

Theme: A covenant is an oath defining the nature, promises, and consequences of a relationship.

I. Intro - A Happy Day!

- A. June 9, 1984 - a very happy day for me! (photo)
- B. The day we were married and began our life together
- C. Ceremony, vows, a meal - this is a covenant ceremony!
- D. Today we start a series on God's Covenants in Scripture
- E. What is a covenant? Why are they important? How does this apply to my life in the modern world?

II. Defining the Term 'Covenant'

- A. The text today uses the idea of 'covenant' a lot!
Carefully follow the terms of this **covenant**, so that you may prosper in everything you do... ¹² You are standing here in order to enter into a **covenant** with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day and sealing with an oath ... ¹⁴ I am making this **covenant**, with its oath... Deut 29:9, 12, 14
 - 1. Hebrew word for covenant (berit) appears 3 times
 - 2. This is true throughout Scripture - covenant is very important
 - a. Berit occurs 287 times in the Old Testament!
 - b. Diatheke occurs 33 times in the New Testament
 - c. Major covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David
 - d. We split our Bible into Old and New Testaments - which is actually the word 'covenant'
 - 3. As we will see, God's covenants actually structure the entire Bible and govern the relationship between God and humanity.

B. Understanding and defining 'covenant'

- 1. The basic meaning of 'covenant' is an agreement.
- 2. A covenant is a solemn oath
You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day and sealing with an **oath**, ¹³ to **confirm** you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he **promised** you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ¹⁴ I am making this covenant, with its **oath**, not only with you... Deuteronomy 29:12–14
 - a. Note that oath is used 2x, and promise 1x in context
 - b. A covenant is a solemn promise - an oath
- 3. A covenant establishes or confirms a relationship
All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God — your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, ¹¹ together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. Deuteronomy 29:10–11
 - a. Note the emphasis on people - personal relationship
 - b. Not some dry, legal arrangement - it is relational
You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, ¹³ to **confirm** you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he **promised** you and as he swore to your fathers, **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. Deuteronomy 29:12–13
 - c. The covenant oath confirms them as His people, and Him and their God.
 - d. This is building on the earlier covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - relationship!

4. A covenant defines the nature, promises, and consequences of a relationship

Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do.

Deuteronomy 29:9

- a. The covenant has terms to define the nature of the relationship, governing what is expected from each person in the relationship
- b. So that you may prosper - there are rewards when the covenant is followed (and penalties when it is not!)
- c. Some covenants stress God's promises and some human responsibility, but all covenants contain both.
- d. Some covenants in Scripture stress law and some Gospel, but all contain both law and Gospel.

C. Our working definition of 'covenant'

A covenant is an oath defining the nature, promises, and consequences of a relationship

III. The Heart of God's Covenants

A. The goal of God's covenants is to create and redeem a people in whom He might dwell so they will glorify and enjoy Him forever

to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Deut. 29:13

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. Genesis 17:7

I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Exodus 6:7

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. Leviticus 26:12

You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O Lord, have become their God. 2 Samuel 7:24

They will be my people, and I will be their God. Jeremiah 32:38

Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. Ezekiel 11:20

They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" Zechariah 13:9

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 2 Corinthians 6:16

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Hebrews 8:10

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." Revelation 21:3

1. This 'covenant motto' shows that the goal of the covenant has always been to create and redeem a people that belong to God and in whom God dwells.

2. It is quoted in the time of the patriarchs as part of the covenant with Abraham.
3. It is quoted while Israel is languishing in Egypt as the reason God is bringing them out.
4. It is quoted as part of the covenant made at Sinai.
5. It is quoted as God is making a covenant with David
6. It is quoted when Israel is languishing in exile
7. It is quoted in anticipation of the new covenant
8. It is quoted as part of the new covenant
9. It is quoted at the consummation as the New Jerusalem descends and God's covenant purposes have reached their fulfillment.
10. This has been God's purpose from before He created humanity, and it is the goal of all His covenant promises.

B. The focus and fulfillment of all of God's covenants is Jesus Christ

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human **covenant** that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ **The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.** ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. ¹⁹ What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. Galatians 3:15–19

1. Paul is speaking about the relationship between the covenants.
2. The Seed of the Abrahamic Covenant is Jesus Christ. There are not many "seeds" but only one.
3. This does not change under the Law covenant of Sinai
4. The Law is a placeholder until the Seed of the Covenant, Jesus, arrives to fulfill all of God's Covenants.
5. The same message was spoken by Zechariah about Jesus
 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in **the house of his servant David** ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us — ⁷² to show mercy to our fathers and **to remember his holy covenant,** ⁷³ **the oath he swore to our father Abraham..** Luke 1:68–73
 - a. He speaks of both David and Abraham
 - b. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's covenants with both Abraham and David
6. All of God's Covenants are focused upon and fulfilled in Jesus Christ & the promised blessings of every covenant are found only in and through Him.

C. The purpose of God's covenants is to be an anchor for our faith

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:16–20

1. God gives His covenant oath to show His unchanging purpose to His people
2. We have this as a strong anchor for our soul: God does not lie, He has made a covenant with us, and Jesus has fulfilled its requirements in our behalf!

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I see the importance of covenant?

1. God is a God of covenant
2. The entire Bible is structured by God's covenants
3. Our Christian life is initiated and sustained by covenant.
 - a. We become God's children through the new covenant
 - b. We take the covenant sign of water baptism at the beginning of our Christian life, and we are sustained by the covenant Table, and our worship each week is a reenactment of the covenant story.

4. The principle of covenant are woven into the warp and woof of all creation and life

- a. Family, Church, and government are all covenant institutions created by God
 - b. We take oaths in court, sign contracts for work & bills
5. But our culture is increasingly anti-institutional, anti-covenant. We want blessings with no responsibilities.
6. We also think we can change the basic structure of these covenant institutions, but they are given by God and we are not free to redefine them as we like.
7. Do I live conscious of the reality and importance of covenant?
8. Do I take my covenant responsibilities seriously?

B. The covenant table

Understanding Covenants

Deuteronomy 29:9-15

January 5, 2020

Communion

Hebrews 13:20-21

Teaching keywords: Covenant; God; hermeneutics

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20–21

Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. ¹⁰ All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God — your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, ¹¹ together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. ¹² You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, ¹³ to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ¹⁴ I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you ¹⁵ who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God but also with those who are not here today. Deuteronomy 29:9–15