

Net•Work Notes

Week 7, Day 1: The Covenant—Words to Live By

God creates human beings. We turn away from God. God calls Abraham. Abraham steps out in faith. But the people of God live in a world that is at odds with God, and so the people of Israel ended up in slavery. This is still true of the world. Human beings are not good at living as creations made in God's image. We would rather do things our way.

God called Moses because he heard the cry from his people in slavery in Egypt. Our God is a listening God. Human sin leads to slavery, violence, selfishness, back-stabbing, lying, you name it. But God is working to change things. He saved Israel out of Egypt, as the Bible says, "by a mighty hand." God's hand is still mighty to save!

After God delivered Israel out of Egypt, he brought them, under the leadership of Moses, to the "mountain of God", to Mt. Sinai. Today we will read that God brought them into a special relationship with himself, a **Covenant**, at the mountain of God.

A Covenant is a relationship based on promises. God promised to be Israel's God, to lead them to the promised land, and to bless them. He asked Israel to be his people, to walk with him and worship only him. **Read Exodus 20.** God not only gives himself in a relationship; he gives us Words to live by. The 10 Commandments were "Words" meant to guide us in our response to God. They are like our wedding vows with God.

The 10 Commandments are the basic outlines of the relationship. Try this: write each one of the commandments as a positive guideline for a relationship. Try to do this in your own words and

make it "today." (Don't worry if you have trouble 'numbering' the commandments! If you have 9 or 11, no biggy). Write your guidelines now:

Example: "You shall have no other gods before me" I might put as, "I will place God at the top of all my commitments."

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

When we are in love, we want to be faithful to the one we love. We demonstrate, by our actions, the reality of our love and devotion. The 10 Commandments guide us in how to love God. What is one guideline from the 10 commandments that you want to improve on? Which one is going well for you?

Net•Work Notes

Week 7, Day 2: The Covenant—Cracks and Chasms

We are a good **Creation** of God. We are made to live closely with God, living out the lives God created us for. But there as has been a **Crisis** which has disordered and disturbed our lives. So God brings us into a special relationship by his act of **Calling**. God calls us in order to establish us within a wisely ordered **Covenant** relationship.

But you have probably found that life is not always that clear. Our relationships with God (and with one another!) can be difficult. We get confused about what a relationship with God means. It is common for us to doubt whether God is walking with us or not. We question whether or not God has good plans for us. We don't always like being guided by God's Words.

We want you to grow in your faith. That is why we have introduced you to Abraham and Sarah and Moses. Living each day by faith means stepping out in trust that God wants to guide you and walk with you. But living in faith each day is hard. Do you have difficulties trusting God? What situations in your life do you have the most trouble trusting that God is a part of? Use the space below to write some of these down (be as specific as you can)

Israel was called into a Covenant relationship with God. But Israel had trouble trusting God. **Read Exodus 32**. Use the space below to write some of your thoughts on this story. Why do you think they had

trouble trusting God? Try listing some of the questions or thoughts the people may have had.

Israel wanted a god they could "get their hands on"! They wanted a god they could see and control. Have you ever felt this way? What areas of your life would you like to control most? Write down your thoughts why you want to control this:

You may remember that this story is not the only time when Israel "slipped up" with God. It was part of the pattern. Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness because they had trouble trusting God. They complained about the food (tired of manna!), the lack of water, and the hard conditions; they were afraid to move into the Promised Land, fearing the people who lived there.

So, living by faith is a challenge. The people of God (Israel) kept breaking their relationship with God. Ultimately though, God's love is greater than our faithlessness.

Write below one **new area** of your life you **are** trusting God to guide you in:

Net•Work Notes

Week 7, Day 3: The Covenant—Cracks and Chasms

Through these Net•Work Notes we have been trying to introduce you to the basic storyline of the Old Testament—not the whole thing obviously, but at least the core story. There is a reason for that. The story the Old Testament tells is the oldest and truest story we know. And it continues to speak to who we are as we live with God. The story of the Old Testament tells us who we are, but it also states what God is doing to make our lives whole.

The people of Israel wandered for 40 years in the wilderness (the story of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Maybe you feel like you've been wandering in your life with God. Where would you like some direction from God? (List some specifics here).

What commandment of God gives you the most trouble or difficulty? Spend some time writing this down:

There is a detail in the story of the wilderness wanderings of God's people that is worth remembering: God had the people build an ark (a box, basically) to hold the 10 Commandments, and he gave Moses directions to build a moveable tabernacle or sanctuary to surround the ark of the

covenant. And it was in this sanctuary that Moses met and talked with God and where the sacrifices were offered (the book of Leviticus is all about this).

Why is this worth remembering? **It demonstrates that God goes with us even during our wandering and confusion!** That is good news. Also the sacrifices tell us something else worth remembering: **We can use everyday, ordinary parts of our lives (for Israel that was grain, wine, olive oil, sheep, goats, and doves) to show our devotion to God.** God knows that we need him in the everyday details. What are the everyday things that mean the most to you? List these below.

In what ways could these be an offering to God?

Net•Work Notes

Week 7: Day 4—The Covenant: a Matter of the Heart

Eventually the people made it to the promised land and began to live in the land as God's people. The books of Joshua and Judges tell the story of Israel's taking over the land and beginning to live in it. Like Joshua, they were told to "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Well, the old pattern continued. The people had trouble living faithfully with God. They did not live by God's guidelines (the 10 Commandments) and did not keep the Passover (which was meant to remind them of how God had saved them). And when they were threatened by the armies of the peoples around them, they grew frightened. When they were in trouble they cried out to God to save them (the book of Judges tells many of these stories). But Judges also reveals how the people wanted to live without listening to or obeying God. The book of Judges ends with the conclusion, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." Even though God was their "king" they decided that they wanted their own king. As a result, things were a mess in Israel (Judges is a messy, violent account of what happens to and among the 12 tribes of Israel).

The result is that the people demand a King. By the time Samuel was judge in Israel, the ark of the covenant had been stolen (being misused in battle) and Samuel's corrupt sons were trying to lead. **Read 1 Samuel 8.**

What does this chapter tell us would happen to the people of Israel as a result of taking a human king? Write these below:

What do you think happens to people when we let other people or things "rule" us? Notice in this chapter the real problem was that they rejected the one being who was able to rule the people well: God.

The first king of Israel was Saul. He was kind of a lesson for Israel: don't judge a king by his looks. Saul looked the part but was more concerned with how he **looked** to the people rather than how he served God or the people. His life ends in tragedy. Then God raises up the most loved king in Israel's history: David. What was the key to David's life? Was he more religious? Was he smarter? Was he morally perfect? The Bible says "no" to all of these questions. **Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.** David was different because he had a heart for God. Love and devotion are what set David apart.

Net•Work Notes

Week 7, Day 5: The Covenant—Praying to God

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

David is a bright spot in the middle of the story of God's people. He is the king that was loved and remembered by his people as having been the high point in their history. David established the capital of Israel in Jerusalem and brought the ark of God's covenant to the city as the sign that God was the center of Israel's life.

But let us be clear about something. David was a strong military leader, fierce in battle and unafraid of his enemies; he was a loyal friend, unwilling to let rivalries weaken his commitment; and he was a passionate worshiper of Israel's God, ready to dance and sing before the living God. There is a lot to admire and appreciate about his life.

Read Psalm 51. But maybe you already know the whole story. David was an admirable man, but he has more to teach us than bravery, or loyalty, or passion. In David we see someone who was honest before God. Let's not fool ourselves: David also sinned terribly (he was an adulterer and murderer; cf. 2 Samuel 11). David is the one whom God led to look directly at his sin and name it. It was in the bright light of God's gaze that David came to understand how far he fell from God's presence.

David's story is memorable because God showed great love for David, even when David had done great wrong. And the good in this story is that David asked God to deal with him, to work in him, to make him new. David knew his need for God, received God's mercy, and renewed his faith and trust in God.

Ultimately that is the story of the rest of the Old Testament. We will only touch on the prophets of the Bible. But what they show us is that even though Israel was God's people, their hearts were far from God. God had called them in a covenant relationship. The prophets tell us that Israel abandoned that relationship. There is crisis once again. The question then becomes, "What do we do when we find ourselves in the midst of crisis?" May we be like David who says, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love."