



2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Feb 26th - Mar 3rd

Sermon: February 25th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

February 26

Genesis 1 and Revelation 21

Today's devotion is somewhat introductory in nature. My goal is to give us a bit of a roadmap that will help us navigate and anticipate the direction we are going to take for the week. In doing so, I have selected the two chapters that bookend our Bibles. Genesis 1 constitutes the first Words from God to man recorded and passed down in Scripture and Revelation 21 are the concluding Words of God recording the future when God's plan culminates in a new, better creation (heaven and earth).

Why did I select these two texts? Because I want us to see that the entirety of the Bible tells us the story of how God brings redemption from the perfect, but subsequently marred first creation to the perfect and eternally unblemished new, future, creation. The point is that the story is meant to fit together, it is one grand narrative that tells one unified story which terminates on One, Glorified Savior who would appear in space and time to take away the sins of the world, make possible a reconciliation with God the Father and lead us to a time when we will once again dwell with God in paradise (which, not coincidentally, is how the story begins in Genesis 1).

The fact that the Bible is one, cohesive story has many ramifications, but this is perhaps the most important reality, if we are going to interpret the Bible correctly, we must recognize this fact and understand each section of Scripture within its larger context. Thankfully, God gives us certain road signs along the way and those signs are His various covenants. Throughout the Scriptures (beginning in the very first chapter) God makes covenants with His people. These covenants are binding agreements, with both blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. They further provide insight into how God desires His people to live and what He is planning for redemption. Furthermore, we can trace the development of the redemptive plan in Christ through the covenants God makes with His people.

Biblical covenants inform the reason behind some of the more bizarre laws (why did God not allow Israel to eat Shrimp?), they foreshadow the need for the coming Redeemer (If Adam couldn't stand against Satan in paradise, what mere mortal could hope to prevail against him in a broken world?) and they ultimately lead us to the Person of Christ (the second Adam, the ultimate ark of Noah, the lamb who finally and truly takes away the sins of the world).

Our conviction, therefore, is that covenants are not only neat additions to the text, but they also form the very backbone of the Scriptures and need to be understood and consulted when we formulate ideas or draw conclusions about a passage of Scripture. This week's devotions are going to fixate on how the covenants lead us to Christ but before we dive into that concept, let me conclude today's entry with a marvelous quote from Dr. Stephen Wellum on the need of covenants for biblical interpretation: "One cannot fully understand Scripture and correctly draw theological conclusions from it without grasping how all the biblical covenants unfold across time and find their telos (this means their ultimate objective) and fulfillment in Christ... we assert the covenants form the backbone of the Bible's metanarrative and thus it is essential to put them together correctly in order to discern accurately the whole counsel of God." Pastor Robert and I would affirm the above sentiment with a hearty "amen!" and I hope that this week's devotions will help us all to understand why Dr. Wellum's statement is so necessary and profound.

February 27

Exodus 20 & Exodus 23:21-22

There are five major covenants in the Old Testament that form the backbone of the outline of God's redemptive storyline. These covenants all constitute integral points along the path of God's plan of salvation and they ultimately terminate in Christ. Over the next five days, we are going to look at each of these covenants, examining them to understand not only what they teach but also how they ultimately foreshadow and lead us to Christ.

However, before we arrive at our destination, I do believe it is important for us to take a day to study the content of every covenant in Scripture. Let's face it, there are thousands of Bible verses and many of them give us commands to follow, how do we know the difference between a command that flows from a covenant and an actual covenant itself in Scripture? The answer is that God has given us covenant agreements that contain obvious and specific elements which serve to set apart a covenant from instruction that flows from official covenants. As David Chilton tells us, covenants have a certain legal tenor and flavor to them, in fact "the covenant was a legal arrangement, a binding agreement imposed on God's people by her King, stipulating moral obligations and promises." You will notice in this quote that covenants are binding, there is no escape clause! A covenant will be fulfilled either in curses or blessings. Furthermore, you will notice that covenants are not negotiated! They are "imposed on God's people by God (the King). Absolutely every covenant is the direct result of God's good pleasure and wisdom alone."

This being understood, there are also necessary elements of each covenant that help us recognize and understand the presence and requirements of the agreement. First, we have a preamble. A preamble is an introduction from God, the covenant giver, whereby He testifies of His identity as our great and transcendent God. In our text for today, God says, "I am the Lord your God..." The importance of these words is straightforward, God expects His people to listen and abide based on His standing as God.

Second, we have the historical prologue. This is the section of the covenant that details the previous relationship to His people. In the case of Exodus, God reminds the people that He is the One who "brought them out of Egypt..." Specifically, God's desire is for His people to know that He is faithful and powerful. Next, we have the ethical stipulations, considering who God is and what God has done, He has requirements for His people to observe. This God is not indifferent to His people's lifestyle, instead He is concerned with His glory through their obedience and, therefore, He offers them exact instructions on how to live.

Fourth, we have sanctions. These are the lists of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. God is so gracious to His people as to share with them the beauty and abundance that flows from their faithfulness and the shipwreck that will occur in their disobedience. At the end of this long passage of Scripture (chapters 20-23), God offers Israel clear statements about what will happen if they disobey (God will not pardon your transgressions) and if they do obey (God will be an enemy to their enemies, meaning He will be on their side in battle and prosperity!). Finally, the covenant offered always deals with succession. This covenant is not just made with the immediate generation that composes God's people, instead the Lord makes it known that His agreement will be in force for the generations to come as well. These are the components of a covenant. They clearly outline God's expectations and the results of the people's obedience or lack thereof.

February 28

Genesis 1

Now that we have some understanding of the importance and composition of covenants within the biblical narrative, it's time that we turn our attention to the various covenants themselves. You will notice that 3 of 5 covenants are given in Genesis which is why this study is important for our understanding of Genesis moving forward.

Today's covenant is the first covenant, and it is sometimes referred to as the covenant of works. This agreement between God and man has a unique historic context as it is the only covenant made before the fall of man into sin and corruption. In this covenant, God gives a clear directive to Adam and Eve that they are to work together as God's representatives. Some theologians have helped us here in stating that mankind's duties can be separated into three neat categories: prophet, priest, and king.

As a prophet, man was to speak and embody the true nature of God to the world around Him. As priest, he was to honor God in worship and discern evil, casting those things which were not in accordance with God's right rule out of Eden and as King, man was to rule as God's "vice regents" (a term that means God's authoritative representatives) over creation. Man was instructed to faithfully fulfill this covenant in expanding his rule beyond the current bounds of Eden by exercising dominion over more of the earth and he was to do so while obeying God's commandment to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The reward for his faithfulness was prosperity in his endeavors and life and the consequence for his unfaithfulness was death.

We know of course that man failed to faithfully fulfill his covenant with God. He neglected to speak truth to the serpent who misquoted Scripture, he was unwilling to cast the evil serpent out of the garden and unwilling to honor the Lord in worshipful obedience and he forfeited his rule over creation through his acquiescence to the temptations of the devil. The result of man's disobedience was death and separation from God.

The story of our first ancestors is central to the biblical storyline as it explains why the world is so broken. We know that we suffer the curses of the breaking of the first covenant in our frustrated work, painful toil and, ultimately, in our sure death. In this explanation, Christianity demonstrates a competence in the "real world". We do not act as if everything is wonderful, instead we acknowledge that the world is horribly marred, but we also affirm that God isn't through with this world!

In fact, we could say that the consequences of man's fall through disobedience to the first covenant, or covenant of works, form the very introduction to the plan of salvation and they make the good news of the new covenant truly marvelous. Whereas the first man failed, and those he represented fell with him. Another man would come to succeed and institute a new covenant with us many years in the future.

February 29

Genesis 8

Today's passage records the second covenant in Scripture, known as the "Noahic" covenant. There have been some who would like to quibble with the qualification of the Noahic agreement as a covenant because they claim that the elements are not explicit. Specifically, some note that there doesn't seem to be a noted consequence for disobedience, in fact it doesn't seem that God requires obedience to fulfill His promises at all!

The reality of the fact is that there is still absolutely a statement about obedience and disobedience in the text. While God does in fact promise that He will never again destroy all of life on the earth, He does not promise to spare EVERY life. In fact, the Bible would continue to show us that many, in fact most, of the lives who came about after Noah were still subject to judgment. Furthermore, we see that the Noahic covenant was made by God to man after an act of worship on Noah's part. In fact, the Bible connects the dots quite nicely for us as it states that the fragrance of the offering made its way to God which was the impetus behind His covenant (at least from man's perspective).

The significance of the covenant is crucial if we are going to understand redemptive history. God's promise to spare the world from total destruction is a promise to preserve the world, and some people within it, throughout all generations. If God is to honor the promise He makes in this passage, He must ensure that some are spared from His wrath and that there will not be a time in which the entirety of the planet is wiped out again.

This promise sets the stage for the rest of the Biblical story which shows us how God would go about making and saving a people. To be clear, there were dark times when only a few had not abandoned the truth for the world's bankrupt promises, but there would never be a moment in which God's people were not.

From this moment forward, the Bible is a story of redemption. God's people would be redeemed and, as they were set apart, they were to continue the work of cultivating and ruling the world as God's vice regents. In fact, many notice that God reprises a very similar commission to Noah that He gave originally to Adam. Once again, man has been given the task to exercise dominion, by multiplying image bearers and faithfully serving and glorifying our great God.

The trouble with this commission is not the rightness of the charge. This is exactly why man was created! We should rule as God's representatives and work to bring Him glory but the rest of the Old Testament shows us that sinful man is simply incapable of obedience due to his wicked, rebellious heart. If man is going to obey this charge, he will need to be fundamentally changed. Stated differently, if God is going to complete His mission to build a people for Himself, their sin and its consequences must be dealt with and their hearts must be changed. The Old Testament shows us that even the best of the saints of God still failed... someone must come to atone for our sins and make possible God's transformation in our lives if we can ever realistically fulfill the Divine commission that was given to Noah, and all of God's people after him, again in Genesis.

March 1

Genesis 12

Today's covenant is known as the "Abrahamic Covenant". This agreement between God and Abraham is central to the storyline of Scripture from Genesis 12 to Christ. We see in this passage of Scripture that God freely chooses to promise Abram (later Abraham) some marvelous and miraculous blessings upon his obedience.

As many of you know, Abram was a man of advanced age when the Lord encountered him, and this meant that the promise of offspring (of which Abram had none at the moment of their conversation) was literally too good to be true. Nevertheless, God promised that He would make Abram's descendants great and numerous and yet this wasn't even the most amazing aspect of God's promise.

The crux of the covenant is found in two distinct promises. First, God promises to bless those who bless Abram's descendants and curse those who curse the progeny of Abram. This blessing and cursing is in keeping with God's desire to associate with the offspring of Abram so that those who honor Abram's offspring honor God and those who harm his offspring make an enemy out of God. The rest of the Scripture tells the story of God honoring this promise on behalf of His people. In both the Old and New Testaments, we see examples of God blessing those who bless His people and cursing those who curse His beloved.

The second promise is even more incredible and that is that through Abram's offspring, "all nations will be blessed". How is this possible? The answer is that Abram had been selected by God to father a line of people through whom the Savior of the world would appear in space and time. In fact, Matthew demonstrates the connection well in showing us that Jesus did in fact come from the line of Abraham.

The point of this covenant then is not to terminate on a specific ethnic people as much as it is to see that God would build a people that He would use to bless all nations. Now, we see that all those who have faith are grafted into the people that receive God's blessing through Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9), indeed we now know that those who have embraced Christ have been "grafted into" the family of God (Romans 11) and we believe that the promise to bless and curse those who bless, and curse God's people is still in effect for Abraham's descendants in the faith. Jesus Himself prophesied that upon the confession of Jesus as the Christ (or Messiah) that He would build His church (His covenant people) and the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

Christ is teaching us that God still plans to bless His followers and shield them from all outside attacks and this is done, specifically, because the people of God have been adopted into the family of God by faith. The quality and nature of our saving faith is the same faith that Abram exercised in hearing the Word of God, its promises and warnings, and choosing to follow Him, trusting that God would indeed deliver upon all of the guarantees that He had made even if the promises had not yet been realized.

March 2

Exodus 19 & Leviticus 26

Today's covenant is called the "Mosaic Covenant". The Mosaic Covenant is also regularly referred to in the Scripture as the "law". While Romans makes clear that all mankind is imbued with an innate knowledge of right and wrong (though that understanding is skewed and suppressed by virtue of our fall into sin), the Mosaic Covenant constitutes the law that God explicitly gave as a reflection of His character and expectations and for the purpose of His people's obedience which would lead to their being set apart, or a holy nation, amongst the pagan people groups of the rest of the world.

For our purposes today, we see that the covenant God makes with Moses and Israel guarantees both blessings and curses. The blessing is prosperity and relationship with the Father as His treasured possession and the curses include panic, grief, and being expelled from the Promised Land that was given to them upon their exit of Egypt and promised to them by God through Abraham.

The law formed a standard that all men were expected to obey, however the function of the law was really intended to illuminate man's inability to obey God. While the law rightly dictated outward behavior, the real problem with mankind is a wicked heart. Even outward obedience is tainted by sin and perfect obedience is rendered impossible by virtue of our rebellious and dull hearts towards God.

Therefore, the greater reason for the Mosaic Covenant was to once again demonstrate the people's need for salvation. In this way, the law functioned as a "schoolmaster" or "teacher" that would inform the people of their need for salvation through Christ (Galatians 3:24). This means that a major point of the law was to cause the people to look outside of their own efforts and being for salvation, they needed to see that an extrinsic Messiah must come to redeem them from their sins by atoning for their guilt and living faithfully where they disobeyed.

Now, this doesn't mean that the law isn't good, and it doesn't mean that the law is not to be followed! Instead, Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5 that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law. He fulfilled the law by living perfectly according to its commands and He fulfilled the law's obligations for those who have transgressed against it by dying as the propitiation, or payment, for our sins.

This is the final way that the covenant helps us understand the larger biblical storyline. When Christ came to earth, He was on a mission to die. His death was not some arbitrary act, instead His death is the fulfillment of the law's demand for restitution or payment for sins. Whereas the law dictated that animals should die as sacrifices for the sins of mankind, Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats were not enough to take away the sins of men. Something more valuable, more precious, had to die and that death would happen, in accordance with the law's demands, through the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God. In this way, the Mosaic Covenant foreshadows the need for a Redeemer and, on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus announces that He is in fact that Redeemer as His body is broken for us and His blood spilled so that ours wouldn't have to be.

March 3

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Today's devotion will be the final devotion in our study of Old Testament covenants. I pray that we have done a passable job of showing how each covenant is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Perhaps a bit of review will help us as we round the final corner this week. Jesus is the better Adam who fulfills the covenant of works where Adam fell. Christ preserves His people from the wrath of God as the better ark and guarantees that they will never be overwhelmed by judgment. Jesus is the means whereby God makes good on His promise to bless all nations through the line of Abram. Christ both perfectly fulfills the law given to Moses in His obedience and satisfies the wrath of God due our sins as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice.

Finally, we have the covenant God makes with David. David was a righteous ruler in many respects, but his life is far from perfection. Because of his sin, David would die, and the Scriptures tell us as much in 2 Samuel 7. God predicts that David would die, and that Solomon would take the throne, but Solomon had the same issues that David had. This meant that there would be constant turnover and the possibility of either upheaval by the masses or wandering from God by the offspring of David on the throne. The truth is that both of those issues occur in Israel at various times in Old Testament history and this means that Israel's hope of stability and righteousness must be grounded in something more...eternal.

God promises David this very eternal joy in predicting that David's throne would be established forever, but how? Well, some in the Kingdom may have thought they found the answer in David or Solomon, but the biblical narrative shows us that these men were fallen and temporal kings. Neither of them could rule perfectly or eternally, so what exactly did God have in mind? The answer is that one was coming through the line of David (as seen again in Matthew 1) who would rule and reign forever. This God-man would not be beset by sin and therefore the Kingdom would have no need to worry that He would lead them into depravity. Furthermore, this man would never die, or at least He wouldn't stay dead.

Now, we look back over history and realize that the fulfillment of this covenant with David has come in the Person of Christ. He rules and reigns over all mankind as the ascended King of the universe. He is returning to reign on earth, and He will do so as the Sovereign over all of God's people. His Kingdom has no end, His righteousness endures for all eternity and His people will prosper forever as they benefit from His might in overwhelming all of the enemies that would seek to destroy His Kingdom.

Christ is the greater David. David slayed the giant Goliath and Christ slays the greater giant of Satan and sin. David ruled as a man after God's own heart, but Christ is God with a perfect heart. David desired to build a Temple for worship and Christ made possible a Temple within every soul that would believe upon Him, thereby being indwelt by the Holy Spirit as a glorious blessing of the New Covenant. The Davidic Covenant, therefore, is another harbinger of the Person of Christ.