someone use His name in vain. It is unpronounceable. English inserts vowels to get Yahweh, but in Judaism, it is just YHWH.

That said, it is pronounceable with just the consonants - it is the sound of a mighty exhaled breath. The 'Y' is a short 'i' sound, followed by a 'ha' and then a 'w' which is exhale with pursed lips to make a sound of the wind, then again an 'h' as 'ha'. It is the sound of the wind, like a mighty rushing wind, ending quietly. Just like on Pentecost in Acts 2:4.

It is in this meeting with Abram and Sarai that the all powerful I AM yet again confirms the covenant with them, giving them as Covenant Head part of Himself: His name. He takes one H from YHWH and gives it to Abram, making him forever Abraham, father of nations.

He takes the other H and gives it to Sarai, making her Sarah, mother of nations. From this point on, they have in their names the name of the God the all powerful I AM. In the same way today a groom gives his name to his wife, this is what He did for His bride - the covenant people with Abraham and Sarah.

It is this same breath of life this same Jehovah Elohim breathed into the sculpted clay body of Adam to bring it to life. He now in essence breathed on Sarai, turning her into Sarah, and told her that 'next year about this time according to the time of life, you will have a son.' (17:21, 18:9-15)

To this Abraham laughed, and later the 90 year old Sarah laughed*. The Lord responds in so many words; 'Because you laughed you will call him 'laughter'. Laughter in Hebrew is 'Isaac'. *Genesis 17:17; 18:9-15

We close with the fact that Sarah after first laughing, had a change of heart and believed. Hebrews 11:11 we are told: "Through faith Sarah received the ability to conceive, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she had judged Him faithful who had promised."

The difference between laughing in unbelief and judging God faithful is a simple turn of the heart, a simple decision. Is He faithful who has promised you?

Make that judgement of God - judge Him faithful who had promised. You and I too, have His name, for Christ lives in us, and we have the authority to use the name of Jesus. We are part of the Abrahamic covenant. Amazing grace, we conclude next week. Until then, blessings,

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Covenant #3, Why Isaac had to be offered & more

Hi all,

I've shared how covenants were based on agreements, sealed by blood, the exchanging of gifts, vows, and a common meal. Today focusing on the exchange of gifts, a common meal, and wrapping up this series.

Livingstone I presume?

David Livingstone was a British missionary who served in Africa from 1840 to his death in 1873. One day he came upon a powerful chief who offered a covenant with Livingstone. Livingstone spread out on the ground all his belongings, from pocket watch to books, from his few clothes to the goat whose milk kept him alive with her milk. The chief chose the goat, much to Livingstone's dismay.

In exchange, he was given what appeared to be the chief's walking stick. Disappointed, Livingstone complained to the Lord about giving up his main source of nutrition due to his many stomach ailments, in exchange for a stick. He complained to one of the local men who told him:

"That's not a walking cane. It is the king's very own scepter, and with it you will find entrance into every village in our country." This proved to be true, allowing the gospel to be spread to the whole region. Livingstone found another goat, but the scepter gave him the 'keys' to the chief's kingdom!

Dad, where is the offering?

In Genesis 22:1-18 we find the statement in v1-2: "...that God did tempt Abraham, saying...go to the mountains of Moriah to a particular mountain I'll show you, and make your son a burnt offering to me..."

The first thing to note is that we interpret the Old Testament through the truths of the New Testament. We are told in James 1:13 that God does not test anyone with evil for He is not tempted by evil.

This then is seen as God not tempting as the King James Version translates it, but rather 'proved' Abraham. In other words, God was proving what was in Abraham's heart, not tempting him. As part of covenant challenges come, but knowing with whom you have made covenant means each challenge merely proves their love and devotion - this is what was going on here - an opportunity for Abraham to prove what was in his heart.

God doesn't tempt man with evil: This was understood even before Abraham

Job and the events of his life happened after the flood but before Abraham. Elihu told Job that God wasn't making him sick several times. For instance Job 37:23: "As touching the Almighty, He is beyond knowing. But He is excellent in power, and judgement and justice, and He will not afflict." Elihu was the only one of Job's friends who spoke truthfully about the Lord, the only one God did not demand he repent for what he said.

God was proving Abraham's heart. In the Bronze Age time of Abraham, human sacrifice was common among the heathen. So the Lord was using local culture as an example and teaching point to Abraham and us all.

Covenant heads exchange their most important possession.

Abraham was asked to offer his son of promise to God as his part of the gift exchange of the covenant. We know when the Lord told him to offer him as a burnt sacrifice, Abraham fully realized what was going on.

According to Hebrews 11:17-19, he knew the Lord had told him the covenant was with Isaac, so whatever he was asked to do, he knew Isaac would live. "Knowing God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, in which he received him in a figure."

The Lamb

When Isaac asked his father where they would get the offering, Abraham responded; "God will provide a lamb for the offering." When Abraham was ready to plunge the knife into his son the Lord stopped him, and provided a *ram*, not a lamb, for the offering. Abraham knew Who he was talking about when he said God would provide a lamb - he knew the Lamb of God and knew the resurrection of the Lamb.

Because you have done this...

In Genesis 22:16-18 the Lord tells Abraham: "Because you have done this, and not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you...and in your Seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Why did this one act have a world-wide effect? Because what is bound on earth is bound in heaven, and what is loosed on earth is loosed from heaven. Because Abraham here on earth loosed his son of promise, the Father God was then able to release His Son of Promise from heaven.

This was the Great Exchange. The exchange of sons, and once again like the animals split in Genesis 15 when He walked between them, God provided the sacrifice, reconciling the world to Himself, by Himself. All He needed from Abraham was 'permission' to loose His Son from heaven. That could only happen by Abraham first loosing his son of promise on earth. Wow.

I've covered some of the elements of covenant, but I'll have some follow up thoughts on the subject next week, until then, blessings,

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Final thoughts covenant #4

Hi all,

We've covered several elements of the ancient covenants, but there are a few more things of note.

Circumcision

What an odd requirement for God to require Jewish males be circumcised. Like much of what we've studied thus far, it too is symbolic of a larger truth. Paul would write in Ephesians 5:23-33 a man is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, which implies in a mystical sense, that sexual union on earth is a picture of heavenly intimacy of things spiritual.

Circumcision therefore, is a symbol of man and his wife and family, being one with God, walking in intimacy with God in a way people outside the family of God cannot. It is a reminder this intimacy with God came with the shedding of blood, putting a high price on being faithful to the bounds of marriage and one's walk with God.

Vows

When Israel came to the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Lord met with them there. They were 47 days from coming out of the Sea, and spent 3 days preparing to meet the Lord at the foot of the mountain, making a total of 50 days out of Egypt. This is the first Pentecost, which I will talk about next week.

Moses was given the 10 Commandments, which were the summary of laws to be given later. It is here the people vowed as a nation in Exodus 24:7: "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient."

God's part of the vows was to bless them, protect them, walk with them and so much more. Their part was to walk with Him in these things. The summary of these is found in Deuteronomy 28, where verses 1-14 state the blessings, and 15-68 the consequences of not obeying. Ancient covenants always had blessings and 'curses'. Today in weddings we only include the blessings in the exchange of vows.

Covenant meal

After vows were exchanged as seen above in Exodus 24:7, there was always a celebratory meal. Today in weddings we see the same thing, a reception meal in celebration of the covenant. In ancient cultures the celebration only commenced after the bride and groom had consummated the physical act of marriage. Yes, everyone waited outside the tent or home for news they had consummated their covenant.

That is the proper place of the 'act of marriage'. It is a physical confirmation of a covenant first made in the hearts of the covenant heads. Sex is not a game played with anyone willing. Within the bounds of marriage there is great freedom, for no matter if the husband and wife come together in romance or a spontaneous moment, each time physically confirms the covenant first made in the heart.

The best Old Testament example of a covenant meal in my opinion, is found in Exodus 24:7-11. After the people vowed their vows: "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient", it was time for the meal.

Immediately after hearing their vows, Moses sprinkles himself, his brother Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders with blood from a sacrifice, they climb the mountain to have a meal with God.

"And they saw the God of Israel. And beneath His feet the flooring was as clear as the sky, and upon the nobles of Israel He did not lay His hand (to hurt them). For they saw God, and did eat and drink."

We know this is the Father because those who have also seen the Father when 'in the Spirit' describe the same clear flooring. In The Revelation 4, which is the Father on His throne, John describes the same clear flooring, cherubs around the throne, and a rainbow overhead. Ezekiel 1 has the Father flying to Ezekiel and he describes a clear flooring and rainbow as well.

The elders of Israel were 'in the Spirit' and not only saw the Father in the covenant meal, but 'did eat and drink' with Him.

Fast forward to our covenant meal

In John 14:1-3 Jesus made a statement right out of the betrothal agreement of ancient Israel. When a groom wanted to propose to a woman, he would go to the father's house and with the oldest brother present, ask permission to marry her.

The groom brought 3 things with him: A money called 'the bride price', a contract of betrothal (Shitre Erusin), and wine. Notice these elements of covenant for they are for us as well. We have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God with our body and spirit. We vow to walk in His ways (contract) and it is sealed with the blood of Jesus, and our willingness to die daily to sin, and carried to the ultimate degree, willing to die for being a Christian.

When permission was given, the money exchanged, the contract of betrothal signed, the young woman was called out and a cup of wine was set before her. If she accepted the bride price, if she vowed with the groom to keep the covenant outlined in the contract, then she

would drink the wine - and they were engaged. It could only be broken by a divorce. The only thing lacking at this point was a wedding ceremony, consummation, and celebratory feast.

The groom would then tell the bride: "In my father's house are many places to live. I am going to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may also be..." This is what Jesus was stating in John 14:1-3, which would have been understood by the disciples.

They had just received what we call The Last Supper, they were now betrothed to the Lord. They were to be faithful to Him from that point on, they were (about to be) bought with a great price.

The Lord's Supper therefore, is an act of confirming our covenant with Him, for we show His death until He returns, and that is why that is stated that way. Every time we eat it, we remember our vows, remember our 'contract' to obey and be consecrated only to Him, and we remember the blood of His sacrifice.

The Lord's Supper is both a look back at His sacrifice, and a look forward as a bride to be eagerly awaiting the moment of marriage, the celebratory feast with all the family and friends!

Amazing grace. Next week, the first Pentecost and more. Until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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