Section: Divine Covenants (Covenant Theology)

Wednesday, February 19, 2020

M. Kirstine

**TEACHING 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.

**Genesis 17:1-2** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”

**Deuteronomy 11:26-28** “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.”

**James 2:10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

**Hebrews 10:1** (NASB) For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near

(Further study: Hebrews 8:4-5; Romans 4:2-3, 13, 16; Acts 4:12; Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18–21; 17:1-14; 22:16-18; Exodus 19-24; 2 Samuel 7)

* **Introduction**

Last lesson we began our study of the Old Covenant and were able to get into the first covenant it contains, the Abrahamic Covenant—in this lesson we continue on in the Old Covenant.

Keep in mind, again, that *A divine covenant is a relational agreement initiated by God that may include obligations, rewards, and/or punishments from Him.*

We are still working within that definition.

Let’s look again at our Divine Covenants Timeline Layout.

To recap where we’ve been,

First, the Covenant of Redemption, then we identify the beginning of creation, and we see the Adamic Covenant, then the Noahic Covenant, and then the Old Covenant.

The Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants are included in the Old Covenant. They happen progressively *as steps* in time taking us to the New Covenant. But they are all under the Old Covenant—together they make up the Old Covenant.

As we saw last week the Word of Truth Catechism says ... 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.

* **The Mosaic Covenant**

Up next in the timeline of history comes the Mosaic Covenant.

By way of an introductory consideration, note the following…

We see the immediate context and establishment of the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus chapter 19 through chapter 24.

* **A development and a conditioning**

We will see tonight, as our catechism answer tells us, that, The Old Covenant was conditioned by the Mosaic Covenant.

This means that the *fuller* expression of the law and commands that God decreed for this temporary covenant people *were given through the Mosaic Covenant*; it conditions the Old Covenant—it adds conditions.

As we get into the Mosaic Covenant, we must consider its relationship with the Abrahamic Covenant.

We considered last lesson that the Abrahamic Covenant *defined* an earthly people, with the offer of earthly rewards—earthly benefits.

Additionally, in the Abrahamic interactions God repeated His gospel promise for a Redeemer to come, and promised that this Redeemer would come from this people, the line of Abraham.

So, while there is a threat of curse if they do not honor the covenant, *this ethnic line* must be preserved for God to fulfill His promises.

In light of that, 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 Mosaic Covenant adds depth and height to what expectations came with being God’s set apart earthly people in that time of human history.

The Mosaic Covenant adds judicial laws for just living and government for the Abrahamic people.

The Mosaic Covenant adds provisions for stumbling and ceremonies for temporary cleansing for the Abrahamic people.

The Mosaic Covenant adds powerful *types*—types that anticipate the better and different New Covenant to come.

The Mosaic Covenant is based on God’s commitment to bless the people of Abraham, and it sets forth the depth *and width* of God’s Old Covenant law that the people must obey.

The Old Covenant was conditioned by the Mosaic Covenant—that we will certainly see tonight.

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

With that introductory declaration, let’s briefly track with the history that gets us to the Mosaic Covenant.

In one of the primary Abrahamic Covenant chapters we identified last lesson, Genesis 15, God declared that *prior to* the Old Covenant people receiving the full inheritance of the land of Canaan four hundred hard and painful years would pass. They were to “be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (**Genesis 15:13**).

Therefore, 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.

As the basis for the covenant events about to happen with Moses, in Exodus, we also see, over and over, the Abrahamic Covenant reality remembered and referenced. 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* and He promises to act on their behalf for freedom from bondage in Egypt *because of the promise He made to Abraham*—to all of them—in the Abrahamic Covenant.

See:

**Exodus 6:2-6**

**2**God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. **3**I 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. **4**I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. **5**Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. **6**Say 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.’

We must see clearly that *God promised these things would happen*—the 400 years of bondage and the deliverance, unto eventually arriving at the land of Canaan.

And we must see that God was committed to fulfill His covenantal promises. Therefore, God delivered them. The proceeding chapters of Exodus tell of the mighty power of God in delivering His covenantal people.

As one of the most amazing events in human history, later portions of Scripture call back to and celebrate this awesome work of God. 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**

Moving on in Exodus, 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 as we see God remind the Old Covenant people of His mighty work to deliver them and He again establishes their obedience to Him as a necessary covenantal condition:

**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. **5**Now 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; **6**and 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.”

**7**So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. **8**All 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 as it demands obedience based on the covenant *terms and commands* in order to receive or maintain in the covenant rewards. This was a fitting precursor interaction for what was about to take place.

* **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. Given that, its important to focus on the law.

* + **Two Types of law**

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

God, first and foremost, gave to them the Ten Commandments, which are a summary expression of the eternal **Universal Moral Law**. We see this law expressed in Exodus 20:3-17.

Since this eternal moral law is applicable to all peoples everywhere, God expressing it plainly and directly to His temporary chosen people certainly makes sense.

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.

Mosaic Covenant positive law was issued to them in the latter verses of Exodus 20 and go on for much of the next section of Exodus. But this doesn’t encompass all of the remaining positive laws God issued for the Old Covenant. For example, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are well known for containing much positive law, by expanding upon what was given in Exodus.

See that…

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—condition the Old Covenant.

This Mosaic Covenant—the laws God gave through the covenant—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.

These laws, given for the people of the Old Covenant, are of significant importance.

Having a proper understanding of these laws are of critical importance for having a fuller understanding of

the Old Covenant,

many happenings in Scripture—especially the Old Testament,

and the work of the Messiah who came in the New Testament.

We had a detailed discussion in a previous midweek lesson about the unchanging, always applicable Universal Moral Law and changing Positive Laws. We need to remember those things we learned when we think about the Old Covenant and also our New Covenant realties.

Why do we still follow God’s commands to not commit idolatry and not to lie? Because those things are Universal Moral Law that applies to every person at all times of human history.

Why don’t we follow the Old Testament command to put to death someone caught in adultery or not to eat pork? Because those laws are of the temporary Positive Law that was only for the people in the Old Covenant.

As we learned previously, when the New Covenant was established, the Positive Laws unique to the Old Covenant were put away, like the Old Covenant.

*While* the Universal Moral Law, being based on the nature and character of our unchanging God, never ceases to apply to every person at all times of human history, as we have discussed.

We won’t go into further depth about biblical law now, as we’ve done that in depth in a prior midweek lesson, but if you haven’t heard that Biblical Law lesson, you should. Please reach out to your midweek group leader if you need help locating it.

Back to the text, as Exodus 23 closes we see God expand on the covenantal terms:

**Exodus 23:20-33**

**20**“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. **21**Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.

**22**“But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

**23**“When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, **24**you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. **25**You shall serve the Lord your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. **26**None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. **27**I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. **28**And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. **29**I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. **30**Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. **31**And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. **32**You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. **33**They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

In that, we hear of great blessings offered to them. What a significant display of that God would do for His covenant people.

* **“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.”

“All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” This is significant. They heard the Universal Moral Law, they heard many positive laws, they understood that they were committing to do **all** that God required of them, and they say, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” What we have here is a covenant of works. When a covenant requires those covenanted with to obey law or commands in order to receive the rewards it offers, it as “*a* covenant of works” to them.

The Mosaic Covenant, therefore, is not a covenant of grace; it is most certainly a covenant of works. This covenant of works demands obedience based on the covenant terms and commands in order to receive or maintain in the covenant rewards.

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 we’ve read here thus far, there are other significant passages in the Old Covenant time period that make these terms explicitly clear. We saw a few of these passages in our previous lesson, let’s note them again:

**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, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.”

* **The covenant rewards/blessings**

Hopefully you noticed in Exodus 23 that the covenant rewards at stake for them were the same as in the Abrahamic Covenant. These were strictly temporary/natural/physical rewards.

We considered last lesson that the Abrahamic Covenant defined an earthly people, with the offer of earthly rewards—earthly benefits. *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 Old Covenant reward Scripture most commonly speaks to the reward of the land of Canaan, which they were told was a land flowing with milk and honey. This is speaking about a real, physical land and real, *tangible prosperity*.

Deuteronomy 28 contains an extensive declaration of the blessings and curses at stake. And in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 the threat of curse and the offer of reward is repeated again and summarized.

**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**

At this point, it should be clear, once again, that 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.

If someone was saved during the Old Covenant, it was not administered to them by or based on that Old Covenant. If someone was sentenced to Hades during the Old Covenant, it was because of their spiritually dead condition and guilt because of the fall of Adam—enteral punishment was not a penalty of the Old Covenant.

In agreement with our points about this covenant, the great theologian John Owen said: “*This covenant thus made, with these ends and promises, did never save nor condemn any man eternally. ...it was confined unto things temporal. Believers were saved under it, but not by virtue of it. Sinners perished eternally under it, but by the curse of the original law of works* (speaking about the Adamic 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.

These Israelites *knew* the covenant that was made with Abraham, they *knew* the stipulations and promises. They *knew* they needed to obey the positive law of male circumcision given before their time. The truth of the foundations of the Old Covenant they were in *was known by them*. 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.*

To this they say, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” They knew they had to obey *correctly and perpetually* to *fully and continually* enjoy the covenant benefits.

* **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.

Imagine a nation without *any* direction from God, it would be even worse than ours is currently (to be clear, we are not a nation in covenant with God. But we can still see our floundering related to the idea of lack of godly law as many of our leaders in government deny and move away from biblical truth. We are getting a taste of what that would look like:

Homosexuality is supported while real marriage is attacked,

victims of crimes are not properly cared for,

hard-earned money is taken from those who worked for it so that—in some cases—it is given to those who refuse to work,

public schools teach our children lies about gender, sexual standards, and creation,

more than 60 million government-legal abortions have occurred in the United States since 1973,

and on and on.

As many of our leaders in government deny and move away from biblical truth, we are getting a taste of what a people without God’s instruction looks like.)

Now…………imagine if God’s expressed law was *completely* out of the picture.

So, the law—the instruction—from God to them was for their good. Obeying God’s law is always best.

* **Israel’s unfaithfulness**

But 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*.

Get this, *right after* they declared, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient,” Moses went up the mountain to meet with the Lord again. While Moses was meeting with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, the people became impatient and showed their wickedness.

**Exodus 32:1-10**

1When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” 2So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” 5When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” 6And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

7And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” 9And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

Church, they *grossly* sinned *RIGHT AFTER* THEY COVENANTED NOT TO.

They *grossly* sinned WHILE THE DISPLAY OF GOD’S GOODNESS IN DELIVERING THEM FROM SLAVERY *JUST HAPPENED*.

That is crazy.

……and yet……..it reminds me of all other human beings who’ve lived in this creation….including you and me!

Look, God is literally displaying His power and goodness in innumerable ways every moment of every day….yet mankind does not honor Him as He is due.

From the more grievous sins all the way done to the many times today you and I did not give God praise for His work in our lives….we are all guilty of evil choices and motives. It’s likely not our habit to seek a golden calf, but we do seek all kinds of other idols. Every time we choose creation over the Creator and His law, we show the same disposition as they had.

Yes, it is right and good for us to see the stupidity and wickedness of the Exodus people, but one reason it’s in Scripture is that we are to see them, then we turn to look at our stupidity and wickedness.

Let everyone examine THEMSELVES to search out were repentance and growth needs to happen.

Then, let us, as Scripture also commands, confess our sin to one another and ask for accountability and help, based on His word, from those God has matured.

Let this biblical account read you, let it expose you, and then, look to God and His design for your hope and repentance.

We are desperate for God’s powerful, effective grace. It is by grace alone that we been saved, and it is by grace alone are we grown. Look to the Lord Jesus in faith and rest in His powerful grace.

Back to the Mosaic Covenant.

We see here and all throughout the rest of the Scriptures, that sinful fallen human nature plagued the Israelites. *Right after* the giving of the mosaic law and their pledge to honor it and over and over, they turned to their own ways, dishonoring God and the covenant they were in.

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*. If God were to have fully cursed and cut them off, then, for example, His promise to deliver Abraham’s people to the land of Canaan would not have been fulfilled. God made that promise and He was committed to see it happen, having to longsuffer much wickedness in the people.

Threats of the covenant curses were realized in significant ways prior to arrival at the promised land, but it is not until later that we see the full extent of the broken covenant. We will look at that further next lesson.

To these things, Sam Renihan writes, “Because the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant work together, as two covenants governing the kingdom of Israel, the corporate and individual principles intertwine.

God will provide the promised blessings to the people as a nation, corporately.

Individually, those who are unfaithful will be cut off.

This is illustrated by at least two cases.

When Aaron and many of the Israelites committed adultery with the golden calf, many individual Israelites were killed for their infidelity according to the covenant.

But Moses appealed to God’s promise to preserve the nation in general according to the Abrahamic Covenant as the basis upon which God must not destroy them entirely (Exodus 23:13).

Additionally, a whole generation of Israelites died in the wilderness for their disobedience and disbelief, but God made the promises good to the next generation.”

Also remember, there is a superior promise that God made in Genesis 3 and repeated to Abraham that must be fulfilled. That promise rests in the great plan of God, decreed before time began. That decree was covenanted between the three Persons of the unchanging triune God.

So, God would forbear the wickedness of this fallen humanity, even in the particular people He set special care upon, for more years to come, *to see through* that promise, that plan, that decree, that trinitarian covenant. All of this is happening to bring about and show the need for the chosen One of the New Covenant. All of creation is set in the context of the Covenant of Redemption, God’s eternal plan.

* **The sacrificial system**

When fallen humans are involved, with law comes the breaking of law. So, 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. Renihan speaks helpful points to this as well, “Sinners are terribly bad at obeying God's commandments, and terribly good at disobeying them.

The Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant did nothing to change the nature of the Israelites. The[se covenants] did not grant them a new heart. They provided no help for the compliance with the demands of the covenant. Israel's disobedience and unfaithfulness are unsurprising as a result. But God provided the sacrificial system as a way to forgive their sins.

Leviticus and numbers appear to be repetitive lists of the details of the positive laws of Israel. However tedious and laborious this may seem at first, it is very important. Without these rules of kindness in the sacrificial system, Israel would have been exiled long before it was. …

There were many kinds of offerings [in the sacrificial system]. The sin offerings and the guilt offering, which had the same laws, are the most important. If someone sinned unintentionally, or in some cases intentionally broke the law, they could find forgiveness and atonement through sacrifice. The spilling of the blood of another would pay the penalty that they deserve. This achieved atonement, the reconciliation of two parties so that they are “at one” again. Sacrifices provided reconciliation in the covenantal relationship. The law condemned the guilty, and sacrifices redirected the guilt to the sacrificial victim. This would have been a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly endeavor, teaching Israel repeatedly of its own sinfulness and the kindness of God in bringing atonement through sacrifice.

Once a year, the High Priest would offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people to cleanse the entire nation. ...

The priest would represent the entire nation in this event. It wasn't the people atoning for their own sins, but the appointed priest of God's pure and holy temple cleansing the people. Their sins would be taken away, quite literally, before their eyes as the goat was let out to the wilderness. Through this sacrifice, they would know that they were again pure and right with the law.

This is kindness. God never changed His standard of justice. The law never became more lenient, but the sacrifices accounted for Israel’s sin and provided a way for atonement. All of this was intended to be a teaching lesson to Israel. The people of Israel were *supposed to learn* that forgiveness comes through sacrifice administered by the high priest.”

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. It was about earthly life in Canaan.

The inspired author of Hebrews looked back on the Old Covenant sacrificial system and said authoritatively (in **Hebrews 9:13**) that it only accomplished a “purification of the flesh.” And we read in **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. The Old Covenant was not offering these eternal, spiritual things.

Surely the things of the Old Covenant *pointed to and foreshadowed* eternal, spiritual things—which we will consider a bit further in coming lessons—but eternal, spiritual blessings were not rewards of the Old Covenant, therefore certainly not offered in the Old Covenant sacrificial system.

As we close, we can summarize and say that while the Mosaic Covenant was primarily focused on laws, duty, and obedience, God’s wisdom and kindness was on display in again making covenant with Israel and His patience and longsuffering was on display in providing the sacrificial system and not putting them off during this time. The one true God, the Creator of all things created, the Sustainer and Ruler of all things condescended to make covenant and see through His perfect plan. Praise be to God, the almighty!

That’s all we have time for in this lesson. But, the story doesn’t end here. We know that. The Old Covenant includes *steps*, taking us to the New Covenant. We have the third covenant of the Old Covenant to consider, and in all of this, God is setting the stage for the Messiah to come to abolish the Old Covenant and fulfill the plan set in the Covenant of Redemption. Jesus would fulfill the law and establish the New Covenant, earning eternal redemption of the elect from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

As we wrap up, let’s consider a bit of **APPLICATION** to be thinking about for your discussion time and personal pondering.

* **Application**
* **Worship, Sanctification, Evangelism**

How does this lesson help us worship God / what does this mean for our sanctification / how does this lesson spur on evangelism?

We’ve said our God is amazing. He is perfect, wise, gracious, and just.

What’s your response to this lesson’s clarity? Awe? 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!

And, consider this: There are no circumstances in which a sinner’s own work makes them right with God for salvation. Whether a person grew up in church, or lives in a prosperous nation that acknowledges God, or lived in the Old Covenant with a unique earthly interaction with God…none of these things produces righteousness in a person unto justification.

Since the fall, what man has always needed is the good news about Jesus Christ and the call to repent and trust in Jesus alone. This is the means that God has ordained as the prerequisite to Him causing new birth and saving faith.

So, let’s go with boldness, for no other circumstance or commentary does what the gospel does. **Romans 1:16** says for example, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes…” People need the gospel. And God has commissioned us to share it: verbally, lovingly, boldly. Let’s enjoy this call.

Finally, I told you upfront that these covenant theology “lessons will significantly benefit you in your understanding of God and His word.” So… What does the truth in this lesson mean for my hermeneutic?

* **Bible Reading and Interpretation**

As we read Scripture, we need to understand is 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.

And, as always, we must not read the Old Testament, nor consider the Old Covenant, apart from the solid foundation of the Covenant of Redemption. If we try to understand the happenings we read about in the Old Testament without that foundation, we will continue to struggle to understand it. We will come to conclusions that are not correct.

We hope this portion of our study gave you some other key things you need to know to have the basic tools to begin the long and blessed journey of understanding things in the Old Testament in a deeper way than before.

That’s all for tonight, let’s pray.

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Next time we are going to look at the final covenant of the Old Covenant—Davidic Covenant, and we’ll focus on Israel’s performance in the OC, along with the results of that.

Very important things to see next week.