06

Covenant

God Promises

Thirteen points every follower of Jesus should know. A study by Pastor Andy Cisneros.

13 POINTS · 06

Covenant: *God Promises*

"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God."

Exodus 6:7

Do you have an enemy? One whose betrayal of you, disregard of you, has been very difficult? What has your response been?

The sins we have committed against God are far worse, more deep, and more disgusting than any sin that has been committed against us. God created the world as a gift for us. God created us and bestowed on us love, blessings as people made in His image. God gave us companionship through the gift of marriage. And God spoke nothing but grace to us and did nothing but bless us. **Our response was sin.**

God's response to our sin was a covenant—a saving, loving covenant. This is because God is, by nature *love*. He expresses His love with commitment to His people. At the basic level a covenant is an agreement between two parties. Various covenants are made between people, between people and God, and between God and people. In the Old

Testament, the word covenant appears hundreds of times and is used in a variety of ways.

- Personally, Job made a covenant with his eyes not to look at women lustfully (Job 31:1).
- Relationally, an agreement made between friends (1 Samuel 18:3), as is marriage.
- Nationally, the elders of Israel made a covenant with King David (2 Samuel 5:3).
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Benefits of covenants can include protection from an enemy, peace, financial blessing, and obtaining a homeland. When the Bible speaks of God's covenant with his people it is explaining how our relationship with God is made by His provision and exists by His terms. The way God deals with His people in covenant includes all of these truths. Through a covenant with God we enjoy a relationship with Him that is similar to marriage and includes protection from Satan our enemy, peace with God though we declared war on Him through sin, material provision in this life and a coming perfect kingdom as our permanent home where Jesus will rule over all as our king.

The word for covenant is *berith* in Hebrew and *diatheke* in Greek. A covenant is "a solemn commitment, guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both parties, sealed with an oath." When God enters into a covenantal relationship with humanity He sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. Or, to say it another way, a covenant is a life-and-death relationship with God on His terms with His standards.

As a bond a covenant is a relationship that commits people to one another, God to God's people, and people to God. Oaths, promises, and signs accompany the bond or commitment. This aspect of God's covenants reveals His loving grace and mercy because, although people deserve nothing but condemnation, God gives covenantal salvation.

By initiating covenants God never enters into the relationship casually or informally. Covenant relationship signifies the life-and-death intensity of the bond. This intensity is seen in all three types of covenants, human to human, God to human, and human to God (2 Kings 11:17; 23:3; 2Chronicles 29:10). The establishment of a covenant is called "cutting a covenant." It usually entails the slaughter of an animal. This symbolizes, or represents, the curse that the covenant maker calls down upon himself or herself if they should violate the commitment that was made. This aspect of God's covenants reveals His perfect holiness and justice.

In a covenant with God there is no bargaining, bartering, or contract negotiations regarding the terms of the covenant. Neither is God's covenant something we must earn by our good works. It is always a gracious provision from the loving God to His people. The sovereign LORD of heaven and earth dictates the terms of God's covenants. It is God's covenant in that it is conceived, devised, determined, established, confirmed, and dispensed by God himself, who often says, *"I will establish my covenant with you."* This aspect of God's covenants reveals His sovereign rule as LORD.

God makes five major covenants in the Bible with the following:

1. Noah and his family.

2. Abraham and his descendants.

3. Moses and the Israelites.

4. David and the kingdom of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8-19; Psalm 89:3).

5. The new covenant of Jesus and the church.

For each of these covenants, it is helpful to highlight five special features:

1. The covenant mediator (the person with whom God makes the covenant) and his covenant role (whom the mediator represents).

2. The blessings promised in the covenant. A good example – Deut. 28:1 - 14

3. The conditions (or curses) of the covenant. See Deut. 28:15 ff.

4. The sign by which the covenant will be celebrated and remembered.

5. The form that God's family takes as a result of the covenant.

The purpose of these covenants was to address the problem of the human race and of the entire created order. Across the Old Testament echo the promises and relationships in the covenants that will redeem God's people and restore God's sin-alienated creation to Himself. It is important to say that covenants themselves do not solve the problem, but they do point to Jesus who does.

Why a Covenant?

Throughout the Old Testament, covenant love is referred to in various terms, but the main one is *hesed*. In fact, it is not a stretch to say that the word *hesed,* in essence, summarizes the entire history of God's covenantal relationship with Israel.

Hesed is God's loving-kindness—the consistent, ever-faithful, relentless, constantly pursuing, extravagant, unrestrained, one-way love of God. It is often translated as covenant love, loving-kindness, mercy, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, commitment, or reliability. *Hesed* turns up regularly in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. It is typically translated "love" and sometimes as "mercy." However, *hesed* has a much narrower definition than the English term *love* conveys. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *hesed* refers to a sort of love that has been promised and is owed—covenant love—as in Hosea 11:1*: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."* Covenant love is the love God promised to give to His covenant people, and which they, in turn, were to respond in kind, loving God with all their hearts, minds, and strength. *Hesed* does not suggest some kind of generic love of everyone. Rabbi Kamsler states the best English word to use as a translation for *hesed* is *loyalty,* which refers to God's covenant loyalty because of his love for His people. The *Jesus Storybook Bible* for children says it best of all: *"God loves us with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love."* (Thank you Brooke and Logan). Malachi 1:1–5 is a clear presentation of *hesed*. Malachi opens with the declaration of the word of Yahweh: *"I have loved you."* The people were not immediately convinced of this declaration because of their state of spiritual rebellion. It sounded good, but it wasn't very assuring because things had not worked out to their satisfaction. *"How have you loved us?"* they asked. The prophet's response reminded them of their status as the chosen people of God: *"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"* Yahweh asked, *"Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau."* Malachi was stressing that their existence as the people of God was the clearest evidence of the love of God. God chose the Israelites to be His kingdom of priests, His witness in the world. He gave them the Scriptures, the temple, the priests, the prophets, the covenants, and the Messiah. And, His love for them was an everlasting love, even though they failed Him again and again, God still retained His covenant with them. Not only did God choose Israel ("Jacob"), but He also cared for the Israelites whenever they were in trouble. The simple fact was that God protected Israel down through the ages. Being God's people is a repeated theme throughout Scripture: *"I will live among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people."*

It's important to note that this promise recorded in Malachi is a reminder of the covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1 – 3 & 17:1 – 8). This covenant was repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:1 – 5) and again to Jacob (Gen. 35:9 – 12). In each case it was an *unconditional* covenant, i.e., there were no conditions placed upon it. God also made *conditional* covenants. The Mosaic covenant is a good example of that. In this covenant God said, "*IF* you do this, I will do this." In Deuteronomy 28, just before the Israelites entered that land promised to them many years before, Moses reminds the people of their responsibilities. In the first fourteen verses he speaks of all the blessings they can expect if they obey God's commands. In verses fifteen forward he tells them of the punishment they can expect if they disobey. The history of the Jewish people proves to us that God means what He says. But, again, we must note: God never contradicted His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Read Deuteronomy 30:1 – 10.

Our story begins with creation in harmony, unity, and peace, and it ends with a restored creation. In between these two bookends is redemption. The covenants are major chapters of the story. The goal is to see the work and person of Christ in light of the Old Testament and to highlight aspects that we have possibly overlooked. Christ's work is related to and fulfills each of the four covenants (with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David) that God initiated in the Old Testament. New dimensions are brought to light when Christ's covenant is understood in the context of the previous covenants. Covenants are about God's activity and intention to redeem us, and the covenants tell us about ourselves—our condition, our brokenness, our dignity, our role as images of God, our suffering, and our calling.

Regarding our calling, Christopher J. H. Wright says of God's covenant people (Israel and the church): "This people also have a mission, derived from the mission of God. Again the word is used to mean that this people exists for a purpose, or more precisely, have been brought into existence for the sake of the purposes of God. But, in their case, especially in the New Testament (though not absent from the Old Testament), the concept of mission as 'sending and being sent' is an essential component in that overall orientation towards the goal of God's mission."

One way of walking through the story of God in Scripture is to see God sending His Son and His people into the world through covenants as an act of worship in relation to Himself and as an act of witness in relation to the nations.

The Noahic Covenant

God's calling of Noah to build the ark begins with the genealogy of Adam's descendants until the birth of Noah (Genesis 5:1-7). The primary theological point of the genealogy is to show that every descendant of Adam was a sinner who lived and died without exception; it reveals this in a very long fashion, simply saying "and he died" repeatedly. Peter, reflecting on God's patience in the days of Noah, sees a correlation with our own day (2 Peter 3:3-9). As decades pass with little change in the world, it is easy for us to lose hope that things will never be different. Don't you wonder if God will ever change the world in a dramatic way? We may doubt at times, but we can take heart. God did not allow sin to go unpunished in Noah's

time; He will not let it go unpunished in the future. He did not fail to rescue His people from judgment in Noah's day; He will not fail to rescue us in the future. Christ will return and bring us into a new heaven and new earth in time, just as God brought the flood. (Genesis 6:5–9) that breaks the cycle of mere sin and death:

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."

It is easy to misread this passage and come to the conclusion that Noah was a good guy who earned God's favor through his good works. The story of Noah is commonly told like this: "In the days of Noah, all the people were wicked except for Noah, a righteous man who earned God's favor. Therefore God saved him from judgment in the flood." The practical application of this version of the story is that there are good guys and bad guys and that God loves and saves the good guys but kills the bad guys. Therefore, we should all be good guys so that God will love and save us. This teaching about Noah works against the rest of Scripture and simply not what Genesis 6:5–9 says. However, though a sinner like others, Noah demonstrated a faith in the one true God by obeying His command to build the ark. In a similar fashion Abram left his homeland and traveled to an unknown location on faith alone (Hebrews 11:7 – 10).

1. Genesis 6:5–7 depicts the complete brokenness of everyone on earth with one of the most negative declarations about human sin in all of Scripture. We are told that God saw that every person was only evil all the time. God was grieved that He had made mankind. This statement does include Noah.

2. Genesis 6:8 does not say that Noah worked hard to merit God's favor. Noah did not begin as a righteous man. He began, as all men do, a sinner. His status with God was God's gracious gift, not a result of Noah's religious works.

The word *"favor"* in this passage is the Hebrew word for *"grace."* It appears here for the first time in the Bible, but, it is found throughout the Bible in the teaching that salvation is by grace through faith alone. Throughout Scripture people are saved through the undeserved working of God. Because everyone was a sinner in Noah's day, just like everyone is a sinner in our day, no one earns God's favor. God's favor is a free gift. So God worked, as He always has, by saving an ill-deserving sinner by grace alone, through faith alone, thereby enabling him to live a righteous life. Genesis 6:9 then explains the effects of God's grace to Noah: *"These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."*

Noah was a blameless and righteous man who, like Enoch, "walked with God," and like Job, whom God pointed out to Satan as "a blameless and upright man" (Job 1:8; 2:3). But, Noah was only this sort of man because God saved him by grace and empowered him to live a new life of obedience to God by that same grace.

God began to speak directly to Noah and give him commands to obey. God informed Noah that he planned to end sin by killing all the sinners through an enormous flood as judgment on them. God then gave Noah orders to build an ark. The ark measured some 1,400,000 cubic feet, and was big enough to house 522 modern-day railroad boxcars. Noah obeyed God's commands and built the ark, likely with only the help of his sons. Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah did so in holy fear as a man of faith who believed that God would bring the flood even while others continued in sin without repentance. When he completed the construction of the ark Noah placed his family on the ark along with the animals God had commanded him to bring. Then he waited for God to fulfill His promise of judgment.

After Noah was saved by God's grace, built the ark according to God's instructions, and loaded his family onboard with the animals as God commanded him, God sent rain. The rain continued for forty days until it covered the land, drowning all the sinners under God's righteous judgment. The only people spared in the flood were Noah and his family because, as Genesis 6:8 states, God gave him grace.

After the flooding stopped, the land appeared out of the water like in the days of creation for Adam. In many ways, the account of Noah echoes the account of Adam, with a sort of new creation, a new humanity and a new fall. After the flood subsided and God dried the ground, Noah and his family exited the ark. Then Noah did a remarkable thing. In Genesis 8:20 we read, *"Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar."* Recognizing the devastation that God had wrought upon the earth, Noah was convicted of his own sin. He knew that he too should have been killed like everyone else. So he offered a burnt offering for the atonement of his sin. God was so pleased with Noah's offering of atonement that he responded by promising never to flood the earth again; the answer to sin from now on would be atonement, which foreshadowed the death of Jesus for sin.

God then made a covenant with Noah that was intended for all people of the earth (Genesis 9:1-17). God promised that He would never again send a cataclysmic flood and that the seasons would continue. In this covenant we see that God's answer to human sin would be a covenant of grace, beginning with Noah. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow to remind God's people of His promise to never flood the earth again. Through this covenant God would restore His intentions to bless His people.

The terms of the covenant for human beings include respect for the sanctity of human life and the freedom to eat animals. It was at this point in history that meat was added to man's diet. These commands further build upon the teaching in Genesis 1, that while animal life is to be treated kindly, it is inferior to human life which alone bears God's image. The effect of this covenant is the renewal of God's intentions in creation to distinguish between those people who, like Noah, are in a covenant relationship with Him, from those who are not.

In Genesis 9:18–28 Noah responded to God's kindness by getting drunk and passing out naked in his tent. Noah's son Ham then walked into Noah's tent to gaze upon his father's nakedness. The text does not tell us much more than these details. Whatever happened, one thing is sure: both Noah and his son had

sinned. In this story of Noah we have a type of second fall. God started over with Noah who, like Adam, sinned. The point is simply that sin remained the human problem even after the flood. Mankind failed to learn from that horrible experience.

The Noahic covenant reveals that not only is ours a cursed earth, but also a covenanted earth. The Noahic covenant is for both humanity and all of creation. In Genesis 9:9–10, God says, *"Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth."* God's plan is to ultimately redeem all his creation along with His covenant people.

This desire is shown in the fact that the flood is a new start for creation and humanity despite the ongoing nature of the fall. Noah and his family are blessed and called to fill the earth and exercise dominion over creation in a manner that echoes God's instructions to Adam and Eve. The creation mandate is renewed with a special emphasis on respecting life and exercising care for all creation as responsible stewards of all that God has made (See Gen. 9:1 – 17).

We easily forget how much God's covenant with Noah enhances our lives. We have grown so accustomed to the order of creation that we act as if it were something automatic, inherent in nature itself. But, as scientists learn more about our world we see more clearly that the universe is not self-sufficient. Nature is fragile, constantly teetering on the edge of disaster. Disruptions in the food chain, water pollution, atmospheric changes, and a host of other modern environmental concerns demonstrate dramatically that the earth needs the constant providential care of the Creator. The food we eat, the air we breathe, the streets we walk, the cars we drive, the books we read, the buildings we erect, the universities we establish —all these good things in life have been possible only because God constantly upholds a safe place for humanity to multiply and have dominion.

To summarize the Noahic covenant - The human covenant mediator is Noah, who intercedes for his family and the rest of humanity. The blessings of the covenant include God's saving grace and promise not to flood the earth again, thereby preserving human life so that it could be fruitful and multiply. The conditions of enjoying the covenant include not drinking the blood of animals and the command that God's people are to honor God's image bearers by not committing murder and by upholding the sanctity of human life (Gen. 9:1 – 7). The sign of the covenant internally is faith, as demonstrated by Noah and his family as they built the ark in the desert. This project could have taken 120 years, all the while being mocked by those around them. The sign of the covenant externally was the rainbow, which God said was to be a reminder of his promise not to flood the earth again. The covenant community took the form of an extended family.

The Abrahamic Covenant

God's response to man's efforts to make a name for themselves and their refusal to go forth and cover the whole earth as God intended them to do was to confuse their language (Gen. 11:1 – 9). Obviously this inability to communicate with one another caused them to mistrust and fear each other. It also caused them to discontinue their efforts to build a city, and further, to scatter across the land. It also must have been the crowning event that convinced God that mankind would not, could not, listen to Him. A new strategy was required.

Beginning with Genesis 12 we read of God's calling of Abram. He was to become a man with a new name, Abraham, because he was to become the father of many nations (Gen 17:1 – 5). With the arrival of Abram in Genesis, the book shifts from the theme of God calling creation into existence in Genesis 1 to 11, to God calling a people into a covenant relationship with Him in chapters 12 through 50.

There is no record of God speaking to mankind from the time of his covenant with Noah until he speaks to Abram. Once again He was to initiate a covenant. He called Abram to become the father of a new nation. Abram was to become the prototype of a life of faith, and one of the most important men in the Bible. Up to this time he was simply another sinner living among the scattered nations. We know very little about him before God called him other than his genealogy (Heb. 11:26 – 32). He was apparently born in Ur of the Chaldeans, but traveled north with his father's family to live temporarily in Haran. We know that his wife Sarai was barren, his brother Haran had died in Ur, leaving a son, Lot, who would later travel with Abram to the land of Canaan. In Joshua 24:2 we see that Terah, Abraham's father*, "served other gods."* Nehemiah 9:7 and Acts 7:2–3 indicate that God called Abram while he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans. It is amazing that Abram, apparently just another sinner from a godless family, much like Noah, found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Joshua 24:3).

God simply told Abram to leave his homeland and his father's house and to journey to a new land that God would show him. Later God promised Abram that, though his wife was barren, she would have a son in her old age and he would become a father. He was promised a great nation blessed by God that would be a blessing to the nations of the earth through one of his offspring or seed. This reflects back to that original "seed of the woman" promise of Genesis 3:15. The noun is singular, referring to Jesus.

"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

It is also collectively referring to Israel, the carrier of that promise, a nation that would be God's witness to the world. In spite if their many failures they succeeded in making Yahweh known. Thankfully Galatians 3:29 connects the promises God made to Abraham to all who are in Jesus Christ.

In this way, God promised that the nation of Israel would come through Abraham and, like Mary, be the "womb" through which Jesus Christ would be brought forth as the blessing to all nations. This fact is so significant that Galatians 3:8 comments on it, saying, *"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'."*

Abram was also told that his descendants would receive the Promised Land. "*I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God"* (Gen. 17:8). Though his descendants would eventually spent four hundred years as slaves in Egypt, the promise remained a valid hope. Genesis ends with Joseph requesting that his bones be taken from Egypt to the Promised Land when God's people would finally return. The book of Exodus also ends with the expectation of one day entering that Promised Land, a longing not realized until after the death of Moses in the opening chapters of the book of Joshua.

In faith Abram believed and obeyed God, doing as God commanded. At the age of seventy-five he took his wife, Sarai, their household, and his nephew Lot and traveled to the land of Canaan. As he travelled God again appeared to Abram (Gen. 12:6 – 7), who responded by worshiping God in faith by building an altar.

The main point of the account of Abram is discovered by contrasting Abram with Babylon in the story that preceded his call, the Tower of Babel. The Babylonians sought to be a great nation and a blessed people, great in name, protected from their enemies, and the focal point of world affairs. But they pursued their selfish goals apart from faith and apart from God. So God called one of them, Abram, out into covenant with Himself and promised to give to Abram, by his gracious provision, all that the Babylonians had strived for. What God is showing us is that our hope cannot rest in the efforts of sinners to save and bless themselves. Our only hope is to be found in entering into covenant relationship with God by faith.

Although God promised Abram a son through his wife and a nation in the Promised Land, Abram, out of fear and a momentary lack of faith, nearly gave both away (Gen 12:10 – 20). Thankfully, God did intervene and, through inflicting diseases on Pharaoh and his household and causing Lot to choose land other than the Promised Land, God made good on his promises, in spite of his servant Abraham. The central theological point in these accounts seems to be that while God's servants are imperfect, it is His covenant protection that saves them from themselves and makes His covenant promises become reality.

Genesis opens with God speaking and preparing creation for mankind by the power of his word. Throughout Genesis God has so far spoken to Adam, Noah, and Abram. In Genesis 15:1 God once again speaks to Abram in a vision. God poetically promised to be Abram's protector and provider. God promised that though Abram was childless and his wife, Sarai, barren, they would have a son, and that through that son a nation would be born. Genesis 15:6 reports Abram's response to God's word, which is among the most important verses in the Bible, saying, *"Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness."*

Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abraham dared to believe God's unlikely promise of a son in his old age. This is the kind of total trust that receives the promise of God. It becomes a verse that is central to the New Testament doctrine of faith in general, and Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, in particular. Jesus' half-brother James quoted Genesis 15:6 to teach that true faith in God results in good works in life with God.

God's covenant with Abram was confirmed with a sacrifice and the shedding of blood (Gen. 15:9 - 11). This act foreshadowed the new covenant of our salvation, which was confirmed with Jesus' sacrifice of his own life on the cross and the shedding of his blood. God then promised to Abram that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land. This, however, would not happen in his lifetime, but only after a future four-hundred-year exile in Egypt. This exile is recorded in the book of Exodus. God then marked out the boundaries of the Promised Land, the boundaries of which also coincide with the garden of Eden. (Are you sure?)

Throughout God's dealings with Noah and Abraham we have witnessed a pattern. First God speaks to them, calls them into covenant, establishes them as the head of a new humanity, promising to bless them, and inviting everyone to respond to Him in faith. We then see each falter in their faith and sin against the Lord despite His patience and kindness to them. This is just one small fact that attests to the validity of the Scriptures. It is frankly honest about every "hero" of the Bible. It tells of their humanity, their weaknesses, their failures and their sins. But, in each case, it also confirms their faith in the one true God. There were no "supermen," just people like us.

In Genesis 16 we see this pattern repeated in yet another mini-fall of sorts. After the establishment of God's covenant in Genesis 15, Abram sought to take matters into his own hands by bearing a son with his wife's Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. The faithless plot was conceived by Sarai who, like our first mother Eve, failed to trust the simple words of God and feared that God had not kept His promise to her. Their actions were likely motivated, at least in part, by the fact that they had been waiting ten-plus years for God to give them the child he had promised. Abram was now eighty-six years old and his wife was seventy-six years old and still barren.

Following the confirmation of God's covenant with Abram in Genesis 15 and Abram's sexual sin with Hagar in chapter 16, God institutes circumcision as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17. The reason why God chose to mark his men on this part of their anatomy is not revealed to us, but it makes sense, since it is generally very important to men—the means by which they conceive children and the cause of some of our worst sins. God spoke to Abram, and Abram responded to God's command in faith, falling down on his face to worship God. God then changed his name from Abram, which means "exalted father," to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude," as the time for God to fulfill his promise of a son for Abram was very near. God also expanded his covenant with Abraham to include Abraham's descendants.

God then told Abraham that his wife's name would also be changed from Sarai to Sarah, which means "princess." God also promised that through Sarah the princess, kings would come with the ultimate fulfillment being the birth of Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings promised to Sarah's great-grandson Judah (Gen. 49:10).

In chapter 17, when God restates His Genesis 15 promise that He would give Abraham a son by Sarah, Abraham laughed (v.17), unable to believe that he and Sarah could conceive as God had promised. Rather than giving up on Abraham, God graciously repeated His promise once again, even instructing Abraham to name the boy Isaac, which means "laughter." In chapter 18:10 – 14, when Sarah overheard the angels tell Abraham the news that she would be having a son, she also laughed. Abraham immediately obeyed God, as Moses makes clear by writing that he did it *"that very day."* Abraham was circumcised at the age of ninety-nine along with every member of his household, as God had commanded. He did this because God promised that any male who was not circumcised would be cut off altogether by God. Ever since this occasion, Jews have circumcised their sons on the eighth day, as that was the day chosen for their father Isaac.

Scripture explains the concept of circumcision as not just the cutting away of the foreskin but, more importantly, the cutting away of sin from the heart (Rom. 2:28 – 29).

Abraham's descendants expand from sons by natural birth to include those who are descendants by new birth. Those with hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit are truly Abraham's descendants, as they, like him, live in covenant relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal.3:29; 6:15).

Genesis 21 talks about the birth of Isaac, the promised son whose name means laughter. Sarah jealously demanded Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael into the desert. This troubled Abraham, but God told him to do as Sarah demanded assuring him that Ishmael would live and prosper. The Muslim world claims him as their ancestor and, as the first born son, the proper recipient of the promises God gave to Abraham. It's important to note here that according to the Law the firstborn son is to receive special treatment. He is to receive a double portion of any inheritance and become the head of the family upon his father's death. However, there is a pattern established in the scriptures that is different. Consider: Very early on it was Able, not Cain that received God's favor. It was Isaac rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Esau, Judah, the third in line, rather than Reubin, and David, the youngest of eight sons, that became king, and, of course, it was Jesus, not Adam (Luke 3:38), that received special blessings from God. The lesson being that God can choose whomever He desires to carry out His will.

Chapter 21 ends with a portrait of Abraham's life. It has finally all come together under God's perfect covenantal blessing. Despite nearly losing his wife twice, Abraham still has Sarah. And despite waiting for twenty-five years, Abraham finally has his promised son, Isaac - because God is faithful.

Some time later, when Isaac was likely a young man, Moses tells us that God tested Abraham (Gen. 22). Perhaps the point of this test was not for God to see if Abraham had faith, but rather, for Abraham to demonstrate the depth of his faith in front of his son Isaac so that he, too, would learn to walk in faith just

like he had. Echoing His initial call to Abraham in Genesis 12, God commanded Abraham to “go” and sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. This would have required that Abraham slaughter his son, dismember him, and burn his body. Obediently, Abraham awoke early the next morning without any noticeable hesitation and set out with his son to do as the LORD commanded. The Bible has no words adequate to describe Abraham’s agony. But, just before Abraham killed his son, the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and commanded him not to harm his son. God then provided a ram to be sacrificed.

Abraham, and Moses writing seven hundred years later, recognized that this foretold God’s future messianic provision at the same mountain, Mount Moriah, also known as Mount Zion.

The comparisons between this account and the death of Jesus are many. To help you see them clearly I have listed them:

- Isaac and Jesus were both born to women who could not have conceived apart from a miracle.
- Isaac and Jesus were both sons of a promise that was given many years before their birth.
- Isaac and Jesus went to the top of Mount Moriah/Mount Zion.
- Isaac carried the wood to his own sacrifice, just as Jesus carried his wooden cross to his crucifixion.
- Isaac and Jesus each willingly laid down their lives to their father/ Father.
- Isaac’s father and Jesus’ Father both felt the agony of killing an innocent son.
- Isaac was brought back from the dead figuratively and Jesus was brought back from the dead literally

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After having walked with God for many years and seeing God provide in some very difficult situations, Abraham had apparently learned to trust God no matter what. This fact reveals that those in covenant with God can mature and grow in faith. Abraham’s faith in God was so sure that he believed that even if he killed his son that God, who gave him the son through a miracle, could give him back through yet another miracle. After all, Abraham had also lost his wife on two occasions only to see God bring her back to him. Abraham believed that God would do the same with Isaac because God always keeps His covenant promises.

The Abrahamic covenant: The human mediator between God and Abraham’s family, the nation of Israel, and all the nations of the earth, is Abraham. The blessings of the covenant include land, a son, and a nation of people who would bring forth Jesus Christ as the ultimate promised blessing. The condition of enjoying the covenant was obedience to God and “doing righteousness and justice,” as God’s people are to be ethical and promote justice on the earth. Like Jesus who would call the church to be a city within the city, (Matthew 5:14) God commanded His people in the Abrahamic covenant to live as a nation among the nations for the missional purpose of revealing God to the nations through righteousness and justice. The sign of the covenant internally was faith as Abraham believed God, and the sign externally was

circumcision, as visible evidence of internal faith. The covenant community took the form of a family and a nation. From it would come Jesus, a blessing to all nations. The promise of Jesus Christ is that he would come as the seed of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations of the earth. Revelation 7:9–10 reveals the fulfillment of this aspect of the Abrahamic covenant at the end of time around the throne of Jesus:

“

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

The Mosaic Covenant

Exodus powerfully demonstrates the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises to Abraham. Out of a barren elderly couple, a nation of perhaps a million was born over the course of four hundred years. It is amazing that the entire exodus event was promised to Abram directly from God Himself (Gen. 15:12 – 16). As promised, the people of God were enslaved for four hundred and thirty years, and then delivered by the judgments of God upon the Egyptians.

In the closing scenes of Genesis, we learn that Abraham’s great-grandson Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous older brothers. But, God elevated Joseph to a position of power and prominence as the top advisor to Pharaoh, the great ruler of Egypt. Because of Joseph’s exemplary service and wisdom from God, the entire nation of Egypt was spared the starvation of a famine and Joseph’s family, the Hebrews, were given privilege and dignity in that land. Later they would become slaves. The Egyptian empire was the most powerful on earth at that time. For thirteen hundred years, twice as long as the Greek and Roman empires, it ruled the middle-east. But, the pharaoh was worshiped as a god and had no regard for the God of Israel.

The Exodus story begins by noting that, in the years following Joseph’s death, a new pharaoh rose to prominence, one that knew nothing of Joseph’s service or the privileges given to his people. Fearing their numbers (Exodus 1:1-14, 22) he enslaved God’s people and treated them cruelly, attempting genocide. In Exodus 3 God appears to Moses. Speaking directly to him He promises to deliver His covenant people from slavery. He exhibits His tenderness in His powerful protection as he responds to the pain of His people (Ex. 3:7 – 10).

In Exodus 3:14, God reveals Himself by name. *“God said to Moses, ’I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* Among the Hebrews a name embodies the entire essence and identity of a person. So, by giving His name, God revealed Himself personally and gave sacred access to an understanding and the experience of His wanting a personal relationship with His people. His divine

name, YHWH, reveals His eternal self-existence. He is a relational being, unchangingly faithful and dependable, who desires the full trust of His people. As He states His name He reminds Moses and the people of His promise of help for them in covenant faithfulness (3:16 – 17).

In view of the third commandment the Jews were/are so afraid of blaspheming God that they would not (nor will not) utter this sacred name, nor would they write it out. They render it YHWH, noting quite correctly that it is unpronounceable. They will typically substitute the term *G-d*, or just, *The Holy One of Israel* whenever it appears. There has been some debate as to exactly how the name should be spelled and pronounced, but most scholars now recognize that the most likely rendering is *Yahweh*. In times past the name *Jehovah* was popular and you'll see it in some older Bible translations. The basis for that is the Hebrew YHWH can also be JHVH. Since there are no vowels in the Hebrew alphabet a Bible scholar in the middle-ages added the vowels from another term for God, *eloha* – the mighty one - in order to make it both pronounceable and commonly used. Why didn't the Jews add the necessary vowel sounds like they did all other words? They preferred to keep it unpronounceable in order to eliminate any possibility of misusing it. We should also note that throughout the Old Testament scriptures whenever this name appears it is almost always rendered LORD, with all capital letters.

God acted decisively in His judgment on Egypt, delivering His people through the ten plagues that culminated in the killing of the firstborn of Egypt. He passed over the houses of Israel because they faithfully obeyed His instructions to paint the doorposts with the blood of a slain lamb. They walked across the Red Sea on dry ground and turned to watch the pursuing Egyptians drown as the water returned to its place. In this we clearly see that life and death hinge on whether or not we trust and obey God. In Exodus 19 we read that God led His people to the foot of Mount Sinai, just as He had promised to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:12). But the people of God were forbidden from ascending, or even touching, the mountain and entering into the presence of God because of their sin. Any violation of this command was promised to bring immediate death. God desired His people to know that they cannot ascend to Him, but instead He initiates the relationship and descends to them. They were told to purify themselves and prepare for God's frightening presence on the mountain in three days. There they would receive the message God would give them through His mediators, the prophet Moses and the priest Aaron.

God began by reminding them of his faithfulness and His redemption: *"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."* Based on His grace and provision, He asked them for their response: *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant . . ."* His purpose is that they would *"be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Ex. 19:3 – 6). If they will respond to His grace they will be a kingdom of priests, having access to God and the joy of mediating Him to all people. They will be a holy people set apart to Him in all purity and cleanness. God gave them the Ten Commandments which were intended to guide their lives as holy people.

But, instead of responding in faith their fear drove them away from God. This was the beginning of a pattern of moving away rather than drawing near and of disobedience, defilement, and spiritual adultery, culminating in judgment. Christopher J. H. Wright says: “As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The task of blessing the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations. This dual movement is reflected in the prophetic visions of the law/light/justice and so on of YHWH going out to the nations from Israel/Zion, and the nations coming to YHWH/Israel/ Zion. . . . The priesthood of the people of God is thus a missional function.”

To summarize the Mosaic covenant: the human mediator was Moses, who interceded between God and Israel, God’s **covenant** people. The blessings of the **covenant** included redemption from bondage and the freedom to worship God. The conditions of enjoying the covenant centered on obeying all of God’s laws, synthesized in the Ten Commandments, which are anchored in God alone being worshiped. On this point Wright says: “The priority of grace is a fundamental theological premise in approaching Old Testament law and ethics. Obedience to the law was based on, and was a response to, God’s salvation. Exodus has eighteen chapters of redemption before a single chapter of law. The same is true in relation to Israel’s mission among the nations. In whatever way Israel would be or become a blessing to the nations would be on the grounds of what God had done for them and through them, not on the basis of their own superiority in any sense.” Because of this the knowledge of the one God and the promise of His coming king and kingdom have come to the world in spite of their failures.

The requisite of the covenant internally was faith, as Moses and God’s people trusted God to deliver them, and the sign of the **covenant** externally was the celebration of the Passover. The covenant community was referred to as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, and in this way their mission was not to go, but to be God’s people as an example to and an invitation for the nations to worship their God.

The relationship between Moses and Jesus Christ is evidenced in a number of places and ways throughout the Scriptures. In Deuteronomy 18:18, God said to Moses, *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”* Over a millennium later, in Acts 3:17–22, Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:18 and applies its fulfillment to Jesus Christ so that Jesus’ eventual coming was promised to Moses. Hebrews 3:1–6 says that Jesus and Moses were faithful to the Father’s leading, but that Jesus is worthy of greater honor because he is much greater than even Moses.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is clearly and repeatedly foreshadowed throughout the exodus story. It begins with God making a promise to elect a people as His own in the Abrahamic covenant.

- His people are then taken into slavery and ruled by a godless and cruel lord (foreshadowing Satan and sin). Unable to save themselves, God Himself intervenes to redeem them from slavery and deliver them into freedom to worship Him only by His work (foreshadowing Jesus’ death and resurrection to

liberate us from our slavery, including our self-chosen slavery to pharaohs such as money, drugs, alcohol, sex, and food).

- After taking His people out of Egypt, God's work with His people continues as He seeks to get Egypt out of His people (foreshadowing sanctification).
- Resisting God's continual attempt to lead His people as he desires, the people grumble against Moses and long to go back to Egypt (foreshadowing the believer's wrestling with their flesh).
- God's faithfulness persists, and He continues to lead His people by being with them in the pillar and cloud and providing for their needs out of His love, as He leads them on a journey to a land of rest and promise (foreshadowing the Kingdom). God's interaction with His people is clearly that of a living God who speaks, acts, loves, declares His laws, judges sin, delivers, redeems, provides, and is present with them. The central picture of the gospel in Exodus is one of covenantal redemption.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1 - 12 Paul compares this exodus experience of the Israelites with our Christian experience warning us not to act as they did, but to walk in faith. Remember, only two of that first generation were allowed to enter the promised land.

Even Moses was denied access to that land because of one mistake. (Num. 20:8 – 11). Moses, in his frustration with the constant complaining of the people, instead of speaking to the rock as God instructed, struck the rock as though he was the one providing the life giving water. As Paul pointed out that rock was a type of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) and Moses represented the Law. In this way God is telling us that entrance into the Promised Land was not dependant on keeping the Law, but on faith. Interestingly, it fell to Joshua to lead God's people into the land. Joshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus.

The Law of Moses

The books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) contains about six hundred and thirteen commands. The question of whether new-covenant Christians (we will get to that meaning next) are under the Law of Moses is complicated, with everyday implications: May believers eat pork? May we charge interest on loaned money? Must we practice Sabbath? Some things are commonly agreed upon.

- The New Testament declares that the law "is holy and righteous and good."
- The law helps to show us our sin.
- Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of the law for us.
- Justification (being declared righteous before God) is completely apart from keeping the law.
- Those who said, or say, believers are required to keep the whole law to be sanctified are wrong (Galatians 5).
- The Ten Commandments express fundamentally important moral principles for the Christian life.
- Not every old-covenant law is binding on Christians. For example, we do not have to sacrifice animals and can wear clothes made of multiple kinds of fabric.

The difficulty is that we must not dismiss all the old-covenant laws (e.g., stealing and murdering), and we should not retain all the old-covenant laws (e.g., stoning adulterers). One proposed solution is to divide the law into three categories.

1. **Ceremonial laws**, referring to the priesthood, sacrifices, temple, cleanness, and so on, are now fulfilled in Jesus and therefore no longer binding. Nearly all of the book of Hebrews is about this issue for Jews who struggled with the Old Testament laws once they were saved. These laws are no longer binding on us because Jesus is our high priest, temple, sacrifice, cleanser, and so on.

2. **Civil laws** are those pertaining to the governing of Israel as a nation ruled by God. Since we are no longer a theocracy these laws, while insightful, are not directly binding on us. Romans 13:1–6 says we are to obey our pagan government because God will work through it, too.

3**. Moral laws** refer to commands that forbid such things as rape, theft, murder, and so on. These laws are still binding on us even though Jesus fulfilled their requirements through his sinless life. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated by Jesus, with the only exception being the Sabbath, as that is part of the ceremonial law and now Jesus is our rest.

If we work in this manner, ceremonial and civil laws are no longer binding on us, but moral laws are. In Matthew 22:36 – 40 Jesus summed up the whole Law with two commandments. First you must love God with all your heart and, secondly, love your neighbor as yourself. Obviously, if you do that you will not have to worry about keeping laws.

Others see the solution in this statement: The whole law was valid until its purpose was accomplished in Christ. Now that Jesus' work is complete, the Law of Moses is abolished and we are now under the law of Christ stated above, as guided by the Spirit. This seems to be supported by Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:16–4:7 that the law was added to God's promise to Abraham 430 years afterward because of sin. It imprisoned the people of God until Jesus came. Paul summarizes, *"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."* Galatians 3:24-25

The Davidic Covenant

Because God was faithful to His covenant with Noah sinners continued to live and increase on the earth. Because God was faithful to His covenant with Abraham His descendants became a nation. And because God was faithful to His covenant with Moses, the nation settled in their Promised Land, which set the stage of history for the establishing of a kingship to rule over the kingdom of Israel. In 2 Samuel 7:8–16, God chooses David to be the next covenant head:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts . . . I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. . . . Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

David's covenant promise that, not only would this former shepherd boy be a king, but that from him would come a King whose kingdom would endure forever and be ruled by none other than the Son of God, a descendant of David. David's response to this prophecy is recorded in 2 Samuel 7: 18 – 19:

"Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD!"

The Davidic covenant promise of an eternal kingdom was so treasured by God's people that they worshiped God in faith knowing that He would be faithful to these covenant promises as He had been to Noah, Abraham, and Moses. One example of this is found in Psalm 89:3–4, which declares, *"You have said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"*

Scriptures continue to record how God poured a special measure of His grace on Israel in the days of David to lift His people to greater heights of dignity. He transformed the nation from a loose confederation of tribes into a strong empire. David, as well as many of his sons, accomplished much as they ruled over Israel.

The Old Testament records a sad end for the house of David. The sin of David's sons caused God to remove the throne from Jerusalem. The nation and its king went into exile in Babylon. As we see the disarray of Israel's kingdom today, we have to wonder what happened to God's promises. Did God not assure David of an unending dynasty? Whatever became of the kingdom blessings promised to Israel?

The prophets foretold that a descendant of David would restore the nation. Ezekiel, a prophet that experienced the Babylonian exile, wrote concerning the kingdom of Judah, *"Thus says the LORD God, 'Remove the turban and take off the crown; this will no longer be the same. . . A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I will make it. This also will be no more until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him'"* (Ezek. 21:26 – 27). We know that one who is coming, who's right it is, is Jesus.

The New Testament answers these questions by identifying Jesus as the heir of David's throne. Matthew and Luke composed extensive genealogies to demonstrate that he was the descendant of David. In the angel's announcement to Mary he tells her that the son she would soon bear would eventually be given "*. . . the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*" (Luke 1:30 – 33). Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, as God's providence brought

pregnant Mary there to register for a governmental census. As David's final heir, Jesus brings incomparable kingdom blessings to God's **covenant** people. He fulfills all the hopes of honor associated with the royal line in ways that go far beyond what David and his other sons accomplished.

The blessings of Christ's kingdom encompass a vast array of benefits for God's **covenant** people. To gain a glimpse into what Christ does for us we will focus on three blessings that came through the line of David during the Old Testament period. Then we will see how Christ brings these gifts to God's people in the New Testament age and in the age to come.

1. David's house was to provide protection for Israel against evil. David and his sons had the responsibility of safeguarding the nation. Even when the offensive conquest of the land subsided, the royal house had the responsibility of providing ongoing security. For this reason, the kings of Israel erected walls and maintained armies. Every responsible member of David's house devised ways to protect the people.

2. The royal line of Judah was to ensure prosperity for God's people. Within the walls of royal protection, Israel prospered beyond measure. Righteousness prevailed when the king enforced the law. People could live and work without fear of criminals. Economic conditions improved as David's sons did their jobs properly. When kings ruled over the land in righteousness, the people prospered. The house of David not only protected God's people from their enemies, it also brought prosperity to the land.

3. David's house was divinely ordained to ensure the special presence of God among the people. David spent his life preparing for the temple, a permanent place for the presence of God. Solomon constructed the temple and centered his kingdom on it. The kings of Judah always bore the responsibility of maintaining the proper functioning of the temple. Without the presence of God all the efforts of royalty were in vain. There could be no protection or prosperity without the presence of God. The prayers, sacrifices, and songs associated with Israel's temple were the sources out of which all kingdom benefits flowed.

The kingdom blessings of protection, prosperity, and divine presence did not cease with the Old Testament. These ancient realities anticipated greater benefits to come in Christ. But we must remember that Jesus bestows these kingdom blessings in two stages. He brought protection, prosperity, and divine presence through faith to the faithful at his first coming, which we now enjoy. He will bring them tangibly at his second coming, which we are awaiting by faith.

Samuel anointed David as king of Israel, but it was a long time before he began reigning on the throne (2 Samuel 5). In the meantime, David gathered followers who were loyal to him, influencing life in the kingdom ruled by the evil Saul until the day David began his reign on the throne. In a similar way, after his resurrection and ascension, Jesus rose to the right hand of the Father to be anointed king (Daniel 7:13 – 14). From that place he will one day return to earth as reigning king. Exercising all the authority of the

Father he will rule from Jerusalem while setting on the historic throne of David. In the meantime he is gathering faithful followers who will continue the mission to bring people into the glory of that kingdom. From his exalted position Jesus bestows kingdom benefits now on the people of God.

In this initial stage Christ's blessings are primarily spiritual in nature. Jesus guaranteed his followers' protection: *"No one will snatch them out of my hand."* (John 10:28) As 1 John 4:4 says, *"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*." Neither human nor supernatural forces can rob us of our salvation in Christ. As our king, Jesus protects each one of his covenant people.

Christ also blesses his people with spiritual prosperity. Paul said we have been *"blessed . . . in Christ with every spiritual blessing."* (Eph 1:3). Jesus said he came *"that they may have life and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10). *Christ* guarantees spiritual prosperity to the people of his kingdom.

Christ provides the presence of God among his people. When Jesus left for heaven he removed his physical presence, but he sent the Spirit to comfort his followers with the assurance of his nearness: *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"* (John. 14:18). For this reason, he could promise his apostles, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matt. 28:20).

The kingdom blessings that we enjoy today are grand, but we must remember that they are primarily spiritual. Christ does not promise us protection from all physical evil in this stage of his kingdom. In fact, he warned that his followers would receive persecution and suffering: *"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* Christ's kingship does not guarantee physical prosperity and health today. The trials of poverty and physical illnesses remain with many of us, as the book of 1 Peter continually communicates. Finally, Christ does not give us his physical presence at this time either. He is present in the Spirit, but we long to see him and touch him again.

We have the firstfruits of the kingdom, which make us long for the kingdom in its fullness. While Christ guarantees us only spiritual blessings today, his protection, prosperity, and presence will extend even to physical levels when he returns. Within the new creation we will be protected against all forms of evil, physical and spiritual. The enemies of God will be utterly destroyed and we will have nothing to fear: "*Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For, he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (1 Corinthians 15:24 – 25).

In the fullness of Christ's kingdom we will receive glorified physical bodies. (See 1 John 3:2; Rev. 20:6). Eventually, after Jesus turns the Kingdom over to His Father, all illness and grief will be gone: *"Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore."* (Rev. 21:4b). Finally, when Christ turns the kingdom over to his Father we will no longer yearn to be in God's presence because He will be among us. We will experience God's presence as well as the Lamb's both spiritually and physically. As John said, in the New Jerusalem he *"saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."* (Rev.21:22). Yahweh will walk among us just as He did with Adam before the fall, and this earth will be restored to its Edenic perfection. .

Christ fulfills all the hopes of the Davidic covenant. He brings the blessings of God's kingdom to all who serve him faithfully. David and his sons brought outpourings of tremendous benefits for God's people, but those Old Testament blessings fall short of the dignity for which we were designed and the fullness of God's **covenantal** grace. Christ alone brings full **covenantal** kingdom blessings. The human mediator of the Davidic covenant was King David. The blessings of the Davidic covenant centered on a kingdom and a King who would come through David's family line to rule over all people for all times. The condition by which the Davidic **covenant** was to be enjoyed was participation in the nation of Israel and the worship of God, who was present in the temple. The internal sign of the **covenant** was faith in God's promises to establish an everlasting King and kingdom; the external sign was the throne, the symbol of the Davidic covenant and ultimately the seat of Jesus Christ, as is mentioned in fourteen of the twenty two chapters of Revelation. The **covenant** community took the form of a kingdom. The promise of Jesus was that he would come from David's line as the King of kings to rule over all creation forever, bringing peace and prosperity with him.

The Davidic covenant will be fulfilled when all the nations come to know Jesus Christ as King of kings following His return. Until then we are to add to the **covenantal** community through evangelism and church planting. This explains why the great prayer of Psalm 72 that speaks of Jesus' kingdom includes this echo of the Abrahamic **covenant** in verse 17: *"May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!"* It is amazing that God's covenant grace is nothing short of a global gift.

The New Covenant

Our study of **covenant**s now brings us to the ultimate **covenant** in all of Scripture. It's that **covenant** which is the fulfillment and extension of all prior **covenant**s between God and His people, expanding the benefits to people from all the nations of the earth. Jeremiah 31:31–34 promised the new **covenant**:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new **covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my **covenant** that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the **covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Many years after Jeremiah prophesied, as Passover approached, Jesus Christ sat down with his disciples to celebrate the Mosaic **covenant** by partaking of the Passover meal. For over a millennium God's **covenant** people had partaken of the Passover by following a strict order with sacred statements of

promise interspersed throughout the *Seder* meal. Aware of the importance of the moment, Jesus did not speak the words tradition had dictated. Instead, Matthew 26:26–29 says:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

This new **covenant** is God giving us His mediator between Himself and man, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This time, rather than taking life as He did when he flooded the earth in the days of Noah, or requiring continual blood sacrifices for sin as in the Mosaic **covenant**, He offered His Son as the sacrificial substitute for sinners. On the cross Jesus shed his blood in our place. He became our sacrificial lamb once for all time.

2 Corinthians 3:5–6 says, *"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*

In this new **covenant**, God dwells in our hearts as He did with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. He also placed the Holy Spirit within us to make us, His church, into a temple where worship occurs (Eph. 2:19 – 22). The Spirit makes us new creations, a part of the dawning and firstfruits of a new creation that will dawn when Jesus' returns. The Spirit's work includes regenerating us into Jesus' likeness (1 John 3:2).

Perhaps the longest discussion of the new **covenant** and its superiority to all preceding **covenants** is found in the book of Hebrews. In light of our study of **covenants** it would be most helpful to read Hebrews 8:6–9:28. Here we discover that Jesus is a better Noah who brings judgment of sin, salvation by grace to the family of God, and a new world free of sin and its effects. Jesus is a better Abraham, the blessing to the nations of the earth. Jesus is a better Moses. He is God's prophet who fulfilled the law for us; who allows God's wrath to pass over us because of His shed blood; who conquers our pharaohs of Satan, redeeming us from sin; and who journeys with us toward home in spite of our sins and grumblings. Finally, Jesus is a better David. He is seated on a throne ruling as the King of kings, wielding all the power of God, and is coming again to establish an eternal and global kingdom of peace and prosperity. "Amen. Come Lord Jesus."

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Notes & Reflections

What stood out to you in this study? Write down questions, verses to look up, and what God is teaching you.