

# Introduction to Covenants

## Intro

- Three goals for today:
  - present the concept of covenant
  - identify typical covenant elements
  - briefly examine the covenants we will study in this series

### Similarities Between Contract and Covenant

both are legal agreements which define relationships

both have terms or lists of expectations

both have blessings or benefits for adhering to the terms

both have curses or penalties for violating the terms

both require all parties involved to affirm the agreement

both may require legal witnesses

### Differences Between Contract and Covenant

#### Contract

defines a potentially adversarial or hostile relationship

each party focuses on self-interests, maximizes own benefits within contract terms

specifies protection of each party from the other to prevent abuse or harm

defines a conditional relationship based on performance

can be changed or even canceled

exchanging property or service is primary importance; e.g., payment in exchange for product or service

sealed by a promise (each gives his word or signature; only as good as the party's character)

#### Covenant

defines a loving relationship

each party is fully committed to the other's success & well-being within the covenant terms

protection of each party from the other is unnecessary

defines an unconditional, enduring relationship

is a binding, unbreakable obligation between two parties; breakable only by death

exchanging abilities & resources is part of covenant, but secondary importance

sealed by an oath (usually by the name of God; therefore as good as God's character)

- Our relationship with God is based on covenant
- Typical covenant elements
  - Oath or vow (seals & guarantees the covenant)
  - Terms (purpose, nature, scope of covenant)
  - Exchange coats (giving of self, shared identity)
  - Exchange belt & weapons (pledging strength, support, abilities & protection)
  - Exchange portion of names (shared identity & authority)
  - Cut flesh, mix blood, fix permanent scar (sign of unity, proof of covenant)
  - Pronounce blessing for adhering to terms (includes revealing possessions)
  - Pronounce curse for violating covenant
  - Prepare meal, exchange food (care & provision)
  - Sacrifice animal, cut in half (death to self or individualism)
  - Include descendants
  - Set a memorial (visual reminder)
- Key words
  - “covenant” in Old Testament: Hebrew, *berith*
  - “covenant” in New Testament: Greek, *diatheke*

### **God’s Covenant with Adam & Eve**

- Hos 6:7, “Like Adam, they have broken the covenant.”
- This is a unique covenant
  - God made it with A&E **before sin affected them**

### **God’s Covenant with Noah**

- God initiated this covenant and specified all aspects of it **after the flood**
- Gen 6:1-9 (background)

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, “I will wipe

mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth — men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air — for I am grieved that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

- Why did God make covenant with Noah?
  - Noah found favor with the Lord: he was a righteous man, he was blameless, he walked with God
- Gen 6:17-18 (God speaking to Noah), “I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark . . . .”

### **God’s Covenant with Abraham**

- Gen 15:18-21, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.’”
  - This covenant was virtually unconditional toward Abram
  - Eternal & irrevocable
- Why Abram?
  - Gen 18:19, “I have chosen him.”
- Jas 2:23 states Abraham “was called God’s friend.”

### **God’s First Covenant with Israel**

- Ex 19:3-6 (after the Exodus from Egypt), “Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.’”
- This is the covenant God made through Moses with Israel at Mt. Sinai, is the most detailed covenant in the Old Testament
- Books of Leviticus & Numbers provide the details of

the covenant

- why did God make covenant with Israel?
  - Israel was the nation descended from Abraham's grandson, Jacob
  - Deut 7:6, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."

### **God's Second Covenant with Israel**

- Deut 29:1, "These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at [Mt. Sinai]."
- Why did God make this covenant?
  - for same reasons he made first covenant
  - this second covenant is described in Deuteronomy.
- Major difference from first covenant: this one gives laws for the land

### **David and Jonathan's Covenant**

- 1 Sam 18:3-4, "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt."

### **God's Covenant with David**

- Ps 89:3 "You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant . . . .'"
- 2 Sam 23:5 (David, near the end of his life), "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part?"
- Why did God make covenant with David?
  - David had a heart for God and would become the standard for all other kings of Israel
  - David was courageous, had integrity, set standards for worshiping God, wrote many of the psalms
- God's covenant with David is extraordinary!
  - Irrevocable

### **God's Covenant with Christians**

- Lk 22:20 (the "Last Supper"), "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"
  - "covenant" is Greek word *diatheke*: covenant, testament, will

- Our entire relationship with God is based on this covenant: salvation, justification, righteousness, sanctification, holiness and everything else
- Important point: God does not make the new covenant with us as individuals
  - It's a covenant between God the Father and God the Son of Man, Jesus
  - Father guarantees the divine side of covenant, the Son guarantees the human side
    - Unconditional
  - Applies to us as we believe on the Lord Jesus, accepting what he has done for us
- Main purpose of new covenant: restore man to relationship with God, which he did through Jesus the man

### **God's New Covenant with Israel**

- Jer 31:31
  - “The time is coming,” declares the LORD,  
when I will make a new covenant  
with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah.
- Replacement Theology? No!

### **Marriage Covenant**

- Mal 2:14, “It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”
- God created marriage & defined it as a covenant
  - therefore it is a covenant, regardless of what we think

### **Closing**

May you begin to see the magnitude of God's love for you, how fully committed he is to your well-being, and how he has honored you by entering an unconditional and unbreakable covenant with you.