

Covenants: The Backbone of the Bible

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Partnerships Between God and People

God - Noah

Scripture: Genesis 8:20-9:17

Situation: God promises to never again destroy the world until redemption is fully accomplished.

Stipulation(s): None. It's an unconditional covenant.

Sign: Rainbow. God has withdrawn his weapons of war and his warrior's bow will remain at rest until the final day of judgment.

God - Abraham

Scripture: Genesis 12, 15, and 17

Situation: God enters a redemptive partnership with Abraham which developed progressively. He promises Abraham a huge family that will inherit a promised piece of land in Canaan and bring universal blessing to all humanity through his family.

Stipulation(s): This is both a conditional and unconditional covenant. God and man each have a part to play, but ultimately these promises will be fulfilled because God will see to it that they come to pass.

Sign: Circumcision. A symbol setting this family apart to God, showing that their fertility and future lay in God's hands.

God - Moses (Israel)

Scripture: Exodus 19-24

Situation: God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt and promises to make them his own treasured possession, a holy, set apart nation. He will personally dwell in their midst and bring them into the promised land. He (Yahweh) will be their God and they (Israel) will be his people. Moreover, they will be a kingdom of priests that mediate his goodness and glory to all the nations. An epic role in redemptive history.

Stipulation(s): This was a conditional covenant of grace. Israel was to obey the terms embodied in all the laws given at Mt. Sinai (summarized in the ten commandments). God promised to bring blessings if they followed his commands, but curses if they disobeyed, most notably exile into foreign lands.

Sign: Sabbath. A sign that God sanctified and set apart Israel to be holy unto him.

God - David

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7

Situation: God establishes David as king over Israel and promises to make his name great. He'll give David a royal kingdom in which the promises made to Abraham and Israel will be fulfilled through his lineage. God will raise up a Davidic descendant who will build a house for the Lord and his throne and kingdom will last forever. God's steadfast love will never depart from him.

Stipulation(s): There are conditional and unconditional elements to the covenant. David and his descendants must remain faithful to God, walk in covenantal faithfulness, and lead Israel in obedience to the covenantal laws. Despite the kings' failures, God guaranteed a faithful Davidic king on the throne. (Hmmm...I wonder who that could be?!)

Sign: None.

God – Us (The New Covenant)

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:19-22

Situation: The new covenant is the culmination of God's saving work in his people. He promises to make an everlasting covenant with his people in which he will write his law on their hearts, bring complete forgiveness of sin, put his Spirit in them to empower them to love and obey his commands. Having raised up Jesus, the faithful Davidic king to rule over God's Kingdom to bring His love and light to all the world.

Stipulation(s): There are no stipulations to this unconditional covenant of grace. God both gives the promises and brings them about through the work of his faithful Son Jesus.

Sign: The Lord's Supper (Bread and Cup)

Summary: Do you see now how the covenants progressively build upon one another forming a backbone of sorts to the redemptive storyline? God preserved the world through Noah, initiated redemption through Abraham, formed a special people through Israel, promised a shepherd-king through David, and then fulfilled all of his covenantal promises through Jesus. With each covenant, God's promises and plans to save the world become clearer and clearer until we finally see that redemption can only come through King Jesus.

In the New Covenant we get total forgiveness of sins and cleansing from shame. We get new hearts of flesh and the indwelling Spirit, causing us to love God's laws and to walk in his ways. We can actually do justice and righteousness, and so be a light to all the nations. In light of the biblical storyline, that's amazing! We can walk in freedom and light, rather than sin and darkness. We have bold access to God and stand in the realm of grace. We trust that a renewed world is coming where peace and righteousness will reign forever under the rule of King Jesus. And it's all possible because of him, the perfect covenant-keeper.

See. We told you that you'd want to know the covenants.

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2 Samuel 7:1-17

7 After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."³ Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?' ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?""

⁸ "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders[Ⓜ] over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me[Ⓜ]; your throne will be established forever."

¹⁷ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Come, let us all unite to sing

Come, let us all unite to sing, God is love.
Let heaven and earth their praises bring; God is love.
Let every soul from sin awake,
Each in his heart sweet music make,
And sing with us, for Jesus' sake, for God is love!

Refrain:

God is love! God is love!
Come let us all unite to sing that God is love

O tell to earth's remotest bound, God is love
In Christ we have redemption found, God is love
His blood has washed our sins away
His Spirit turned our night to day,
And now we can rejoice to say that God is love (refrain)

How happy is our portion here! God is love.
His promises our spirits cheer; God is love.
He is our sun and shield by day,
Our help, our hope, our strength, and stay,
He will be with us all the way, our God is love. (refrain)

Attributed to Howard Kingsbury, Music by Edmond S Lorenz