****

Section: Divine Covenants (Covenant Theology)

Teacher: M. Kirstine

Date Taught: February 19, 2020

**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q58. What is the Old Covenant?**

The Old Covenant was a temporary covenant made primarily with Israelites and was defined by the Abrahamic Covenant, conditioned by the Mosaic Covenant, and focused by the Davidic Covenant. This covenant offered temporary blessings but did not offer eternal life. Through promises, types, and shadows, it taught about the Messiah, who was to come to fulfill the law, establish the New Covenant, and redeem the elect.

* **Introduction**

**Divine Covenant**: A relational agreement initiated by God that may include obligations, rewards, and/or punishments from Him.

* **The Mosaic Covenant**
* **A development and a conditioning**

The Old Covenant was conditioned by the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant is a development and a conditioning of the same *covenantal relationship* that God had initiated with Abraham and Abraham’s decedents.

The people of both the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant are the same and the offers of blessed earthy life in the land of Canaan of both the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant are the same.

The Mosaic Covenant adds another covenant commitment to the same parties of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant builds on, expands, and conditions the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant expresses the majority of the law required to be obeyed in the Old Covenant.

* **The history that gets us to the Mosaic Covenant**

**Genesis 15:13** “… be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.”

As we get to the book of Exodus, we find the context for the coming Mosaic Covenant. The Old Covenant people are in bondage (as God declared would happen), and that meant God’s promise to Abraham’s descendants to give them full inheritance of the land of Canaan had not yet been fulfilled; deliverance needed to take place.

In the early chapters of Exodus, we see God’s singling out of Moses, and we see God begin to interact with him on behalf of Abraham’s line—the Israelites. In this we can see that God chose to give Moses a significant role, in which Moses was to speak God’s words to the people, lead the people, and act as a mediator between God and His covenantal people.

God repeatedly identifies Himself to Moses, and therefore the people of the Old Covenant, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

**Exodus 6:2-6**2God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. 3I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. 6Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.’”

God was committed to fulfill His covenantal promises; therefore, God delivered them.

God promised to Abraham that this would happen, and this is the context for the Mosaic Covenant.

See that the Mosaic Covenant sits in the reality of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant is a development and a conditioning of the same covenantal relationship that God had initiated with Abraham and Abraham’s decedents.

* **The Mosaic Covenant comes into view**

When we get to Exodus 19, we find the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. Deliverance from bondage happened, but the full inheritance of the land of Canaan had not yet take place.

Here in chapter 19, the Mosaic Covenant terms begin to come into view:

**Exodus 19:3-8**3… The Lord called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” 7So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. 8All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

The people heard their duty and gave their commitment to obey God. In this, we see what we saw last week, that the Old Covenant is a covenant of works.

* **Old Covenant law**

The verses following this describe God declaring laws required in the Mosaic Covenant. Many more laws would be issued to the people of Israel after this first Mosaic deceleration for the Old Covenant, but this interaction is the most foundational. The giving of law is the conditioning of the Old Covenant brought in by the Mosaic Covenant. These laws are the core of the Mosaic Covenant; the Mosaic Covenant revolves primary around the laws which God gave to Israel through Moses.

* + **Two Types of law**

There were two types (kinds/categories) of law given in the Mosaic Covenant: **Universal Moral Law** and **Positive Law**.

God, first and foremost, gave to them the Ten Commandments, which are a summary expression of the eternal **Universal Moral Law**.

And in addition to this eternal moral law, God saw fit to give many other laws to them—these are of the **Positive Law** category, which in the Old Covenant are often called **ceremonial** and **judicial** laws.

The **Universal Moral Law** expressed through the Ten Commandments gave them important clarity as to how to honor God and honor others in a moral respect.

The **judicial laws** gave them clarity on what God expected for the governing of the people—judicially what this people must do in the Old Covenant.

And the **ceremonial laws** gave them commands regarding things like proper ways of worship and temporary sin atonement sacrifices.

This Mosaic Covenant—the laws God gave through the covenant—further condition and govern the people of the Old Covenant, the prophets of the Old Covenant, the priesthood of the Old Covenant, the kingship of the Old Covenant, and the curses and blessings of the Old Covenant.

As Exodus 23 closes, we see God expand on the covenantal terms.

**Exodus 23:20-33**

* **“A” covenant of works**

After these things were declared, Moses went down to the people to deliver the law and details, and we see their response, once again affirming their understanding of the work-reward covenant terms:

**Exodus 24:3-8 3**Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.” **4**And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. **5**And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. **6**And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. **7**Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” **8**And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

They heard the Universal Moral Law, they heard many positive laws, they understood that they were committing to doallthat God required of them, and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

What we have here is a covenant of works.

It was for their good that God initiated this covenant with them, no doubt. But *they had to obey correctly and perpetually* to *fully and continually* enjoy the covenant benefits.

In addition to the Exodus portions, there are other significant passages in the Old Covenant time period that make these terms explicitly clear.

**Leviticus 18:5 “**You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them … if a person does them, he shall live by them …”

**Deuteronomy 11:26-28 26**“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: **27**the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, **28**and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God ...”

* **The covenant rewards/blessings**

The covenant rewards at stake for them were the same as in the Abrahamic Covenant. These were strictly temporary/natural/physical rewards.

*The people* of both the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant are the same and *the offers* of blessed earthy life in the land of Canaan of both the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant are the same.

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**15“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 17But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, 18I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. 19I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

What God is communicating is very simple: *If you obey* my commands, *it will go well with you in the promised land of Canaan*—it will go well in this physical life on this physical creation—ongoing and prosperous life on this creation will be your wage; but *if you disobey my commands curse unto death will be your wage*.

* + **Not eternal life and eternal blessing**

The rewards of the Old Covenant are not eternal life and eternal blessing. God is interacting with the Israelites based on the covenant they are in for temporary, earthly benefits.

**Romans 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight …

The three covenants of Old Covenant only administer temporary, earthly life and prosperity.

Any people of Abraham’s line that were saved eternally during that time were not saved by any of the Old Covenant covenants; rather they are saved eternally by faith in the promise of the Messiah—by Jesus’ Covenant of Grace to come in the future.

Eternal life is only given to the chosen ones of the Covenant of Redemption as God effectually calls them into a different covenant: the New Covenant.

Eternal realties were not the reward or curse of the Old Covenant. This was **not** a republication of The Covenant of Works made with Adam. The Old Covenant offered and threatened earthly, fleshly, tangible, bodily things: prosperous life on this creation or curse, covenant excommunication, and eventually, bodily death.

These Israelites knew their covenantal relationship with God was for earthly blessings or curses based on their obedience to God’s law.

They knew that God said to their “father” in the flesh, Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations … Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (**Genesis 17:9, 14**).

So when they heard from Moses the Ten Commandments and many new positive laws, they understood that they were committing to continue in a covenant relationship on this earth with God based on their obedience.

* **The goodness of God**

While the best kind of benefits (eternal benefits) were not offered in this covenant, we must see that the laws that God expressed to them were most certainly for their good.

Certainly, the moral law to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might is of the highest priority for all humans, being created in God’s image.

Certainly, the moral law to love your neighbor rightly is for one’s own good, the good of others, and the glory of God—our Maker.

Certainly, the positive laws given to them to bring clear direction to how to live, govern, and worship in all kinds of real and complicated situations was a wise and good gift to them.

How fitting are these laws for a people seeking to settle in a land specifically marked out for them.

* **Israel’s unfaithfulness**

Sinful depraved human nature is so consuming and wicked. Fallen man is so feeble. Despite their pledge of upright obedience, Abraham’s descendants floundered and failed early and often.

**Exodus 32:1-10**

Israel was unfaithful to God—unfaithful to the covenant they were in with God. They disregarded the laws—they broke the terms. Therefore, it was just for God to issue the covenant curses.

And curses were issued, but not yet to the fullest extent.

* **The sacrificial system**

In the Mosaic Covenant, God saw fit to issue a system of temporal forgiveness for when the people of the Old Covenant sinned against God.

It must be clearly understood that the Old Covenant sacrificial system of purification and forgiveness was, again, like the Old Covenant itself, not about eternal purification and forgiveness. No, it only provided a temporary, earthy, fleshly type of purification and forgiveness.

**Hebrews 9:13** … for the purification of the flesh

**Hebrews 10:1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

It was not spiritual cleansing, it was not new birth, it was not a new heart, it was not eternal purification and forgiveness.

* **Application**
* **Worship, sanctification, evangelism**

Are you humbled by our God’s decree and working in the Old Covenant to do things so specific and intentional? God puts on display His justice and kindness in the Mosaic Covenant. Praise God for who He is and how He works!

There are no circumstances in which a sinner’s own work makes them right with God for salvation. So, let’s go with boldness:

**Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes …

* **Bible Reading and Interpretation**

We need to understand the Old Covenant Positive Laws do not apply any longer because the Old Covenant has been abrogated (or abolished), and Jesus established a New Covenant with its own Positive Laws for us to follow.

As we read, we need to be very careful in determining Universal Moral Law from Positive Law in the Old Testament.

Often times these two kinds of laws are mixed together in the same section of Scripture. We certainly can’t make distinctions of what commands we don’t follow now based on our preferences or feelings. We must make the distinctions very carefully, using a right understating of Moral Law and Positive Law, and using the teaching of the New Testament.